NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM ON CD (MS WORD FORMAT)

1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE (must comply with a Board of Revision of Taxes address)

Street address: 405-411 Queen Street, Philadelphia, PA OPA Address: 405-25 Queen Street

Postal code: 19147 Councilmanic District: First District

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Bethel Burying Ground

Common Name: Bethel Burying Ground

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☐ Building ☐ Structure X Site ☐ Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☐ excellent ☐ good X fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: X occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: City of Philadelphia playground – "Weccacoe Playground"

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach a plot plan and written description of the boundary. (See attached)

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach a description of the historic resource.

The Bethel Burial Ground is located underneath a portion of the Weccacoe Playground which is owned by the City of Philadelphia. The playground is located in the 400 block of Queen Street in the city's Queen Village neighborhood.

7. Significance

Please attach the Statement of Significance. (See attached)

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1810 to 1889

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration:_____

Architect, engineer, and/or designer:_____

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan:_____

Original owner:_____

Other significant persons:_____

Criteria for Designation:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

X (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,

☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,

☐ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,

☐ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,

☐ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,

☐ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,

☐ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,

☐ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,

X (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or

☐ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

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8. Major Bibliographical References

Please see attached bibliography.

9. Nominator

Name with Title Mr. Terry Buckalew Email: tebuckalew@gmail.com

Organization not applicable Date January 4, 2013

Street Address 1500 Locust Street, Apt. #2605 Telephone 267-319-1957

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19102

Nominator ☐ is X is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 7 January 2013

☑ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 4 March 2013

Date of Notice Issuance: 8 April 2013

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: City of Phila, Weccacoe Playground

Address: C/O Dept. of Recreation

1030 MSB

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19102

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: 29 May 2013

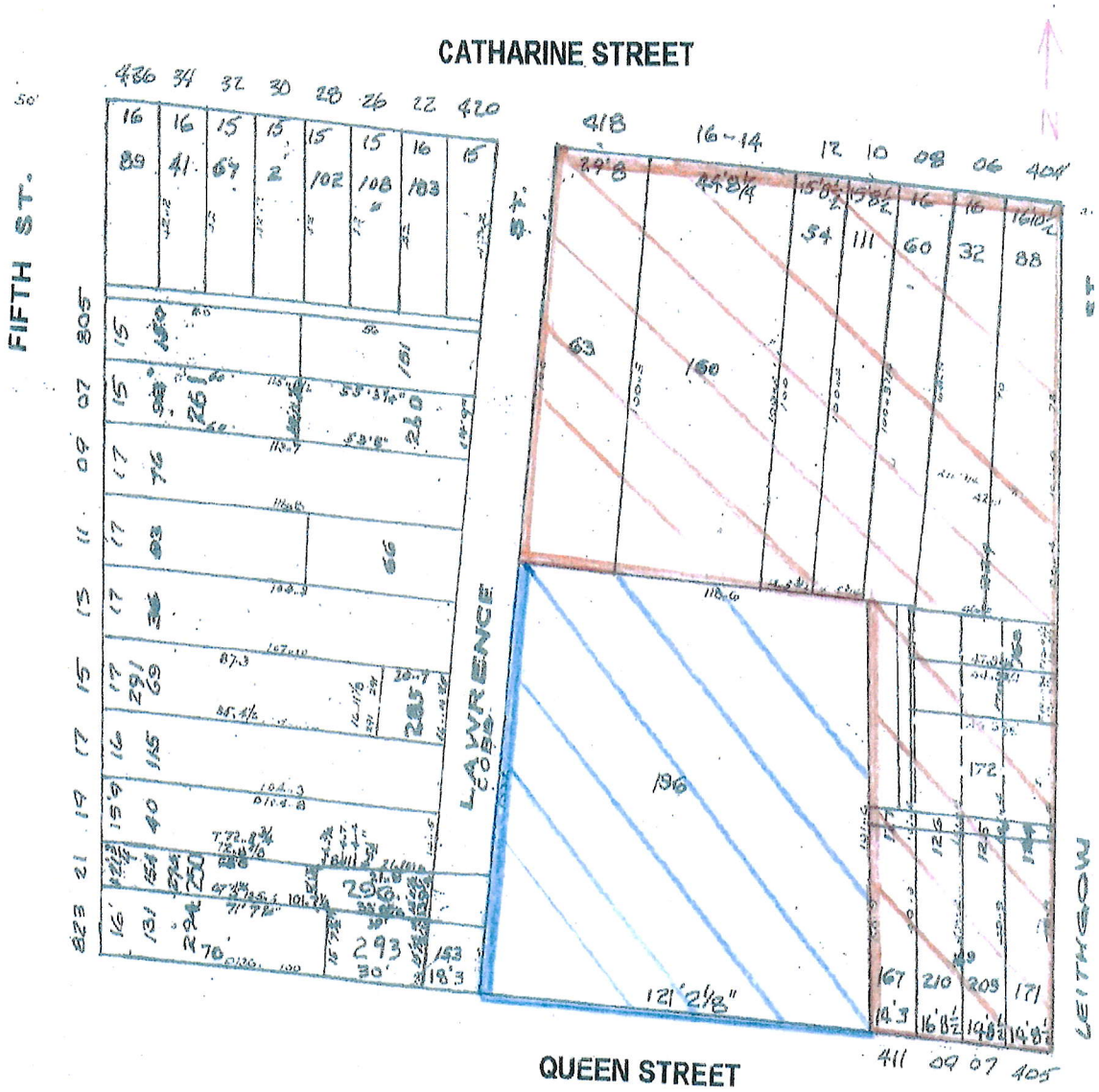
Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: 14 June 2013

Date of Final Action: 14 June 2013

☑ Designated ☐ Rejected

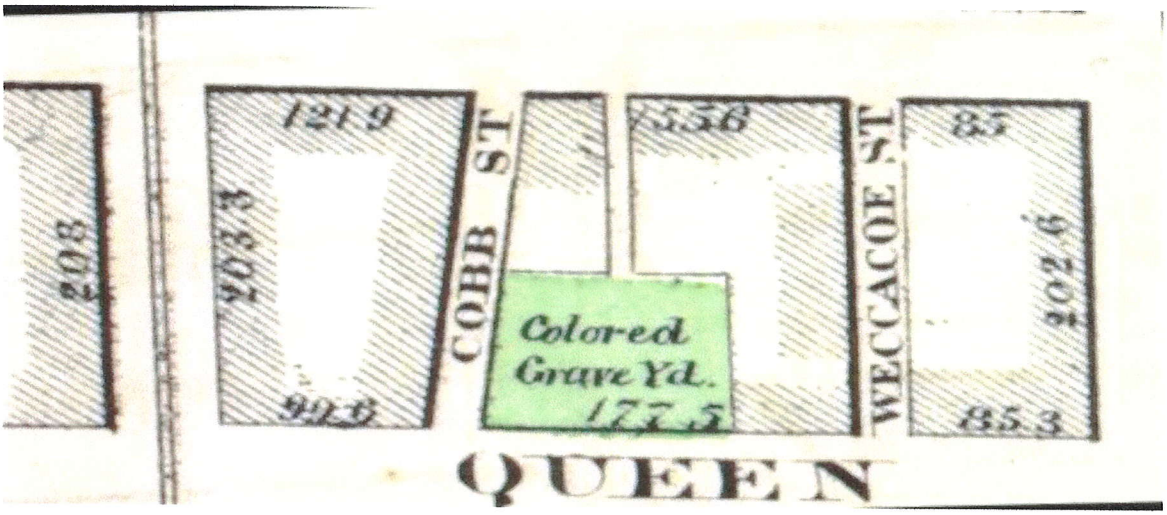
3/16/07

SECTION 5: BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION



Plot Plan: Red + Blue = Weccacoe Playground; Blue = Original Bethel Burying Ground

Beginning at a point at the northeast corner of Queen and Lawrence Streets and extending eastwardly 121 feet and 2 ⅛ inches along the northerly side of Queen Street to a point; then extending northwardly 101 feet and 6 inches to a point; then extending westwardly 118 feet and 6 inches parallel to Queen Street to a point on the easterly side of Lawrence Street; then extending southwardly 103 feet along the easterly side of Lawrence street to the point of beginning.



(1862 City Map of Philadelphia by Samuel L. Smedley (Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia)

ORIGINAL DEED OF SALE INFORMATION IN 1810:

Lot #196: **405-411 Queen Street**

Former Owner: Matthew Waring

Present Owner: African Methodist Episcopal Church

Date of Deed: April 28, 1810

Description of Property: *All that certain lot or piece of ground:* Situate on the South side of Queen Street in the district of Southwark, in the County of Philadelphia, aforesaid containing in front on said Queen Street 121 feet 2-1/3 inches and extending in depth Northward 103 feet or thereabout.

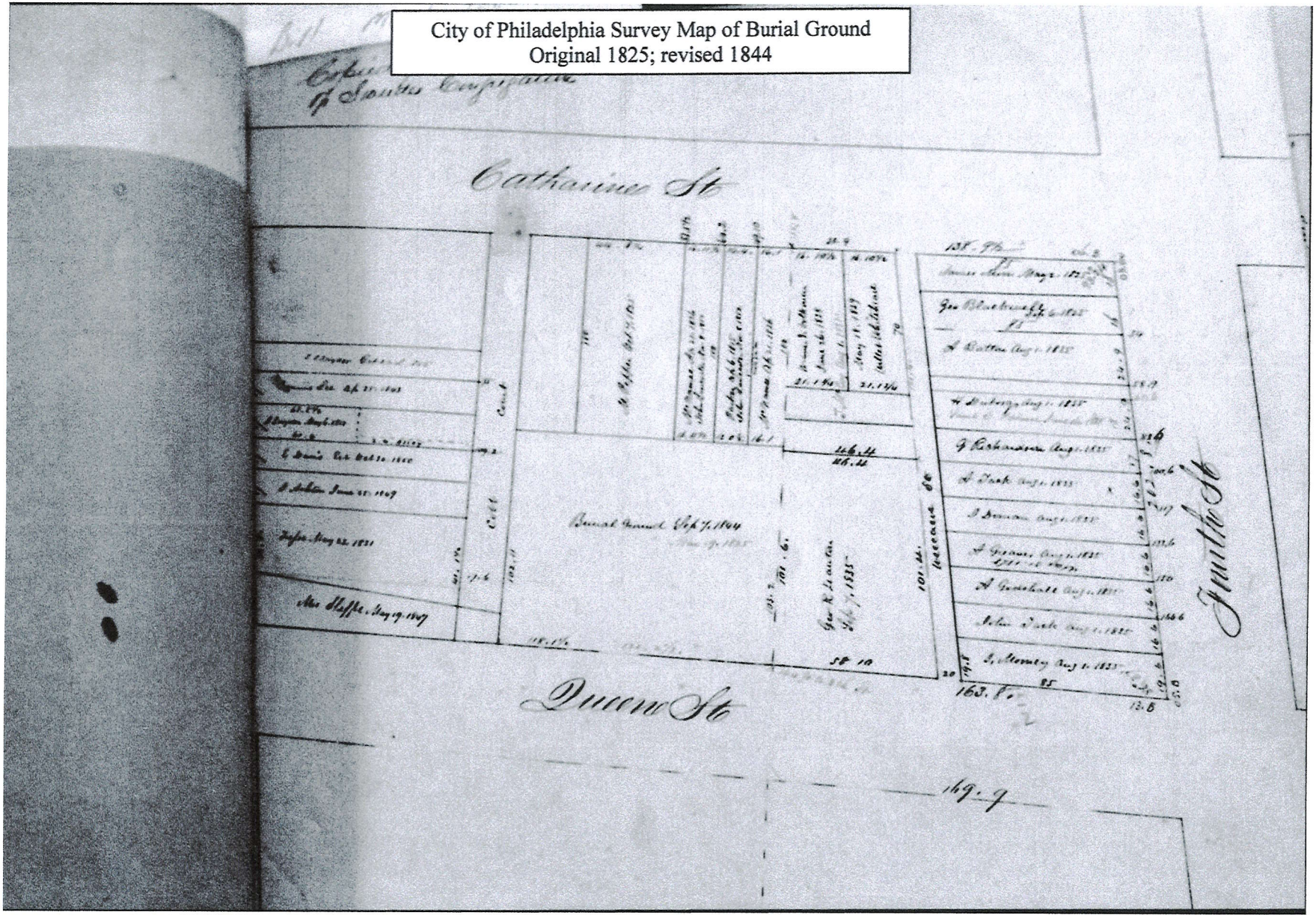
Bounded Southward by Queen Street aforesaid, Eastward by ground now or late belonging to the Swedes Church, Northward by other ground of the said Matthew Waring and westward by ground now of late of Thomas Wharton.

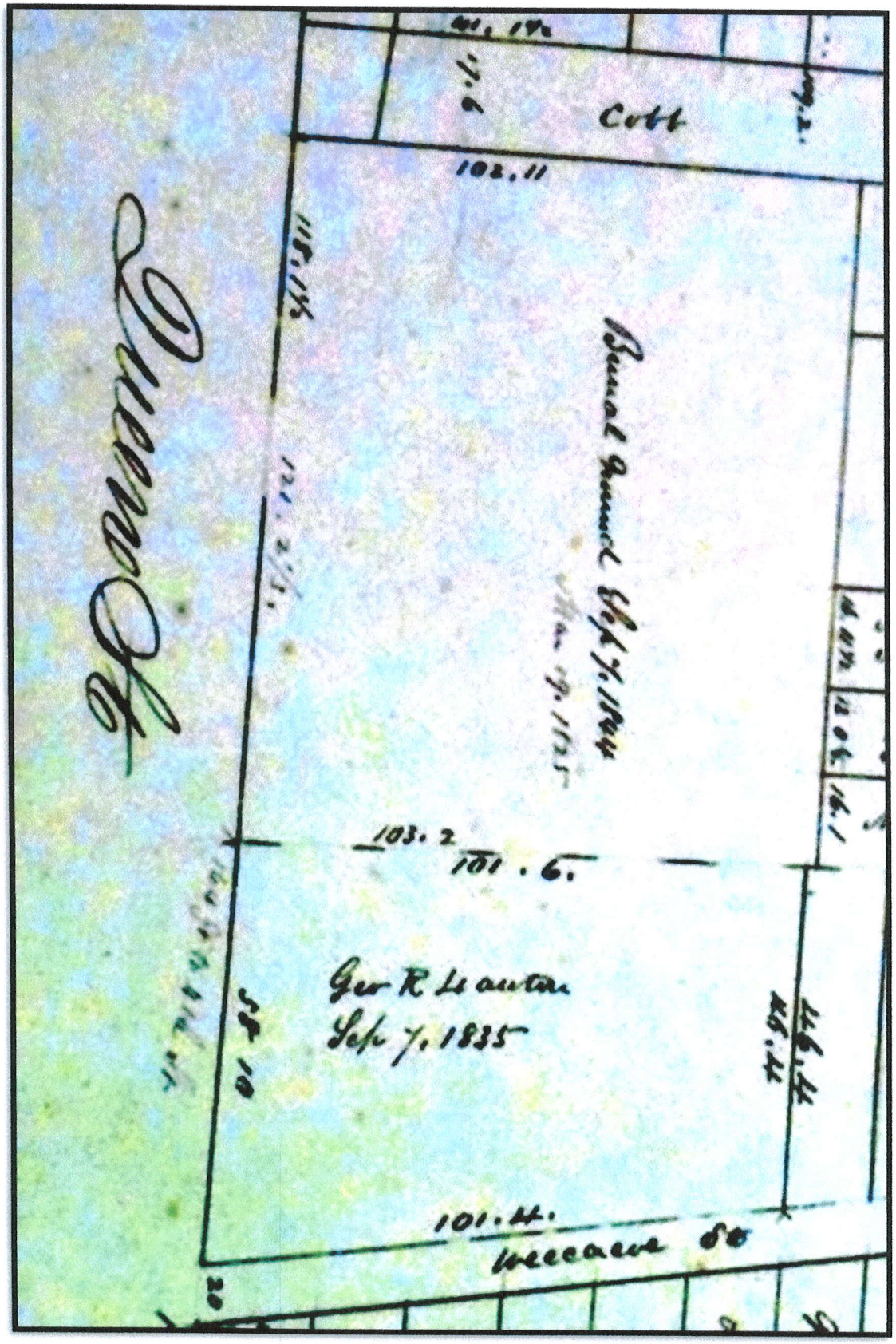
This property is E. of 5th Street

Signature of Owner, or Agency, Wm. J. Canby for the African M. E. Church

Blocked area is an approximation of the burial ground location within the Weccacoe Playground.

City of Philadelphia Survey Map of Burial Ground
Original 1825; revised 1844





Burial Ground section magnified from Map A.

Page **5** of **5**

6. DESCRIPTION:

Part A: Has significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past

The Bethel Burying Ground is important based on its association with the Reverend Richard Allen, his founding of the African Methodist Episcopal religion and the establishment of the Mother Bethel AME Church at 6th and Lombard Streets in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The Mother Bethel Church was dedicated on June 29, 1794 and instantly became a symbol of African American determination. Under Reverend Allen's leadership the church became an incubator for African American civil rights, endeavors and a refuge for escaping slaves on their freedom journey to the North. Reverend Allen and the founding trustees made it clear that that the right of ownership and capacity for self-government is as inherent for Black America as for White America.

Reverend Allen and several of these original trustees purchased the burial ground on Queen Street in 1810.

Criterion I: Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important to pre-history or history

As of this date the names of 1,378 African American Philadelphians have been identified who were buried on Queen Street in the Bethel Burying Ground. Attached is a directory of those who have been identified. Research is only 50% accomplished and upwards of 3,000 individuals could be buried under the park. The average age of death for those interred is 40.52 years for the females and 38.35 for the males. Thirty-seven percent of the interred are children 2 years of age or younger.

The Bethel Burying Ground and those that are buried there represent the African American culture of 18th and 19th century Philadelphia. It is the first African American owned, free standing (not a churchyard) burial ground in Philadelphia. Many of those interred were former slaves and/or the children of slaves. They are the trailblazers, the first generation, who established their own churches, schools, financial institutions and beneficial aid societies against a backdrop that threatened their very existence. Black men were murdered as well as men, women and children beaten and their homes and churches burned to the ground. Racism and bigotry disguised as Jacksonian Democracy attacked the African American community like a virulent disease. These individuals made a significant difference in the survival of Philadelphia during its most horrible period when the city stood firmly on the verge of anarchy and self-destruction

In addition, the Bethel Burial Ground (BBG) is archaeologically important.

The BBG offers the opportunity for scientists to examine from a multidisciplinary biocultural perspective the health, diet, lifestyles, living conditions and diseases of an urban and free (non-slave) 19th century African American population. It especially offers a unique physical anthropological exploration of African American skeletal biology in the assessment of health and disease status in antebellum Philadelphia.

The primary sources of Philadelphia African American history are few compared to other ethnic groups. The BBG offers the potential to add significantly to this historical record. Any archaeological investigation would reveal important burial customs, funeral practices and spiritual beliefs of this population. The study of these phenomenons could in turn reveal African origins, ancestry, and cultural heritage. Burial practices tend to be among the most conservative or least changed factors of a group's material culture. The oldest and most persistent values are sometimes preserved only in cemeteries. The BBG has the distinct importance of being relatively undisturbed after its sale to the City in 1888. The shift from burial ground to city park had the advantage of very little digging or excavation occurring on the property. The digging that did take place was shallow and probably did not reach the level of the skeletal remains.

Cotter, Roberts and Parrington (1992), Rankin-Hill (1997) and Yamin (2008) have stated that the excavation of the First African Baptist Church Cemetery (FABC) in the mid-1980s in Philadelphia was important and crucial to understanding the African American community of the 19th century in the Philadelphia.

The Bethel Burying Ground (BBG) site has the potential of being much more significant. Both burial grounds were in existence at the same period of time for 17 years from 1825 – 1842. They were only two miles apart. Moreover the BBG existed 15 years before (1810) and 46 years after (1888) the FABC cemetery. The FABC site yielded 146 skeletal remains. To date, with only approximately 50% of the research accomplished, there is documentation for 1,378 burials at the Bethel Burying Ground.

In addition, the National Museum of African American History and Culture of the Smithsonian Institution is planning to exhibit the original copy of the BBG 1810 land deed that was the possession of Rev. Richard Allen and the Mother Bethel trustees. In doing this the nation's most prestigious archeological institution is acknowledging the importance of the BBG and the need for its preservation.

Land Indenture for Bethel AME Church, 1810, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

8. Major Bibliographical References

1862 City Map of Philadelphia by Samuel L. Smedley

City of Philadelphia Deed Book, I.C., no. 28, 469-471.

Richard S. Newman, Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers; New York University Press, 2008.

City of Philadelphia Deed Book, GGP, 2 Jan 1890: 573, 172.

Philadelphia City Death Certificates (PCDC) originals are available the City Archives of Philadelphia and online at FamilySearch.org.

Stephanie G. Oberle, *The Influence of Thomas Meehan*, A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Public Horticulture Administration, Spring 1997.

Minutes of the Bethel Trustees, 1878-1891. Available at the Mother Bethel Church archives.

Numerous newspaper articles from the *Philadelphia Inquirer, New York Times, Public Ledger* and the *Christian Recorder.*

Philadelphia Board of Health Minutes, 5 May 1885; Nuisance 1521, p. 273. Available at the Philadelphia City Archives.

The Playground, no. 15, June 1908, published by the Executive Committee of the Playground Association of American.

John W. Harshberger, PhD, *The Botanists of Philadelphia and Their Work*, 1899, p. 252-253.

The Gardeners' Chronicle: A Weekly Illustrated Journal of Horticulture and Allied Subjects, vol. v, 3rd series, Jan to June, 1889, London, p. 529.

Appleton's Magazine, vol. 5, January-June 1905.

The Nature-Study Review, vol. 1, 1905, p.34; Published by the U.S. Bureau of Education.

James Ralph Jewell, *Agricultural Education including Nature Study and School Gardens*, Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Education, whole no., 368, bulletin no. 2, 1907, p. 212-217

U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Annual Report of the Office of Experiment Stations for the year ended June 30, 1905, printed 1906, p. 356-7.

Annual Report of the Mayor of Philadelphia . . .for the Year ending 31 Dec 1912, vol. 1, 1913, p. 706.

Ordinances of the City of Philadelphia from January 1 to December 31, 1912, printed 1913.

Philadelphia's Progress in Playgrounds and Municipal Recreation: Report of the Board of Recreation, January 1, 1914, p. 14-15.

Lesley M. Rankin Hill, *A Biohistory of 19th-Century Afro-Americans: The Burial Remains of a Philadelphia Cemetery* (1997).

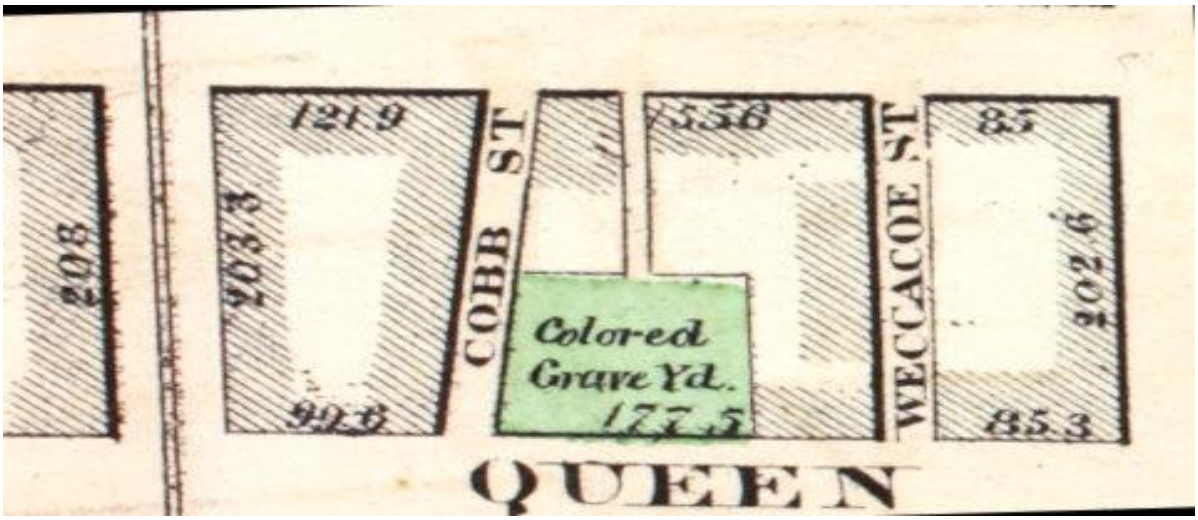
Rebecca Yamin, *Digging in the City of Brotherly Love* (2008)

Cotter, Roberts and Parrington, *The Buried Past: An Archaeological History of Philadelphia* (1992).

WECCACOE: BURYING GROUND, GARDEN, PARK AND PLAYGROUND – A HISTORICAL SKETCH AND TIMELINE FROM 1810 - 2012.

BURYING GROUND, GARDEN, PARK AND PLAYGROUND

THE BEGINNING: 121 ft. x 103 ft. (.767 acres)



(1862 City Map of Philadelphia by Samuel L. Smedley (Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia)

The parcel of ground bordered by the 400 block of Queen Street to the south and 800 block of Lawrence Street (formerly Cobb Street) to the west in the Queen's Village section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania has a unique history.

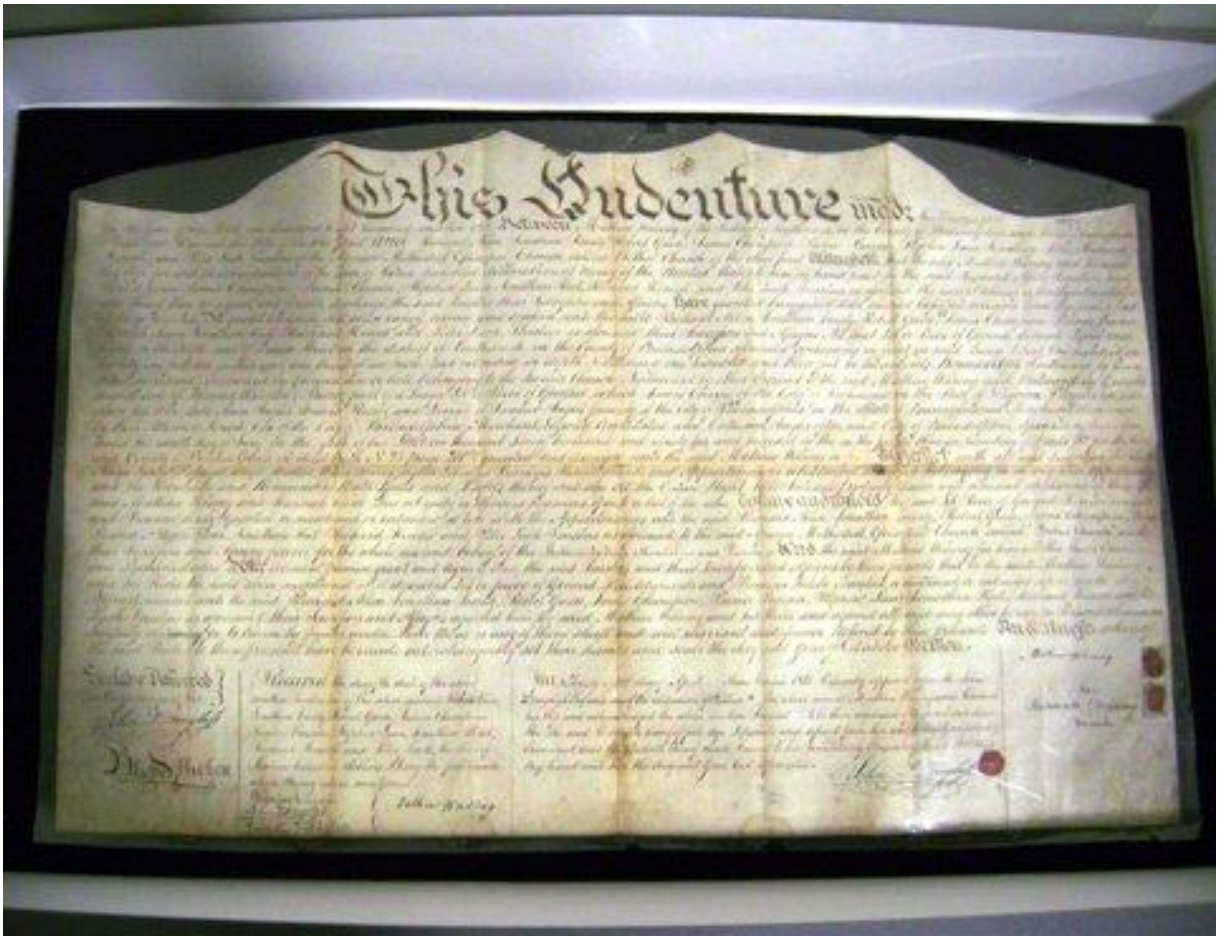
Now known as Weccacoe Playground, the plot was purchased by Reverend Richard Allen and the trustees of Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church on April 28, 1810 for $1,600.[1] The Mother Bethel congregation had risen to quickly 1,200 in 1810 from several hundred members in 1805. This necessitated the building of a larger church and the need for more burial space than the very small amount of land available around the church at 6th and Lombard Streets. Also adding to the immediate need for land was the 1795 closing of the "Stranger's Burial Ground" located in a corner of Washington Square that had long been used as a burying ground for persons of color. Reverend Allen and the trustees of Mother Bethel were committed to providing "burial aid" as part of the church's mission. When congregants lost a family member and could not pay the cost of a funeral, the church offered loans that in numerous cases could not be paid back. In addition, Reverend Allen believed that one of the fundamental services his church could offer was the availability of a proper burials, not only for church

[1] Deed Book I.C., no. 28, 469-471. Original is available at the City Archives of Philadelphia).

members of the 5th and 7th wards, but also the working poor and wretchedly destitute that lived in districts of Southwark and Moyamensing.[2]

Richard Allen was also a successful businessman who knew the value of owning real estate and pursued the purchase of the first major free standing (not a churchyard) African American burial ground in Philadelphia. The sellers were Matthew and Hannah Waring, Irish immigrants and Free Quakers, who lived on Catharine Street very near the plot of land.

Previously it was a part of a larger plot owned by Dr. James Currie[3] of Richmond, Virginia. The area was surveyed at one hundred twenty-one feet two inches (east to west), extending in depth northward one hundred three feet.[4]



[2] Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers*; New York University Press, 2008.

[3] James Currie was a relative of Dr. William Currie, a Philadelphia physician, who work was critical during the Yellow Fever epidemics of the late 1700s in the city.

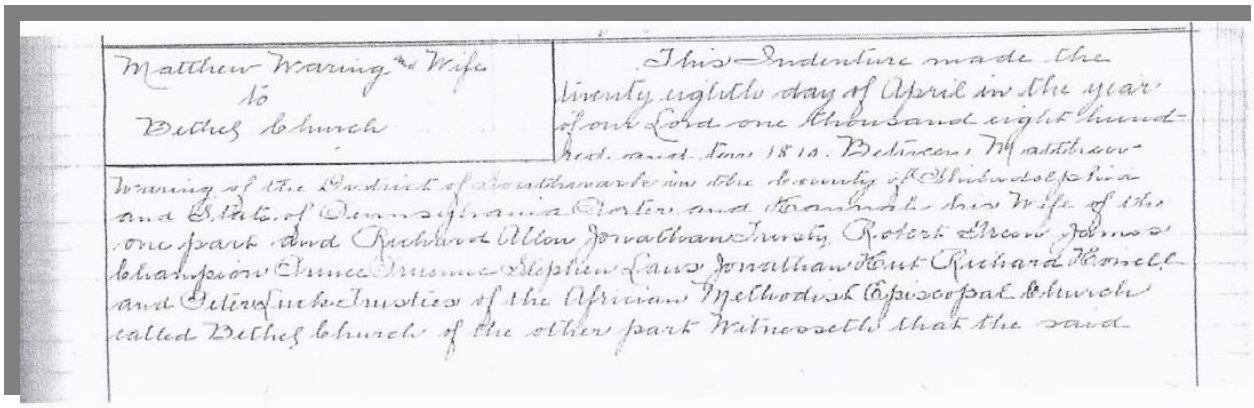
[4] *City of Philadelphia Deed Book*, GGP, 2 Jan 1890: 573, 172. Original is available at the City Archives of Philadelphia.

Land Indenture for Bethel AME Church, ca. 1810, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (Permission must be obtained before reproduction)

TIMELINE OF THE BETHEL BURIAL GROUND ON QUEEN STREET

Bronze sculpture by artist Frank Bender based on forensic facial reconstructions of three intact skeletons exhumed at the African Burial Ground in New York City. (National Park Service photo)

Prior to March 7, 1810:	In late February or early March of 1810, the trustees of the Ebenezer Methodist Church of Southward considered the purchase of the Queen Street lot for use as a burial ground. The asking price was $1,700. They instead purchased a lot on Christian Street. (*The History of Ebenezer M.E. Church of Southward, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1890, 62).
28 April 1810:	The parcel of ground bordered by the 400 block of Queen Street to the south, the 400 block of Catharine Street to the north, the 800 block of Leithgow Street (formerly Weccacoe Street) to the east and the 800 block of Lawrence Street (formerly Cobb Street) to the west in the Queen's Village section of Philadelphia is purchased by Reverend Richard Allen and the Trustees of Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church on April 28, 1810 for $1,600.



Matthew Waring and Wife
to
Bethel Church

This Indenture made the twenty eighth day of April in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and ten 1810. Between Matthew Waring of the District of Southwark in the County of Philadelphia and State of Pennsylvania Porter and Hannah his Wife of the one part and Richard Allen Jonathan Trusty Robert Green James Champion Prince Truemee Stephen Laws Jonathan Hut Richard Howell and Peter Luck Trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Church called Bethel Church of the other part Witnesseth that the said

Original Deed of Sale, Deed Book I.C., no. 28, 469-471 (City Archives of Philadelphia)

19 June 1810:	Died:	Mary Turner
	Age:	24 years
	Trade:	Spinner
	Resided:	Southwark
	Habits of life:	Sober
	COD:	Mortification of the Uterus [5]

***The African Burial Ground* by Charles Kelly, 18894; New York Public Library, Schomburg Center for Black Culture**

[5] Philadelphia City Death Certificates (PCDC) originals are available the City Archives of Philadelphia and online at FamilySearch.org.

19 July 1813: Richard, an enslaved Black man, dies at "about 50 years" and is buried at BBG. His enslaver was Philadelphia merchant John Stille. (PCDC)

6 Dec 1813: James Champion, 47, an original Mother Bethel trustee dies of Tuberculosis and is buried at BBG. (PCDC)

7 April 1814: Stephen Laws, 60, an original Mother Bethel trustee dies of Typhoid Fever and is buried at BBG. (PCDC)

5 Oct 1814: Feticita Ardica, a 50-60 year old woman, dies of Dysentery and is buried at BBG. She was born in Guinea, Africa. (PCDC)

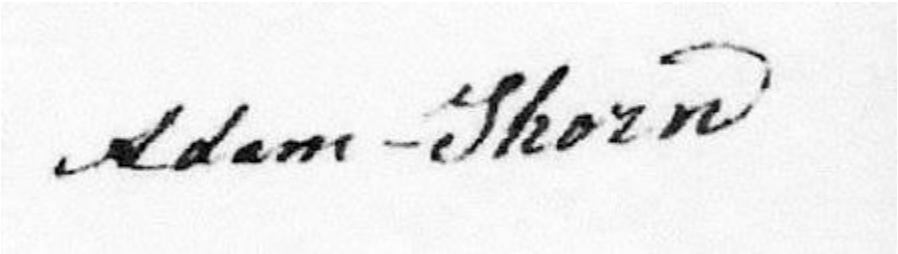
1820: Richard Allen's "Sword of Truth" pamphlet states that Mother Bethel has spent between $1,200 and $1,500 by "crediting funerals." (Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, p.150.)

Reverend Richard Allen

22 May 1823: Fillis Garnet, age 113 years old, dies of "old age" and is buried at BBG. (PCDC)

9 Feb 1824: John Rumsey, servant to Major Gamble, USMC, dies at the Philadelphia Naval Hospital from Bilious Fever and is buried at BBG. (PCDC)

Adam Thorn, 46 years old, is buried at BBG. He was the Mother Bethel sexton and graveyard manager. He lived at 4th Street above Pine Street and died of Typhoid Fever. (PCDC)



1824: Typhus and Cholera epidemics swept the city and took many of the family members that co-founded Mother Bethel Church and are buried at BBG.

1826: The Union Benevolent Sons of Mother Bethel, a burial assistance charity, is established by Bishop Allen with Reverend Morris Brown as its head. (See Newman, 288-89.)

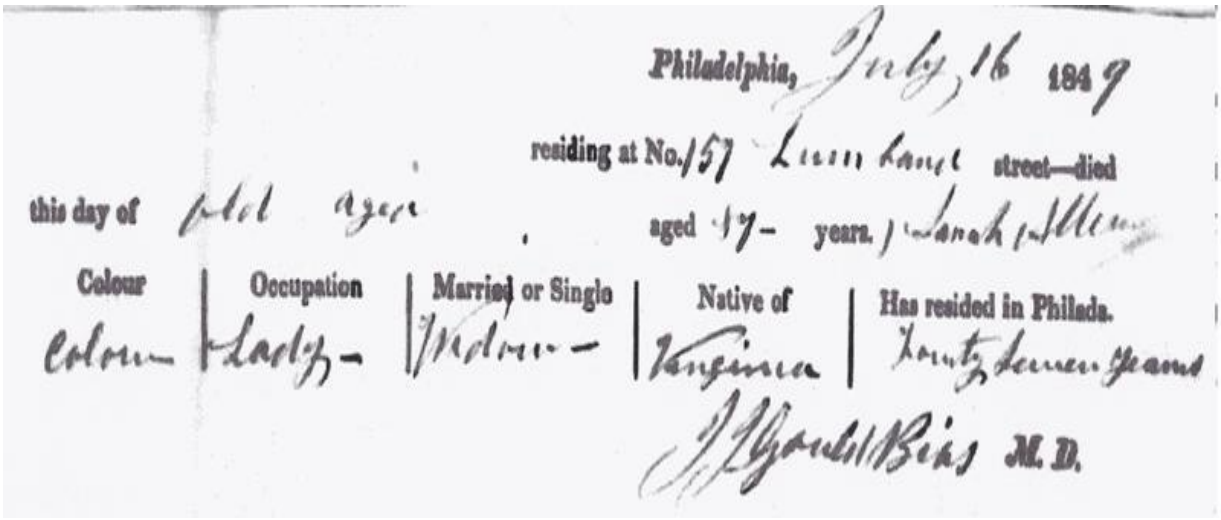
1835: BBG is included in the city guide "Picture of Philadelphia: Being a complete guide for strangers." Map coordinates are given for "Bethel Church-Burial Ground." (p. 232)

1842: Ben Smith, an African American, is arrested by a watchman of Moyamensing for stealing a body from BBG. Mr. Smith was committed to prison. (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, 25 Oct 1842)

1 June 1844 Mother Bethel pastor Rev. Richard Williams (1840-1844) dies in a coma and is buried at BBG. He is praised by Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne as a man who "performed some of the most painful, laborious and important missions of the itinerant service." (History *of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*: Electronic Edition. Payne, Daniel Alexander, 1811-1893; edited by C.S. Smith.)

12 May 1848: Rev. John Boggs, one of the early legends of the itinerant ranks of AME clergy, is buried at BBG. His funeral was attended by one thousand mourners including 200 clergymen. (PCDC and *My Recollections of African M. E. Ministers, or Forty Years' Experience in the African Methodist Episcopal Church*: Electronic Edition. Wayman, A. W., 1821-1895.)

July 1849: Sarah Bass Allen, heroic nurse during Yellow Fever epidemic of 1793 & 2nd wife of Richard Allen, is buried at the BBG (PCDC) and eventually reburied with her husband in the lower level of Mother Bethel Church.


Philadelphia, July 16 1849
residing at No. 157 Lumbard street—died
this day of old age aged 47 years. Sarah Allen

Colour	Occupation	Married or Single	Native of	Has resided in Philada.
Colour	Lady	Widow	Virginia	Forty seven years

J. J. Gould Bias M.D.

14 Oct 1849: Ignatius Beck is buried at BBG. As a enslaved laborer worked on the construction of the U.S. Capitol Building. (See author for additional research.)

1850: Bethel burial records "were lost," according to William Carl Bolivar, "in the church Dissension of 1850." (*The Philadelphia Tribune,* 10 Oct 1914)

1 Jan 1869: "Sixty years after the purchase of the ground that was long used by Mother Bethel as a burial ground," the Trustees of Bethel rented the burial ground out on the first of January, 1869 to Barnabas H. Bartol, a sugar refiner, for 10 years at $500 per year; the lot is to be used for the storage of wagons and drays. (*The Philadelphia Tribune,* 3 December 1921)

City of Philadelphia Deed book JTO 209, 1869 January 1, p. 30 - : "The African A.M.E. Church of the City of Philadelphia to Barnabas H. Bartol ... party of 1st part leases to party of 2nd part of a lot on north side of Queen St. between 4th and 5th...." the same having been used and occupied by the parties of the first part hereto commonly known as the Bethel Church for the purposes of burial".... provided "that the remains of the dead who are interred in the said lot of ground are to be allowed to remain there undisturbed." (Emphasis added)

6 July 1872: An article appears in *The Christian Recorder* by the editor Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner calling attention to the shameful condition of "the burial ground of Bethel Church." The article exclaimed ". . . is there no more precious dust" than those who are buried there. These men and women, these "heroes and heroines" are responsible for what Mother Bethel is today.

3 August 1872:	Another article appears in *The Christian Recorder* calling attention to the disgrace of Bethel trustees who have let the "consecrated grounds" of the church's "Old Burial Ground" on Queen Street crumble. The plot is in gross disrepair and has been rented out for $500 a month to a company that dumps rubbish, old hogsheads, barrels and lumber over the graves. "There is not a grave stone unbroken and not a grave to be seen – all in confusion and shame."
6 June 1873:	In June of 1873, Barlot (the lessee of the plot) sought to be released from his agreement. The Bethel Trustees, led by Theodore Gould, did so on June 6, 1873 for a cash settlement and the erection of a "good fence" around the lot. (*Minutes of the Bethel Trustees 1878-1891*)
14 Dec 1882:	Another article in *The Christian Reporter* states that the ". . . graveyard of Bethel Church, where sleep the dead fathers and mothers of our Connection" is in a condition "not credible to us as a church."
20 Feb 1883:	Thomas Meehan elected to Common Council of the City of Philadelphia. He was responsible for identifying and lobbying for the establishment of community parks and playgrounds including BBG. (Stephanie G. Oberle, *The Influence of Thomas Meeham*, A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Public Horticulture Administration, Spring 1997; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 June 1912; *NYT*, 1 Sept 1895.)
1 April 1885:	President of the Board of Trustees for Mother Bethel introduces a motion that a sign be purchased advertising the sale of the Queen Street lot. It is also proposed that an advertisement be place in the "Ledger." (*Minutes of the Bethel Trustees 1878-1891*)
5 May 1885:	"Resolved that the defective retaining wall of the African A.M.E. Church Burying Ground west of 411 Queen Street . . . are on account of their condition, nuisances prejudicial to public health, and as such the owners or agents thereinof have failed to abate the nuisances in the manner hereinafter specified in accordance with the law, and the rules of the Board; viz." (*Philadelphia Board of Health Minutes*, 5 May 1885; Nuisance 1521, p. 273)
1 April 1886:	At a Bethel trustees' meeting "Brother Cornish" asks his fellow trustees how many lots they desire for the reburial of the dead in the "Queen Burying Ground." It was also suggested that "a large box or boxes" be purchased for the bones and then interred at Olive Cemetery. There is no evidence that this was ever accomplished. (*Minutes of the Bethel Trustees*)

12 April 1886: At a Bethel Corporation meeting, it is requested by George F. Woodson that the retiring trustees and officers remain after the meeting to discuss the erection of a building on the Queen Street lot. (*Minutes of the Bethel Trustees*)

10 Oct 1887: Two nuisance complaints had been filed against the lack of upkeep on the burial ground. Trustee Shadd asks what has been done "to keep the Board of Health from the Queen Street lot." The president of the board reports that a contract was issued to have a new fence erected and that he had obtained a building permit to have a building erected on the lot. (*Minutes of the Bethel Trustees*)

1 Mar 1889: "Survey notice: Notice is hereby given that the Board of Surveyor has fixed upon Monday, March 2-5, 1889, at 10 a.m. for a hearing of all parties interested in the confirmation of the following plans: a plan of the lines of the Weccacoe Square at the Northeast corner of Queen and Cobb St. in the 3rd Ward. " (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 1, 1889, p. 7)

30 March 1889: William Carl Bolivar, historian and journalist, reports in the *Philadelphia Tribune* that there is an offer of $10,000 from the city to the Bethel trustees for the burial ground. He recommends accepting the offer "Since it is apparent that the present officials of Bethel cannot or do not keep the grounds in the condition it should be kept."

He also reports:
+ The burial ground contains "old, old members of the Church."

+ "Bishop Allen set apart a place where they (the dead) could have a proper kind of Christian burial."

+ "Twenty-five years have passed since the last burial (1864).

William Carl Bolivar

16 April 1889: "An ordinance to appropriate $10,000 to purchase a plot of ground on Queen Street, to be turned into a square to be known as 'Weccacoe Park,' was ordered negatively reported." (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 16, 1889, p. 3)

21 April 1889: Board of Surveyor has confirmed lines on Weccacoe Square between 4th and 5th on Queen Street. (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 21, 1889, p. 3)

24 May 1889: The Select Council of the City of Philadelphia transfers $10,000 from the Department of Public Safety for the purchase and improvement of Weccacoe Square, to the department of Public Works for the repaving of Queen Street between 4th and 5th streets.

25 Nov 1889: "An ordinance to amend an ordinance approved December 24, 1888, entitled 'an ordinance to make an appropriation to the Department of Public Safety for 1889.' "

Section 1. The select and Common Councils of the city of Philadelphia do ordain:

That Item 41, Section 8, of the Ordinance approved December 24, 1888, making an appropriation for 1889 to the Department of Public Safety (Bureau of City Property) , be amended by striking out the words "and improvement" as that the item will read "for the purchase of Weccacoe Square," ten thousand ($10,000) dollars.

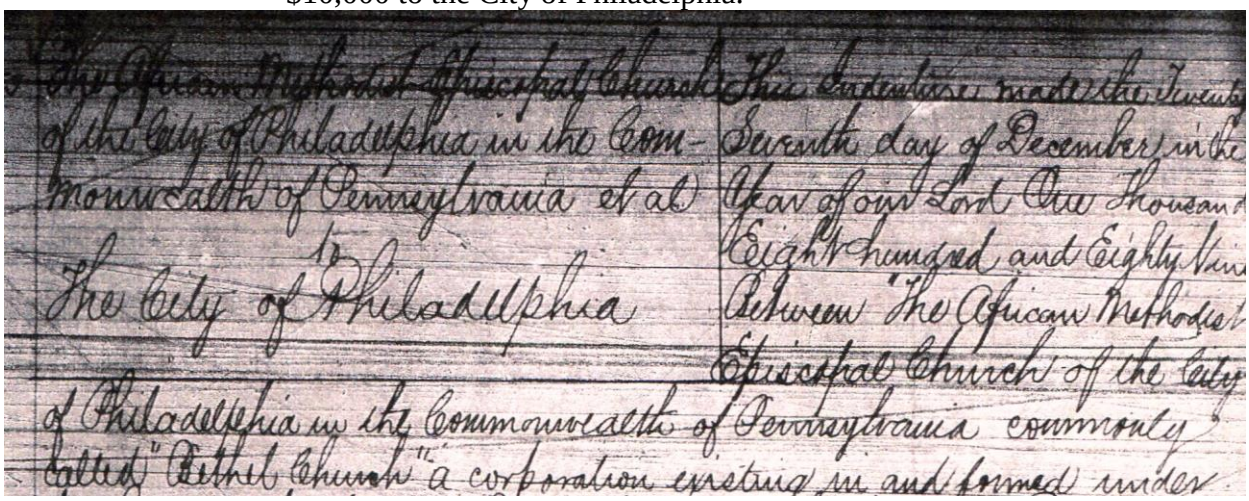
Approved this fourteenth day of November, A.D. 1889, Edwin H. Fitler, Mayor of Philadelphia." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov 25, 1889, p. 5.

2 Dec 1889: At a specially called meeting of the Mother Bethel Corporation, President D.W. Parvis states the City of Philadelphia has "ordained" that the BBG be used for a park. In addition, it is necessary for the Corporation to vote to empower the trustees to sell the plot for $10,000 and the money is to be directed to be used for the improvement of the 6th and Lombard Streets properties. The Corporation voted unanimously 20-0 in favor of the sale. (*Minutes of the Bethel Trustees*)

11 Dec 1889: *The Philadelphia Ledger* reports "The Board of Health yesterday amended the rules governing the removal and interment of bodies." (Researcher's Note: *The Minutes of the Board of Health for the City of Philadelphia* was examined at the City Archives for their weekly meeting that was held on 10 Dec 1889. There is no written record of any motion, vote or correspondence in reference to any changes to body removal or interment rules, ordnances or laws.)

19 Dec 1889: *The Philadelphia Ledger* reports that the trustees of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church received the purchase money for Weccacoe Square. The Square is the first plot actually acquired as a result of the "Small Park" movement.

27 Dec 1889: Sales agreement signed by Mother Bethel trustees selling the BBG for $10,000 to the City of Philadelphia.


The African Methodist Episcopal Church of the City of Philadelphia in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania et al to The City of Philadelphia

This Indenture made the Twenty Seventh day of December in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Eight hundred and Eighty Nine Between The African Methodist Episcopal Church of the City of Philadelphia in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania commonly called "Bethel Church" a corporation existing in and formed under

5 Feb 1890 President D.W. Parvis reports on behalf of the Real Estate Committee that the "Queen Street lot" has been sold to the City of Philadelphia for $10,000. In addition, Mr. Parvis reports that board member Charles Jenkins had an interview with Wendell P. Bowman, Esquire. Mr. Bowman "points out" that he had "difficulties" in securing the high amount for the burial ground ($10,000). Mr. Bowman's fee is $1,250. Trustee Parvis states he would be willing to check out with "other lawyers" to ascertain if the fee is excessive. Pastor Shaffer is in attendance. (*Minutes of the Bethel Trustees*) (Researcher's note: Mr. Bowman is a white, Republican powerbroker and lobbyist. He is debatably one of the most influential men, in Philadelphia politics at this time.)

20 Aug 1890: "Contractor Filbert is getting Weccacoe Square, Queen St. east of Fifth, ready for Promenaders. The site **is** that of an abandoned burial ground for colored people." [Emphasis added] *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug 20, 1890, p.1. (Emphasis added)

By all accounts, the condition of the graveyard in 1889 was a rubbish strewn, "hard clay" lot that was used as a trash dump and a space for neighborhood children to play. There were no headstones or other artifacts to indicate that a burial ground existed there, although newspaper accounts indicate it was common knowledge. The lot remained untouched for the next ten years. Even though the Select Council of the City in July of 1896 directed a portion of "the Weccacoe Park to be opened" and awarded a contracted for certain "buildings" to be demolished on the property, it wasn't until June of 1899 that the city legislature approved the appropriation of

$10,000 for the improvement of the property and to repave Queen Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets.[6] A contractor was hired to ready "Weccacoe Square" for "promenaders." It was reported that the property is the site of "an abandoned burial ground for colored people."[7]

Arbor Day was observed in the Park in the spring of 1901 with the planting of saplings and again in 1902.[8]

Circa 1900 photograph is of the "hard clay" lot and the surrounding neighborhood. (From the magazine, *The Playground*, no. 15, June 1908, p. 5, published by the Executive Committee of the Playground Association of American. Available at Google Books)

WECCACOE PARK: THE SCHOOL GARDEN MOVEMENT

The "School Garden Movement" was introduced to America by Henry Lincoln Clapp in 1890. He was the head master of the George Putnam Boys' Grammar School in Boston and a respected educator. The purpose of the program was industrial training and keeping young people occupied, off the streets and out of trouble. The movement did not gain national prominence until 1902 and by 1904 thirty-five cities and towns had established school gardens including Philadelphia which boasted the second largest collection (next to NYC) in the country. Weccacoe Park was the first selected for a garden by the city government.

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[6] *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 June 1889.

[7] Ibid., 20 Aug 1890.

[8] Ibid., 12 Apr 1901 and 5 Apr 1902.

The Queen Street lot had long been championed by renowned botanist, horticulturalist and long time city councilman, Thomas Meehan. He chose the lot as an ideal location for a park and lobbied yearly for appropriations and organizational assistance. Weccacoe Square was used as a school garden by local sixth and seventh graders during the growing seasons of 1904 and 1905. After 1905, the program was moved to a lot located at Porter and 5th Streets opposite the Taggard School. [9]

Two initial plowings of the lot revealed many layers of 'broken bricks' with a bottom surface of "hard clay." After further nurturing, the Weccacoe garden consisted of 250 single plots 4.5 ft. by 11.5 ft. that were tended by a single student. There were also 18 general plots that were used for instruction and to grow grain. The Weccacoe program engaged 250 students yearly. The immediate effect of engaging the students was that "Gambling and rioting have disappeared from the neighborhood, there have been fewer arrests than before and the college settlement, a block away, reported that 'never had there been a summer so peaceful.' "[10]

Perhaps a longer lasting effect of the movement was the mandatory establishment of an accompanying playground attached to the gardens. The rudimentary playground at Weccacoe took up one third of the entire lot and included softball (there was not enough room for hardball), basketball, ring toss and a punching bag. The average attendance in the playground was a reported average of 100 children a day.[11]

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[9] John W. Harshberger, PhD, *The Botanists of Philadelphia and Their Work*, 1899, p. 252-253. Available at Google Books; *The Gardeners' Chronicle: A Weekly Illustrated Journal of Horticulture and Allied Subjects*, vol. v, 3rd series, Jan to June, 1889, London, p. 529. Available at Google Books; also see, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 June 1912; *NYT*, 1 Sept 1895; Stephanie G. Oberle, *The Influence of Thomas Meeham*. The above photograph was published in *Appleton's Magazine*, vol. 5, January-June 1905.

[10] *The Nature-Study Review*, vol. 1, 1905, p.34; Published by the U.S. Bureau of Education and available through Google Books; James Ralph Jewell, *Agricultural Education including Nature Study and School Gardens*, Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Education, whole no., 368, bulletin no. 2, 1907, p. 212-217 and available through Google Books; *U.S. Dept of Agriculture, Annual Report of the Office of Experiment Stations for the year ended June 30, 1905*, printed 1906, p. 356-7; *The Booklovers Magazine* (later "Appleton's Magazine"), vol. 5, Jan-June, 1905, p. 468-478 and available through Google Books; *Philadelphia Inquirer* articles on the Park's gardening era include: 25 Feb 1904, 9 Mar 1904, 17 Apr 1904, 24 May 1904, 20 Oct 1904 and 23 Dec 1904.

[11] *The Booklovers Magazine*, p. 473; *Annual Report of the Mayor of Philadelphia . . .for the Year ending 31 Dec 1912*, vol. 1, 1913, p. 706. Both are available through Google Books. Note: For remarkable photographs of the plot before and after the garden was planted see *The Playground*, a monthly journal published by The Playground Association of America, no. 15, June 1908, p. 2-6. Available at Google Books.

The above photograph is from the *Evening Ledger*, 1 Feb 1915, p.1

WECCACOE: THE PLAYGROUND

Now established as one of the nicest parks in the vicinity, it hosted 4th of July celebrations, carnivals, pageants and athletic events through the first couple of decades of the 20th century. [12]

Weccacoe Playground was one of nine city playgrounds under the control of a quasi-governmental agency called the Philadelphia Playground Association that relinquished oversight in 1910 to the Bureau of City Properties which in turn transferred responsibility to the Board of Recreation in 1912. The park system created a valuable amount of political patronage jobs that resulted in a tug of war between city agencies.[13]

Statistically speaking, the neighborhood playground was very popular. In 1913 it was reported that the usage at a nearby playground at 7th and Lombard broke down to "64% of the boys and girls were Russian Hebrew, 12% Italian, 15% colored and 9% miscellaneous." A year later, Weccacoe's recorded attendance was 66,314 in an 8 month period against 55,350 in 7 months in 1913. The Board of Recreation in their annual report to the City strongly suggested the acquisition of adjacent land to expand the crowded and popular park.[14]

[12] *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 July 1905, 19 June 1910, 29 June 1911, 2 July 1911, 16 June 1912, 7 June 1914, 6 June 1915, 4 June 1916, 27 May 1917 and 5 July 1917; the above photograph is from *The Philadelphia Ledger*, 1 Feb 1915, p.1.

[13] Ibid, 17 Oct 1910; *Ordinances of the City of Philadelphia from January 1 to December 31, 1912*, printed 1913 and available on Google Books.

[14] Ibid, 20 July 1913; *Philadelphia's Progress in Playgrounds and Municipal Recreation: Report of the Board of Recreation, January 1, 1914*, p. 14-15. Available at Google Books; photograph from the City Archives of Philadelphia.

As of 1921, there was an active “Weccacoe Playground Association” which appears to be the predecessor of today’s Friends of Weccacoe Playground and the Queen Village Neighborhood Association (QVNA). These volunteers help to maintain the facility as a clean, beautiful and safe respite. Weccacoe Playground is one of the few playgrounds in Philadelphia with a full-size, professional tennis court where anyone can play and each summer there is a youth tennis league. The Playground also houses a recreation center, which serves as QVNA's office and a neighborhood meeting place for community activities, children's events, and other meetings.[15]

Weccacoe Playground as it stands today. Renovations plans have been created and funds have been raised for its renovation. Construction will include excavation for sewer, water and electrical lines and for the planting of trees. For further information on the renovation plans and fundraising efforts go to http://www.weccacoe.org/. (Photograph from renovation plans which are available at website.)

-End-

[15] See, http://www.qvna.org/committees/weccacoe.htm.

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