



DC's Greatest
Undertaking

The Graveyard Gazette



The triumphant arrival of spring also marks a meaningful crossroads for Historic Congressional Cemetery. And just as with spring, this season at Congressional invites reflection, heralds change, and engenders renewed purpose. As we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery and look ahead to the nation's 250th, we are reminded that this landscape has always been shaped by a careful balance of memory, change, and community. Here, among the stones and trees, the past is not distant, our community is vibrant, and change is in the air. The completion of our new Master Plan stands as a testament to this: a thoughtful, community-informed vision for the decade ahead, grounded in preservation, community engagement, and environmental stewardship. At the same time, this season is not only about plans, but about people. As we carry this work forward, we are also welcoming new staff, new perspectives, and new energy into our organization—individuals who will help shape how we interpret, preserve, and share this place in the years ahead. Their contributions, alongside the continued dedication of our staff, board, volunteers, and community, ensure that Historic Congressional Cemetery remains DC's Greatest Undertaking.



Letter from the Vice Chair

Hello from the Building and Grounds Committee.

As the Chair of the B & G Committee and Vice Chair of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to inform our community that we have a new Historic Congressional Cemetery Master Plan!



After 15 months of a thorough analysis of the existing conditions of our buildings and grounds, review of the Cemetery’s Strategic Plan, community engagement, and creative thinking by our team of consultants, Master Plan 2026-2036 provides us with a decade-long road map for the care of, and improvements to, our thirty-five acres of buildings and grounds.

With a focus on enhancing the visitor experience through pointed improvements, prioritizing improved safety, and protection of the cemetery’s historic integrity, the phased implementation will result in:

- Repair and improvements to our existing pedestrian circulation system.
- Gentle interventions to improve wayfinding and safety through the introduction of discrete signage and site lighting.
- Additional interment opportunities.
- Further exploration of ground water seeps to define recommendations for corrective measures.
- Continued conservation of monuments, headstones, and memorials.
- A welcome kiosk/visitor center to improve the entrance experience.
- The rehabilitation and expansion of the gatehouse to better serve our community, support the unique programs being offered at HCC, and provide our staff with space more conducive to their work.
- Additional tree planting, pollinator gardens, and careful attention to environmentally sustainable principles to reflect our continued commitment to sustainability.

As we begin implementing the improvements outlined in the Master Plan, we will keep you informed of our progress – and soon you will begin to see them for yourselves.

Marsha Lea

Marsha Lea

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- Ashley Molese, *Curator-in-Residence*
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Dear Friends,

On March 30, 1976, the Association for the Preservation of Historical Congressional Cemetery held its founding meeting at the Smithsonian Castle. The records of that meeting describe those in attendance as folks “who had loved ones buried in the Cemetery, residents of Capitol Hill who had concern for the 30 acres, and people who were interested in the Cemetery as a historic place.” While we have seen our constituencies grow and evolve during the past half century, those core concerns still resonate through our community today.

This year we will commemorate our 50th anniversary as an organization, while also joining with organizations from throughout the country in celebration of our nation’s 250th. Both milestones offer opportunities to reflect upon our past while planning for the bright future that lies ahead. In the same way that our democracy has weathered the challenges of the past, Historic Congressional Cemetery has demonstrated remarkable resiliency. We emerge today stronger than ever and prepared to address the needs of the next 50 years.

Earlier this year, we completed a master planning process that will guide the care and development of the cemetery for the next decade. The plan identifies over a dozen improvements that will expand our capacity as a burial ground, preserve our unique historic resources, enhance the visitor experience, and advance environmental sustainability. With projects phased over the next eight years, the cemetery will be filled with exciting projects for much of the next decade.

In the coming weeks and months, we will be sharing details of the plan and inviting you to be part of the cemetery’s future through your support and engagement. This year also will bring programs and activities commemorating America250. Keep an eye on our website and social media channels to learn more about both.

Happy 50th to our organization! Happy 250th to America!

Warmly,

Mark Hudson

Mark Hudson
Executive Director



Support Our Mission



This stunning Kwanzan cherry tree casts its picturesque shadow on HCC's Latrobe cenotaphs. Scan the QR code on this page to learn more about how your support helps us care for our urban oasis and cherry blossom trees!

a custom message of your choice! Your support allows us to continue our ongoing commitment to preserving and stewarding the urban oasis of Congressional Cemetery.

As spring returns to Historic Congressional Cemetery, the landscape stirs with new life, buds unfurl, blossoms brighten the grounds, and the canopy begins its annual renewal. Through HCC's Sponsor a Tree Program, this seasonal transformation becomes something more: an opportunity to shape a living legacy within one of Washington's most historic landscapes.

Each sponsored tree contributes to a broader vision now coming into focus as HCC prepares to become an accredited arboretum. This designation, through the organization ArbNet, reflects a deepened commitment to stewardship, education, and the thoughtful cultivation of the cemetery as both a place of memory and an urban oasis. The growing collection of trees, made possible by our longtime partners Casey Trees, forms the foundation of this next chapter.

Visitors can already experience this work through the new Tree Walk Through History, where the natural environment and 27 species of trees are in the spotlight. Along the route, trees are not only markers of beauty, but of continuity, living witnesses to the evolving landscape of the cemetery. Complementing the walk is HCC's expanding online arboretum database, offering a deeper look at the species that define the grounds and the role they play in the cemetery's ecological future.

We extend our sincere thanks to Sharon Metcalf for her leadership in advancing this initiative, and to all of our past and present tree sponsors whose generosity has helped bring this vision to life. And to continue our commitment to stewarding the environment, we need your help.

We ask you to consider making a gift through the Sponsor a Tree Program and to explore our calendar for upcoming environmental programs, seasonal tours, and opportunities to engage more deeply with the trees that help define this place. Sponsorships include the installation of a tree tag that will denote the tree's common name and species, and even has space for



Scan the QR code to sponsor a tree.



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

Annual Plot Reclamation

Congressional Cemetery now publishes an annual list of unoccupied plots eligible for reclamation when no contact has been made by the owner or their descendants within the past 75 years. This list is also available on our website. If you believe you own one of the listed plots, or are a descendant of the original owner, please contact us with proof of lineage. Once verified, we will update our records and begin the transfer or attestation process (fees apply). If no contact is made by December 1, 2026, the plot will revert to the cemetery's care on January 1, 2027. This process supports responsible stewardship of our grounds and ensures burial space for families in need.

This year's eligible plots include:

- R82, S98, Anderson
- R84, S361, Birch
- R15, S204, Branson
- R15, S205, Branson
- R50, S201, Brodhead
- R50, S202, Brodhead
- R50, S205, Brodhead
- R50, S208, Brodhead
- R50, S209, Brodhead
- R51, S201, Brodhead
- R51, S202, Brodhead
- R51, S205, Brodhead
- R51, S208, Brodhead
- R51, S209, Brodhead
- R51, S210, Brodhead
- R66, S13, Buchly
- R66, S14, Buchly
- R66, S15, Buchly
- R66, S16, Buchly
- R65, S11, Buchly
- R95, S169, Burton
- R96, S170, Burton
- R96, S171, Burton
- R119, S182, Burton
- R119, S183, Burton
- R119, S184, Burton
- R75, S256, Chase
- R75, S257, Chase
- R75, S258, Chase
- R59, S270, Childs
- R59, S271, Childs
- R12, S203, Chiswell
- R12, S204, Chiswell
- R12, S205, Chiswell
- R10, S141, Church
- R10, S142, Church
- R35, S155, Clarke
- R35, S156, Clarke
- R35, S157, Clarke
- R34, S156, Clarke
- R34, S157, Clarke
- R34, S158, Clarke
- R49, S21, Crauch
- R49, S22, Crauch
- R49, S25, Crauch
- R77, S96, Cullinan
- R77, S98, Cullinan
- R77, S298, Cunningham
- R77, S300, Cunningham
- R77, S301, Cunningham
- R63, S271, Edfeldt
- R75, S103, Elliott
- R75, S104, Elliott
- R75, S105, Elliott
- R75, S101, Elliott
- R75, S102, Elliott
- R130, S203, Forney
- R130, S204, Forney
- R87, S323, French
- R87, S325, French
- R88, S323, French
- R88, S324, French
- R88, S325, French
- R42, S132, Gideon
- R42, S133, Gideon
- R42, S134, Gideon
- R42, S135, Gideon
- R42, S136, Gideon
- R42, S137, Gideon
- R43, S133, Gideon
- R43, S134, Gideon
- R43, S135, Gideon
- R43, S136, Gideon
- R79, S316, Gonzenback
- R79, S317, Gonzenback
- R79, S319, Gonzenback
- R14, S101, Graff
- R14, S104, Graff
- R14, S105, Graff
- R78, S205, Griffith
- R78, S206, Griffith
- R78, S210, Griffith
- R44, S165S, Hall
- R44, S166, Hall
- R44, S167, Hall
- R44, S168, Hall
- R44, S169, Hall
- R45, S165S, Hall
- R45, S166, Hall
- R45, S167, Hall
- R45, S168, Hall
- R140, S185, Harr
- R140, S186, Harr
- R60, S271, Harrison
- R159, S222, Henderson
- R159, S223, Henderson
- R82, S112, Hitz
- R82, S113, Hitz
- R9, S62, Hough
- R9, S64, Hough
- R10, S64, Hough
- R125, S199, Jameson
- R126, S199, Jameson
- R126, S200, Jameson
- R33, S61, Judson
- R101, S204, Keith
- R101, S205, Keith
- R102, S204, Keith
- R102, S205, Keith
- R77, S319, Kirkwood
- R77, S320, Kirkwood
- R77, S321, Kirkwood
- R78, S321, Kirkwood
- R150, S220E1, Klinehane
- R150, S220E2, Klinehane
- R150, S220E3, Klinehane
- R149, S220E3, Klinehane
- R135, S237, Koeth
- R135, S238, Koeth
- R135, S239, Koeth
- R17, S80, Korff
- R44, S19, Kraft
- R44, S20, Kraft
- R44, S21, Kraft
- R44, S22, Kraft
- R79, S118, Lang
- R9, S210, Lauxman
- R10, S210, Lauxman
- R10, S211, Lauxman
- R39, S153, Law
- R39, S154, Law
- R39, S157, Law
- R39, S158, Law
- R21, S45, Lescallette
- R21, S46, Lescallette
- R21, S47, Lescallette
- R21, S48, Lescallette
- R54, S149, Lovell
- R54, S150, Lovell
- R17, S135, Lown
- R17, S136, Lown
- R17, S137, Lown
- R17, S138, Lown
- R18, S136, Lown
- R18, S138, Lown
- R81, S72, Lusby
- R42, S279, Lynch
- R42, S280, Lynch
- R8, S35, MacKensey
- R8, S36, MacKensey
- R93, S135, Marsh
- R94, S134, Marsh
- R94, S135, Marsh
- R105, S210, Marshall
- R105, S211, Marshall
- R106, S211, Marshall
- R9, S215, Martyn
- R36, S80, McCrabb
- R36, S81, McCrabb
- R125, S218, McKinley
- R126, S218, McKinley
- R126, S219, McKinley
- R126, S220, McKinley
- R145, S261, Mead
- R145, S262, Mead
- R95, S288, Metz
- R95, S289, Metz
- R34, S131, Minnix
- R34, S132, Minnix
- R34, S133, Minnix
- R34, S134, Minnix
- R34, S135, Minnix
- R81, S152D1, Moore
- R81, S152D4, Moore
- R82, S152D4, Moore
- R52, S73, Morgan
- R53, S73, Morgan
- R53, S77, Morgan
- R79, S116, Morrison
- R80, S116, Morrison
- R80, S117, Morrison
- R81, S225, Munsen
- R81, S226, Munsen
- R82, S225, Munson
- R82, S226, Munson
- R82, S227, Munson
- R82, S228, Munson
- R128, S185, Murray
- R128, S186, Murray
- R15, S195, Nelson
- R15, S196, Nelson
- R151, S256, Nicholson
- R38, S212, Otterback
- R38, S213, Otterback
- R38, S215, Otterback
- R38, S216, Otterback
- R38, S217, Otterback
- R38, S218, Otterback
- R39, S213, Otterback
- R39, S214, Otterback
- R39, S215, Otterback
- R39, S217, Otterback
- R67, S169, Pullman
- R68, S166S, Pullman
- R68, S168, Pullman
- R68, S169, Pullman
- R63, S269, Pumphrey
- R63, S270, Pumphrey
- R81, S74, Robertson
- R81, S75, Robertson
- R81, S365, Sanford
- R81, S366, Sanford
- R81, S367, Sanford
- R82, S366, Sanford
- R82, S367, Sanford
- R68, S155, Shannon
- R68, S156, Shannon
- R59, S200, Slater
- R59, S201, Slater
- R59, S202, Slater
- R59, S203, Slater
- R60, S202, Slater
- R60, S203, Slater
- R125, S213, Small
- R125, S214, Small
- R126, S214, Small
- R19, S181, Snook
- R19, S182, Snook
- R14, S18, Spangler
- R14, S19, Spangler
- R161, S201, Stewart
- R161, S202, Stewart
- R13, S138, Swift
- R14, S136, Swift
- R14, S137, Swift
- R14, S138, Swift
- R88, S221, Wilson
- R88, S222, Wilson
- R88, S223, Wilson
- R88, S224, Wilson
- R66, S358, Wilson
- R66, S361, Wilson
- R68, S282, Wiswall
- R68, S284, Wiswall
- R68, S285, Wiswall
- R26, S9, Young
- R148, S179, Young
- R148, S180, Young
- R148, S181, Young

Featured K9 Corps Member



Name: Simona

Age: Around 10 (a lady never tells)

Member Since: 2018

The Masker-Accoo Family

Likes: Playing with friends, midday walks with her pack, getting pets, scoring cemetery treats, rides no matter the destination, and Eastern Market fruit samples.

New Season: Welcome to the New Members of the HCC Team!

This spring also brings new faces to the HCC Team! Please join us in welcoming them to our community. You can read more about them below:

Em Aufuldish



Em (they/them) is our *Development Coordinator*. Em moved to Washington, DC after graduating from Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon, with a BA in Art History. They previously worked in academic program support and art

administration at Georgetown University. Em is looking forward to working with the development team at Historic Congressional Cemetery to support fundraising efforts for exciting upcoming renovations and improvements to the cemetery grounds. In their free time, Em enjoys being creative and learning new crafts like crochet, mosaics, and stained glass. Em lives with their cat Nellie in Takoma Park, MD.

Anjali Diezman



Anjali (she/her) is our *Events and Marketing Coordinator*. She completed a BFA at Virginia Commonwealth University and the Museum Education Program at George Washington University. Her passion for cemeteries stems from a lifelong

love of art, nature, and storytelling, coupled with a deep interest in death positivity. Having worked in community-centered museums, she is excited to share the stories of Historic Congressional Cemetery with all who visit. In her free time, Anjali enjoys fiber arts such as crochet and quilting. When the weather is nice, she'll be on a hiking trail or attempting a natural dye recipe with various levels of success.

Dawn Matthews



Dawn, our *Visitor Services Associate*, is a native Washingtonian who thrives under pressure and embraces organized chaos. She enjoys variety in life and spends her days supporting influential leaders and innovative ideas. In her spare time, she focuses on bringing good vibes, positive energy, and a bit of humor to every environment she works in.

Want to attend an upcoming event or program? Check out our events calendar by scanning here!





Following in Her Footsteps: Belva Lockwood, from NY to DC to HCC

By Kaitlin Calogera, Founder and President of A Tour of Her Own

Off the beaten paths of Congressional Cemetery is the final resting place of a woman whose career reached heights as high as the spiry trees that shade her tombstone. Before she was a cemetery resident, Belva Ann Lockwood became the first woman to argue a case before the U.S. Supreme Court, as well as the first woman to appear on U.S. presidential ballots. Before she relocated to Washington, DC, and changed history, Lockwood lived in upstate New York. I followed in Belva's footsteps this past winter when I did a two-week stay in the Owego, NY, house where she resided in the 1860s. I invite you to join me on this journey of uncovering how her Owego home became a historic bed and breakfast and her formative New York years.

This region was familiar to her, having been born Belva A. Bennett in Royalton, NY, in 1830. Throughout the 1850s, newly-widowed Belva McNall attended teaching courses at what would become Syracuse University. She launched her career in education by teaching at various schools across western New York before landing in Owego. She bought this historic property where she lived and taught from 1863 to 1865. During these two years, she served as the principal of the all girls boarding and day school called the Owego

Female Seminary. At age 36, she moved to Washington, DC, with her daughter to begin her journey as a lawyer and political candidate. In 1868, she married Reverend Ezekiel Lockwood and assumed his last name. Rev.

Lockwood was supportive of his wife's pursuit of a legal career in the District.

But let's not travel to the nation's capital quite yet, until we can take a deeper look at this female seminary-turned bed and breakfast. Since 2022, the Belva Lockwood Inn has been owned and operated by a couple who made their way from the DC area, the reverse path that their venue's namesake took. Brie and Matt Woods are champions for Lockwood's legacy, and for them it all started the

same way most of their visitors experience the inn.

The history and beauty of Owego are inescapable as you approach the scenic Court Street Bridge and cross over the breathtaking Susquehanna River. In the distance, but growing taller upon approach, is the Tioga County Courthouse of 1872, a central point of reference for both locals and tourists who are met with grand Civil War statuary out front in the square. Even Susan B. Anthony spoke here in 1894! Now a gathering spot for peaceful protest, I found myself among the small but mighty crowd there for a vigil in remembrance of Minneapolis's Renee Good, who was fatally shot by an



Belva Lockwood was photographed in Owego in August 1909, when she returned during Old Home Week. Courtesy of BelvaLockwoodInn.com

Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent.

Brie Woods recalls when she and her husband Matt experienced this entry into town for the first time. “We took a weekend trip to a village we had never heard of, where we knew no one—and fell instantly in love,” she explains on the inn’s website. “The charm of the home, the legacy of Belva, and the warm, welcoming spirit of Owego captured our hearts. We knew this was where we were meant to be, and we’re so glad we made the leap.”

You’re invited to park in the long driveway and walk your way up to the front door. As you approach the decorative wooden entryway, you can’t help but notice the magnificent, welcoming, wrap-around porch that invites you to relax. Equipped with a couch, rocking chair, and firepit, the porch allows you to truly walk in Belva’s footsteps, as she too used to sit and study here overlooking the Susquehanna River.

Rolling up to the Belva Lockwood Inn brings a unique kind of emotion depending on the season. During the holidays, I trekked through the snow-covered front yard to admire the festive decorations of Christmas wreaths and oversized ornaments dangling across the balcony. When I visited a few summers ago, a soft breeze came off the river as the birds chirped and flowers were in bloom

all around. During Women’s History Month in March, you can expect one of the most empowering displays of decorations, which include yellow, white, and purple suffragist banners reminiscent of the historic National Woman’s Party. Color pops from this Victorian home not only in June, but all year round with a rainbow flag waving proudly.

“As the caretaker of this historic 1815 inn, I feel a profound responsibility to share Belva’s remarkable story,” Brie professes. “It’s not just my job, it’s my passion—to inspire others with her indomitable spirit, to empower the next generation of leaders, to ensure her legacy lives on. That’s why we’ve infused every corner of the Belva Lockwood Inn with her remarkable life and legacy. From the artwork adorning our walls to the educational events we host—women’s retreats, artist workshops, and even a Belva Lockwood badge program for Scouts of America—it’s all part of our ‘Be Like Belva’ movement, a rallying cry to stand tall, persist, and champion the causes that make us most human.”

The interior is basically a shrine to Belva. Portraits of her hang high in the common area where guests admire her confident posture as they sip on a draft prosecco at the bar. A walk toward the restroom stops you in your



An interior room at the Belva Lockwood Inn. *Courtesy of Belva Lockwood Inn*

tracks with an embroidered quilt commemorating the 19th Amendment. There are framed documents, letters, and books all detailing the nuances of Belva Lockwood's life as a mom, teacher, lawyer, and candidate.

There are five private rooms with names that are relevant to the local history and culture. One of my favorite rooms is the Knickerbocker, inspired by the funky local artist Chris Knickerbocker, owner of Old Souls Home. From a glitter glass sculptured wall to unique finds and quirky treasures, this room not only shows Belva's spirit, but brings a modern approach to the historic space.

The local spirit in a town like Owego gives a welcoming feeling to visiting tourists. I certainly experienced that from various local businesses, such as Carol's Coffee and Art Bar, Owego Kitchen, and even the local tourism bureau that I stopped in on to chat with staff. But in this town of 18,000 people, Belva's legacy plays a dual role. To believers like Brie and Matt, she remains an epic trailblazer who changed the world. To others across the town square however, she's an insignificant woman rightfully lost to history. This split in honoring the first woman to run for president is an interesting perspective from the outside. With so many opportunities to showcase Belva, it seems some of those campaigns are met with resistance. Perhaps that's also in the spirit of Belva somehow.

One interesting effort that fell short was legislation sponsored by Senator Chuck Schumer in 2019. His goal, which had widespread support, was to rename the local post office after Belva Lockwood. His press release stated: "On the eve of the centennial anniversary of U.S. women's suffrage, Schumer launches effort to commemorate the trailblazing legacy of upstate native and feminist icon Belva Lockwood; senator announces legislation to name Owego post office in honor of first woman to argue in front of the U.S. Supreme Court and appear on an official presidential ballot." The naysayers pushed back however, writing op-eds asking, "Belva who?" and refusing to put their support behind the campaign, possibly because Belva lived in Owego only a few years. The post office renaming campaign was a flop.

To be fair, there are many women from Owego who have also made history and are worthy of recognition. Markers across the town recognize suffragists Harriet L. Moe, Elizabeth Browne Chatfield, and Esther Hobart Morris, who has a statue in the Capitol Building. Owego was also home to a remarkable patriot during World War II, Cpl. Margaret J. Hastings, who survived 47 days in the

New Guinea jungle after a plane crash. It makes me wonder if these women knew Belva at the time she lived there, or maybe Cpl. Hastings had learned about her in the history books and then embodied her persistence long after Belva passed. I have to also consider what might very well be true though, that these women might not ever have heard about the legendary Belva Lockwood, as most women's stories are lost to time. Restoring the Belva Lockwood Inn really resurfaced her contributions to America, so much so that it was featured on an episode of the HGTV show, House Hunters.

The same curiosity about Belva's connection to other women comes to mind for me when I stand at her headstone in Washington, DC. She now shares a home in death with the many women buried at Congressional Cemetery. As historians, we put their names together so easily on walking tours and in books and brochures; but how would they have inspired each other in real life? I can't help but consider Pat Schroeder, whom the New York Times called a "leading feminist legislator" in her 2023 obituary. When Representative Schroeder ran for president in 1988, did she know she was following in the footsteps of Belva Lockwood, and that one day she would be interred in the same historic cemetery?

Similarly, I am curious if librarian Barbara Gittings, interred near Congressional Cemetery's Gay Corner, would have read up on Belva's quirky and somewhat queer presentation in this world. Maybe, just maybe, she questioned Belva's unique relationship with Dr. Mary Edwards Walker.

We can't possibly leave out one of the more risqué, successful, and entrepreneurial residents of Congressional. Is there a chance madam Mary Ann Hall and Belva would have crossed paths in 1870s and 1880s Washington? Or what about Lucy Bell, who died in 1862 at the age of 99? Enslaved half of her life, what would the Bell family matriarch who fought for freedom think of a woman like Lockwood?

In the end, whether they knew her or not, Belva does not rest alone. Here at Congressional Cemetery, she is joined by women from vastly different walks of life, all bound together in death. They stand as silent sentinels, their stories layered upon one another, forming a collective testament to persistence, resilience, and the long, unfinished pursuit of equality. And they remind us that the belief in fair and equal treatment for women is not only a legacy to be remembered, it is a cause that has always been, and remains, worth fighting for.



Two Loyal Airmen, United by Service and a Final Resting Place

By Tamar Abrams

The graves of two men at Congressional Cemetery are not particularly near one another, and there is no sign that the two would be connected in any way. The engraving on one is well known and reads: “A Gay Vietnam Veteran. When I was in the military they gave me a medal for killing two men and a discharge for loving one.” On the other headstone is carved the words, “Joan and Carl Abrams. Married for 69 years, Together for Eternity.”

The first grave is for Technical Sgt. Leonard Matlovich, recipient of the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star. He was also, famously, the first service member (United States Air Force) to intentionally out himself to challenge the military’s ban on gay members. He became an icon, an advocate, and died of complications from HIV/AIDS just before his 45th birthday.

The second grave is for my parents, Col. Carl Abrams and Joan Abrams, who died months apart in their 90s in 2023. My father was also in the US Air Force, which is where his path first crossed with that of Sgt. Matlovich. His final resting place is largely because of that friendship. Let me explain.

My parents met on a blind date in December 1953 in Daytona Beach, Florida. My dad was visiting his parents



Matlovich gravestone.

for a few weeks before attending War College as he rose up the ranks in the Judge Advocate General’s Corps (JAG). My mother was staying with her parents as she prepared to head to Okinawa to work as a librarian. They

were in their early 20s. He asked her to marry him on their first date. She laughed. He went out with someone else the next night. On their second date, he asked again and she said yes. Times were different then and eligible Jewish women were hard to find. Plus it was nearing the end of the year and my dad wanted the tax advantage.

Carl and Joan Abrams married less than three weeks after they first met.

The life of an Air Force lawyer in the 1950s and 1960s was nomadic, and my parents were all in. Neither had ever left the US before. In Japan, I came along and my parents reveled in the adventure of living on the northernmost island of Hokkaido. Every two to three years they packed up the household and moved to another location. New friends, new schools, new adventures.

My father did a stint at the Pentagon which allowed us to wander through the Washington, DC, area at the height of the Vietnam War protests. One lovely warm day in the late 1960s, my dad told my mom he was taking me to the Smithsonian. So we drove in from the suburbs to, in fact, attend a huge protest around the Reflecting Pool. I remember Joan Baez sang “We Shall Overcome,” and at some point my dad and I were running with hundreds of others from the police on horseback. I can still taste the pepper spray. When we arrived home later that evening, it turned out my mom had seen us on the news. It was not a happy homecoming.

Our time in Germany saw my dad becoming Chief Judge of the Air Force for the European theater. He was always gone—hitching rides on Air Force jets to preside over trials in Turkey and Spain and England and Italy. He was among the first military judges to wear a robe over his uniform.



Col. Carl Abrams, circa 1970s.
Tamar Abrams

In 1975, soon after my father was moved back to the US, Matlovich delivered a letter to his commanding officer stating that he was gay. He had an exemplary record in the Air Force and, although there was a ban against gay service members, the Air Force did have a clause for those with extenuating circumstances. That might include, I suppose, a drunken encounter or perhaps a night of experimentation.

In preparation for the discharge hearing, my father was asked to serve as Matlovich’s legal advisor to the discharge board. As my father explained, “Anybody in the military knows that you don’t refuse a direct order. You talk people out of it.” He told me his reason for doing so was that he always believed the anti-gay policy was wrong. “It dawned on me that kicking people out because they were gay was ridiculous,” he said. And he worried his superiors by casually mentioning that his bias might be revealed in the press at a time when it might be viewed as insubordination.

The Air Force quickly rescinded their offer for him to serve as legal counsel. At his military hearing, Matlovich was asked to sign a pledge that he would “never practice homosexuality again.” He refused and was given an Honorable Discharge in October 1975.

By 1977, my father was the Chief Judge of the United States Air Force Court of Military Review in Washington, DC. He and my mom bought a townhouse

in an unfashionable area of Capitol Hill and settled into DC life. It turned out that Matlovich lived nearby on the Hill and paid a visit to my dad at home. My dad recalled, “I found him to be a very charming guy, and we had a lot of discussions about the question of homosexuality, politics, and many other things. Surprisingly, he had very conservative political views.”

Several years later, Matlovich moved to San Francisco, though my dad said they stayed in touch. Matlovich died on June 22, 1988,



Sgt. Leonard Matlovich poses for a photo with his Honorable Discharge Certificate.
Michael Bedwell

and he was buried at Congressional Cemetery. My parents had also bought a plot there. As the years passed, my parents visited his grave frequently and enjoyed the

idea that a place of burial was also a center of community.

In November 2006, my father was the guest of honor at the fifth annual gay veterans memorial service, “Honoring Our Fallen,” at the cemetery. He laid a wreath at Matlovich’s grave during the event organized by Dr. Michael Rankin with the help of the Arlington Gay & Lesbian Alliance and American Veterans for Equal Rights. My mom stood proudly at my dad’s side as he talked about the incongruity of discharging loyal members of the Air Force simply because of whom they loved.

Many years later—in 2023—a group of friends and family attended the interment of both my parents under a large tree.. Walkers strolled by and dogs paused to sniff at the freshly dug dirt. A military bugler stood by to play taps. It was a cool spring day as my parents’ ashes were laid to rest. They didn’t want to end up in Arlington Cemetery, although my dad certainly could have had he wished after retiring from the Air Force with more than 30 years of service to his country.

Congressional Cemetery, with its beautiful diversity of permanent residents, its history, and its sense of community, was where my parents wanted to rest in peace. They knew that around the corner lay Sgt. Matlovich, who had opted not to have his name on his gravestone, but to instead memorialize his own life and that of so many other gay veterans.



The Abrams Gravesite.

The idea of a grave marker honoring love is not a new one, though “When I was in the military they gave me a medal for killing two men and a discharge for loving one” is particularly moving. When choosing my parents’ grave marker I wanted love to be the central theme. If you find them, you will see a color photo of my parents nuzzled into each other. Love is love is love.

I once asked my mom if she minded the fact that dogs would be frolicking and perhaps urinating on her grave. She grinned and said, “They can have at it. It will give your dad and me something to laugh about.”

Tamar Abrams is a retired writer and communications director who lived in the DC area for 42 years. She now divides her time between coastal Rhode Island and England, where her daughter and her family live.



America250 Retrospective: Elbridge Gerry, Founding Father

By Kurt Deion, History Education Manager, Historic Congressional Cemetery

Near the perimeter of Historic Congressional Cemetery on E Street, a 12-foot monument topped with what its designers described as a “towering and animated flame” in a Grecian vase is a sentinel in the grounds’ oldest section. Funded by Congress, the memorial was carved from Massachusetts marble by brothers William and John Frazee and erected in 1823. Writer Egon Verheyen notes, “Size and elegance—as well as material—distinguish this tomb from the modest yet impressive cenotaphs” designed by Benjamin Latrobe that stretch south in three rows. “The great number of these cenotaphs stresses the idea of equality in death,” he says, adding that the “simplicity of Latrobe’s design makes that of the Frazees appear even more lavish than it is.”

But whose résumé merited a monument that dwarfs that of congressmen? A man who signed the Declaration of Independence; who served as the magistrate of his commonwealth; who was nationally elected and was just



The grave of Elbridge Gerry. He is the only Declaration of Independence signer and only vice president buried in Washington, DC. *Kitty Linton*

one heartbeat away from the presidency; whose most memorable legacy is a controversial political stratagem that bears his name, albeit mispronounced. This is the final resting place of Elbridge Gerry.

Elbridge Gerry was born July 17, 1744 in the fishing and shipping port of Marblehead, Massachusetts.

According to descendants, the family pronounces Gerry with

a hard G sound (geh-ree), rather than the soft G that has predominated in public perception. Elbridge Gerry was just 14 when he matriculated into Harvard College. He graduated in 1762 and then pursued a master’s degree, which he earned in 1765. In his dissertation, he advocated for colonial resistance against the nascent Stamp Act. Commerce was an important part of Gerry’s upbringing. His father, Thomas, was a ship captain and a merchant and, for a time, Gerry worked in his business, which shipped cured fish to Barbados and Spain.

However it was the tumultuous political scene that called to young Gerry. In 1772, still in his twenties, he was selected to represent Marblehead in the Great and General Court. There he first became acquainted with political radical Samuel Adams, with whom he closely worked and was often aligned. It was also in this period that he was elected to the Massachusetts legislature and was selected for Marblehead’s Committee of Correspondence. These committees were part of a system throughout the colonies that allowed for an exchange of ideas on how to resist and respond to ever-stricter imperial policies imposed by the British government. In 1774, Gerry was chosen to serve in the First Continental Congress, but he declined this post in the aftermath of his father’s death that July.

By February 1776, ten months after the first official shots of the Revolutionary War were fired in Lexington, Massachusetts, Gerry was a member of the Second Continental Congress, replacing Thomas Cushing. Whereas some members of the body convened in Philadelphia were still hesitant to break ties with Britain, 31-year-old Gerry was immediate and steadfast in his calls for independence. This endeared him to delegate John Adams, Samuel’s cousin from Braintree, Massachusetts. In July, Adams wrote to friend James Warren that Gerry “is a Man of immense Worth. If every

Man here was a Gerry, the Liberties of America would be safe against the Gates of Earth and Hell.”

Gerry was among the delegates who voted for independence from Great Britain on July 2, 1776, and for the Declaration of Independence on July 4. He departed Philadelphia soon thereafter, returning to Massachusetts in a bid to restore his ill health. On July 21, a traveling Gerry wrote Samuel and John Adams and asked them to sign the Declaration on his behalf “if the same is to be signed as proposed. I think We ought to have the privilege when necessarily absent of voting and signing by proxy.” Proxy signing was not approved, and most delegates to the Continental Congress signed the Declaration on August 2. Gerry affixed his signature after he returned to Philadelphia, likely in September. During the Revolutionary War, Gerry leveraged his merchant connections to help keep the Continental Army supplied with the indispensable gunpowder, without which the Army would have been unable to even take the field.



Elbridge Gerry is among the delegates portrayed in painter John Trumbull's Declaration of Independence, commissioned in 1817. Architect of the Capitol

After the Revolution, in 1787, Gerry was once again sent to Philadelphia to meet with a body of men. This gathering evolved into a constitutional convention, with its end product replacing the ineffective Articles of Confederation that had governed the disparate states since 1781. On May 31, Gerry gave a warning in response to the motion that members of the House of Representatives “ought to be elected by the people of the several States.” With the memories of Shays’s Rebellion on his mind, he declared, “The evils we experience flow from the excess of democracy. The people do not want

virtue, but are the dupes of pretended patriots.” The National Constitution Center says “he managed to irritate almost every other delegate because of his unpredictable and often contradictory stances on the central issues facing the Convention.” In the end, in large part because the adopted Constitution lacked a Bill of Rights, Gerry, along with George Mason and Edmund Randolph, declined to sign the document. Nevertheless, Gerry quickly became an official in the new government that the Constitution provided. He was an inaugural member of Congress and served from 1789 to 1793.

In 1797, amid tensions with the French Republic, President John Adams nominated Gerry to be an envoy extraordinary to France. Based on previous conversations, Adams knew his staunch Federalist cabinet would protest the nomination of the Republican-leaning Gerry. Even his dearest friend and advisor, First Lady Abigail Adams, had concerns about Gerry’s fitness for the role. But the president trusted Gerry and that won out. Even though Adams’s duplicitous Secretary of State, Timothy Pickering, made a gambit to block the nomination, the Senate approved Gerry for the post, 21-6. Along with John Marshall and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, he was dispatched to France.

Despite Adams’s instructions to Gerry that he should maintain a unified front with his fellow envoys, Gerry faltered. Pinckney wrote to his brother that Gerry was “habitually suspicious, and hesitates so much, that it is very unpleasant to do business with him.” Sometimes Gerry hosted social gatherings that included French agents but excluded Marshall and Pinckney. They did show a united front on one crucial aspect: they would not give in to foreign minister Charles Maurice de

Talleyrand’s demand of a bribe to put them in contact with French diplomats. When Adams released documents relating to the incident to Congress, the names of the three diplomats were replaced with the letters X, Y, and Z, leading to this being called the XYZ affair.

Even after Marshall and Pinckney left, Gerry remained in France. Though he said the French would not consent to his departure, his actions were largely unpopular in the US. When he returned home, his carriage was pelted with rocks and he was burned in

effigy. When he met with the president in Massachusetts, Adams admonished him. Nevertheless, when Timothy Pickering assembled a report for Congress, Adams eliminated passages critical of Gerry's actions before turning it over to Congress on January 21, 1799.

More firmly positioned as a Republican after the Federalist response to his conduct in France, Gerry was several times an unsuccessful candidate for Massachusetts governor. In 1810, he was finally victorious. As governor, he was notably presented with a bill to reshape congressional district lines in dramatic ways. Although he supposedly found the legislation to be "highly disagreeable," Gerry signed it into law. "Towns were separated and single towns were isolated from their proper counties," Elmer C. Griffith explains in his 1907 dissertation, *The Rise and Development of the Gerrymander*. One district within Essex County surrounded Massachusetts's North Shore and was so misshapen that an opposing Federalist said it resembled a salamander, an amphibian popular in mythology and pre-modern folklore.

Artist Elkanah Tisdale's political cartoon of this "Gerry-mander" was published in the *Boston Gazette* on March 26, 1812. It was reprinted widely by the Federalist press. Although this was not the first instance in American politics where questionable motivations resulted in wonky district boundaries, the political cartoon resonated. Gerrymandering entered the political lexicon and never left.



The "Gerry-mander" and its namesake. *Composite by Fair Districts PA*

James Madison—the "father" of the Constitution Gerry had refused to sign at the 1787 convention. Madison and Gerry were victorious in November, beating the Federalist duo of DeWitt Clinton and Jared Ingersoll.

In April 1812, Vice President George Clinton died in office, and he needed to be replaced on the Democratic-Republican ticket. Gerry, defeated in his gubernatorial re-election bid that same month, was later drafted as the running mate of the incumbent president,

In November 1814, less than two years into his vice presidency, Gerry was en route to the Capitol when he was stricken by a fatal heart attack. He was laid to rest at Congressional Cemetery, with the government-funded monument erected over his body in 1823. "Gerry! Gerry! Gerry! You was the last of my Colleagues! I am left alone!" John Adams mourned in a letter.

Gerry was polarizing among his contemporaries and, like his peers, was multi-faceted and flawed. Understanding historical figures like the Founding Fathers more fully, for their feats and foibles alike, is a worthwhile endeavor not only for America250 but beyond. For better understanding history concerns not just the past—it helps us learn how we want to move forward into the future.

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