One of Onondaga County's oldest cemeteries, General Ellis Cemetery, has been restored and preserved by Onondaga Community College with the help of generous donors. A ceremony commemorating the cemetery's restoration was held in June. The cemetery is located on a hillside above Onondaga Road, across the street from Murray Hall, as indicated by a blue historical marker on the shoulder of the road. The cemetery is named after General John Ellis, who moved to Onondaga Hill when it was a wilderness. He was a Revolutionary War veteran who came here in the 1780s from Massachusetts. The first burial in the cemetery was recorded in 1798.

As part of the restoration, the headstones were removed and repaired by Sweetwoods Memorials of Phoenix, N.Y. “There were some areas of the headstones we actually had to reconstitute because the pieces were missing,” said Glenn Canede, owner of Sweetwoods Memorials. “The headstones were made of marble. Because our rain is so acidic, it slowly deteriorates the headstones.” Before and after pictures of the headstones show the remarkable work that was done on them. “It’s very impressive to be able to stand back and see it finished,” said Canede. Other restoration to the site included replacing ground cover and correcting erosion, removing and pruning trees, and restoring the black wrought-iron fencing that surrounds the cemetery to its original look.

Onondaga Historical Association volunteer and former Post Standard columnist Dick Case spoke at the dedication ceremony. He played an important role in the work done at the cemetery and was pleased with the finished product. “To see this restored in this way by the College — I think it’s important. It’s a little park, a memorial park, and that’s what it should be.”

Rick McLain, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of History at Onondaga who has regularly brought students to the cemetery. “Having a general from the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 here on campus is a great opportunity for students to learn. It’s great that it’s been restored so students can appreciate the significance of it.”

Several groups collaborated on the restoration project, including the National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution and its local chapters: Betsy Baldwin Chapter; District O-Central New York Roundtable; Fayetteville-Oswego Chapter; General Asia Danforth Chapter; Onondaga staff; Sons of the American Revolution Onondaga Battle and Syracuse Chapters; and the William G. Pomeroy Foundation. Special thanks to former Town of Onondaga Historian Jane Tracy for her assistance.