



Westwood Cemetery: *The Platt Family Monument*



Location: Westwood Cemetery,
Section E, Lot 124

Built: 1893

Platt Family Grave Marker
(Image Courtesy of Evangline McFarlin)

Description of the Monument

Located in Section E, Lot 124 of Westwood Cemetery stands a marble statue depicting a woman leaning on a cross atop a six-foot granite base. This statue, the only large-scale figurative grave marker in Westwood, is commonly known in Oberlin as the “Sorrowful Maiden,” though the origins of this name are unclear. The statue is approximately 144 inches (12 ft) tall and 36 inches (3ft) wide.¹ The woman’s arm is draped over the cross and she faces northeast.

Little information is available on the provenance of the monument. Upon the statue’s addition to Westwood in 1893, the *Oberlin News* reported that the monument was commissioned by Clayton W. Platt of Sandusky, Ohio. No sculptor is named, but the sculpture is reported to have been made in Florence, Italy, and lettered by A.J. Jones, a prominent marble and granite dealer in Oberlin.²

¹ Westwood Database, held by Oberlin Heritage Center. Accessed April 2023.
<https://www.oberlinwestwood.org/omeka/items/show/56508>

²Oberlin News, December 21, 1893

Engravings on the Monument

A total of ten members of the Platt family are listed on this monument: Alfred E., Harriet C., Harriet P., Clayton W., and Florence G, Alanson, Betsey B., Samuel J., Ashael E. , and Lenora Shattuc Platt, the mother of Clayton Platt.



Top left: Grave facing Southeast
Photo by Evangeline McFarlin

Top right: Grave facing Northeast
Photo by Evangeline McFarlin

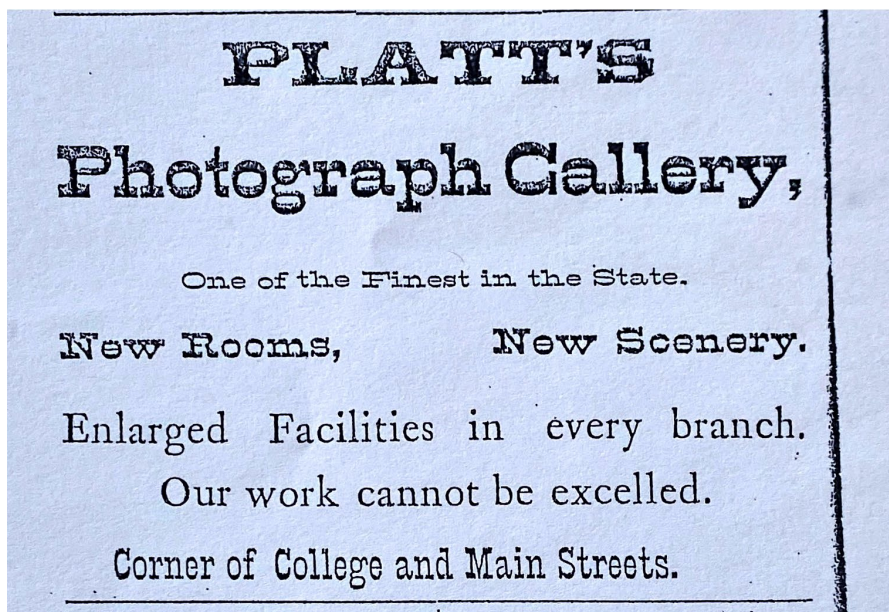
Left: Grave facing Northwest
Photo by Evangeline McFarlin

The Platt Family

The Platt family, notable for their photography businesses, dates back to some of the earliest Oberlin settlers. Patriarch Alanson Platt, a religious man who participated in the great revivals of 1816-1836, came to Oberlin in 1836 to lead prayer meetings and provide education for his family.³ Alanson Platt lived to the age of 75, leaving several children, including sons Alfred C. and Henry M. Platt, who would both become prominent Oberlin photographers and businessmen.

³Obituary of Alanson Platt. *Lorain County News*, October 3, 1866

Alfred and Henry learned the art of photography in 1857 and 1858, respectively, in an art gallery owned by local portrait painter David Brokaw.⁴ Brokaw and Platt, located on the southeast corner of College and Main, is the earliest known photography studio in Oberlin. Alfred Platt reportedly purchased the gallery from Brokaw in fall of 1858.⁵ The 1860 city directory indicates that the gallery offered ambrotypes, a cheaper alternative to daguerreotypes, and a relatively new technology at the time.



*Advertisement for Platt's
Photography Gallery,
Oberlin City Directory,
1883*

In 1865 Alfred sold the business to Henry. A later photo studio, also called Platt's Photograph Gallery, existed at least between 1873-83 on the top floors of a Main Street building, with Henry Platt as main proprietor during this time.⁶ Though some sources claim he spent time in Toledo, H.M. Platt is listed in the city directory as photographer from 1870 to 1883 and is described as “the leading photographer in Oberlin” in his obituary.⁷

Henry Platt and his wife Winnie lived at 136 West College Street, near what is now Dascomb Hall, with their three daughters, and are both buried in Westwood Cemetery. Though Henry's death occurred in 1899, after the Platt sculpture had been added to Westwood, Henry and Winnie are the only Platts to have a separate grave marker, located in Section D, lot 039.

⁴Oberlin City Directory, 1873-74

⁵Oberlin City Directory, 1873-74

⁶Oberlin City Directory, 1873-74; 1883

⁷“Death of H.M. Platt.” *Oberlin News*, June 30, 1899

The Lorain County Census indicates that Alfred originally married Harriet Paige.⁸ The couple later divorced and Alfred married Lenora Shattuc of Henrietta in 1865.⁹ Alfred and Lenora's son Clayton Platt also went into the photo business, spending around twenty years in Sandusky before opening a photo studio in Oberlin in 1907. Located at 21 East College Street, above where the Apollo Theatre is located today, Clayton Platt's gallery notably had installed an electric light system allowing photos to be taken at any hour of the day.¹⁰

The last two additions to the monument are Clayton and his wife Florence. Both Clayton and Florence were residents of Sandusky at their death, but had their remains brought to Oberlin to be buried in the Platt plot in Westwood.¹¹ They are reported to have been succeeded by several children, though none seem to be named on the grave marker.

Interpretation of Monument

There are a few possibilities regarding who or what the woman is intended to represent. The monument is reported to be "in memory of [Clayton Platt's] parents and grandparents," namely Alfred and Lenora and Alanson and Betsey, respectively.¹² The monument is also described at the time of its addition to Westwood as representing "a young mother leaning upon a cross, looking at the grave of her child."¹³ While it is unclear if this was the intended meaning or just an interpretation given at the time, there are possible links to the Platt family to be made here.

Alfred Platt and his first wife, Harriet E. Platt, had a child who died in 1865, at only a year old.¹⁴ This child, Hattie Platt, is buried in Westwood and listed on the monument. It is possible that the image of a "grieving mother" is meant to reference Hattie, but it seems unlikely that this would be Clayton's intention given that this child died years before his birth, and the mother in question here is not Lenora.

⁸ Lorain County 1860 Census

⁹Marriage Announcement of A.C. Platt and Lenora E. Shattuc. *Lorain County News*, August 16, 1865

¹⁰"Takes Photos by Day or Night: Pictures Taken by Electric Light in New Studio." *Oberlin News*, December 3, 1907.

¹¹Oberlin News, January 7, 1914; "Mrs. Florence Platt Is Taken By Death." *Oberlin News*, January 12, 1916

¹²*Oberlin News*, December 21, 1893

¹³Ibid

¹⁴Obituary of Hattie Platt. *Lorain County News*, June 14, 1865

The Westwood Cemetery database also indicates that a second, unnamed child is buried in the Platt lot. Little information is available on this child, but they are listed as the child of C.W and F.G. Platt¹⁵. The listed date of death for this child is 1886, seven years prior to the addition of the sculpture to Westwood by Clayton Platt. A map of lot 124 shows this child buried to the northeast of the monument, the same direction the statue is facing.¹⁶ While no mention of this child is made in the newspaper report on the monument, it seems much more likely that the “grieving mother” depicted is meant to represent Florence.

Given that this recently recovered information provides new context for this monument, the Oberlin Heritage Center is reconsidering use of the name “Sorrowful Maiden,” as the monument does seem to reference a part of Platt family history directly. We welcome additional information anyone may have on this monument or on the Platt family.

¹⁵ Westwood Database, held by Oberlin Heritage Center. Accessed April 2023.
<https://www.oberlinwestwood.org/omeka/items/show/56506>

¹⁶ Map of Westwood Cemetery Lot 124. Accessible via Oberlin Heritage Center.

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