

NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION *62 pp.*

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

1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE (must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)

Street address: 700 South 9th Street

Postal code: 19147

Councilmanic District: First (1st)

OPA # 781608700

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: "Ronaldson's Philadelphia Cemetery"

Common Name: Palumbo Playground

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☐ Building

☐ Structure

☒ Site

☐ Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

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

Occupancy: ☐ occupied ☒ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: Playing fields for sports; playground.

This is a City-owned property.

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach a plot plan and written description of the boundary.

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach a description of the historic resource and supplement with current photographs.

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1827 to 1950

Date(s) of ~~construction and/or alteration~~ Activity from 1827 to 1950

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: James Ronaldson (1768-1841)

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: not applicable

Initial owner: "The Philadelphia Cemetery, Inc." now, City

Significant persons: James Ronaldson

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

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

- ☒ (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,
- ☒ (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.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Please attach

9. NOMINATOR

Organization ----- Date -----

Name ~~with Title~~ Celeste A. Morello, MS, MA Email -----

Street Address 1234 South Sheridan Street Telephone 215.334.6008

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19147-4820

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 9/15/2021

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 10/28/2021

Date of Notice Issuance: 10/28/2021

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: Philadelphia Parks & Recreation

Address: 1515 Arch Street, 10th Floor

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19102

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: 12/1/2021

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: 1/14/2022

Date of Final Action: 1/14/2022

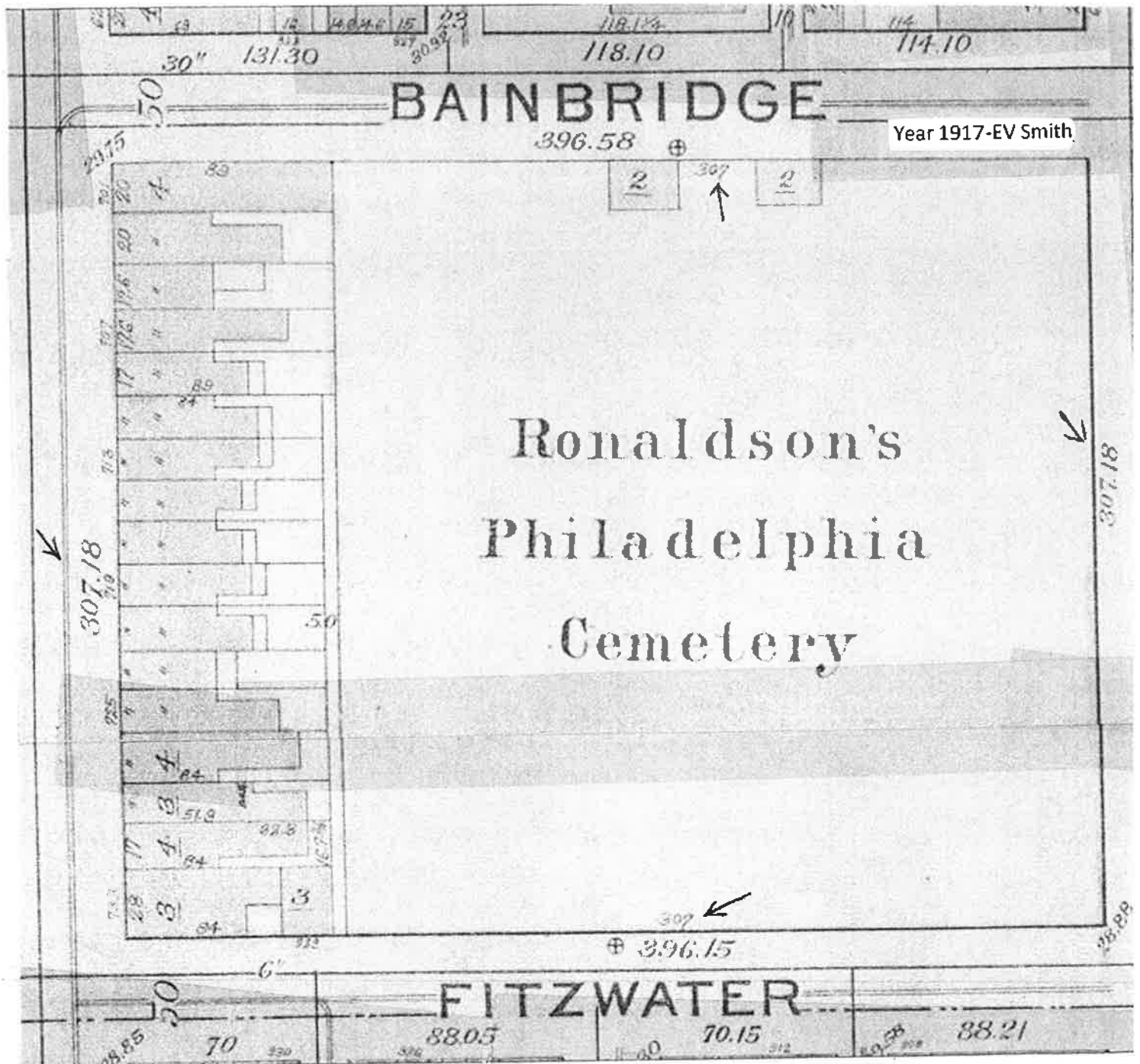
☒ Designated ☐ Rejected

Criteria A and I

BOUNDARIES:

The 1917 E.V. Smith Atlas (below) notes the nominated lot's north and south sides as "307" feet with the east and west sides measuring "307.18" feet.

This nomination only concerns this former cemetery's lot, not where the rowhouses line South 10th Street at the lot's west.



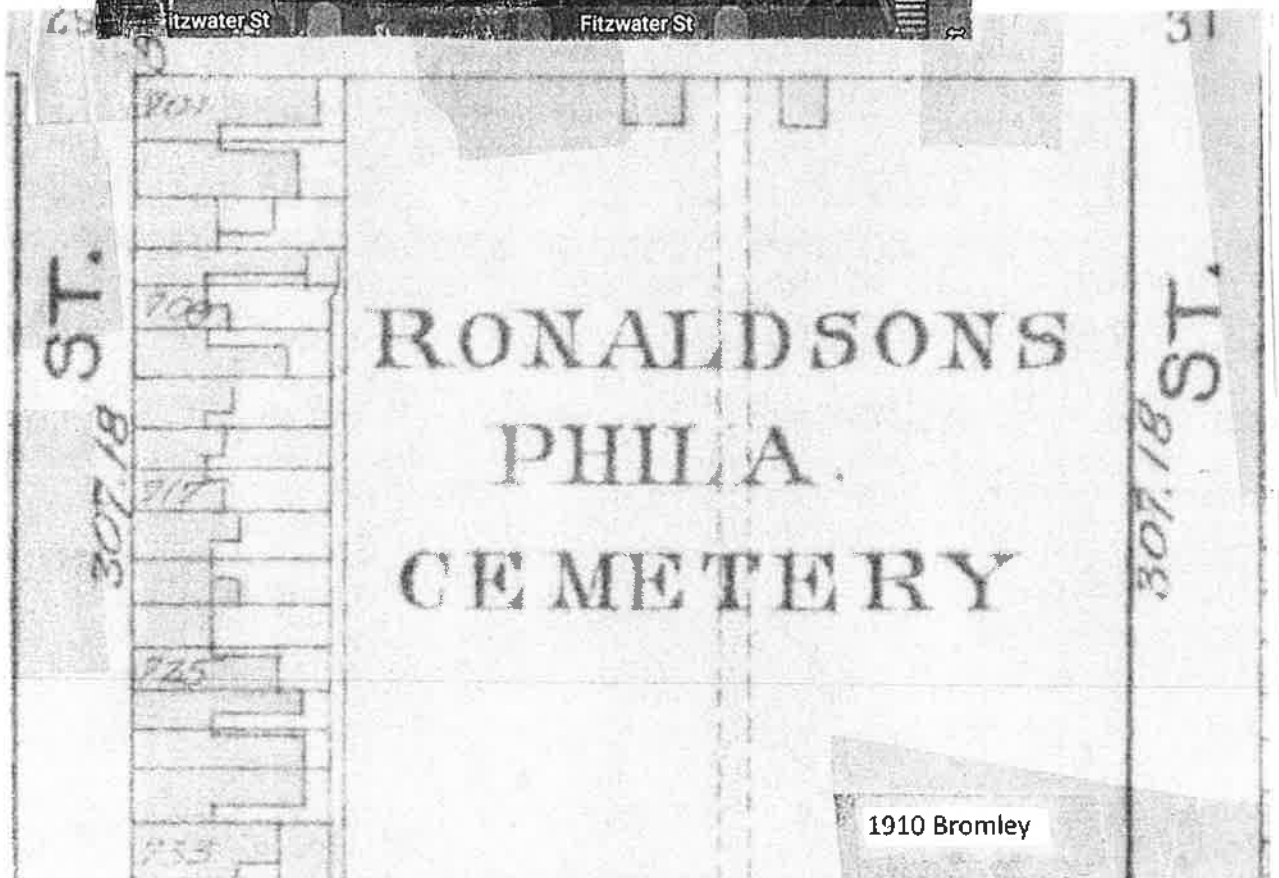
DESCRIPTION:

Below is a GoogleMaps aerial of Palumbo Playground's open field where various sports are played. This is a City-owned property since acquisition by Deed on December 27, 1949. The nominated property had been a burial ground, 1827-1950.



3-4'h mound

2021 aerial
aligned to
the 1910 map
to demonstrate
consistency.



1910 Bromley

Staff-Supplemented Boundary Description



Beginning at a point at the southwest corner of S. 9th Street and Bainbridge Street, then continuing south along S. 9th Street approximately 308 feet to the intersection of S. 9th Street and Fitzwater Street, then extending west along Fitzwater Street approximately 304 feet to a point, then extending north approximately 308 feet to a point, then extending east along Bainbridge Street approximately 304 feet back to the place of beginning. Being part of the larger parcel at 700 S. 9th Street.

Staff-Supplemented Historic Photographs



Figure 1. Exterior of gateway to Ronaldson's Cemetery, date unknown. Source: Temple University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center, City Parks Association of Philadelphia Records, <https://digital.library.temple.edu/digital/collection/p15037coll5/id/205/rec/3>.



Figure 2. View from inside the entrance gate, date unknown. Source: Temple University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center, City Parks Association of Philadelphia Records, <https://digital.library.temple.edu/digital/collection/p15037coll5/id/206/rec/4>.



Figure 3. Mayor Kendrick and President of City Council Charles B. Hall survey Ronaldson Cemetery, April 17, 1924. Source: Temple University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center, George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Collection, <https://digital.library.temple.edu/digital/collection/p15037coll3/id/509/rec/2>.



Figure 4. The main walk of Ronaldson's Cemetery looking toward the entrance gate, May 1927. Source: Temple University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center, [City Parks Association of Philadelphia Records](https://digital.library.temple.edu/digital/collection/p15037coll5/id/212/rec/5), <https://digital.library.temple.edu/digital/collection/p15037coll5/id/212/rec/5>.



Figure 5. James Ronaldson's monument, May 1927. Source: Temple University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center, City Parks Association of Philadelphia Records, <https://digital.library.temple.edu/digital/collection/p15037coll5/id/213/rec/6>.



Figure 6. Ronaldson's Cemetery looking east towards S. 9th Street, February 13, 1947. Source: Temple University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center, George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Collection, <https://digital.library.temple.edu/digital/collection/p15037coll3/id/496/rec/1>.

Staff-Supplemented Current Photographs



Figure 7. Looking northeast from the entrance on Fitzwater Street. No above-ground historic resources remain. October 2021.



Figure 8. View south from Bainbridge Street. No above-ground historic resources remain. October 2021.



Figure 9. Playground occupying the southern end of the subject property. This is the same view as the historic view in Figure 6 from 1947. October 2021.

STATEMENT of SIGNIFICANCE:

From 1827 to 1950, "Palumbo Playground" in Bella Vista had been used as a burial ground known as "Ronaldson's" but incorporated as "The Philadelphia Cemetery" in 1833. It was a garden-type resting place, holding "13,500"¹ deceased when converted by the City into a playground after exhuming all of the remains in 1950. Designed by James Ronaldson (1768-1841), a local businessmen, philanthropist and first president of the Franklin Institute, he created a non-sectarian, landscaped area with paths and deeded plots for his venture which Laurel Hill Cemetery later implimented, as acknowledged by that cemetery's designer, John Jay Smith. Scharf & Westcott's History of Philadelphia (1884) distinguished "Ronaldson's" as "the model burying-place of the city"² when dozens of other cemeteries had already formed. HABS Historian Aaron V. Wunsch, Ph.D. wrote in his report on Laurel Hill Cemetery on Ronaldson's novel concept of a cemetery as a business,³ with each plot deeded to the owner. Dell Upton's Another City (2008) spent pages on Ronaldson's Cemetery, again creditting it as the "progemitor" of Laurel Hill Cemetery.⁴ The timing of this cemetery, its environmental design, its "privatization" concept and the changes in burial customs have significant interest in American history and ths site holds probable specimens from the 1820s to 1918 that have historic value.

The City's exhumation of Ronaldson's "13,500" remains are now⁵ at Forest Hills Cemetery in a circular lot with a 50 foot diameter. This would imply that a significant amount of the original cemetery's subterranean level has "fill" from this 90,000 square foot area which had not been transported to the 50 foot wide plot at Forest Hills. My preliminary research will lend some basis that at this playground's subterranean level, there are areas which could yield a great amount of historical information from 1827 to 1918. This evidence demon-

¹ "Evening Bulletin," March 21, 1950.

² Scharf & Westcott, pp. 620i; 2359iii.

³ HABS No. PA-1811 of 1999.

⁴ Upton, Dell, Another City. Yale University Press, 2008, p. 233.

⁵ Measurements made on-site, September 9, 2021.

strates that the cemetery left considerable material specimens including bones; metal articles and personal effects; chemical residue from leaded paint, embalming fluids, lye and/or other contaminants placed prior to 1918 at the last burial. In sum, there are reasons for archaeological interest here, when the United States was about 50 years old and widening into the Industrial Revolution and urbanization periods of the City's growth. Criteria (a) and (i) will guide to qualify this site for historical designation.

Celeste A. Morello, MS, MA
September, 2021
(During COVID-19 limitations)

Below, cemetery divisions.
(Library Company of Phila.)

PLAN OF PHILADELPHIA CEMETERY,
IN THE TOWNSHIP OF MOTAMENSING, ESTABLISHED BY JAMES RONALDSON, 1896.

The Lots are 19 feet from North to South, and 8 feet from East to West.

Perspective is from the southwest corner looking towards east--
to corner of South 9th and Fitzwater Streets.

Farther beyond where the black gate is, are several vaults with
multiple graves deep below the surface--ideal for archaeological
and anthropological research.

(Photo: Temple University Special Collections.)



The former Ronaldson's Cemetery...

(a)⁶ 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.

This criterion directs that the resource demonstrate the qualifiers that do not specify whether the "character, interest or value" is overt, or in this case, at the subterranean level.⁷ For many parts of Philadelphia, burial grounds and what may be found underneath from pre-history with the Native Americans here, then with the European and Black residents from the 1600s, the "character, interest or value" has already been found to have historical significance when unearthed from below the surface area. The former Moyamensing Township in what had been the County of Philadelphia presents such an area where archaeological exploration is essential as part of interpreting historical development there.

Moyamensing Township's boundaries fluctuated during the 18th and 19th centuries even after its incorporation in 1808. West of Southwark District and south of the original City border on South (Cedar) Street, Moyamensing usually began at 6th Street from South and went west towards Broad (14th) Street, southward to indefinite bounds, according to the time and map. Perhaps because Southwark had been settled earlier, with residences erected from the shores of the Delaware River to about 5th Street, the only demarcation remained at South Street and to where there were fewer homesteads, such as those near 6th Street where many houses today resemble those closer to the river.

Philadelphia's earliest churches and synagogues had limited space around their worship sites to bury their members, but the

⁶This criterion presumes that only visible resources qualify, but criterion (i) does not require proving that the resource have same qualifiers for historical significance where "may be likely to yield."

⁷The PHC Staff had already reviewed the former St. Paul's Catholic School's lot under criterion (a) as proposed for archaeological research in August, 2021.

documentation--if it exists--does not usually correlate with sources such as Scharf and Westcott's History of Philadelphia (1884). In those volumes, cemeteries outside of the City's limits arose first in Moyamensing Township by "1826" and were non-sectarian.⁸ Recent research on the Black cemetery under the Weccaco Playground in Queen Village showed it was part of Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, having a place in City, Commonwealth and National history unrecognized by Scharf and Westcott. Construction at 8th Street and Washington Avenue in 2002 also faulted documented 19th historical sources (except on atlases) which omitted Old St. Joseph's Roman Catholic graveyard which archaeologists dated to "1824" or before, because the cemetery extended from a northern location above Washington Avenue and went southward.⁹ (Holy Trinity German Catholic Church also had a nearby cemetery from the early 19th century.) Thus, the "character, interest and value" of what is underground and yet uncovered, cannot be limited to that which is seen at hand. Varied religious cemeteries have not yet been compared.

In their historical accounts on Philadelphia's cemeteries, Scharf and Westcott attempt to differentiate between "cemetery" and "burial ground" unsuccessfully and the terms will be interchangeable herein. The authors relate the business-like approach in forming non-sectarian cemeteries first, in Moyamensing Township by "1826" with the Machpelah Cemetery arising at the same time as Ronaldson's "Philadelphia Cemetery" in 1826. The "mutual associations" coming together for privately-held cemeteries in Moyamensing Township had indeed been a step away from the religious denominational hold of their deceased members, and by 1826, deeded plots were given to those who purchased their own places to rest eternally. This new concept was thoroughly expounded by HABS historian Aaron V. Wunsch, Ph.D. in his report for National listing on Laurel Hill Cemetery.¹⁰

⁸ See Scharf and Westcott, op.cit., p. 2359iii.

⁹ Excavation and report on the Washington Avenue Project by R. Michael Stewart, Temple University Dept. of Anthropology, June, 2005.

¹⁰ HABS No. PA-1811 of 1999.

Dell Upton continued Wunsch's thesis (which was also the basis of Wunsch's doctoral dissertation), but added more on the results of Philadelphia's much-needed expansion into the County and how urbanization would be effected.¹¹ These unseen advancements in City planning and management are part of Ronaldson's Cemetery's history as it reached into the Jacksonian Era's ideals of self-responsibility and capitalism. Here at Ronaldson's, each plot on the "Plan" was individually deeded--which would later delay the City from faster ownership of the entire cemetery by 1949. Plot owners also could arrange their spaces as they wished with either upright stones, flat stones, obelisks or other types of markers. In these types of privately-held cemeteries, corporations oversaw the management and sales: it was a business agreement on death.

Ronaldson's Cemetery's "Plan" aids in quantifying the number of interments, as well as their locations if anything underground was to be excavated for historical research. Local newspapers used "13,500" as the number of remains held at the cemetery¹² when the City purchased the land with the agreement that the City would assume all costs to convert the cemetery into a playground once the last of the plot owners surrendered their eight by ten foot piece of ground. This is a figure not reckoning with the number of plots numbering 450 on each side for a total of 900 deeded plots. However, the "Account of the Cemetery" compiled in 1845 listed "6076" plots filled,¹³ even if the owners of the plots had not died. Of interest is where these deceased are, and what value their remains leave to us to bring more history of this past.

¹¹ Upton, Dell, Another City. Yale University Press, 2008 was published after Wunsch's HABS report on Laurel Hill Cemetery in 1999. Also, Wunsch's "Parceling the Picturesque: 'Rural' Cemeteries and Urban Context in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia." Ph.D. dissertation on Architecture for the University of California, Berkeley, 2009.

¹² "Evening Bulletin," March 21, 1950.

¹³ Philadelphia Cemetery Deed and Account Book. Library Company of Philadelphia.

PLAN OF PHILADELPHIA CEMETERY, IN THE TOWNSHIP OF MOYAMENSING, ESTABLISHED BY JAMES RONALDSON, 1826.

The lots are 20 feet from North to South, and 6 feet from East to West.

The entire lot has 900 spaces for single or multiple burials

The scope of historical value from a site where "13,500" were laid to rest from 1827 to 1918 had not yet been researched had not been addressed.

This grid--which continues on the next page, holds administrative information, but broader information is under the surface.

Brackets point to aggregate of vaults.(left)

Grid of lot numbers and names, organized by rows and columns. Includes a legend at the bottom left.

Row	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6	Column 7	Column 8	Column 9	Column 10	Column 11	Column 12	Column 13	Column 14	Column 15	Column 16	Column 17	Column 18	Column 19	Column 20	Column 21	Column 22	Column 23	Column 24	Column 25	Column 26	Column 27	Column 28	Column 29	Column 30	Column 31	Column 32	Column 33	Column 34	Column 35	Column 36	Column 37	Column 38	Column 39	Column 40	Column 41	Column 42	Column 43	Column 44	Column 45	Column 46	Column 47	Column 48	Column 49	Column 50	Column 51	Column 52	Column 53	Column 54	Column 55	Column 56	Column 57	Column 58	Column 59	Column 60	Column 61	Column 62	Column 63	Column 64	Column 65	Column 66	Column 67	Column 68	Column 69	Column 70	Column 71	Column 72	Column 73	Column 74	Column 75	Column 76	Column 77	Column 78	Column 79	Column 80	Column 81	Column 82	Column 83	Column 84	Column 85	Column 86	Column 87	Column 88	Column 89	Column 90	Column 91	Column 92	Column 93	Column 94	Column 95	Column 96	Column 97	Column 98	Column 99	Column 100
1	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120	121	122	123	124	125	126	127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140	141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150	151	152	153	154	155	156	157	158	159	160	161	162	163	164	165	166	167	168	169	170	171	172	173	174	175	176	177	178	179	180	181	182	183	184	185	186	187	188	189	190	191	192	193	194	195	196	197	198	199	200

Legend: For Keyes & House, lot 101 North, 10 feet East and West.

THE RONALDSON'S CEMETERY SITE:

Prior to James Ronaldson's purchase of this ground, the site was undeveloped and apparently cleared. Watson's Annals (1891) had reported that the ground served as a "celebrated skating-lot in the winter"¹⁴ which raises a question of how water settled onto the ground and whether there was sufficient drainage. Any moisture collecting on this area would have greatly affected the conditions of the subsurface to hasten decomposition and decay of the earlier burials--depending on the location of the burials. Deeper gravesites with vaults were noted mainly along Fitzwater Street at the mid-block; near the middle and close to South 9th Street side; and west of the "Keeper's House" on Bainbridge Street towards Tenth. (Refer to "Plan.") These locations may be best preserved as it seemed that the Philadelphia Cemetery Company had known which specific areas of the lot were least vulnerable to collecting water.

This lot also appeared to have had a level terrain since it was occupied--either as a "skating-lot" or with the burials. When purchased, Ronaldson prepared the ground to absorb some rainwater and snow: "He...filled up by adding several thousand loads of earth, ornamented by planting various trees and shrubs..."(1845 "Account")¹⁵ The ground was still flat.

No details were recorded on how contractors hired by the City handled the site, i.e., how deep into the ground were the remains retrieved for reburial? And, was more soil added to fill in any voided areas?

There were no regulatory directives to the depth of graves at the time, nor how much lye to use, or other means of burial. The "Washington Avenue Project" from 2002-2005 at 8th and Washington Avenue, about one-half mile from Ronaldson's, is not compara-

¹⁴Watson, John F., Annals... Phila.: E.S. Stuart, 1891, p. 137.

¹⁵See 1845 "Account" page in Appendix II herein.

ble to the possibility of a Ronaldson's archaeological study, but the extension of Old St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church's Cemetery dated to "1824" and can demonstrate what to expect at Ronaldson's.¹⁶

Washington Avenue had been well-travelled since the 1700s as "Prime Street," with numerous pavings built up for the City's first railroads and truck-hauling. The 2005 study by Stewart, et al. had resulted because contractors prepared for new water pipes and happened upon about 19 wood coffins, most with skeletal remains and artifacts. Stewart compiled the depths of each coffin and recorded finding coffins from "3 feet" below the street level, to just over "6 feet" deep within a span of about one-half block. (Refer to Appendix II.) Most burials were found just about 4 feet below surface.

"The Evening Bulletin" (January 1, 1944) wrote that vaults at Ronaldson's could be accessed and that "some (vaults) of which contain as many as 25 bodies" are deep underground. Moreover, "Each vault entrance, four feet down, is reached only by digging." (Underlining added.) Thus, the vaults hold what may be the remains and objects for study best preserved at that undisturbed depth.

Ronaldson's Cemetery may provide a contrast, or a study to enhance Stewart's findings. Of the numerous cemeteries scattered in the former Moyamensing Township, for "Washington Avenue Project," (as crude and inexperienced that those who initiated the project were: the "lead" claimed to be from a "Civil War society" of one person and never produced anything to verify her standing; a Civil War reenactor's improper and inaccurate "research" was referenced), Stewart's published report corrected the errors and shortcomings, but it is the only archaeological study of cemetery yields: Washington Avenue had a Union Cemetery, Machpelah and another cemetery from Sixth to Eleventh Streets destroyed with all historical contexts.

¹⁶ Dr. Stewart's "Abstract" and some pages from Report are in Appendix II herein for reference.

¹⁷ This "lead" person actually had no credentials, but she enlisted an attorney and solicited Laurel Hill, not a Catholic cemetery for the reburials, which is improper.

AUG 18 1922
PHIA, FRIDAY, AUGUST 18, 1922

Forgotten Lives

Once Popular Chapters Indexed In
Old Ronaldson's Cemetery

A MASS of tall grass and weeds from which rises a simple headstone, and by its side, nearly hidden by the rank growth, a plain, well worn slab of stone, modestly placed beyond the path of even casual observation, in old Ronaldson's Cemetery, 9th and Bainbridge sts., marks the spot under which rests the body of one of the three prima donnas heard in the first performance of a grand opera in Philadelphia. The simple headstone, erected a few years before his death by her son, merely reads: "To our Mother and our Brother, Cornelia F. Jefferson, Charles Burke."

To the theatre goer of today it tells little. The name Jefferson is familiar to those approaching middle age or older, who well remember Joseph of that name, the world-famous "Rip Van Winkle," comedian par excellence. It was this Joseph who erected the tombstone that the last resting place of his mother might not be wholly lost.

Cornelia Francis she was. She became the wife of a popular actor, Thomas Burke, and as "Little Mrs. Burke" she was adored by the patrons of the old Chestnut Street Theatre, at 6th and Chestnut sts., early in the last century, when as associates in that celebrated stock company she had Joseph Jefferson the elder, Joseph Jefferson, Jr., John Jefferson, Mrs. Joseph Jefferson, Sr., Elizabeth Jefferson and Euphemia Jefferson. Some family for one company! But then there were Mr. and Mrs. John Darley, Henry Wallace, Mrs. LaFolle, Messrs. Hughes, Abercrombie, Hathwell and others of prominence in the profession. As Mrs. Burke she had a son, Charles, destined to become a famous comedian, who now lies by his mother's side.

Ronaldson's Cemetery was opened in 1827, and for many years was a favorite burial place for men and women of the stage. Its records teem with names that once were the magic that coaxed dollars to the box office. Over toward the southwest corner is a large slab which bears the name of Harrison Hudson Rowbotham, and carries an inscription which is now undecipherable. He was better known, possibly, as Henry H. Rowbotham, and he, too, was

Devilshoofs ever heard here. Mrs. Seguin also assumed the name part in the first American grand opera, "Leonora," by Joseph and William Fry, of Philadelphia. They were both heard here for many years in an extensive repertoire.

Towards the last of 1842 the Seguins were giving a season of opera at the Chestnut, and during their stay in the city were the guests of Peter Richings at his Pine st. residence. There the two little ones were stricken with scarlatina at the same time. Nightly after the curtain was rung down the parents hastened home to divide the hours until the next performance in nursing the children, but their vigilance and devotion were of no avail. When little Anna passed away they closed the engagement.

Another son was given the name of Edward. He lived to attain a large measure of popularity as a baritone in English opera. He married a young contralto named Zelda Harrison, and as Zelda Seguin she charmed audiences for many years.

A tomb in the cemetery also shelters William Jones and his wife, Julia, both long before the Philadelphia public. Mr. Jones sometimes as a manager of the Arch Street Theatre or the old but ever new Walnut. Jones was eccentric and had some curious ways of expressing himself. Durang illustrates this in an incident that occurred when the solemn veteran, Joseph Horton, revolted against singing in the chorus of an opera. When he complained to Jones the manager simply looked at him, then with a whoop that would have done credit to Rain-in-the-face in his palmyest days, slammed his hat on the floor, danced a wild jig, kicked his hat as far as it would go, then retrieving it, jammed it on his head and fled without a word.

WHO WAS BURIED at RONALDSON'S:

Identifying those buried at Ronaldson's Cemetery who had national significance for their professions and achievements.

Broken Headstones, Tin Cans Hidden JAN 1, 1944 F4 Heroes' Graves in Old Cemetery

Local heroes of America's first major conflict — the Revolutionary War — lie in almost forgotten graves in a little-known South Philadelphia cemetery.

The burial grounds, once called the Nation's most beautiful, is Ronaldson's Cemetery, founded in 1827 by James Ronaldson, an emigre from Scotland.

His desire was to create a "home for the dead," with non-sectarian burials. A main avenue was laid out from the entrance gate on Bainbridge (then Shippen) st. to Fitzwater, complete with gravel walks, flowers and shrubs.

Time has done much to dispel the original plans. Many of the old stones are broken at the base, and in some cases monuments have been smashed by hoodlums. Rubbish and tin cans are thrown over the fences, and the trees and shrubs are fast disappearing.

James Almost Obliterated

And here lie the remains of 13,500 of our ancestors. Almost obliterated are such names as General William Irvine, of Revolutionary fame; Commodore Charles Stewart, commander of Old Ironsides, and such stalwarts of the early stage as Cornelia Frances Jefferson, mother of the famous Joseph Jefferson, and Samuel H. Chapman, actor, playwright and manager of the Walnut Street Theater.

Here, too, lie ten other soldiers and officers of the Revolution, including John Stowers, who crossed at Trenton with Washington, and 150 veterans of the Civil War.

The Philadelphia Cemetery Co., incorporated in 1833, to manage the burial ground, still exists with George C. C. Stout, real estate dealer, as president. He explains:

"There is little we can do. Most of the lot holders died long ago, and only about 100 remain to pay their allotments of \$1 a year. That, with earnings from endowments, gives us \$200 annually for upkeep."

Slum Clearance Project

He said a plan has been formulated to sell the cemetery and use

the proceeds for a more fitting resting place for the illustrious dead.

"We are trying," he said, "to see it to the Philadelphia Housing Authority for a slum clearance apartment project. The plot contains about 92,000 square feet, and if we can effect the sale we will use the money to buy cheaper ground somewhere in the suburbs, move the remains, and mark each grave with bronze plaque. With the remainder of the money we will set up an endowment fund for maintenance."

In the meantime, Karl Boesenhof and his wife, Ida, the caretakers, do what they can to keep up the appearance of the plot. For years has been a losing battle.

Mrs. Boesenhof has lived in the little gatehouse on Bainbridge since she was eight years old. Her father, William Henry Meredith, was caretaker then. Three of his six children were born there.

"The last burials here," she said, "were in 1913, I believe. There were six people laid away, all victims of the influenza epidemic."

Cans and Bottles

The paths lead between chipped marble lot markers to the fast disappearing headstone of Captain Abraham Parsons, who died August 26, 1822, "An officer during the first American Revolution of 1777, part of which he was held a prisoner of war."

Dog and Cat Burials

Karl, oldest son of the Boesenhofs, explained that the monuments were often smashed by neighborhood boys who believed stairs led down to the vaults, some of which contain as many as 25 bodies. There are no stairs underneath. Each vault entrance, four feet down, is reached only by digging.

Karl also said the last burials were not in 1913 but only a few years ago. He explained:

"We had a dog named Blackie who was hit by a truck outside. We put him in a box and buried him at the foot of the stone of John Hardy who died in 1869. We also buried our cat here."

Identifying anyone buried at Ronaldson's Cemetery would add to the criterion requiring the resource's "character, interest or value" elements. The "Plan" and a Directory lists all decedants; newspapers highlighted the notable figures from the theatre, such as the Jefferson family who resided in the City, but had been actors working all over the country. A calculated "150 Civil War" veterans also were in Ronaldson's,¹⁸ but there were those who served in the Revolutionary War of all ranks and War of 1812 patriots, too. A news clip mentioning that Gloria Dei Episcopal Church's cemetery would receive some of these heroes¹⁹ was followed by a personal visit more than ten years ago to see the site. (The cemetery is managed as part of Independence National Historical Park and "Ronaldson's Cemetery" is marked in this designated area. See next page.)

My visit to Forest Hills Cemetery to see its "Ronaldson" area noted three other identified deceased supposedly at that site: Revolutionary War veterans Philip Stimmel, a Master Sergeant, and Major John Polhemus, who had a much smaller marker than his wife, Susannah Hart, whose new stone indicated some descendants may have wanted them honored (and noting that Susannah's father, John Hart was a "Signer of the Declaration of Independence.") Of course, this area bears an approximate 9 foot high obelisk with "James Ronaldson" appropriately; his brother, Richard's name is etched on another side on an otherwise blank stone. It is difficult to reconcile how the remains of 900 graves, or "13,500" individuals fit into a circular lot with a 50 foot diameter.

James Ronaldson (1768-1841) had devised a popular cemetery site, according to the 1884 History of Philadelphia. It is a fact that this cemetery was closest to Pennsylvania Hospital, the morgue for the City at that time. Jefferson College was also nearby, and with classes in pathology and anatomy, and "resurrectionists" will-

¹⁸ "Evening Bulletin," March 21, 1950.

¹⁹ " " " April 9, 1951. This would be the second "Ronaldson's in existence now, after Forest Hills.



**Gloria Dei (Old Swedes')
Episcopal Church**
Columbus Boulevard & Christian
Street
Philadelphia, PA 19147-4332

Voice: 215-389-1513
Fax: 215-389-7817

www.old-swedes.org



May 23, 2008

Celeste A. Morello, MS, MA
1234 South Sheridan St.
Philadelphia, PA 19147-4820

Re: Re-interred Revolutionary War Heroes from Ronaldson's Cemetery
Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church, Philadelphia, PA.

Dear Celeste,

It was a pleasure speaking with you via telephone and actually meeting you in person last Saturday.

I know you've taken a photo of the monument in our Churchyard pertaining to the re-interred Revolutionary War Heroes from Ronaldson's Cemetery and please, feel free to come back and take more photograph to support your application for an historic marker.

The inscription on the monument reads:

"The Pennsylvania Chapter National Society of the Daughters of Founders and Patriots of America prepared this lot and here re-set the tombstones of Revolutionary officers brought from Ronaldson's Cemetery, thereby saving the same from destruction and oblivion."

Brigadier General William Irvine
Capt. Abraham Parsons
Capt. Michael Hopkins
Capt. Thomas Taylor

Col. Robert Rae
Major James Moore
Capt. James Peale
Capt. James Moore

Unveiled May 1952

A member of our History Committee is researching our records to check on Capt. Wm. Mc Fadden, Capt. John Barber, Capt. John Stowers and Commodore Charles Stewart. As soon as I get this information, I will be happy to send it along to you.

If we can be of further help, please let me know. Good luck in your quest for the historic marker.

Best regards,

Cathy Ufheil
For Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church

ing to exhume corpses for medical students at that time, Ronaldson's escaped any rumors of "body-snatching" or any lack of security for those who were buried there without any family or friend. There were no anecdotal stories whether there was any association with Pennsylvania Hospital or Jefferson, as with the mention of a "lady" who became the Cemetery's first interment, while a patient of the infamous "Dr. Physick."²⁰ In all, Ronaldson's Cemetery had no detractors, but praise during the 19th century.

By the 20th century, just a few years after Spanish Flu victims were buried in Ronaldson's, its popularity veered in a negative direction. (Refer to Appendix I's newspaper items from the 1920s.)

A Scottish emigre, Ronaldson appeared beloved and respected in contemporary and later 19th century publications. At his Cemetery he was said to have paid for plots for his fellow Scotsmen who were less fortunate than he, a businessman, philanthropist, first president of the Franklin Institute, friend of President Andrew Jackson and Philadelphia's elite. The cemetery held a plot for the "Philadelphia Typographical Society" referring to his and Archibald Binney's first typesetting blocks which are now at Columbia University--the font includes what was then, the new "\$" sign. His charity included aiding the poor at the Southwark Soup Kitchen which he founded and the Thistle Society. He had also suggested using sugar beets instead of cane--he was boundless, curious and engaging to have brought onto his Cemetery venture very influential Philadelphians such as James Peale, Robert M. Patterson, Robert Vaux and Joseph Parker Norris, among other officers and managers.²¹ On religion, Ronaldson was said to have been briefly associated with the Old Pine Street Presbyterian Church with its large Scottish

²⁰ Scharf and Westcott, op.cit., p. 620i. She had died in "a hospital" not named, but it put the Cemetery open on "June 2, 1827."

²¹ Appendix II holds many 19th and 20th century sources on Ronaldson.

congregational base. Some of Ronaldson's letters are preserved at the American Philosophical Society; he is not only remembered for his accomplishments, but today, there are two(2) "Ronaldson's Cemetery" sites, maintaining interest.

Indirectly, however, Ronaldson's legacy is yet unrevealed: whatever is still under Palumbo Playground's field that maintains the historical value of artifacts which may have historical significance--the probability is there.

The former Ronaldson's Cemetery...

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

Of the interments from 1827 to 1918, what has already been yielded are those remains from the 1950 excavation, especially the veterans claimed for the Gloria Dei Episcopal Church Cemetery.²²

What Ronaldson's Cemetery "may be likely to yield" is addressed in narratives on: 1) the "Quantitative Considerations" implying how much of the "13,500" deceased remained and not reburied in the circular plot at Forest Hills Cemetery in 1950; and, presuming there might be a vast amount of recoverable remains and artifacts...

2) What the ground would yield based upon the 1827 to 1918 span, the different kinds of burial customs, the wide sampling of decedants and the families in the deep vaults and the advancements in medicine, hygiene, embalming practices and preferences in the material goods placed in caskets. Of concern would be whether lead paint, lye and other contaminants affected the soil here.

²² It was not recorded why only these individuals were chosen by the Gloria Dei rector who had not verified if these men were of that congregation or of the Episcopalian faith. Refer to news articles on page 20 and letter with photo, page 17.

Old Cemetery in South Phila. Don't Be a City Playground

By JOSEPH E. REICHMAN

Of The Bulletin Staff

he last chapter is about to be written in the history of Ronaldson Cemetery, an old Philadelphia landmark.

Today workmen began converting the 123-year-old burial ground, bordered by Bainbridge and Fitzwater sts. in the block between 8th and 9th, into a city playground.

It will end a riches-to-rags excuse for the cemetery, which was considered the most beautiful in the country, but which for the past 25 years has been a neglected dumping ground for neighborhood junk.

10 to Be Reburied
The first step in the conversion will be the disinterment and reburial of some 13,500 dead.

Included are the bodies of Revolutionary War heroes and stars of early stage. The bodies of six patriots and the graves of six patriots will be transferred to the burial ground of Old Swedes Church, Swanwick and Christian sts. The area is a national shrine.

The other dead will be reburied in the section of Forest Hills Cemetery, Somerton. Their graves will be marked by bronze tablets and the old tombstones in Ronaldson will be destroyed.

Ronaldson Cemetery was founded in 1827 by James Ronaldson, who moved to this city from Scotland and established a type foundry. Ronaldson founded the burial ground because there was no place for the poor in which to bury the dead. The graves of the poor belonged to no local congregation.

soldiers buried there were transferred from an old burial ground behind Independence Hall.

As the lot-holders died and the shape of the city changed, interest in the cemetery declined. The caretaker remained, but funds to keep the place in condition were inadequate.

According to the records, the last

Many Actors There

Ronaldson is listed in some old records as "the actors' cemetery," because so many theatrical people are buried there. Most actors, in those days, couldn't be placed in church graveyards, so their friends purchased space in Ronaldson.

The main entrance was on Bainbridge st. A wide avenue ran back to Fitzwater st., and many graves walks cut through the plot. The whole place was beautifully landscaped. Flowers bloomed everywhere.

There are little buildings on each side of the massive iron gate. The founder designed one to be the residence of the caretaker.

The other served as the "bell house." In it, persons who had died unexpectedly were placed for three days. A string attached to a bell was placed in their hands so that if there was a move of returning life the bell would ring and arouse the caretaker.

Mrs. Karl Boesenhofer, whose father used to be caretaker, still lives in the tiny residence. The bell house has fallen into disrepair. Both buildings will be torn down.

Funds Inadequate

Ronaldson saved a portion of the space at the front of the plot for his family and sold the rest. In 1833, the lot-holders were incorporated as the Philadelphia Cemetery Co.

Many of the Revolutionary War

persons buried there were several influenza victims in 1918.

Today Ronaldson is littered with tin cans, pop bottles and trash of all sorts. The paths and graves are weed-covered. Many of the high monuments and markers are crumbled.

As far back as 1922 it was proposed that the city take over the land. Finally, in 1946, after a long series of discussion and court proceedings, the city and the cemetery company reached their agreement. The city will foot the bill for the removal and reburial of the bodies.

The work will be done under the

persons buried there were several influenza victims in 1918.

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The work will be done under the

direction of Thomas A. Morris, president of the Evergreen Memorial Park Association.

Rector Makes Search

Dr. John Craig Roak, rector of Old Swedes Church, when he learned of the proposed move, made a search in the cemetery and located, through still legible stones, the graves of six old soldiers.

They include General William Irvine, who died in 1804 after serving in the Revolution and also as a delegate to the Continental Congress; Captain William Moore, who died at the age of 86; Captain Abraham

Parsons, who, according to his tombstone, "served all through the Revolution and was for a time a prisoner of the British"; Captain William McFadden, a native of Dublin, Ireland, who died here in 1839; Captain Robert Rae, who also died in 1839, and Captain John Barber, who served in the War of 1812. Dr. Roak has set aside a corner of Old Swedes Cemetery for their new graves.

Morris said the big stone over the grave of Ronaldson, still in fairly good shape, will be placed in Forest Hills as the hub of the new cemetery.

Hero Gravestones Placed at Gloria Dei

The gravestones of seven Revolutionary War soldiers, removed last year from the old Ronaldson Cemetery, 9th and Bainbridge sts., have been set up in a plot of ground adjacent to Gloria Dei Church.

The plot is being developed as a national shrine and the tombstones were salvaged by the Rev. Dr. John Craig Roak, rector of Old Swedes, when it was announced that the cemetery was being razed to make way for a playground.

Also removed to the shrine from Ronaldson was the monument of the Scotch Thistle Society. The society was founded by James Ronaldson in 1796 to provide relief for sick members and their families, and to care for the widows and children of any deceased members.

The society also provided for burial of strangers, who could not be buried in church cemeteries because they were not regular members of congregations.

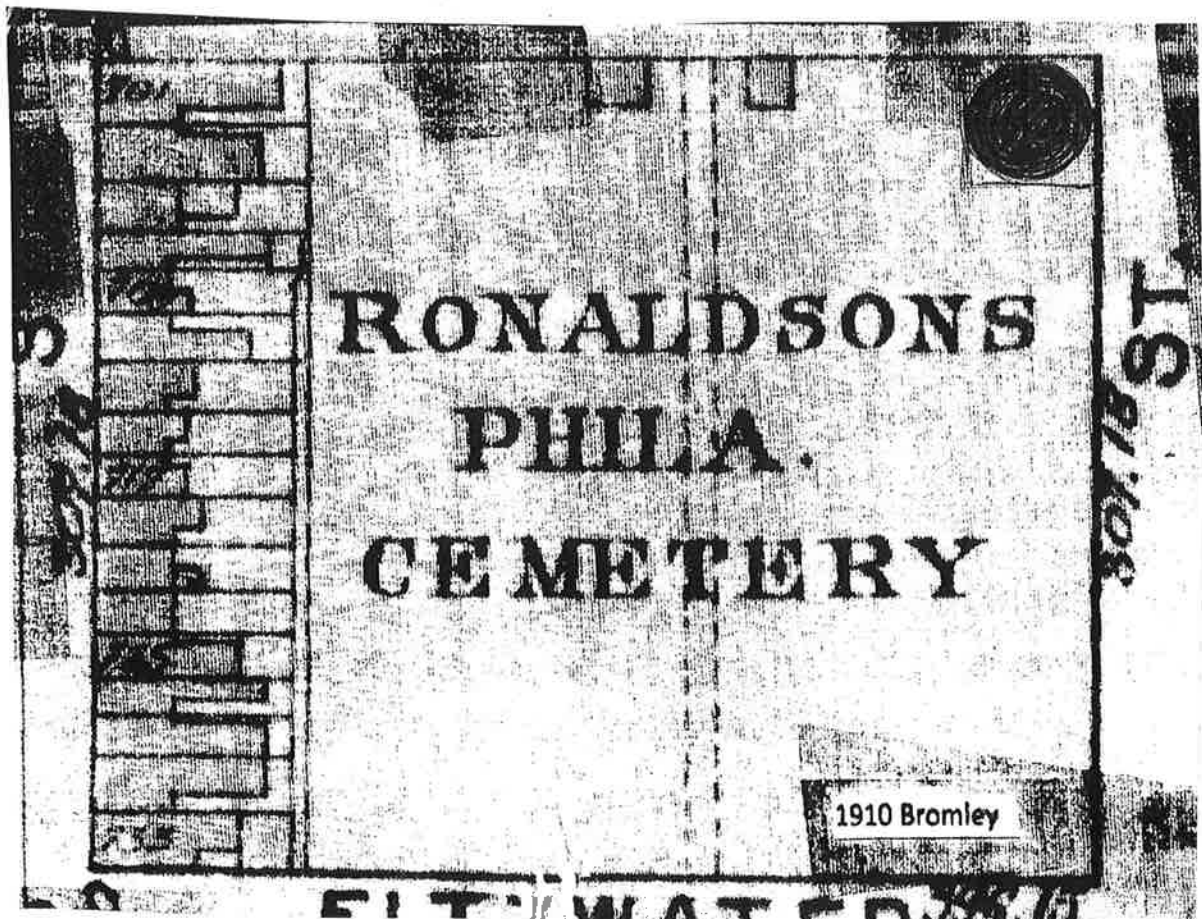
Other gravestones taken from Ronaldson were placed in Evergreen Memorial Park, Bucks County.

Exhumations and reinterments of deceased to prepare land for a playground.
"Palumbo Playground" honored local restaurateur and philanthropist Frank Palumbo, Sr. whose restaurant was one block south of the site, dedicated in 1954.

QUANTITATIVE CONSIDERATIONS:

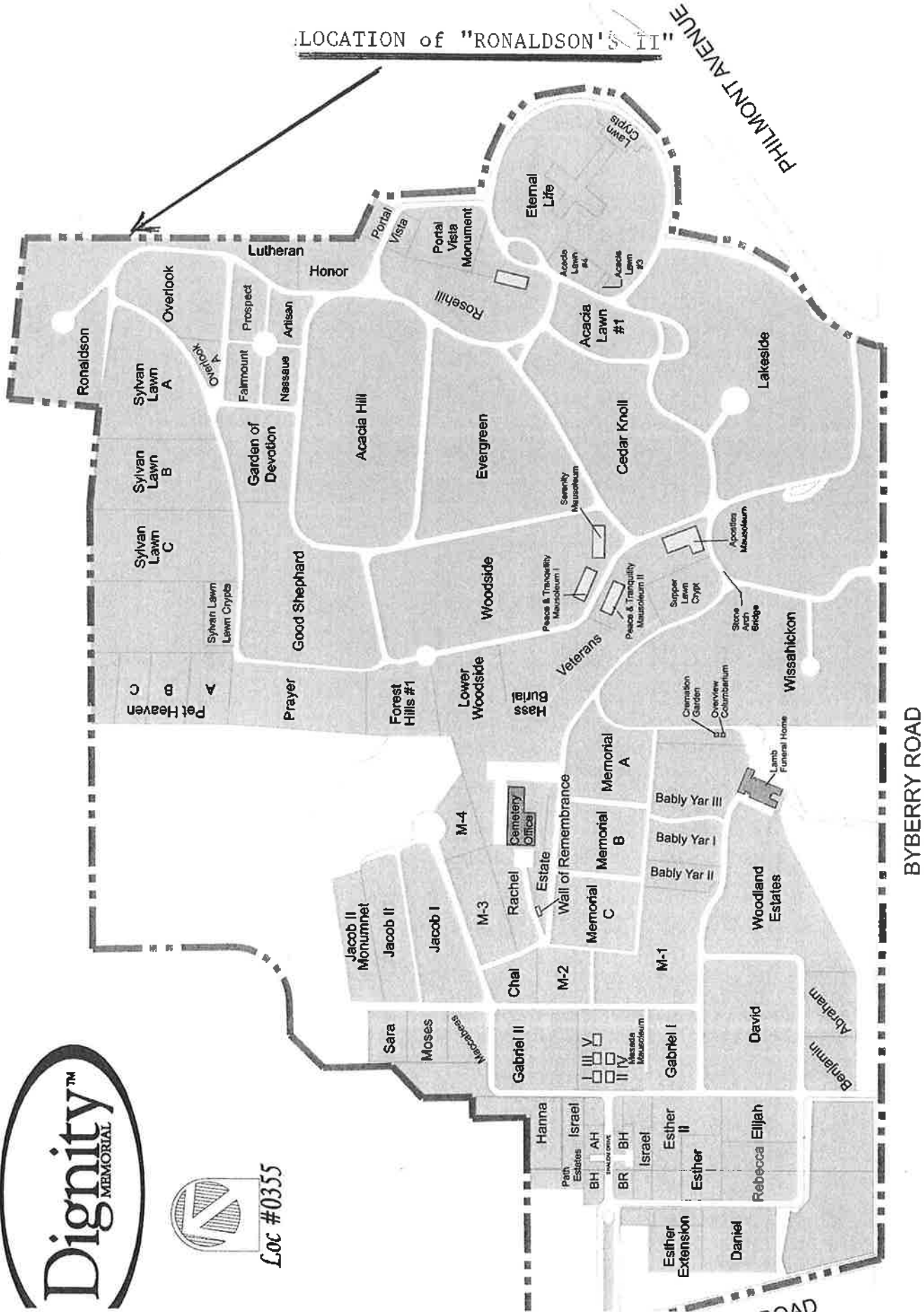
The black circle in the northeast corner of the Ronaldson's Cemetery lot is a scale measure of the site at Forest Hills Cemetery where in 1950, the City transported the exhumed remains of "13,500" bodies. Or, what had been in 900 graves.

There are many reasons to explain how a burial ground of the dimensions of Ronaldson's (307' X 307.18') holding a fully occupied site could find a satisfactory interment within a circle of 50 feet in diameter at Forest Hills: that only a certain layer (stratum) of Ronaldson's was excavated to accommodate the land purchased by the City for the reburials; or, that a greater quantity of the Ronaldson's subterranean strata was left untouched so that the City would not need to purchase extra soil to fill in the vacated grave pits. It is more economical not to have excavated each grave--many which were stacked--and just level out the surface. If the City did this, the archaeological advantages to what "may likely to yield information important in...history" are here.





Loc #0355



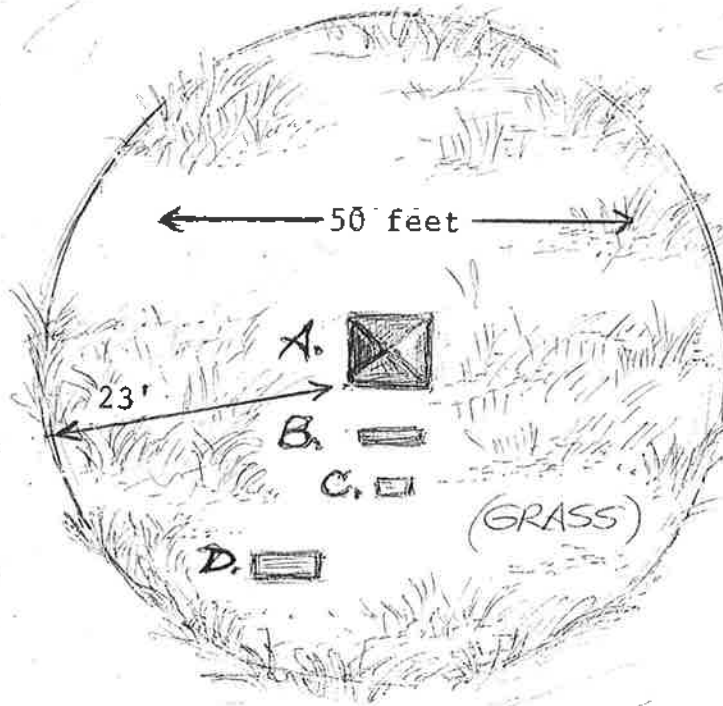
FOREST HILLS/SHALOM MEMORIAL PARK

101 Byberry Road, Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania 19006
(215) 673-5800

FOREST HILLS CEMETERY SITE:

"RONALDSON'S"

GRAVEL
DRIVE



A. Stone 9' obelisk
"James Ronaldson"
with "1841" death.

B. New headstone to
"Susannah Hart Pol-
hemus, daughter of
John Hart" (Signer
of Declaration of
Independence.d.1832.

C. Major John Polhemus
"Patriot of the Re-
volutionary War."
d.1834.(Small stone)

D. Philip Stimmel
Master Sergeant
"Pennsylvania Mili-
tary, War of 1812"
1790-1831
(flat stone)

(Drawing from 09/09/2021
on-site observation.)

GRAVEL
DRIVE

GRASS

GRASS

WHAT THE FORMER RONALDSON'S CEMETERY WOULD YIELD:

Dr. Stewart's report benefitted anthropological study with the skeletal remains, and of course, Ronaldson's Cemetery holds a potential bonanza of diversity in social status and economic class within the burials. These remains would produce artifacts bearing the characteristics of the individuals and their lifestyles. Unlike the Roman Catholic remains of limited sampling at the Washington Avenue project, the lack of religious strictures at Ronaldson's could be reflected within each casket where the burial positions and "grave goods" placed with the deceased would have varied from the 1827 to 1918 period. From the Plan, there are a remarkable number of single individuals resting here without familial associations to dictate how the deceased would be treated.

The chemical findings would be extensive, especially from each material good whether hand-made or manufactured or imported. Glue, paint, glass, paper, fabric--all have historical value in how they changed over nearly a century. As mentioned previously, lye, embalming fluid and other deodorizers used to counter the decomposition within the cramped area could be processed from the soil at different levels. Besides the broad range offered below Palumbo Playground's field, to explore in many areas of science, the lack of regulations for this privately-run business allows for many histories to be written on this type of cemetery versus those overseen in religious communities, most especially, in Judaism.

The 1845 Account noted "6076" burials at Ronaldson's, or about one-half of the estimated "13,500" later: this pre-Civil War period is one of movement into the City and expansion more into the County Districts and Townships for settlement and for commerce. This was a very rich, yet underexplored time which deserves more attention. Whoever was at Ronaldson's Cemetery then, could greatly contribute to this void.

It is more than probable that Ronaldson's Cemetery still has a trove of uncovered artifacts at different depths below Palumbo's field. The circular plot at Forest Hills Cemetery cannot justify holding the remains of 900 burial sites within its approximate 1,650 square feet of space from Ronaldson's nearly 90000 square foot area. Moreover, the time and labor to exhume "13,500" separate burials--despite any condition--would not have been cost effective for the City. Likewise, dumping fill into each open plot would have been too expensive in hauling and in the purchase of extra soil. (My family was in the business of demolition, hauling and paving for nearly fifty years--"shop talk" was in every conversation.) The City's budget, plus no one caring about the handling of the remains at Ronaldson's seemed to surmount as well as determine how Ronaldson's would be left to convert to the playground which the community had requested for decades.

This site is very significant in the City's history, as the 19th century documentation proved. More recent inquiries into Philadelphia's different types of cemeteries has Ronaldson's Cemetery again gaining interest, this time, in academic scholarship. James Ronaldson today has two cemeteries as his legacy, in addition to what had been attributed to him while president at the Franklin Institute. All of these facts, and what is attached in the Appendices should be sufficient for historical designation under criteria (a) and (i).

Celeste A. Morello, MS, MA
September, 2021
(During COVID-19 limitations)

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Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Temple University's Special Collections (Newspapers); Steward Report.

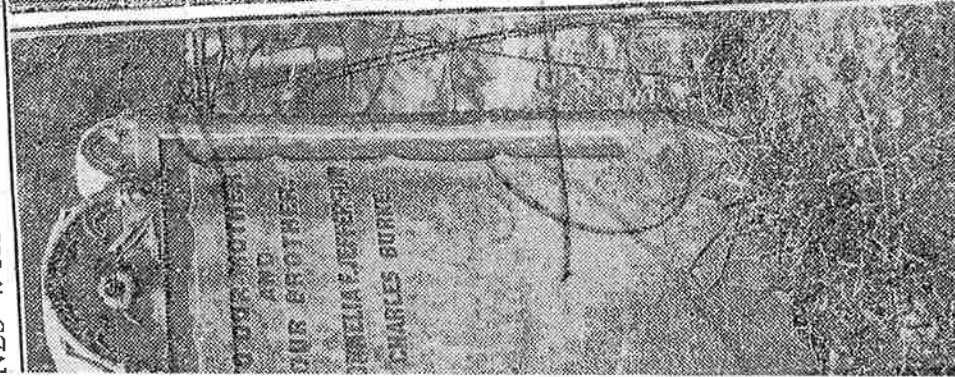
Special thanks to Dr. Aaron V. Wunsch who lent important expertise and information for Ronaldson's submission for an (unsuccessful) historical marker. The Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission's panel would have granted Mr. Ronaldson a marker, but not to the site, claiming its "lack" of statewide significance, ceding to its preference of Laurel Hill Cemetery as a garden-type cemetery.

A P P E N D I X I

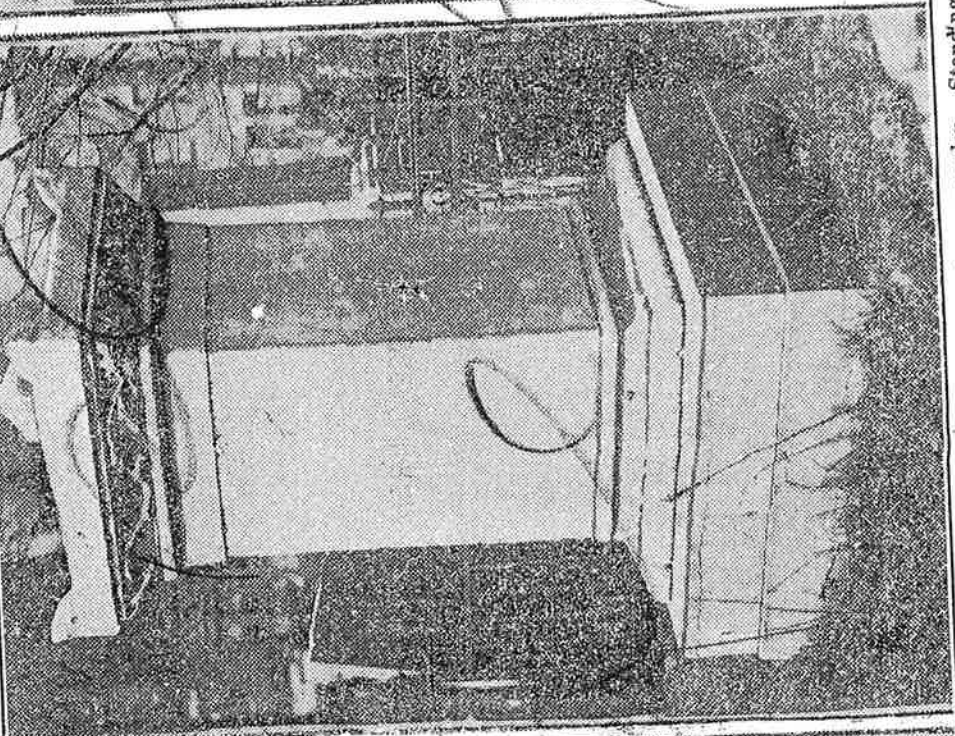
R O N A L D S O N ' S C E M E T E R Y

in the news...

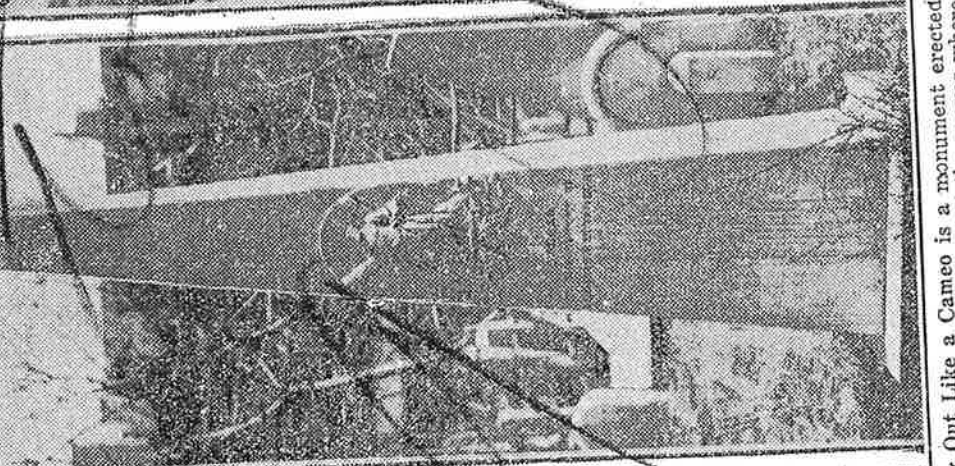
★ BULLETIN—PHILADELPHIA, TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 1929
 NAMES WHICH MARK GRAVES OF PATRIOTS AND ACTORS IN RONALDSON CEMETERY



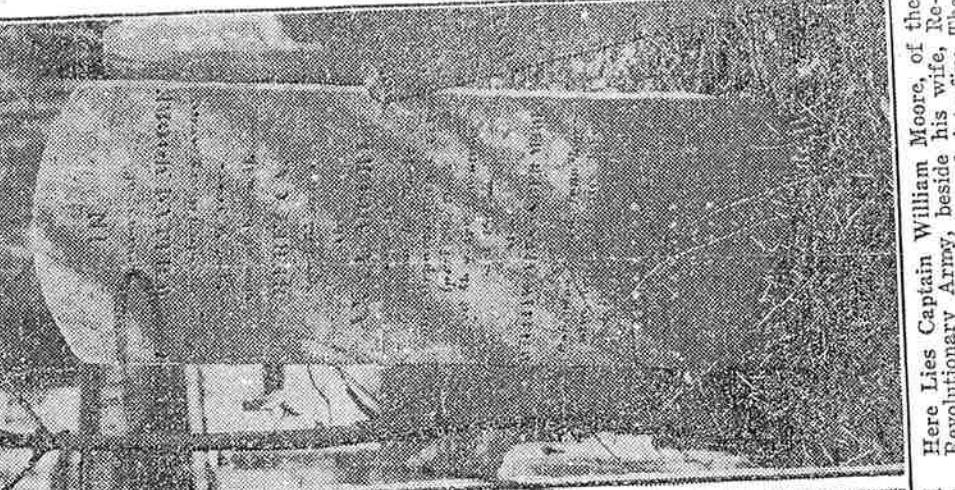
Grave of Mother of Joseph Jefferson, of Rip Van Winkle fame. The ravages of time. She was the body of Jefferson's half brother, Charles Burke, lies in the same grave.



Grave of Commodore Charles Stewart, commander of "Old Ironsides," is marked by a simple marble shaft. Commodore Stewart, one of the Navy's first heroes, was buried here with high naval honors after impressive ceremonies at Independence Hall.



Standing Out Like a Cameo is a monument erected by The Scottish Thistle Society at the graves where Scottish strangers who died in this country were buried. Many Revolutionary patriots were interred at this spot.



Here Lies Captain William Moore, of the Revolutionary Army, beside his wife, Rebecca, who died at the age of sixty-five. The announcement of his passing, at 86, is easily read despite the long lapse of time.

PHILADELPHIA RECORD

SECC

Historic Graveyard

Waiting for a Buyer

OCT 22 1941 REC.

Ronaldson's 13,500 Dead Will Get a More Fitting Resting Place

By JAY LERNER

Want to buy a graveyard?

Ronaldson's Cemetery, at 9th and Fitzwater sts., first public burial ground in the United States, is for sale.

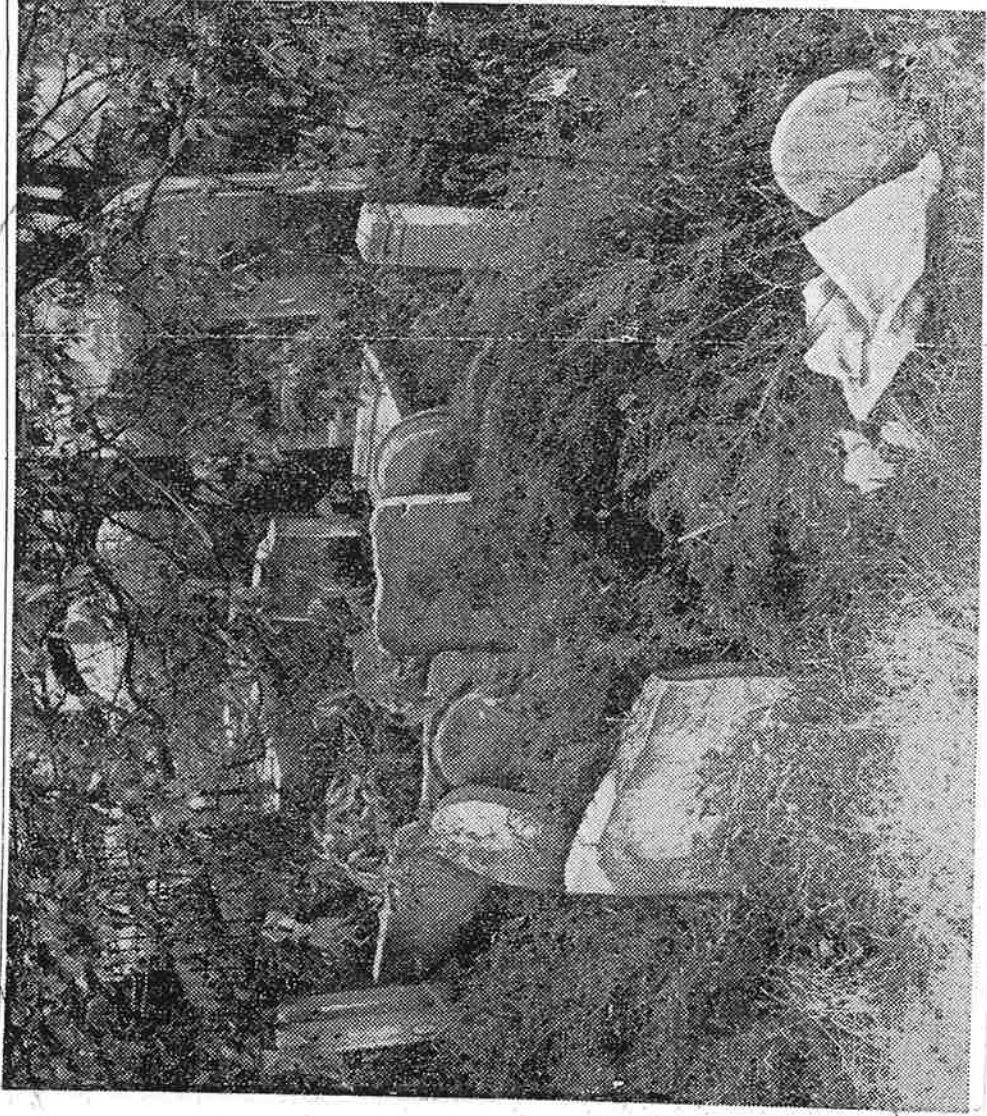
Here lie Revolutionary General William Irvine, John Stowers, who crossed the Delaware with George Washington, and Mrs. Cornelia Jefferson, mother of Joseph Jefferson.

But you can buy the grounds at bargain rates.

The remains of the 13,500 prominent 19th century Philadelphians who were buried here between 1827 and 1918 will be removed and reinterred in a peaceful countryside where they will become part of a national shrine, according to George C. C. Stout, president of the board of managers of the cemetery.

As it now stands, Ronaldson's is in a state of neglected deterioration. Weather-worn tombstones lie broken on top of one another, their inscriptions long since illegible. Guard rails, twisted and bent, are rust-covered where they poke above the tall grass. Oil and food cans mingle with bottles and other refuse thrown by neighbors over the brick wall surrounding the grounds.

Time and the elements have respected no one. The monument to Commodore Stuart, a Union naval hero of the Civil War, is in the same battered condition as the stones which mark the graves of Revolutionary Officers Captain William Moore and Captain Abraham Parsons.



One corner of Ronaldson's cemetery . . . time and the elements have respected no one.

Opened in 1827

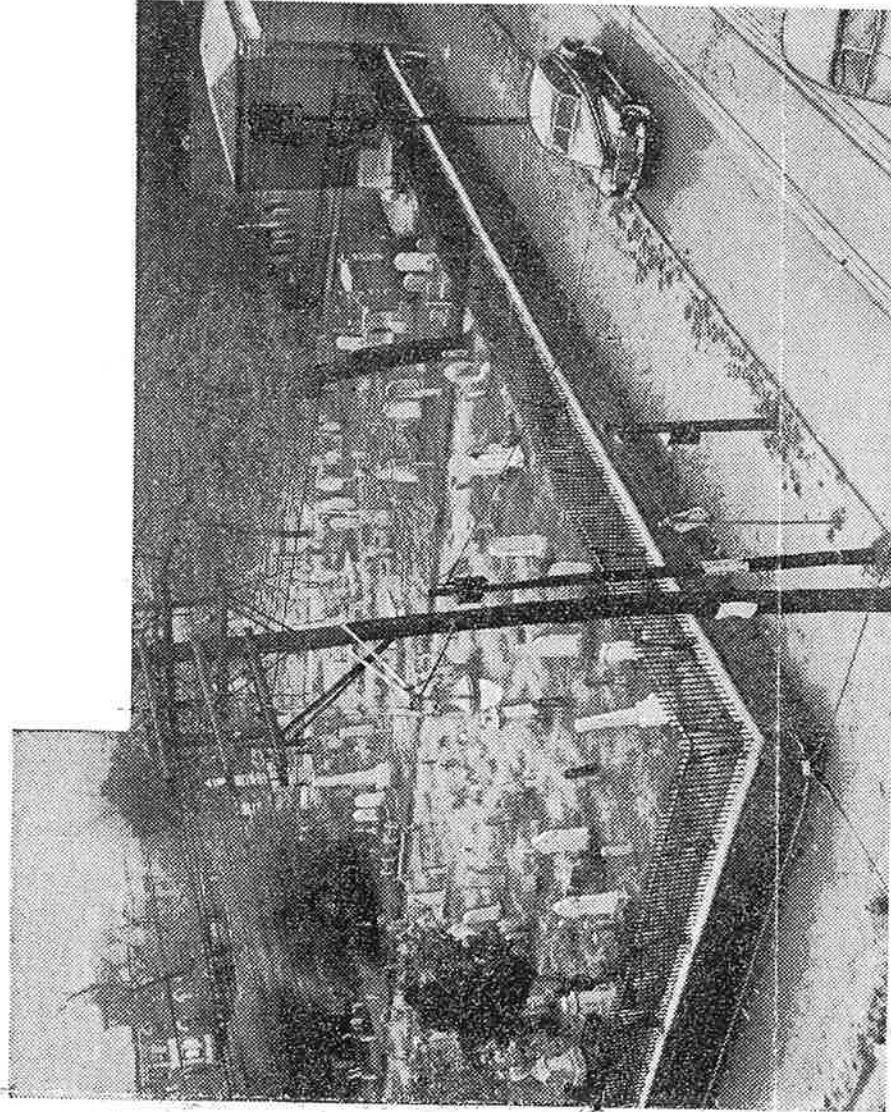
When it was opened in 1827, however, Ronaldson's was acclaimed as the finest cemetery in the United States, according to Scharf and Westcott's "History of Philadelphia." Visitors came from all over the East to see "the most beautifully laid out burial grounds in the country" and to inspect its famous "Bell Room."

The "Bell Room" was in a small house just inside the left side of the cemetery entrance and was equipped with a couch, stove, and the usual furniture that you expect to find in a dwelling. This dwelling, however, was for those who died suddenly. Their remains were placed in this room and a taut rope connected to a powerful bell placed in one hand. If after three days there was no movement, burial followed.

Rang Only Once.

There is record of only one occasion on which the bell rang and roused the keeper, who lived in an identical house on the right side of the entrance. The records also show that the unfortunate died soon after.

With the passing of years the number of visitors has diminished, and few now come to see the cemetery in its desolation, according to Mrs. Karl Boesenhofer, who lives in the keeper's house. The only people who have come since the flu epidemic of 1918, when the last eight people were interred



General view of the cemetery that was once the finest in the United States. The small building at the right housed the "Bell Room," where the dead were kept three days with a taut rope connected with a bell placed in one hand.

there, seem only to be trying to trace their genealogy. Because of the battered condition of the grave markers, they rarely succeed, and soon leave to go to the headquarters of the Pennsylvania Historical Society.

where the records of the cemetery are kept.

The cemetery is in better condition today than it was in 1930, however. At that time, long neglected because of lack of funds, the consecrated ground

served as a goat pasture and a playground for chickens and ducks.

But a group of prominent Philadelphians determined to transform the cemetery into a national shrine. They banished

the goats and fowl, and set to work stirring up interest among patriotic organizations, trust companies and private citizens in the cemetery. The result was that the board of managers raised an endowment of over \$10,000.

Gardeners Quit

The interest on this money, added to about \$300 gained from the rental of lots, was enough to keep the grass-cut and green, the paths clean and edged, the shrubs trimmed, and to make a start on restoring tombstones. But seven weeks ago the gardeners who had the contract to take care of the grounds went into defense industries. In these few weeks nearly all the good of the past 11 years has been undone.

The board of managers is now negotiating with the F. H. A. in hopes of selling the cemetery for a housing project. If the negotiations fall through they will try to sell the cemetery to private realtors for development. They think they can obtain enough money from this transaction to remove the bodies to some suburban area. There, in a national shrine, the dead will be more fittingly honored.

OLD BURIAL GROUND IN S. PHILADELPHIA NOW GOAT PASTURE

Ronaldson's Cemetery
Falling to Ruin
Through Lack of Funds
Acc. 12,100
Prominent Personages Buried
in America's First
Private Graveyard

Ronaldson's Cemetery, at Ninth, Tenth, Fitzwater and Bainbridge streets, the first private burial grounds in America, where the bones of some Revolutionary soldiers are interred, has been turned into a goat pasture for the sake of economy.

Neglected in recent years because of lack of funds and a sufficient number of persons interested who might contribute toward its perpetual maintenance, the old graveyard has virtually sunk into oblivion. It is merely a graveyard to those who live in the vicinity—a desolate square shaded by tall trees and overrun by vines and weeds.

Tombstones are tumbling down, guardrails are twisted and bent, and in some cases even missing from their lots, paths are muddy and covered with grass, and shrubs are growing in wild disorder. After more than 100 years the cemetery is no longer the fresh, green, plot of ground it was in the days when James Ronaldson set aside a corner for poor persons who could not afford to buy lots for their relatives, and yet the caretakers can do little, for there are no funds for the work.

Grass Cut Last Summer
Early last summer, Charles Wagner and his wife, Mrs. Catherine Wagner, who are given the privilege of occupying a house free in return for looking out for the old graveyard, had the grass cut, but they had to pay for it out of their own pocket. That was the last time it was cut. Since then, naturally, it has grown wild. Now it is so long, except where matted down or chewed off by animals, that many of the tombstones are hidden by it. Wagner hasn't the time to attend to it himself, for he has his own business to look out for, receiving no salary as caretaker.

Deplored the condition of the historic old cemetery, yet with their hands tied because of lack of funds, the managers tried to get sheep to put out at pasture, believing that they would keep the grass down, but in this attempt they were unsuccessful, for they couldn't buy the sheep and there were no voluntary offers forthcoming.

However, their effort wasn't altogether in vain, for Carmelo Ravignolo, a resident of the neighborhood, learning of the plight and the attempt to get sheep, came forward and offered to lend four goats for the purpose. The offer was accepted and a dual economy effected, for in return for his loan of the goats, Ravignolo has no feed bills, while already the grass shows signs of beginning to disappear.

Goats Relish New Home

Now, the goats seem to relish their new home with a great liking. Unmolested and undisturbed in their surroundings, they nibble all day long. Save for a "ba ba" when they are suddenly startled by a passerby in the street, their presence probably would not be known. For company they have chickens and ducks which are kept by Wagner and his wife.

Ronaldson's Cemetery was founded in 1827 by James Ronaldson, who came here in 1794 and established the first type foundry in the United States. At that time there was no place, other than Potter's Field, for free-thinking

L GROUND IN SOUTH NOW GOAT PASTURE

families in Philadelphia who belonged to no religious congregation. Ronaldson felt that this was a disadvantage, and on April 2, 1827, conveyed the plot to Joseph Parker Norris, Robert Vaux, Robert M. Patterson and Joseph Watson, in trust, to "permit James Ronaldson and his heirs to use and occupy the said several small lots for subdivisions only as burial places for the interment of deceased human beings other than people of color."

13,500 Buried There

According to the caretakers, nearly 13,500 persons are buried there, but their descendants either have died or moved away—no more than 50 lot holders have been located in the last few years. No one seems to know what has happened to the Ronaldson family or to what part of the country the little Scotch group that once considered the old cemetery as the family burying ground, spread.

Records kept safely locked in a vault in the caretaker's house show that there haven't been any burials in the cemetery in the last three or four years. According to the caretakers, the cemetery is unvisited except on Memorial Day, when G. A. R. veterans decorate the graves of their fallen comrades. Except on special occasions, the huge, massive gate is kept locked and the public is barred from entering the grounds.

The graves are easily seen from the street, and many of the inscriptions can be read quite readily, however. A glance here and there reveals an uprooted post, a tombstone overturned, or a marble or stone slab tilted at an incongruous angle. Every winter the frost gets in a damaging blow. Met with it all, there is something very peaceful and appealing about the place.

According to records, both in the caretaker's possession and at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, many prominent men and women are buried here, but have apparently sunk into oblivion.

there. The Scottish Thistle Society set up a monument to Scottish strain in this country at Ronaldson's Cemetery. Here were buried the bones of several Revolutionary soldiers moved from Franklin Square, among the tombstones marking graves of poor people who benefited the founder's kindness, stands a monument to James Ronaldson and his ter.

The charity section is an interesting part of the old graveyard, for here number of well-known names appear on the worn tombstones. Many of the names and inscriptions have all completely faded, or else are covered with moss, but there is the statue of Constantine Rafinesque, a native Constantinoite, who became a well-known scientist.

"Honor to whom honor is owed" reads an inscription on the monument erected many years afterward by one of his pupils.

Stage Stars Rest in Burial Gro

Besides Constantine Rafinesque (who was a number of theatrical luminaries buried in this section, Samuel Chapman, noted melodramatic actor, is one of them. Still another is Henry Harris Rowbottom, at one time manager of the Walnut Street Theatre. Others are Mrs. Cornelia Jefferson, mother of Joseph Jefferson, and her son, Charles Burke.

The entrance to the cemetery, with its massive iron gate and vine-covered arch overhead, is flanked on either side by a red brick building. One of these is the caretaker's. The other was used for persons dying suddenly. It was equipped with a couch, a stove and a bell, which was placed in the hand of the person, presumably dead, to sound an alarm if there was any motion.

Thus medical help could be called. But this contrivance has long been out of use, and even the house, like the cemetery, is dreary looking. Both have apparently sunk into oblivion.

A P P E N D I X I I

Copies of pages from sources cited herein.

(29 pages)

610
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PHILADELPHIA

CEMETERY.



COPY OF

DEED OF TRUST.



AM. PHILOSOPHICAL SOC.

JUN 2 1969

APRIL 2, 1827.

PHILADELPHIA

30
100.00
100.00

DEED OF TRUST.

THIS INDENTURE, made the second day of April, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven, between James Ronaldson, of Moyamensing Township, in the County of Philadelphia, Esquire, of the one part, and Joseph Parker Norris, Roberts Vaux, Robert M. Patterson, and Joseph Watson, Esquires, all of the City of Philadelphia, of the other part: WHEREAS the said James Ronaldson is legally seized as of fee of and in the large lot of ground hereinafter particularly described, which he has at much expense enclosed with a wall, iron railing, and other fencing, and otherwise improved and ornamented; and has caused the same to be laid out as set forth in the map or plan hereunto annexed: Immediately inside the fence is a walk all round the lot, and three other walks running from the northern to the southern boundaries thereof. And the remaining part of the lot is laid out and subdivided into small lots, extending ten feet from north to south, and eight feet from east to west; and these small lots are respectively designated on the plan, by numbering each lot from two base lines; the south edge of Shippen street being the northern base line, from which the designations south commence, and all distances southwardly are reckoned; and a line drawn from the middle of the carriage gate, on Shippen street, to the middle of the carriage

gate on Fitzwater street, forms the other base line, from which the designations east and west commence, and all distances east and west are reckoned: And this lot, with its improvements, the said James Ronaldson hath set apart for the purpose of establishing a decent and respectable Cemetery or Burial Place, with a view to moderate funeral expenses, and a hope that it will contribute to cherish those tender feelings that connect the living with their deceased friends; and in order to secure its application at all future times to that purpose only, he, the said James Ronaldson, has agreed to execute these presents.

Now this Indenture witnesseth, that in consideration of the premises, and of the sum of one dollar lawful money to him in hand paid by the said Joseph Parker Norris, Roberts Vaux, Robert M. Patterson, and Joseph Watson, at the time of the execution hereof, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, he the said James Ronaldson, hath granted, bargained, sold, released, and confirmed, and by these presents doth grant, bargain, sell, release, and confirm unto the said Joseph Parker Norris, Roberts Vaux, Robert M. Patterson, and Joseph Watson, their heirs and assigns, all that certain lot or piece of ground situate on the south side of Shippen street, and north side of Fitzwater street, between Ninth and Tenth streets, continued in the township of Moyamensing, and County of Philadelphia aforesaid, now called 'The Philadelphia Cemetery.' Beginning at the south-west corner of the said Shippen and Ninth streets, thence extending westerly along the south line of Shippen street three hundred and six feet four inches and a quarter to a corner; thence southerly, parallel with Tenth street, partly by other ground of the said James Ronaldson, and partly by grounds of Isaac Harvey, three hundred and seven feet, more or less, to Fitzwater street; thence easterly along the north line of Fitzwater street two hundred and twenty feet four inches and a quarter to a cor-

ner; thence by ground late of James R. Greaves, north thirty-one degrees east, two hundred and sixty feet to Ninth street, and thence northerly along the said Ninth street fifty-eight feet five inches to the place of beginning.

The above described lot of ground is composed of four pieces of ground: one of them being a small part of the south or rear end of a thirty-six feet wide lot fronting on Cedar street, which Christopher Marshall and Margaret his wife, by Indenture, dated the sixth day of June, Anno Domini one thousand seven hundred and ninety-nine, recorded at Philadelphia, in Deed Book E. F. No. 10, page 123, &c., granted to Archibald Binney and the said James Ronaldson, in fee, subject to a paramount yearly rent charge of one pound sixteen shillings sterling, payable to William Shippen, his heirs and assigns, on the twenty-fifth day of June, yearly for ever, and paying also therefor unto the said Christopher Marshall, his heirs and assigns, the yearly rent-charge of seventy-two dollars, in half yearly payments, on the first days of September and March, in every year for ever, without deduction for taxes; and the said Archibald Binney, by deed poll, dated the 24th day of August, Anno Domini one thousand eight hundred and fifteen, endorsed on the said recited Indenture, and recorded at Philadelphia, in Deed Book M. R. No. 4, page 221, &c., granted and released his moiety of the lot now reciting unto the said James Ronaldson in fee: and the other three pieces of ground, whereof the above described lot is composed, are the same which Joseph Parker Norris, Esq. Executor of the last will and testament of John Bleakly, deceased, by Indenture, dated the thirty-first day of January, Anno Domini one thousand eight hundred and twenty-six, recorded at Philadelphia, in Deed Book G. W. R., No. 11, page 628, &c. granted unto the said James Ronaldson in fee, as in and by the said recited Indentures will more fully and at large appear; together with all

PHILADELPHIA CEMETERY.

COPY OF THE

DEEDS OF TRUST, CHARTER, BY-LAWS,

AND

LIST OF LOT-HOLDERS;

WITH

An Account of the Cemetery.

PUBLISHED AGREEABLY TO A RESOLUTION OF THE LOT-HOLDERS.

PHILADELPHIA:

MISSLIN & PARRY, PRINTERS, No. 99 S. SECOND ST.

1845.

The Philadelphia Cemetery.

JAMES RONALDSON was the original projector of the burial ground, called the Philadelphia Cemetery, situated in Moyamensing township in the county of Philadelphia.

James Ronaldson was born at Edinburgh, Scotland, in the year 1769; he came to the United States of America in the year 1794.* He settled in Philadelphia, and established the first type foundry in America, associated with Archibald Binney.

Many years ago, about the beginning of the present century, Mr. Ronaldson conceived the idea of establishing a respectable place for the interment of persons whose circumstances did not admit of their incurring the charges usually made for interments in grounds belonging to the churches; and that they might avoid the necessity of being buried in the public grounds, where the expense is small, but the hazard of being removed very considerable. With these views, Mr. Ronaldson was induced to purchase from the Executors of the late Mr. Eleakley, the lot of ground on Shippen street, between Ninth and Tenth streets, now the Cemetery, and appropriate it to the present purpose. He had suitable buildings erected, had it enclosed with proper fences, filled up by adding several thousand loads of earth, ornamented by planting various trees and shrubs, and making gravel walks, and it was sur-

* James Ronaldson died on the 26th of March 1841, and was interred in the Cemetery which his benevolence established.

vayed and laid out in lots of 8 by 10 feet, fixing the price of each lot at \$26 to \$30.

The success of this plan was for several years doubtful, as some of the neighbors were hostile to such an establishment, apprehending it would become a nuisance; others were backward in countenancing the project from an idea that it was an infringement on the rights of the church, and that the ground was not properly consecrated: even some of the gentlemen of the clergy expressed an unkind disposition on the subject, and declared their intention of refraining from officiating at funerals in this Cemetery.

But happily for society, the humane views of the projector have at length been carried out, and his endeavors have succeeded in dispelling these prejudices. Any person of whatever religious persuasion, may now have his own freehold estate in the ground consecrated and blessed in any manner of faith consistent with his belief, without any hindrance or unkind feelings from his neighbors.

As a wish has been expressed by some of the owners of lots in this Cemetery, that a short history of it should be placed on record, the present Managers have obtained the preceding facts, and publish them with the Deed of Trust and Act of Incorporation, trusting they will be gratifying and satisfactory to all interested. Sincerely hoping that this establishment may long continue to be a benefit to the community and a source of satisfaction to the citizens of Philadelphia, as it was the first to overcome old established prejudices, the foregoing statement is most respectfully submitted to the proprietors.

PHILADELPHIA, DEC. 1, 1844.

✱

From the Philadelphia Gazette, March 3, 1837.

The following lines were addressed to JAMES RONALDSON, Esq., by a friend who came passenger with him from Scotland, in the good ship *Providence*. The effusion is meritorious, not merely from its point, but from the spirit of enduring friendship which it breathes.

LINES ADDRESSED TO MR. JAMES RONALDSON.

By an Old Shipmate.*

In youthful days, when we resolved
Our native land to leave,
With a firm faith in Providence
We crossed the Atlantic wave.

No better name! a ship could have,
Than that which brought us here,
And Providence has favored us
Throughout our long career.

And when our varied race is run,
And each has done his best,
A pleasant place you'll furnished have
Where both of us may rest.

* Adam Ramage, of Philadelphia.

† Ship Providence.

‡ Philadelphia Cemetery, where his mortal remains now rest.

DEAR SIR,

I have seen a manuscript copy of your Address, and feel very much obliged to you for the compliment; it makes me in *memory* 45 years younger, and revives feelings and recollections that produce a mixed and indescribable train of sensations in my memory, and brings into a focus in the mind, the past, the present, and the future. Well, Adam, don't you think that now we are acquainted, it is more likely that we shall be so hereafter, than it was 70 years ago that we should meet in the little ship *Providence*? It is a kindly hope, and I will cherish it; and, until we see hope a reality, I am

Yours sincerely,

JAMES RONALDSON.

NUMBER OF INTERMENTS.

Since the establishment of the Philadelphia Cemetery in the year 1827, the interments, as taken from the books of the Keeper, are as follows :

YEARS.	INTERMENTS.
1827	52
1828	116
1829	201
1830	288
1831	354
1832	433*
1833	314
1834	342
1835	420
1836	417
1837	358
1838	407
1839	457
1840	397
1841	438
1842	395
1843	337
1844	340
Total	6076

* The Asiatic Cholera year.

PHILADELPHIA CEMETERY.

COPY OF

Deed of Trust.

APRIL 2, 1827.

THIS INDENTURE, made the second day of April, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven, between James Ronaldson, of Moyamensing Township, in the County of Philadelphia, Esquire, of the one part, and Joseph Parker Norris, Roberts Vaux, Robert M. Patterson, and Joseph Watson, Esquires, all of the City of Philadelphia, of the other part: WHEREAS the said James Ronaldson is legally seized as of fee of and in the large lot of ground hereinafter particularly described, which he has at much expense enclosed with a wall, iron railing, and other fencing, and otherwise improved and ornamented; and has caused the same to be laid out as set forth in the map or plan hereunto annexed. Immediately inside the fence is a walk all round the lot, and three other walks running from the northern to the southern boundaries thereof. And the remaining part of the lot is laid out and subdivided into small lots, extending ten feet from north to south, and eight feet from east to west; and these small lots are respectively designated on the plan, by numbering each lot from two base lines; the south edge of Shippen street being the northern base line, from which the designations south commence, and all distances southwardly are reckoned; and a line drawn from the middle of the carriage gate, on Shippen street, to the middle of the carriage gate on Fitzwater street, forms the other base line, from

relation to the places in which interments were made. The church burying-grounds or the Potter's Field were the only places of interment. The families of persons who did not belong to religious congregations were at great disadvantage on the occasion of their death, or if there was no difficulty on this account the charges for opening the ground and permitting the burial were heavy. Besides, there was no property in a grave, and it became necessary in course of time to dig new graves exactly where old ones had been situate. These circumstances led to the calling of a meeting at the "New Market" Inn, Pine Street near Second, kept by William Ogden, about the 12th of July, 1826, "for the laudable purpose of forming a mutual association, without any exception or distinction on account of differences of religious tenets, to economize the heavy expense attending of sepulchral ground for an interment, and to insure to every individual member a lot or piece of ground of equal size to him and to his heirs forever to be reserved as a family cemetery, and the possession of a burying-place after the example of the patriarch Abraham." It was stated at this time that the church-wardens of Christ Church and St. James presented bills of twenty and thirty dollars for opening graves, and would not allow a tombstone to be put up until the money was paid. These proceedings culminated in the formation, at a meeting held at Lambert Keating's, Sixth and Chestnut Streets, on the 17th of August, of the Mutual Burying-Ground Society of the City and County of Philadelphia. The members purchased a piece of ground on the south side of Prime Street [or Washington Avenue], east of the line of Tenth Street, and in a few days the price of a lot in Mutual Cemetery, of the dimensions of eight feet by ten feet, was announced to be ten dollars. In the succeeding year the Union Burying-Ground was formed in Southwark. A large lot of ground was purchased on the line of Sixth Street, extending down to Federal Street. The price of lots was fixed at ten dollars. The Machpelah was formed about 1827, and purchased ground on the north side of Prime Street [Washington Avenue], extending from Tenth to Eleventh Street. About the same time the Philanthropic Cemetery was established on Passyunk Avenue, below the county prison. All these were upon the mutual and associate plan.

About the period that the Mutual Cemetery Company was established, James Ronaldson, who was the owner of a lot of ground bounded by Shippen, Fitzwater, Ninth, and Tenth Streets, determined to lay out the eastern portion of the ground, nearly the whole of it, for the purposes of a cemetery. He opened main walks and intersecting small walks. The plots between were divided into burying lots, ten feet north and south and eight feet east and west. On the 2d of April, 1827, Mr. Ronaldson conveyed the ground to Joseph Parker Norris, Roberts Vaux, Robert M. Patterson, and Joseph Watson, in trust, to permit the

said James Ronaldson and his heirs "to use and occupy the said several small lots or subdivisions only as burial-places for the interment of deceased human beings other than people of color." There was also a provision to permit Ronaldson to build on both sides of the gate, or carriage-way, on Shippen Street, suitable houses for the keeper, etc. On the 8th of April, 1833, the Legislature incorporated the lot-holders as the Philadelphia Cemetery Company, in the township of Moyamensing. Mr. Ronaldson displayed great taste in the establishment of this ground and in the manner of laying it out. It was for some years considered the finest cemetery in the county, and was a popular place of burial. The projector said, in relation to his original plan, that he wanted to erect within the inclosure of the Philadelphia Cemetery a dwelling-house for the keeper, or grave-digger, on one side of the gate, and on the other side a house uniform with the grave-digger's, this house to have a room provided with a stove, couch, etc., into which persons dying suddenly might be laid and the string of a bell put into their hand, so that if there should be any motion of returning life the alarm-bell might be rung, the keeper roused, and medical help procured. The first interment at Ronaldson's Cemetery took place June 2, 1827, of the body of a lady who had died in a hospital under Dr. Physick.

The centre house at Centre Square was torn down about the beginning of the year 1827. The ordinance to open streets through the square was presented in May of the preceding year, but the measure was not finally accomplished for some time.

On the 24th of November, 1827, pursuant to a call in the newspapers signed by James Mease, N. Chapman, George Pepper, John Vaughan, Reuben Haines, Joseph Hopkinson, Charles Chauncey, Horace Binney, and Mathew Carey, a meeting was held at the Franklin Institute to form a Horticultural Society. Mr. Carey was chairman and Dr. Mease secretary. It was resolved "that it is expedient to establish a Horticultural Society in the city of Philadelphia for the promotion of that interesting and highly important branch of science, and that a constitution be framed for that purpose." A committee, consisting of D. Maupay, D. Landreth, Jr., T. Hibberd, T. Landreth, John McArran, and A. D'Arras, all practical gardeners and florists, was appointed to obtain members, and a resolution was passed that the society should be organized as soon as fifty members could be secured. This work did not require much time. On the 21st of December the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society was founded, with : members. It was not until the 2d of June of the succeeding year that the first regular election was held. Horace Binney was chosen president; Dr. James Mease, Mathew Carey, D. Landreth, Jr., Dr. N. Chapman, vice-presidents; William Davidson, treasurer; Samuel Hazard, corresponding secretary; David S. Brown, recording secretary; George Pepper, Nicholas Biddle, Thomas

(VOL. I: SCARF & WESTCOTT)

for a burial place for all strangers, negroes, and mulattoes as died in any part of Germantown, forever."

Potter's Field, Moyamensing.—The district of Moyamensing was chartered by act of 24th of March, 1812. Under this authority the commissioners some time afterward established their public burying-ground upon a lot on the north side of Tidmarsh Street, between Eleventh and Twelfth.

Hart's Lane Burying-Ground was appropriated as a Potter's Field in 1855, and is bounded by Lehigh Avenue, Twentieth Street, and Hart's Lane. Up to 1883 it was still in use for burial purposes.

The Morgue.—The first place brought into service for the deposit of unknown or unclaimed bodies, was the Green House at the Potter's Field, on Lombard Street, between Ninth and Tenth, and in 1870 the Morgue was built on the north side of Noble Street, east of Front.

Cemeteries.—As distinguished from the burial-places in churchyards, the first cemetery in Philadelphia was that established in 1826 by the Mutual Burying-Ground Association, which bought ground on the south side of Prime Street [Washington Avenue], east of Tenth. It was followed by the Philadelphia, Passyunk road between Twentieth and Twenty-second Streets, and by the Union Burial-Ground Society, which in 1841 was regularly incorporated. A lot was purchased on the east line of Sixth Street, which has been extended from Washington Avenue to Federal Street, and half-way to Fifth Street.

Machpelah Cemetery dates back to about 1827, and is owned by the Machpelah Cemetery Society, which bought ground on the north side of Prime Street, at Tenth Street. The Philanthropic Cemetery, on Passyunk road, was also established about 1827, and was followed in the next year by Lafayette Cemetery, covering the block between Ninth and Tenth, and Federal and Wharton Streets. Philadelphia or Ronaldson's Cemetery was projected by James Ronaldson in 1826, and founded a year or so subsequently on the ground bounded by Tenth, Shippen, Ninth, and Fitzwater Streets. He spent money liberally upon it, and for many years it was the model burying-place of the city.

Laurel Hill Cemetery, unsurpassed in its beauties of location and adornment, was planned in 1835 by some gentlemen, principal among whom were Frederick Brown, Benjamin W. Richards, and John Jay Smith. They purchased, in February, 1836, the country-seat of Joseph Sims, on the east bank of the Schuylkill, and called "Laurel," which then became Laurel Hill Cemetery, and in later years North Laurel Hill. The Laurel Hill Cemetery Company was incorporated Feb. 9, 1837, and the first interment was made a few months later. It was that of Mrs. Mary Carlisle, who had visited the grounds a few weeks before her death and selected for her grave

a spot under a group of pines near the centre of the inclosure. Laurel Hill at once became the chief cemetery of the city, because of its rural charms, its picturesque variety of hill and dale, its noble trees, and its splendid architectural adornment. One of the first pieces of decoration selected by the managers was the exceedingly appropriate group executed in red sandstone by James Thom, a Scotch sculptor, representing "Old Mortality" with his pony, and in conversation with Sir Walter Scott, the author of that famous character in fiction. In course of time other art-creations were added, and the owners of many lots erected in them the costly and superb tombs and monuments that now everywhere dot the surface of this beautiful city of the dead. Within a short time after its opening it was found necessary to enlarge Laurel Hill. An extension northward was not possible, as the ground fell off sharply, and the Reading Railroad ran below. Immediately adjoining, on the south, was situate Fairy Hill, the seat of the Pepper family, but it was not to be bought when the cemetery company would have been glad to acquire ownership. As a matter of necessity, the managers were compelled to purchase somewhere else, and a negotiation was entered into for the estate, formerly Harleigh, on the Ridge road, adjoining Fairy Hill on the north and Strawberry Mansion on the south. This was bought some time before 1852, and opened as South Laurel Hill. In course of time the Fairy Hill property came into the market, and was purchased by the Laurel Hill Cemetery Company, and thus the north and south sections were united, while to the newly-acquired property was given the name of Central Laurel Hill.

Monument Cemetery, situated on the west side of Broad Street, between Montgomery Avenue and Diamond Street, was laid out in 1836-37, by Dr. John A. Elkinton, who was owner of the property, under the title of Père La Chaise. The lot-holders were incorporated March 19, 1838, as the Monument Cemetery Company of Philadelphia.

Woodlands Cemetery was previously the country-seat of William Hamilton, lying southeast of the Darby road, or what is now Woodland Avenue. It was purchased by a number of citizens, who, on April 13, 1840, were incorporated as the Woodlands Cemetery Company of Philadelphia. This cemetery occupies an admirable site, commanding views of the course of the Schuylkill and the city, and embraces numerous monuments that are marked by a high standard of artistic design and execution.

Franklin Cemetery.—In 1840 Mrs. Catharine R. Livingston, of the township of the Northern Liberties, proposed to convey to Rev. George Boyd and John W. Kester a lot of ground containing about seven acres, situate near the two-mile stone on the Frankford road, for the purposes of a rural cemetery. On the 29th of May, 1840, the association was incorporated as the Franklin Cemetery Company.

RE: RONALDSON'S CEMETERY
(VOL. III: SCARF + WESTCOTT)

PP 136-
137

ANNALS
PHILADELPHIA, AND PENNSYLVANIA,
IN THE OLDEN TIME;
BEING A COLLECTION OF
MEMOIRS, ANECDOTES, AND INCIDENTS
OF THE
CITY AND ITS INHABITANTS,

AND OF THE
EARLIEST SETTLEMENTS OF THE INLAND PART OF PENNSYLVANIA:

INTENDED TO PRESERVE THE RECOLLECTIONS OF OLDEN TIME, AND TO EXHIBIT SOCIETY
IN ITS CHANGES OF MANNERS AND CUSTOMS, AND THE CITY AND COUNTRY
IN THEIR LOCAL CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS.

By JOHN F. WATSON,

MEMBER OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETIES OF PENNSYLVANIA, NEW YORK, AND MASSACHUSETTS

ENLARGED, WITH MANY REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS, BY

WILLIS P. HAZARD.

PROFUSELY ILLUSTRATED.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

"Oh! dear is a tale of the olden time!"
Sequari vestigia rerum.

"Where peep'd the hut, the palace towers;
Where skimm'd the bark, the war-ship lowers;
Joy gaily carols where was silence rude,
And cultured thousands throng the solitude."

PHILADELPHIA:
EDWIN S. STUART,

9 SOUTH NINTH STREET.

1891.

ciated together and bought lots for the purpose. The Friends were an exception to the first plan, as their burial-lots at first were always separate from their meeting-houses; as, for instance, the lot at the corner of Fourth and Arch streets, which had nearly ceased being a receptacle of their dead, or more than a century after it was started, before the meeting-house was built there. The first burial in this lot was that of T. Lloyd's wife, in 1683; William Penn spoke at her grave. For many years this was a general burying-ground, strangers and the friendless finding here a resting-place.

In 1825 a number of persons united under the name of the Mutual Association and bought ground on Washington (formerly Prime) street, between Ninth and Tenth streets. In the two following years four other companies adopted the association principle—the Machpelah, Washington avenue from Tenth to Eleventh; the Philanthropic, Passyunk avenue below Cross street; the Union, South Sixth, from Washington avenue to Federal street; the La Fayette, from Ninth to Tenth and from Federal to Wharton street.

In 1827, James Ronaldson, a Scotchman and an eminent type-founder, improved the plan by starting a cemetery Ninth and Tenth streets from Bainbridge to Fitzwater, which should make the burial-place attractive by trees, shrubbery, handsome ornamental tombstones, walks, etc. Though he met with opposition from the sanctimonious and those opposed to new ideas, it was in keeping with the feeling of the times, and was successful. He commenced preparing the lot in the fall of 1826, and the first interment took place June 2d, 1827, of a lady who died in the hospital under Dr. Physick. Many tombstones in the ground bear dates of 1828 and 1829. Before Mr. Ronaldson made it into a cemetery it was a celebrated skating-lot in the winter season. At the corner of Tenth and South streets was the old Lebanon Garden, where a barbecue in honor of Gen. Jackson took place. (See p. 402 of this volume.)

The next cemetery that was established was that of Laurel Hill, on the banks of the Schuylkill, extending to Ridge avenue and from Huntingdon street to Allegheny avenue, and now accessible by cars or steamboat. It is now known as North, Central, and South Laurel Hill, as it was purchased at three separate times as the demand increased for more space.

In 1835 the topic of non-sectarian cemeteries had been brought before the public by the foundation near Boston of the first burial-place on an extensive scale. Judge Story's beautiful address had been printed, exciting general interest in a greatly neglected topic of civilization. Very soon after this well-considered and exhaustive oration had been published the attention of one of our prominent citizens (John Jay Smith) was called to the subject by the loss of a favorite young daughter. Little other preparation

of the last class on payment of \$1; and to pupils of the Drawing School without charge. Gentlemen not members paid \$5 and ladies \$2 each season.

The professorships were filled as follows: Chemistry, Wm. H. Keating; Natural Philosophy and Mechanics, Robert M. Patterson; and Architecture, Wm. Strickland.

Professors Keating and Patterson held chairs in the University of Pennsylvania, as did the subsequent Professors of the Institute, Alex. Dallas Bache, John F. Frazer, Henry Reed, Roswell Park, Robert Hare, and the brothers James and Robert E. Rogers.



James Ronaldson

Mr. James Ronaldson was born upon his father's estate, "Georgie," near Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1770. He came to Philadelphia in 1791, and not wishing to be idle he bought an interest in a biscuit bakery, which he maintained for nearly two years, when he entered into partnership with Andrew Binney, in 1794, to manufacture type of various kinds, which was the beginning of the type-founding business in America. This business later on developed into the McKeller, Smith & Jordan Co. of the present time.

James Ronaldson engaged later on in spinning cotton yarns. He owned the "Hillsburg Mills" of 1200 spindles—located on Ridley Creek, fifteen miles below Philadelphia. Ultimately he established the Philadelphia (now the Ronaldson's) Cemetery, to afford citizens of small means decent burial at charges within their means. This was the first cemetery outside those around the church-yards in the city. The west-end walk ground was free to worthy persons who were in straitened circumstances and poor.

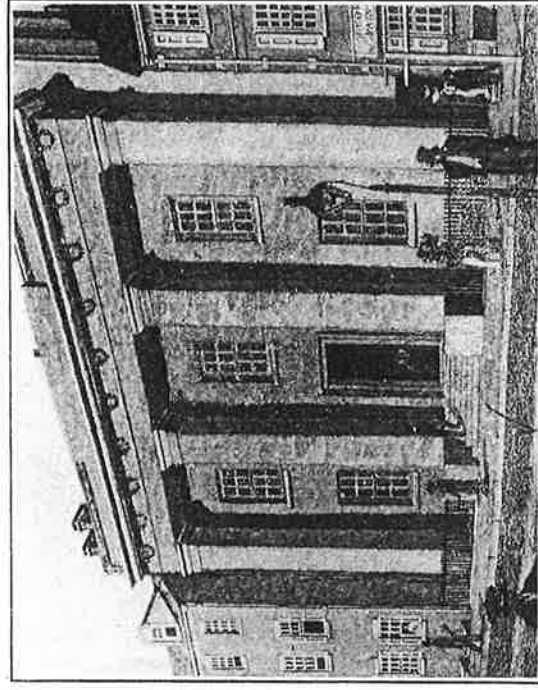
He established the first Night School in the Southwark District, and also the first Soup Society for the poor. He had the soup made in a room

or kitchen in the rear of his house, where he could at any time test its quality by having samples brought to his table.

He was President of the Mechanical Society, which preceded the Franklin Institute by many years, and eventually was its nucleus. This Society had its rooms on the west side of Third Street, a few doors below Market Street, in the second story in the rear.

He was a personal friend of President Andrew Jackson, but refused a seat in his Cabinet.

He was the President of the Louisville Canal Company, and it may be of interest to add that he had in his employ, as one of his Engineers, the late J. Edgar Thompson, whom he subsequently sent to the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, of which Thompson eventually became President. He was the first President of the Franklin Institute, and occupied the office from 1824 till his death, in 1841.



Franklin Institute Facade before 1830

The first course of lectures was delivered in the old Academy building, belonging to the University of Pennsylvania, in Fourth Street near Arch. Soon a school of Architecture and Mechanical Drawing was established. Among the first pupils was Thomas U. Walter, then a bricklayer, but, thanks to that school, afterwards the architect of Girard College, and ultimately of the Capitol at Washington.

Then a special school of English Literature, Ancient and Modern Languages, Mathematics—a veritable high school—was placed under the direction of Walter R. Johnson.

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILADELPHIA



SON RET LINGUE

BY

JOSEPH JACKSON

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VOL. IV

OLD ZOOLOGICAL

ADDENDA

ILLUSTRATED



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TELEGRAPH BUILDING

1933

RONALDSON CEMETERY—At the southwest corner of Ninth and Bainbridge Streets. Founded in 1827 by James Ronaldson (1768-1841), a native of Scotland, who, having visited Philadelphia in 1791, returned in 1794 to settle here. In 1796, together with Andrew Binney, he established here the first permanent type foundry in the United States. Type had been cast here before, but by printers, usually for their own use. In 1806, the firm purchased the typefoundry materials and tools which Franklin had sent here from France. The firm later established a china manufactory.—See CHINA AND PORCELAIN MANUFACTURE. Ronaldson established the first soup kitchen, in Southwark (1805); was a founder of the Scots Thistle Society, and first president of the Franklin Institute. He operated cotton mills on Ridley Creek (1823). He was a member of the St. Andrew's Society of Philadelphia, and at one time its vice-president. Ronaldson owned the block from Ninth to Tenth Streets, and from Shippen (Bainbridge) Street to Fitzwater. The eastern and larger part of this property he designated for a burial ground. He organized it in 1826 as the Philadelphia Cemetery, and in 1827 turned the property over to trustees. The first interment was made June 2, 1827. In 1833, the lot-holders were incorporated as the Philadelphia Cemetery Company. Since Ronaldson's death it has generally received his name. His design contained one interesting feature. This was a building beside the gateway where bodies of persons who had died suddenly could be laid for a time to prevent premature burial. In such cases one end of a rope attached to a bell was placed in the hands of the corpse so that if he revived he might give the alarm. *

RONALDSON'S ROW—West side of Ninth Street, from South to Bainbridge, was so named after James Ronaldson, who erected the attractive dwellings, with their high marble steps, in 1828, on the property upon which his foundry had been situated. He was a retired typefounder, and had suggested the laying out of Ronaldson Cemetery at Ninth and Bainbridge.—See RONALDSON CEMETERY.

ROOSEVELT BOULEVARD—Eight miles long and 300 feet wide. Starts at Broad Street, north of Hunting Park Avenue, and has its terminus in Pennypack Park, on Pennypack Creek. Was in course of construction for fifteen years. In 1911, it was opened for traffic for about seven miles, and had cost up to that time \$1,622,286. In November, 1918, the last section of the Boulevard was completed. Originally, it was designated as Northeast Boulevard, but after the death of President Theodore Roosevelt, in 1919, his name was given it by City Ordinance.

ROPE FERRY—See FERRIES.

ROPE-WALKS—Being one of the principal ports of entry in the Colonial period, and one of the important ship-building centers, Philadelphia quite early had its rope manufacturers. In those times, and until very recently, ropes were

**SUMMARY OF
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SALVAGE OF BURIALS
WASHINGTON AVENUE, PHILADELPHIA**

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June 2005

ABSTRACT

On February 6 and 7, 2002, 16 coffins and portions of two additional coffins were observed in a construction trench situated in the 700 block of Washington Avenue between Passyunk Avenue and 8th Street in Philadelphia. Sixteen of these burials subsequently were removed by archaeologists from Temple University in conjunction with various volunteers and staff of the Laurel Hill Cemetery. Time constraints prevented the excavation of the grave shafts and removal of the burials using standard archaeological techniques. The burials are probably associated with the Bishop's Ground, a Catholic cemetery first opened in 1824. A variety of data indicate that none of the burials were interred after the Civil War era. En-coffined burials occurred singly and stacked in single grave shafts, with the heads of all coffins oriented to the west. The human remains represent children and adults of both sexes. When multiple burials were encountered in a single grave shaft, children always seemed to be positioned lower in the stack of coffins than adults. Few material objects were recovered from any of the coffins. Notable exceptions include: remnants of silk ribbon associated with a few child burials; a thin, yellow metal (gold?) wedding band and folded woollen "shawl" or blanket from the burial of an adult female, bone buttons from the burial of an adult male, and fragments of a white clay pipestem from a grave shaft containing multiple coffins. Ornamental white metal strapping was also associated with a number of the coffins. The hexagonal, flat topped, and occasionally arched top style of the coffins, burial style, artifacts, and historic background research suggest that the burials were interred during the first half of the 19th century. The physical anthropology of the human remains and the results of historical research are the subjects of separate reports. Following the conclusion of their study at the Laboratory of Anthropology at Temple University, the human remains were removed to the Laurel Hill Cemetery pending reburial.

Coffin 7

First encountered at 6.1 feet below street level, the child sized, hexagonal coffin has an arched lid. The arched lid was created through the combined use of some bent/formed wood in addition to beveling the joins of the boards used in the lid. Similar construction is seen in Coffin 5.

Recognizable grave pit fill was associated with the coffin and after excavation was screened. No artifacts were recovered from the pit fill. Upon full exposure in the field, the coffin collapsed. Immediately beneath the coffin were linear impressions in the trench floor perpendicular to the coffin's long axis. This appears to be what was left of wooden spacers upon which the coffin was laid, making it easier to remove the ropes used to lower the coffin into the grave.

The human remains associated with Coffin 7 are those of a child of undetermined sex, 8-16 months old (Crist 2005). Small amounts of hair are associated with the collapsed skull. Blue staining is visible on the left lower leg (tibia/fibula). The arms were oriented along the side of the body.

Ribbon-like fragments of silk fabric were found distributed over portions of the body. Fragments associated with the skull may have been part of some type of bonnet. Three, five-pointed stars were created by tying together similar ribbons (Figure 3). These stars were positioned on the body just below the skull. The body itself appears to have been laid on a bed of wood shavings which may have been the stuffing of some type of mattress or coffin padding, although no related fabric was visible. In conversations with historical archaeologists, it was suggested that the use of wood shavings in a coffin may have served a variety of purposes. If the wood were of an aromatic type, the shavings would have mitigated the smell of the decomposing corpse during the period of a wake and subsequent burial rituals or services. The shavings would also serve to absorb fluids from the decomposing body, and prevent the body from moving around inside of the coffin during transport. It was not determined whether the wood shavings in Coffin 7 were the same type of wood as used to manufacture the coffin.

Coffin 9

This coffin was only partially revealed in the open construction trench. Portions of the south wall of the trench had to be undercut in order to expose this child-sized coffin. The top of the coffin was encountered at approximately 3.7 feet below surface. The coffin was damaged and it seemed that pieces of it and associated human remains were missing. Subsequent laboratory evaluation showed that only the lower limbs were present of this 2-3 year old child (Crist 2005). The skeleton presented evidence of rickets, a vitamin D deficiency resulting in anterior curvature of the femora and tibiae.

Portions of the coffin seemed to have been formed with bent or formed wood. Decorative metal strapping was found within the coffin.

Coffins 13a, 13b

Very small portions of the edges of what are probably two distinctive coffins were exposed on the eastern side of the trench - one along the northern wall of the trench, and one along the southern wall of the trench. Exploring these further would have required substantially undercutting the existing walls of the trench. Since the construction had not really disturbed them, they were left in place (no human remains were observed or recovered). The tops of the coffins were encountered from 5.0 to 5.5 feet below surface.

Coffins 1 and 12

C1 was exposed and removed prior to the arrival of Temple archaeologists in the field. Kelley's field notes indicate that the burial had been damaged by the backhoe during the opening of the trench. There is some discrepancy between what Kelley observed in the field and designated as C1, and what was transported to Temple's lab and labeled as C1. Kelley notes that there didn't appear to be a coffin associated with the human remains that she designated as C1, but encased remains labeled as C1 were delivered to the Temple laboratory.

There was sufficient sediment in the coffin delivered to the Temple lab to require excavation to fully expose all skeletal elements, those of an adult male (Crist 2005). During the excavation of the sediment in the coffin, seven buttons were recovered (Figure 4). The location of four of these could be determined as follows: one on the left side of the body near the lumbar vertebra; one on the right side near the lumbar vertebrae; and two in wood shavings in the bottom of the coffin.

Janowitz and Miller evaluated the buttons and stated that it would not be unusual to find them in burials dating to the early 19th century. The single-holed buttons are made of bone and were probably cut with a circular saw. Single-holed buttons were generally covered in cloth and fastened to clothing with a metal eye that passed through the hole. Such buttons were generally used on underwear and shirts. Of all of the burials examined, this is one of the few adults with evidence of clothing.

C12 is located in what appears to be the same area where Kelley reported recovering C1. The two coffins may have shared a common grave shaft. C12 is an adult sized coffin, only a portion of which was able to be exposed within the confines of the construction trench. It was encountered at 4.7 feet below the surface. It was not possible to fully expose the coffin and gently remove the burial. As the day's fieldwork was drawing to a close, staff of the Laurel Hill cemetery broke into the side of the exposed and removed an undetermined amount of the human remains it contained for reburial. These were not transported to Temple University for analysis.

Coffins 2 and 4

These hexagonal coffins appeared to be stacked in a common grave shaft, the associated remains each representing an adult female (Crist 2005). C2 is the uppermost of the burials in this stack and was encountered at 4.5 feet below surface. The lid of the coffin was badly decayed. During examination in the laboratory it was determined that at some point after the emplacement

of the burial, the coffin lid collapsed onto the human remains, and sediment gradually filled large portions of the coffin. The underside of the coffin lid near the head of the burial bears deep impressions of the teeth of the individual. Upon full exposure of the human remains it was seen that one arm was crossed over the body while the other was laid straight along side of the body.

There was a thin layer (0.15 foot) of sediment separating the base of C2 from the top of C4, found at 5.2 feet below the existing surface. C4 is the best preserved of all of the coffins observed and recovered. This adult-sized, hexagonal coffin has a slightly arched lid as a result of beveling the joins between the two boards that were used to construct the lid. Narrow-width decorative white metal strapping runs the length of the coffin's midline. Another length of this material is oriented along the width of the coffin at the shoulder position. Together the metal straps visually describe a cross. Metal screws were employed in attaching the coffin's lid, something that was not typical of the other coffins that were recovered during the project. Large screws and nails were also employed in other portions of the coffin's construction.

The coffin contained dark colored sediments, indicating that the it had been breached at some point well before its recent exposure in the construction trench. These sediments were thickest in the area of the skull and thinned below this area. The sediments continued the length of the humerus at the body's side and then ceased.

The arms of the adult female were oriented along the sides of the body (Figure 5). Hair is preserved in the area of the head and groin. A thin plain band of what is apparently yellow gold was on the ring finger of the left hand. The band appears to have been soldered in one place. A folded length of fabric (blanket?) covered the body from the lower portions of the rib cage down to the knees. The hands, but not the arms of the body, are resting on top of the fabric at the level of the waist. Gary McGowan identified the material as woolen, with a looped, machine produced weave. The use of this technique indicates that the fabric was produced after the 1820s. Quantities of wood shavings were found beneath the body and between the legs.

Coffins C3, C5, and C6

These three coffins, all containing the remains of adults, were stacked in a common grave pit with C3 being the uppermost and C6 the lowermost. A white substance, possibly lime or plaster, covered the lid of C6, and may have been emplaced to make it easier to stack C5 on top of the slightly beveled lid of C6.

The hexagonal coffin of C3 was encountered at 4.75 feet below surface and contained the remains of an adult male (Crist 2005). The head of the coffin was oriented to the west, as were the rest of those observed and recovered during the project. The lid of the coffin had been damaged by the backhoe used to open the construction trench.

The coffin contained sand, fill that was used to temporary close the trench prior to the removal of the burials. When the coffin was opened and the interior excavated, there was the visual impression that the body was a bit tall for the size of the coffin. The skeleton exhibited a

healed right tibial periostitis, an inflammation of the outer layer of the bone. This is the result of a localized infection of unknown origin (Crist 2005). Hair was preserved on the skull. The arms were arranged along the side of the body.

C5 occurred at 6.1 feet below the surface. The hexagonal coffin contained the remains of an adult female. The coffin lid was slightly arched. Some bent or formed wood is incorporated in the construction of the coffin's lid. The outside of the bottom right portion of the coffin was covered with a white material (lime or plaster?) that was also found covering the lid of C6 below.

The arms of the skeleton were situated along the sides of the body with the hands resting on the abdomen. Quantities of soft tissue are preserved in the area of the torso, abdomen, and legs, and hair occurs in the area of the groin. The skeleton exhibited a wide pre-auricular sulcus, which is evidence of at least one pregnancy (Crist 2005).

At the base of the common grave shaft (7.0 feet below surface) was C6, a hexagonal, arched lid coffin containing the probable remains of an adult male (Crist 2005). Nine nails run up the edge of one section of the coffin's lid, spaced at intervals of 4-6 inches. The coffin was beginning to collapse in the field.

Hair and what may be portions of scalp are preserved on the skull. A bluish stain also occurred on the skull. Pubic hair is also preserved. The arms are arranged along the side of the body and some finger bones of each hand lay beneath the left and right femur. Wood shavings were found below the head and shoulders.

Coffins C8, C10, C11, and C16

The four coffins were stacked in a common grave shaft with C8 at the top and C16 at the bottom. Three adults and a child are represented in the burials. C8 rested on two wooden chocks placed on the lid of coffin C10 in order to make it easier to stack C8 on the arched lid of coffin C10. A mold-made clay pipe stem (Figure 6) was recovered during the screening of the fill from the grave shaft at the level of C10. Its style is typical of the 19th century but can't be pinned down to a specific decade. There is no conflict between the potential age range that can be associated with the style of coffins recovered and the period of use of pipes similar to the one from the grave shaft. Shell (oyster? clam?) was also in the pit fill at this level.

The remains of an adult female were found in C8, a hexagonal coffin found at 3.0 feet below the surface. The south wall of the construction trench had to be undercut to fully expose the coffin. C10, containing an adult female, was found at 4.2 feet below surface.

An adult male is associated with C11, encountered at 4.8 feet below surface. White metal decorative strapping is on the coffin. There is considerable soft tissue and hair preserved in the burial. The arms are oriented along the side of the body with the hands laying on the abdomen. Large quantities of wood shavings and wood debris occurred beneath the lower legs and feet.

C16, a child-sized coffin with arched lid was encountered at approximately 6 feet below surface. Decorative white metal strapping crosses the width of the coffin at its shoulder and helps to bind the two pieces of the coffin's lid.

Coffins C14, C15, and C17

These coffins, all containing very young children (Crist 2005), were stacked in a common grave shaft with C14 at the top and C17 at the bottom. C14, found at 3.9 feet below surface, is a hexagonal coffin with an arched lid containing the remains of a newborn. The interior of the coffin's lid had the Roman numerals XIII carved into it. Wood shavings and wood debris were found throughout the base of the coffin.

The remains of an 8-16 months old child were found in C15, encountered immediately beneath C14 at 4.5 feet below surface. It, too, is hexagonal in shape with an arched lid. Strips of lace or other fabric were preserved on top of the skull and may be part of a bonnet or other head covering. The skull had collapsed. Hair and what may be scalp are preserved in association. The arms were positioned along the side of the body. Blue staining occurs on portions of the skull and the tibia.

An 8-16 months old child is found in C17 at 5.6 feet below surface. C17 is another hexagonal coffin with arched lid. Portions of the skull are stained blue. Cloth strips (lace?) are associated with the skull and may be portions of a bonnet. Wood shavings and wood debris are found through the base of the coffin.

Age of Interments

The most precise thing that can be said about the age of the burials is that they are probably interred no earlier than 1824 and later than the post Civil War era. The hexagonal shape of the coffins conforms to the style of coffins during this period of history. Further, none of the Washington Avenue burials seemed to have been subjected to embalming, a practice that only became widely used during and after the Civil War. Historical research collated by Andy Waskie suggests that the burials were once part of the Old St. Joseph's Catholic Burial Ground also known as "Bishop's Ground". The burial ground was officially opened in 1824 due to overcrowding at other graveyards and the increased number of burials due to epidemics. The burials at Bishop's Ground were apparently moved to Holy Cross Cemetery during the early 20th century.

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The woolen fabric or blanket from C4 could not have been produced prior to the 1820s. The machine cut nails, screws, and clay pipe stem have manufacturing and use histories do not contradict the assumptions made above.

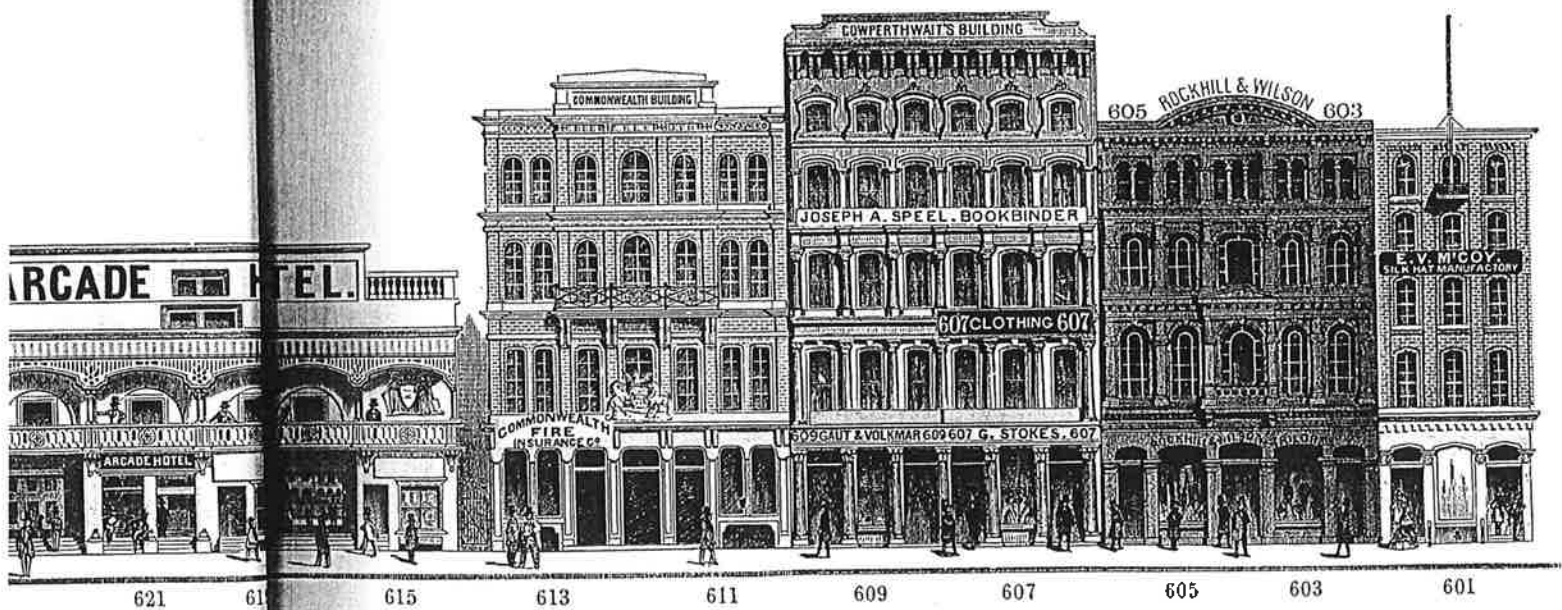
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Likely a part of the Catholic cemetery at the Bishop's Ground dating from 1824, the burials recovered along Washington Avenue were made before the time when embalming corpses was habitual. In all cases, the heads of the coffins were oriented to the west, a relatively common custom throughout historic times in the region and elsewhere. The alignment

DELL UPTON

Another City

URBAN LIFE
AND URBAN
SPACES IN THE
NEW AMERICAN
REPUBLIC



YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS NEW HAVEN & LONDON

2008

dertaken "the building of a new and entire city, in the immediate rear of the old one. He builds his houses of stone, in a very solid and costly manner, and has marked out the area of a spacious square, in which are to be ornamental plantings." In the midst of his subdivision, on a hill overlooking his cemetery, Hillhouse set his own residence.³²

Plantings further unified the cities of the living and the dead. Hillhouse and his fellow beautifiers planted elm trees along the main streets of New Haven, a "great multitude of shade trees" that Dwight celebrated as a "species of ornament in which the town is unrivaled." Visitor Algernon Sydney Roberts found the town a "delightful place . . . truly a classic spot—an elysium! . . . each house has a small yard or lawn in front ornamented with trees and shrubbery," while fellow Philadelphian Sidney George Fisher also commented on the gardens "adorned by shrubbery, and the wide streets lined & shaded by magnificent old elms." When Hillhouse gave the land of his subdivision to the city, he retained control over its plantings during his lifetime. And in the New Burying Ground he planted the "alleys" or streets with Lombardy poplars, a species then being introduced as street trees in many American cities.³³

These trees connoted refinement rather than nature in the romantic sense. As a group of Philadelphia residents pointed out in a petition to the city council, the planting of trees would show the world "the Character of Philadelphia as to taste and magnificence." Landscaping lay a veneer of gentility over the articulated space of the commercial city, its cemetery, and, by extension, its inhabitants. Rather than positing culture-nature, city-suburb, or living-dead dichotomies, Hillhouse and his systematizing colleagues imagined the city and its cemetery as complementary aspects of urban life unified by the cultivated, artificial refinement of landscape plantings. The cemetery, separated and classified within itself, was in turn incorporated into the articulated landscape of the town, holding present and past generations in proper relationship, allowing appropriate commemoration while at the same time preventing the living and the dead from intruding on one another.³⁴

* New Haven's New Burying Ground defined the reformed cemetery, but the grid and privatization did not come to most American cemeteries until the 1820s, as the oldest cities outgrew their colonial graveyards and required new ones. Like the New Burying Ground these reformed cemeteries were usually founded as one of a number of projects of urban reordering by men who articulated a systematic understanding of the city, men such as Philadelphia's James Ronaldson (1768–1841), who established the Philadelphia, or Ronaldson's, Cemetery just outside the city's limits at Tenth and Shippen (now Bainbridge) streets in 1826–27. *

Ronaldson was as deeply engaged in the political and economic life of Phila-

Philadelphia as Hillhouse was in New Haven's. A Scottish immigrant who began his American career as a biscuit baker, Ronaldson and fellow Scot Andrew Binny later established a type foundry that for a time also produced Queensware ceramics. By the 1820s he owned a cotton spinning and weaving mill as well. His wealth and his lack of a family allowed him to be one of Philadelphia's most energetic systematizers. He was a founder and first president of the Franklin Institute, contributed to the Pennsylvania Hospital, served as president of the Louisville Canal Company, helped promote the Columbia Railroad, organized Philadelphia's first soup kitchen, and took an interest in the city's public school system.³⁵

Through these activities Ronaldson was able to indulge an obsessive and occasionally overbearing passion for rationalizing and organizing urban life at every level. He published pamphlets about the effects of paper currency on the economy, the kinds of goods merchants ought to import, and the disposition of Stephen Girard's legacy. No subject was beneath his attention or foreign to the expertise he assumed. During the War of 1812 Ronaldson offered "hints" to General Thomas Cadwalader about the best way to lay out and administer his military encampment and reminded him to make sure his men used the proper-sized ammunition in their guns, to keep them as healthy as possible, and to serve them well-cooked food.³⁶

In the fall of 1826, Ronaldson began to prepare several adjacent parcels of land, including a vacant lot that had been used as a skating rink, as a graveyard. The first burial took place in June 1827. It was Ronaldson's proudest achievement, and he reputedly sited his row of houses to be near it, as Hillhouse had his mansion. Ronaldson occupied the end building, from which he could look out on his burial ground (see fig. 4.2).³⁷

Ronaldson's Philadelphia Cemetery was one of six private cemeteries established south of the city in the years 1825-27, following a city ordinance forbidding inner-city burials. Yet Ronaldson introduced several innovations that were absent from the others—the Mutual Association, Machpelah, Philanthropic, Union, and La Fayette cemeteries. Ronaldson's Cemetery was famous for accepting people with any or no religious affiliations and people, notably actors, who were excluded from most churchyards on moral grounds. As a result, Ronaldson was opposed by people who believed that his burying ground infringed the vested rights of the church or who were offended that it was unconsecrated. Some clergymen refused to officiate there.³⁸

Like the New Burying Ground or New Orleans's St. Louis cemeteries, the Philadelphia Cemetery fostered ties between the living and dead generations. Ronaldson "hope[d] that [the cemetery] will contribute to cherish those tender feelings that connect the living with their deceased friends." His intended clients

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ers' Western burying ground in the city. Like Joseph Bigelow before him, Smith assembled a group of interested men in November 1835 to discuss the creation of a rural cemetery. They purchased Joseph Sims's former estate, Laurel Hill, which had been used briefly as a Roman Catholic boys' school and which was already landscaped. William Strickland (one of the original committee), Thomas U. Walter, and John Notman were asked to submit designs for a cemetery on the site. Notman's design was chosen, although in many ways the design was a collaboration among Notman, the unsuccessful competitors, the surveyor Philip M. Price, and Smith.⁵⁷

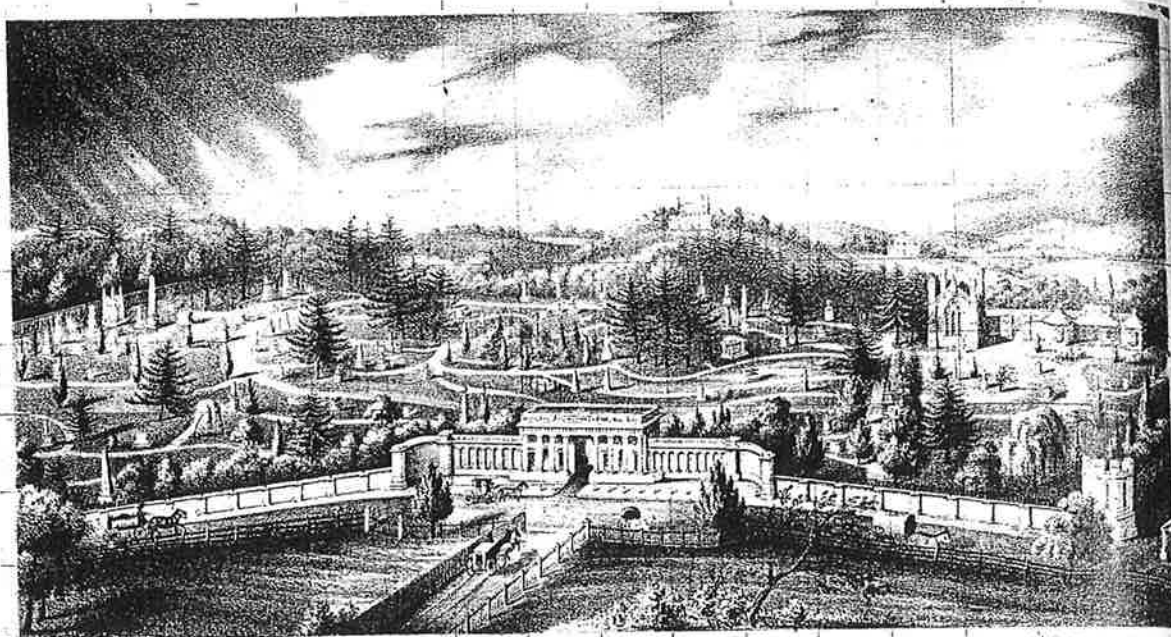
Laurel Hill was organized around a pair of irregularly looping drives ascending a hill from the entrance on Ridge Road. One rose to the right (north), passing the original Laurel Hill mansion and outbuildings, while the larger loop to the left (south) enclosed a formal central roundabout and narrower curving paths. Outside the area defined by the main roads, other curving paths gave access to grave sites on the south and central portion of the tract, while north of the house and its outbuildings the site was laid out as three rectilinear tracts intersecting at irregular angles.

Contemporary descriptions and views for general consumption celebrated the "rural and romantic beauties" of the site. For example, the map Notman drew for Smith's guidebook to Laurel Hill emphasized the plantings over the roadways and the geometry of the site (see plate 11). The "General View of Laurel Hill Cemetery" in the same guide is an oblique aerial panorama that stresses the Gothic-detailed wall and classical gate in the foreground (fig. 9.20). The sparse, irregular clumps of plantings open to reveal the presence of grave monuments, while the topography is made to seem much more rugged than it is. The wild character of the terrain resembles those in which Renaissance painters often set portraits of holy recluses. The difference from the flat, gridded regularity of Philadelphia was evident.

Smith's guidebook text took a much different tack from those of the map- and viewmakers, however. He addressed the aesthetic qualities of the cemetery, but more of his comments were intended to guide the decisions of prospective monument/buyers than to praise the works of nature or of Notman. The cemetery's managers were "anxious to unite in carrying out the intention of creating at Laurel Hill a *toute ensemble*, which shall evince that, with superior facilities, there is growing up an improved taste in monumental sculpture."⁵⁸

Smith's primary concerns were the same as those of the burial-ground reformers of earlier decades. In fact, he acknowledged Ronaldson's Philadelphia Cemetery as Laurel Hill's direct Philadelphia progenitor, for it "undoubtedly prepared the public mind for the innovation on established uses." Smith argued that Laurel Hill represented a significant advance over Ronaldson's work, but





GENERAL VIEW OF LAUREL HILL CEMETERY.

FIGURE 9.20.
General view
of Laurel Hill
Cemetery, 1844.
(The Library
Company of
Philadelphia)

the nature of the advance is striking. He made no reference to the difference in sizes of the two burial places (Philadelphia Cemetery was slightly over 2.1 acres whereas the original Laurel Hill tract was 32 acres, of which 20 were devoted to the cemetery proper) or to the differing landscape styles of the two cemeteries. Instead, the decisive advance for him was the greater security of Laurel Hill with respect to the earlier cemetery, which had been surrounded by the city and was nearly full: "The proprietors of Laurel Hill were first to emulate the risk and expenditure, incidental to the establishment of a Cemetery, on a scale commensurate with the wants of so large a population, and removed beyond the probable approach of active business, or private dwellings." In addition to being distant from any possible urban encroachment (in fact, Laurel Hill was surrounded by industrial development within two decades), individual property in the cemetery was carefully delineated and protected.⁵⁹

The cemetery's by-laws detailed the managers' strategies for guaranteeing the security of property. "To protect the interests of each separate purchaser," the managers reserved the right "to prevent the erection of large improvements which might interfere with the general effect, or obstruct any principal view." Certain other practices, such as raising the level of the plot above the surrounding and planting or removing trees without permission, were forbidden in the interests of the overall aesthetic effect of the landscape. To maintain the social

Parceling the Picturesque: "Rural" Cemeteries and Urban Context
in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia

by

Aaron Vickers Wunsch

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Architecture

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Margaret Crawford, Chair

Professor Paul Groth

Professor David Henkin

Fall 2009

The implications for burial practice were initially unclear. The public squares were already closed to dead paupers, making their disposal more arduous or secretive. Technically, at least, similar bans now also applied to the newer public lots on Lombard Street.⁹⁷ As a result, a friendless or penniless decedent would need to be hauled across the Schuylkill to the Upper or Lower Burial Grounds, or out Ridge Avenue to the city lot at Francisville. Such a fate was as ignominious as it was inconvenient. The potter's field, after all, was a place of last resort. But what of those families who could afford something better? While the transition to industrial capitalism dragged many artisans and laborers into poverty, others saved just enough of their wages to escape the potter's field. Traditionally, members of this latter group had bargained with church sextons; (they came daily to Nicholas Collin). Now, though, their prospects were dimmer. As the Second Great Awakening gained momentum, evangelicals increasingly joined economy-minded social reformers in stressing moral and financial autonomy. Missionary efforts mounted while monetary aid diminished. Churchmen like Collin, willing to negotiate on burial costs, surely remained active in some quarters. On the whole, though, the "spiritualization of poverty" tended to counteract churchyard leniency.⁹⁸

But diminishing access alone hardly explains what came next. Over the last few decades, the sorts of people who approached Collin had come to share certain assumptions about the deceased. Individualized commemoration, "hygienic distance," the association of death with repose – all of these cultural modes held increasing appeal for men and women who had previously considered them out of reach or had never considered them at all.⁹⁹ These were the buyers of ready-made coffins, so shocking to refined observers. And yet refinement, or at least *respectability*, was precisely what these buyers wanted. Churchyard burial was probably compatible with their wishes. From all evidence, it was still what they preferred. But shrinking availability combined with growing demand, democratic political impulses, and Philadelphia's history of religious and ethnic pluralism to bring forth a parallel structure. This transposed the churchyard's main benefits onto secular, market-based forms.

* Philadelphia Cemetery seemed to epitomize this shift. Conceived by restless entrepreneur James Ronaldson, this prim and tended landscape drew curious visitors and newspaper coverage from the outset. People marveled at its attractive design, so suited to its benevolent mission. Yet the *Ariel*'s vaunted subject emerged from a wider movement. If we wish to make sense of the site, we must study its local context, for Ronaldson's was only the politest version of an emerging cemetery type.¹⁰⁰ Between 1826 and 1834, five graveyards with distinctive traits appeared on

⁹⁷ Scharf and Westcott, 3: 2357.

⁹⁸ Dorsey, 76-81 (I have adapted Dorsey's "spiritualizing poverty," p. 76); Scharf and Westcott, 3: 2357.

⁹⁹ Sappol, 9, 17, 34-37; Upton, "Gridding the Graveyard," 18.

¹⁰⁰ In emphasizing local context, I hope to reveal traits that might vanish in a broader survey of cemetery development. Nonetheless, Philadelphia's "mutual" cemeteries were part of a phenomenon that occurred elsewhere in the Atlantic world. New Orleans was one such locale, as analyzed in Upton, "Urban Cemetery," *passim*. Britain's "Dissenting" cemeteries are another relative, accompanied by some of the same populist language as their Philadelphia counterparts, albeit for different reasons. See Julie Rugg, "The Origins and Progress of Cemetery Establishment in Britain," in Peter C. Jupp and Glennys Howarth, eds., *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 107-112; Julie Rugg, "A New Burial Form and Its Meanings: Cemetery Establishment in the First Half of the 19th Century," in *Grave Concerns*, 45-48.

typefounder soon convinced reformer Roberts Vaux and three other prominent citizens to serve as trustees. Union Burial Ground took shape at Sixth and Prime Streets in the same era. A few blocks down the road, the Machpelah Cemetery Society claimed land between Tenth and Eleventh Streets in 1830 (Fig. 9).¹²⁹

Location may have served as an index of status among these institutions. Union, Mutual, and Machpelah all clustered along Prime Street (now Washington Avenue) but Machpelah lay furthest to the west. This site was among the least desirable. Although it overlooked Alexander Parker's boxwood-filled botanic garden, it also faced the Alms House Burial Ground on the other side of Eleventh Street. Philadelphia Cemetery fell at the other end of the spectrum. Situated on Shippen (now Bainbridge) Street between Ninth and Tenth, the grounds were three blocks closer to the city's core. The Lebanon Garden, with its popular tavern and grounds, lay northwest of the main entrance. To the northeast rose Ronaldson's Row, a block of prim, marble-stepped town houses named for their developer and notable occupant.¹³⁰

Newspapers played up Ronaldson's association with his venture. Quoting his descriptions of the grounds, they portrayed him as a self-made man who tended to the needs of fellow citizens. The *Ariel*, for example, proclaimed:

Mr. Ronaldson is known as the first successful Type Founder in America, and a gentleman of enlarged and patriotic views. He is a firm supporter of internal improvements, and is an efficient member of the Franklin Institute – a society whose liberal encouragement of American Manufactures has done much to advance them to their present respectable standing.¹³¹

Although it read like advertising copy (and may have been just that), this profile was reasonably accurate. Ronaldson was a diligent baker-turned-businessman, the ex-partner of type pioneer Archibald Binny, and successful enough to wear the label of "gentleman." What tended to fall out of such portraits was notable, too. Only rarely did journalists hint that Philadelphia Cemetery was itself a kind of business.¹³²

¹²⁹ *Philadelphia Cemetery. Copy of Deed of Trust. April 2, 1827*, 5; *Charter and By-Laws, of the Machpelah Cemetery*, 13; Scharf and Westcott, 1: 620; 3: 2359; Watson (1891 ed.), 3: 137. Ronaldson's Cemetery opened in the spring of 1827, as indicated in "Philadelphia Cemetery," *National Gazette*, 11 April 1827. While Philadelphia was arguably America's most important cadaver clearinghouse at this time, the peak in demand from anatomists was felt also in Britain and provided a similar impetus to cemetery founding. See Rugg, "A New Burial Form," 45-46, 48.

¹³⁰ *A Plan of Philadelphia, or the Stranger's Guide*, map and pp. 240, 261, 269, 280; Gordon M. Marshall, III, "James Ronaldson (1769-1841)," in *Philadelphia: Three Centuries of American Art* ([Philadelphia]: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1976), 238; Scharf and Westcott, 2: 944, 945; "Union Burial Ground," *Mechanics Free Press*, 16 May 1829; "Burial Ground," *Saturday Bulletin*, 1 October 1831. My thanks to Matthew Osborn for pointing out the latter two sources.

¹³¹ "Philadelphia Cemetery," 14. Ronaldson was part of a segment of master craftsmen whom Sean Wilentz has labeled "craft entrepreneurs"; see his *Chants Democratic*, 36, and Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 5. An earlier generation of historians tended to take the democratizing rhetoric of this group at face value but were chided for doing so as early as the 1940s (see Dorfman, *passim*). More recently, students of the Jacksonian era have taken self-identified "master mechanics" as members of an emergent middle class (Blumin, 112-121, 133-137).

¹³² A notable exception probably overstated the case by lumping Mutual, Machpelah, and Ronaldson's together and claiming that "property of this kind yields an enormous income" ("Moyamensing," *Atkinson's Saturday Evening*

In visual and textual representation, Ronaldson's Cemetery differed from its competitors more in degree than in substance. The goal was to provide "a decent and respectable Cemetery or Burial Place, with a view to moderate funeral expenses, and a hope that it will contribute to cherish those tender feelings that connect the living with their deceased friends."¹³³ This language was more sentimental than that employed at Mutual or Machpelah, and it lacked the Enlightenment-inspired emphasis on the brotherhood of man. The landscaping was more lavish, too. Lots still measured 8' x 10,' and a central path still lent bilateral symmetry to the whole (Figs. 12-13). Now, though, that passage was flanked by grass walks, making it more of an avenue. "Carriage gates" terminated both ends, while other walks traced out the perimeter and divided linear blocks of grave lots. In time, Ronaldson would invest in horticulture. Trees and shrubs arrived at the site, along with "several thousand loads of earth."¹³⁴

There were more eye-catching amenities, too. Philadelphia Cemetery's enclosure went beyond the norm, combining a wall with an iron railing. If this feature did not proclaim bodily security loudly enough, the message was amplified by two buildings at the main entrance (Figs. 14a and 14b). One served as the "Keeper's House," a post for a vigilant gravedigger. The other was identified as the "House for Bier, etc., etc." At a time when newspapers and gothic novels played up the threat of premature burial, this structure housed a parlor-cum-laboratory designed to preclude such a fate.¹³⁵

On the whole, though, it was details rather than theatrics that set Ronaldson's scheme apart. For one thing, only traces of the voluntary association model survived. The cemetery's rules, written into the original deed of trust, were called "articles," but they neither rested on lot-holder consensus nor amounted to a constitution. Mutual and Machpelah determined the locations of their members' lots by ballot. No such lottery system obtained at Ronaldson's. Moreover, while the former institutions limited member purchases to one or two lots, Ronaldson deliberately left the door open to speculators. It was for these reasons, perhaps, that Philadelphia Cemetery's backers were called a "company" rather than a society in their 1833 charter.¹³⁶

Post 13, no. 633 (14 September 1833): 3, via APS Online. On Ronaldson's biography, see Marshall, 238-239; Simpson, 849.

¹³³ Philadelphia Cemetery. *Copy of Deed of Trust*. April 2, 1827, 4.

¹³⁴ Philadelphia Cemetery. *Copy of the Deeds...and List of Lot-Holders*, 1 and plan.

¹³⁵ These buildings appear on the plan accompanying Philadelphia Cemetery. *Copy of the Deeds...and List of Lot-Holders*; see Simpson, 849, for a description. A high-profile case of premature burial at nearby Union Cemetery may have convinced Ronaldson to install his life-detection system or at least brought him more business; see "Buried Alive," *Literary Register* 1, no. 18 (6 October 1828): 274, via APS Online. In any case, Philadelphians seem to have been particularly afraid of vivisepture, perhaps because of actual or reported cases that occurred during the yellow fever epidemic of 1793; (the theme crops up repeatedly in Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* [pp. 133, 141, 144, 181]). Ronaldson's Scottish roots raise the question of whether his life-detection chamber might have British antecedents. The answer appears to be: no. "Asylums for doubtful life" began appearing in Germany in the 1790s and inspired similar waiting mortuaries in Paris, Vienna, and, possibly, New York. Britain, however, failed to produce parallel institutions. See George K. Behlmer, "Grave Doubts: Victorian Medicine, Moral Panic, and the Signs of Death," *Journal of British Studies* 42 (April 2003): 209-210; Jan Bondeson, *Buried Alive: the Terrifying History of Our Most Primal Fear* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001), chap. 5.

¹³⁶ Philadelphia Cemetery. *Copy of the Deeds...and List of Lot-Holders*, 8-15, 19-24; *Preamble to...the Mutual Family Burial Ground Association*, 10-12; *Charter and By-Laws, of the Machpelah Cemetery*, 7. There were, in fact, important shades of difference here, with Mutual explicitly prohibiting profit-taking by members, employees,

While all the new cemeteries implicitly defined themselves in contrast to the potter's field, their differences were equally telling. Mutual prohibited the interment of African-Americans but set aside one-third of the grounds for "strangers and sojourners." Machpelah promised "the interment of strangers at a very moderate charge": one to three dollars, depending on age; (again, blacks were prohibited, along with executed criminals). Predictably, Ronaldson's venture was the most restrictive. Both the rules and the charter repeated the ban on "persons of colour." Also barred from lot ownership was the city's coroner. However, this last provision bordered on redundancy: officially, at least, Philadelphia Cemetery offered no single graves and started lot prices at \$25.¹³⁷ *

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Ronaldson's scheme was its thoroughgoing urbanism. All customers were viewed as would-be builders. Concerned with postmortem security, they would presumably wish to erect subterranean burial chambers or "vaults." Elaborate rules governed the design of these structures. Their walls, for instance, had to be at least nine inches thick, and could encroach half that distance onto adjoining lots in order to support another unit. Earthen graves, however, might spread contamination. Although permissible, they needed to be set back from the edges of the lot to avoid intruding on neighbors. A neutral framework held these properties together: walks were treated as public terrain, set off like streets for "common use." The combined effect was a sort of subterranean city, complete with a municipal code.¹³⁸

The grid plan made such relations possible. Its economy, legibility, and promise of "spatial neutrality" arose from a checkerboard composed of seemingly interchangeable parts.¹³⁹ In Ronaldson's hands, though, the grave-lot-as-real-estate was not quite such a standardized item. Like Mutual's founders, Ronaldson dwelt on the numerical assignment of personal topography. His system, however, was more nuanced – a recipe for orderly hierarchy. Philadelphia Cemetery was laid out in four long blocks, separated by eight-foot walks. Each block, in turn, consisted of eight rows of lots, termed "ranges" and running north-south. While ordinary lots cost twenty-five dollars, Ronaldson charged five dollars extra for lots in two ranges at the center of each block. Here, proprietors might enclose their land with low masonry walls and surmount them with iron railings. This privilege effectively reproduced the cemetery's form in miniature. *

or officers (pp. 4, 12), Machpelah allowing but limiting such profits (pp. 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13), and Philadelphia implicitly condoning them. *

¹³⁷ *Preamble to...the Mutual Family Burial Ground Association*, 8, 11-12; *Charter and By-Laws, of the Machpelah Cemetery*, 3, 8; *Philadelphia Cemetery. Copy of the Deeds...and List of Lot-Holders*, 2, 8, 11, 20. The latter source puts Ronaldson's original bottom lot price as \$26 but 1827 newspaper articles give \$25. A modern biographer claims that "certain lots were provided free to the deserving poor of any creed and a section was set aside for 'friendless Scots'" (Marshall, 238). True or not, this idea may well derive from "Men and Things," a biographical sketch of Ronaldson that survives as an undated clipping in the Castner Collection Scrapbook, 24: 24-25.

¹³⁸ *Philadelphia Cemetery. Copy of Deed of Trust. April 2, 1827*, 7. The rules on party walls were later revised to make construction more substantial; see *Philadelphia Cemetery. Copy of the Deeds...and List of Lot-Holders*, 17, 23.

¹³⁹ I borrow the phrase "spatial neutrality" from Upton, "Another City," 73; see also Philip Fisher, *Still the New World*, 43-45-49, on the related notions of uniformity, transparency, and intelligibility.