

**Baltimore City
Commission for Historical and
Architectural Preservation**

**Landmark Designation Report
November 13, 2018**



Credit: Augustus Köllner and Laurent Deroy, *Baltimore. Green Mount Cemetery*, 1848, lithograph of drawing, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC, accessed October 23, 2018, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2009632739/>.

Greenmount Cemetery Gates and Chapel

1501 Greenmount Ave.
Baltimore, Maryland



Commission for Historical & Architectural Preservation

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Significance Summary

The gates and chapel of Greenmount Cemetery exemplify the built environment of Baltimore City's first rural cemetery, established in 1839. The gates and chapel are the two structures in the Cemetery that are used by the general public. The gateway represents the fact that people are entering the land of the dead, and the chapel is a place for prayer and funeral services. Both are designed in the Gothic Revival style by significant Baltimore architects. Robert Cary Long, Jr. designed the gateway and the architectural firm Niernsee and Neilson designed the chapel. People are still being laid to rest here, and the cemetery currently holds 65,000 individuals. Although Greenmount Cemetery was meant for the dead to rest, many people would go to Greenmount for leisure as it was the first place that city dwellers were able to enjoy open green space. The chapel and gateway were designated as Baltimore City Landmark in 1986.

Contextual History

In the Northeast United States, it was common for burial grounds to be placed around industrial areas and in churchyards. Burial plots were often close together and sometimes on top of one another. As the 19th century went on, populations grew, and small towns began to turn into cities. Overcrowded church cemeteries became a public health concern, and people often complained about the odors of rotting dead bodies. Therefore, rural or garden cemeteries began to appear throughout the United States.¹

In Cambridge, Massachusetts, the first garden cemetery known as Mount Auburn Cemetery opened in 1831, and was the first cemetery available for public leisure. Shortly after Mount Auburn opened, garden cemeteries began to appear throughout the Northeast. Mount Hope Cemetery opened in 1834 in Bangor, Maine. In 1836, Laurel Hill Cemetery opened in Philadelphia, then in 1838 Greenwood Cemetery opened in Brooklyn. Baltimore's Greenmount Cemetery followed shortly after, opening in 1839.²

Before the advent of public parks, these rural cemeteries gave people of all classes a place to walk around and enjoy the scenery and fresh air, while also honoring the dead. Since these garden cemeteries were some of the first public communal spaces in America, people started to wonder about etiquette and proper behavior for visitors. In Joy Giguere's article about vandalism and public misbehavior in rural cemeteries, she stated "Was it inappropriate to pick a flower? Break a twig? Whittle on a tree trunk? Race a carriage? Shoot a firearm?" Vandalism and immorality led to police presence in the cemeteries.³ In order to respect the deceased buried in these cemeteries, in the 1830s and 1840s, cemetery boards were created to enforce rules and regulations for visitors. As the movement expanded, proprietors of all the rural cemeteries made sure to enforce these rules in efforts to maintain a peaceful public land. Greenmount Cemetery proprietors banned riders on horseback and only lot owners with tickets were allowed passage

¹ French Stanley, "The Cemetery as Cultural Institution: The Establishment of Mount Auburn and the 'Rural Cemetery Movement,'" *American Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (March 1974): Page 42.

² *Ibid.*, page 52-53.

³ Joy M. Giguere, "'Too Mean to Live, and Certainly in No Fit Condition to Die': Vandalism, public misbehavior, and the rural cemetery movement" *Journal of the Early Republic*, no. 2 (June 2018): page 294.

through the cemetery with their carriages.⁴ Urban population continued to climb, and these cemeteries gave city dwellers a place to find peace and serenity. An Englishman by the name of Henry Bright toured the United States in 1852 and stated, “Cemeteries here are all the rage, people lounge in them, and use them [as their tastes inclined] for walking, making love, weeping, sentimentalizing, and everything in short.”⁵ Sundays were commonly spent at these rural cemeteries especially for families trying to enjoy the beauty of the outdoors and away from fast-paced city life. All visitors were required to display a ticket for admission to the gatekeeper.⁶

Property History

Greenmount Cemetery (legally named Green Mount Cemetery) was dedicated on July 13, 1839, by Reverend William Wyatt, Congressman John Kennedy and Reverend J.G. Hammer.⁷ Prior to becoming a cemetery, the 63-acre plot of land was purchased and named by Robert Oliver, a well-known merchant originally from Belfast, Ireland. Oliver built an estate on this parcel and gave it the name Greenmount because of the natural elegance which it possessed. Oliver passed away on December 28, 1834, only months after he purchased the land.⁸

Following Robert Oliver’s death in 1834, Samuel Walker, a tobacco merchant, gained support to convert the estate into a cemetery to help address the overcrowded church cemeteries that were quickly becoming a problem in Baltimore City. In 1838, heirs of Robert Oliver sold 63 acres of the land to a group of people that became the proprietors of the Greenmount Cemetery. The General Assembly of Maryland created an act which integrated the “Seven Proprietors of the Greenmount Cemetery” on March 15, 1838. The General Assembly also created legal documents that the cemetery would remain a non-profit and provide resting plots for all, disregarding race, social class, and religion, and thus legally created the first garden cemetery in Baltimore City.⁹

Walker and architect Benjamin H. Latrobe, Jr. were in charge of the design of the cemetery, which was officially dedicated July 13, 1839. Latrobe incorporated winding paths, which were surrounded by a variety of trees, as well as monuments and statues.¹⁰ His father, Benjamin Latrobe, was one of the earliest architects in America, designed the U.S. Capitol and was appointed the surveyor of public buildings in 1803 by President Thomas Jefferson.¹¹

⁴ Giguere, 310.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 312.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 310.

⁷ James Wollon, Jr and Daniel Monahan, "Art and Architecture," Greenmount Cemetery, last modified 2006, accessed September 18, 2018, <https://www.greenmountcemetery.com/greenmount-cemetery-features-architecture.html>.

⁸ “Greenmount Cemetery Recalls Romantic Past,” *The Baltimore Sun* (Baltimore, Maryland (MD)), July 17, 1970, page C1; “Green Mount in Baltimore,” *American Cemetery* 44, no. 9 (September 1971)

⁹ “Green Mount,” page 27.

¹⁰ Judith Smith, "Nature/Landscape," Green Mount Cemetery, accessed October 23, 2018, <https://www.greenmountcemetery.com/greenmount-cemetery-features-nature.html>.

¹¹ University of Pennsylvania University Archives and Records Center, "Benjamin Henry Latrobe," Penn University Archives and Records Center, last modified 1995-2017, accessed October 23, 2018, https://www.archives.upenn.edu/people/1700s/latrobe_benj.html.

Robert Cary Long, Jr., native to Baltimore City, was the architect who designed the entrance gateway to Greenmount Cemetery. The entrance gate is located at the southwest corner of the cemetery facing the intersection of Greenmount Ave and Oliver Street. The entranceway holds offices and a waiting room for visitors. Construction began in 1840, soon after the establishment of the cemetery, with completion by 1846. His father, Robert Cary Long, Sr. was Baltimore's first native born self-taught architect. Long, Jr. after receiving an education at St. Mary's College in Baltimore, apprenticed with Martin Thompson in New York. During his apprenticeship, he mastered the styles of Greek, Gothic, and Egyptian Revivals as well as Italianate. Following his father's death in 1833 Robert Cary Jr. came back to Baltimore to continue his father's successful business. Although he was quite popular for his architectural influence throughout the country, his most notable buildings in Baltimore include the Lloyd Street Synagogue in 1841, St. Peter the Apostle Roman Catholic Church, as well as St. Alphonsus Roman Catholic Church in 1842, which started the Gothic Revival style movement of churches built in America.¹²

The architects chosen to design the Greenmount Cemetery Chapel were John Niernsee and James Nielson. Construction began in February 1851 with completion in 1856. The chapel was originally used for prayer and funeral services.¹³ In 1936, the basement was turned into a crematory.¹⁴

Niernsee was a founding member of the national American Institute of Architects, and both Niernsee and Nielson were charter members of the Baltimore chapter of the AIA. After working and training with Benjamin H. Latrobe Jr. on the B&O Railroad, John Niernsee and James Nielson established an architectural firm in Baltimore in 1848. While working on the Greenmount Cemetery Chapel, they also were finishing the construction of both Grace and St. Peters Church and Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Baltimore. Although successful doing business in Baltimore, Niernsee was asked to review problems with the State House building in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1854 that was built just a few years before. While in South Carolina, the Civil War began, so he stayed and fought with the Confederate Army before returning to Baltimore 10 years later. James Nielson made sure their firm thrived even in Niernsee's absence; they continued their partnership up until 1874 when Niernsee then decided to start a business with his son Frank.¹⁵

The first burial in the cemetery was 2-year-old Olivia Whitridge on December 7, 1839. Johns Hopkins, who died in 1873 leaving money in his will to create the university and the hospital in Baltimore City which bear his name, is buried there. Betsy Bonaparte, sister-in-law to Napoleon Bonaparte, was also buried at Greenmount in 1879. Sidney Lanier, a popular poet in Baltimore, was buried at Greenmount in 1881.¹⁶ Another well-known person buried at Greenmount is John Wilkes Booth, a member of the popular theatrical family from Bel Air, Maryland, and assassin of President Lincoln at Ford's Theater in Washington D.C. on April 14, 1865. It wasn't until 1869

¹² James T. Woolon, Jr., "Robert Cary Long Jr.," Baltimore Architecture Foundation, last modified 2018, accessed October 2, 2018, <http://baltimorearchitecture.org/biographies/robert-cary-long-jr/>.

¹³ "Greenmount Cemetery," Page C1.

¹⁴ "Green Mount," page 27.

¹⁵ James T. Woolon, Jr., "John Rudolph Niernsee," Baltimore Architecture Foundation, last modified 2018, accessed October 16, 2018, <http://baltimorearchitecture.org/biographies/john-rudolph-niernsee/>.

¹⁶ "Green Mount," page 27-28.

that his body was laid to rest in the Booth family plot at Greenmount Cemetery where his grave is left unmarked.¹⁷

Greenmount Cemetery holds the remains of 65,000 individuals that have passed away, with room for 7,000 more, with many plots are reserved for family members. Greenmount Cemetery is associated with the International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association and with the Maryland Cemetery, Funeral, and Cremation Association. Today the cemetery grounds and office are open to the public, Monday through Friday 9am to 4pm. Wayne Schamburg, a Baltimore historian, offers guided tours in the months of May and October. Schamburg has been giving tours of the cemetery since 1985.¹⁸

Architectural Description

With the Romantic Movement in high gear, Gothic Revival became a popular architectural design for these rural cemeteries. Robert Cary Long Jr. designed Greenmount Cemetery's five-bay wide symmetrical gateway that features battlemented towers, large arches, cast iron fences, and appealing stained glass windows. The battlemented towers reach 40 feet and are made up of broken coarse cut stone. The supporting battlemented towers are positioned so the archway is intricately centered in-between. A basic stone cornice remains on top the archway mounted by a battlemented parapet wall that features a datestone with the year "1838". The stone Gothic archway was built in order to allow carriages through the cemetery and is large enough to allow entrance of automobiles as well. Flanking either side of the main entrance archway are two arched pedestrian entrances. Stepping stones guide people to these entrances which are secured by cast iron fences. Topping these archways are similar cornices as the large arched entrance way. Flanking the pedestrian archways are stone 1 story side-gabled structures. Although it may seem as just an entrance way, the structure also encompasses offices and a waiting area.¹⁹

The chapel is an octagonal, Gothic Revival building, designed by Niernsee and Nielson. The chapel was constructed with Connecticut sandstone. It features a port-cochere over the entrance to the chapel, pinnacles, flying buttresses, a 102-ft tall spire, and stained glass windows. In the late 1930's a crematory was added to the basement of the chapel.²⁰

Application of Landmark Designation Criteria

The property meets CHAP Landmark Designation Standards: B. A Baltimore City Landmark may be a site, structure, landscape, building (or portion thereof), place, work of art, or other object:

1. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Baltimore history.

¹⁷ "The Green Mount Beyond the Wall," *The Sun Magazine*, May 16, 1976,

¹⁸ Wollon and Monahan, "Art and Architecture," Greenmount Cemetery.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

3. That embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

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Maps



Image 1: Location map of the Cemetery Chapel and Gates.



Image 2: Designation Boundary map of the Cemetery Chapel and Gates (boundaries in red).

Photos

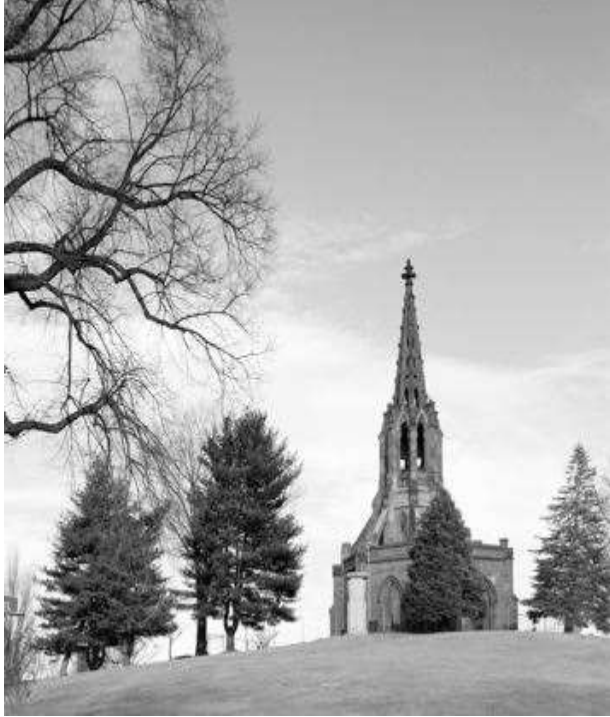


Image 3 and 4: Greenmount Cemetery Chapel (left) and Cemetery Gates (right) (Credit: Jack Boucher, n.d. Greenmount Cemetery, Historic American Building Survey)