
DECISION

of the District of Columbia

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD in Historic Landmark Designation Case No. 04-13

Prospect Hill Cemetery
2201 North Capitol Street, NE
(Square 3505, Lot 801)

The Historic Preservation Review Board, having held a public hearing on March 24, 2005 on the application for historic designation of the property known as Prospect Hill Cemetery, 2201 North Capitol Street, NE, hereby designates the property a historic landmark to be entered in the *District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites*. The Board does not recommend that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places for listing unless and until the nomination is put into the required National Register nomination format.

The National Register considers cemeteries to be one type of property not usually considered for listing. An exception may be made for cemeteries that meet the Register's Criteria Considerations, i.e., "a cemetery which derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, [and/or] from association with historic events..."—thus, there is effectively a higher burden of proof. Rather than for association with particular persons or specific events, Prospect Hill Cemetery has a better likelihood of National Register listing as of local significance on the basis of design, general events that illustrate broad patterns of history, or eligibility for information potential, in descending order of probable applicability.¹ But a National Register nomination asserting the design consideration, for instance, would likely need additional description of the plan and features of the cemetery as well as its placement within the context of the evolution of American cemeteries. The Board would recommend that, if National Register listing is sought, then the applicants should apply for designation on the basis of design, contributions to the understanding of broad patterns of history, and potential archaeological value.

¹ "A Victorian cemetery is eligible if it clearly expresses the aesthetic principles related to funerary design for that period, through such features as the overall plan, landscaping, statuary, sculpture, fencing, buildings, and grave markers.... A cemetery associated with the settlement of an area by an ethnic or cultural group is eligible if the movement of the group into the area had an important impact, *if other properties associated with that group are rare, and if few documentary sources have survived to provide information about the group's history* [emphasis added].... Cemeteries...can be eligible if they have the potential to yield important information [that is not available in extant documentary evidence]. The information must be important within a specific context and the potential to yield information must be demonstrated." National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation (1997), pp. 35-36.

Prospect Hill Cemetery was founded in 1858 by the German Evangelical Society, a men's organization from Concordia Church. The small cemetery associated with Concordia and located between 4th, 5th, G and H Streets, NE was filling fast and, as with other localities at the time, District law forbade the expansion or establishment of burying grounds within the Washington City limits. There was plenty of land available in Washington County, however, and immediately south of Glenwood Cemetery, established only four years earlier, the Society purchased seventeen acres along what is now Lincoln Road. The site was reduced by three acres in extent when North Capitol Street was laid through the grounds at the turn of the twentieth century²—placing the cemetery entirely in Washington's Northeast quadrant; requiring re-interments and the construction of new fences and walls to mark the parcel boundary and retain steeper grades; and re-orienting the approach to the cemetery away from Lincoln Road.

The name Prospect Hill is suggestive both of the site's elevation and its views.³ From within high, stone retaining walls, the cemetery overlooks the Bloomingdale and Eckington neighborhoods that grew up around it at the turn of the twentieth century. There are also views to the Washington Monument and the Capitol; the latter was undoubtedly the foremost vista when the cemetery was established. The topography and views are very much in line with the nineteenth-century rural cemetery movement—a Romantic-era appreciation of nature expressed in the creation of beautiful, park-like grounds beyond the city in which to bury the deceased, but also for the pleasure of urban residents. This was both a cause and consequence of changing attitudes toward death—also brought about by increasing life expectancy and standards of living, religious revivalism of a more personal or spiritual nature, and the rise of Romanticism or sentimentalism itself.⁴

Among the best and prototypical examples of the picturesque “rural” cemetery are Paris's Père-Lachaise (1803) and Mount Auburn⁵ in Cambridge, Massachusetts (1831). They share with Prospect Hill a general asymmetry of plan—winding roads and paths over and around gentle grassy hills and under trees—and burials in a combination of rows and plots, marked in a variety of ways, including with classical monuments. None of these three cemeteries is wholly without

² The road cutting was first proposed in 1886 and caused much controversy. Congress approved the measure in 1893, at the time of the Highway Act, but it was not until 1897 that the courts gave the go-ahead to the road—and to the specific compensation for the condemnation of the property by the District Commissioners.

³ The name Prospect Hill is quite common for cemeteries. There are at least three in Massachusetts, which are among the oldest in the U.S. by that name. There are multiple examples in New York and Michigan, and many in other states. A World War I cemetery near Gouy, France also bears the name. A burying ground in Denver and the “pioneer” cemetery of Omaha are both “Prospect Hill” and laid out in the same year as Washington's. York, Pennsylvania's Prospect Hill Cemetery (1849) is another good example of the Victorian “rural” or “garden” cemetery.

⁴ Unlike stern reminders of the mortality and vulnerability of the living inscribed on many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century American headstones, nineteenth-century stones, such as those at Prospect Hill, were more likely to be inspirational—symbolizing the hope or attainment of heavenly reward for the deceased and the viewer—or sentimental reminders of loved ones. The widespread adoption of the word cemetery as a replacement for “burying ground” is sentimental or even euphemistic, based as it is on the Greek verb “to put to sleep.” By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, a variety of types of markers—and thus, a certain individualism even in death—was available, adding to picturesqueness and made possible by increased commerce and transportation links, an influx of skilled immigrants, technological advance, and marketing.

⁵ Mount Auburn bills itself as “America's First Garden Cemetery” and welcomes tourists—but now forbids picnics and any active recreation.

formal elements, however; in plan, Prospect Hill's off-center heart is an ellipse set on something of an axis perpendicular to Lincoln Road. Its orientation and proximity to Lincoln Road, plus the proximity of the oldest burials and the customary eastward orientation of most of the graves, point to the location of the original entrance there.

It was after the cutting of North Capitol and W Streets and the re-grading of Lincoln Road that the present walls and gates were constructed. Built mainly of coursed and random granite ashlar of various sources and shades, the walls also include rusticated or rubble granite, mica-schist, greenstone, etc. At least portions of the walls were constructed (and dated) 1917. Much of the open iron (wrought, except for some cast finials) fencing on the north, west and east sides may date from that era as well. There are at least three types of fence, of different heights and configurations.

The earliest buildings—a tenant house and barn pre-dating the cemetery, the 1873 Lincoln Road gatehouse and 1900 chapel⁶—were demolished during the twentieth century, although some archaeological remains could be present unless wholly disturbed by subsequent burials. (The old gatehouse was designed by A.G. Schoenborn, Thomas U. Walter's assistant and the designer of the Capitol's interior dome structure. He is buried at Prospect Hill). The earliest remaining true buildings are the temple-like mausolea for the Baumann and Abner families on the slope facing the North Capitol Street gate. The 1927 foursquare office/superintendent's house was constructed as a replacement for many of the functions of the demolished buildings and is still central to the operations of the cemetery. Its fieldstone walls are sympathetic to the picturesque cemetery, and the building as a whole retains high integrity.

Prospect Hill received the remains of many of those who had been buried at the old Concordia cemetery⁷ and continued to be the last resting place principally of Protestant Germans. A total of about three quarters of the roughly 14,000 burials are of German-Americans, often with their Old World birthplaces inscribed on their headstones (including some written in German), but there are also Irish, Eastern Europeans, Anglo-Saxons, etc. Notable burials include the Petersen family, owners of the home where Lincoln died, and Brigadier General Joseph Peter Gerhardt—a veteran of and émigré from the failed 1848 liberal/socialist revolution in Germany and a commander of District of Columbia and New York Civil War units. There are a number of other German veterans of the Civil War and the Spanish-American War—and as a result, Prospect Hill was the site of numerous Decoration Day ceremonies. Dr. Carl Rudolph Powalky, an astronomer whose work in Berlin included charting stars and calculating the mean distance to the sun, was buried in 1881. A number of important businessmen are interred there as well, including Edward Abner, partner in a major D.C. brewery before Prohibition, and Henry Buttner, head of the German Building Association. There are also German editors and journalists, lawyers, and the founders and directors of institutions such as the German Orphans Asylum. Indeed, Prospect Hill itself was a central institution for Washington's (Protestant) German-American community and contains a cross-section of nineteenth-century German life. Germanness—names, language, stonework, etc.—may be more immediately evident and certainly more personal here than at other landmarks associated with important German institutions.

⁶ The architecture firm of Autenrieth and Goenner created the chapel.

⁷ The earliest marker bears a death date of 1844.

Most cemeteries are first and foremost archaeological resources (HPRB Designation Criterion G). The burials themselves are the reason for such sites. While most cemeteries may never actually be excavated—and there are certainly no plans ever to expose or unnecessarily disinter any burials at Prospect Hill—they nonetheless *have the potential* to reveal information about religious and burial practices; nutrition, disease and causes of death; ethnicity, social relations and material culture in general (as expressed in location, grouping and methods of burial, clothing and coffin hardware, crypts and funerary art, and burial goods). Even a cemetery that retained no trace of its existence above the surface would be worthy of protection and capable of providing substantial information, assuming a sufficient degree of integrity. This, in turn, suggests that it is probable that any local cemetery of sufficient age—say, established in the nineteenth-century—could be landmarked by meeting the archaeological criterion, if it also meets the criterion of integrity.

Prospect Hill is also notable for its design, embodying the Romantic landscape architecture of the Victorian era (HPRB Criterion D, “architecture and urbanism”). It is characteristic and a relatively early example of the garden cemeteries created in the United States beginning in the 1830s. The picturesqueness of its plan and the arrangement and character of its markers and mausolea are of a piece with the adjacent and contemporaneous Glenwood Cemetery (1854) and Saint Mary's Catholic Cemetery (1869). The collection of markers are interesting as well, including the marble or limestone slab type of headstone ubiquitous in this region during the mid nineteenth century and later, larger, more elaborate monuments bearing true sculpture in the round. Such prominent sculptors as Jacques Jouvenal are represented. Jouvenal himself was a German immigrant (1853) and is best known for creating the statue of Franklin at Federal Triangle.⁸ But markers are only secondarily funerary art; they are first conveyors of information—some symbolic, but much presented straightforwardly as text and constituting important genealogical and historical information.⁹

Six other D.C. cemeteries have been landmarked and for a variety of reasons.¹⁰ Generally, they have been protected for their archaeological significance. Congressional Cemetery is significant for the prominent figures interred there. Battleground National Cemetery is, of course, important for its direct relationship to the Civil War and particularly to the defense of Washington from Jubal Early's 1864 raid. Others, such as Mount Zion and Woodlawn have been honored for their contributions to broad patterns of history and specifically to the lives and contributions of a particular group—in those cases, the District's African American community.

Naturally, the beginning of Prospect Hill Cemetery's period of significance should be the date of its establishment, 1858. Because the cemetery is still active, its period of significance has not a true termination. For the purpose of evaluating individual elements, it is useful to adopt the National Register's 50-year rule of thumb. The plan, major structures, fences, and most of the

⁸ Jouvenal was the son of a French Huguenot who settled in Wurtemberg. Arriving in Washington in 1855, he was engaged to carve details on the Capitol. He created a bust of Baron von Steuben for the German Orphan Asylum and busts of Alexander Hamilton, Martin Van Buren and Daniel Webster for the Senate chamber.

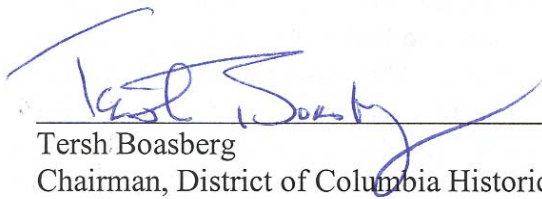
⁹ The paper records generated by burials are also important primary sources.

¹⁰ Battleground National Cemetery; Congressional Cemetery; Mount Zion Cemetery; Oak Hill Cemetery; Rock Creek Church Yard and Cemetery; and Woodlawn Cemetery. All but Oak Hill are on the National Register. Several cemetery structures are also landmarked independently.

burials and monuments predate 1955, and the date also roughly coincides with both the cemetery's centennial and the suburban migration that diminished burials there and dispersed Washington's German-American community.

The list of Prospect Hill Cemetery's contributing elements should include:

- the plan—including the present extent and boundaries of the parcel, the paths, ellipse and roads (although not necessarily their present paving) and the general topography;
- the head and footstones and family monuments, the crypt and mausolea;
- the perimeter walls and fences and entrance gate; and
- the stone office/superintendent's house.



Terah Boasberg

Chairman, District of Columbia Historic Preservation Review Board