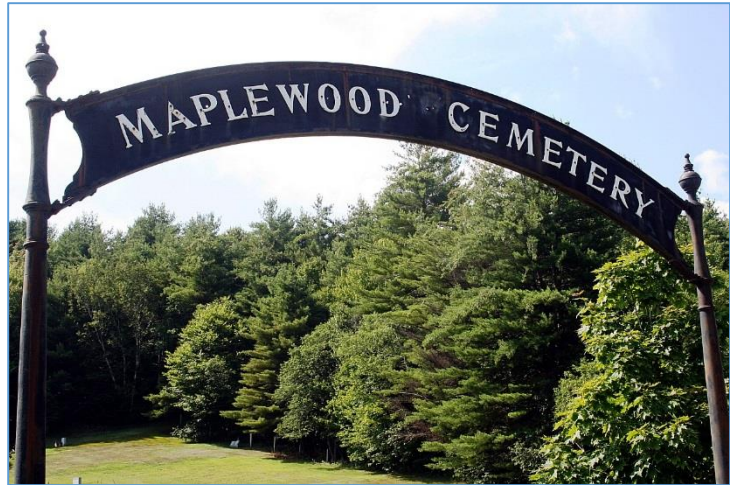


## The Old Fence at Maplewood

by Dwight D. Harrington

Of the three Barre Town cemeteries, Wilson, Maplewood, and West Hill, Maplewood has the most interesting fence. It is easy to discount Wilson, what little fence exists is hidden away in the brush and out of view. Up on West Hill, there is a beautiful old wrought iron fence in the front, but the gateway is set on wooden posts and sits a ways behind the iron fence gate. At Maplewood, on the other hand, the gateway is an integral part of another beautiful wrought iron fence.



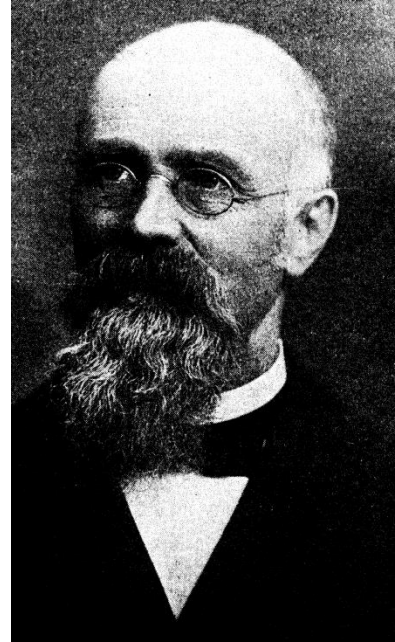
The old fence is in need of some care and maintenance, something that usually proves to be an expensive proposition. With the proper refurbishment, the fence will last many more years into the future. In 2015, cemetery commissioner Merle Miller took on the task of finding some grant money and thereby lightening the load on the Barre Town taxpayers. Vermont's Division for Historic Preservation provided one of the first sources Miller contacted. What he found out about the fence adds to the overall history of the cemetery and adds to the historic value of the site.

To get the process rolling, Mr. Miller contact the state agency and obtained the proper paperwork. An agency representative told him the cemetery would need to be eligible to be listed on the list of historic sites to be considered for any grant money. Miller filled out the form and attached the historic background information that has been researched to date and sent the package in. The state representative would have to visit the cemetery as part of the approval process to get the cemetery listed.



During the site visit, facts about the old fence began to emerge. While moving a little dirt from around the front of the gateway posts, the name of the fence manufacturer appeared. Still visible among some flecks of rust, the name "Page Fence Co., Adrian, Mich." appeared. Also visible, the model number for the post style could be seen, No. 200. According to the state rep, the fence company itself is historic.

J. Wallace Page established the Page Fence Company in 1886 at Adrian, Michigan. Born in Michigan in November of 1843, Page attended the local schools and graduated from Adrian High School. He had attended some classes at Adrian College, but left school to join the 17th Michigan Infantry at the start of the Civil War. The army put young Page on hold as he hadn't yet reached the age of 18 at the time of his enlistment. In 1863, Page joined Battery F of the Michigan Light Artillery. During his time in the service, Battery F served under General Sherman on his quest to capture Atlanta. They also served in Tennessee and North Carolina. Page served until his discharge in July of 1865, after the conclusion of the war. [photo from "Illustrated History and Biographical Record of Lanawee County, Mich."<sup>1</sup>]



Page spent the next 20 years as a farmer. The lack of wood for fencing got him experimenting with other materials, he ultimately settled on developing and improving wire fencing. Page and some of his neighbors developed a loom to weave fencing and along with a cousin, they ultimately developed a machine to do the weaving. By 1889, they had formed a company and a corporation.

Page's company grew in size and he had fencing plants in Adrian and in Monessen, Pennsylvania. He employed 1,300 workers between the two locations and had 6,000 local agents and 150 traveling salesmen by 1902. The company did \$3,000,000 in business that year. The firm also had its own wire mill on the Monongahela River above Pittsburg. The company thrived for many years and not only provided the agricultural fencing that Page started with, the company also branched out into wrought iron fencing for cemeteries and residential neighborhoods. Page passed away in September of 1916 at Adrian of smallpox.<sup>2</sup>

Baseball presented a serious interest for Mr. Page. For a few years, the company sponsored one of the Negro League teams, the Page Fence Giants. Players Bud Fowler and Home Run Johnson organized the team in 1894 and the team played from 1895 through 1898. The organizers recruited players of high moral character, many with college degrees. In 1896 the Page Giants played a 15 game series against the Cuban Giants and won 10 of those games earning an unofficial title as the best team in the Negro League. The team had an 82 game winning streak in 1897; they ended the year at 125 and 12. The Page Giants had their own rail car that slept 20 people. The luxurious car had a kitchen, dining area, a manager's office, and other amenities. The car also provided a readymade home for the players as they traveled around, the segregationist policies of the time limited dining and hotel accommodations for the black athletes. The team soon lost many of its top players as other teams around the nation lured them away from the Page Fence Giants.

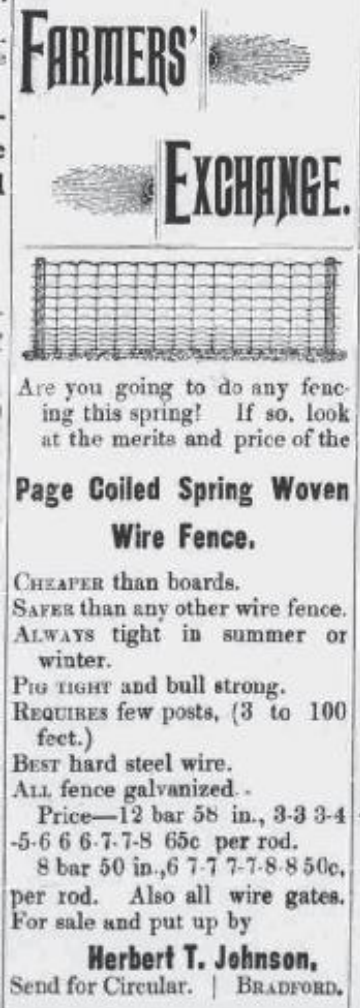
Back to our fence. A copy of one of Page's catalogs can be found on the website, "archive.org." This catalog is generic and features fences for different purposes. One of the illustrations advised the viewer to "send for our Illustrated Wrought-Iron Fence Catalogue." [the referenced page shows a single gate, very similar to the single gate at the Maplewood Cemetery.] In addition to livestock and other agricultural fences, Page sold fences to surround homes in residential areas, grand gate entrances, park fences, cemetery fences, and even grave guards. The grave guards provided a secondary fence around the family lot to prevent intrusions.<sup>3</sup>

So why are there fences around the cemetery? There may be several reasons, there surely are many theories, some based in logic, others in personal beliefs. For example, in past times, livestock roamed around more freely in search of grazing land. These animals would sometimes invade the cemetery, what better way to keep them out than with a fence. In some beliefs, the fence would be used to keep the spirits of the dead from leaving the grounds. Others might say the fence provided protection to the grounds from vandals or grave robbers. Another reason might be to set aside the cemetery from other lands after the ground had been consecrated as a burial place. Or, maybe the fence marked the boundaries of the plot of land.

Where could Vermonters buy a few hundred feet of Page Fence? As noted above in the paragraph about the company, Page had many agents spread throughout the country. Among those, Herbert T. Johnson of Bradford, Vermont sold Page Fence. This is not to say the people of Barre Town bought their fence from Johnson, but the newspaper advertisement shown here shows Johnson's involvement with The Page Fence Company. The advertisement carried a date of April 03, 1896 and appeared in the United Opinion, a newspaper formerly published in Bradford, Vermont.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to selling fence, Johnson once owned the Stonecliff Farms in Bradford. A Johnson biography stated he worked as a dairy farmer and a cattle breeder. As another historical note, Johnson left the farm to fight in the Spanish American War and the First World War. He stayed on with the Vermont National Guard through World War II as adjutant general and is the namesake of today's Camp Johnson in Colchester, Vermont.

On the following pages, photographs of the current fence at the Maplewood Cemetery are compared with the Page Fence catalog or otherwise described within the context of wrought iron fences.



**FARMERS' EXCHANGE.**

Are you going to do any fencing this spring? If so, look at the merits and price of the

**Page Coiled Spring Woven Wire Fence.**

CHEAPER than boards.  
SAFER than any other wire fence.  
ALWAYS tight in summer or winter.  
PIG TIGHT and bull strong.  
REQUIRES few posts, (3 to 100 feet.)  
BEST hard steel wire.  
ALL fence galvanized.

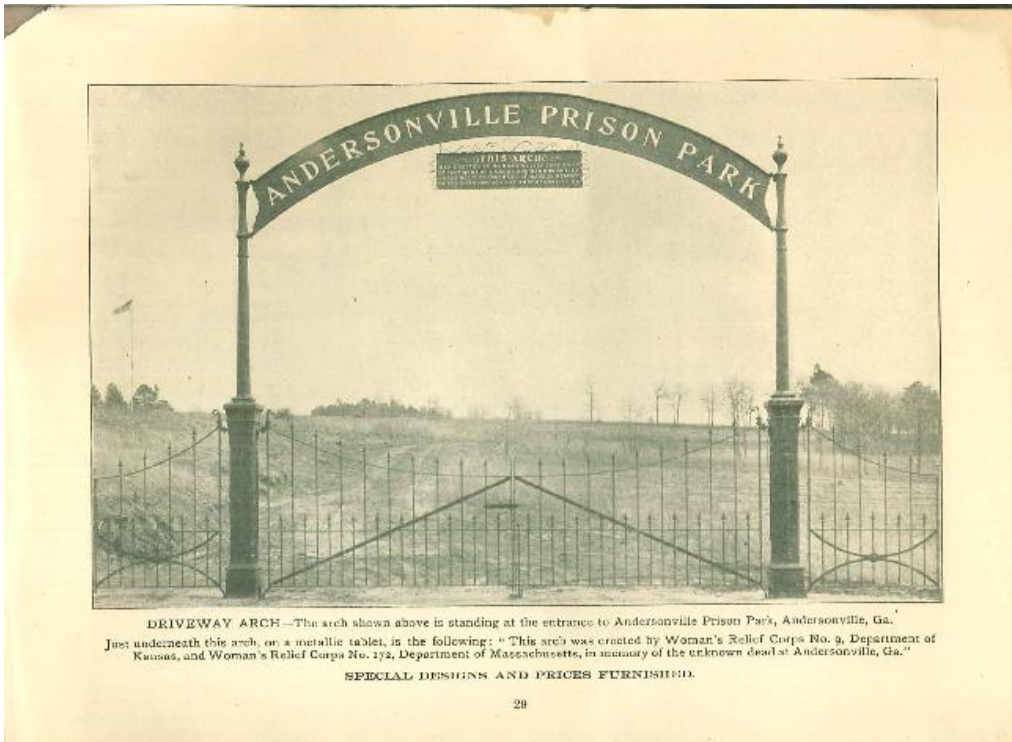
Price—12 bar 58 in., 3-3 3-4  
-5-6 6 6-7-7-8 65c per rod.  
8 bar 50 in., 6 7-7 7-7-8 50c,  
per rod. Also all wire gates.  
For sale and put up by

**Herbert T. Johnson,**  
Send for Circular. | BRADFORD.

5

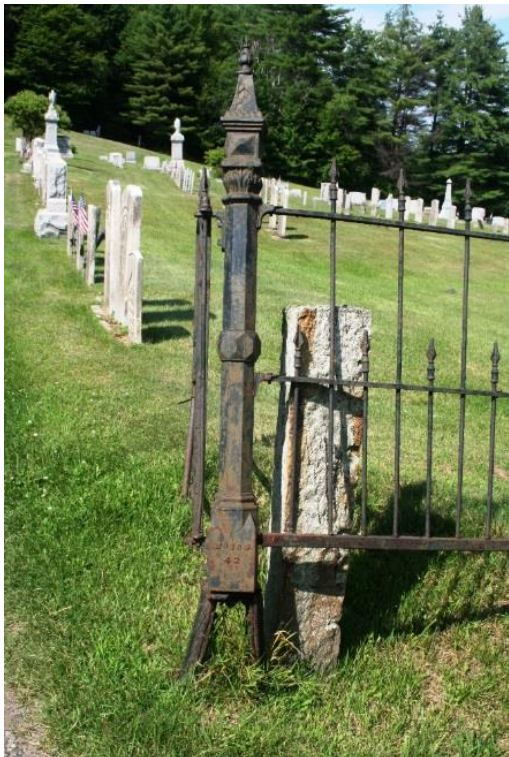


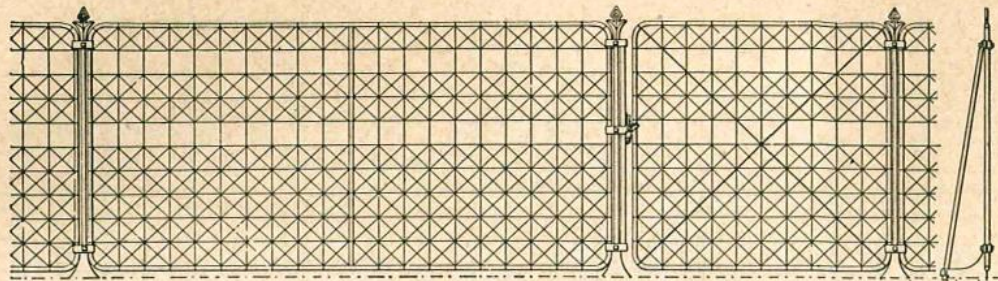
State Architectural Historian Devin A. Colman noted the similarities of the gated entryways of the cemetery, above, and the Andersonville Prison Park below. The posts, the gate, the shape of the arc and the four attachment points for the arch and the posts, and even the font style of the words are very much alike. Although both have picket based fence style, the two sites have different fence configurations in that respect. [Andersonville was a southern prisoner of war camp located in Georgia during the Civil War; the prison had a horrible reputation in the treatment of its inmates. Maplewood resident Oran Beckley's son, Sergeant Oran Beckley, Jr., died there in 1864.] (photo below from a Page Fence Company catalog)





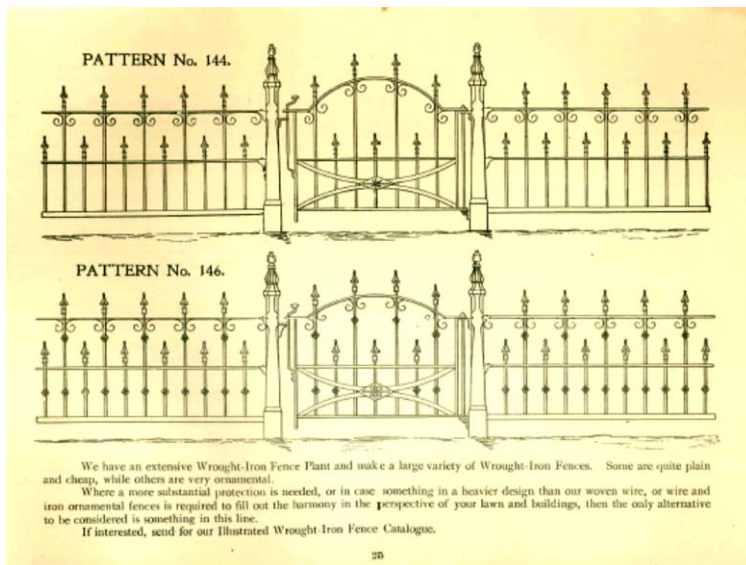
Post details: above photo shows the ornamental details of the posts that support the gateway arch. To the above right, connection details of the picket panels and the corner post at the corner of Farwell Street and Pine Hill Road. Below left shows a gate post at the vehicle entry at the south end of the cemetery. The post is partially out of the ground and two “ears” can be seen, they provide stability for the anchorage of the gate post. The post also shows the Page Fence Company style number, No. 105, 42.



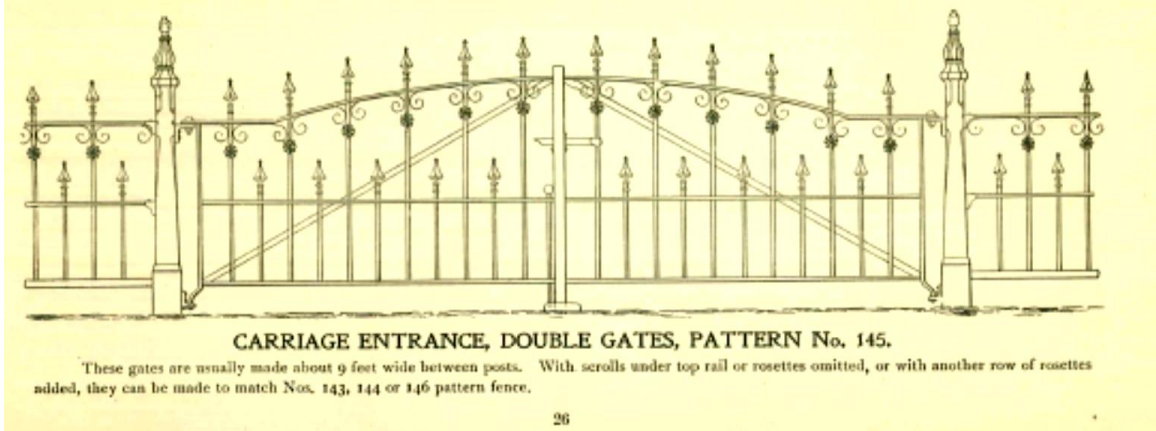


### ORNAMENTAL LAWN FENCE.

Made in panels 6 to 8 feet in length, wrought-iron frames, mesh of best galvanized wire, frames painted to correspond. Price per foot includes iron posts, and all necessary fastenings and trimmings. We also furnish fastenings adapted to use on top of stone walls.



In the Ornamental Lawn Fence detail above, the right edge of the detail shows a picket fence brace system. The dashed line shows a triangular foot extending into the ground to add stability to the fence. The photo at left center shows an iron bar leading from the back of the fence and disappearing into the ground. The single gate from the catalog, Pattern No. 144, clearly represents the photo above of a single gate found in the Maplewood fence on the Pine Hill Road side of the burial ground, except for the curled adornments in the catalog are not present in the cemetery. (Page Fence catalog)



The illustration at the top shows a representation of the gate latch, the photo above is an actual latch, similar but mirrored from the illustration. To the right, a detail of the top of the corner post at Farwell Street and Pine Hill Road. The photos below are details of the tops of the pickets. The top is more or less spear tips, at the right is the detail on how the seven and a half foot long sections are connected with angles along the length of the fence between major posts.



So there you have it, a bit of background on the fence marking out two sides of Maplewood Cemetery. Not only has the fence set off the cemetery from the edges of the road, the back story of the fence provides some interesting facts on its own. The fence represents the work of a man interested in making what he had better and at the same time, offer a bit of dignity to a black baseball team during times of racial segregation. Fences don't last forever, nature might provide the materials to make up the fence, but nature also has powers to reclaim those same materials, in this case, rust. With some maintenance and hard work and some special paint, perhaps the fence can remain for several more years, keeping the spirits in and showing off the work of J. Wallace Page.

List of sources:

Newspaper source: The United Opinion. (Bradford, Vt.), April 03, 1896 as found on the website, "Chronicling America" provided by the University of Vermont.

photo below from a Page Fence Company catalog as found at the website, archives.org

From: Negro League Baseball Players Association website

[http://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/Page\\_Fence\\_Giants](http://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/Page_Fence_Giants)

<http://michiganhistory.leadr.msu.edu/page-fence-giants/>

Maplewood Cemetery photos by author.

Catalog, Page Woven Wire Fence Co., Adrian, Mich., U.S.A., date not apparent, as found on the archive.org website

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<sup>1</sup> Knapp, John I. and Bonner, R. I., "Illustrated History and Biographical Record of Lanawee County, Mich.," The Times Printing Company, Adrian Mich., 1903 as found on the website, archive.org.

<sup>2</sup> Biography information about Page: Knapp, John I. and Bonner, R. I., "Illustrated History and Biographical Record of Lanawee County, Mich.," The Times Printing Company, Adrian Mich., 1903 as found on the website, archive.org.

<sup>3</sup> Catalog, Page Woven Wire Fence Co., Adrian, Mich., U.S.A., date not apparent, as found on the archive.org website

<sup>4</sup> The United Opinion. (Bradford, Vt.), April 03, 1896 as found on the website, "Chronicling America" provided by the University of Vermont.

<sup>5</sup> Catalog, Page Woven Wire Fence Co., Adrian, Mich., U.S.A., date not apparent, as found on the archive.org website