



Your Turn
Rey C. Wojdat
Guest columnist

How SUNY Broome center carries on Carnegie's legacy

If you love Halloween, you have likely determined "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," as written in 1820 by Washington Irving, synonymous with celebrating the holiday.

The fate of the slightly framed schoolteacher Ichabod Crane disappearing at the hands of the Headless Horseman at a bridge near an Old Dutch Burying Ground in Sleepy Hollow, New York, set along the Hudson River, is a tale which never grows old in the telling.

Washington Irving lived and died at his estate, "Sunnyside," in Tarrytown. He is buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, which had been incorporated in 1849 as Tarrytown Cemetery. The site posthumously honored Irving's request for the name change, furthering the ground's association with his great tale.

Buried in this cemetery are some famous and even infamous persons: Walter P. Chrysler, Brook Astor, Elizabeth Arden and the "Queen of Mean," Leona Helmsley.

Helmsley was a hotelier and real estate mogul who became a symbol of 1980's greed following a trial and conviction on tax evasion. She earned the unflattering nickname when her alleged tyrannical treatment of employees was revealed during the trial.

Helmsley built a \$1.4 million mausoleum replete with long, intricate, panoramic stained-glass panels of cityscapes of New York City — and set aside \$3 million for its annual maintenance — as a monument to herself. She also left \$12 million to her dog, "Trouble."

Further up on a hill — which appears the highest point of the cemetery — another mogul similarly attempted to construct a self-aggrandizing monument from stone. William Rockefeller, a co-founder of Standard Oil, built a towering, overbearing, classical mausoleum occupying a commanding view of the grounds. Both edifices seemingly cry out in an appeal for immortal attention.

If one takes a walk along a slightly winding trail, almost hidden from the mainstream but near the epicenter of the cemetery, a different gravesite is situated and marked by an unimposing, 6-foot-high, ornately carved cross. Buried near that cross is a man who stood only 5-foot-3 in life, but whose philanthropy endowed over 20 institutions devoted to fulfilling his "Gospel of Wealth," perhaps making him one of America's tallest heroes in spirit. The gospel preached by this man assumed the rich only as caretakers of accumulated wealth with an obligation to convert it back for the public good.

Along the base of that comparatively diminutive cross one will find many coins spontaneously placed by visitors — loose change intended as tokens of homage paid to a man whose philanthropy touched and continues to touch their lives to this day. That man was Andrew Carnegie.

Southern Tier residents might wish to remember that man once they enter the meticulously refurbished SUNY Broome Culinary & Event Center, which has regenerated the old Binghamton Public Library into a new public institution of learning. The original 1903 construction of this remarkable building was made possible by Carnegie, representing one relatively small but lasting testament to fulfilling Carnegie's Gospel of Wealth.

I'll leave it to all of you to decide who constructed the greatest monument to self.

Rey C. Wojdat is chair of Hospitality Programs for the SUNY Broome Culinary & Event Center.

We Be People

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