ROCKVILLE CEMETERY
Spend an Hour or Two Among the Tombs...
ROCKVILLE CEMETERY

Wander over this enclosure to the various points of interest...

Rockville Cemetery, c. 1734
Spend an hour or two among the tombs of which the storms of more than a century have spent their force, the sleepers beneath unconscious of their fury.
ROCKVILLE CEMETERY

Dating back to the colonial era, Rockville Cemetery covers more than 26 acres and consists of two sections. The upper, older section is separated from the lower, newer section by Little Falls stream. The elevation changes 119 feet. Rockville Cemetery is the city’s history book on the landscape and is still in use today.

COLONIAL BURYING YARD

In 1728, the Anglican chapel in Georgetown became too inconvenient for the upper parish, and the vestry resolved “that as Mr. Thomas Williams was so kind as to offer two acres of land being part of land called Mill Land for the building of a Chappell on that the vestry accepts the same.” In 1734, an assessment was made “toward a building a new church.” Thomas Nicholls contracted in 1751 to build a fence around the Chapel Yard, or burying yard, “to measure 100 by 96 feet ...” Charles Haymond was hired to “grub the yard and to clear the trees all out of same and to fell the trees for 15 feet distant all around the laid railes.” The oldest gravestones in the cemetery were located within this yard. In 1752, longtime vestryman and planter John Harding was buried here.

The rural cemetery movement

In 1880, the Rockville Cemetery Association, comprised of two members from each prominent Protestant congregation, incorporated, taking responsibility for the cemetery. Judge R. J. Bowie donated five acres of land from his adjacent estate. No longer associated only with the Episcopal Church, the cemetery became a true community cemetery for Rockville.

In 1889, the Cemetery Association paid for a caretaker’s cottage, built by Rockville carpenter and undertaker Reuben Pumphrey. In 1890, Rockville prohibited burials outside of existing cemeteries. To meet the increased demand for space, Catherine Bowie, Judge Bowie’s widow, donated two additional acres. The 1897 construction of Van Buren Street required 16 burials from the Baptist Cemetery to be reinterred at this out-of-town cemetery.

The rural cemetery movement influenced the expansion of Rockville Cemetery. Boston’s Mount Auburn Cemetery inspired cemetery planners to design landscapes that incorporated topographic complexity, curvilinear roads, and picturesque vistas. Family plots dominate the cemetery, with large markers, individual stones, and small boundary markers. The cemetery’s terraces and curved carriage drives are consistent with the rural cemetery movement. Architectural influences – Gothic Revival, Classical Revival, and Victorian – add to the picturesque quality. With planned paths and carriage drives, cemeteries were places to visit and enjoy.

Societal perception of death changed. Previously regarded with horror and fear, Victorians saw death as a reunion with loved ones and God. Remembering the departed was combined with contemplating nature; the indulgence of grief was a transcendental experience. Markers had images symbolizing a welcome to the afterlife, or pointing upward, towards heaven.

LAWN PLAN CEMETERY

The lower cemetery is on a flat terrain and is accessed by one paved road running north of the burial sites. The largest lots are adjacent to the drive, medium-sized lots in the center, and individual grave sites close to Baltimore Road. Robert Cridland designed the lower cemetery in 1936. The gridded plots are orderly, stones stand in straight lines, and trees are grouped.

The lack of topographical features emphasizes the unbroken lawn scenery and attempts to balance the formal cemetery with the natural environment.

Cridland believed that “drives and walks must be as direct as possible without being forced or twisted; they should approach by means of straight lines or easy graceful curves.” The open lawn style dominated cemetery design in the 20th century. The aesthetics of efficiency and order in the landscape design provide an effective contrast to the variety of shapes and landforms in the upper, older section of Rockville Cemetery.

ROCKVILLE CEMETERY

Located there by ancestors of a generation passed away.
**Rockville Cemetery, circa 1734**

**PERSONS OF NOTE**

Several historic figures buried in the cemetery are associated with local historical significance and strived to improve the public. Use the letters on the map to locate the graves of prominent figures in Rockville and Montgomery County history. Visit the museum and site described below to learn about their roles in our local heritage.

- **Richard Johns Bowie** (1800-1881)
  - Located at 100 DeSellum Ave., Gaithersburg. He was a prominent Rockville farmer and merchant. His observatory, named 'Sylva,' reflects the cultural and scientific pursuits of the time.

- **Edwin Smith** (1829-1905)
  - Located at 301-309-0919. Smith worked for the Coast and Geodetic Survey and was renowned for his study of the variation of latitude.

- **Dr. Edward Elisha Stonestreet** (1811-1865)
  - Located at 103 W. Montgomery Ave. Stonestreet was a prominent Civil War era doctor. His office is now a medical museum.

- **A. Gude Sons Company nursery** (1873-1917)
  - Located at 100 DeSellum Ave., Gaithersburg. The nursery was a prominent Rockville business during the 19th century.

- **Richard Johns Bowie** (1800-1881)
  - Located at 100 DeSellum Ave., Gaithersburg. The nursery was a prominent Rockville business during the 19th century.

**SYMBOLS AND DESIGNS**

Different symbols on headstones reflect how death was regarded during different time periods. Use the map to find the following stones:

- **Innocence of childhood**
  - The lamb and weeping willow motifs symbolize the innocence of childhood. These symbols are emblematic of a particular cultural or ethnic heritage.

- **Family name**
  - The inkwell and quill pen are common symbols of a family name. These symbols often appear on a lotus or a cornucopia base, symbolizing the family's abundance.

- **Return to happiness**
  - The Lily of the Valley motif symbolizes the return to happiness after death. This symbol is often used in Victorian funerary art.

- **Return to heaven**
  - The clasped hand pointing to heaven or a cross is a common symbol of return to heaven or reunion with the deceased. This symbol often appears on a stone.

- **Willow motif**
  - The Willow motif is a popular symbol for grief and loss. It often appears on a memorial stone as a symbol of the weeping willow tree.

- **Orthodox cross**
  - The Orthodox cross is a symbol of the Christian faith. It often appears on a memorial stone as a symbol of the crucifixion.

- **Scrolled pediment**
  - The scrolled pediment is a popular symbol of Victorian funeral art. It often appears on a memorial stone as a symbol of the weeping willow tree.

- **Baltimore**
  - The Baltimore cross is a popular symbol of Victorian funeral art. It often appears on a memorial stone as a symbol of the crucifixion.

**MONTGOMERY VENUE**

Visit the Montgomery County Historical Society for more information about Rockville Cemetery. For assistance, call 301-309-0919.
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