# Heritage Gazette

ASSOCIATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY • FALL 2009

## Restoring America's Past

If you think it's just an old brick shed, think again. The brick burial tombs at Congressional cemetery represent an important part of America's heritage — the burial practices of 19th Century high society. From about 1810 to 1870, Congressional was one of the places where high society strutted their stuff. The brick tombs were an announcement about social standing that set a standard that most folks could only envy.

Some 150 years later these structures are showing their age and the Association is committed to preserving them as best we can. It's more than just simply repointing the occasional loose exterior brick. The doors, surrounds, facades, and the vaulted roof itself must be inspected and repaired. Furthermore, as befitting a professional operation, the Association is committed to the highest standards of restoration work. History, archives, architecture, archeology, anthropology, photography,



masonry, landscaping, and fundraising all come into play. Restoration is complicated work.

In the 19th Century family vaults were used as temporary morgues for neighbors and friends, as well as family. It was not uncommon for a family vault to have a number of comings and goings over time. Because various cemetery activities

> were recorded in different ledgers and books, it is not always immediately clear who or how many folks were placed in and remained in the family vaults.

## ৰ্তীteamboat Highways

Imagine a time when a "quick" trip to Georgetown from Capitol Hill took 3½ hours by horse drawn carriage. One way. Now imagine that trip with an oxen led cart piled high with goods. Toward the end of the 18th Century, if you didn't live near a navigable river, transportation was well nigh impossible. Even then, sailing up river was a challenge. The invention of the steamboat revolutionized travel, commerce, and the

The earliest boat driven by steam operated on the upper reaches of the Potomac as early as 1787, fully 20 years before Robert Fulton's Clermont began its run on the Hudson

American economy. River. The steamboat Washington

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## Letter from the Chair

### Award Winning

In 2007 and 2008, we undertook a major long term restoration project that brought together several world class organizations, a lot of enthusiastic professionals and volunteers, incorporated the latest in historic preservation technology, and preserved components of Congressional Cemetery for the next 100 years. It was a very large, complex project for which we earned the 2009 Mayor's Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation.

The Cenotaph Project saw the participation of the Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration (NCA), the National Park Service Historic Preservation Training Center (HPTC) and the National Center for Preservation Training & Technology (NCPTT), the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), the DC Office of Historic Preservation (HPO), and Architect of the Capitol in the restoration of 166 sandstone cenotaphs and two major marble monuments. Also participating were the NPS Fort McHenry Guard, U.S. Army Office of the Chief of Staff, the Macomb descendents, and volunteers from Congressional Cemetery.

Throughout the project every organization used the project and its staff to further public education in historic preservation concepts and standards. Interns and new employees from each organization visited and participated at the site The participation of the NCA and HPTC in the APHCC

bicentennial festival in May 2007 helped make it a successful celebration of Congressional Cemetery's heritage. The work done on his project has already made its way into scientific papers presented by HPTC, NCPTT and NMNH.

The restoration of these monuments brought together an unusual collaboration of preservation enthusiasts, skilled craftsmen and technicians, scientists and historians, volunteers and civil servants. Every organization involved adhered to the highest standards of historic preservation. The result was an outstanding success. It's safe to say that all the organizations and individuals involved are proud of the work they did and the level of cooperation we maintained.

The Mayor's Award offers a moment to reflect on how far we've come, and what an outstanding community it is that participates at Congressional. From the gardeners to the archivists, stone conservators to docent story tellers, event planners to groundskeepers, Congressional Cemetery is not only a rewarding place to participate but now an award winning place as well.

On behalf of the whole community, I thank and congratulate the participants in the Cenotaph Project for making it such a success, for contributing to the preservation of this historic site, and being such a great lot of folks to work with.

—Patrick Crowley



Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery

Community · Leadership · Discovery!

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HERITAGE GAZETTE: Fall 2009

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The Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. All donations are fully tax deductible according to applicable federal tax laws

#### The Incidental Architect

On September 26, author Gordon Brown lead a lively discussion of the earliest days of the Federal City and the life of William Thornton, the man who designed the US Capitol Building. Brown's new book, The Incidental Architect, is available at bookstores.

#### Victorian Mourning

The Fairfax Victorian Society chose Congressional Cemetery as the lead-off location for their yearlong look at Victorian Era mourning practices. The festively attired gathering listened to a presentation of fashions and practices from the Era before embarking on a tour highlighted by re-enactments of Victorian Era notable individuals such as Count Gurowski and Flora Darling.



From the Executive Director

Just as October marks the end of mowing and the beginning of leaf removal, the fall season brings up the opportunity to enjoy the vistas of our 35 3/4 acres. A number of groups have rented the chapel or gatehouse for parties, meetings and special tours including the Victorian Society, National Society of Colonial Dames, and the Children of the Revolution. Before it gets too cold to enjoy being outside, our docents have scheduled a special tour, Scandal, Seduction and the Supernatural, for Saturday, October 17th; all four branches of the military are going to "Make a Difference" here on the grounds October 24th, and the Association Awards Ceremony and John Philip Sousa birthday celebration on November 6th. We invite you to call the Gatehouse 202-543-0539 for details and reservations to these free events.

The fall also brings to a close the restoration of four family vaults. Our partnership with the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History has allowed us to reverently move the Causten, White, and Keyworth families to a safe location while restoration work continues. Work has started on repair and up-righting stones. A special contribution has allowed us to hire a professional stone mason to work on 21 stones in varying degrees of deterioration. This test will give us a baseline for cost to repair. To those of you who contributed toward the cost of the

restorations, we thank you. For those of you who still would like to help, your tax deductible contribution will allow us to continue this very important work.

Our historic range books and Daily Logs and Interment Records are now back in the restored safe. Other historic documents are now in our new fireproof room. Members of our History Advisory Committee are joining local teachers and techies to develop our Wish List parameters for a new interactive, multi-media website. If you have thoughts on any feature you would like to see, please let us know - staff@congressionalcemetery.org.

And at last, before the first snow falls, the drainage project and road construction should be completed soon. It will have taken 1 ½ years and over \$2 million to repair and replace this important part of our infrastructure, built to last for most of the next 100 years.

As Congressional started its 2nd century with a new expansion plan, we start the 3rd with new and traditional burial opportunities. Cemetery Manager, Alan Davis, has developed a "Site-Selection Tour for those who want to pick out their final neighborhood, as well as some very innovative new burial options.

So, things are moving along well here. If you haven't visited us in a while, drop by — and stay a while.

—CINDY HAYS

## 

Over two hundred after its founding Congressional Cemetery once again finds itself on the cutting edge of burial offerings and options with the creation of the first Green Burial Section not only in Washington DC but in the North East Corridor.

Green or Natural burial is a way of going "back to the future" as this is the way burials were done throughout most of history. Natural burials are a way of allowing human remains to naturally recycle their nutrients back to the Earth by allowing the remains to decompose and rejoin the elements that gave it life.

As modern cemeteries have evolved, products and methods such as underground burial vaults and embalming, the use of steel and copper caskets have limited nature's processes and not allowed ashes and dust to naturally return to mother earth. In a natural burial, a wood or biodegradable casket is placed in the ground bereft of any concrete or plastic outer burial containers, no embalming is permitted. Individual grave markers are also prohibited.

The result is the participation in a movement that aims to protect and preserve damaged landscapes as well as a permanent and final statement commitment to the environment.

In the end however the Green Burial at Congressional Cemetery, simply serves to expand our offerings and provide more choice for the community.

If you would like more information on Green Burial, or any other type of interment at Congressional Cemetery, please contact alandavis@congressionalcemetery.org or Sales@congressionalcemetery.org.

—Alan Davis

#### **Greater DC Cares**

Some volunteers just like to work, rain or shine. So it is with Greater DC Cares, which returned to Congressional Cemetery for the second time this year with a crew of 60 some volunteers for a day of community service in honor of those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001.

#### Stone Restoration

The Association awarded a contract to Howard Wellman Conservation for the restoration of 22 gravestones in the southeast corner of the original square of the Cemetery. Among the oldest grave markers at Congressional, these marble tablets have fallen, broken, or sunken over time. Mr. Wellman has been a frequent volunteer at Congressional and a good steward of our old stones.



#### **Totem Pole Explained**



If you've ever wondered what all the symbols on the grand healing totem poles mean, you can now stop by the new explanatory signage installed in August. Funded by TKF, the sign ties together the vision and beliefs of the Lummi Carvers in helping the families of the victims of 9/11 attacks heal.

#### **Architect to Architect**

Stephen Ayers, Acting Architect of the Capitol, brought his senior staff over to Congressional Cemetery September 16th for a quick look at our stellar line up of past architects who designed and built the great structures of DC, plus a look at the restoration and infrastructure work underway this year. Mr. Ayers recorded a cell phone tour for the 19th Century architect George Hadfield — to listen dial 202-747-3474, 36#.

## **Magnolia** grandiflora

Our majestic Magnolia grandiflora anchors the corner of Ingle Street and Coombe carriage way, on the east side of the chapel. Standing well over 50' tall, it is a landmark in the cemetery, easily spotted in winter and summer due to its evergreen foliage. The large, waxy leaves are dark green with a lustrous sheen on top, in contrast to the dusky, suede-like underside.

In June, huge white blossoms open and exude a sweet scent from their cone-shaped center, then appear sporadically on the tree through September. Too fragile for picking, this trait of delicacy protects the fertilized blooms, promoting good seed set from September through December. As the Magnolia pod ripens, the cone scales curl back to reveal bright red seeds, which creates a welcome display of holiday color against the contrasting leaves.

Sometimes known as the Bull Bay Magnolia, it is the state flower of both Louisiana and Mississippi. It thrives in our southeastern climate and grows well as far north as New





Jersey if sheltered. Carolus Linnaeus, who developed the system of botanical nomenclature we use today, chose the name 'Magnolia' to honor Pierre Magnol (1638-1715), a French botanist who originated the classification of plants by families. In his dedica-

tion he states: "It is handsome both in foliage and flower and worthy of so fine a man." We believe our beautiful and stately tree is worthy of the many fine residents of, and visitors to, Historic Congressional Cemetery.

## American Heritage

## Steamboat Highways

continued from 1

was making regular runs from Washington down the Potomac by at least 1815. For the next 100 years the Potomac was a busy "highway" connecting the small communities along the river to Alexandria and Washington. Dozens of steamboats travelled the river each day. They stopped at locations with proper wharves and at local stops where small boats were used to carry passengers to and from shore.

Steamboats were often luxuriously appointed with private cabins available to those who could afford them, a dining room and bar, and

facilities for steerage where passengers could travel comfortably at the "no frills" fare of a dollar or less. Below deck there was space for cargo and pens for livestock. The trip from Washington to the Chesapeake could take 14 hours or more, and on the larger steamboats there was space for as many as 500 people to sit or walk and room for children to play.

Local people travelled up the river on a regular basis to stock up on goods that were not available in local shops. Washingtonians travelled down the river to visit family, and on day excursions to popular picnic

spots such as Marshall Hall and Glymont. Others travelled to popular hotels where vacationers could spend time away from the summer heat of the city for a moderate cost.

By the 1930's roads were being built everywhere to accommodate the automobile. The river steamboat era came to an end. For more information on the Potomac steamboats go to our website - www.congressionalcemetery.org and look for the Rambler articles under the DC Local History menu. ~

—Sandy Schmidt

#### Congressional Cemetery Moments in History

American heritage home delivery!

Grab your phone, Dial our number Punch in the code #, Listen to a moment in history

#### 202-747-3474

- 36# George Hadfield Architect: US Capitol Building Narrated by Stephen Ayers, Acting Architect of the Capitol
- 35# William Thornton Designer: US Capitol Building Narrated by Gordon Brown, Author of The Incidental Architect
- 18# Mathew Brady, Civil War photographer Narrated by Stephen Hammond Civil War historian
- 11# George Bache, Coastal surveyor swept into the sea Narrated by Patrick Crowley, Chairman Congressional Cemetery
- 12# Pushmataha, Choctaw Chief Narrated by Spc. Eric Summers, US Army

For more Moments in History see our web site: www.CongressionalCemetery.org

### Reserve your place in American history

#### Congressional Cemetery

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Introducing 'Green Burials' this fall

Traditional grave sites are available in a number of price ranges

#### Call today:

Alan Davis, Cemetery Manager Historic Congressional Cemetery ADavis@CongressionalCemetery.org

Gatehouse Office: 202-543-0539

#### Disaster on the Potomac: The Last Run of the Steamboat Wawaset

#### Scheduled for release by The History Press in November 2009:

Just inside the main gate at Congressional Cemetery sit five white marble gravestones in memory of the Reed Family, who all died when fire set off tragic events aboard a paddle wheeled steamboat on the Potomac River. Author Alvin Oickle claims, 136 years later, that disturbing social mores prevalent after the Civil War contributed to the deaths. Excerpts from several parts of his book follow, connected here for dramatic impact:

On an August day in 1873, a steam-boat called Wawaset had completed about half its routine run from Washington down the Potomac River when it unexpectedly became history. It is among the many stories that begin with the joy of adventure and end in tragedy, taking the lives of seventy or more children, women, and men. But there is more to this story. The paddlewheel vessel's sinking offers a glimpse of American life and culture unfamiliar in the twenty-first century.

On one level of morality, this is the story of maritime officers who hedged legal requirements, ignored rudimentary safety training and even carried on a moonlighting business in trade while being paid to run a ferry and excursions. Some of these officers were on trial twice, at a local inquest and before a far more serious federal board. The end of slavery in the mid-1860s brought the nation into unfamiliar challenges that would be most difficult to overcome. Historian Paul Johnson put it this way: "The end of the Civil War solved the problem of slavery and started the problem of the blacks, which is with America

still." Brought into the harsh light of a modern examination, life in and around the nation's capital city might seem to us now as disgusting for its lack of sharing courtesy and respect. And nothing can be more upsetting than the loss of life — six in the Joseph Reed family, four each in the Grant-Lynch and Griffin families and two in several others.

Seen tethered to a wharf in Washington, who would have thought the Wawaset was about to become a symbol? It might be remembered by some for its reputation as a fancy excursion boat. A full reading of the record, however, may leave more of us sensitive to other memories. There is the unforgivable failure of the boat's captain to have his crew prepared for disaster. There were the despicable practices of greed by several of the Wawaset's officers and the company that owned the vessel. Continued discrimination against African Americans was carried out aboard this boat on its last trip. Regional attempts to integrate public transportation were seldom successful this soon after slavery's end.



Artist Anne R. Dolan's acrylic painting for the new book Disaster on the Potomac was created in a naive style common in the nineteenth century.

... African American passengers on the Wawaset "were allotted the hot bow deck section," one author has written. They were "obliged to find seats amidst the cattle, peach boxes and hen coops."

... And then [nearing Chatterton's Landing] the bad became worse. "All at once the engine suddenly stopped," the captain said. The cause was the shaft's falling. As the engine failed, the boat responded with a tremble, perhaps a hard shaking. Said Captain Wood, "The passengers were under the impression that she had struck the land, and many jumped overboard where the water was quite deep." He was referring to the large group of black women and children seated aft. As the boat headed to shallow water, the view of those aft did not include the shallow water. For them, the shore had been obscured by the heavy smoke and fire that had turned the Wawaset into one huge flame. Facing shore, passengers on the front decks were quick to recognize the danger of leaving the boat. ~

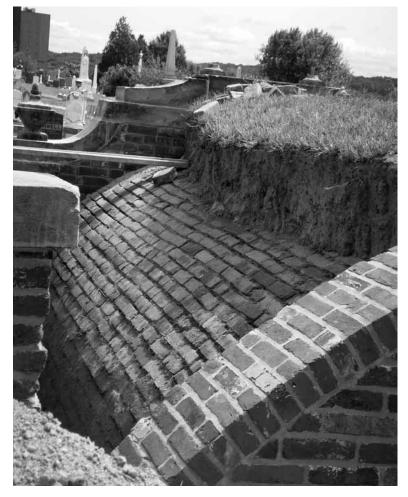
—ALVIN F. OICKLE
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## Restoring America's Past

There is surprisingly quite a lot of variation in the interior design of burial chambers. The oldest burial vaults were designed as open rooms four steps below ground level covered by a vaulted ceiling. Caskets were simply laid on the floor and stacked as more the family or friends were laid to rest. Over time the boxes would deteriorate and crumble to the floor, as intended.

This plan creates problems for restoration efforts. It's difficult to do interior repair work when the floor is covered, wall to wall, in advanced decomposed coffin debris. If the structure is to be saved, the interior work must get accomplished. That





means cleaning the interior so that the masons and restorers can do their work. It also allows the Association to restore dignity to the remains of those interred in the tomb by gathering the remains into suitable receptacles.

Cleaning burial chambers is not for the faint of heart. The work of Mother Nature, while always fascinating, is not always pleasant to see. Fortunately, Congressional Cemetery has an on-going relationship with the Smithsonian Institution Museum of Natural History. Doug Owsley and his team from the Department of Anthropology often assist the Association in historic preservation work by handling the human remains aspect of the job.

Nonetheless, we have a number of volunteers to thank for their contributions: Susan Wagner, Jesse Itskowitz, John Kreinheder, Tom Arrasmith, Dan Benjamin, Coty Dooley, Michael Edmonson, Nick and Francis Sundt. The practice of using family vaults as community morgues with less-than-stellar record keeping makes the archival work of Erin Lombard and Dayle Dooley all the more important. By carefully combining the information of as many as seven different original source documents, our archivists were able to demonstrate how many individuals should be in each vault and who they were. This provides the Smithsonian team a far better understanding of

what their research can reveal.

With
the site
preparation
complete,
the restoration
team from Worcester
Eisenbrandt began their work. Under
the direction of Debora Rodrigues,
President of WE's Conservation
Division, the conservators dismantled

and rebuilt portions of facades and side walls where needed, repointed the fronts of the vaults, removed the cover sod and repointed the roofs, and treated the iron doors last resistance. For an update on

for rust resistance. For an update on the progress of the work, call our cell phone program: 202-747-3474, and select 32#, 33#, and 34#.





#### ACCOUNTING FOR DEATH

When our historic preservation intern Erin Lombard lifted the lid off a dusty old box this summer, she expected to find records of transfers and site sales from the 1920s. What she found were accounting ledgers dating back as far as 1864 with strange titles and odd columns of numbers. Before she could properly catalogue the documents she had to figure out what they were. Time to bring in an accountant — that would be me.

Although surrounded by history at Congressional, my work here is all about today, about keeping our current accounting and bookkeeping records accurate and up to date. So Erin's 19th Century ledger sheets brought a pleasant diversion into my professional routine.

Accounting hasn't changed much since the 1800's. It's still all about the plusses and minuses or as we bean counters say, debits and credits. So what's different? What time has shown is that the terminology we use to count those beans has changed. Once you get the hang of the nomenclature, the rest falls into place. Either it adds up or it doesn't.

In 1860, the fee for a burial was \$4.00 or \$5.00 depending on the location, which the cemetery superintendent recorded on a ledger called Return of Grave Sites. For a time this ledger was kept on loose sheets of legal sized paper. In 1865, the superintendant began to use over-sized bound leather journals to record both site sales and burials, and the associated costs for each. These are the

original Interment Journals. At the same time, another oversized ledger called the Register was used to record just the names of the site purchasers and the names of those interred in the sites, with no financial data

shown. Today we refer to the Register as an Interment Log and record the actual monies in a Cash Receipts Journal using a double entry method of accounting.

[Note Return of Graves ledger for Feb 23, 1866 sale of site to Jesse

Williams for burial of Fred

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Albright; see also Interment Log for Feb 23, 1866 for use of Public Vault for F. Albright paid by Jesse Williams. See also on the same day Jesse Williams purchased sites for what is now Williams Vault, which is being repaired this year.]

By 1884, we see a variety of monthly and quarterly financial records that detail income and expenses, and reports to the Vestry about the general financial health of the cemetery. In a report called Return of Interments, the superintendant recorded how the fee for a burial was split between the Superintendent and the Church Treasury. Using current accounting methods, we would only record the amounts we paid out to the Treasurer as an expense or disbursement, leaving the remaining balance as gross profit to the organization.

In addition, the Superintendent prepared the Personal Report of the Superintendent, which detailed receipts and expenses such as the cost of providing a horse & cart for burial services. Today we call that a Profit and Loss Statement, also known as an Income Statement. In 1901, payments to employees were detailed on a ledger called Pay Roll. We still use this term today, only it is one word, not two. And in 1901, employees didn't have taxes withheld from their pay!

Although the oversized sheets of ledger paper have a certain charm to them as historic documents, in terms of finding information and assuring accuracy they don't hold a candle to modern computers. I appreciate what

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the archivists are doing and find it all very interesting but for my own work, I'll stick with the 21st Century, thank you very much. ~

—Carol Itskowitz

#### LOOKING AHEAD...

#### Scandal, Seduction & the Supernatural

**Saturday, October 17th** 11:00, 11:30, 12:00, 12:30

Which cemetery resident haunts the Capitol Dome? Who was famous for levitating grand pianos? And who was invited to dinner...as the main course? Learn the scandalous, sinful, and supernatural side of Congressional Cemetery on this special new tour. Admission is free and open to the public.



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#### Make a Difference Day

Saturday, October 24th 8:30 AM to 2:00 PM

Make A Difference Day is celebrated each year on the fourth Saturday of October. The brainchild of USA WEEKEND Magazine, it has become the nation's largest day of volunteering, thanks to the passion of millions of people like you. The Cemetery will once again host over 100 volunteers, anchored by men and women from all four branches of the Military. Come by, Volunteer, Make a Difference!

#### John Philip Sousa Birthday Celebration

#### Friday, November 6th

time: approximately 10:30 AM

On the 155th anniversary of the March King's birth, Congressional Cemetery celebrates all things Sousa. With a performance by The Marine Band, everyone from diplomatic dignitaries to Capitol Hill schoolchildren will help us celebrate the life and music of one of our most famous residents. Admission is free and open to the public.

For more information please call the gatehouse 202-543-0539 or email staff@congressionalcemetery.org



**Yes!** I want to help preserve and restore Historic Congressional Cemetery with a tax-deductible donation.

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