

The Voice of Vale Cemetery *Established 1857*

907 State Street
Schenectady, N.Y. 12307
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Spring 2025

Schenectady, N.Y.

Upcoming 2025 Tours at Vale Cemetery:

Below is Vale Cemetery's tour schedule for 2025. Please note tours commence at 2pm on Sunday and those on Thursday at 5:30pm. All tours begin at the historic Caretaker's House and ***the cost is \$10.00 per attendee (children under 12 free.)*** If you are a member of Vale Cemetery Preservation Inc. it is free. Tours typically last between 1.5 and 2 hours. Each one will also be announced on the Cemetery's Facebook page as time draws closer.

- Sunday, May 4th- Victorian Lady in Mourning-Sue McLane
- Thursday, June 5th-Rural Cemetery Movement-Scott Haefner
- Thursday, July 10th- Schenectady and the American Revolution -Mike Diana
- Thursday, August 7th-Giants of Industry-Chris Hunter
- Sunday, September 7th-Schenectady and the Civil War-To be Announced
- Sunday, October 5th-Notable Women-Sue McLane

Upcoming 2025 Events at Vale Cemetery:

Below are events scheduled for 2025 and please note there may be others that arise throughout the year. Be sure to check the Cemetery's Facebook page for those as well.

- Tuesday, May 13th- Nature Walk in Vale Park-Betsy Henry-10:00am
- Sunday, June 8th-Birding at Vale - George Steele-7:30am
- May and September-Sheep and Goats
- Sunday, November 9th-Stockadathon

Memorial Day Commemoration:

Vale Cemetery will observe Memorial Day at 10:30 a.m. May 26th with a formal ceremony. Taps, a flag raising, and the National Anthem will be on the program. Veterans' groups representing all military branches will participate. Local dignitaries will speak briefly at the Veterans' Plot. Participants will assemble at Vale's Veteran Section near the main entrance at 907 State Street.

Juneteenth Celebration:

On Friday, June 20th at 6pm, Vale Cemetery will host a Juneteenth celebration at the African American Ancestral Burial Ground. Juneteenth commemorates the last slaves freed under the Emancipation Proclamation, June 19th, 1865.

Vale Cemetery Preservation Inc (VCPI) Membership:

We are currently offering individual memberships at an annual cost of \$25.00. Member benefits currently include free admission to public tours, attendance of VCPI meetings and the ability to elect a Board of Directors at the annual meeting held in December. You can apply for membership on the Cemetery's main website or send a check made out to Vale Cemetery Preservation Inc.

Call for Old Postcards, Photos and more of Vale Cemetery:

Vale Cemetery Preservation Inc is in the process of restoring the historic caretakers house and surrounding landscape to its formal grandeur. To assist with this process, we are looking for old photos and postcards of the caretaker's house, the State Street, Nott Terrace and Brandywine entrances, the landscape (trees/ flowers/ shrubbery) as well as Vale Park and the ponds. We are also interested in any old documents i.e. reports, maps and newspaper articles that might tell of the cemetery's rich past. Vale is interested in adding this information to our archives and potentially place online. If you would like to donate items or allow us to digitize and then return them, please email or call the main office.



Vale now part of the Black Cemetery Network (BCN):



Vale Cemetery is pleased to announce that the African American Ancestral Burial Ground has been added to the Black Cemetery Network's national directory. One of the main goals of the BCN is to promote and preserve African American burial

grounds throughout the US that have been neglected and/or underrecognized. The Cemetery thanks Michael Ennis-McMillian of Skidmore College and John Gearing, Vice President of Vale Cemetery Association for their efforts. Please see the link below for further information.

<https://blackcemeterynetwork.org/bcnsites/african-american-ancestral-burial-ground-at-vale-cemetery?rq=vale%20cemetery>

134th Regiment Infantry NY Volunteers at Gettysburg-By Jeff Austin:

Historic Vale Cemetery is the final resting place for many famous and influential people. Among the most honored are the most humble: the citizen soldiers of the 134th Regiment Infantry NY Volunteers. These sons of Schenectady and Schoharie played a pivotal role at one of the most famous battles in American history.



The 134th mustered out of Schoharie in September, 1862 under the command of Col. Allen Jackson. They engaged in many of the most important battles of the Civil War, including Missionary Ridge,

Kennesaw Mountain, and the Battle of Atlanta. But they may be best remembered for their heroic defense at the Battle of Gettysburg.

After fierce fighting at the Battle of Chancellorsville, the 134th headed north towards a town no one had heard of - Gettysburg. Deployed on the front line for only a few minutes, they were attacked by two Confederate brigades. Forced into a prolonged retreat, the 134th was the last to fall back. Their flank exposed, they suffered horrendous losses, with half their men killed or wounded. Col. Jackson wrote to his friends on July 5, "My poor regiment was horribly cut up to pieces on the 1st. Out of 400 whom I carried into the engagement I can now muster but one hundred. I never imagined such a rain of bullets." Strong words from a seasoned veteran. Falling back to Cemetery Hill, they repulsed the Louisiana Brigade on the evening of July 2nd. Men were buried where they fell, although many were reburied closer to home by relatives.

Many of these fallen Gettysburg soldiers call Vale Cemetery their eternal home, including Jacob Trask, Sam Swales, and Alonzo Van Aernam.

Trask and Swales share a private marble headstone. Two others, Robert Corl and David Prop-er, were buried later that month on a day of ceremony and celebration. After observing the tribute, a *Star & Times* reporter wrote, "Brave soldiers! They have yielded up their lives on the altar of their country."



If you visit these heroes, or some of the dozens of other Civil War veterans, including Medal of Honor recipients, please take care. Do not take rubbings or try to clean or straighten these old stones, as this could cause unintentional damage. If you travel to Gettysburg, be sure to visit the large monument on East Cemetery Hill dedicated to the brave men of the 134th New York Infantry, 1st Brigade, 2D Division, 11th Corps.

Special thanks to the late Frank Taormina for the use of his extensive notes and research materials on Civil War veterans at Vale.

Sources and Photo Credits:

Additional factual material came from the NYS Military Museum and Veterans Research Center web site <https://dmna.nvgov/historic/reghist/civil/infantry/134thInfCWN.htm>

Photos taken by Jeff Austin of Lieutenant Chas A. Ahreet and Samuel Swales graves

Urban and Community Forestry Update:

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Tree Inventory and Community Forest Management Plan (UCF1) has been completed for Vale Cemetery. Davey Tree company identified thirty species of trees (including those invasive) as well as those diseased and/or endanger of falling down. The next phase is Tree Planting and Tree Maintenance (UCF2) and could involve surveying and identifying trees in the older back section of Vale near Vale Park and planting 500 trees.

Vale Cemetery Preservation Inc. recently applied for the NYSDEC's Community Reforestation (CoRe) grant program. This involves the planting of trees to expand, restore and create forested natural areas within urban population centers. If awarded, more than 6,200 trees and 260 shrubs would be planted in Vale Cemetery and Vale Park over the course of several years. Invasive foliage would also be extirpated from the grounds. This will involve a collaborative effort between Vale and the City of Schenectady as the city owns Vale Park.

Vale would like to thank Mac Sudduth for all of his efforts in planning/meeting with individuals to ensure the most critical aspects of the landscape are addressed. Finally, it is hoped that Vale Cemetery and Vale Park will be an integral component of Schenectady's overall master plan to revitalize the city.

Vale Cemetery Remembers Walter Simpkins, By Paul Contarino:

The Vale Cemetery family and the greater Schenectady area continue to mourn the loss of community leader Walter Simpkins.

Vale Cemetery held its first Juneteenth commemoration in 2006 due to the great efforts of Mr. Simpkins. He spearheaded the recognition of the Moses Viney's gravesite. Viney, a runaway slave from Maryland made his way to Schenectady and befriended the President of Union College, Eliphalet Nott. Viney served as Nott's chauffeur and eventually became a successful businessman.

Simpkins engaged the greater African American community to recognize the historical and cultural significance of the Old Colored Plot. He accomplished this by holding clean-up days to maintain the grounds as a method of educating folks about the ancestral struggles for freedom and



equality. The Old Colored Plot eventually became the African American Ancestral Burial Ground (AABG). In turn, high school history teacher Neil Yetwin used this ground to conduct his research on Viney and Jared Jackson as a corporal in the

Union Army. In 2009, Simpkins started incorporating his narrated story of Moses Viney further facilitating Juneteenth's growing popularity. By 2012, Simpkins worked with Vale in its efforts to have the AABG listed on the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. The following year the Underground Railroad History Conference honored Vale Cemetery. Simpkins always prided himself on dressing up like Moses Viney as a way to educate young people.

Simpkins complimented Vale Cemetery as, "a beautiful place where diverse cultures in Schenectady are represented and a great place to get together for some community consciousness." (Schenectady Gazette 6/11/2013.) The African American Ancestral Burial Ground is now used to teach about slavery, the Underground Railroad and the Civil War. Vale thanks Mr. Simpkins for his two-decade long service to the cemetery. His efforts greatly contributed in getting the cemetery further recognized locally but also nationally. Vale plans to continue carrying on the legacy of Mr. Simpkins.



Sources and Photos used for composing this article:

- 1) Vale Cemetery archives-grant related materials to National underground Railroad Network to Freedom
- 2) Voice of Vale Cemetery newsletter 2008, 2012, 2013
- 3) Schenectady Gazette- 6/10/2012, 6/11/2013, 6/18/2016
- 4) Photo of Walter Simpkins as Moses Viney-Juneteenth 2012
- 5) Photo of Walter Simpkins with a baby provided by Nott Street Office

A Potential New Direction of the Voice of Vale Cemetery Newsletter:

We are looking to revamp the current newsletter to include more biographies of famous and locally-famous persons interred at Vale, nature at Vale, as well as "news" around the cemetery which could be expanded to include surrounding neighborhoods such as Vale Village and Hamilton Hill. To facilitate with this process Vale is forming a newsletter committee. If you are interested in joining and perhaps chairing, please reach out to the main cemetery email. Please sign up for our email updates, Notes From The Vale, too. It includes news, event updates, and bits of Vale history. Join at the link below or scan the QR code: <https://tinyurl.com/notesfromthevale>



Vale Cemetery welcomes its new Office Manager Paula Lemire:

Paula Lemire started as Vale Cemetery's new office administrator in early March to fill the void left by Bernie and Barbara McEvoy. She has a lifelong interest in local history and nearly a decade of cemetery administration experience. Some of her strengths include website and social media management. She already began posting new and old photos of the cemetery as well as upcoming events to our Facebook page. Vale is pleased to have her onboard.

Vale Looking for volunteers:

Vale is actively seeking volunteers to assist with the grounds as the weather warms. We could use help with picking up trash and branches, the placing of flags on the graves of veterans, and the planting and watering of flowers at the caretaker's house or on graves. If interested, please call or email the main office.





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**Vale Cemetery Association Board of Trustees
and Staff:**

President- Thomas Ciancetta
Vice-President- John Gearing, Esq.
Secretary- Daniel Bradt
Treasurer- Marion "Jet" Jackson
Elena Alvarez
Jill Bogdanowicz-Wilson
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Carla Hernas, DVM
John Polster, Esq.
William McLean "Mac" Sudduth
Superintendent- Clark Adams
Crematory Operator- James Carpenter
Office Administrator- Paula Lemire

**Please contact Vale Cemetery by phone or email
for the following:**

- To receive your newsletter via e-mail (Vale continues its efforts to go green)
- Had a change of address or e-mail?
- Know someone who would like to receive the newsletter?
- Unsubscribe to the newsletter
- Volunteer opportunities
- Have an idea for a tour or event? (there is a tours/events committee that meets)
- Would like to advertise your business in our newsletter



VALE CEMETERY EST. 1857

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Dear Friends of Vale:

Vale annually observes Memorial Day, with a formal ceremony at the Veterans section near the State Street cemetery entrance. Veterans' groups representing all military branches will participate. Local dignitaries will speak briefly at the Veterans' Plot. Participants will assemble at Vale's main entrance at 907 State Street at 10:30am.

Since 1866 we have honored the memories of our loved ones who have served in all the wars, and most especially, those who made the ultimate sacrifice to our country. It is also a time to remember departed friends and family.

Vale is offering to plant potted red geraniums (three plants per pot) on specified graves, which will last through the summer. The **FIRST POT** purchase is \$35 and each additional pot is \$25. The price includes the planting and careful maintenance of the entire plot.

To Order: Geraniums

Please place geraniums on the following gravesite[s]:

1. Deceased's Name: _____ Lot # (if known) _____ \$35 _____
2. Deceased's Name: _____ Lot # (if known) _____ \$25 _____
3. Deceased's Name: _____ Lot # (if known) _____ \$25 _____

And/or donate to help support Vale Cemetery grounds: Donation \$ _____

Total \$ _____

Check payable to Vale Cemetery Preservation Inc

Or If you prefer to order geraniums, or donate by credit card:

Your Name: _____ Address: _____

E-mail: _____ Phone# _____

Credit card # _____ Exp. Date: _____ Security code _____

Name on Card: _____