

# HERITAGE GAZETTE

FALL 2021

ASSOCIATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF  
HISTORIC CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY

## WELCOME TO OUR NEW PRESIDENT!

Jaclyn “Jackie” Spainhour is a writer, researcher, nonprofit professional, and special needs mom. She is an alumnus of Old Dominion University and sits on the Board of Directors for the Victorian Society in America. Her first book, *Gilded Age Norfolk, Virginia: Tidewater Wealth, Industry, and Propriety* was published in 2015 by the History Press. She serves as the chair of the VSA Book Awards Committee and the copy editor for the VSA’s peer-reviewed journal *Nineteenth Century*.

A life-long lover of historic places, she spent over a decade on staff and as the Director of the Hunter House Victorian Museum in Norfolk, Virginia. Her second book, *Museums and Millennials: Engaging the Coveted Patron Generation*, was published in October 2019 through the American Association of State and Local History. She has given numerous presentations on the local and national level and her third book, *A History Lover’s Guide to Norfolk*, was published in 2021. In her spare time, she uses her voice as an advocate for the creation of a more inclusive world for people living with autism and other disabilities in honor of her son Declan.

Away from the cemetery, you can find her digging her nose into the worn-out pages of

old books, sipping a latte at a corner café, or brewing a fresh pot of tea to pour into her extensive teacup collection. She never misses a good British drama and is a huge fan of the show *Supernatural*. She would love to chat with you about your wishes for the cemetery- especially if you would like to become a future resident!



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Welcome to  
Jaclyn  
Spainhour, new  
President of  
Historic  
Congressional  
Cemetery

## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Last spring, I shared with the Historic Congressional Cemetery (HCC) community the news that our longtime cemetery president Paul Williams had accepted another position and would be leaving the cemetery by this fall. I want to lead off this final newsletter of 2021 by once again thanking Paul for his nearly decade-long service to HCC. The cemetery has grown in myriad ways since Paul joined us, and his leadership has been essential to that growth. So, on behalf of the entire Board of Directors – and indeed our entire community, I want to say: Thank you, Paul.



Every departure also provides an opening for new opportunities. I am thrilled that our rigorous search process has yielded an extraordinary new leader for our beloved cemetery – Jaclyn (Jackie) Spainhour. Jackie comes to us from the Hunter House Victorian Museum where she had spent the last six years as Director. She brings many skills to lead our organization, but I am particularly excited about her vision, administrative and managerial skills, and fundraising experience and passion. Each and all of these skills will directly benefit HCC and will launch us into a new era, building off the many successes of the past decade.

Jackie officially started on November 1, and to say that she hit the ground running would be an understatement. Usain Bolt would have a hard time keeping pace with her as she has arrived and already put to good use the skills that the search committee and Board of Directors saw in her during the interview process. She leads in an inclusive way, maximizing the input of our entire HCC staff. That management style, coupled with Jackie's skills and those of the entire team, give me great hope for the future of our cemetery as my own term as board chair winds down.

The search process allowed us to recognize the extraordinary talent we already had on our team. As part of the leadership transition, we have asked Program Director Sarah Kirsipel to assume an elevated role as the Vice President of the cemetery with expanded duties. In this role, Sarah will continue to create unique programs that distinguish our cemetery from almost every other venue, not only in the city, but beyond, while expanding her portfolio to benefit from her creativity, passion, and experience. I am excited to have Sarah's leadership in partnership with Jackie as the team continues to grow and maximize the skills of each member of our staff.

My letter today has focused on several individuals. The reason for that is that organizations are inherently driven by the individuals who serve them. Our organization is particularly fortunate to have had Paul as president and now to have Jackie as his successor and Sarah as its vice president. I hope that each of you will have an opportunity to meet and spend time with Jackie and Sarah and the rest of our wonderful HCC team as restrictions ease and it becomes safer for us to spend time together in person. Of course, we are in a unique and precarious time, and we as a cemetery will continue to exercise maximum caution during the pandemic.

Thank you all for your continued support of our hallowed space, and I wish you a happy and healthy holiday season.

—Joel Samuels, Chairman of the HCC Board



THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE PRESERVATION  
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## DEAR CONGRESSIONAL COMMUNITY

It is an honor and privilege to introduce myself to you as the new President of Congressional Cemetery. Like all things in life, my appointment at Congressional was unexpected. They say if you want to make God laugh, tell him about your plans, and this has never been a truer statement than as I write this introduction letter to you. Let me tell you a little bit about my background and how I ended up on Capitol Hill's doorstep.

I have been the Director of the Hunter House Victorian Museum in Norfolk, Virginia for almost six years, and a part of the museum for nearly twelve. I joined as a volunteer directly out of high school, answering an advertisement in the local paper for history enthusiasts who love people and enjoy a good tea party. I was sold. Ever since I first visited Colonial Williamsburg on a fourth-grade field trip, I knew I would do something with history as a profession. I worked hard to develop my skillset to be the best I could be in the museum world. I attended every conference, applied for scholarships, wrote articles, published books, and gave national presentations. I joined historical boards and volunteered with local history leadership groups and nonprofits. I ingrained myself so deep into the museum field that they couldn't pry me out if they tried. I was going to be a top leader in the museum world. People looked up to me as a mentor and asked for my expertise in developing their programs and finding new volunteers. I was at the height of my museum career.

Then, I left it all behind for Congressional.

You see, I didn't really seek out this position. I was looking online through open positions in museums and history nonprofits when this ad popped up for a historic cemetery. I was immediately intrigued. Work

in a cemetery? What would that entail? Would I still get to do all the things I love—the programming, the events, the relationship-building?

I began my deep dive into researching the cemetery. Macabre events? Check. Quirky staff and volunteers? Check. Intriguing history? Check. Opportunities for engaging with the public and making a meaningful contribution? Check and check.

I sent in an application, went through an intense interview process, and knew this was the right fit for me. The board, staff, church, and even Paul thoroughly vetted me as I engaged in a speed-dating roulette. Their tough questions and personal attachments were evidence of their love for the site. They wanted a leader who would take care of the cemetery while nurturing its development. I am in awe of the faith they have placed in me and will endeavor to be worthy of it. The first step is getting to know you.

You, dear reader, are our *raison d'être*. The Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery exists to do one thing: preserve. Preservation of the cemetery has multiple meanings. It is the care of the sites themselves. It is educating the public about those interred onsite, and those who were once there but are no longer. It is developing enriching relationships with the local community. It is offering a safe space for your loved ones, or even you, to find eternal rest. It is maintaining beautiful grounds for

*Continued on page 7*





## HCC BOARD MEMBER LARRY J. WEST FACILITATES EARLY PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION TRANSFER TO SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM (SAAM)

Almost all black and white. So simple and yet so complex. Full of rich contrasts and stark realities. When it comes to images, the near lack of color can be both fascinating and frustrating, leaving much to the imagination. In the case of this collection, photography serves as a metaphor for forces at play in American history, combining art and technology. For most of his life, Larry J. West has been consumed with collecting and stewarding these fragments from the past and the stories that go with them.

West has gathered photographic jewelry, plus the work of early African American photographers and images related to the Underground Railroad. His specialty lies in the earliest photographers themselves – including the largest US collection of three Black image makers and their daguerreotypes as well as the largest collection of African American photographic jewelry from 1850 to 1925. The treatise he compiled on the collection will be available for authors and fellow researchers in the new L.J. West Library in DC.



This watch locket is an example of some of the fine African-American photographic jewelry in the collection. Photo Courtesy of the L. J. West Early Photography Collection.



Man's best friend sitting nice and still for the camera in York, PA—a rare feat! This image was possibly taken by renowned African American daguerreotypist, G.J. Goodridge. Photo Courtesy of the L. J. West Early Photography Collection.

As guardian of these images for decades, West wished for his images to be studied by a wide audience of researchers and storytellers determined to dig out those stories of American history that have yet to be told. His images serve not only as pioneering new resources for historians and researchers but also as a clear illustration of their time period for future generations of museumgoers. Thus, West selected the Smithsonian Museum of American Art with its collections of millions of photographs and international reputation for storytelling across cultures to house his collection. Exhibitions of West's collection will start in mid-2023.

And what does this have to do with Congressional Cemetery, you may ask? In addition to Mr. West's dedicated service on the cemetery's Board of Directors since 2020, Congressional has strong connections to the Underground Railroad. The cemetery has 4 prominent members of the Underground Railroad as residents, and is recognized by the National Park Service as a Network to Freedom Site. We are also the final resting place of prominent photography pioneers – Mathew Brady and Levin Handy. So if all this talk of photography and history has piqued your interest, stop on by and check out the newest self-guided walking tour "Photography Hill." And be on the lookout for the announcement for the dedication of the Brady/Handy Memorial in the Spring.



## THE CONNECTION PROJECT CORNER

**“A Sunday stroll through Congressional Cemetery or how I met my husband’s paternal ancestors.”**

**Mary Ann Hartnett**  
College Park, MD

My husband, Dennis Hartnett, comes from a long line of Washingtonians on his father’s side of the family. Many—38 at last count—now reside at Congressional. These ancestors include grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents, aunts, uncles and lots of cousins. The first to be interred in 1856 (R27/56) was a child of his great- great-grand- parents—Joseph Jacob “Jacob” and Margaret J. Groves Marks. The last relative to take up residence beneath the sod is a cousin who was interred in 1999 – John Richard Wadsworth (R18/144). The only member of the 38 that I met in person was his paternal grandmother, Hellen Irene Dunn Hartnett (R96/166-S). Why was Congressional Cemetery as the family’s choice for burials? During genealogical studies I learned that soldering was the occupation of choice for his Dunn and Marks male ancestors in the 1800s, and the Marine Corps their employer. At the tender age of 9, Edward Dunn (1836-1922) my husband’s great-grandfather, was indentured to the director of the Marine band. His father was



**Christina Marks Dunn [right] with Mary Ann Marks [left] and Edward Dunn**



**Taken for a Marine Corps publication, it described Edward Dunn as “the oldest living Marine.” From the National Archives**



**Edward Dunn died in 1922 and was given a funeral with full military honors.**

## AROUND THE GATEHOUSE

Sgt. Peter Dunn, (possibly interred in an unmarked grave at Congressional) a divorced, single parent, who had enlisted with the Marines at the barracks on 8th Street and needed childcare. Edward learned to play the fife and started his military career by going on recruiting outings with the drum corps. This led to his enlistment in 1850 at the age of 14, and a lifelong career with the Marines. Sgt. Major Dunn (R18/145)

was reported to be the oldest living Marine in 1915, at the age of 79. He offered to reenlist in 1917 at the age of 81 to fight in WW1. Once a Marine always a Marine. Edward spent his final days at the Naval Hospital, “old soldiers’ home”, on Pennsylvania Avenue just north of the barracks. The sons of Marines married the daughters of Marines, and thus the ties to the Marks family.



### WHAT IS THE CONNECTION PROJECT?

Share your story (or stories) with us. You can visit <https://congressionalcemetery.org/connectionproject/> to share YOUR Congressional Cemetery Connections. Fill out a simple online form, download a document to work on at your own pace, or print it out and deliver it to the gatehouse. We want to make it as easy as possible to share your connections with us. You can share as many or as few stories as you like.

**FROM THE PRESIDENT**

*continued from page 3*

friends and family to visit. In truth, it is treating every aspect of this cemetery as part of our extended family.

I invite you to become part of that family however you see fit. Shoot me an email, pick up the phone, knock on my office door, or meet me for coffee. I want to get to know you, your needs, and how we can grow the Congressional Cemetery family together. You matter to me, and this cemetery matters to all of us.

My door is always open. All I ask you to do is walk inside to take part in this journey with me as we take the cemetery to its next stage of growth. Together, we can honor this historic landmark and all the community it exists to serve.

Yours in service,

Jackie Spainhour  
President  
Congressional Cemetery

**CONSIDER DONATING STOCK**

Make a bigger impact by donating long-term appreciated securities, including stock, bonds, and mutual funds, directly to HCC. Compared with donating cash or selling your appreciated securities and contributing the after-tax proceeds, you may be able to automatically increase your gift and your tax deduction. It is simple and easy using our brokerage account at National Capital Bank. When you donate stock to HCC, you will generally take a tax deduction for the full fair market value.

**ATTENTION: CEMETERY LOVERS OVER THE AGE OF 75!**

**Trying to decide what to do with your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD)?**

Give up to \$100,000 to a qualified charity. An RMD is an IRS-mandated amount of money that you must withdraw from traditional IRAs or an employer-sponsored retirement account each year. It's important to understand when you need to take an RMD, how to avoid potential costly penalties for late distributions, and how to maximize your withdrawal strategy.

**Information for your estate planning, bequest, stock gift, endowment match, or donation:**

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## WORK ON THE SWALES CONTINUES

In April 2021, K9 Corps member, Jonas Howard completed his Eagle Scout project at Congressional Cemetery by renovating a stormwater drainage swale in the East End. His project consisted of the removal of plants and soil from the buried swale, excavation of historic river rock, and preparation of a gravel pad for concrete. The objective was to reduce future plant growth and make the swale visible and functional as stormwater drainage again. Over the course of two days, Jonas led 57 volunteers working a total of 230 hours to accomplish his goals.

Having already gone above and beyond the typical expectations for an Eagle Scout project, Jonas handed the remainder of the project to the cemetery. Phase 2 of the project was to pour concrete and return the river rocks to the trench. Due to the precision and time required when resetting the rocks, the cemetery opted to purchase a concrete mixer as opposed to delivery by a concrete truck. One-hundred and seventy-eight volunteer hours went into mixing and spreading concrete, placing river rock, and scattering river



pebbles to conceal the concrete pad. The swale is nearing completion, and the cemetery looks forward to having one more volunteer day to finish the remaining ten feet.

This was a meticulous process that we could not have accomplished without our dedicated volunteers. Especially Jonas Howard for approaching us about his Eagle Scout requirements and executing his plan with great leadership. And also, Greg Michaels who attended six of the workdays and devoted a total of 24 hours, well beyond his 8-hour K9 Corps commitment. Greg was awarded the 2021 Benjamin B. French Lodge No. 15, F.A.A.M. Volunteer Award for his commitment to the swale project.

If you are interested in helping with our conservation goal, please reach out to Margaret at [mcanilang@congressionalcemetery.org](mailto:mcanilang@congressionalcemetery.org)



**Special thanks to the volunteers that contributed to the work at our July 24 work day!**

# THE GESSFORDS OF CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY

BY ROBERT POHL

**A**cross Congressional Cemetery, there are multiple clusters of Gessfords, constituting 25 graves in all. All are descendants of William T. Gessford, who was born 1810 in England, and emigrated to Maryland as a young man. He married Ann Elizabeth Chenoweth around 1830 and they had a passel of children, two of whom, Charles and James, would move to the District in 1852. While both originally worked as carpenters, their paths would diverge at the beginning of the Civil War, when James became a member of the originals, those police officers that were sworn in on September 11, 1861, a month after President Lincoln had signed the act creating the Metropolitan Police Department.

By this time, James and his wife Margaret already had four children, the youngest of which, Henry Lincoln, had been born in February of that year.

Tragedy would strike late the following year, when Margaret would die. Two years later, James would remarry, marrying Susannah Carr. They would have six more children, three of whom would survive to adulthood. James had an interesting career as a police officer; he became the city's first Lieutenant in 1866, and by 1878 he was in charge of the First Precinct, which was located in Southwest. In 1884, he transferred to the Second Precinct, which covered all the land north of Florida Avenue between Rock Creek and the Anacostia River.

In 1899, Gessford was reduced in rank from lieutenant to sergeant, and placed in charge of the then-new Anacostia police station. The *Washington Evening Star* is silent on why an officer of such long

James W. Gessford,  
photo courtesy of  
the Library of  
Congress,  
R74/S229



Ex-Lieut. Gessford.

standing should be demoted when he was so close to retirement age. Nor does his obituary three years later cast

light on the situation, referring only to him as "Ex-Lieut." and describing him as "an efficient officer and [...] one of the most popular members of the force."

By this time, his son Henry Lincoln Gessford was himself on a steady climb upwards in the police force. Harry, as he was known, became a police officer before his 21st birthday as the station keeper at the Fourth Precinct and for the next 20 years he was a private, not gaining the rank of acting sergeant until 1899. However, then his career took off: within three days in 1901 he vaulted from acting sergeant to captain. While his scaling of the career ladder slowed down at that point, he was made inspector only five years later.

Somewhere along the line, he also was given the rank of major, which he held until his death.

Gessford did not get much ink as a police officer, mainly because he seems to have spent much of his time at headquarters, as assistant to various higher-ups in the department. This would, unsurprisingly, change when he joined the upper reaches of the police force, and Inspector Gessford was soon mentioned with



great frequency in the papers of the day, whether because he had been put in charge of the police force's property, as a member of the retiring board, or when censoring the Belasco Theater's proposed poster for a performance of *A Vision of Salome*. In 1919, Gessford became the first assistant superintendent. The following year, the superintendent of police died, and Gessford was chosen to replace him.

This promotion did not turn out well for Gessford. The entire first year in office was taken up with planning for the burial of the unknown soldier from World War I in Arlington Cemetery. When, on the day of the ceremony, the traffic situation became so bad that even President Harding was affected by it, public opinion immediately found the perfect scapegoat in Gessford, who retired in "ill health" less than three weeks later.

His health was not helped by the death of his wife three years later. While preparing a large Boxing Day meal for her family, some of whom visiting from far away, her skirts caught fire on a gas heater. Harry attempted to put out the flames, but in vain. She passed away the following day, her husband would follow her nine years later.

While Harry's father James had begun as a carpenter before switching to policing, his brother Charles stuck with his original *métier*. He married Elizabeth Evans on October 5, 1852. Over the next years, they would have a whole slew of children. For much of this time, Gessford worked as a carpenter, occasionally being hired by the federal government.

Around 1880, this began to change. He bought property, applied for building permits, and sold houses – most of these on Capitol Hill, which also became his home in the late 1880s.

One area where he is conspicuously absent is in the courts. While others seem to have spent a fair bit of time either fending off or pushing lawsuits, Gessford avoided this for the most part.

His luck ran out in 1893. In the course of the financial crash of that year, Gessford found himself forced to pump money into one of his suppliers, the "grate, mantel and tile dealer" Sotheron K. Spaulding. Unfortunately, instead of receiving profits from the business, he found that Spaulding was "working the partnership for his own especial benefit," as the *Washington Post* wrote. Gessford applied to equity court for redress. Whatever relief he was able to gain from this action did not do much for him. On February 1, 1894, Gessford died. Three days later, the *Post* printed a brief obituary that

stated that he had "erected a number of handsome residences."

But, as sometimes happens, his name continued to appear regularly in the records of the day. At first just because of a protracted fight over his will, but then because of the many subdivisions that he had made of properties across the city.

Even later, his name was attached to the Philadelphia Row houses on 11th Street, in spite of his never having been involved in their construction. Nonetheless, from an article in the *Evening Star* in 1960, this falsehood made its way into numerous books about Capitol Hill.

Most people, however, know him only as the man who gave his name to one of the most famous alleys of Capitol Hill: Gessford Court, located just off the 200 block of 11th St, SE.

James and his wives are buried in R74/229; Charles and Elizabeth can be found in R90/116; Harry and Kate are located in R69/164S.



Henry L. Gessford, photo courtesy of the Library of Congress, R90/S116



# YOU CAN NOW BROWSE CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY GRAVES ON GOOGLE ARTS AND CULTURE

BY ROSIE GRANT

This fall Congressional Cemetery launched its exhibition page on Google Arts & Culture. Google Arts & Culture is an online platform of high-resolution images of artifacts from cultural organizations throughout the world. It lets people tour our “collections” of graves through galleries to explore the lives of some of the people buried here.

The platform includes advanced search capabilities and educational tools. Scroll down the page to learn about some of our famous residents including J. Edgar Hoover, Mary Fuller, and John Philip Sousa. You can also learn the details about some fascinating people in Washington, DC history including socialite Marguerite DuPont Lee and political spokesman Tyrone Gayle.

Congressional is one of the first cemeteries to join the platform and now displays 150 graves in the cemetery on Google, with plans to add more. You can also browse a series of exhibitions featuring tours of parts of our cemetery. Our LGBTQ tour is the first to be launched, with several others coming later this fall. In the LGBTQ exhibition, click through to learn about some of our famous residents including Walt Whitman’s lover Peter Doyle, “Father of the Harlem Renaissance” Alain Locke, and gay rights activist Leonard Matlovich.



Sample Exhibition

*Yes!*

I want to help preserve and restore Congressional Cemetery with a tax deductible donation.

☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$75 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

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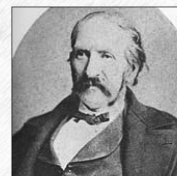
Check the Event page on the website for details!

- January 10** K9 Corps Renewals Begin
- January 11** Tombs & Tones Book Club
- February 7** K9 Corps New Membership Invitations
- Early March** K9 Corps Orientation, check your email
- April 2** 2022 Docent Tour Season Begins  
"Only at Congressional" Intro Tour,  
Saturdays, 11am, \$5  
Sunday Strolls Guided Tour, Sundays,  
1pm, \$5
- April 16** Association for the Preservation of  
Historic Congressional Cemetery  
Annual Meeting



(Weird Al 2009- )

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