

Heritage Gazette

ASSOCIATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY • SUMMER 2012

The forgotten war

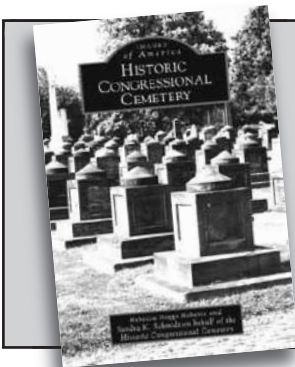
In June 18th 1812, the United States declared war against Great Britain. Tensions had been building for months. Britain, hoping to pinch Napoleon's resources, was blockading America's trade with France. British cruisers regularly boarded U.S. ships on the high seas and impressed sailors of English or Irish descent they thought should be serving the British Navy. The U.S. meanwhile, figured that with Britain distracted by Napoleon on the continent, there might be an opportunity to expand American territory into Canada.

Although it is known as the War of 1812, the war actually lasted till the end of 1814. The terms of the Treaty of Ghent basically restored the pre-War status quo and the neither side could claim an important victory. But a loss would have been devastating for the young United States. The Constitution was only 23 years old when war broke out, and a return to colonial rule would have rendered the U.S. no more than a Camelot; a brief experiment in democracy.

Beginning this summer, Congressional Cemetery is joining historic sites from Ottawa to New Orleans to mark the Bicentennial of the War of 1812. And this newsletter will feature biographies of War of 1812 eyewitnesses who now rest at Congressional. We begin, appropriately enough, with Commodore John Rodgers (R56/S152), who fired the very first shots of the War of 1812.

(More on page 6)

Commodore
John Rodgers
Born 1772
Died Senior Officer of
the United States Navy
August 1st 1838.
After forty one years of
brilliant and important service



HISTORIC CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY: THE BOOK

We are delighted to announce that our new book has been published by Arcadia Press and is now available for purchase! With gorgeous photographs on every page, *Historic Congressional Cemetery* explores the wonderfully rich history of this enchanting place. Visit www.congressionalcemetery.org to order your copy.

Letter from the Chair

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Congressional Cemetery's transition to a new management team should draw to a conclusion in early June. The Search Committee brought forth several well qualified applicants for consideration, each of which brings unique skills and approaches to the table. Executive searches force an organization to take a good look at itself and ask tough questions. Who are we, are we fulfilling our mission, do we have the resources and personnel to accomplish our mission, where do we want to be in five years? There are not necessarily right or wrong answers to these questions but the discussions help guide the board and staff to find answers or new paths to create answers. Maybe that's why they say change is good.

In the process of looking at our personnel positions and needs, it becomes clear we are not the small organization we tend to think we are. A 35-acre historic property requires many hands to operate successfully. While a visitor may only see three or four folks at work, there are in fact several more who are not salaried employees. For example, our bookkeeper and gardener are actually contracted independent businesswomen. Our computer network relies on an outsourced IT provider, as does the web site management and annual audit. The lawn is mowed by a team of three Brickman employees here every day it's not raining. And although we're a grave yard, we don't have a grave digger on salaried staff. All these folks need to be paid. And then we have the wonderful Saturday docents who are all volunteers as are the summer interns.

While we've accomplished a lot through the extraordinary generosity of our volunteers, we still need to bring in professionals to accomplish many of the routine tasks. These aren't the fun projects or the ones we talk about at parties, these are the day to day needs of almost any organization to keep the keep the organization functioning and striving towards its mission. Your continued financial support makes it possible keep both our salaried staff and contracted services showing up on Monday morning, and the Board thanks you for your generosity.



THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE PRESERVATION
OF HISTORIC CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY

1801 E Street, Southeast
Washington, DC 20003
202-543-0539

www.congressionalcemetery.org
staff@congressionalcemetery.org

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From the Senior Manager

Making History

A small contingent of Rolling Thunder returned to Congressional Cemetery Memorial Day weekend to lay a wreath at the grave of an Unknown Soldier buried near Elbridge Gerry. Rolling Thunder's mission is to press for resolution and remembrance of military service members captured or missing in action in the course of duty.

There is poignancy to the brief service at Congressional. Compared to the hundreds of thousands of cycles that participate annually around the Mall and Arlington Cemetery, the simple wreath laying at Congressional is so small as to seem insignificant: eight veterans, four or five on-lookers, and few cameramen. Yet the executive committee of Rolling Thunder makes the time despite a week filled with a myriad details calling for attention. That's how important they see their mission:



no unknown or missing serviceman is unimportant.

Striking too is the juxtaposition of the marker for the Unknown Soldier and the grand monument to Elbridge Gerry, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. They both risked all; one survived and prospered, one died for his country. Gerry's fame and fortune assured him a place in the annals of history while the Unknown Soldier lies so close by and is more or less forgotten. I suppose every sol-

dier knows life is unfair but it still seems, well, too unfair.

Last week's service also included a wreath laying at the tombs of General Alexander Macomb and Commodore John Rogers, heroes of the War of 1812. Macomb's monument is even grander than Gerry. As the wreath was placed at the foot of the Macomb gravemarker I couldn't help but note that the grand marble monument is fading away, a victim of acid rain. If the high and mighty cannot avoid the relentless wear of time and tide, how can the lowly hope to be remembered?

Well that's part of our mission here at Congressional. Through the building and management of our archives we have the stories to tell that bring the past to life and remind us that individuals, high and low, can and do make history.

—PATRICK CROWLEY



MEET DANIEL HOLCOMBE

If you see a young man with a shovel ankle deep in cobblestones out on the east end of the cemetery, stop and introduce yourself to our intern Daniel Holcombe. Daniel recently graduated from the University of Mary Washington with a degree in Historic Preservation. His degree, along with years as both an Eagle Scout and a Rugby player, give Daniel the skills, passion, and stamina to restore the old cobblestone swales that once acted as low-tech gutters for cemetery roads. Daniel has been digging out the swales and documenting them for the past few weeks.

Around the Gatehouse

KAHLERT STONE FUNDED

Thanks to the generosity of our wonderful donor community, we are pleased to announce that we have raised enough money to restore the monument from the grave of Marion Ooletia Kahlert (R98/S199). The statue of Marion, who died at age 10 in 1904, has been a favorite at the cemetery for years. In 1891, the statue was vandalized, and little Marion was knocked off her pedestal. Now, thanks to your generosity, her statue is being restored, and will soon be back on Marion's gravesite for all to admire.



Visitors admiring Kahlert's monument in 1910.



Brickworkers from Pointing Plus filling in the car-sized hole in the 17th Street Wall.

A HOLE IN THE WALL

You may have seen a gap in the cemetery wall that runs along 17th street. One night this spring, a driver hit the wall and fled the scene. Our friends at Pointing Plus are in the process of repairing the damage. If anyone has any information about the incident, please let us know!

FOUNDATION GRANT

The Capitol Hill Community Foundation awarded Congressional Cemetery a grant to work on digitizing the Proprietor's List. Former intern Erin Lombard will return to take on the long-awaited but very important project to have a searchable data base of plot owners.

QING MING

About a dozen Chinese-American visitors visited the cemetery in

April to mark the traditional Qing Ming spring holiday, where those of Chinese descent clean the graves of their ancestors. Led by Ted Gong, the group visited Range 99 along the brick wall by the DC Jail, where local Chinese workers were buried then disinterred about a hundred years ago. Until the 1930's, the bodies of Chinese immigrants across the U.S. and Canada were regularly exhumed, cleaned, and shipped back to China for reburial in an ancestral location. The *Evening Star* death notice for Lee Fun Wing in 1898 was typical for the time.

LEE FUN WING LAID TO REST WITH APPROPRIATE HONORS

All that was mortal of Lee Fun Wing was put in a grave in Congressional Cemetery yesterday, there to remain until the body can be resurrected and taken to China. Wing was only about 35 years old, and his death was due to consumption. He had recently lived at 330 Pennsylvania Avenue, where he died. At the grave the Chinese burial services were participated in by relatives of the deceased, and there was the usual fire made of the dead man's effects, and Chinese punk, white wine and eatables were placed on the grave to tempt the evil spirits.

ROLLING ON THE RIVER

When local historian Garrett Peck suggested we host his latest book party at the cemetery, we jumped at the chance. On a



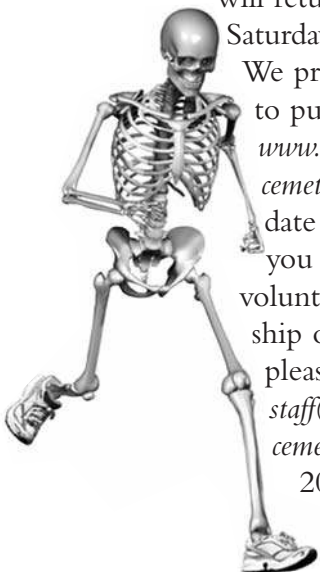
Author Garrett Peck charms the crowd

beautiful night in April, a crowd gathered on the slate walk to enjoy cocktails (including a potent concoction called a “corpse reviver”), take tours, and hear about Peck’s book *The Potomac River: A History and Guide*. Among other fascinating facts, the book includes a section about the Aquia quarry, the source of the sandstone used in our distinctive cenotaphs.

DEAD MAN’S RUN POSTPONED

Don’t worry, Dead Man’s Run will return! But not till Saturday October 6.

We promise to put details up at www.congressionalcemetery.org as the date approaches. If you are interested in volunteer or sponsorship opportunities, please email staff@congressionalcemetery.org or call 202-543-0539.



BEES ON GARAGE

We have some new residents on the east end of the cemetery. Two hives of honeybees were installed on the roof of the maintenance garage. DC beekeeper and HCC dogwalker Toni Burnham will watch over the hives, and label the honey as “Life is Sweet” honey. Our honey around here tends to be light to medium red-gold, and gets lighter during years that that Tulip Poplar is weak. The bees benefit from all the folks on the Hill who plant herb gardens, which add minty and lavender notes. Anyone who is interested



Life is Sweet honey from cemetery bees

in beekeeping or honey should contact the gatehouse and we will put you in touch with Toni.

ROLLING THUNDER CELEBRATES 25 YEARS IN WASHINGTON



Terri Maxfield leads Rolling Thunder through the cemetery.

Every Memorial Day for 25 years, the veterans of Rolling Thunder ride their motorcycles into Washington. A recent addition to their tradition is to lay a wreath at the grave of “Unknown”. They also marked the graves of General Alexander Macomb, John Rodgers, and Jacob Brown to mark the bicentennial of the War of 1812 (see related stories page 1).

John Rodgers

John Rodgers was born in 1772 in present-day Havre de Grace, Maryland, where his father was a farmer. Young John was always taken with the sea, and as a teenager walked to Baltimore hoping to find a tall ship that would take him on. His father, who expected John to work on the family farm, caught up with him on the road to Baltimore and tried to convince him to come home. But John was stubborn in his desire for the seafaring life, and his father finally apprenticed him to a shipbuilder in Baltimore Harbor.

John Rodgers distinguished himself enough to earn a captaincy in the merchant marine, where he continued to excel. When the American Navy was first organized in 1798, he was made second lieutenant on the new USS *Constellation* (designed by Joshua Humphreys R64/S177). By the time war broke out in 1812, Rodgers was a commodore, and the second most senior officer in the Navy. He learned war had been declared while aboard the USS *President*. According to a 1910 biography, Rodgers ordered his crew on deck and said, "Now lads we have got something to do that will shake the rust from our jackets. War is declared! We shall have another dash at our



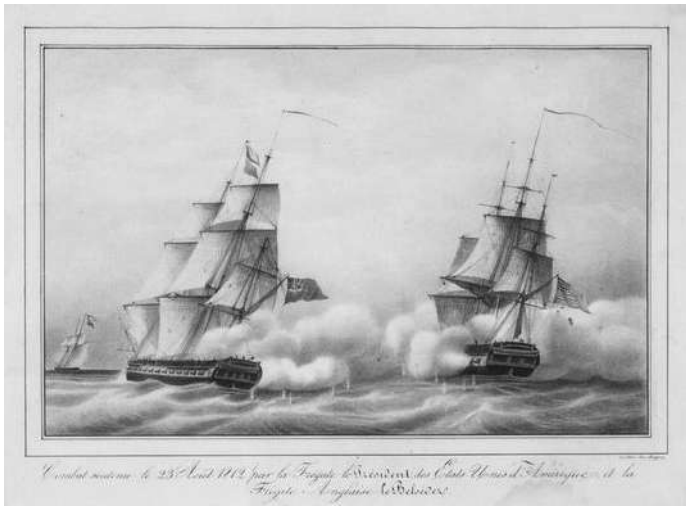
Commodore John Rodgers, Senior Officer of the U.S. Navy

old enemies. It is the very thing that you have long wanted. The rascals have been bullying over us these ten years and I am glad the time is come at last when we can have satisfaction. If there are any among you who are unwilling to risk your lives with me say so and you shall be paid off and discharged. I'll have no skulkers on board my ship by God!" Not one crew member took the payoff, and the *President* and a couple of other ships sailed off in search of a battle. They found it on June 23, when the *President* chased down the *HMS Belvidera*. Rodgers himself aimed and fired a bow gun at the *Belvidera*, the

very first shots fired in the War of 1812.

The *Belvidera* got away that day. But Rodgers went on to serve throughout the war with distinction and success. He organized the marine defense of Baltimore in September of 1814, holding off the British siege on Fort McHenry that inspired Francis Scott Key to write the *Star Spangled Banner*.

The navy expanded rapidly during the War of 1812, and when the war was over serious defects in the service were brought to light. President Madison chose John Rodgers to remedy these problems, making him president of the Navy Board, a position he would hold for twenty years. He and his wife Minerva bought a house at Greenleaf Point (the land settled by James Greenleaf R49/S23, now the site of Fort McNair) and settled in to raise their growing family. Greenleaf Point was rather remote for daily commuting, however, and eventually the family moved to Lafayette Square behind the White House. (Oddly enough, their house was later the home of President Lincoln's Secretary of State William Seward, and the site of his attempted assassination in 1865. Also injured in that house that night was Seward's



Commodore John Rodgers, Senior Officer of the U.S. Navy

aide Emerick Hansell R86/S152).

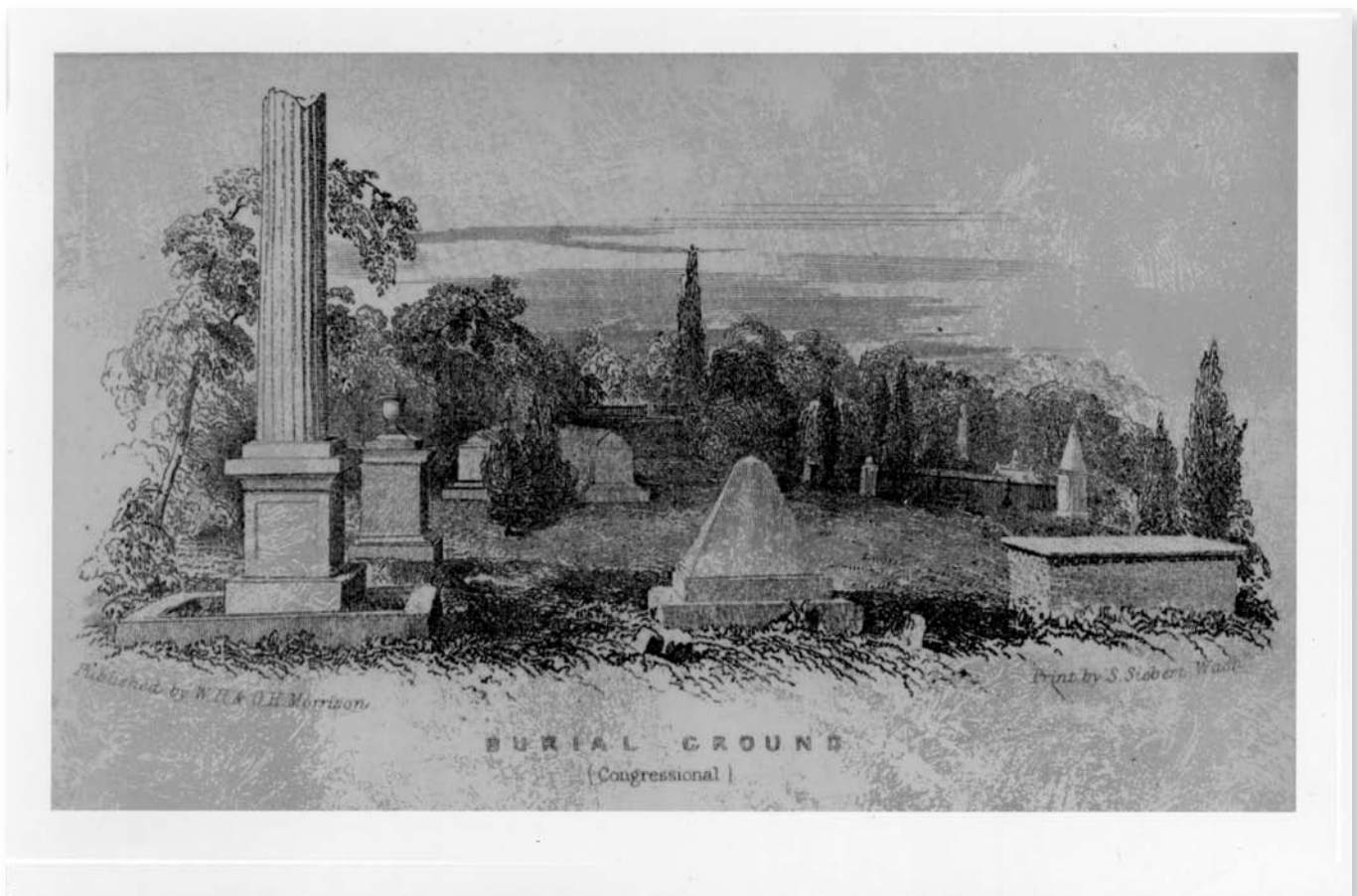
In 1828, Rodgers' seventeen-year-old son Frederick drowned while trying to save some friends

Lear's bedside until his death. Rodgers contracted cholera himself and survived, but in a weakened state. Rodgers died in 1838 in Philadelphia, and was original-

ly interred there. His body was reinterred in Congressional Cemetery in 1839. His grave at R 56/S152 is marked by a striking sandstone pyramid. One side details Frederick's heroic death. One side marks the death of Rodgers' wife Minerva in 1877. And one side reads "Commodore John Rodgers Born 1772, died Senior Officer of the United States Navy, August 1 1838, after forty-one years of brilliant and important service." Close by are the graves of other War of 1812 notables, including General Alexander Macomb, Commodore Isaac Chauncey, and Captain John Brown. We will tell their stories as our celebration of the bicentennial of the War of 1812 continues. ☞

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A Victorian-era postcard from the cemetery featured Rodgers' distinctive mounmet



From the Ground Up

Blankets of Buttercups



Buttercups blanket the cemetery grounds

Every year, just as spring turns to summer, a beautiful blanket of vibrant yellow flowers all across the yard that's so rich it looks good enough to eat. So it's no

wonder they're called buttercups (the common name for many species of the genus *Ranunculus*). Although it is in fact an opportunistic weed, the delicate

sunshine-colored buttercup is a welcome and cheering harbinger of warm weather. We don't recommend eating them no matter how mouthwatering.

Children have long held buttercup blossoms under each others' chins to see if they reflect up. If your chin glows yellow, the tradition goes, it means you like butter. If the day is sunny, everyone likes butter. And now a team of scientists has figured out why it reflects so strongly. In a recently published journal article (titled, appropriately enough "Directional scattering from the glossy flower of *Ranunculus*: how the buttercup lights up your chin"), Cambridge physicist Silvia Vignolini determined that buttercup petal cells are unusually smooth and glossy. (Most flowers have bumpy cells, to make it easier for bees to hold on.) The reflective properties of these extra glossy cells are then magnified by the cup shape of the flower, making a little tiny spot light that attracts pollinators. ~

Stone Stories



The Lynch family monument with individual footstones

Footstones

Burial monuments are called many things, including tombstones, gravestones, headstones, and footstones. Originally, a tombstone was the top of the casket itself. The gravestone was a slab of stone laid on top of the grave. And a headstone was an upright stone installed at the head of the coffin, usually facing East towards the rising sun. Today, the terms tombstone, gravestone, and headstone are used interchangeably. The footstone, on the other hand, is distinct. Placed at the foot of a grave, a footstone is usually small, and flush to the ground. In

contrast to headstones, little information is carved on footstones, usually just initials. There are some graveyards in England where footstones, since they face West toward the setting sun, were used to mark the graves of executed prisoners in the Victorian era. In Congressional Cemetery, footstones are most often found in family plots that have one

large central family monument surrounded by small footstones with individual family members' initials.

Because they are small and low to the ground, footstones can sink into the cemetery's earth, and be covered over by grass. Sometimes we don't even know a stone has been lost until a family member remembers seeing one

years ago and asks us to probe the grave for it. A telltale sound of the metal probe hitting stone tells us something solid is buried there. Raising footstones is not an easy job (See Conservation/ Restoration below). But thanks to the efforts of some strong and willing volunteers, we are able to unearth and reset sunken stones across the property. ~

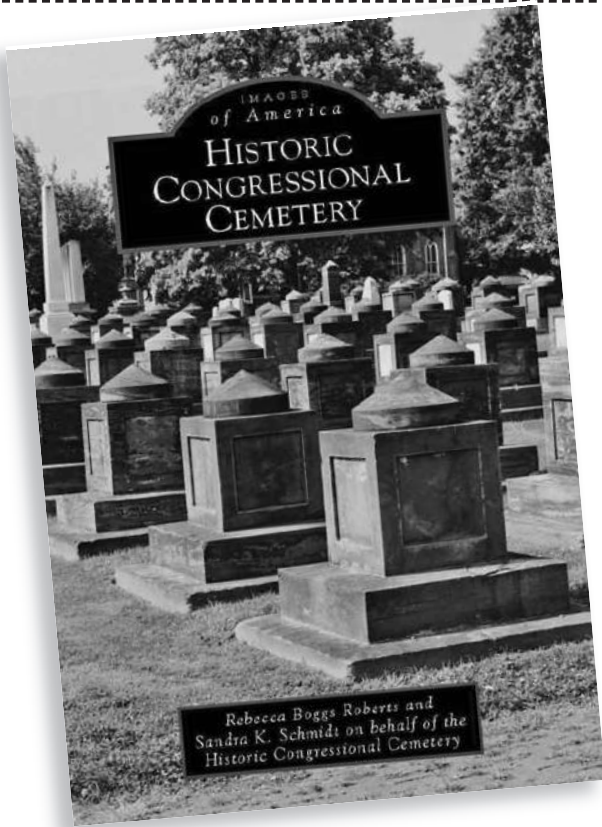
Conservation Restoration

Stone raising

Raising up a sunken stone requires both strength and delicacy. When a sunken stone is located by probing (see Stone Stories, previous page), we wait for a group of the volunteers with the right skills to pull it out of the ground. Lucky for us, Boy Scouts earning the coveted Eagle Badge have just those skills. The volunteers first carefully dig around a site to determine the dimensions of the sunken stone. Then they dig a hole that is about six inches

wider than the stone in all directions, making sure not to damage the stone with their shovels. When the whole stone is exposed, they pull it out by hand, and set it aside. Then they fill in the hole with gravel to form a foundation. Finally, the recovered stone is carefully reset on the new foundation, making sure it is square and plumb. ~





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Washington DC 20003

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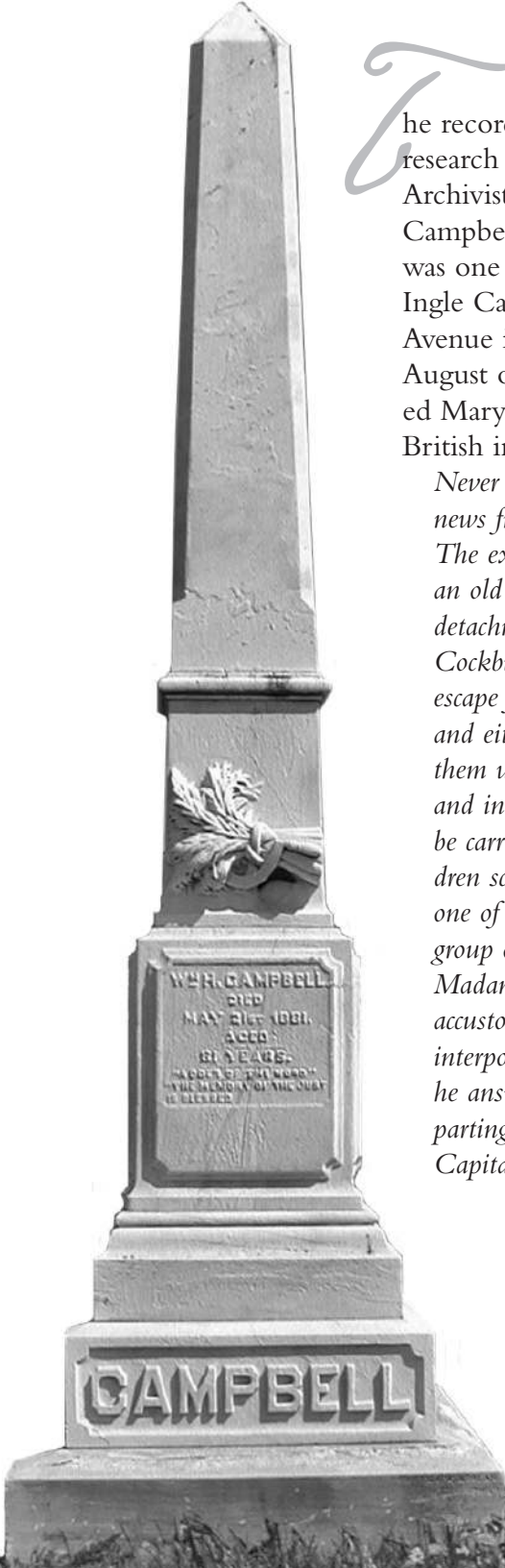
Card Number _____

Name on Card _____

Expiration Date _____

Signature _____

Mary Ingle Campbell, eyewitness to the War of 1812



The records of the Columbia Historical Society are an excellent source of research on those who rest at Congressional Cemetery. Recently, HCC Archivist Dayle Dooley rediscovered the 1898 reminiscences of Virginia Campbell Moore (R37/R214). Virginia's grandfather Henry Ingle (R56/S2) was one of the founders of Congressional Cemetery. Virginia's mother, Mary Ingle Campbell (R37/S213) was born in 1801, and lived on New Jersey Avenue in early Washington. When the British marched into Washington in August of 1814, young Mary was sitting on her front step. Virginia recounted Mary's eyewitness testimony of a huge dramatic storm, which cut the British invasion short and sent the Brits temporarily back to their ships.

Never shall I forget the night which followed this eventful day how we watched for news from fathers, brothers and friends on guard against the return of the enemy. The explosion we had heard was caused by the premature throwing of a torch into an old well in which was secreted part of the contents of our powder magazine. A detachment of 40 or 50 men had been sent by the British commander Admiral Cockburn to destroy our ammunition. In their haste to perform their mission and escape from the city and the storm they became demoralized, failed to obey orders, and either by accident or design this torch was thrown and about twenty five of them were destroyed. For days after their dismembered bodies were being collected and interred by those organized for the purpose, while those too badly wounded to be carried away by their fleeing comrades were tenderly cared for and even we children scraped lint for use in the hospital. Hearing the tramp of the retreating foe one of the ladies of our household stepped to the door and there encountered a group of British officers taking a last drink from the old pump. "Great God, Madam!" said Admiral Cockburn, "is this the kind of storm to which you are accustomed in this infernal country?" "No sir," was the reply. "This is a special interposition of Providence to drive our enemies from our city." "Not so Madam," he answered. "It is rather to aid them in the destruction of your city." With this parting shot the Red Coats galloped off and disappeared forever from the Nation's Capital.

The Campbell family monument marks many graves in Range 37.



Association for the Preservation of
Historic Congressional Cemetery

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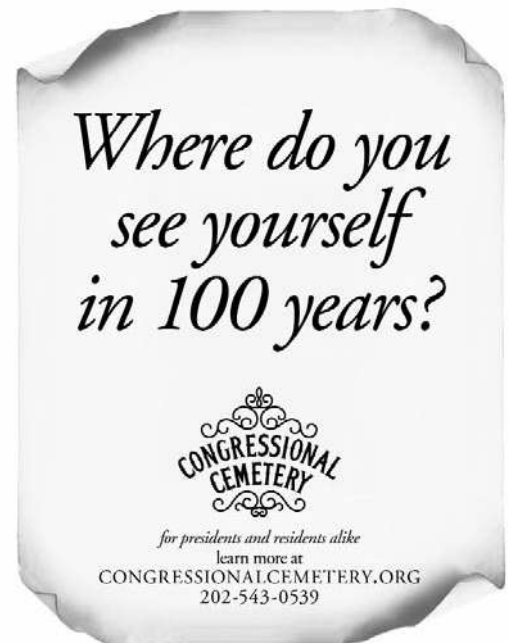
Calendar

JUNE 18
Bicentennial of War of 1812 Begins

JULY 21
1:00 Civil War Tour with Steve Hammond

AUGUST 18
1:00 Civil War Tour with Steve Hammond

OCTOBER 6
Dead Man's Run



Reserve your place in American History
Congressional Cemetery is a non-denominational burial ground open to the whole community. Introducing burial niches next year. Traditional grave sites are available in a number of price ranges. Call today.
202-543-0539