



BORN ON THIS SITE

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A few hundred feet south of the old gatehouse in Mount Hope Cemetery and quite near Mount Hope Avenue itself is a modest, flat stone with a simple, but arresting, inscription:

NANCY HARRIS QUACKENBUSH

1818-1900

BORN ON THIS SITE

Born in the cemetery? Well, not exactly. But the story is interesting nonetheless.

The first thing we need to remember is that Mount Hope Cemetery was opened in 1838, the land having been purchased by the city in 1837. So, Nancy Harris' birth preceded the cemetery by two decades.


When little Nancy was born in 1818, a log cabin stood on the site of her present grave. The cabin had been built by her maternal grandfather, Jacob Miller.

Miller came here prospecting for land around, we think, 1808. He established a farm in what is now the Elmwood/Mount Hope Avenue area. The western part of his farm formed the southeast portion of the old section of Mount Hope Cemetery. Jacob Miller built a log cabin on that portion of his land in 1810.

They had to barricade the door of the cabin at night to keep out the bears and wolves. When the British invaded Charlotte in the War of 1812, Miller feared he might lose his ox team to the British, should they be successful in their invasion. So his son, Harvey, drove the oxen through the woods near the cabin into a marsh (now Sylvan Waters in the cemetery) and hid there in the thick brush with the oxen until the all-clear signal came.

When Jacob Miller and his family moved out of the cabin in 1816, he let his daughter and son-in-law, Amanda and Daniel Harris, have the Mount Hope cabin. It was a crowded little cabin, because Amanda and Daniel arrived from Otsego County with nine children in tow. And Nancy hadn't even been born yet.

When Nancy Harris was born in 1818, the area surrounding her home was still wild. One pioneer's letter describes the place where the old entrance to Mount





Hope Cemetery (a stone's throw from Nancy's cabin) stands today. He wrote: "There was a low, swampy place in there, filled in with a perfect mat of high alders, choke cherries, and high bush huckleberries, and people said that lights moved around there in the daytime, and in the night would start up and move off up into the hills and that horrid sounds had been heard, and we boys always ran like a streak through there, or if we had a horse, we put him through on the double-quick till we rose on the hill going by Judge Warner's. It was literally a howling wilderness-so howling with wild beasts that at night, alone and unarmed, no individual dared venture along the road there, much less to penetrate the woods at the base of those hills, I can remember when no common Indian, versed as he might be with the voices of the Wild animals of the forests, could interpret the discordant sounds of beast and fowl and frog that were sprung upon the air there any fall night. It was through this passage that George G. Sill of Old Lyme, Connecticut, afterwards the first bookseller in Rochester, had to be escorted in the night by Daniel Harris, because the road was so blind, and there were so many wildcats, bears, and wolves in that neighborhood.

Here is where little Nancy spent her early years. She saw the forests leveled, the roads cut through, and the marshes drained and filled. She married a boat builder, John Quackenbush, on December 18, 1845, in the town of Greece.

In the 1850's, Nancy and John Quackenbush, along with their young daughter, Mary, and Nancy's mother, Amanda, lived at 7 Marshall Street, while John supported them with his boat building trade, a highly needed craft in the days of the Erie Canal. Records that we studied disagree on when Quackenbush died, but it was probably in the late 1850's, so Nancy's marriage was all too brief.

Widow Nancy spent her final years in Buffalo, where she died of influenza at the age of 82. She was buried on April 3, 1900, in Mount Hope Cemetery on the site of her birth where the log cabin had disappeared perhaps sixty years before. Why not pay a visit to the grave of this Rochester pioneer and let your mind imagine the surroundings that young Nancy experienced.

From the *Epitaph*.

