Sally Dodge Cram Green: A Restless Spirit of Mound Cemetery

By Linda J. Showalter

Of the many ghosts that wander through the darkness in Marietta's historic Mound Cemetery, that of Sarah "Sally" Dodge Cram Green may be the most haunting. An ordinary woman who struggled with the challenges of nineteenth-century life, in death she became a victim of disrespect.

The daughter of Nathaniel and Rebecca Walton Dodge, Sally grew up in Hampton Falls, a small town in southeastern New Hampshire. Her uncle, Oliver Dodge, was one of the original 48 pioneers who landed at the confluence of the Ohio and Muskingum rivers in 1788 to found the town of Marietta. About 1804, Nathaniel Dodge followed his brother west and became a prominent merchant and operator of a ferry across the Muskingum River to Harmar.

A veteran of the American Revolution, Nathaniel was described as "a man of fearless disposition and of great integrity." His courage was displayed during one early Marietta court session...
when a mob of malcontents threatened to overthrow the judges. Nathaniel strode into the courtroom with a heavy club, took a seat near the bench to protect the officials, and sat there each day until court adjourned. (Genealogy of the Dodge Family of Essex County, Mass., 1629-1894, by Joseph Thompson Dodge, 1894.)

Marriage to Jonathan Cram in 1804, kept Sally in New Hampshire until 1816, when she and her husband moved to Marietta with their young family. Jonathan Cram became the partner of Sally’s brother, Nathaniel Dodge, Jr., in a mercantile business on Ohio Street. In a few years the store was transferred to the eastern shore of the Muskingum River near the ferry landing, where a wide variety of merchandise, “from a needle to a plow,” was sold. Jonathan Cram was at the peak of a successful career when his life was cut short by pneumonia in January of 1821.

Jonathan’s death left Sally a young widow with three small sons and a daughter to care for. She must have possessed at least a modicum of business sense, as she served as administratrix for her husband’s estate and was later listed as a partner in business with her brother, Oliver. Also in partnership with Oliver Dodge was John Green, a widower who was well known in the community.

According to Devol family notes, John Green, II, was born in Leicester, Massachusetts. (Devol, Early Settlers in Rhode Island, 1639, and in Ohio, 1788, researched and compiled by Jerry Barker Devol, 1999.) He married Betsy Devol, daughter of Daniel and Elizabeth Jennings Devol, in 1808. In 1820 John Green and his family were living in Marietta near the Cram and Dodge families. Green was involved with mercantile pursuits in the business district, and on January 9, 1824, he captained the Rufus Putnam, first steamboat on the Muskingum River, on its maiden voyage from Marietta to Zanesville.

Green’s investment in the steamboat enterprise proved profitable, and it may have been river commerce that took him to Cincinnati, where his wife died on October 31, 1825. Betsy Devol Green is buried in Marietta’s Mound Cemetery, with a distinctive monument marking her grave. John Green’s sorrow at the death of his first wife did not keep him from moving on.

John Green was not in mourning for long, however, for records in the Washington County Courthouse show that “John Green, Esquire, of Cincinnati,” was joined in marriage with “Mrs. Sally Cram of Marietta” on January 26, 1826.

From this point forward, the story of Sally Dodge Cram Green becomes somewhat murky and difficult to follow. The Devol genealogy indicates that John Green died in Portsmouth, Ohio, sometime after 1830. (There is, indeed, a small tombstone with the name of a John Green in the Lucasville Methodist Church Cemetery, but no further information is provided.)

In 1828, Sally’s daughter, Rebecca, married Anselm Tupper Nye, a Marietta manufacturer with prominent family
ties. The Dodge genealogy states that Sally’s health became poor after the death of her first husband, and that Rebecca Cram Nye took on the task of raising her youngest brother, Jacob Cram. Oliver Dodge, the last of Sally’s siblings living in Marietta, died in 1836. Then her father, Nathaniel Dodge, died in May of 1838.

Perhaps it was the loss of so many of her family members that put Sally over the edge, or perhaps it was something to do with her second marriage, but in 1838, she was committed to the Ohio Lunatic Asylum in Columbus. Within a year, Sally was dead.

A brief obituary was published in the Marietta Intelligencer, December 12, 1839: “Died – At Columbus on the 28th ult. [November 28] Mrs. Sarah Green, of this place aged 56 years.” But these few words do not begin to convey the anguish and tumult caused by her death.

On January 1, 1840, the Ohio State Journal revealed Sally’s fate after death in their report of a bill before the Ohio legislature in relation to “digging up dead bodies.” George H. Flood, a Representative from Licking County, told of the recent case of “a respectable lady” of Washington County, whom he had known:

She had been unfortunate, and became deranged, and was placed in the Lunatic Asylum in this city. While there, she sickened and died, and was buried. Soon after her decease, her son came for the purpose of removing the body to Marietta for interment; but, to his horror, found it had been taken away. He procured a warrant, and proceeded to the medical institution at Worthington. The President of that institution denied the right of the officer to search. Search was made; and upon opening a trap door in the centre of the building, the first object that met the eyes of the son was the body of his mother, with the head mutilated. He had been informed, by respectable authority, that persons belonging to this institution dug up bodies, not for anatomical purposes only, but for trade.

The History of the Eclectic Medical Institute, authored by Harvey Wickes Felter, M.D., 1902, provided an even more shocking account of the “resurrection riot” of 1839, part of a nationwide uprising against the practice of grave robbing:
A Mrs. Cramm [sic], of Marietta, O., died at the State Insane Asylum, and owing to the deep mud-roads to Columbus, her relatives did not arrive in time to claim her body. For some reason or other she was buried in the potter’s field – then located where the Union Depot of Columbus now stands. Upon the arrival of the Cramms, they found that the grave had been disturbed. Upon opening it they found no body. Suspicion was at once directed to the Worthington Medical College, and the flame was fanned by the college enemies. Two other graves were found to have been opened. On one memorable day, news came that there was to be an attack on the college building, and that a great company of men were on their way from Delaware for that purpose. The students and their friends, by chance, got word in time to arm themselves with pistols and shotguns, and every kind of firearm that they could procure and fortified themselves in the college building . . . It is said that battering-rams were erected for the demolition of the building. Finally, some one betrayed the Faculty, by placing in the hands of the mob the key to the college edifice . . . Entering the building, the latter found what was believed to be the body of Mrs. Cramm upon the dissecting table.

The unauthorized removal and dissection of Sally’s corpse resulted in the Ohio legislature revoking the college’s right to confer medical degrees. The school was forced to close its doors and move to Cincinnati, where it was revived as the Eclectic Medical Institute.

The remains of Sally Dodge Cram Green appear to have been brought to Marietta and interred in Mound Cemetery. It is hoped that they lie there yet today. □
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