



DC's Greatest
Undertaking

The Graveyard Gazette

Fall is a special time for us at Congressional Cemetery. With the heat of the summer sun waning and the chill of winter beginning to creep into the air, the clang of our wrought iron gate welcomes thousands of visitors to the cemetery, the most of any season at Congressional. Many visit to attend a signature program, like Soul Strolls or Dead Man's Run. Others visit to walk the grounds, taking in the scenic colors of the season, often with a four-legged companion leading the way. Others visit to remember a loved one, seeking a moment of peace and reflection. And this year, we were happy to welcome local classrooms for the cemetery's first official field trip program, the History Hunt. Regardless of their reason for visiting, we are a place for everyone. We are DC's Greatest Undertaking.

You also may have noticed something else new; the results are in! The voters have spoken and the NEW name for the Congressional Cemetery newsletter is *The Graveyard Gazette*, where you can catch up on all the latest going on at DC's liveliest cemetery. In this issue, we cover HCC's exploration of public art, grave robbing stories from the macabre past, the Battle of Bladensburg, and more!



Letter from the Chair

This past week we have started to consistently experience the annual transition from our often-unbearable summer weather to the cooler temperatures of fall. And I absolutely love it. The chill in the morning that makes a run or walk that much easier. The mid-afternoon that is just perfect to sit outside and read a book. And the chilly evenings that are not too cold, where a fleece is enough to stay warm. If you're like me, this part of the year—like our springs—is way too short. But it's also a wonderful reminder of the constant change we see in our environment.

Unfortunately, climate change is not always so positive. As I write this, parts of our country are preparing for unprecedented hurricanes that are undoubtedly influenced by climate change. And while these changes sometimes feel too big to address on an individual level, our collective efforts can contribute toward positive change within our local communities. And Congressional Cemetery plays a role in that too. Our very existence requires managing our environmental conditions. Whether it's the cultivation and maintenance of different varieties of trees, conducting green burials, helping grow and strengthen a vulnerable bee population, carefully managing our water use, protecting the Anacostia Watershed from stormwater runoff, or picking up and properly disposing of animal waste—we all play a part.

The Cemetery's mission statement acknowledges that environmental stewardship plays an active role in our ability to respectfully celebrate the legacy of the many people interred within its gates. But our ability to live up to this mission is not one we can do alone. It requires all of us to play a part. And in this season of change, I want to take a moment to express my gratitude for all that you do to help us live up to our mission statement's charge to be a good environmental steward. While there is still much to do, we would not be where we are today without the leadership of the Congressional Cemetery staff, its volunteers, and its visitors.

We believe that by prioritizing sustainability, we honor the memories of those interred here and respect the natural world around us. To the extent you can, please help us continue to fulfill our environmental stewardship by donating, including us in your estate planning, or pledging a regular gift. Thank you for your continued support as we work together to create a peaceful, environmentally friendly sanctuary.

Warm regards,

Richard Greene

Richard S. Greene IV
Board Chair

Association for the Preservation of
Historic Congressional Cemetery



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From the President

"It's not easy being green."

Kermit the Frog's beloved song reminds us that we all need to feel like we belong—both as people and as part of our world. At Congressional, we take this literally, working to build a greener, more environmentally conscious corner of the Hill to be enjoyed by all. This work requires the time and commitment of many, and I am thrilled to update you on just a few of the ways we are turning even greener in 2024 and 2025:



- The Anacostia Watershed Society and LimnoTech worked with us to apply for the *Green Streets, Green Jobs, Green Towns* grant offered by the Chesapeake Bay Trust to support our work to eradicate stormwater issues on the property. The grant application was successful, and work is underway in soliciting feedback on possible places for new green infrastructure, such as a bog walk along the southern perimeter fence and rain gardens in flooded areas.
- Under the leadership of *Circle of Life* creator Sharon Metcalf, a new partnership was established between the cemetery, Casey Trees, and the Trowel Garden Club, which culminated in the awarding of a 3-year grant from the Garden Club of America to pursue Level One Arboretum Accreditation. Work has begun on this to create a new "Tree Walk through History" tour, highlighting the amazing trees on our property.
- The amazing and dedicated volunteer gardeners of our Adopt-a-Plot program managed nearly 100 plots this year, many focused on the propagation of native plants to support wildlife and pollinators in our area.
- Green burials, or natural burials done without embalming or materials which will not return to the earth, continued to flourish under the leadership of our Director of Site Sales and Funerals, Lily Buerkle, who also spent her personal time advocating for greener options in the area, such as natural organic reduction in Maryland. This process is not yet legal in DC, but we are proud of Lily for leading the way for another green option for final disposition.
- Continued partnership with the DC Beekeepers Alliance resulted in not only hundreds of jars of coveted honey, but thousands of happy pollinators and hundreds of delighted schoolchildren who toured our grounds as part of our new K-12 education programs that highlight both our history and our pollinators.

These are just a few of the major accomplishments of 2024 that we will continue to build on in 2025. I may be going out on a limb here (pun intended), but would you consider supporting this work by giving a gift to our nonprofit organization today? With your help, being green may be easy after all.

Yours in service,

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Jackie Spainhour".

Jackie Spainhour
President



Support Our Mission

Help Preserve this Washington, DC Treasure



Historic Congressional Cemetery has been an active cemetery since 1807. Today there are over 67,000 residents buried within our 35-acre oasis in the middle of Washington, DC. More than a burial ground, HCC has served as a peaceful place of reflection and restoration for generations of Washingtonians. And in these uncertain times, it feels more important than ever to help ensure this refuge for future residents, friends and families, historians, neighbors, and visitors.

Join the Skeleton Key Society with a Planned Gift

If there is one thing we all have in common, it is that we are all going to die. We make no secret of this fact here at Congressional Cemetery. In fact, we celebrate our pending deaths by living our lives thoughtfully, with purpose, and with a nod to those who will outlive us. If you have embraced your own mortality and enjoy our unconventional relationship with death, planned giving may be an option for you.

Debuting in 2024, the Skeleton Key Society is the planned giving community of Congressional Cemetery and includes individuals who have chosen to remember the cemetery in their wills and estate plans. To join, notify us of your pledged support in your will, and we will send you a welcome gift and invitations to special events.

By remembering Congressional Cemetery in your will, establishing a charitable gift annuity or charitable trust, or making the cemetery a beneficiary of your IRA or life insurance policy, you qualify for a significant charitable income tax or estate tax deduction.

Naming Historic Congressional Cemetery as a beneficiary in your will:

- Creates a legacy that lasts beyond your lifetime. Your gift will continue making an impact on HCC and its community long after you're gone.
- Costs you nothing now. Your gift will have a significant impact in the future, without causing any financial strain today.
- Allows you to show your appreciation today for this special place.



We're Grateful for Your Gift

Thank you for supporting the longevity of Historic Congressional Cemetery. Your charitable contributions will make this special place a treasure for generations to come. For more information, please contact us at (202) 543-0539.



Want to make a tax deductible donation to Historic Congressional Cemetery? Scan the QR code to give online! Want to contribute in a different way? No problem! Please send us the enclosed envelope. We greatly appreciate your support.



Around the Gatehouse

Congressional Cemetery is a special place because of our hard working and amazing volunteers. As a non-profit, we would simply be unable to host the programs that we do without their efforts. And while all of our volunteers are dedicated, we want to highlight the efforts of our C.O.R.P.S.E (Company of Residents Peacefully or Suspiciously Expired) Corps Actors. Whether it's Soul Strolls or Gentleman's Gambit, the actors portraying our interred residents act for hours on end in costume, often for multiple days in a row! Whether its hot, cold, wet, or dry, they are there putting on a great show for our community and helping educate the public about those who have come before us, all for free. Please join us in thanking the following volunteers for their efforts this year:

Elizabeth Costanzo Sally Cusenza Jennifer Dumas Dawn Kopecki
Linda Lenrow-Lopez Katherine Smyth-Haskins John Wells



Volunteer actress Linda Lenrow-Lopez as Margaret Laurie, a spirit medium buried at the cemetery, at Soul Strolls.
Kitty Linton



Eager participants at the Dead Man's Run Kid's Run spring into action! *Kitty Linton*

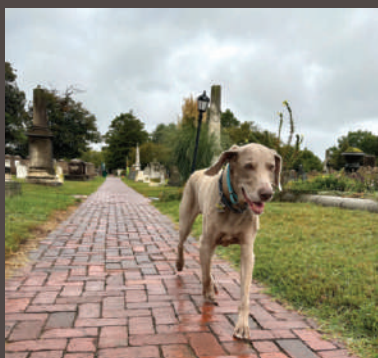
Upcoming Events + A Preview of Next Year.

2024 Calendar

October 31-	<i>Lýkos Anthrōpos</i> by Bob Bartlett:
November 24:	A New Play About Monsters
November 12 and 13:	Tombs and Tomes Book Club
November 30:	Mausoleums and Manuscripts
December 8:	Holiday Market
December 8:	Worldwide Candle Lighting
December 15:	Notes From the Crypt Concert

Coming in 2025:

- St. Patrick's Day Irish-American Commemoration
 - Tombs and Tomes Book Festival
 - The Cherry Blossom 5K
 - Cemetery Speaker Series
 - Cinematery
 - Soul Strolls
 - World Pride Programming
- And more!*



Featured K9 Corps Member

Name: Finn

Age: 12

Member Since: 2018

The Romero Family

Likes: Being a 4th generation HCC Weimaraner, staying close to his family, chasing fellow K9 Corps Member Eddie, walking with fellow K9 Corps Members Callie and Tanga, Aunt Jill, Uncle Jay

Death Awareness Programming Update!

The cemetery's popular death awareness programming expanded this year. We now offer a range of opportunities to accept, talk about, and plan for death. We've enjoyed workshops, celebrations of life, and one-on-one or group Death Doula Office hours sessions. Coming up, join us for gatherings like Death Cafes, Death Over Drafts, and the upcoming annual Worldwide Candle Lighting on December 8 for families who mourn the loss of children of any age. Thank you for your continued support for our death awareness programs and be on the lookout for more in 2025!



Attendees discuss their own mortality at our Design Your Own Epitaph and Tombstone workshop held earlier this year. *Congressional Cemetery*

Love history? Love HCC? Book a Private Docent Tour!

Our Docent Corps or the "Dozen Decent Docents," as they were originally fashioned, are always eager to welcome visitors on docent tours, whether it's an Introductory Tour or a special topic tour. But did you know that you can book your own private docent tour? Is an out-of-town history lover visiting you? Looking for the next team-building experience for your office or organization? Maybe you have an unusual request, like a tour focusing on the Civil War, suffragists, LGBTQ+ civil rights leaders, and/or American Indian chiefs? For whatever reason or occasion, our dedicated docents are here to make your experience an amazing and memorable one. Interested? Contact our office or scan the QR code to request your tour today.

In addition to your tour, space may be rented for receptions or other events upon request.



HCC Debuts Public Art Program

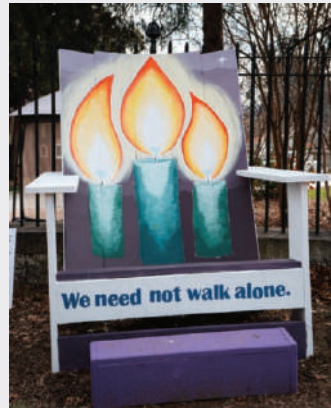
Walking into Congressional Cemetery, visitors are greeted by over two hundred years of preferences. From material and size to color and design, the families of permanent residents chose how to not only craft their loved one's markers, but how to recognize their unique lives amongst the tens of thousands of stones on site. They decided what they would like to see, touch, and interact with during their visits and the future visits of their great-great-grandchildren. These preferences resulted in an eclectic

mix of traditional and contemporary works, and everything in between.

In this way, Congressional Cemetery has been building its own outdoor "art museum" for public enjoyment for hundreds of years. It is no wonder then, that one cold day I looked through my office window at the Big White Chair outside the front gate and thought to myself: "Isn't that a great blank canvas? Now, what can we do with it?"



In the fall of 2023, mother and son duo Heather and Aiden painted a lighthouse scene titled "Light in the Darkness" on the chair in honor of suicide awareness. The lighthouse in their artwork symbolized a beacon of hope and guidance, offering light and support to those navigating the turbulent waters of mental health challenges and the tragedy of suicide. This piece of art, born from personal loss and love for their relative Justin Handley, reminded viewers of the importance of suicide prevention and mental health awareness.



Elizabeth Marik's design was featured in the second Message of Hope installation in December 2023 along with two other painters, Michele L. and Evelyn M. of Compassionate Friends. The candles they depicted were in honor of the annual Worldwide Compassionate Friends Candle Lighting Ceremony and included their motto: "We Need Not Walk Alone." Compassionate Friends supports families who have lost children of any age. Their motto was left on the chair as part of its story to be incorporated in subsequent designs.



Marik again became message giver in the spring and summer of 2024. In spring, for the season following the vernal equinox, the design included flowers associated with death and mourning such as marigolds, daisies, lilies, and a white rose.



In summer, painted images reflecting Marik's experience as part of the LGBTQ+ community were included. The design expressed a sincere wish for communities to come together to break free of what confines us to create universal freedom of expression for all.

About the Big Chair Project

(some parts adapted from text provided by Laura Lyster-Mensh)

That passing thought turned into our first foray into official public art programming at the cemetery. Called *Messages of Hope: The Big Chair Project*, this program received start-up funding from the Capitol Hill Community Foundation to purchase supplies to allow neighbors of the cemetery to paint their own hopeful messages to greet our visitors. What followed was a multi-year, ongoing project featuring solo and group artists highlighting topics from suicide prevention and child loss, to Pride month and celebrating the beauty of spring. Few things are off limits, and nothing is taboo, especially when it allows for conversations normalizing death, dying, and grief as parts of living life to the fullest.

From the Contributors:

"I got involved in the project initially to shed the light on the staggering statistics of suicide and the lack of mental health resources. The project is now near and dear to my heart because it was an event that I shared with my son."
—Heather Salabrese

This project was a very exciting way to combine my passion for art and love of contributing to collective experiences... I would love to see more people from the community coming together to create future murals on the Big Chair!" —Elizabeth Marik

I find the Big Chair a living conversation between the cemetery and the neighborhood. It invites people in, and the ongoing installations illustrate the engagement between the public and our permanent residents... [I would like to see] a widening legacy of installations drawing from the city's diverse communities using different media and modalities." —Laura Lyster-Mensh



With the initial Big Chair Project underway, I began to think more about how we could connect with the landscape and encourage thoughtful discussions around death. I remembered an encounter I had a few months prior with a volunteer who specialized in art curation and reached out to her to discuss options for our next iteration of public art. What emerged was an idea inspired by conversations I had with our Death Doula-in-Residence about the wind phone phenomena. Originating in Japan, an old, disconnected phone booth provided a space for those grieving an unexpected and

tragic loss to "call" their loved ones and send messages on the wind to them. I was enamored with this idea, and our newly tasked Curator-in-Residence collaborated with me to put together the materials to find the perfect artist with a vision to install a temporary, site-specific piece in spring of 2024.

I was thrilled when Tommy Bobo accepted the commission and began working within the space. As you might imagine, it did not come without its challenges. As a beloved community recreational area, many dogs, wildlife, and people interacted with Tommy as he worked to install the piece. Sometimes a piece would be knocked off, and he would have to come and repair it. The mirrored sculptures did not leave much room for equipment to trim the grass, so Bobo took this on himself as maintenance for the project. He eventually settled on partially fencing the installation in, hoping it might assist with stopping happy paws and wandering feet. Unfortunately, nothing stops mother nature. Tommy often worked in blistering heat, much like his Big Chair artist counterparts, to complete his work. Several storms and winds also forced repairs of the piece. In the end, though, the efforts were worth the growing pains. The reviews were in: the wind phone elicited deep contemplation and touched the hearts of hundreds of people over its three-month show.

About the Installation

Wind Phone Installation: *The Landscape Listens*
(adapted from the press release written by Ashley Molese)



The Landscape Listens is a kinetic meadow of environmental sculptures that coalesces the natural landscape of Congressional Cemetery into an interactive installation. Artist Tommy Bobo crafted an assemblage of 150 reflective sculptures, each responding discreetly to shifting wind currents. As with other rhythms found in nature, like the murmurations of birds in flight or



HCC President Jackie Spainhour using the wind phone on a rainy day to call her grandfather (d. 2019). It was a beautiful, emotional experience dialing his number.

schools of migrating fish, these sculptures were made of individual elements that responded uniquely to their singular conditions but also collectively to their environment. An analog wind phone (風の電話 kaze no denwa) offered visitors a point of connection to speak with those dwelling in other worldly planes. Originally conceived of by Itarū Sasaki for his garden in Ōtsuchi, Japan, the wind phone has appeared in various forms and locations to create a dedicated space for mourning, remembrance, and connection. Like portals that dissolve the veil between earthly and spiritual realms, *The Landscape Listens* attuned visitors to individual and collective feelings of mourning and acted as a vehicle to carry remembrances across the wind.

The state of seasonal change was an active component of Bobo's work, which often uses elements of light and dark, reflectivity and refraction, as key elements of his practice. With cloud forms, tree blossoms, or the overgrowth of grass underneath, *The Landscape Listens* mirrored ephemeral moments of connection to the cycle of seasonality found in Congressional Cemetery's natural landscape. From the spring equinox to the



HCC President Jackie Spainhour, artist Tommy Bobo, and Curator-in-Residence Ashley Molese welcome visitors during a public program on *The Landscape Listens*.

summer solstice, visitors were invited to take a respite in Bobo's meditative environmental installation.

Praise for *The Landscape Listens* from surveyed visitors:

"Serene and touching."

"Healing and beautiful."

"Such a great reflection tool—a way to make us slow down in this very beautiful place. Thank you."

"I loved how well the installation fit into the surroundings."

"So thoughtful—as someone with recent grief I liked that it was interactive."

"I wish there could be something like this closer to my home. This was something I needed in my grief. Being somewhere to share that grief and talk to my dad even if he can't hear it was so therapeutic."

From the Contributors:

Large-scale public art is the next natural step in expanding HCC's community engagement. This feels like mission critical approaches to creating more resonance with the cemetery's history and residents...I am confident that HCC can become a beacon for both the death positivity movement and models of best practice for commissioning and producing expansive artist-led initiatives." —*Ashley Molese*

"At its best, public art is egalitarian- it meets its audience where it is at. When bringing new art into a historic space, both are enriched and imbued with each other's essences. You get to see the old in a new light and the new within its space in history. There is a bittersweet feeling to being the inaugural artist knowing that my experience is the foundation that hopefully bigger and better things will be built atop off. Hopefully, the Congressional Cemetery will become nationally recognized for—amongst other things—their amazing art programs." —*Tommy Bobo*



I invite you to visit the cemetery and experience these art forms throughout the year. If you are an artist looking for your next project, please contact us with your proposal. I likewise invite you to submit a proposal for the Big Chair Project to us for 2025. We would love to hear from you!

By Jackie Spainhour
President
Historic Congressional Cemetery



Body Snatching and Grave Robbing in the Nation's Capital

A previous version of this article appeared on the Congressional Cemetery blog in 2023.

Body snatching may conjure a macabre scene in your mind: a foggy, moonless night in a graveyard and the hushed whispers of men digging by lantern light. But can you picture the anatomy professor at a prestigious medical school paying for a cadaver fresh from the grave to dissect in front of his students? Or the mourning widower who goes to visit his young bride's grave only to find her missing? Attaching names and stories to the parties involved and their victims (and, yes, they were victims) can humanize the practice to help us understand life and death in the nation's capital. Body snatching and grave robbing are not simply spooky stories to tell for Halloween; they were illegal and unethical practices that often victimized those most vulnerable in society.

On the night of December 12, 1873, DC police officers noticed a suspicious carriage sitting at Washington Circle. After midnight, an officer approached the woman sitting inside, who explained she was waiting for her husband who was conducting business. Later, they saw one man approach the buggy and place a spade inside. Then another man appeared and placed a muddy shovel inside before the three set off towards New Hampshire Avenue and Boundary Street. The officers pursued them, suspecting they must have stolen goods on board. Instead, they found grave robbing tools. Officers investigated nearby Holmead Cemetery and discovered

the body of Thomas Fletcher inside a large canvas bag near the fence.

The three individuals inside the wagon were seamstress Margaret Harrison, driver Charles Green, and Dr. George Christian. Christian was a former clerk in the surgeon general's office and graduated from a medical college in the District. He was also a resurrectionist active in DC around 1873-1875.

Resurrectionists, or body snatchers, made money by

illegally sneaking into cemeteries at night, stealing bodies from fresh graves, and selling them to anatomy professors at medical colleges. In the 1870s, only a few states had anatomy acts or bone bills, laws that allowed medical schools access to unclaimed bodies—often those of people who died in workhouses, hospitals, or other institutions whose loved ones couldn't afford to bury them elsewhere. Since the District of Columbia had no such law, medical schools needed to get creative to procure the cadavers that attracted students to their schools.

The night of Dr. Christian's arrest, a diary was also found inside the carriage, which illustrated the extent of his resurrectionist business.

Excerpts from this diary were

published in the newspapers and later used at his trial.

Christian had arrangements with doctors at Washington Asylum and the almshouses, where patients often died penniless and sometimes without family, for records of deaths. These were potential victims for him to later dig up at the city's potter's fields, where the impoverished were buried in unmarked graves. Notes in his diary describe various doctors going out resurrecting



An 1887 illustration by Hablot Knight Browne depicts resurrectionists exhuming a fresh body. Public Domain, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

with him or sending janitors and hospital stewards out with him as assistants. One local doctor offered Christian and his partner \$15 for each body.

In addition to supplying nearby medical schools with cadavers, Christian corresponded with doctors at schools in Virginia, Michigan, and Ohio. Their letters spoke of the best ways to pack bodies in whiskey barrels and prices per cadaver.

One Michigan doctor wrote that he'd pay Christian \$25 per body but then sell the bodies to the students for \$40. (\$25 in 1873 is worth \$635.64 today.)

Christian at Congressional

Christian's diary entry from October 29, 1873 reads, "Attended a funeral at the Congressional Cemetery this afternoon and brought the subject in to Georgetown College to-night."

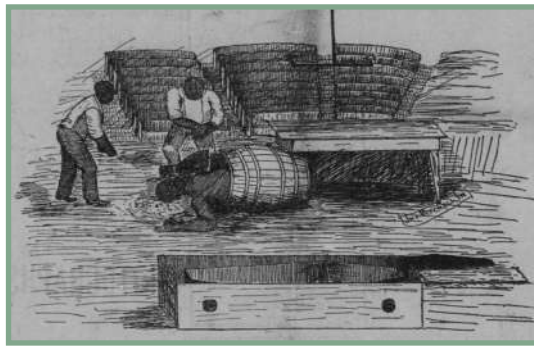
Mr. Thomas Thompson testified that he saw Christian at the funeral of the late A.C.H. Webster at Congressional. The unmarked gravesite was described as being "by Centennial Lodge and Washington Chapter of Masons." The next morning Mr. Thompson returned to the cemetery and saw the grave dug up, the coffin lid split open, and even the pillow removed.

Christian was charged with desecrating the graves of Thomas Fletcher, the body in the bag at Holmead Cemetery, and A.C.H. Webster at Congressional Cemetery. Offenders were often sentenced to one year in jail and a fine. During his trial, Christian's attorney argued that "As long as the world remained, the taking of bodies would continue and if they shut up the dissecting rooms, soon the physicians would be powerless to treat the living."

Life After His Trial

By September 1874 Dr. Christian was pardoned by President Ulysses S. Grant after he was petitioned by Christian's friends. However, he returned to resurrecting shortly after and was arrested again by November.

Charged again with desecrating graves while out on bail in September 1875, he failed to appear in court and was arrested on a train to Baltimore. The next day officers brought him back to Washington, DC, but the cells were full so he was allowed to sit around the police



A diagram of a body being packed in a whiskey barrel. From the August 1, 1896 issue of the *Richmond Planet*.

office. At some point in the night, he disappeared. In the years after his escape, officers in Ohio and New York attempted to connect Christian to many unsolved body snatching cases.

Little is known of Christian after his escape in 1875. However, it appears he made a concerted effort to avoid the fate he rendered to his victims, only being mentioned again while on his deathbed. According to a

Washington Times article from 1896: "While Christian was on his death bed at Philadelphia, he piteously besought the woman he had lived with for a number of years not to let his remains fall into the hands of the medical fraternity. His dying request was that his body lie in a vault until decomposition had rendered it unfit for the dissecting table."

By Gabriella Welsh, Events & Digital Content Specialist

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Discovering History at Congressional Cemetery: The War of 1812 and the Battle of Bladensburg

On a hot July afternoon this past summer, I stooped lower, squinting in the sun, trying to discern the worn lettering on a low marble tombstone. Moving to the left, another angle revealed to me, a name, Louis Shryer, with the letters below spelling out “D.C. INF.” Standing up, I picked up my clipboard and marked a tally on my notes. “Another one,” I thought as I flipped to my cemetery map, drawing a circle where I was standing. One of dozens of graves I had marked that day, the research I was conducting was slowly revealing the past. Like a puzzle, the job of the historian is often to reassemble the past by putting pieces of evidence together. And I was doing just that, piece by piece, grave by grave, assembling a glimpse into days past.

At museums, almost everything is knowable. Every artifact on display is there for a premeditated reason. They are researched, interrogated, cataloged, and conserved. They are known. But what if there is no blueprint? What if the research is limited and there is no comprehensive catalog? What if the solution to how all the pieces fit together is unknown to the institution itself, the history sitting there waiting to be discovered, beckoning to be known? Enter Congressional Cemetery, where the pieces are not artifacts: they are people, their graves, and their stories. I’ve often said that cemeteries are a one-of-a-kind portal into the past, and at Congressional this window reveals a common history that unites us all. And by discovering cemeteries, we discover ourselves.

In this case, the window into the past I was slowly forging gravestone by gravestone revealed a story of American and Washingtonian service, patriotism, sacrifice, and endurance. For at the Battle of



The final resting place of Louis Shryer. Congressional Cemetery

Bladensburg, citizen soldiers who lived in the District of Columbia rose to defend the capital. On August 24, 1814, American and British forces clashed at the Battle of Bladensburg. Part of the Chesapeake Campaign waged by the British during the War of 1812, a British strike force attacked Washington, DC. An American force consisting of regular army and militia moved to block the British offensive. Among the American forces were thousands of District of Columbia militiamen, organized into the 1st and 2nd DC militia regiments.

The Americans maneuvered north of the District, taking up positions near the Anacostia River and the town of Bladensburg to block the British advance. At noon on August 24, elements of the British force advanced across the bridge. Other British regiments forded the river north of the bridge, unbeknownst to the Americans. The Americans initially resisted, yet they wilted in the face of the British assault, forcing them to retreat.

While the Americans only suffered 200 casualties, their defeat opened the way to the nation’s capital. The enemy force proceeded to burn the President’s home (today, the White House), the Capitol, and other public buildings in the District. The British force withdrew the next day, but the damage had been done. And while “The Bladensburg Races” did little to weaken the war effort, the ignominious battle remains as one of the greatest defeats in American history. Yet the Americans endured and just a few weeks later repulsed the British at the Battle of Baltimore, inspiring Francis Scott Key to pen the first lines of “The Star Spangled Banner.”

As a military historian, I had known about the Battle of Bladensburg before arriving at Congressional



Members of the 5th Maryland Militia Regiment open fire on the enemy at the Battle of North Point. Fought three weeks after the Battle of Bladensburg, this art accurately depicts the uniform of militia members at the time of the Battle of Bladensburg. *Painting by Don Troiani*

Cemetery. As I discovered, the cemetery had numerous connections to the War of 1812 and the Burning of Washington. And of course, I knew there were thousands of veterans from almost every major American armed conflict buried at the cemetery. The puzzle pieces were all there, laid out across the 35 acres of the cemetery.

At HCC, we love working with our neighbors. And this includes Major General John C. Andonie, the Commanding General of the District of Columbia National Guard (DCNG). He had attended a tour at HCC earlier in the year and had noticed several gravestones of DC militia members. Given that the DCNG directly traces their legacy to the days of the militia, this had understandably piqued the interest of General Andonie. Thankfully, I had already planned a program for August 24, 2024, the 210th anniversary of the Battle of Bladensburg, to explore the topic. I eagerly shared our plans with General Andonie, and he enthusiastically agreed to support a larger program with full DCNG participation.

With these elements in place, I turned back to the archives, the sources, the graves, the stories. My own curiosity was rising. Working to uncover the past, to flip over a stone that has not been turned over in a long time to see what lies beneath, to find stories and names that haven't been said or thought about in decades, centuries even, sends my pulse racing. I wanted to know--had to know--more. With my synapses firing off, I dove into our records.

Before explaining further, I think it's important to highlight the nature of my role. I serve as a public historian, a "history translator" where I specialize in making historical narratives, processes, and stories understandable, accessible, and relevant to the vast majority of individuals who are not scholarly historians. And while I can navigate an archive well enough, it's certainly not my specialty. Enter the public historian's best friend, the archivist. And my best friend for this project was Sandra Schmidt. While she no longer works



Brigadier General John H. Campo and Command Sergeant Major Ronald Smith of the DCNG stand at attention after laying wreaths at the grave of Captain Lenox. *Kitty Linton*

at HCC, her hard work lives on in the form of the wealth of archival materials she compiled and organized at HCC. When I told her about this project, she kindly offered her guidance and assistance. With Schmidt's wealth of knowledge, both in the form of the archived materials and her own involvement, I fortunately had the raw materials and expert guidance to begin assembling the puzzle of DCNG legacy at HCC, including, of course, DC militia at the Battle of Bladensburg.

First of all, I had to narrow the scope of our research. I envisioned it as three overlays like a Venn diagram, trying to find the confluence of three different categories of interred residents: 1. War of 1812 veterans, 2. DC militia members, and 3. Battle of Bladensburg veterans. Researching along these lines allowed a triangulation of various types of sources and records. After consulting the sources, we were ready for the next step, finding the graves. Enter the cemetery public historian's other best friend, the clipboard. I marked the locations of these veterans, traversing the grounds in the July heat. With these two steps complete, I had a result: I discovered that Congressional Cemetery was the final resting place of at least 24 DC militia veterans who fought at the Battle of

NOTICE.
THE Captains of companies of the Militia of the City of Washington, are hereby notified that such arms belonging to the Militia of the 1st and 2d Wards, as are out of order, will be repaired with all possible expedition, at the expence of the Corporation, at the shop of Hollenbach on Pennsylvania Avenue, nearly opposite T. Ringgold's, Esq.—and those of the 3d and 4th Wards at the shop of Capt. Wm. McKee, near the Navy Yard.
By order of the Mayor,
PETER LENOX,
Superintendent.
August 20, 1814.

This newspaper article from the National Intelligencer illustrates Captain Peter Lenox's efforts to prepare the DC Militia for combat before the Battle of Bladensburg, one of many puzzle pieces I considered in this project. *Courtesy of Sandy Schmidt.*

Bladensburg. Mission accomplished...or was it?

As public historians, our jobs are not simply to reassemble these lost puzzles, but to make sure these puzzles are accessible to the public. You can have the most brilliant and original scholarly thought of a generation, but ultimately what use is history without (living) people to appreciate it? In other words, how do you take the history and turn it into a program? Often practical necessities and common sense lead program development. In this case, since we didn't have a complete accounting of all Bladensburg DCNG veterans, and with the need for a quick turnaround, it became obvious we needed to select a single grave site, for the location of a ceremony. Working with our partners, we developed a wreath-laying ceremony with music, remarks, and a color guard. But where to do it?

I selected the grave of Captain Peter Lenox to be the ceremony location. At the time of the battle, he commanded the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Infantry

Regiment of the DC Militia and was also heavily involved with the reorganization of the militia prior to the battle. While Lenox was certainly a veteran worth recognizing, his grave site was slightly elevated, quite large and visibly striking, located near an easy-to-access footpath, and, most importantly, had plenty of open space for attendees.

On August 24, 2024, around 11:15 AM, a small crowd gathered around the grave of Lenox. I walked over to stand next to the podium as the ceremony began. I looked at Lenox's towering obelisk, representing a man who was so devoted to his militia service that he asked to be referred to as "Captain" his entire life, and I wondered if he ever would have imagined that his service at Bladensburg would be recognized so far after his time. The color guard moved into place, the band played the national anthem, and I spoke, along with DCNG representatives, about why we were gathered there.

As we watched a bright patriotic wreath being placed in front of Lenox's grave to commemorate his service and that of the other veterans, I was struck by a palpable sense of place and purpose. At the ceremony, Brig. Gen. John Campo of the DCNG stated that, "Their service is not confined to a single day, but a lifelong commitment to protect and preserve the ideals that define our country." These words resonated with me and they still do.



The grave of Captain Peter Lenox after the ceremony. *Kitty Linton*



Attendees of the ceremony during the playing of the National Anthem. *Kitty Linton*

For in the same way that veteran service to the country is not confined to a single day, neither is our duty to tell the stories of the past, to piece their lives back together piece by piece, to remember them, and to present their stories in a way that is compelling. It keeps them alive in our memory. It honors them and our own collective past. It's the least we can do. It's the work we must do. And at Congressional Cemetery, we have so many stories to tell.

By A.J. Orlikoff
Director of Programming
Historic Congressional Cemetery

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