

# MATILDA S. WILSON BURGHER

**Born:** 1831, Ireland

**Died:** November 4, 1894, Canandaigua, NY

**Cemetery Location:** Section 5 Lot 133 NP

Matilda Wilson was born in 1831 in Ireland. In 1839, at the age of 8 years old, Matilda and her family migrated to the United States. In most certainty, prior to 1852, she meets a gentleman named Sidney S. Burgher in Canandaigua, NY and in 1852 they are wed.

Sidney, the youngest child in a family of nine, was born in the eastern part of the Town of Canandaigua on February 11, 1829. He remained at home upon his father's farm until he was 18 years old, when he came to (at that time) the Village of Canandaigua and began as an apprentice in the carpenter trade. After several years of apprenticeship, he went into the business for himself for about twelve years. In 1866, he opened a wood planing mill on Chapin Street, which he conducted successfully for about eleven years. He then brought on George Thompson as a partner, and a few years later the mill was moved to Bemis street. In 1886 (or so) he sold his interest in the business to Mr. Thompson. Sidney retired from active life for a few months, when believing there was an opening in Canandaigua for a grocery store, he purchased the business of L. B. Gaylord. Having had no experience in the business, he brought on as a partner Martin Ferguson, but the partnership was dissolved just short of two years.

Sidney passed away on March 14, 1894 at the age of 65. He was a man of vision, hard work and dedication to his businesses and his widow, Matilda, heir to his estate.

## Now here's where it gets good, so stay with me!

Presumably, Matilda was friends with a local (and beyond) notable named Mary Clark Thompson. Now we can spend a bit of time on Mary's legacy but this is about the unsung hero, Matilda Burgher. Mary and Matilda had a vision for Woodlawn Cemetery long before it became reality. A reality that, unfortunately, Matilda would not be in on the fruition – The Woodlawn Chapel. Records indicate that shortly before her passing that there were visions of a chapel being constructed at Woodlawn, possibly near the newly constructed holding vault that was built around 1892. After many, many years of planning, a beautiful chapel was indeed built encapsulating the existing holding vault in 1909.

Matilda Burgher, however, passed shortly after her husband, in November 1894 never knowing what her estate was going to attribute to. Mary Clark Thompson carried out the vision of creating an architectural gem in 1909 for the cemetery with a little help from her friend that had passed nearly 15 years prior. Matilda had left her estate, valued in 1894 at \$5,500, to the future construction of the chapel. To put it in prospective, the value in 2019 is approximately \$165,000.

However, according to the Ontario County Journal (March 8, 1895), *"objections by heirs to the will of Matilda Burgher, late of Canandaigua, were filed. The \$5,500 estate, aside from a few small legacies, is left to the Woodlawn Cemetery association for the erection of a mortuary chapel"*.

Cemetery records on file don't indicate that the estate was ever received. Records do show that \$300 was received from Matilda to be utilized for a pipe organ. The historical and unique pipe organ that was specifically built for the Woodlawn Chapel by the Hook and Hastings Co. and installed around 1910 was a direct legacy of Matilda Burgher. At that time, the pipe organ cost \$287.50 or equivalent to approximately \$7,800 in 2019. This organ is currently being fully restored and will be in full operation in late 2020.

Sidney and Matilda are interred in "lower" Section 5 situated behind the chapel. Ironically enough, their monument faces in the direction of the chapel unlike most of the others in the section.

The Woodlawn Chapel, built in 1909 and dedicated in 1910, was closed for use around 1958. After many years of planning and fundraising, the chapel has been restored and reopened for public use.

