

Heritage Gazette

ASSOCIATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY • SUMMER 2009

Storm Drain to Relieve Flooding

Congressional Cemetery's storm water management system is a fairly straightforward chain of cobblestone swales, brick catch basins, and a drainage ditch, all built in the 1890s. Being an open-air system, it catches not only rainwater but grass clippings, autumn leaves, and anything else that floats in its network. Maintenance of the system is critical to its operation; clogged waterways don't drain. Sometime over the last hundred years, the system stopped being maintained.

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Ivy League

Eradication of Congressional Cemetery's invasive English ivy is one of the high priorities for Emily Crandall's Green Thumb volunteers. While some Green Thumbs offer TLC to the gardens they tend, the Ivy League teams are on the forefront of search and destroy missions for ivy. Clippers in hand, the Green Thumbs pinch, pull, and pry the offending invader plants from our oaks and maples, off marble gravestones, and out of the struggling shrubs.

Not only does ivy abound in the gardens, stone carvers seem to favor ivy. Maybe the resilience of the plant makes it an attractive symbol of life, death, and renewal. It's easy to grow, stays green all year, and comes back after a harsh winter or scorching summer. Ivy is low-maintenance, fast-growing, and seemingly eternal. Perfect for a graveyard!

But don't let a real gardener catch
continued on 9

RIGHT: Coty Dooley plays a newsboy (far right) and Jamie Sledge plays Cranston Lurie, the host of HCC's Lincoln Bicentennial Performance Tour, Lincoln's Last Day: A Theatrical Walk Through History, performed in April and May at the Cemetery.





APHCC Chairman Patrick Crowley addresses members of Rolling Thunder on Memorial Day. The vets laid wreaths at an unknown soldier's grave and the Arsenal Monument.

Letter from the Chair

A Community That Cares

I remember when my family had milk delivered to the back door of our home outside Chicago by a milkman whose truck was laden with huge blocks of ice. On hot summer days, we'd chase him down the block begging for chips of ice. If we couldn't break the ice into smaller chunks, we'd pass it around like a community ice cream cone. This memory survives from quite a long time back; what makes it so powerful? Why do we cherish these kinds of memories?

If I may hazard a guess, I would say it's because it's grounded in a community experience. My siblings and friends created a game of chasing the milkman. Shared experiences and shared spaces create communities. That's the secret to Congressional Cemetery—we are a community.

That's rare for a cemetery. Most cemeteries today are experienced as remote places where we drop off grandma and don't come back. But at Congressional, we've created a stewardship community where

some people come back every day. Others come to volunteer and bring back 30 to 50 friends for a day of volunteer work. It's a shared space where we've built a community that cares, that gives back an inner joy because we connect with others over shared goals and accomplishments. It's a wonderful place.

But operating this wonderful place and coordinating the scores of activities each month requires staff, and staff has to be paid. In these difficult economic times, donations are down for non-profits everywhere. So too with Congressional. We've come a long way pulling on our boot straps. We've expanded our services, developed new ways of exploring our heritage, fired up our repair and restoration efforts, and overhauled our internal operations. We have built the foundation to support the HCC community and we need your help to keep it going. Please consider making a contribution today—give us a chip off the block! ~

—PATRICK CROWLEY

CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY

Association for the Preservation
of Historic Congressional Cemetery

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HERITAGE GAZETTE: Summer 2009

All photos in this issue by Patrick Crowley unless noted otherwise.

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Meet Erin Lombard

Erin Lombard has joined us for the summer as an intern working on our archival projects (see her article on page 11). An Historic Preservation major, this fall she will begin her junior year at the University of Mary Washington, in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

She will have wonderful tales from the crypt to take back to school with her in the fall. ☺



Flower vendors cluster at the gate of Congressional Cemetery on Memorial Day in 1943.



Scenes from earlier years in the Cemetery. Above, 1913. Below, statuary photographed in 1945. The girl statue awaits restoration in the gatehouse.



As we enter the warm summer months, our activities are centered upon restoration. Vault contracts have been let; utility workers are digging deep ditches to bury large drain pipes to eliminate flooding in the east end; we prepare for the formal City Council hearing to deed us G Street and the city's right-of-way that lays within the cemetery grounds; and fireproof filing cabinets are on the way to protect and preserve old cemetery records.

From the mid-1800s through the first quarter of the 1900s, the Cemetery was more than a burial ground. The beautiful park-like setting welcomed families for picnics, long walks, and even weddings. Since that time, however, we have lost hundreds of trees and shrubs, leaving areas of the cemetery barren. To help us recreate the former splendor, HCC has hired the nationally renowned landscape design firm Oehme van Sweden to develop a plan for future burial opportunities and greenscape to enhance the entire property.

We are very fortunate to have

received a generous grant for restoration work on our family vaults, but it is not quite enough to complete the work on the four in most trouble. We are taking a gamble that we can raise an additional \$18,500 to finish the fourth—the Jesse Williams family vault.

When we restore family vaults, we ask the Smithsonian Institute team of archeologists and anthropologists, led by Douglas Omsley and Laurie Burgess, to assist us in protection or temporary removal of any remains. In preparation for that, summer intern Erin Lombard is performing a survey of interments and disinterments in each vault. By comparing the "Vault Book," which has been maintained by Cemetery managers since 1829, with the Interment and Account books, Erin is making a definitive list of who still remains in each of our 22 vaults and 17 mausoleums.

Lots of good things are happening at Historic Congressional Cemetery. Come see us, and I hope you will continue to support our mission and our projects. ☺

—CINDY HAYS



The 1866 Jesse Williams family vault is in need of repair.



A Youngsville, Pennsylvania high school marching band plays at the Sousa site.

Rose Garden Dedication

The dedication of the Docents' Garden on Sunday, June 14th welcomed the Cultural Attaché, Embassy of Ireland, Ms. Aiofa McGarry, rosarian Nick Weber, and over 60 contributors to raise "a wee dram" of lemonade to toast the DDDs and the young women who perished in the Civil War Arsenal tragedy in 1864.

The Docents raised over \$6,000 to create the Rose Garden at the foot of the Arsenal Monument and to install an irrigation system. The Garden is surrounded by a low granite wall etched with names commemorating the donors. The Rose Garden effort was spearheaded by Board Member Emily Crandall.

The Arsenal Monument honors 21 women who died in an explosion at the munitions assembly workhouse at Fort McNair. Ms. McGarry noted that these women were most likely fleeing starvation in Ireland during the Great Famine, when Ireland's population fell from eight million to four million. Docent Steve Ham-

mond reported recent research had revealed that the War Department had promised to place grave markers at all the victim's gravesites. The Monument itself was erected in 1865 and was due to be dedicated by President Lincoln. Lincoln's assassination forestalled that event; the Monument has yet to be dedicated. ☺

The Marching Bands are Back !

Congressional Cemetery is back on the agenda for marching bands from all across America. Last year's high gas prices sidelined the travel plans for many high school and community bands that normally would have headed east to participate in events in the Nation's capital. This year, prices are down and the bands are up.

In the first half of 2009, the Association's Dozen Decent Docents have welcomed several marching bands, each with two to three busloads of uniformed musicians. Over Memorial Day weekend bands from Wayne County High School, Georgia, Youngsville, Pennsylvania, and Blue Valley High School (North), Mississippi. When their tight schedules permit, the bands play a medley of Sousa pieces before taking a short tour of the Cemetery.

In addition to the DDD's regular Saturday tours at 11:00 AM, the Docents welcomed Rolling Thunder back to Congressional over Memorial Day weekend to lay a wreath at the Unknown Soldier gravestone and the Arsenal Monument. The following week, the DDD's led 12 tours as

part of the DC Cultural Tourism's annual city-wide tour program. Mid week, the Adams County Historical Society from Gettysburg enjoyed a tour highlighting the Civil War connections between Gettysburg and Congressional. ☺

—PATRICK CROWLEY



ABOVE: At the rose garden dedication are (clockwise from top left), Steve Hammond, Tom Young, Amanda Raziano, Nick Weber, Aiofa McGarry, Emily Crandall and Joyce Palmer.



Volunteers from Greater DC Cares reset stones, wash a tabletop marker, work in the gardens.

It Takes a Community

What do a bevy of tax lawyers, an elementary school class, a troop of Boy Scouts, a wedding party, and an assortment of do-gooders have in common? Congressional Cemetery, of course.

This spring saw an explosion in volunteer groups digging in at Congressional Cemetery. Lawyers from

Deloitte; students from the Montessori School in Wilton, Connecticut; two Scouts earning their Eagle Badges; and the return of Greater DC Cares have all contributed to the long-term goal of restoring Congressional Cemetery grounds with hands-on sweat equity.

Under the direction of Cemetery staff and volunteers, these groups tackle the massive chore list at Congressional: righting gravestones, weeding gardens, cleaning bio-growth from stones, and resetting footstones. Lynne Boyle, Alan Davis, Dayle Dooley, Barry Hayman, Cindy Hays, and Patrick Crowley regularly take groups of ten to 15 in different directions to chip away at the long to-do list.

Never mind the glaring sun or pouring rain, every group works hard and shares a lot of laughs along the way. And everyone leaves tired and dirty, but proud to have helped restore a great national treasure. It's all about building community. ∞

—PATRICK CROWLEY



Revolutionary War Moments in History

Paul Revere had nothing remotely approaching a cell phone when on April 18, 1775, he learned of an advancing troop of British regulars whose intent was to capture the principals behind the burgeoning rebellion—men like Elbridge Gerry. So he saddled his horse and rode into history to warn his compatriots, “The British are coming!”

Today we do have the luxury of cell phones to keep us in touch with friends and family, and allow us to connect in so many ways with the world around us. Now with Congressional Cemetery’s *Moments in History* program, you can use your phone to connect with the past.

This summer, the Association honors our Revolutionary War veterans and patriots with a new self-guided walking tour and a cell phone tour. As a truly national cemetery of the 19th century, Congressional is the final resting place of patriots from many of the Colonies. We’ve gathered one from each colony and asked a Congressman or Senator from that state to narrate a Moment in History. The result will span two hundred years of American history, as modern-day leading citizens connect us with forebearers who fought for and secured our freedom. When the project is complete, you can dial 202-747-4347 and choose any tour stop between 70 and 81 followed by the # sign.

The Revolutionary War cell phone project is an outgrowth of the regular cell phone program developed by Board Member Joyce

Palmer, which highlights a well-rounded gathering of individuals who represent the broad scope of national interest at Congressional.

The list of regular cell phone stops can be found on our web site: www.congressionalcemetery.org.

—PATRICK CROWLEY



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Revolutionary War color guard reenactors at the Gatehouse. Soldier of the American Revolution, and DAR graveside insignias. A current cell phone tour sign.

The Incidental Architect

The body of this article is excerpted from Gordon S. Brown's new biography, Incidental Architect: William Thornton and the Cultural Life of Early Washington, D.C., 1794-1828 (Ohio University Press, 2009). The Cemetery will host a book party for author Gordon Brown on September 26th. Look for details at the end of the summer.

William Thornton's education was in medicine. But he dabbled in the nascent profession of architecture, winning a 1789 competition for the Library Company of Philadelphia. In 1792, an open competition was held to choose the design of the nation's new capitol building in the as-yet-unbuilt capitol city. William Thornton was living on a plantation on the West Indian island of Tortola, and his submission was mailed after the deadline. But President George Washington and Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson knew Thornton's reputation, and hadn't liked any of the other submissions, so they held the contest open a few months longer.

By the end of January, Thornton had submitted his new plan. A low central dome and grand columnar portico based on Rome's Parthenon gave the building monumental scale, while two well-proportioned and embellished wings, one for each

house of Congress, symbolized the building's function as the seat of the people's representatives. The design immediately captured the President's imagination. That was probably enough to assure a favorable decision, but Jefferson, too, was impressed. "Doctor Thornton's plan of a capitol has been produced," he wrote to the commissioners, "and has



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decision is most important. It is simple, noble, beautiful, excellently distributed, and moderate in size." With the commissioners thus apprised that "[he] whose decision is most important," that is, General Washington, had already made up his

mind, they declared the competition over, and Thornton the winner. By the beginning of April, and following his tardy submission of the additional

drawings required, Thornton's plan was formally approved. His design would guide construction of one of the first icons of the new republic: a grand capitol building to be built in the new Federal city on the banks of the Potomac.

It was a singular moment for Thornton. A convinced republican, he had chosen to become a citizen of the new United States in early 1788, praising the American experiment and its potential to his British friends and colleagues. His enthusiasm over America's future extended even to the controversial plan to build a new capital city in the wilderness: years earlier he had told his skeptical Philadelphia mother-in-law that he was "informed that it would be the grandest city in the world." Now he would play a part, a seminal part he hoped, in the development of that new capital. ∞



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so captivated the eyes and judgment of all as to leave no doubt you will prefer it when it shall be exhibited to you; as no doubt exists here of its preference over all which have been produced, and among its admirers no one is more decided than him whose

TOP TO BOTTOM: Portrait of Dr. William Thornton by George B. Matthews after Gilbert Stuart, 1930. Model of the west front showing the central colonnade and dome intended as a "Temple of Fame," which was never constructed. Thornton's east elevation, circa 1796, was favored by George Washington for its "grandeur, simplicity, and convenience." Thornton's cenotaph and burial site at Congressional Cemetery.



EUGENIA KIM

Storm Drains Will Relieve Flooding

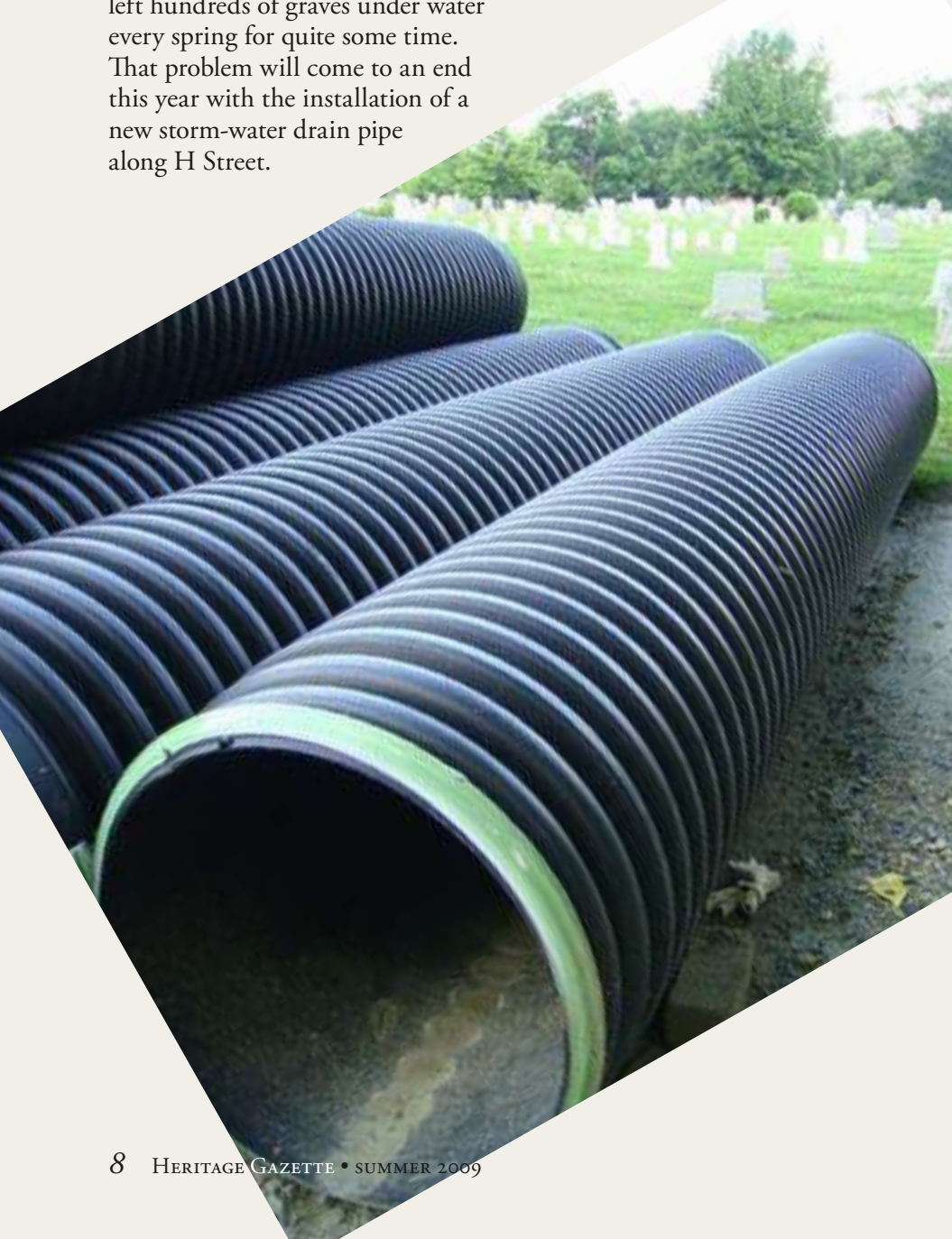
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The National Park Service did not maintain its drainage ditch along H Street, and the Cemetery did not maintain its catch basins. The result was predictable: the ditch filled up with debris and silt, the basins filled up with muck and dirt, and the swales disappeared under decades of clippings and leaves. The system stopped working and rainwater had nowhere to go.

Our failed drainage system has left hundreds of graves under water every spring for quite some time. That problem will come to an end this year with the installation of a new storm-water drain pipe along H Street.

The Association hired Fry Plumbing to build the new system, which starts 120 feet west of 19th Street and runs approximately 1,250 feet to the east end of the grounds. Although the new system forecloses the return of Mr. Graves—the big snapping turtle who lived in a catch basin—it will end the era of flooded gravesites along our south side. ♡

—PATRICK CROWLEY



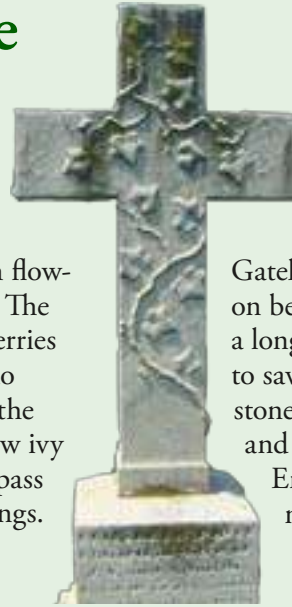
Ivy League Gets Aggressive

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you thinking that way—you'll get a firm bonk on the head. The dark side of ivy is its aggressive nature. It will grow out, down, up, and over everything in its path, laying down a dense canopy of leaves to block the sun from rival plants. Its roots will attach to almost any surface for support and sustenance. It will smother grasses, shrubs and trees alike. It's just a matter of time before it covers everything in sight.

Technically, *hedera helix*, or common English ivy, is a climbing evergreen shrub, a member of the *Aralia* family, rather than a true vine. It is mostly a wild plant that grows by sending out fibrous tendrils in search of anything within reach. The tendrils have tiny disks at the end that attach and cling to whatever object they touch, to become roots that drink up whatever moisture the

host object may have. Once established, it produces flowering shoots from which clusters of small greenish flowers open in late autumn. The easily pollinated black berries are a favorite of birds who carry the seeds far from the parent plant, forming new ivy colonies when the birds pass the seeds in their droppings. Truly an invasive plant.



The Green Thumbs meet every first Saturday of the month from April to October, at the Gatehouse at 10:00 AM to work on beautifying the grounds. It's a long-term effort that promises to save our trees and preserve our stones. All are welcome, tools and gloves are provided, and Emily will teach you all you need to know. ∞

—PATRICK CROWLEY



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Ivy motif sculpted on a cross, and as a decorative corner on a granite border. Sallie McIlrath ferrets out an ivy tendrill growing between stone joints. Stone ivy wraps around a column on a monument.

Eagle Scouts Restore Gravesites



Boy Scouts Douglas Pierce and Michael Edmonson of Troop 255 are each earning their Eagle Scout Badge this summer by leading teams of Scouts and parents in restoration projects at Congressional Cemetery that will have a lasting impact on the grounds for the next one hundred years.

The Footstone Restoration Projects involve the resetting of footstones and corner markers, dating back into the 19th Century, that have sunken below grade over the years. The Scouts work in teams of four to carefully excavate each footstone or range marker, document its inscription, underfill the footstones with dirt or brick, and reset the stones in their proper orientation.

At 170 to 190 pounds per cubic foot, moving a “small” footstone would be a challenge to most folks, especially those who weigh in at 150 pounds themselves. Adding to the

PHOTOS IN THIS STORY USED BY PERMISSION OF DOUGLAS PIERCE



Scouts Douglas Pierce and Michael Edmonson, above, and at left, excavating a footstone.

challenge is the fact that many of the stones are completely below grade and have been hidden from view for decades.

Douglas brought his team in on May 16th; Michael brought his team a month later on June 14th. In all, over 100 footstones, corner markers, range locators, and gravestones were reset back into their correct and original positions, leaving Congressional Cemetery a neater and safer place.

Stone reclamation is hard work; lucky for us it's also fun. ∞

—PATRICK CROWLEY

Events Highlight

COURTESY OF JOEL KUBICKI JR.



In addition to the performance tour of *Lincoln's Last Day* (photo, page 1), spring and early summer featured numerous other events. Among them: (clockwise from above) Confederate gravesites were paraded by the CSA Honor Guard; Capitol Hill Arts Workshop held a scavenger hunt at the Cemetery; and Montessori School student volunteers from Wilton, Connecticut, take a rest at the Sousa site.



Monumental Discoveries

One of the most eye-catching sights at Congressional Cemetery is the treasure trove of family vaults and mausoleums. These monumental vaults, filled with history, are a testament to the memory of a family. When I walk by these structures, with their regal entrances and ominous heavy iron doors invoking visions of opalescent Egyptian tombs, I can't help but wonder what's inside.

The Cemetery has a vast collection of records amassed over two hundred years. For the past month I have gathered all the information pertaining to family vaults and mausoleums in order to create a complete inventory of the vaults.

We will embark upon a project to restore four of our 22 remaining vaults, Keyworth, M.G.W. White, Causten, and the Jesse Williams family vaults, which have been badly damaged by erosion, weather and the ever-changing landscape. If not repaired, they are at risk of joining other family vaults that had been torn down.

Due to the extensive restoration work needed, the delicate nature of those who lie within pose a problem to the completion of the project. However, a team of anthropologists from the Smithsonian Institute will assist by removing the remains from the vaults. Opportunities like these are very beneficial to those working at the Smithsonian because, unlike most cases they have, we have records of exactly who the people under examination are and, more often than not, also have information about their lives, such as where they were born, how old they were at their death, etc.

The first partnership with the Smithsonian was in 2005—the investigation of Attorney General



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Vault backs show critical need for restoration; the crumbling side of the Jesse Williams vault; and the Private Vault Book.

William Wirt's (1772–1834) missing skull, stolen in a grave robbery in the 1970s. After examining all the remains in the vault, they successfully determined that the skull was indeed that of William Wirt, but they also found the remains of a newborn baby on the floor of the vault. At that time the Wirt vault record did not indicate a baby had ever been buried there. Where did the baby come from? As I was looking through the records of interments documented in the Private Vault Book, I discovered that a child had



been buried with the body of Ellen McCormick. Could this baby have been the one found on the floor? The report from the Smithsonian states that her coffin appeared to have been left undisturbed by the grave robbers and therefore was not examined.

So we may never know if this found baby could have been the one buried with Ellen.

Our work gathering all the information pertaining to each vault in one document is certainly a benefit for those researching their family genealogy, but it is critical in our effort to preserve these family structures. ∞

—ERIN LOMBARD



WANTED: VINTAGE PHOTOS

If you have old photos of Congressional Cemetery or images of ancestors buried at Congressional, send us a copy! You'd be surprised how much history can be gleaned from backgrounds of photo-



Morteotype (daguerrotype in lead frame affixed to the gravestone) of Mary Gideon, circa 1853.

graphs. That urn over Aunt Mable's left shoulder is gone now; but it could be recreated if we knew what it looked like. The old Polaroid of Grandpa's gravestone can help fill in what acid rain has washed away. And decades from now, one of your descendants may find the image of Uncle Joe you sent us and will see the resemblance in his own children. Conservation and preservation isn't just for pros—you can participate too! Please contribute to our archives with your old photographs and family trees (we'll scan them—you keep the originals).



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Revolutionary War Moments in History Cell Tours: 202-747-3474

ext.

- #71 Connecticut: Senator Uriah Tracy
- #72 Delaware: Quartermaster John Craven
- #73 Georgia: General James Jackson
- #74 Maryland: General Philip Stuart
- #75 Massachusetts: Vice President Elbridge Gerry
- #76 New Jersey: Congressman John Linn
- #77 New York: Vice President George Clinton
- #78 North Carolina: Major General Thomas Blount
- #79 Pennsylvania: Congressman John Smilie
- #80 South Carolina: Congressman Thomas Tudor Tucker
- #81 Virginia: Congressman Theodoric Bland



The cell phone narratives will be recorded by Members of Congress from the original thirteen colonies, including **Sen. John Kerry** (D-MA), **Rep. Frank Wolf** (R-VA) and **Rep. David Price** (D-NC).