



Heritage Gazette

ASSOCIATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY • SUMMER 2010

Who is she?

The body bag looked wildly out of place. Not because it contained a skeleton – this was, after all, a burial vault full of skeletons. No, it was the anachronism of the bag: white vinyl with a plastic zipper, a police evidence number scrawled in black sharpie, which made it look all wrong in a nineteenth-century tomb.

The cemetery is dotted with family vaults and mausoleums, in various states of repair or disrepair. The brick vaults in particular are susceptible to erosion, as the mortar between the bricks disintegrates over time. The cemetery is gradually raising the

money to restore these vaults, (*see Fall 2009 Gazette for full article on the restoration process*) but in order to let the restoration masons in, the remains have to be removed.

This particular vault was built in 1835 by William G.W. White, a prosperous local merchant. Family members were buried there until 1904, coffins stacked on top of each other over the years. When the vault was opened last summer in preparation for the restoration work, the coffin wood had rotted and splintered, and the bodies of the Whites, buried without embalming and now fully skeletonized,

Continued on page 9

Stone Stories

BY REBECCA LUEG

With more than 15,000 markers, Historic Congressional Cemetery includes an abundance of gravestones of different size, material and design. This article is the first of a series introducing different types of gravestones.

As you walk across the cemetery you will come across grave markers that are more than your average headstone. Some of the more eye-catching monuments are table stones or tombs. They consist of a horizontal slab that is supported by four or six small columns and therefore resemble

dinner tables. In contrast to the similar box and chest tombs, which are enclosed, all or at least two sides are open.

While the large, flat surface is ideal for elaborate inscriptions, it is also prone to surface erosion which ultimately renders the

Continued on page 5

Letter from the Chair

HISTORIC LANDSCAPES

About the time the Association formed in 1976, historic preservation awareness and activism began to grow beyond great buildings in history to include historic landscapes as well; the thousands of outdoor historic places that could enrich our understanding of who we are and how we came to be.

With this new appreciation of open space as history, grand city parks, forgotten battlefields, and a few ghost towns became not simply relics of the past but vital components of our local and national identities. The increasing number of open spaces that have made the annual lists of endangered places published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation reflect the growing importance of their place in history.

I don't know how many cemeteries and burial grounds are designated as historic places but certainly they are historic places. It's not just because they are old, or have significant architectural features, it's also because the local cemetery is the place where all our history comes to rest. In one place, scores of stories may be told that weave the tapestry of our

towns and communities together through time.

Now considered saved, thanks to the fantastic support of our Association members, Congressional Cemetery is one such historic place. I won't get started on the hundreds of wonderful stories we could tell (visit our web site), except to say that many of our stories are national in scope. The Association founders saw that Congressional, an otherwise commonplace everyday burial ground, was actually a treasure of American heritage and gathered together to save this place.

This November, the National Park Service will convene a panel to consider and decide whether Congressional Cemetery shall enter the ranks of National Landmarks. Thanks to an exhaustive and expansive history of Congressional by Dr. Julia Sienkewicz, we're pretty sure we'll be raising a special Thanksgiving toast this fall. It's an exciting time to be a member of our preservation association; come by and take another tour, take in some American heritage.

~ Patrick Crowley



THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE PRESERVATION
OF HISTORIC CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY

1801 E Street, Southeast
Washington, DC 20003
202-543-0539, 202-543-5966 (fax)
www.congressionalcemetery.org
staff@congressionalcemetery.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Patrick Crowley, Chair
George Chamberlain, Jr., Vice Chair
John Gillespie, Treasurer
Alice Norris, Secretary
Uwe Brandes
Amy Ballard
Ted Bechtol
Jan Gaudio
Clyde Henderson
Scott Kibler
Patti Martin
Tom Mitchell
Sid Neely
Rhonda Sincavage

STAFF

Cindy Hays, Executive Director
Alan Davis, Cemetery Manager
Rebecca Roberts, Program Director
Dayle Dooley, Archives
Terri Maxfield, Office Manager

The Association for the Preservation of Historic Congressional Cemetery is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. All donations are deductible to the extent permitted by federal tax laws. Funding for the preservation and maintenance of Historic Congressional Cemetery is provided in part by the Congressional Cemetery Endowment, which was created with matching funds provided by the U.S. Congress and administered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

From the Executive Director

Summer is usually a quiet time in Washington — too hot to be outdoors more than to and from the car or Metro. Though certainly hot, this season has been anything but quiet. Volunteer groups from the 12 metro offices of Deloitte Consulting spent a day making an IMPACT on the grounds, cutting out a block of Pyracantha bushes on 17th Street and raising over 100 sunken foot stones. The next week, staff from the Washington-based Discovery Channel hacked down scrub trees, pulled 102 bags of ivy and weeds, and removed years of unfettered growth on the street side of our historic brick wall. Even though the street property belongs to the City, we will be good stewards of it in the future.

Property interment-right sales are increasing. Before Cemetery

Manager Alan Davis joined us we had about 12 burials a year. Now, through our new advertising campaign and pre-need seminars, we have more than doubled that already this year. Yes, there is space available, and this could be the last property you will ever own.

In cooperation with the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, the White, Keyworth and Causten families will be returned to their restored vaults. When they were buried in the 1800's, the caskets were stacked in the vaults. Over the past 100-170 years, the wood has deteriorated and boxes caved in. During the restoration work, the remains of 71 people were taken to the Smithsonian for identification and study. The reinterment of each family will take place this fall.

The Docents celebrated the ninetieth anniversary of the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment by introducing Congressional's own "Uppity Women" tour, featuring twelve men and women buried here who were involved in the suffrage movement.

For years we have called ourselves the first de facto national cemetery, since there were so many government officials buried here and no national cemeteries until 1862. Now we are officially recognized as the first national cemetery by the Department of Veterans Affairs and will be listed on the National Cemeteries 150th anniversary tour.

The road crew is back at work, and by the end of the year, we should have all new roads throughout the Cemetery. Things are moving along nicely. Come see us.

~ Cindy Hays

INTRODUCING REBECCA LUEG

If in the haze of these hot and humid D.C. days, you may have noticed a quiet, gentle soul lurking around the tombstones in the cemetery recently, you needn't worry if it's a spirit, specter or apparition. You have just seen our new summer intern, Rebecca Lueg, out on the grounds working on one of the extremely important projects she's assisting us with this year.

Rebecca comes to us from Breckerfeld, Germany, by way of the University of Maryland. She has a background and Bachelor's degree in architecture, and it was her love of the ancient buildings, castles and villages of Germany that led her to follow the path of Historic Preservation. It is her hope to be able to rescue, renovate and renew some of the numerous, breathtaking architectural treasures of Europe. She is currently working on her Master's in Historic Preservation at UM, and will complete her degree next May. We are lucky enough to have Rebecca in our midst and working with us until the end of August.

Her most visible and ambitious undertaking at the cemetery is the Stone Inventory Project. She has organized resources and volunteers to photograph every stone not yet in our photo database, as well as inventory each and every marker on the premises as to placement, condition, and any and all other relevant information. She will then systematize all the photos and statistics into a usable database, which will eventually be available on our new website. Her extraordinary work will be helpful to us, not just because it will make our jobs easier knowing where and in what condition everything is. It will also break new ground in online research, and give us a tangible means of assessing our financial needs regarding future restoration projects. Importantly, it will also provide an accurate tool to help in applying for restoration and preservation grants. Rebecca brings her creative mind and technical skills to everything she does, and is very much appreciated here at HCC!

Around the Gatehouse

PATRIOTIC CELEBRATIONS AT HCC

MEMORIAL DAY

Every year the veterans resting at Congressional Cemetery are honored on Memorial Day. This year 30 Boy Scouts from Troop 1688, sponsored by American Legion Post #66 in Bowie MD, placed flags on veterans' graves. Led by former Cemetery Manager Melvin Mason who with Historian Sandy Schmidt had developed maps of the cemetery showing each vet's grave, the boys and their adult leaders spread out across the 35 acres and placed over 1200 flags.



Mathew Brady stands on his own grave

Memorial Day weekend in Washington brings thousands of members and supporters of Rolling Thunder to the City. For several years, the national organization's leadership has come to Congressional to honor our veterans. This year they laid wreaths on the graves of brothers Arthur Humphreys, who served with distinction in the Union Navy, and Joseph (Joshua) Humphreys who served in the Confederate Navy.

Between visits from two high

school bands that laid wreaths and "played" tribute to John Philip Sousa, there was a special visit from Civil War re-enactors playing Mathew Brady, Robert E. Lee and the Lees' Lieutenant.

4TH OF JULY

The DC Societies of the Children of the American Revolution (CAR) and Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) paid honor to 14-year-old drummer boy John Hunter of General Washington's army, who grew up to be the Doorkeeper of the House of Representatives, and to Elbridge Gerry, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and Vice President under James Madison. The joint ceremonies have taken place annually since 1953, and this year participants included former CARs who have grandchildren who are now CARs.



July 4th, 1954

RETURN OF THE NATIVE AMERICANS

Congressional is the only cemetery in the country that has chiefs and leaders of thirteen different American Indian Tribes. In the early and mid 1800's, delegations came to Washington to negotiate treaties or petition the



Eugene Taylor gets into the spirit of Choctaw Chief Pushmataha

government to live up to its promises. Many caught diseases and died here. The U.S. Government honored these leaders by purchasing lots and burying them at Congressional. May 19th, leaders of the Cherokee, Muscogee (Creek), Choctaw, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate and Pawnee Nations held a "Time of Rededication and Story-Telling" event featuring interpretive guides' historical accounts of Native American leaders and dignities interred here. The guests including Senator Sam Brownback (KS), who read the "Native American Apology Resolution" passed by Congress last fall, Representatives Jim McDermott (WA), Lois Capps, (CA), and Mazie Hirono (HI). After the ceremony, members of each tribe held a storytelling at the grave sites of notable members of their tribes. The event was sponsored by the Faith and Politics Institute and the National Congress of American Indians.

HCC ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN RECOGNIZED ON TWITTER

Many photos of Congressional Cemetery can be found on Twitter, but for the first time, we received the "Favorite Print Ad

of the Week” with July’s “Stay on the Hill Forever” printed in the Hill Rag. The ad campaign, developed by Hunt Smith Design, started in April and each month has a different saying. Remember the Burma Shave signs along the roadside — same idea.

And along with advertising, Cemetery Manager Alan Davis has held three pre-need seminars for those people who are interested in doing things their way. The last was in July for members of Capitol Hill Village.

CHOCTAW STORYTELLER

TIM TINGLE

A crowd of curious Washingtonians braved the July heat to come

learn more about the Native Americans buried at Congressional Cemetery. After a tour that included Choctaw chiefs Pushma-ta-ha and Peter Pitchlynn, as well as Cherokee statesmen William Shorey Coodey and John Rodgers, Jr, the visitors headed to the Chapel for wine and cheese (lemonade and cookies for the younger set) and to hear Tim Tingle spin his yarns. An enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Tim’s ancestor walked the Trail of Tears, and this family history has influenced Tim’s award-winning books. He told the inspiring story of a Choctaw girl who helped a slave family cross the

Bok Chitto River to their freedom, and led the crowd in a lovely rendition of Amazing Grace. Tim then graciously stayed till every last question was answered and every book signed. Copies of two of his books for children, *Saltpie* and *Crossing Bok Chitto*, are sold at the gatehouse.

CORRECTIONS DEPARTMENT

On page 3 of the spring edition of the Heritage Gazette, former board member Fred Davis was incorrectly listed as Fred Smith. Now our Fred said he wouldn’t mind being related to the founder of Federal Express, but it was a slip on our part. ~

STONE STORIES

Continued from page 1

engravings and inscriptions illegible. The biggest problem, beside wind, is standing water which infiltrates the stone and thereby accelerates the natural surface erosion. Due to their delicate construction, table stones are also very sensitive to movements in the ground. Even though they usually have a foundation, their legs can easily shift, leaving the slab in a rather unstable position. In addition, four-legged table stones are prone to deformation. As the stone weakens over time the large slab starts bending and cracking in the unsupported middle, which will eventually result in collapse.

Table stones are originally an ancient Greek form and came into fashion again in the early nineteenth century. They were traditionally used as small altars

and to place vases and donations. In the Victorian era though, table stones were often put to a different use. While people had been buried in small churchyard cemeteries for centuries, the rise in population during the Industrial Age triggered the Rural Cemetery Movement. Cemeteries were established on separate lots and incorporated into the landscape, creating beautiful parks where people came to spend time tending to the graves, enjoying nature and picnicking. Families would gather around table stones, have



Time and erosion can lead to collapse

dinner and remember their deceased relatives.

While the majority of HCC’s table stones was erected during the first half of the 19th century there is one exception. In 1997, a couple who was famous for their fabulous dinner parties on Capitol Hill decided to put up a table and two benches as their gravestone. Since then the surviving partner has come back regularly to dine with his loved one and even threw a large dinner party in memory of the splendid times they shared. ~



1997 table stone, waiting for a party

From the Ground Up

Bee Season in the Cemetery

BY TONI BURNHAM

any kinds of bees, hornets and wasps visit the Cemetery, and in most cases these insects build up from a single winter survivor to a colony of up to 2,000 (in the case of yellowjackets) by end-summer. Honeybees are a bit different — they spend the whole year as a large family, tens of thousands strong, so their numbers do not appear to rise and fall as much.

We are experiencing a historic drought for this time of year, so all these insects are desperate for water, nectar and pollen. Because the Cemetery is so near the river, it is probably a wetter-than-average place, and attracts more winged visitors.

Honeybees like smallish blooms, preferably in the white to pink to light blue spectrum, sometimes yellow. They have small tongues, and can't reach

down into long blooms like honeysuckle or trumpet vine.

I see honeybees on clover at this time of year — if there is any water in the ground. The honeybees also like any herbs. They enjoy the henbit/dead nettle that makes a blue carpet in the Spring (and which many lawn lovers despise). The big plants around here for bees are trees, notably the Tulip Poplar and Black Locust, though in DC they also benefit from public plantings of linden and exotics like the Golden Rain and Japanese Pagoda trees. In late summer, they enjoy going to sedums and stonecrops.

The properties of honey are 100% derived from the plant.

Some plants crank out a lot of sugars to attract bees to their nectar, some pack that nectar with loads of wonderful floral smells. Depending on the trace nutrients in the honey, you can

get light or dark colors, fast or slow crystallization, strong or light flavors, or even medicinal effects.

Our honey around here tends to be light to medium red-gold, and gets lighter during years that that Tulip Poplar is weak. In the city we benefit from all the folks who plant herb gar-



dens, because we get lots of minty and lavender notes.

When the honey is light, it tends to be more floral and almost too sweet. When it is red, it is fuller and more buttery in flavor. I see color and flavor change year to year, but I am definitely paying close attention.

There is a BIG DIFFERENCE, however, between any year here in DC and the generic taste of supermarket honey (which is generally clover from fallow pastures in the Midwest).

For honey flavor, I would love to see my neighbors plant mints, lavenders, salvias, thymes, scented geraniums, hyssops, and Tulip Poplar trees. Because bees around here have a hard time finding stuff to eat in late summer, I would encourage folks to put in late blooming plants like sedums and stonecrops and Russian Sage to help carry us through! ~

Toni Burnham is the no-longer-secret urban beekeeper who blogs at city-bees.blogspot.com. You can find her buzzing around the Cemetery with her dogs Maxie, Cassie, and Giselle.



A honeybee enjoys a cemetery clover flower

Art Devlin, Deadball Star

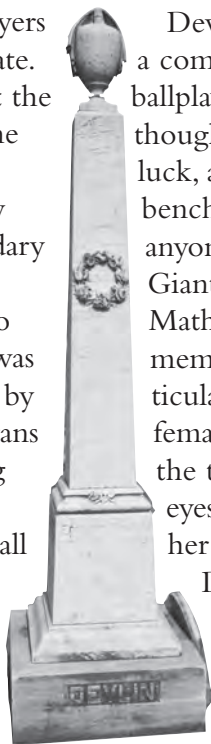
The game of baseball in the early 1900's was not for sissies. Infielders routinely earned bloody gashes from the spikes of sliding runners. Runners regularly took elbows to the ribs or sharp kicks to the shins from basemen. Outfielders played drunk, pitchers threw spitballs, and fans tossed beer bottles at the umpires. To survive in the so-called "dead-ball" era, a player had to be fierce, sneaky, and a little bit nutty.

Fortunately, Art Devlin was all three. Journalist Cait Murphy, in her history of the 1908 World Series, says "Devlin fits the stereotype of a ballplayer, being feisty and Irish." Born Arthur McArthur Devlin in 1880, Art's parents were Irish immigrants who settled in Washington. Art was, unusual for baseball players of the time, a college graduate. He attended Georgetown at the turn of the century where he starred at both baseball and football, although apparently not academics. When legendary New York Giants manager John McGraw signed him to play third base in 1904, he was dismissed as a "college boy" by the rough-and-tumble veterans who had grown up working on farms and in coal mines. But he quickly proved his ball skills with smooth play at third and a grand slam in his first two weeks on the roster. He was critical to

the Giants World Series victory in 1905 and led the league in stolen bases in 1906.

Despite his college training, Devlin wasn't afraid to play dirty. Many an opposing player was thrown out at home, slowed down by a vicious bounce from Devlin's broad shoulders as the unsuspecting runner rounded third. In 1910, the Giants were playing Brooklyn when a rowdy fan said something that set Devlin off. He crashed into the stands and started punching. Several teammates joined in. Devlin and two other Giants were tossed out of the game, and Devlin was arrested and charged with assault. The details are murky, but the judge (a Giants fan, perhaps?) let Devlin go.

Devlin was also superstitious, a common trait among ballplayers of any era. He thought humming brought bad luck, and forbade it on the bench, willing to punch out anyone who broke his rule. Giants pitching ace Christy Mathewson wrote in his memoir that Devlin had a particularly hard time with a female fan who always sat on the third base line and made eyes at him. Unfortunately, her eyes were crossed, and Devlin was sure she had



The Devlin family plot at R45/S120



Feisty Irishman Art Devlin's 1911 baseball card

jinxed him. When he finally explained to the team's manager that the cross-

eyed fan was responsible for his batting slump, McGraw took Devlin out of the lineup. But the story leaked to the newspapers. Then the unfortunate lady stopped coming to games: the Giants figured she had recognized herself in the paper and didn't want to cause further harm to her hero's batting average. Devlin began to get hits again. As Mathewson tells it, the manager was delighted. "If she'd stuck much longer," declared McGraw, joyous in his rejuvenated third baseman, "I would have had her eyes operated on and straightened. This club couldn't afford to keep on losing games because you are such a Romeo, Arthur, that even the cross-eyed ones fall for you."

Devlin also caught the (presumably uncrossed) eye of Ilma Wilk, a banking heiress whom he married in 1906 (the newspaper headline read "Rich Bride for Player"). That marriage ended in 1912. By then, Devlin's playing career was ending too. He went down to the minors in 1913, and started a twenty-year coaching career the following year. He married Gertrude Griffin, and knocked around the East coast in various jobs till his death in 1948 at the age of 68. He is buried with his parents and siblings in the Devlin family plot, range 45, site 120. ~

Restoration of the Chapel organ

You're walking through the cemetery. Maybe it's dusk, maybe later. It's a little creepy. As you pass the chapel, you could swear you hear organ music! It can't be, you must be letting graveyard clichés run away with your imagination. But no, it really is organ music. The cemetery's old pump organ has in fact been restored, and once again fills the vaulted space of the chapel with its sacred sound. The man behind the organ is Charles Humphries, a world-renowned countertenor who moved to Capitol Hill last fall. In between concerts around the world, students here at home, trips back to his native England, and his recent marriage, Charles actually sat still for a few minutes to answer some questions about the newly-restored instrument.

Q. How would you characterize the sound of the organ? What are its eccentricities?

A. The organ makes a wonderful, full and “wheezy” sound, as you would expect from a harmonium. Regarding eccentricities: moving two wooden boards with your knees to make the sound louder and softer is novel! In a former restoration the pump was replaced with a motor. Ordinarily the player must pump with his feet and bring his knees back and forth at the same time — not a good look, but effective.

Q. How does a pump organ work?

A. As the name suggests you have to pump. Pedals are situated at the front of the organ with the organist's feet originally resting on the pedals ready to pump when sound is needed.

Q. What music are you looking forward to playing on it?

A. Due to the nature of the organ, with only one keyboard and no pedal board as on a regular organ, the choice of music is

slightly restricted. However I am looking forward to playing examples of manual keyboard music from England of the 18th century as well as some J. S. Bach and American-influenced music.

Q. Are you taking students? What do people who want to take on the organ need to know?

A. No one should let me loose as an organ teacher. But I am using the space as my voice studio, where my singing students appreciate the acoustics of the chapel as well as the peace and tranquility of the place to study and learn to their best ability.

Q. Do you like singing with an organ, or is the sound hard to compete with?

A. Singing with an organ is a wonderful change from piano, although obviously it does depend slightly on the repertoire one is singing. A piece of 16th-century Palestrina written for a sacred place of worship fits nicely with the organ accompaniment as opposed to perhaps some Mozart that would need a clearer

portrayal of the orchestral texture that was written. When an orchestra is not available, a piano fits very well. It is my intention to have this possibility also, and I am looking into getting a piano keyboard for the chapel over the coming months.

Q. What can we look forward to from you (and the organ) in the future?

A. Well, we will begin with a recital to rededicate the organ on Sunday September 19th at 5pm! (see www.congressionalcemetery.org for details)

After that, I intend to organize a series of concerts throughout certain periods of the year, whether it involves organ, voice or even another instrument. In the winter, I hope to introduce “Carols on the Hill”. This could include an eight-part choir of professional singers and a number of ticketed performances of the traditional “Nine lessons and Carols” that one might remember hearing from Kings College, Cambridge in the UK. I very much hope that this will become a regular feature for the Cemetery and known throughout the Hill as a special time of gathering and celebrating before Christmas. ~



Organ tamer Charles Humphries

WHO IS SHE?

Continued from page 1

were jumbled together. Anthropologists from the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, led by Doug Owsley and Laurie Burgess, guided a crew of volunteers through the process of sorting bones, coffin hardware, and family artifacts. The anthropologists took the bones back to their lab to study them further (*see below*). They will be reinterred with their family members when the work is done.

But the body bag was confusing. Was it associated with the White family — or even with Congressional Cemetery? And most intriguing, who or what was in that bag? The anthropologists decided to put it off, pending further information. A few months later, cemetery archivist Dayle Dooley found *Washington Post* articles from 1991, reporting grave robbers accused of stealing human remains for black magic. The articles quoted then-cemetery manager John Hanley saying that the White vault had been robbed. The body bag in the vault, then, was property the police had recovered from the suspects and returned to the cemetery in an evidence bag.

The time had come to open the bag. Inside was a female skeleton, completely intact except missing the top part of her skull and her feet. Leathery skin covered the mummified body, and quite a lot of clothing was ragged, but recognizable. Her abdomen had been stitched up. Embalming? Autopsy? Abdominal surgery? It was impossible to tell at first glance. At the bottom of the body bag were several clean white skulls, and some random long bones. The Smithsonian anthropologists had discovered that many of skeletons taken from the White vault last summer were missing skulls. They agreed to come back to the cemetery and check out the body bag.

Meanwhile, Deborah Hull-Walski and her staff at the Smithsonian had been researching White genealogy, fleshing out the family tree of the skeletons removed from the vault. When Doug Owsley determined a skeleton's gender and approximate age at death, and Laurie Burgess used coffin hardware and other artifacts to estimate year of burial, Hull-Walski would find a match on the family tree and make an initial identification. In June, all three came to the ceme-

tery to try to figure out the identity of the woman in the bag.

There were several clues. Owsley said she was probably in her 40's at her death. Her clothing, which included thick black stockings and lacy cuffs, suggested late nineteenth century. Then there was that stitching on the abdomen. Hull-Walski said some White family members had actually died in Connecticut and been transported back to Washington, which might account for embalming. The body was taken back to the Smithsonian lab with the others.

Using the evidence gathered so far, the woman in the bag has been tentatively identified as Catherine E. White. She died in Fairfield, CT in 1884 at the age of 47. And at least one document lists her cause of death as bowel obstruction, which might have necessitated abdominal surgery, or an autopsy. A coffin plate for Catherine White was found in the White vault, and cemetery records show she was interred there in 1884. Other bones found in the vault look like they are her missing feet and ankles. But no one is ready to make the identification with certainty yet. For now, the case of the woman in the body bag remains open. 🐾

Laurie Burgess is Coming to Congressional Cemetery

In our continuing series of wine and cheese lectures highlighting the history of the cemetery and its residents, we welcome Laurie Burgess, Associate Chair of the Department of Anthropology at the Smithsonian's Natural History Museum. On Friday, September 17, 2010 at 6 pm, Burgess will present *Death, Dogs and Monuments: Excavations at Historic Congressional Cemetery*, fascinating stories of early nineteenth century burial practices for the famous. Call 202-543-0539 or check www.congressionalcemetery.org for details and reservations.



Laurie Burgess: deep thoughts in the White Vault

Charles Dickens American Notes for General Circulation Chapter 12 1842

If you've been to the southwest corner of the cemetery, near the totem pole, it's hard to miss the majestic angel statue that marks the grave of Peter Perkins Pitchlynn (R87/S294). Born in 1806 to a white father and a Choctaw mother, Pitchlynn (Choctaw name Hat-choo-tuck-nee, or "The Snapping Turtle"), was well-educated in both traditions and was known for his eloquence and diplomacy. He served as principal chief of the Choctaw from 1864-66, and his legacy includes eradicating polygamy, controlling liquor sales, and establishing the Choctaw Academy. After his stint as Chief, Pitchlynn continued to advocate and negotiate on behalf of the Choctaw Nation, representing Native interests until his death in Washington in 1881.

In 1842, Pitchlynn was traveling from Cincinnati to Louisville by steamboat when he discovered that no less a personage than Charles Dickens was traveling on the same boat. Pitchlynn introduced himself, and Dickens was so taken with this stately Choctaw that their encounter dominates Chapter 12 of "American Notes," the account Dickens published of his American adventure. The following is an excerpt from that chapter.

Leaving Cincinnati at eleven o'clock in the forenoon, we embarked for Louisville in the Pike steamboat, which, carrying the mails, was a packet of a much better class than that in which we had come from Pittsburg. As this passage does not occupy more than twelve or thirteen hours, we arranged to go ashore that night: not coveting the distinction of sleeping in a state-room, when it was possible to sleep anywhere else.

There chanced to be on board this boat, in addition to the usual dreary crowd of passengers, one Pitchlynn, a chief of the Choctaw tribe of Indians, who sent in his card to me, and with whom I had the pleasure of a long conversation.

He spoke English perfectly well, though he had not begun to learn the language, he told

me, until he was a young man grown. He had read many books; and Scott's poetry appeared to have left a strong impression on his mind: especially the opening of *The Lady of the Lake*, and the great battle scene in *Marmion*, in which, no doubt from the congeniality of the subjects to his own pursuits and tastes, he had great interest and delight. He appeared to understand correctly all he had read; and whatever fiction had enlisted his sympathy in its belief, had done so keenly and earnestly. I might almost say fiercely. He was dressed in our ordinary every-day costume, which hung about his fine figure loosely, and with indifferent grace. On my telling him that I



A steamboat engraving from Dickens' American Notes



Peter Pitchlynn's monument dominates the southwestern corner of the cemetery

regretted not to see him in his own attire, he threw up his right arm, for a moment, as though he was brandishing some heavy weapon, and answered, as he let it fall again, that his race were losing many things besides their dress, and would soon be seen upon the earth no more: but he wore it at home, he added proudly.

He told me he had been away from his home, west of the Mississippi, seventeen months: and was now returning. He had been chiefly at Washington on some negotiations pending between his

Tribe and the Government: which were not settled yet (he said in a melancholy way), and he feared never would be: for what could a few poor Indians do, against such well-skilled men of business as the whites? He had no love for Washington; tired of towns and cities very soon; and longed for the Forest and the Prairie.

I asked him what he thought of Congress? He answered, with a smile, that it wanted dignity, in an Indian's eyes.

He would very much like, he said, to see England before he died; and spoke with much interest about the great things to be seen there. When I told him of that chamber in the British Museum wherein are preserved household memorials of a race that ceased to be, thousands of years ago, he was very attentive, and it was not hard to see that he had a reference in his mind to the gradual fading away of his own people.

This led us to speak of Mr. Catlin's gallery, which he praised highly: observing that his own portrait was among the collection, and that the likenesses were "elegant." Mr. Cooper, he said, had painted the red Man well; and so would I, he knew, if I would go home with him and hunt buffaloes, which he was quite anxious I should do. When I told him that supposing I went, I should not be very likely to damage the buffaloes much, he took it as a great joke and laughed heartily.

He was a remarkably handsome man; some years past forty, I should judge; with long black

hair, an aquiline nose, broad cheek-bones, a sunburnt complexion, and a very bright, keen, dark, and piercing eye. There were but twenty thousand of the Choctaws left, he said, and their number was decreasing every day. A few of his brother chiefs had been obliged to become civilized, and to make themselves acquainted with what the whites knew, for it was their only chance of existence. But they were not many; and the rest were as they had always been. He dwelt on this: and said several times that unless they tried to assimilate themselves to their conquerors, they must be swept away before the strides of civilized society.

When we shook hands at parting, I told him he must come to England, as he longed to see the land so much: that I should hope to see him there, one day: and that I could promise him he would be well received and kindly treated. He was evidently pleased by this assurance, though he rejoined with a good-humored smile and an arch shake of his head, that the English used to be very fond of the Red Men when they wanted their help, but had not cared much for them, since.

He took his leave; as stately and complete a gentleman of Nature's making, as ever I beheld; and moved among the people in the boat, another kind of being. He sent me a lithographed portrait of himself soon afterwards; very like, though scarcely handsome enough; which I have carefully preserved in memory of our brief acquaintance. ~



1801 E Street, Southeast
Washington, DC 20003
www.congressionalcemetery.org

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
LAUREL, MD
PERMIT NO. 6326

Yes!

I want to help preserve and restore Congressional Cemetery with a tax deductible donation.

\$25 \$50 \$75 \$100 \$250 Other _____

2010 Membership: \$125 Individual \$250 Family

Check enclosed, made payable to Congressional Cemetery

Please charge my credit card Visa Mastercard

Card # _____

Cardmember Name _____ Exp _____

Signature _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone/s _____

Email _____

My employer makes matching contributions. Please send me the matching gift form.

Thank you!

Please mail with your donation to the return address on the mailing panel or use the envelope inside this newsletter.

Calendar

- August 22 10:00 am Burning of Washington Walking Tour.
Led by Historian and author Anthony Pitch
\$20 per person, all proceeds benefit the restoration of the gravesite of Stephen Pleasonton. Tour begins at the Neptune Statue in front of the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress, and ends at Lafayette Square.
Reserve at
www.congressionalcemetery.org.
- September 17 6:00pm Chapel wine and cheese lecture
Laurie Burgess on Death, Dogs and Monuments
- September 19 5:00pm Chapel Organ Concert
Rededication of the Chapel Organ with Charles Humphries
- September 25 11:00am-12:00pm and 12:00-1:00pm Chapel
Uppity Women Tour for Walking Town DC
Cultural Landscape Foundation
Reserve at www.culturaltourismdc.org



Reserve your place in American History
Congressional Cemetery is a non-denominational burial ground open to the whole community. Introducing Green Burials this fall. Traditional grave sites are available in a number of price ranges. Call today.
Alan Davis, Cemetery Manager
adavis@congressionalcemetery.org
202-543-0539