

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

**CEMETERIES IN
THE NATION'S CAPITAL**



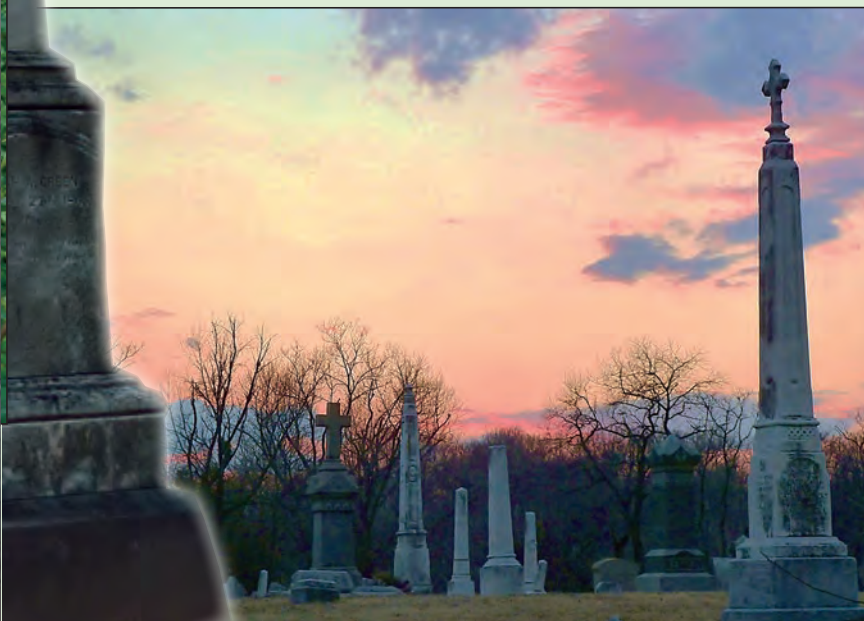


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CEMETERIES IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

Washington, D.C. is home to some of the grandest monuments and most recognized edifices in the world. Beyond its celebrated historic sites, venerable museums, and distinctive rowhouse neighborhoods, however, is an often overlooked facet of the city's history – its cemeteries. These beautiful, although sometimes neglected, landscapes provide the final resting place for the people who have shaped the Nation's Capital in both remarkable and in ordinary ways.

Just over twenty active and inactive cemeteries are currently located in the District of Columbia, although many dozens more have been lost to time or moved to make way for other land uses. Studying their location, design, and grave markers provides insight into the social history, settlement patterns, and religious beliefs of the city's founders and residents. This brochure recounts the burial practices of Washington's earliest inhabitants through the present, focusing on Native American burials, church and family graveyards, and the rise of commercial cemeteries across the four quadrants of the city.



A PLACE TO SLEEP

THE SELECTION OF A BURIAL LOCATION

When colonists arrived in the New World, they brought with them the centuries-old European custom of burial in and around a church. But for inhabitants of the sparsely settled Mid-Atlantic region, churches were often too distant to attend or to use for funerals and burials. Early residents resorted to burying family members on their own property or, when possible, at non-denominational community cemeteries. Within the area that became the District of Columbia, we find both family graveyards and community cemeteries at crossroads villages such as Tenleytown, Brightwood, Hillsdale, and Benning.

These choices – the churchyard (for congregants), the family cemetery (primarily for large landholders), and the community cemetery (at small villages), along with municipal burial grounds (for the destitute) – were the only burial options available to residents of the District of Columbia well into the 19th century. Virtually all cemeteries at this time were informally laid out and operated. Burials were typically

The public vault at Congressional Cemetery was built in 1835 to hold the deceased temporarily while funeral arrangements were made. Three Presidents and two First Ladies were kept here, including Dolley Madison, who remained for over two years while funds were raised to bury her at Montpelier.





Glenwood Cemetery was established in 1854 well outside the city in Washington County. Burials from Trinity Episcopal, Foundry Methodist, and St. John's Episcopal churchyards were moved here soon after.

arranged in chronological order, rather than in family plots, separating deceased parents from children and spouses from one another.

Maintenance was irregular as most early graveyards had no caretaker, but only someone who was paid to bury the dead. Without much oversight, cemeteries became eyesores and were crowded to the point where stacking bodies in the same grave shaft became commonplace. Increasing population density and concerns about contagion further brought into question the appropriateness of having cemeteries in the center of town. The ultimate demise of urban burial grounds in the District commenced with legislation in 1852 which forbade new burial grounds within the boundaries of the Federal City – between the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, Rock Creek and Florida Avenue. From that date, all new cemeteries were located in the outlying Washington County and before long, burials were being exhumed and moved into the new grounds. In fact, several cemeteries were relocated to the suburbs in their entirety.

At the same time, the Rural Cemetery Movement was gaining popularity throughout the nation. Corresponding with the sentimentality of the Victorian era, this entirely new approach to cemetery planning advocated burial grounds as places of beauty and tranquility, envisioning death as a sort of peaceful slumber rather than a pitiless finality. The suburban locations and meticulously planned designs of Rural cemeteries – with winding carriage paths, varied topography, and beautiful vistas – were a far cry from crowded, unkempt inner-city burial grounds. For the first time, people could purchase plots in advance, selecting their preferred location and providing enough space for family members to be buried together. Rural cemeteries introduced regular maintenance, sanitary measures, and security, and created a for-profit, landscape-focused business model.

NO REST FOR THE WEARY MOVING BURIALS

The new Rural cemeteries in Washington – Oak Hill (1849), Glenwood (1854), Prospect Hill (1858), and Mount Olivet (1858), followed by Graceland (1872) and Woodlawn (1895) – served not only the recently deceased, but also became home to the thousands of re-interments from the city center. Throughout the second half of the 19th and into the 20th century, bodies from virtually all of the District's family burial grounds and dozens of the city's early churchyards were relocated to the new cemeteries. The *Critic-Record* reported in 1884 that “popular interest in the excavation of Holmead [Western] Cemetery is on the increase if the crowds that assemble on the scene can be taken as an indication. Yesterday's operations were of unusual interest. Fifty men were at work and ten bodies were exhumed.” Over 3,000 bodies were ultimately exhumed from Western and sent to Graceland and Rock Creek Cemeteries to make room for residential development, taking the work crew months to complete. Other large-scale moves include more than 1,800 bodies from Foundry Methodist to Glenwood Cemetery in 1867, more than 6,800 bodies from Graceland to Woodlawn Cemetery in 1895-1898, and 39,000 bodies from Payne's Cemetery to National Harmony Memorial Park in Maryland in 1969. Such moves typically left some remains behind, as did some other, smaller burying grounds that were simply forgotten and built upon.



The Presbyterian Cemetery in Georgetown was closed in 1887 and the bodies were subsequently moved to Rock Creek Cemetery and other burial grounds, as shown in this 1893 photo. The site is now the Georgetown Playground. The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.



WASHINGTON'S REMAINING CEMETERIES

ACTIVE CEMETERIES

1. ROCK CREEK CHURCH (1719)

Rock Creek Church Road and Webster Street NW

Episcopal originally, now non-denominational

Oldest operating cemetery in Washington

2. CONGRESSIONAL (1807)

1801 E Street SE

Non-denominational

*Founded under the auspices of the Episcopal Church, but
non-denominational*

3. GEORGETOWN VISITATION CONVENT (1815)

1524 35th Street NW

Catholic

*Graveyard is full but crypt burials available for members
of the order only*

4. OAK HILL (1849)

3001 R Street NW

Non-denominational

First Rural Cemetery design in Washington

5. ARMED FORCES RETIREMENT HOME (1851)

21 Harewood Road NW

National Cemetery (Military)

For veterans only, managed by the Army

6. GLENWOOD (1854)

2219 Lincoln Road NE

Non-denominational

7. PROSPECT HILL (1858)

2201 North Capitol Street NE

Lutheran originally, now non-denominational

8. MOUNT OLIVET (1858)

1300 Bladensburg Road NE

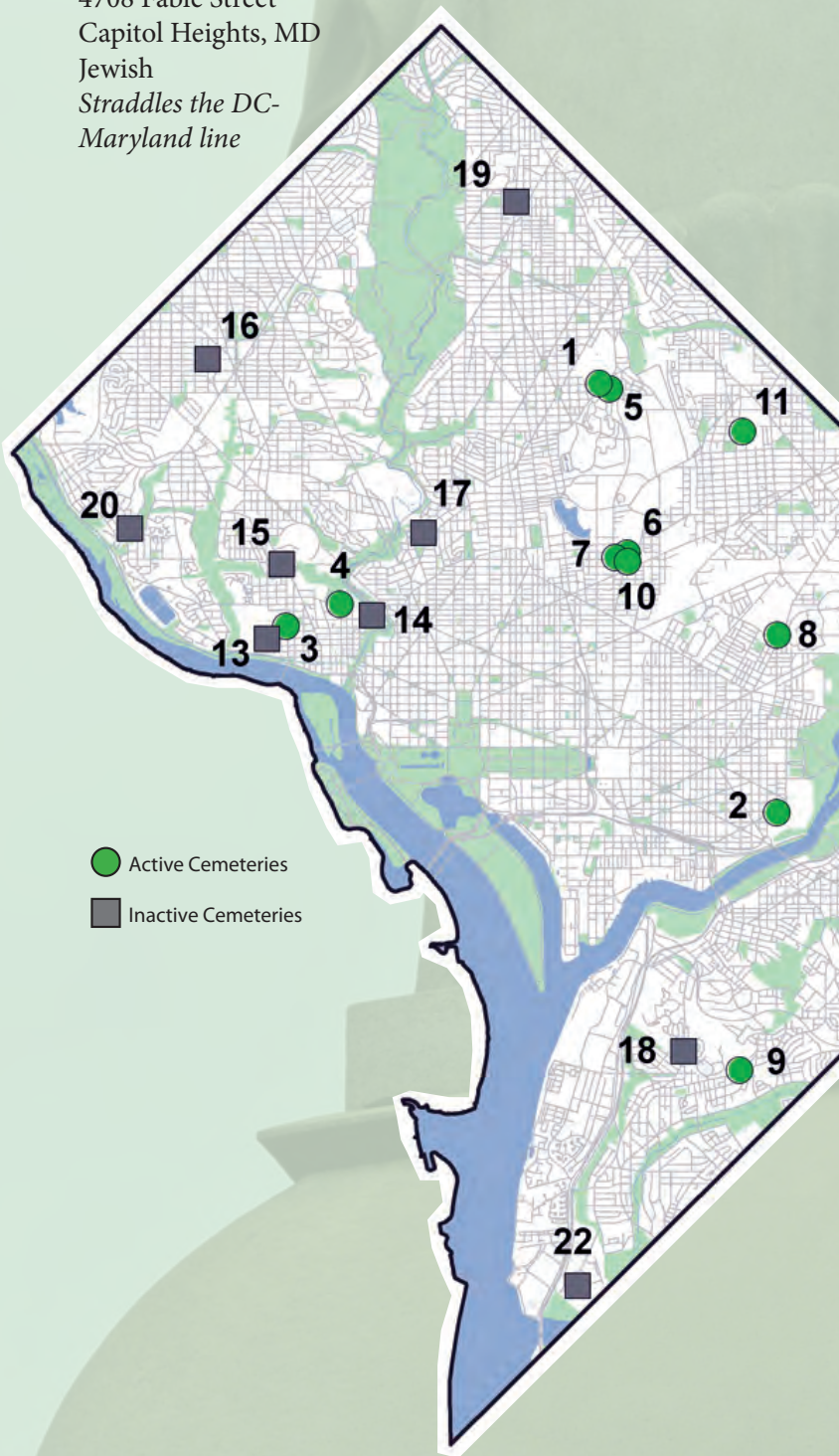
Catholic

9. JEWISH CONGREGATIONS (beginning 1869)
1380-1400 Alabama Avenue SE
Jewish
Adjacent cemeteries; some are in use, some are inactive

10. ST. MARY’S (1875)
2121 Lincoln Road NE
Catholic

11. FRANCISCAN MONASTERY (1901)
1400 Quincy Street NE
Catholic
For members of the order only

12. NATIONAL CAPITAL HEBREW (1911)
4708 Fable Street
Capitol Heights, MD
Jewish
Straddles the DC-Maryland line



INACTIVE CEMETERIES

13. JESUIT (c. 1808)

Georgetown University campus

Catholic

For Georgetown University faculty only

14. MT. ZION METHODIST/FEMALE UNION

BAND (c. 1808-1950)

Mill Road NW, east of 26th Street

Methodist and non-denominational

Adjacent cemeteries, also incorporates Montgomery Street

Methodist Church cemetery

15. HOLY ROOD (1832-1984)

2128 Wisconsin Avenue NW

Catholic

16. TENLEYTOWN METHODIST (1847-1989)

4100 block of Murdock Mill Road NW

Non-denominational

17. COLORED UNION BENEVOLENT

ASSOCIATION (1870-1889)

Adams Mill Road and Calvert Street NW

African American

In Walter Peirce Park. Partially moved, no gravemarkers remain

18. ST. ELIZABETHS HOSPITAL (1856-1983)

Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue SE

Government-owned

Two cemeteries, on East and West Campuses

19. BATTLEGROUND NATIONAL

(1864-1936)

6625 Georgia Avenue NW

National Cemetery (Military)

For veterans of the Battle of Fort Stevens

20. UNION BURIAL SOCIETY OF

GEORGETOWN (c. 1868)

2616 Chain Bridge Road

African American

Last burial c. 1966

21. WOODLAWN (1895-1970)

4611 Benning Road SE

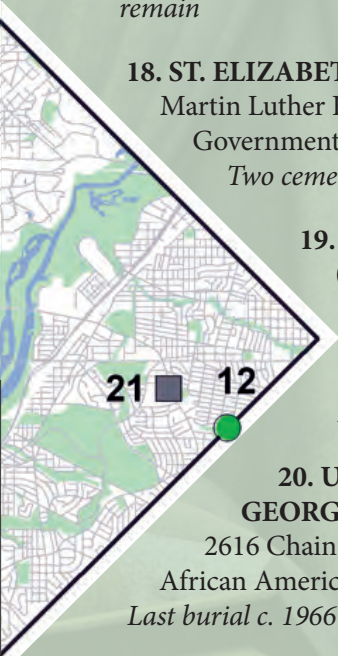
Non-denominational

22. BLUE PLAINS (1907-1967)

D.C. Village Lane SE

Includes burials from the Home for the Aged and Infirm, Almshouse, Asylum, Smallpox Grounds, and various potters' fields

No gravemarkers present



WHEN DEATH HAS COME

HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF WASHINGTON CEMETERIES

NATIVE AMERICAN BURIALS

Long before George Washington selected the area at the confluence of the eastern and western branches of the Potomac River as the site of the new Federal City, Native Americans had used this adaptable region as both a temporary and permanent base for hunting, fishing, and habitation. Although only a scant number of Native American burials have been discovered, they have begun to help us understand the daily lives, religious beliefs, and customs of Washington's earliest inhabitants.

Excavations for the construction of the Whitehurst Freeway near the mouth of Rock Creek revealed a highly intact burial from the Middle Woodland period, dating to about AD 750. The deceased was a female who was cremated and then buried with ceremonial objects such as an antler hairpiece, stone pendants, drilled shark teeth, decorative disks and beads, and well-preserved textiles. The grave goods indicate that she was a woman of high status and suggest belief in an afterlife where her spirit may have need of these items.



Artifacts recovered from a Native American grave found during excavations for the Whitehurst Freeway.

Bolling Air Force Base once held the highest concentration of Native American burials yet discovered in the District. Two ossuaries, where bones were placed after they were cleaned, were discovered during construction in the 1930s. Each ossuary contained the remains of sixty to seventy individuals. These burials may be associated with the village of Nacotch tank, which was a permanent Native American settlement on the eastern shore of the Anacostia River.

RELIGIOUS BURIAL GROUNDS

When early European residents were located close enough to churches, most burials took place in the churchyards. The oldest churches were concentrated in the port town of Georgetown or were built in outlying areas as



Mount Olivet was established in 1858 and became the city's primary Catholic burial ground with a number of bodies relocated here from churchyards.

“chapels of ease,” small houses of worship established by congregants who were located too far from the parish church to attend. Early Catholics, such as Richard Queen and James Barry sometimes built chapels on their own property to avoid the persecution they had experienced in England. Rock Creek Church, which started as a small Anglican chapel of ease and burial ground around 1719, served the few inhabitants of what was then Prince George’s County. Now open to all religions, Rock Creek Church Cemetery, bounded by North Capitol Street, New Hampshire Avenue, and Rock Creek Church Road NW, is one of a handful of colonial cemeteries that remain active in the United States.

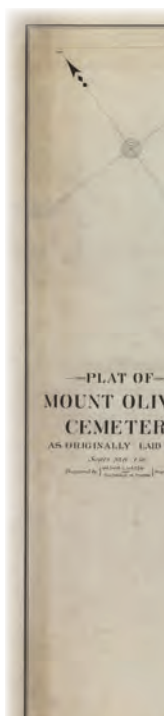


Initially an Anglican (Episcopal) burial ground, Rock Creek Church Cemetery is now non-denominational and contains a number of Eastern Orthodox graves in its northeastern section.

Georgetown was an active port before the District of Columbia was created and was home to several of the city's oldest churchyards, representing each of the major Christian denominations. Georgetown Lutheran was founded in 1766 and burials are believed to have taken place beginning soon after. Still located at 1556 Wisconsin Avenue NW, the churchyard contains no grave markers. Congregants of Bridge Street Presbyterian Church were buried around their church, located on the southeast corner of 30th and M Street, beginning around 1782, while those of Holy Trinity Catholic Church were being interred by 1789 (and possibly as early as 1767) on the south side of O between 35th and 36th Streets NW.

Burials began at Montgomery Street Methodist Church by 1808, although the church was founded in 1772. The cemetery allowed burials of both black and white members, but was segregated by race. The grounds were later leased to Mount Zion Methodist Episcopal, a black congregation that split off from Montgomery Street. The west end of the burial ground was subsequently sold to the Female Union Band Society for the burial of their free black members. Located on Mill Road behind the 2600 block of Q Street NW, the cemetery remains in place although no burials have occurred since 1950.

Following religious tradition, cemeteries for Jewish congregations were not located adjacent to their respective synagogues, but were situated outside densely settled areas. The first known Jewish burial ground was on 17th Street NW, north of Florida Avenue and was in use by the 1850s. Interments were later moved to Southeast, near today's intersection of Alabama and



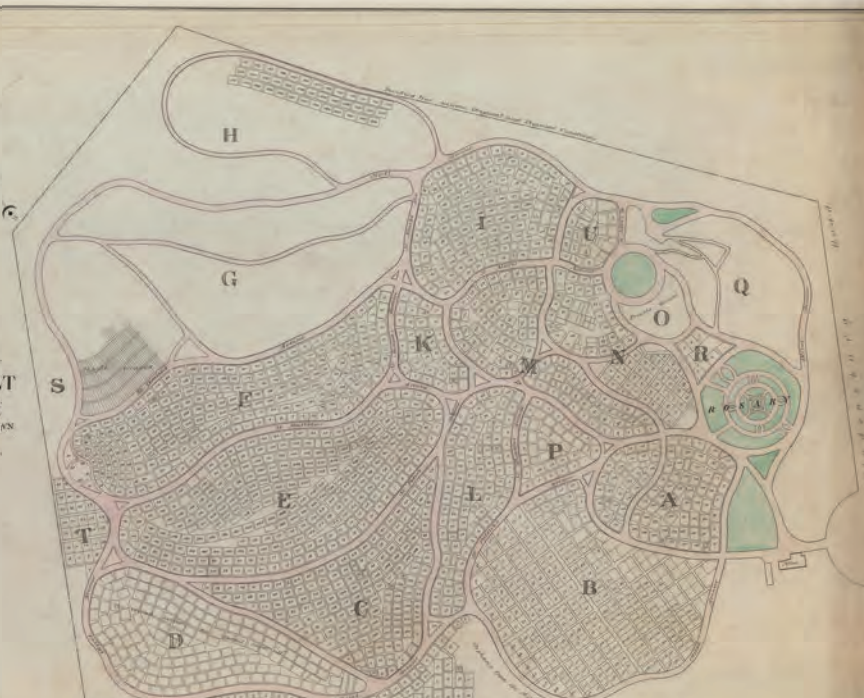
Congress Avenues, where a complex of Jewish cemeteries developed following the establishment of Macpelah Cemetery for the Adas Israel congregation in 1869. Other congregations and organizations that have added their own burying grounds include Elesavetgrad, Ohev Sholom, Washington Hebrew, and Talmud Torah.

The only confirmed Baptist cemetery in Washington was associated with Macedonia Baptist Church, founded in 1866. Located on Sheridan Road SE, it may have been the Howard family graveyard first, or it may be associated with that name because the first pastor was the Reverend James Howard (or both). Historic plats show old and new sections of graveyard located north of the church building. Burials took place here from at least 1874 through 1917 and were mostly, but not exclusively, African American.

One important early religious graveyard worth noting is the inactive Holy Rood Cemetery, which was established in 1832 just north of Georgetown to provide more space for Catholic burials. Holy Rood is one of the few cemeteries with recorded slave burials, offering a rare glimpse of the city's slave-owning past by providing names, dates of death, and ages of those who were considered the property of others.

Religious interments tapered off by the middle of the 19th century as churchyards began to reach capacity. Most burials were subsequently exhumed and removed to newer cemeteries to make room for development within the burgeoning city.

The roads at Mount Olivet are named after the parishes that established the cemetery – St. Dominic's, St. Matthew's, St. Peter's, St. Patrick's, St. Aloysius, and St. Mary's. A number of priests and nuns from various Catholic orders are buried in dedicated sections.





Holy Rood (above) was the final resting place of many Irish Catholics while Prospect Hill (left) was the primary cemetery for German Lutherans. Like this one, many of Prospect Hill's gravestones are inscribed in German.

Other early church cemeteries include:

St. Patrick's, Catholic, 9th, 10th, F, and G Streets NW
(c. 1797)

Barry's Chapel, Catholic, Half and O Streets SW (c. 1805)

Quaker, Adams Mill Road near Calvert Street NW (1807)

Congressional, Episcopal, Potomac Avenue SE (1807)

St. John's, Episcopal, Lafayette Square (c. 1809)

St. Peter's, Catholic, 2nd and C Streets SE (c. 1821)

Ebenezer Methodist Cemetery, 17th, 18th, D, and E Streets SE (1824)

Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal 16th, 17th, C, and D Streets SE (broke from Ebenezer in 1838)



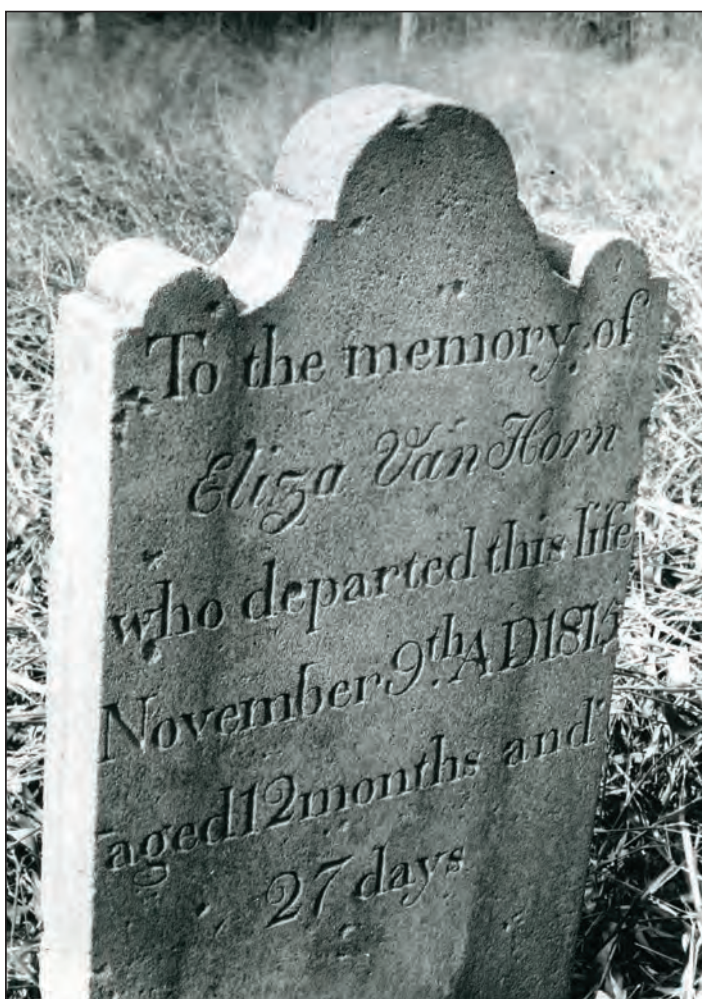
The first burial in the National Capital Hebrew Cemetery on Southern Avenue was in 1911.

FAMILY BURIAL GROUNDS

When a family could not reasonably transport members for burial at a church, they interred them on their own property. After a family burial ground was established, it frequently continued to be used, even when closer places for burial became available. Typical family burial grounds were located on a high point in a farm field or at its edge, where they were walled or fenced to protect them from livestock. Sometimes they were placed closer to the house in the front or rear yard, but usually far from the family's water source. Mounded earth, fieldstones, or wood were used to mark graves – except for the wealthiest settlers, who could afford to send to Europe or New England for carved headstones. Later, after stonecarvers established themselves in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Frederick, Maryland in the early to mid-19th century, headstones became more common.

In some cases, family grounds became the foundation for larger community cemeteries and were eventually turned over to a church, cemetery board, or manage-

Eliza Van Horn was buried in 1815 in the family cemetery of the Youngs, Bealls, and Sheriffs, who were related by marriage. The burial ground was in the vicinity of today's Eastland Gardens community. The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.





Richard Queen's family plot was willed to the Catholic church in 1794 along with the accompanying chapel he had built, giving the area the name Queen's Chapel. The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

ment company. For instance, there were reportedly family burials present on a parcel of land that Colonel Charles Beatty donated to Georgetown Lutheran for church burials in 1766. The Holmead family grounds became Western Cemetery, which was owned and operated by the District government, while the Moore family plot, in existence by the mid-19th century, gradually became used for community burials and was formally incorporated as Rosemont Cemetery around 1930.

Like church graveyards, most domestic burial grounds are rare survivors in urban areas such as the District of Columbia. Development pressures and the value of real estate caused many families to remove their loved ones for reinterment elsewhere. Over a hundred African American and white family cemeteries have been recorded in the District, yet none is known to survive, their occupants having found a permanent home in newer cemeteries or their location lost to time.

AFRICAN AMERICAN BURIAL GROUNDS

Little is known about the burial of enslaved and early free blacks of the District of Columbia (slavery was abolished here in April 1862). In the Mid-Atlantic region, enslaved persons on rural properties were traditionally buried adjacent to the owning family's burial ground. In some instances, they were interred in a separate slave graveyard elsewhere on the property in a spot considered to be of little agricultural value.

Although scant information is available on the location or number of burials, slave cemeteries are likely associated with slaveholding families such as the Shoemakers near Peirce Mill; the Veitches in the Fort Lincoln area; the Lyles, Murdock, Marshall, Loughborough, and Dyer families near Tenleytown; and the Bealls at Bennings.

Following the Civil War, more references to African American family graveyards begin appear in the historic record. For instance, the Belt family's cemetery on their farm north of Tenleytown was in use by 1880, as was the McPherson family grounds in the Hillsdale area. The



Payne's Cemetery on Benning Road NE had been in use for over 100 years when over 30,000 African American burials were moved to National Harmony Memorial Park in Maryland in 1969. Top - Baist's Real Estate Atlas 1967, bottom - The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

Swartz family had a graveyard on their property near Brightwood throughout the 19th century, and by 1883, there were sixteen burials recorded there. Rezin Addison, born a slave in Maryland in about 1830, started a family cemetery on his farm in the vicinity of Tenley Circle after Emancipation.

As with white family cemeteries, several African American family burial grounds expanded to become larger community cemeteries. One such site, belonging to the Henson-Smith family, was located in Congress Heights. Tobias Henson had purchased his own freedom in 1813, and was later able to secure that of his wife, two daughters, and five grandchildren. Their family cemetery at today's Congress Street between 13th Place and Savannah Place SE, contained over a hundred African American burials by the last quarter of the 19th century, indicating a broader use than by just the family. The graves remained through the 1950s, when they were relocated to Lincoln Cemetery in Maryland.

AFRICAN AMERICAN BURIAL SOCIETIES

From a very early date, free African American residents of Washington had another option for burial besides churchyards or private property – mutual benevolent (or beneficial) society cemeteries. These enterprising organizations collected minimal dues from members to cover their funeral expenses, sometimes offering additional financial support to their spouses and children.

The first to form was the Columbian Harmony Society in 1825, which opened Columbian Harmony Cemetery in 1829 between 5th, 6th, S, and Florida Avenue NW. After the city's 1852 prohibition of burials, the graves were





Pictured in 1931, the Female Union Band Society Cemetery is adjacent to the Montgomery Street/Mount Zion Methodist Cemetery in Georgetown. The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

moved to a new Columbian Harmony Cemetery in Washington County at 9th Street and Rhode Island Avenue NE. From 1880 through about 1920, this was most the active black burial ground in the city, adding twelve acres to the existing seventeen in 1886. In 1960, the burials, numbering approximately 37,000, were moved again, this time to Maryland, and the site is now the location of the Rhode Island Avenue Metro station.

Other burial society cemeteries were the Female Union Band Society (1842) on Mill Road at 26th Street NW; the Free Young Men's Benevolent Association, also called Young Men's Baptist or Mount Pleasant Plains Cemetery located between 12th, 13th, V, and W Streets NW (c. 1857); the Union Burial Society of Georgetown, located at 2616 Chain Bridge Road NW (1868); and the Colored Union Benevolent Society on Adams Mill Road NW in today's Walter Peirce Park (1870). Of these, only the Chain Bridge Road and Mill Road sites remain intact.



Two views of the Columbia Harmony Cemetery in 1960, just before relocation of burials to Maryland. Smithsonian Archives Center at American History.



The Union Burial Society of Georgetown served a sizeable community of newly freed African Americans who had congregated around Battery Kemble seeking protection during the Civil War.

GOVERNMENT CEMETERIES

Despite the abundance of open spaces in Pierre L'Enfant's 1791 plan for the City of Washington, no accommodations were made for burial grounds for the city's residents. Churches, synagogues, burial societies, and individual families had already taken on the responsibility of providing resting places for the deceased. But within a few short years of the founding of the capital, burial space was in such high demand that the government stepped in. In 1798, the Corporation of Washington created two very early examples of public cemeteries in America.

Eastern and Western Cemeteries were located "at a proper distance from the populous parts of the city to accommodate the inhabitants at either end." Eastern was located between 13th, 14th, H, and I Streets NE and Western at 19th, 20th, S Street, and Florida Avenue NW. Although open to all religious denominations, they were racially segregated, using a fence to separate enslaved and free blacks from whites. Eastern Cemetery was quickly abandoned as it was found to be too marshy for burials, and Congressional Cemetery took its place for residents of this portion of the city. Western Cemetery, often called Holmead's because it was established on land obtained from Anthony Holmead, remained in active use through the mid-1800s. The city then sold the cemetery land for

development and relocated some 3,000 bodies to Rock Creek Church and Graceland Cemeteries in the last quarter of the 19th century.

Another type of public burial ground, once common in many American cities, was the potter's field. Generally used in the wake of an epidemic or to bury the poor and indigent, these graveyards were frequently unplanned and temporary in nature. The District's primary potter's field was located at Independence Avenue and 19th Street SE, moved here from the Shaw area in 1846. It was associated with the Washington Asylum, which combined the former Almshouse (or Poorhouse), the jail, a female workhouse, and a smallpox hospital. As a complex, the Asylum provided a home and, later, a final resting place for "the poor, infirm, diseased, vagrant, disorderly persons, prisoners, and paupers."

A visitor in 1871 described its doleful appearance:

"We stood at last amongst the graves of the Almshouse dead—those who have escaped the dissecting knife. Scattered about with little stones and mounds here and there, under the occasional sullen green of cedars, a dead-cart and a spade sticking up as symbols, and the neglected river, deserted as the Styx, [s]plashing against the low banks, we felt the sobering melancholy of the spot..."

In the early 20th century, those buried at the Asylum were moved to the city's Home for the Aged and Infirm, later called D.C. Village, in far Southeast Washington. This cemetery remains, although there are no individual grave markers at the site.

These old stones were relocated to Rock Creek Church Cemetery from Western Cemetery along with their respective interments.



Other cemeteries for Washington's neediest citizens are long gone. These included the Washington City Orphan Asylum at H Street NW between 9th and 10th, which was founded in 1815 for the children of deceased War of 1812 soldiers; the Asylum for Aged and Destitute Colored Refugees and Colored Orphans, established during the Civil War at 35th and R Streets NW; the Industrial Home School, which had several addresses over the years and whose burials are unlocated; and the National Training School for Boys, whose cemetery adjoined the Veitch family's on South Dakota Avenue near 33rd Street NE.

The notable Government Hospital for the Insane, now known as St. Elizabeths, contains two burial grounds, one on the West Campus (1856) and one on the East Campus (c. 1873). The other federal burial grounds that remain in the District of Columbia are its two military cemeteries, the Armed Forces Retirement Home (1861) and Battle-ground National Cemetery, for the veterans of the Battle of Fort Stevens (1864).

Although outside the District of Columbia, mention of Arlington National Cemetery is warranted since this venerable burial ground contains thousands of Civil War soldiers who died in Washington's military hospitals and camps as well as African American freedpeople who had sought asylum in Washington during the war. Because of the acute need for burial space – and to spite the Confederacy – the federal government sent the bodies across the Potomac River for interment on land belonging to Confederate General Robert E. Lee.



Battle-ground is one of the smallest National Cemeteries in the country and is the resting place of the veterans of the Battle of Fort Stevens, which took place in July 1864. Forty Union soldiers were buried here immediately following the skirmish with one additional veteran interred in 1936.

CITIES OF THE DEAD

THE RURAL CEMETERY MOVEMENT

The Rural Cemetery Movement had its origins in Boston, where crowded inner-city graveyards were under scrutiny for the same reasons as in other large cities – overcrowding, neglect, fear of pestilence, and the inconvenience of having a burial ground in the center of a burgeoning downtown. Mount Auburn Cemetery, designed in what came to be called the Rural Cemetery aesthetic, addressed these problems with an entirely new concept of the burial place.



Established in 1849 and shown here circa 1920, Oak Hill is Washington's first Rural Cemetery. National Photo Company collection, Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-F82-3229.

Founded in 1831, Mount Auburn was located far outside Boston on a sprawling 70-acre parcel. Several factors set it apart from every other cemetery to date: it was intentionally designed and formally laid out; it was a secular, profit-driven venture; and it was meant to be a peaceful respite that would draw visitors from the city in the days before public parks existed. Drawing on Romantic-era interest in nature, its hilly site featured a meticulously designed landscape with meandering roads and footpaths, heavy plantings, elegant monuments, and thoughtfully arranged vistas. These features were a departure from the



Designed by George de la Roche in 1849, Oak Hill retains much of its historic appearance with steeply graded topography and ornate monuments.

graveyards of the past, where visitors were lucky to find even a walkway or a single tree among the roughly gridded layout of simple headstones. Whereas the old burials grounds were places to avoid, Mount Auburn and other cemeteries of the Rural Cemetery Movement were park-like respites where visiting was encouraged and welcomed. Mortuary symbolism evolved as well, no longer featuring hourglasses or other reminders of mortality and impending judgment. Gravestones of the 19th century celebrated the deceased, who would reap the benefits of a tangible afterlife and forever abide in the memory of the living.

Cities rushed to copy the elegance and popularity of Mount Auburn. Georgetown’s Oak Hill Cemetery was the



This 1866 sketch of Congressional Cemetery shows the romanticism of the Rural Cemetery Movement and its appeal to the visiting public. The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

first to follow the tenets of the Rural Cemetery Movement in D.C. Oak Hill was “laid out on a most romantic site, with great taste and judgment” in 1849. It was designed by civil engineer George de la Roche with steeply graded paths and drives, a fountain, and expansive views over Rock Creek, and was deemed “worth visiting” in tourist literature of the day. Its well-maintained, terraced landscape and chapel attracted lot purchasers, despite the presence of a number of religious cemeteries in the vicinity.

Glenwood (1854), Prospect Hill (1858), and Mount Olivet (1858) followed soon after and all demonstrate elements of the Rural Cemetery Movement. They were created well outside the city’s developed area, featured bucolic landscaping and curving roads, and encouraged visits with their serene settings and carefully tended grounds. The shore of the Rock Creek Cemetery pond, for instance, was a picturesque spot to purchase a burial plot or to spend an afternoon picnicking.



The lake at Rock Creek Cemetery circa 1912 and in 2012. Top - The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.





Granite mausoleums at St. Mary's Cemetery.

To complement the elaborateness of rural cemeteries, gravestones became more ornate as well, a tribute to 19th century Victorian excess. Simple head- and footstones were supplanted by grand memorials in the form of obelisks, columns, angels, and other sculptural works. Elegant stone mausoleums – which house above-ground burials – became fashionable and reflected the popularity of the Gothic Revival, Egyptian Revival, and Neoclassical styles.

REST IN PEACE

WASHINGTON'S CEMETERIES TODAY

For the most part, the District's remaining cemeteries are beautiful, restful open spaces featuring a number of prominent burials, significant artistic works, and architectural gems. Sophisticated carved headstones and architect-designed chapels, receiving vaults, and gatehouses offer an intriguing glimpse into the evolution of funerary design. Mausoleums mimicking Greek temples and Gothic churches offer a roll-call of the city's most prominent families.

Congressional, Glenwood, Oak Hill, and Mount Olivet Cemeteries all feature picturesque chapels nestled among the gravestones. Two of these are so architecturally important, that they have been individually listed in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites. Glenn Brown's chapel at Glenwood is an excellent example of the Richardsonian

Romanesque style, while James Renwick's Gothic Revival chapel decorates the Oak Hill Cemetery grounds. The Van Ness mausoleum in Oak Hill was designed by George Hadfield after the Temple of Vesta in Rome and is also a designated landmark.

Another important cemetery piece is also one of the most notable sculptural works in the District of Columbia. Residing in Rock Creek Church Cemetery is Augustus Saint-Gaudens' bronze sculpture *The Mystery of the Hereafter and The Peace of God that Passeth Understanding*, more commonly called "Grief," a memorial to Marian "Clover" Adams, wife of Henry Adams. This much-photographed allegorical figure is one of Saint-Gaudens' most significant achievements.



The Adams Memorial was designed by sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens and architect Stanford White for Marian "Clover" Adams, wife of Henry Adams.

Unfortunately, some of the District's cemeteries are not in reputable condition, particularly those that are no longer in use. Neglect and vandalism have taken their toll on the Mount Zion/Female Union Band and Holy Rood cemeteries despite sporadic efforts to clean up. Commu-



Over the years, vandalism has taken its toll on the gravestones at the Mount Zion/Female Union Band Cemetery.

nity interest may yet find a champion for the restoration of these grounds.

Of Washington's remaining cemeteries, Prospect Hill, Oak Hill, Woodlawn, Rock Creek, and Battleground National Cemeteries are designated historic sites. In addition, Georgetown Visitation, St. Elizabeths, the Jesuit, and Mount Zion/Female Union Band Cemeteries fall within the boundaries of designated historic districts. Congressional Cemetery is a National Historic Landmark, reaching the highest level of historic recognition because of its national importance.

GRAVESTONE SYMBOLISM

A walk through any of the city's cemeteries presents visitors with a plethora of imagery and symbolism specific to various cultural, religious, and social groups, as well as iconography that has become common among all classes, races, and religions. From the images carved on gravestones, we can begin to understand not only the beliefs of individuals, but how those beliefs have gained or lost importance over the years and how perceptions of death have changed.

A few examples include lambs, which were used on children's graves to symbolize innocence; a hand pointing upward showing that the soul of the departed has gone to Heaven; a broken column or a flower with a broken stem indicating a life cut short; and ivy, symbolic of undying affection or everlasting life. Fraternal emblems are common on gravestones and include the compass and square of the Masons, the linked chain of the Odd Fellows, and tree stump markers for Woodmen of the World.

THEIR SPIRITS WILL



LIVE ON FOREVER

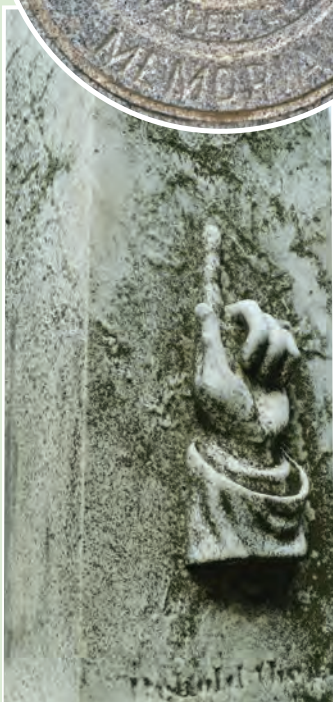




The cenotaphs at Congressional Cemetery, honoring early members of Congress who died in office, have recently been cleaned and restored.

Common symbols denote farewell (shaking hands), a belief in the afterlife (butterfly emerged from chrysalis and finger pointing to Heaven), sorrow at a life cut short (broken chain and flower stem), and blessing (Cohanim hands).

Emblems are also frequently used to denote membership in organizations such as the Masons, Elks, Odd Fellows, and Woodmen of the World.



SOME NOTABLE BURIALS

Many notable individuals, both the illustrious and the infamous, have been laid to rest in the District of Columbia. Some of the more colorful politicians, artists, scientists, musicians, socialites, and criminals include:

Congressional – Photographer Mathew Brady, Mary Ann Hall (the “Madam on the Mall”), J. Edgar Hoover, Belva Lockwood (lawyer, suffragette, and 1884 Presidential candidate), Choctaw Chief Pushmataha, and composer John Philip Sousa

Glenwood – Constantino Brumidi (painter of the Capitol dome), Amos Kendall (founder of Gallaudet University), and Emmanuel Leutze (painter of Washington Crossing the Delaware)

Mount Olivet – James Hoban (architect of the White House) and Mary Surratt (conspirator in Lincoln’s assassination)

Rock Creek – Julius Garfinckel (founder of Garfinckel’s Department Store), Gilbert H. Grosvenor (President of National Geographic Society and the “father of photojournalism”), and author Upton Sinclair

Woodlawn – Blanche Bruce (first former slave to serve as U.S. Senator) and John Mercer Langston (early African American U.S. Congressman)

AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL, WASHINGTON, DC

Woodlawn Cemetery

4611 Benning Road, SE

Woodlawn Cemetery, established in 1895, serves as the final resting place for Sen. Blanche K. Bruce, Mary P. Burrill, Will Marion Cook, John W. Cromwell, John R. Francis, Rep. John Mercer Langston, Jesse Lawson, Mary Meriwether, and Daniel Murray, among other prominent Washingtonians.

The majority of burials at Woodlawn are the remains of more than 6,000 individuals that were exhumed from Graceland Cemetery, a graveyard established in 1872 near Benning Road and H Street, NE. Other re-interments came from cemeteries such as the Colored Union Benevolent Association Burial Ground in Adams Morgan near the National Zoo.

The cemetery was listed in the National Register for Historic Places in 1996.



On left, Benj. Blue Cook, secretary of the newly established Woodlawn Baptist Church Association, Inc., with John Langston, Jr. (right).

Gift of the National Archives and Records Administration.



Official National Register of Historic Places

Woodlawn Cemetery was created when nearby Graceland was condemned by the city in 1894 for a road extension project.

CEMETERY TIMELINE

10,500 BCE - c. 1700 Native American occupation of the region

1608 – Captain John Smith is the first Englishman to navigate the Potomac River

1719 – Rock Creek Church Cemetery was founded

1720s-1850s – Church burials were the most common type of burial

1720s-1880s – Family cemeteries were used

1791 – L'Enfant Plan for Washington included no burial grounds

1798 – Eastern and Western Cemeteries created by the District government

1807 – Congressional Cemetery created

1825 – First African American burial society formed in Washington

1831 – Mount Auburn Cemetery created, beginning the Rural Cemetery Movement

1849 – Oak Hill Cemetery designed as Washington's first Rural cemetery

1852 – The government bans burials within the original city boundaries

1850s – Glenwood (1854), Prospect Hill (1858), Mount Olivet (1858), and Payne's

(1851) created in response to ban on burials and to the Rural Cemetery Movement

1870-1900s – Extensive removals of bodies from the city center to new Rural cemeteries

1964 – The District recognizes the significant historical and architectural features of cemeteries by designating Oak Hill and Congressional as historic sites.

1977 – Rock Creek Church Cemetery designated as historic site

1991 – Woodlawn Cemetery designated as historic site

2005 – Prospect Hill Cemetery designated as historic site



A small pet cemetery was located on the grounds of today's National Arboretum and was in use as early as 1909 through the 1970s. It is one of the oldest recorded pet cemeteries in the country. The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.



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Front: Prospect Hill Cemetery

Back: Glenwood Cemetery

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