

## **Living History Theater and Civil War Memorial Program at Evansville's Maple Hill Cemetery**

On Friday, May 18, Evansville Grove Society and Evansville Community Partnership will present theatrical performances and a ceremony honoring the Civil War veterans interred at Evansville's Maple Hill Cemetery. The programs will be conducted by lantern light, starting at 8:00 that evening.

Bus transportation will be provided between Lake Leota Park and the cemetery, with an additional pick up/drop off at the corner of East Main and Union Streets. The bus will depart from the park at 7:30 pm, and return after conclusion of the memorial program. The program is free and open to the public, but donations are welcome.

Four mini-plays, each running about 7 to 8 minutes will be presented, interpreting the lives of Civil War veterans at their grave sites. Docents will divide the audience into four groups and circulate the groups through the site for intimate presentation of all four plays. Illumination will be by lumenaria and kerosene lantern.

Dr. John M. Evans (namesake and first postmaster of the community) and his wife, Emma, will be portrayed reminiscing about their wartime experiences. Dr. Evans was Regimental Surgeon for the 13<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment (nicknamed "the Unlucky 13<sup>th</sup>") and he had a heavy caseload of sick soldiers throughout the war. John and Emma exchanged voluminous correspondence during the war, so their stories are told in their own words. Emma had to raise two small children and manage the family farm in John's absence, and John found military life disagreeable, and their lives were stressful.

"Captain" Caleb Lee and Mary "Belle" Lee will be portrayed in another performance. Caleb grew up on a farm just outside Evansville, but his adventurous spirit took him to a career on the Mississippi River and on the ocean. When his maritime days ended, he returned to Evansville, where he

met and married “Belle” Shurrum, the most popular and elegant lady in town. The Lees will entertain visitors to their fashionable new Victorian home on First Street, and Caleb will be unable to resist the urge to spin some tales about his adventures in the Navy during the Civil War.

In the third of the plays, Beaman Snow will take the stage at McGee’s Opera House to relate an interesting experience he and others from Evansville had on Sherman’s March to the Sea as part of the original First Brigade Band. Beaman is a last-minute substitute for the notorious Confederate spy Belle Boyd, who has been living in Evansville and touring in Wisconsin with her dramatic recounting of her life of espionage.

The remaining performance features Allen S. Baker (founder and namesake of the manufacturing company that has been Evansville’s largest private enterprise since the 1880s) and his wife Margaret. As a private in Company H of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment – a part of the famous Iron Brigade – John meets Margaret while he is recuperating from wounds. He returns to duty with the Regiment in time to be wounded again at Gettysburg.

Following presentation of the mini-plays, the audience will gather in the natural amphitheater before the flagpole for this year’s Civil War memorial program, which extends honors to Maple Hill Cemetery’s 140 Civil War veterans. Madison’s Frank Medina will perform fitting selections on the violin. In the “Last Mustering Out” the names, and regiments or vessels, of the veterans will be listed, and the moving letter of Jacob West, expressing his family’s gratitude to the comrades of their departed son, will be read.

The program will conclude with some short and appropriate remarks by President Abraham Lincoln, portrayed by George Buss, of Freeport, Illinois, and the sounding of “Taps.”