

The Superintendent's 1899 House Design Contrasts with Cemetery

“... classical form stands in deliberate contrast to the cemetery's carefully designed, irregular landscape...”

— Eugene J. Johnson, renowned author and professor, reflection upon visiting the house

The Times-Union.

ALBANY, N. Y. TUESDAY, AUGUST 8, 1899

Superintendent Burns' New Home BUILDING BEING ERECTED IN THE RURAL CEMETERY

Burns of the Albany Rural cemetery will hereafter reside in a house provided within the grounds, and thus will ever be able to be summoned at short or unexpected notice. . . .

Excavations commenced about two weeks ago, in fact, only one-half hour after the contracts had been let. It is intended to have the building ready for early fall, and consequently a full force of men is kept actively engaged. Up to this time the stonework of the entire foundation has been laid.

Plans for the villa residence, for that is the style of the proposed house, were executed by Mr. Marcus T. Reynolds. Above the basement the construction is to be of wood, and this work was let to Mssrs. Feeney & Sheehan. The mason work was let to Michael Daley. . . .

The location of the residence is on the main eastern driveway that parallels the D. & H. railroad tracks some hundred feet away. It is placed facing this drive about midway between the cemetery lodge and the mortuary chapel. It will be about one hundred feet to the east of the driveway, facing it . . .

Already about the location are flower beds, and indications where a winding walk or drive will connect the house to the main road. The color of the frame of the house will harmonize with the landscape and the shingled roof will be stained the hue of weather-beaten boards. The width of the front will be forty feet, and its depth will be about two-thirds that. . . .

The attractive feature of the front will be a long piazza, with six wooden columns, with handsome terra cotta capitals painted to match. These capitals were especially designed and there will be twenty-two columns employed in the structure. Although the house will not be cut up like many a modern house, there will be many cosy corners.

On the first floor there will be a parlor and sitting room, the former to the right or south side of the entrance. Behind this will be the kitchen. There will be six rooms, on the second floor, all of fair proportions.

Forward of this sign is the Superintendent's House, believed to be commissioned by Superintendent James Burns as one of the earliest on-site residences. Cemetery superintendents were in charge of running the thriving non-profit business as well as supervising burials.

This special residence housed the Albany Rural Cemetery's superintendents listed below.

James Andrew Burns	1899-1923
Thomas Dugal James	1923-1934
Archibald McCaughran	1934-1944
Charles B. Heisler	1944-1961
William H. Kelly, Jr.	1961-1975

Prior to the home's construction, they had to travel here to consult with funeral directors and the families of the deceased.

SET AMIDST A RURAL DESIGN

A National Historic Landmark site, this house is one of Marcus T. Reynolds' earliest residential projects, and his earliest signed work. Reynolds went on to become one of Albany's foremost architects of the period.

His modest design combined Italian and American elements, creating a structure visually interesting in part for its contrast with Albany Rural Cemetery's design, with its winding roads, wooded hills and beautiful burial monuments.

The House's Italianate villa style is created by the flat roof, heavy cornice and prominent



The home, shown here circa early-20th century.

The most interesting feature is quite clearly visible on the west façade. Vertically aligned and connected elements link the first and second floor windows, with Italianate brackets and classical

pediments leading the eye to the upper windows.

MODERN TIMES BROUGHT CHANGE

The emergence of automobile transportation and telephone communications ultimately eliminated the need for superintendents to occupy the residence. For a time, the building was rented as residential property, but it has not been used as such since the 1970s.

overhanging eaves. But the attic story gives way incongruously to dark shingle woodwork, a common Victorian treatment. There are three bays on each side, with doors on the south and west.

The home shows elegant spindle work on the porch balustrade and frames the entrance with impressive fluted Ionic columns. Within, several large rooms on each story grace the living quarters. Some were equipped with fireplaces. The center hallway offered a warm greeting area.



Marcus T. Reynolds' dated nameplate adorns the fascia board above a western doorway. Below: the two-tier staircase provides access to the second floor's gracious and bright living quarters.



Historical information provided here based on research by Professor John Pipkin and Paula Lemire, Historian; Friends of the Albany Rural Cemetery. Signage design by design for a small planet.



A PROLIFIC ALBANY ARCHITECT

Marcus Tullius Reynolds was an influential architect whose generation was deeply influenced by historically rich, eclectic design traditions. He is recognized today as one of the most important regional architects in Albany's long history. Reynolds was a lifelong Albany resident. The son of lawyer Dexter Reynolds and Catherine Maley Cuyler, Reynolds and his older brother Cuyler were both deeply interested in local history and in their own distinguished family roots. Marcus Reynolds lived at 98 Columbia Street, Albany, for most of his life. Educated at Albany Academy, Williams College, and in Columbia's architecture program, he was a lifelong bachelor, an unapologetic elitist, a *bon vivant*, and a close crony of Republican Boss Billy Barnes, Jr.

A keenly serious student of architecture and housing problems, Reynolds wrote

about both, including his prize-winning Columbia thesis *Housing of the Poor in American Cities*.

He was a fluent, productive, and multifaceted architect in Albany. His buildings fared reasonably well during the era of urban renewal and include:

- The Gothic towers of the D&H building at State Street and Broadway
- The Beaux-Arts elegance of his Albany Trust building
- His respectful Romanesque addition to Robert Gibson's Hampton Plaza
- Five bank buildings, only two of which survive today
- Greek Revival panels on Elk Street
- A quirky Dutch Revival firehouse on Delaware Avenue
- Several schools, a factory, the van Rensselaer townhouses forming a magnificent Renaissance palazzo opposite Washington Park, many elegant private houses, and many other projects in the Capital Region



The imposing Delaware & Hudson Railroad Company Building at the foot of State Street now serves as the State University of New York's administrative center known as SUNY Plaza.

TO LEARN MORE: VISIT MARCUS T. REYNOLDS' GRAVE SITE

To get to architect Marcus T. Reynolds' grave in Section 17, Lot 1, proceed up South Ridge Road which is immediately behind you. The Reynolds family site is on your right, set back just behind Section 12 past the top of the hill, and before you get to Cypress Avenue.

All are welcome to enjoy the Albany Rural Cemetery Grounds. Since 1841, ARC has been an important destination for area residents and tourists. Enjoy the beautiful landscape, streams, waterfalls and array of funerary art and architecture. Still an active and prominent cemetery, ARC is proud of its continued heritage and provides a full range of burial services.



Visit online at AlbanyRuralCemetery.org

This ARC historical sign was generously donated by Frank and Sarah Slingerland, 2020.