



Congressional Cemetery Association

Newsletter

Spring 2000

Historical Note: Bessie J. Kibbey

Among the 60,000 people buried in Congressional Cemetery there are many people whose contribution to history have been forgotten. Often a note or article reminds us of people who held a distinction in their life that has faded with time. It is not unusual to unearth a good story from 150 years ago, but it is uncommon to find one from more recent times.

Bessie J. Kibbey, at the time of her death in 1949, was called one of the city's greatest philanthropists, although she was unknown to much of the public. Mrs. Kibbey was a life-long sponsor of charities in the city. She donated her home at 3rd and C Streets, NW to start the first Young Women's Christian Home here. She was on the Board of Governors of the Home for Incurables for 55 years.

Perhaps her most conspicuous contribution was made to the Washington National Cathedral. Mrs. Kibbey was among the first contributors to the construction of the cathedral and in 1925 she chose to underwrite the cost of a carillon in the Gloria in Excelsis Tower. She died before the tower was finished, at the age of 92 and was interred here in Range 48, Site 157. Her estate provided for the casting and installation of the bells. On September 22, 1963 the Kibbey Carillon was dedicated and began daily service to the cathedral community.

A couple of years ago, someone called the cemetery and asked, "Why do you write so much about people from so long ago? Why don't you write about people who have done good deeds in their life like Bessie Kibbey?" The caller was Anne Beale Peters, a friend

2000 Annual Meeting

The 2000 Annual Meeting of the Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery will be held on Saturday April 8 at 11:00 AM in the cemetery chapel.

We will review the progress of the past year and discuss our plans for the future. Students from Georgetown Day School will present vignettes of some of the lesser-known people in the cemetery.

We welcome all of our members to attend this annual event. A tour of the cemetery will follow the meeting.

of the cemetery who has since passed away and was interred here in her family plot. It takes a while for us to get around to doing the things we should, but in writing this we acknowledge the generosity of both Miss Kibbey and Mrs. Peters.

A Call for Volunteers

As you know, for the past three years we have relied on volunteer help to manage the cemetery. Now we really need a volunteer to manage the volunteers. We would like to keep the office open a couple of hours a day so that we can more promptly respond to calls and visitors. If you are interested in staffing the office for a few hours on a regular basis, please call or write to the cemetery office.

Notice to Association Members

As many of you know, John Hanley was the superintendent of Congressional Cemetery from 1989 - 1997. He managed the cemetery virtually alone and made a great deal of progress in maintaining and improving the grounds. After more than half a decade, he gained our trust and confidence, and we believed that with him the cemetery was in capable and caring hands.

Over time, there were some complaints about Mr. Hanley or some of the actions he had taken. Most were dismissed as misunderstandings and amicably resolved. Increasingly, the Board became aware of issues that could not so easily be explained. We found, at a minimum, commitments that were not kept and records in disarray. By 1996 we were also on the verge of insolvency. In October 1996, we could no longer afford a paid staff and in February 1997, we terminated our association with Mr. Hanley.

We spent the following year reconstructing the cemetery transactions and the financial records for 1989 - 1996. There were bills that were not paid, monument orders not filled, and interments and site sales not recorded. We also found that the Association was not the beneficiary of the income derived from monument and site sales as it should have been.

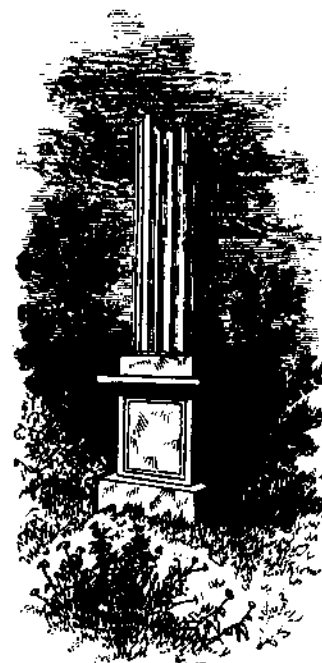
From surviving notes, some just scraps of paper, we were able to fill in a great deal of missing information. We have resolved all our bills. We have fulfilled monument orders placed with Mr. Hanley that were not completed by him, including one for which a family sought relief from us in court. In that case, the court held Mr. Hanley to be the responsible party, but we felt morally compelled to complete commitments made by him. We have sought to resolve all outstanding claims in order to recover our good name.

When we could do no more, and it was clear that there were issues that could not be resolved with the information available to us, we sought the assistance of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia. The FBI, in conjunction with the U.S. Attorney's Office, spent an additional year going over our records and other records to which we could not have access. They conducted numerous interviews

with current and past Board members. The U. S. Attorney's Office is now nearing a conclusion of its investigation. We wanted our members and friends to be aware of this in the event it is reported by the news media.

We believe the most difficult period in this matter is now in the past. We were outraged to learn the cemetery may have been victimized. In response to these events we have done everything we could to fulfill our responsibility to our members, to protect the cemetery and to start building a strong and enduring future. We have conducted the business of the cemetery for three years with a volunteer staff. We have kept expenses to the lowest level necessary for minimum maintenance and have started rebuilding our financial reserves. We have ordered a review of our books and procedures. We have sought and won grants which, when matched, will substantially contribute to preservation and restoration in the cemetery, including an appropriation from the U. S. Congress of one million dollars.

Appreciation grows every day for the value of Congressional Cemetery and the history that it represents. Our members and friends will continue to be our source of strength and of the means for preserving this extraordinary national landmark. We hope that we can count on you to stand with us through a particularly trying time and into a brighter future.



GENERAL BROWN'S MONUMENT.

Save America's Treasures

Last May 19th, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton announced several grants from the Historic Preservation Fund for the Save America's Treasures program. Congressional Cemetery was awarded \$52,880 in a matching grant for cemetery restoration.

Specifically, a number of monuments will be restored with this grant. Chief among them is the statue of Marion Kahlert. A three-foot marble statue of the nine-year-old girl was toppled and broken by vandals in 1981. Since then, the surviving pieces have been kept in storage. All that remains on the site are a tiny pair of marble shoes and a broken pedestal.

The Kiplinger Foundation has awarded Congressional Cemetery \$25,000 toward the match for the Save America's Treasures grant. We are grateful to the trustees of the foundation for this significant boost to our efforts to meet this match.

Ironically, just as Marion Kahlert's statue is being raised, her stature may be slightly diminished. For generations, she has been held to be the first fatal victim of a motor vehicle accident in the District. A vivid story is told of her being hit by a bread truck.

The intrepid Georgetown Day School students searched for details concerning the accident and found none. Marion died of a kidney ailment. Another researcher did find an account of a girl killed in an accident within a year of Marion's death in 1906. Violet Springman is buried in an unmarked grave in Congressional Cemetery. It appears that a dramatic story of a young victim was combined with a delicate statue of a little girl.

The Gadsby Vault

The staff of Gadsby's Tavern in Alexandria proposes to restore the John Gadsby family vault in Congressional Cemetery. The Gadsby vault, built in 1837, is actually in better shape than others built in the same period because it is clad in granite while the others are made of brick. Nevertheless, some pointing and sealing will prevent further damage from the elements.

John Gadsby's reputation is kept alive by the tavern in Alexandria which still bears his name. The tavern was the scene of several events honoring George Washington in his home town. In fact Gadsby hosted every president in his lifetime. He owned subsequent establishments over time culminating with his opening of the National Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue in 1827. He died at his home, Decatur House, in 1844.

We encourage families and interested parties to restore and maintain vaults and sites in the cemetery. Some vaults need just some pointing and others need major masonry work. Restoration of these vaults would significantly enhance the overall appearance of the cemetery.



The Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery

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