

In partnership with Congressional Cemetery, the *Circle of Life* was created and funded by [Sharon Metcalf](#) and *Circle* collaborators – Nancy Brennan, Kay Tatum, Mary Kay Blake and Margaret Tobey, all of whom chose gravesites within the Circle for their final resting place. For details, email [metcalf.sharon@gmail.com](mailto:metcalf.sharon@gmail.com).

The granite stones were sourced, engraved, and installed by [FRAM Monument Company](#), a local business providing memorial monuments to the Washington Baltimore community for over 100 years.

Graphic designer and photographer [David Posey](#) of Alexandria, VA, graphically adapted selected images to produce the vector line art for the granite engravings.

The circle of trees, engraved stones, and native plantings are a gift to preserve the cemetery's natural environment for future generations.



[congressionalcemetery.org/circle-of-life](http://congressionalcemetery.org/circle-of-life)



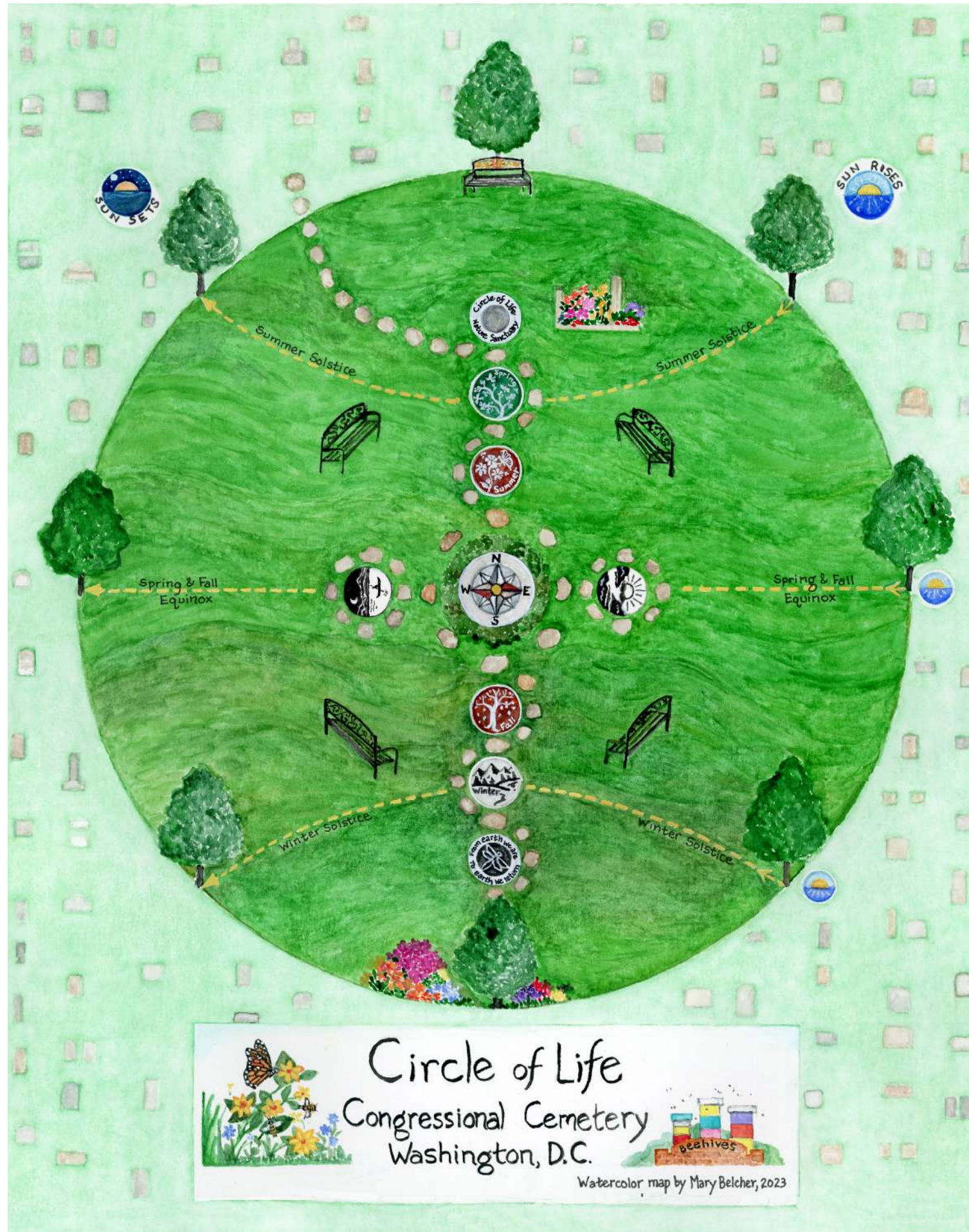
**Association for the Preservation of  
Historic Congressional Cemetery**

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*Join us!*

The Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery is a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization established in 1976 and dedicated to the restoration, interpretation, and management of Congressional Cemetery. It is predominantly a volunteer-based organization relying on over 400 neighbors, history buffs, conservators, dogwalkers, and armed forces personnel each year to help restore and maintain this national treasure. In 1979, the Association succeeded in having Congressional Cemetery listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It became a National Historic Landmark in 2011. Please join the Association or make a donation and help in the third century of service to the Nation's Capital.

Funding for the preservation and maintenance of Historic Congressional Cemetery is provided in part by the Congressional Cemetery Endowment, which was created with matching funds provided by the Congress of the United States and administered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The property is owned by Christ Church Washington Parish.



The *Circle of Life* is an interpretive work of land art that celebrates nature's perseverance. Rooted upon the cemetery's hillside, the distinctive ring of eight trees forms a living 'tree-henge.' Each young tree was precisely planted to align with a cardinal point of the compass sundial in the center.

The arboreal circle surrounds a labyrinthian path that meanders through a series of earthen artworks. An assemblage of benches invites passers-by to sit, reflect, and enjoy the surrounding landscape.

The earthwork design is defined by:

- Steppingstone paths between granite stoneworks engraved with scenes from nature;
- A vantage point to observe the sun's celestial path during solstices and equinoxes;

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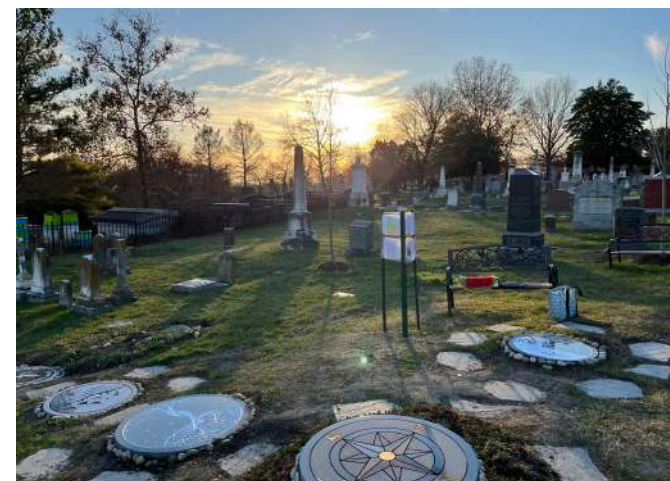
- A 60-foot circle of linden trees aligned with the directional points of a compass rose;
- A celebratory site to pay tribute to past and future stewards of the natural environment;
- A peaceful space for meditating on garden benches in situ.



Steppingstone paths wander among granite engravings and scenes of nature. The trees, stoneworks and open horizon invite visitors to pay homage to the environment by stopping, listening, walking, and observing the surrounding flora and fauna. The slope overlooks a humming bee yard, a row of venerable family tombs, and a pet cemetery. In the distance beyond the tree line is the confluence of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers.

### SOLSTICE AND EQUINOX VANTAGE POINTS (Illustrative map on back)

Not unlike the rituals of Stonehenge, visitors can celebrate the change of seasons by tracking the sun's path across the aligned symmetry of the 'tree-henge.' The summer solstice begins its long day's journey from the NE linden tree. The sun intensifies and then mellows as it finally casts a shadow across the NW tree 16 hours later. The winter solstice dims the light and shortens the SE to SW solar track across the *Circle's* southern horizon in just over 10 hours.

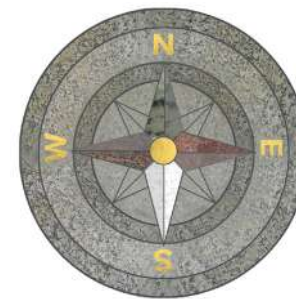


Winter solstice setting sun – December 22, 2022

Welcome rays of sun spread dancing tree shadows across the arc of the *Circle* during the vernal (spring) and autumnal (fall) equinoxes. Twice a year, day and night are of equal lengths as the sun rises above the east tree, moves directly across the center of the compass rose, and sets 12 hours later beyond the west tree.

### COMPASS ROSE & NATURE ENGRAVINGS

At the heart of the *Circle* is a terrestrial compass rose embedded with colorful points of stone that direct one's gaze outward to the surrounding trees, and inward to the monument's core. Each tree is positioned to correspond to the eight directional points of the compass (North, South, East, West, NE, NW, SE, SW).



At sea, ancient Greek mariners used a "rose of the winds" sextant to chart their course. Symbolically, the four points or "winds" of the compass represent infinite possibility, the present, the past, and the future.

Along the north to south axis of the *Circle*, and surrounding the compass, are eight engraved roundels that present a visual narrative of earth's natural cycles. The granite medallions portray the four seasons, flora and fauna, and sunrise and sunset. As simple contemporary depictions, the rock carvings are somewhat akin to the petroglyphs left by indigenous peoples to teach, warn, or pass on significant messages to their descendants.



Eight additional granite medallions with scenes from nature surround the compass rose centerpiece.

Historically, Native Americans and ancient civilizations carved out comparable spaces in open landscapes to follow the sun's movement and celebrate the seasons. Four centuries ago, the Anacostan, Nacotchtank, and Piscataway tribes inhabited and roamed this area and left behind artifacts and hammered stones – later unearthed along the banks of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers. Future generations may interpret this sacred space and the granite engravings found within the *Circle* as an appeal to environmental stewardship at a time when warming climate and pollution threatened our society.

### CONSERVATION AND NATURAL BURIAL

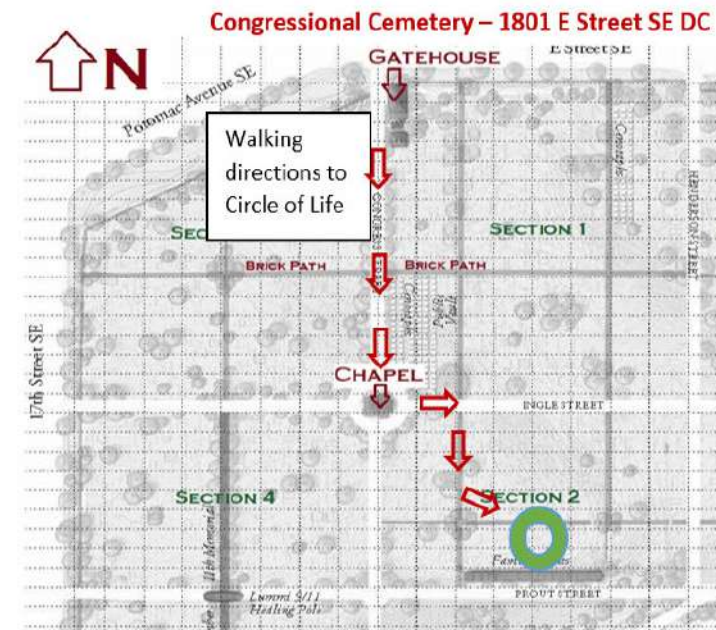
Natural or 'green' burials are designed to have minimal environmental impact and conserve earth's resources. In keeping with its ecological focus, Congressional is the only cemetery in Washington D.C. that offers the option of eco-friendly interment. The *Circle of Life* pays tribute to those who choose this simple and sustainable end to their existence.



In a typical green burial, the body is not cremated, prepared with chemicals, or buried in a concrete vault. It is simply placed in a biodegradable container or shroud and interred in a gravesite to decompose fully and return to nature. The natural and organic disposition of one's body can be a gift to the earth – one that connects our end to the beginning of life for other living organisms. Science tells us that energy and matter cannot be created or destroyed, only converted from one form to another. Green burial eases the transformation of biomass and contributes to the complex ecosystem that continues the cycle of life.

### BACKGROUND & COLLABORATORS

Plans for the *Circle of Life* began in 2019 when a group of friends, interested in the history of [Congressional Cemetery](#) and in green burial, collaborated with cemetery staff and [Casey Trees](#) to plant a grove of trees and create a sylvan sanctuary on the relatively barren SE hillside.



The *Circle of Life* is in the cemetery's SE quadrant, on the hillside above the family vaults as shown.

### ENVIRONMENTAL LAND ART

Land art (also known as earth art) is an art form that connects people with their surroundings and is created using natural materials such as soil, stones, trees and vegetation. Inherently linked to the landscape, earthen artworks are left in the open and change over time with seasons and weather. The Circle of Life design, inspired by the Earthworks Art Movement, was created with minimalist simplicity -- blending the contours of the hillside with the hallowed ground of this National Historic Landmark.

In 2020, Casey Trees planted eight linden tree saplings in a 'tree-henge' design to form a natural boundary for the Circle of Life. As the linden trees mature over 30 years to become 50'- 65' in height, each with branches extending 25' wide, their limbs will interlock to form a shade canopy. Each tree will cast its corresponding shadow across the compass centerpiece to mark the seasons of the year.