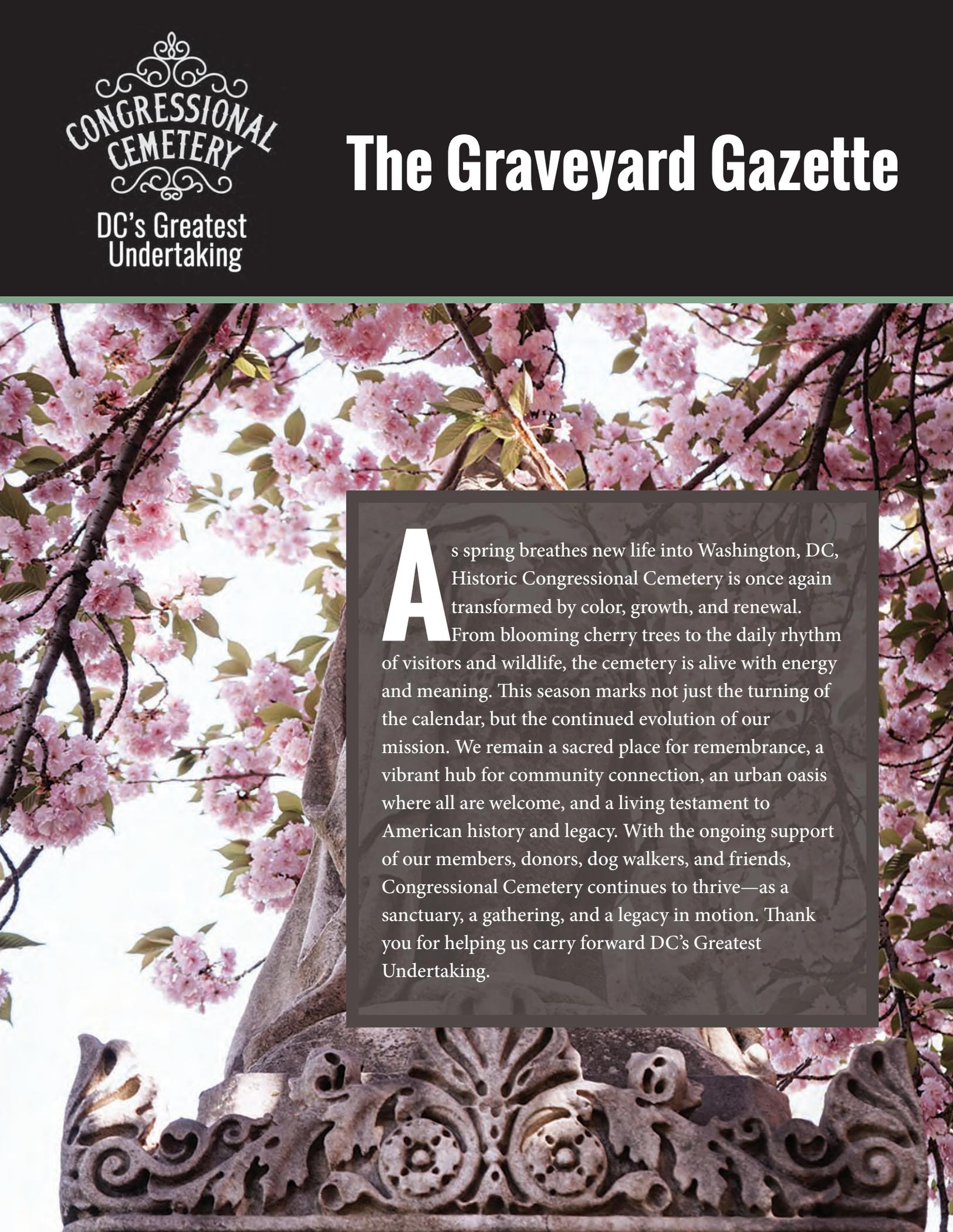




DC's Greatest
Undertaking

The Graveyard Gazette

The background of the page is a photograph of a cemetery in spring. The upper portion is filled with the soft, pink blossoms of cherry trees against a bright sky. In the lower foreground, the top of a weathered, ornate gravestone is visible, featuring intricate carvings of floral and scrollwork patterns.

As spring breathes new life into Washington, DC, Historic Congressional Cemetery is once again transformed by color, growth, and renewal. From blooming cherry trees to the daily rhythm of visitors and wildlife, the cemetery is alive with energy and meaning. This season marks not just the turning of the calendar, but the continued evolution of our mission. We remain a sacred place for remembrance, a vibrant hub for community connection, an urban oasis where all are welcome, and a living testament to American history and legacy. With the ongoing support of our members, donors, dog walkers, and friends, Congressional Cemetery continues to thrive—as a sanctuary, a gathering, and a legacy in motion. Thank you for helping us carry forward DC's Greatest Undertaking.



Letter from the Chair

As spring comes into full bloom with daffodils popping and buds from trees breathing new life into the world, it also serves as a moment to reflect on the enduring legacy of those who have come before us. The blooming trees and vibrant flowers remind us that the beauty of remembrance is timeless, just like the sanctuary we strive to maintain here at Congressional Cemetery. This spring, we invite you to consider how you can help preserve and sustain the peaceful resting place our community cherishes. Planned giving offers an opportunity to ensure that future generations will continue to find solace, beauty, and connection here in our little oasis. Whether through a bequest, trust, or other arrangements, your gift helps us care for the grounds, enhance our services, and honor those laid to rest.



If you'd like to learn more about planned giving or discuss how your contribution can make a difference, we welcome you to reach out! Together, we can continue to nurture the legacy of remembrance that defines the Congressional Cemetery.

Thank you for your kindness and support as we embrace this season of renewal. And enjoy these early days of spring, because as any long-time resident knows, DC spring can be fleeting before the dog days of summer come in full swing!

Warm regards,

Richard Greene

Richard S. Greene IV
Board Chair
Association for the Preservation of
Historic Congressional Cemetery

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Inside

- 2** From the Chair
- 3** From the Executive Director
- 4** Support Our Mission
- 5** Around the Gatehouse
- 7** Honoring Memories
- 10** Forgotten Souls of DC
- 12** Residents of Resistance

The Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. All donations are deductible to the extent permitted by federal tax laws. 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 U.S. Congress and administered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.



From the Executive Director



Dear Friends and Community Members,

As spring arrives in Washington, the grounds of Historic Congressional Cemetery are once again alive with color, sound, and spirit. The cherry trees are in bloom. The grass grows greener with each passing day. Birds call from the trees, and familiar four-legged friends bound along the paths. It is a season that reminds us that renewal is always possible, that hope for brighter days is always on the horizon.

And yet, beyond our gates, we know the world feels heavy. Many in our community are hurting. It is an unprecedented time in the nation's capital and we know many of you are in hardship or turmoil. We see it. We feel it. And we want to help.

At Historic Congressional Cemetery, we are proud to be more than a burial ground. We are a place of refuge and reflection—a living, breathing sanctuary where history, nature, and community meet. We are a rare corner of stillness in a city that rarely slows down, 35 acres of urban oasis. If you or someone you know is in need of peace, connection, or simply a breath of fresh air, please reach out to us. We are always happy to offer a complimentary K9 Corps day pass or free tickets to a guided docent tour. Whether you are coming to grieve, to learn, to walk, or simply to be—we welcome you with open arms.

We are committed to being a source of solace and strength in uncertain times. While our roots stretch back to 1807, our mission is alive and urgent today. In the months ahead, we look forward to new programs, new partnerships, and new ways to serve our city. But through it all, our purpose remains unchanged: to be a place where memory is honored, the environment is valued, and where all are welcome.

As we look to the future, we also ask you to consider how you might help preserve this sacred space for generations to come. A planned gift to Historic Congressional Cemetery ensures that our mission endures—that long after we are gone, the stories, beauty, and peace of this place remain. And we are happy to share a new opportunity to do just that with an upcoming Planned Giving workshop on June 16.

Thank you for walking this path with us. You are always welcome at DC's Greatest Undertaking.

A.J. Orlikoff

A.J. Orlikoff
Executive Director



Support Our Mission

You're Invited: Estate Planning 101

Historic Congressional Cemetery is a safe space to talk about death. And to plan for it.

Please join us on June 16th to discover what you can do today to effectively incorporate philanthropy into your end-of-life plans. With some basic preparation, you can honor your family and the nonprofit organizations closest to your heart by naming them as a beneficiary in your will, retirement plan, life insurance plan, and/or revocable trust.

To help demystify the estate planning process, local experts Maya Weil (Charitable Gift Planning Specialist) and David Jonathan Taylor (Estate Planning Attorney) will join the HCC community and break it all down into manageable tasks. In layperson's terms, they'll discuss how you can use legacy and gift planning to protect your family and what you value most.

Come prepared with your life and death questions.

- How can a planned gift benefit me personally, as well as supporting the organizations I care most about?
- If I name a beloved organization as a beneficiary, do I have to leave my kids/spouse out? (Hint: No!)
- Can I include HCC in a Qualified Charitable Distribution? What about life insurance plans? (Hint: Yes and Yes!)

Estate Planning 101

June 16, 2025 @ 6pm • Historic Congressional Cemetery Chapel • Livestream will be available

You may RSVP on our website! <https://congressionalcemetery.org/event/estate-planning-101/>



Join the Skeleton Key Society

Congressional Cemetery invites you to join the Skeleton Key Society, our planned giving community launched in 2024. By including the cemetery in your will, estate plan, IRA, or life insurance policy, you help preserve this historic site for future generations while potentially receiving significant tax benefits. When you join, you receive a one-of-a-kind Skeleton Key you can proudly display to show your support for HCC! In addition, this key unlocks many other benefits as a member, including VIP tickets to Soul Strolls, free K9 Day Passes for guests, and complimentary access to Congressional Cemetery events like Cinematery, the Speaker Series, docent tours, and more! You may become a member of the Skeleton Key Society simply by notifying us that you have named The Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery a beneficiary in your will or estate plan. You will then be asked to fill out a simple enrollment form.

We're Grateful for You!

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

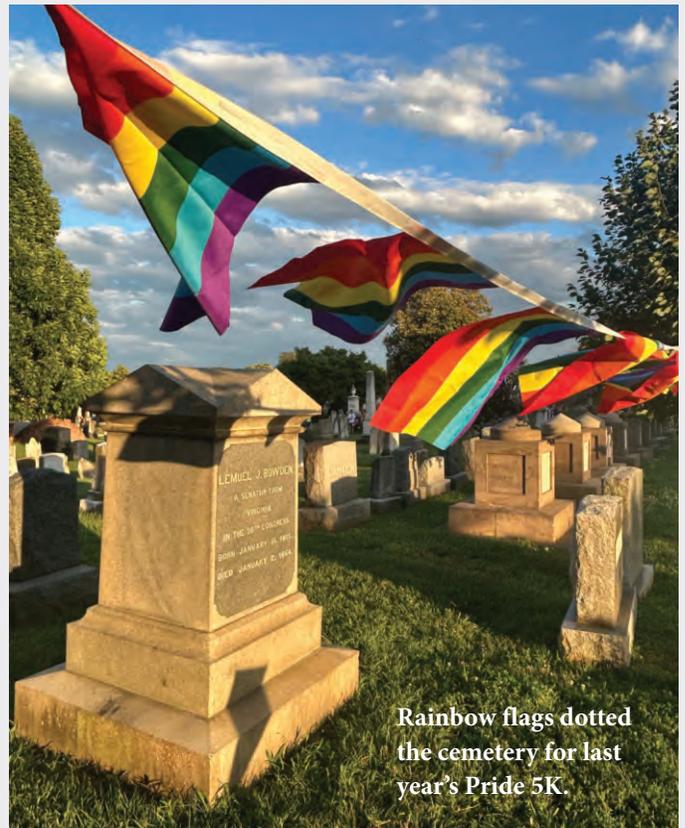
Mortality Tea Room

More than 100 people attended the Mortality Tea Room in the chapel at Congressional Cemetery during the month of February. For the last three years, at least once a year, resident Death Doula Laura Lyster-Mensh has held a “Mortality Tea Room.” Every year has looked a little different. “I love limited pop-up art installations,” Laura said. “This was an artistic way to show death awareness and what death doulas do.”

While every day looked a little different, tables held books and information to help people learn about dying and death, a table featuring a nature mandala to help people visualize the circle of life, and a “choose your own adventure” table—a board game to help people learn about pre-planning, burial options, costs, and even carbon offset. Laura also held space to feature items from the Congressional Cemetery Gift Shop and brochures about walking tours and events at Congressional Cemetery. “I want people to feel a part of the Congressional Cemetery Community.” Laura acknowledged that death can be hard for people to know how to talk about. “Death Doulas like to serve tea and cookies to have a little warmth and sweetness for a tough topic.”



Historic Congressional Cemetery is proud to be a place of LGBTQ+ history. Pioneers of the gay rights movement are buried and memorialized at Congressional Cemetery, and this May and June, we are partnering with WorldPride to bring many events focused on LGBTQ+ history and legacy. We hope that you will join us to celebrate gay legacy at Congressional this year!



Rainbow flags dotted the cemetery for last year's Pride 5K.

Upcoming Events LGBTQ+ History and Pride Programs

- LGBTQ+ Guided Docent Tour: May 28, June 2, June 7
- Cemetery Speaker Series: The Gay Triangle and the Fight for LGBTQ+ Rights in America featuring Dr. Jake Newsome: May 22
- The DCFrontrunners Pride 5K: June 1
- Gays and Graves: A Big Gay Festival: June 21

Self-guided walking tours available at our gatehouse and our website. See our website for more information!



Featured K9 Corps Member

Name: Kodiak

Age: Around 15

Member Since: 2018

The Liebling Family

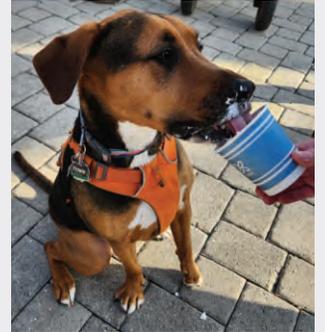
Likes: Meeting other dogs, off-leash cemetery walks, evening naps, and bedtime treats

Have you noticed?

Spring is in the air, and you may have noticed some small changes around the gatehouse and grounds! In front of the gatehouse, there is a new garden bed featuring native medicinal plants and supporting native pollinators. Sage Jackson, our Garden Program Coordinator, will offer learning opportunities about these in the spring. Additionally, along the edge of the patio fence the indigenous and naturalized wildflower hedge will contain soil builders. These plants are plants that will help build, condition and nourish the soil, as well as increase biodiversity and improve climate change resistance. All of this will create healthier, heartier soil that will be used in other garden beds. Some other things you might notice are the growth of sweet peas and dahlias. Keep your eyes open for more changes, new signs, and some opportunities to learn about new garden programs!

Yapping It Up

In 2024 we held three Yappy Hours with more than 80 people and their furry family members. The Yappy Hour themes included “Meet the K9 Committee,” “Fuel the Vote,” and “Giving Tuesday.” The first Yappy Hour of 2025 gave folks a chance to meet the cemetery’s interim executive director, A.J. Orlikoff. The K9 community stopped by for coffee and adult treats, and our favorite four-legged friends were offered pup-cups. We are planning more Yappy Hours in 2025 and look forward to seeing our human and canine pals! If you are interested in volunteering time for Yappy Hours, please reach out to Antonio! We’d love to have you involved.



K9 Corps Member Howie enjoys a pup cup at a recent Yappy Hour



Honoring Memories and Taking Care of Business

By Lisa Malear, Co-Director of Site Sales & Burials

Before working within a funeral home, I had never planned a funeral. Once I became a licensed funeral director, I worked within a variety of cultures and regions to create large celebrations of life or intimate moments of reflection to honor a life. I often merged traditional practices with modern expectations. Usually after the funeral concluded, my interactions with the family would slow or cease completely unless they attended another funeral or had another loved one pass. While a funeral home is not typically a place where a community continues to gather and interact, here at Congressional Cemetery that relationship frequently continues—with visits to grave sites, volunteering, dog walking, community events, gardening, and more. When I work with someone to select a space or to lay a loved one to rest, I know I will see them again within this special community. I know I'll be hearing stories of happiness, confusion, sadness, discoveries, and celebrations.

But how do we work through the tasks that need to be completed while honoring a life? Where do you start?



Benches are just one of many ways to honor a loved one.

Photo by Lisa Malear

Preparing. Even before a death takes place, it's advisable to have a place where important documents are stored and easily accessible. These documents will be helpful to plan a funeral and handle an estate. Important documents include:

- Birth certificate
- Social security card
- Passport and/or state identification
- Marriage license
- Divorce decree
- Will/estate planning documents
- Cemetery property deed
- Home/property deeds
- Vehicle titles
- W2s and tax documents
- Lists of accounts and corresponding log-in information

Planning the disposition or funeral for the deceased.

Disposition is the physical method of taking care of your loved one's remains. This involves your family choosing traditional burial, green burial, cremation, anatomical donation, alkaline hydrolysis, natural organic reduction, or another form of disposition available in your area. You'll need to choose a funeral home that can meet your needs. You may wish to ask a funeral home if they are familiar with the disposition you are choosing and what your options look like.

Next is working with the funeral home to determine if your family will be holding a service. Will that happen later as a memorial service/celebration of life or in a more immediate timeframe with the body present? If you choose burial, do you have a plot already or will one need to be purchased? As always, keep the funeral home and any involved places of worship, cemeteries, and luncheon locations in the loop as events are planned to make sure everyone is on the same page.

During this time, you'll also be able to obtain death certificates and gather proper paperwork indicating a death has taken place from the funeral home. Each personal account that holds monetary value will need a death certificate. Some of the most common places or situations that will require a physical death certificate are:

- Banks—each company needs their own death certificate. Multiple accounts within the same bank only need one death certificate.
- Property—to transfer titles on a house, land, vehicles, etc., you'll likely need a death certificate for each piece of property.
- Stocks/Bonds—it's best to confirm with your financial advisor how many death certificates are needed and what that process looks like.
- Life Insurance Policies—each policy will need a death certificate along with claim paperwork filled out by all beneficiaries. Be sure to contact employers for group policy information.
- VA Benefits—some veterans and spouses of veterans may qualify for death benefits. It's best to set a death certificate aside for these purposes.

Accounts that won't need a physical copy of a death certificate but may need a photocopy, pdf, or nothing at all include utility companies (cable, internet, water, gas, electric, cellular), credit card companies, educational loans, auto-subscription goods, and health insurance. Before you start making calls to notify these companies of a death, make sure you have the death certificates in hand. No sense in waiting on hold just to be told you'll need to call back when you have a copy of the death certificate.

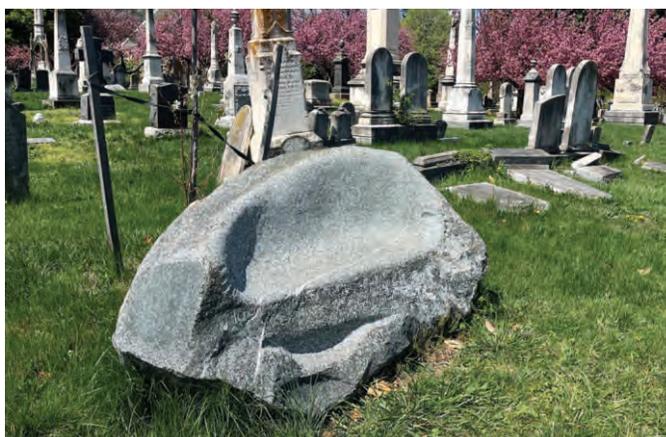
Some actions that are still important to take care of but may not have a high urgency would include cancelling or transferring subscriptions, closing social media accounts, and going through physical items. As a cemetery known for its K9 community, we would be remiss if we didn't bring up pets. Considering taking in any pet that remains after a loved one passes can be such a kind and generous action. However we know that not everyone can take on a new furry friend. If you're not able to take in or re-home within your immediate community, some local no-kill shelters include DC PAWS Rescue, Last Chance Animal Rescue, and Lucky Dog Animal Rescue.

Settling an estate and taking care of legal requirements. Each state and city may handle estate settlements in different ways. It would be advantageous for you to investigate the state or city website where the

deceased lived regarding probate court requirements. There you'll find comprehensive lists and walkthroughs, including options for taking care of the estate on your own or finding legal counsel. The court can give options for securing legal counsel, usually for estates that are extensive and complicated. Smaller estates may not take as long to settle or need legal counsel, but an average time to settle an estate can be 12 to 18 months. Working through probate and estate closure is also a good time to get set up to handle the income taxes for the deceased.

Hosting memorial events or celebrations of life. Funerals aren't the only time that everyone can get together to remember a life. Death doesn't often occur at a convenient time. Significant dates like birthdays or anniversaries can also be used to gather everyone together. HCC has assisted families with hosting events in our chapel and with less formal gatherings at a recently installed headstone. If you'd like to plan something at our cemetery, please be sure to check with our staff and event calendar so any K9 closures or events and programming are known. We'd be honored to help you plan something special. Some families have mentioned they gathered over dinner or coffee just to reconnect with each other and share memories. There is no one right way to gather and remember a person you love.

Creating permanent memorials with monuments and headstones. Some families are very eager to create a beautiful monument in honor of their loved one. There are many companies that are skilled at designing and installing beautiful works of art that represent a well-lived life. It's important to understand what rules and regulations are in place regarding headstones and monuments. Here at Congressional Cemetery, we are quite liberal in what we allow as a monument or headstone, sometimes jesting "as long as the piece is



This solid stone bench includes an inscription and carved handprints. *Photo by Lisa Malear*

within the plot(s) owned.” Some local vendors can be found on our website under our Burial Options heading. The vendors will work with you, and with us, to stay within our rules and regulations, while creating something meaningful and personal for you.

Take this project slowly. There is no rush to have a stone or monument just for the sake of installation. Make sure this physical legacy is exactly what represents your loved one. Depending on the burial or space provided, the ground may continue to settle for some time. We advise all families to wait one full year before a marker or headstone is installed to help with the integrity of the memorial placement. Giving the ground plenty of time to adjust and settle minimizes the ground shifting after the marker is installed. This is especially true for green burials, where a casket and vault are not used, creating a less stable ground.

When you begin working with a monument company, expect at least 6 months from the time you meet until monument installation. The source for materials and the complexity of the design can impact the time frame. In the meantime, if you'd like to have a temporary marker or garden-style marker in place, there are many accessible designs and options on various websites.

Permanent memorials don't have to be traditional. When you walk around our grounds you'll see a variety of benches, natural boulders, art installations, mosaics, sculptures, etc. Let us know if you're looking for something unique and we might have a contact. Of course, please reach out to us if you need help locating the boundaries of your loved one's space.

Considering living memorials and gardens.

Congressional Cemetery gives families the opportunity to use their family plots to garden and plant beautiful and vibrant living tributes. Be sure to check cemetery rules and regulations regarding installation of plants, trees, shrubs and gardens before investing. If you're not able to garden at the gravesite of your loved one, you could create a garden at home or look into a community garden as a space to feel connected to the earth while honoring a memory.

Connecting within our community. With all our unique programs and events at Congressional Cemetery,

what better place for families to connect with others that are in their community and going through similar feelings and experiences? We have adopt-a-plot programs, K9 Corps, historical events, and our in-house Death Doula programming. These opportunities provide a wealth of resources for the folks in our community to connect. Occasionally our staff have been able to individually connect community members that have so much in common but just haven't had the chance to meet each other. This is why we want to know so much about you and your loved ones.

Practicing self-care. Finally, and most importantly, take care of yourself. I always tell family members they



An example of a beautifully maintained grave plot garden at Congressional Cemetery. Photo by Lisa Malear

need to remember three things as they take their next steps after a death: water, rest, and say “no thank you.” The first two are self-explanatory: you need your energy. But the third is my way of letting you know you can tell people you're not ready to take on a new endeavor. After a loved one passes, folks want to help. Sometimes that help can be overwhelming. You can always say “no thank you,” “I'm not quite ready for that,” or “not right now” when there are just too many tasks, conversations, or offers. If someone were in your situation, you would understand if they said “no thank

you” to your help. Take one task and one day at a time. It takes years to live a life, and being the person responsible for finalizing an estate will take time too. You can always reach out to the professionals you've worked with during this process for advice or suggestions.

Our staff at Congressional Cemetery will always strive to greet you with a warm smile and an open ear. As stewards of history and community, we want to hear the stories you have to share. We want to know all about everyone that resides with us eternally, so we can share their lives with others. As always, we look forward to your visits when you're ready. The first visit back to our space after your loved one has been laid to rest can bring about a lot of emotions. We encourage everyone to take the time they need. Please let us know if you need support or a friend to join you. Our staff would be honored to walk with you and chat about your person. We want to hear those stories and talk about you after you're gone.



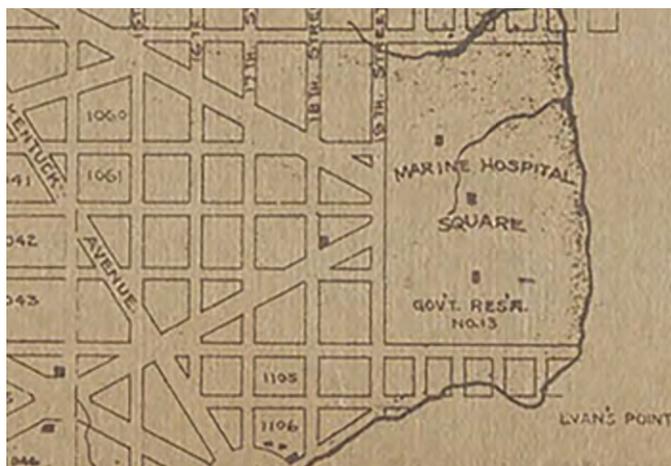
Forgotten Souls of DC: Smallpox, Potter's Fields, an Asylum, and Body Snatching

By Gabriella Welsh, Events & Digital Content Specialist

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

Across Washington, DC, several shopping malls, apartment buildings, and a metro station were once locations of burial grounds. While some remains were likely inadvertently left behind, most remains were exhumed and relocated to mass graves in other cemeteries. Permanent, marked graves are not a privilege afforded to everyone. Societies value protecting the vulnerable, yet in death many remain anonymous, collected in a mass grave somewhere where group identities are lost. Although these places are sometimes erased from the map, the stories of these people still have meaning, and these lessons are there for us to learn from. But if we forget about their suffering, we lose the lessons they taught.

When Congressional Cemetery opened in 1807, the surrounding area was undesirable due to its marshy composition close to the river. The area was thought



Historical map of the city of Washington, District of Columbia: view of the city and location of the houses in the year 1802, the beginning of Washington. *Courtesy of DC Library.*

ideal to store gunpowder and later for housing Washington, DC's indigent, sick, and criminal populations. A southeastern spot along the riverbank on Government Reservation No. 13 was chosen for an Army and Navy Magazine Outpost. There were several other cemeteries close to Congressional Cemetery: Ebenezer Cemetery, Beckett Cemetery, and Potter's Field at Washington Asylum.

In 1846, Washington Asylum was established on Reservation 13. Initially, the asylum included a hospital, a poorhouse, and a workhouse. Petty offenders were sent to work off their debts and offenses at workhouses. Their labor was used on and offsite by the government. A smallpox hospital was added in 1853, and the district's jail was moved there in 1872. Once Navy Yard expanded in 1886, the land once used by the Army and Navy was used by the asylum. Magazines on site were converted into female workhouses, and housing for 26 elderly, black men. The Old Fire Engine House was used as a "Dead-House" to store bodies prior to burial.

In the late 1800s, only a few states had anatomy acts or "bone bills"—laws that allowed medical schools to access unclaimed bodies which were often those of people who died in workhouses, hospitals or other institutions whose loved ones couldn't afford to bury them elsewhere. However, the District of Columbia had no such law, so medical schools relied on resurrection men, or body snatchers, to procure the cadavers. 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. Potter's Fields, essentially empty tracts of land used for burials by those who couldn't afford cemetery burials, were popular targets for resurrectionists because the pine coffins commonly used were easier to break open, graves were often dug shallower, and mourners

were less likely to visit and discover a grave disturbed.

It was common for employees of the medical colleges or even the asylum to make a little extra money assisting body snatchers. When a local body snatcher, Dr. George Christian, was arrested in 1873, his confiscated diary detailed business arrangements with doctors at the asylum. Samuel Banks, a janitor at the medical college of Georgetown University, was arrested in January 1894 while robbing graves in Potter's Field. Banks and two other men were spotted by the jail's night guard carrying heavy bags out of Potter's Field and loading them into a waiting wagon. His companions absconded with three bodies.

According to the *Morning Advertiser* in 1893, the medical colleges and resurrectionists referred to Potter's Field as "Scientific Ground." In the article, the author states that "there were 506 dead buried in the Potter's Field last year. During the last 25 years an average of 400 dead has [sic] been buried there per year." The article noted there should have been 10,000 tombs in Potter's Field, but there were fewer than 400. According to a 1949 article in the *Evening Star*, when the excavations began at Reservation 13, very little could be found of those buried there, presumably due to body snatching.

The Smallpox Burial Ground

At least two of the five burial sites on asylum grounds were used for smallpox victims. Initially, smallpox graves from the 1830s were removed from the old Washington Infirmary grounds in the heart of the city and reinterred east of 19th Street, between D and E Streets, SE. In 1852 the site was used during another smallpox epidemic. A designated smallpox hospital was added to the grounds in 1853. A site around 20th and B Street, SE was used for interments during the 1872-73 smallpox epidemic. A 1904 article in the *Washington Times* describes a burying ground for those who died of contagious diseases as "down along the riverbank where the ground is low and swampy. There is no record kept of these lonely graves and there is no way of securing the privilege of exhuming bodies. The very spot where they are buried is being slowly filled in by the dirt and trash that accumulates there and the principal object desired is that the place become covered up and lost to sight."

Body Snatching

After Congress passed the Anatomy Act in 1902, the number of burials in Potter's Field decreased. When a death occurred in a public institution such as an

almshouse or prison, the Anatomical Board of the District of Columbia was notified. As stated by Slubby in *Bury Me Deep*, "If the deceased has requested that after their demise they be buried or cremated, or within a 24-hour period a relative of the deceased either claimed the body or requested in writing that the burial be made at public expense, then the Board was not authorized to receive the body in question." Otherwise, the board evenly distributed unclaimed bodies between the District's medical schools and other approved institutions.

Between 1902 and 1913, Potter's Field was used for unidentified bodies and for those who requested their bodies not be given to science. If someone couldn't afford to bury a loved one, they would contact the office of the permit clerk of the health department who would send the dead wagon. In 1913, burials at Reservation 13 were discontinued and moved to Blue Plains Potter's Field. The location of the Anatomical Board Cemetery remains unknown.

The interred residents at Congressional Cemetery have the privilege of having their names and graves recorded. Their stories are preserved in some way. A name on a gravestone is a story waiting to be discovered. While we may not know all the stories of those buried without a stone, we can try to give the deceased some dignity back by keeping the memory of their stories alive.

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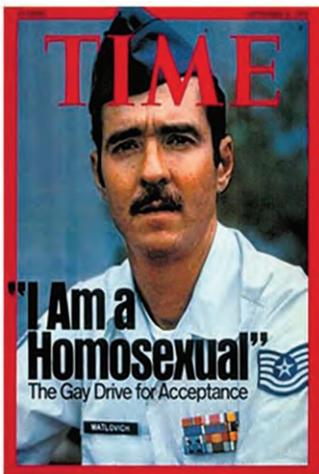
Residents of Resistance: Advocates, Activists, and Agitators at Congressional Cemetery

By A.J. Orlikoff, Executive Director, and Kurt Deion, Education Specialist

History comes alive at Historic Congressional Cemetery. As the first burial ground of national memory, American history is reflected in the gravestones and memorials that dot its landscape. The cemetery offers a one-of-a-kind portal into the past—a window through which to discover and experience legacy.

Activism and resistance are fundamental components of American democracy. From the days of the American Revolution to more contemporary times, Americans have challenged the status quo, advocated for causes, and acted as agents of change. Many of these individuals have legacies at Congressional Cemetery. Their stories illustrate how, regardless of their cause, Americans—and Washingtonians in particular—have fought for personal liberty and helped define the evolving contours of freedom.

Leonard Matlovich is one of the most well known activists buried at Congressional Cemetery. His courageous challenge of the U.S. military's ban on gay service members made national headlines in 1975. Because his story is widely known and celebrated, this



Matlovich was the first named gay person to appear on the cover of a major publication. *Time Magazine*.

article turns the spotlight to other remarkable individuals interred at Congressional Cemetery.

Lucy Bell (circa 1763-1862)

A person can witness a lot and accomplish a lot in a century. Lucy Bell's 99 years of life began a decade before the Revolutionary War and ended when the nation was split in two by slavery. But the Revolution that freed White people from the grip of tyrannical British rule did not set free young Lucy Bell. It is not until the 1820 census—conducted when Bell was around 57 years of age—that there is a record of proof of her freedom. In that document, she is listed as free and the head of her household, with her children, some free and some enslaved, living with her. As signage at her gravesite explains, in the half century that followed, the Bells “used every means necessary to keep them together and free: lawsuits, self-purchase, the goodwill of owners, raising money from abolitionists[,] and finally[,] when all else failed, escape using the underground railroad.” In April 1848, Lucy's son Daniel, a freeman who worked as a blacksmith, sought to free eleven of his relatives from bondage by paying for their escape aboard a schooner named Pearl. The ship was captured and all 77 passengers, the Bells included, were returned to their enslavers. Written records from African Americans of this period are scarce, so

Lucy Bell's gravesite. Photograph by Kitty Linton



Lucy Bell's precise thoughts on the successes and setbacks of her family's quests for freedom are lost to time.

Pushmataha (circa 1764-1824)

One enduring legacy preserved at Congressional Cemetery is that of Pushmataha, a chief and diplomat of the Choctaw Nation. Born in the 1760s in present-day Mississippi, Pushmataha rose to prominence as a warrior, orator, and skilled negotiator. Known as the “Washington of the Choctaw,” he guided his people through the turbulent early 19th century with a focus on diplomacy and strategic alliance-building.

Pushmataha allied with the United States during the War of 1812, believing that military and political cooperation would best protect the sovereignty of the Choctaw Nation. His forces successfully defeated the British allied Red Stick Creek Tribe and even fought alongside General Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans. After the war in 1824, he traveled to Washington, DC, to advocate for his people, directly engaging with U.S. policymakers to secure land rights and resist removal pressures. His speeches to Congress and negotiations with federal officials reflected not only political acumen but also a profound understanding of the consequences of U.S. expansion.



While in Washington, Pushmataha's portrait was captured by Charles Bird King. [Wikimedia Commons](#)

through confrontation, but also through the enduring strength of diplomacy, advocacy, and self-determination.

Belva Lockwood (1830-1917)

Breaking a glass ceiling is tough. Belva Lockwood broke several of them. A widowed school teacher, Lockwood moved from western New York to the nation's capital in 1866. She remarried in 1868 and, not long after, decided to go to school to study law. Columbia College



Belva Lockwood's gravesite. *Photograph by Kitty Linton*

prohibited her from enrolling out of fear that she would distract the male pupils, but in 1871, she and around 15 other women matriculated at the National University Law School. When she and another student completed the coursework in 1872, they were denied their diplomas because of their sex. Without that piece of paper, they would not be admitted to the bar in Washington, DC. Lockwood successfully prevailed upon President Ulysses S. Grant, the chancellor ex officio of the institution, to step in and ensure the women received their rightfully-earned degrees.

In November 1877, Lockwood was poised to become the first woman to be admitted to the Supreme Court Bar. But Chief Justice Morrison Waite denied her petition solely on the basis of her sex. Over the next year-plus, Lockwood garnered enough support in congress to secure passage of a bill that permitted women to argue before the court. After that bill was signed into law in March 1879, another petition was submitted on Lockwood's behalf, and Chief Justice Waite approved it without objection. Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Newspaper* described her admission as “A VERY unusual scene” in the court chamber. How unusual, then, it must have seemed the following year when Lockwood became the first woman to argue before the Supreme Court, in the case *Kaiser v. Stickney*.

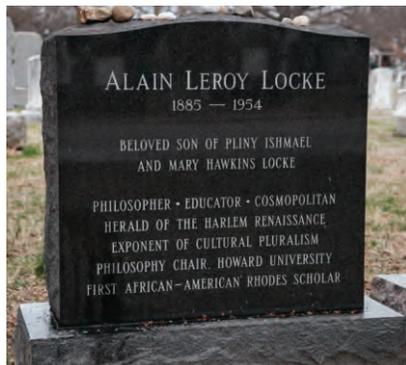
In 1884, Lockwood gained another distinction: the first woman to appear on official ballots for election as U.S. president. Although suffragist Victoria Woodhull ran for the country's highest office in 1872, she had not reached the constitutionally-mandated age of 35, and thus her run comes with an asterisk. Lockwood, who met all the legal requirements to be a candidate, was the 1884 nominee for the Equal Rights Party. Her platform

included not only women's rights, but paying off the public debt and reforming civil service. She and running mate Marietta Stow received 4,149 votes from enfranchised white men across the 38 states that then comprised the U.S. Though that was not enough to impact the electoral college, much less take the White House, it was another historic first that helped blaze a trail for the women who followed and who will continue to follow.

Alain Locke (1885-1954)

Another powerful legacy belongs to Alain Locke, the philosopher, writer, and educator often called the "Father of the Harlem Renaissance." Born in 1885, Locke was the first African American Rhodes Scholar, later earning his Ph.D. in philosophy from Harvard. As a professor at Howard University, he mentored generations of students and helped shape the intellectual currents of 20th-century Black American thought and discourse, with Martin Luther King Jr. later citing him as influencing his beliefs.

Locke's 1925 anthology, *The New Negro*, called for a cultural and artistic awakening among African Americans. He argued that art, literature, and music could be vehicles for racial pride and social change, advocating for cultural pluralism and existing alongside



Locke's ashes resided with a family friend until the 1990s and then at Howard University before interment at Congressional in 2014. *Photograph by Kitty Linton*

White Americans. By framing the Harlem Renaissance as both a cultural and political movement, Locke redefined how African Americans saw themselves—and how they were seen by the nation at large. Although Locke died in 1954, his ashes were not interred at Congressional Cemetery until 2014. His interment, attended by current African American Rhodes Scholars, was a symbolic act of recognition and honor, placing him among others who shaped the American democratic experiment. Locke's legacy endures in classrooms, galleries, and movements, reminding us that activism can be rooted in the arts and intellectual thought.

Frank Kameny (1925-2011)

"Gay Is Good." It is a simple message, coined by activist Frank Kameny in 1968. But gay was good long before 1968, and Kameny had already been in the trenches for some time. An Army veteran who fought on the front lines in Europe during World War II, Kameny used the G.I. Bill to help complete his college career. He graduated with his bachelor's degree in physics in 1947. A decade later, he had a doctorate in astrophysics and was employed in a temporary position by the Army Map Service. When the AMS found out that Kameny was arrested the year prior for "lewd" conduct with another man at a San Francisco bus terminal, it dismissed him and revoked his security clearance. The December 1957 notice of separation stated that his termination, "was considered justifiable to better promote the efficiency of the Federal service and no action will be taken to reinstate you to your former position."

Kameny did not go quietly. He sued Army Secretary Wilber M. Brucker for wrongful termination. His firing was upheld by the DC Court of Appeals in June 1960, and a petition for rehearing was



Frank Kameny picketing with the Mattachine Society of Washington at New York's Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade in June 1970. *(Kay Tobin/New York Public Library)*

denied that August. Though his own legal battle was unsuccessful, he launched a new career as a paralegal who helped other gay Americans fight discrimination. He was also an active protestor and public speaker. Kameny led the movement to have homosexuality removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illnesses, a goal which was achieved in 1973.

Kameny died in 2011 and was cremated. A plot at HCC's Gay Corner, purchased by the local LGBTQ+ charity Helping Our Brothers and Sisters, is the site of a cenotaph which serves as a reminder of Kameny's life, service, and activism. Nearby is the bench that contains the shared urn of Kameny's friends, photographer and activist Kay Tobin Lahusen and her partner Barbara Gittings, the latter regarded as the "Mother of the Gay Rights Movement." Atop the couple's memorial is the following inscription: "GAY PIONEERS who spoke truth to power: GAY IS GOOD."

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