



CEMETERY RESOURCES AID MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION'S RESEARCH

By DAVID RUSSO, *Watertown Historical Commission*

IN 2013, I WAS CONTACTED BY AN INTERN AT THE Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), who was following up on an old inventory done on Mount Auburn in the mid-1970s. It listed the familiar monuments and buildings that we often read about in these pages and elsewhere. MHC was interested in learning the locations of each and whether they still existed.

Fairly quickly, I was able to answer the questions: of the 23 items on the MHC list, 22 were extant (only the Rest House was demolished), and I recorded the location of each resource on a Cemetery map. But the request spurred the idea of a bigger project: we needed complete inventories of these and other resources within the Cemetery that comprehensively and articulately detailed their significance and documented it for perpetuity. With MHC's blessing, this project was born.

The task of every town's Historical Commission is to determine what historic resources exist in its community, to advocate for those resources, and to make them more available to the community. The MHC provides inventory forms that allow users to document landscapes, objects, and structures in a systematic, organized way. Information starts with the year of construction, the architect or maker, materials used, alterations, a design assessment, and a narrative of its history. But that's just the beginning. The forms are very broad and extensive, and require intensive research to get the information and interpretations just

right. The bonus, though, is that the forms themselves, once completed, become an important resource that the MHC and the public can access in perpetuity.

At the start of the project, Meg Winslow, Curator of Historical Collections at Mount Auburn, always an insightful and grounding influence, subtly cautioned that I consider starting with a smaller subset of monuments (maybe mausoleums?) and then consider moving on to others. Despite this sound advice, a project that began with 23 resources soon ballooned to 234. These included all manner of monuments, mausoleums, landscapes, and buildings within the Cemetery that collectively capture its significance. I chose the large and the small, the very old and the very new, and the first burial and the more recent.

For landscapes, I chose Harvard Hill for its obvious significance, inventorying every monument on it (44!) and the lot itself as a landscape. Other significant landscapes that I included were Consecration Dell, Hazel Dell, Asa Gray Garden, Auburn Lake, and Halcyon Garden. Each has a related yet markedly different story to tell. I learned that the lowest point in the Cemetery is not Consecration Dell but Auburn Lake at nine feet above sea level. The highest point is Mount Auburn Hill at 125 feet, the third highest point in Watertown. Adding Washington Tower's 62 feet, those that climb the tower stand a full 187 feet in altitude.

I found some surprises in my research on significant monuments. I learned that the Sawyer monument on Larch

Avenue (a tall Celtic Cross) was the design of Chicago architect Daniel Hudson Burnham, known as one of the founders of the American skyscraper; he also designed the Flatiron Building in New York City. Another surprise was that the Moulton monument on Vesper Avenue was designed by Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson. Mount Auburn also boasts two examples of collaborative work between architect Stanford White and sculptor Augustus St. Gaudens: the Nevins monument and the Booth monument.

Other times, mysteries would present themselves. While looking at invoices for the Longfellow lot, it appeared that the large sarcophagus that dominates the lot may have been replaced in 1924 (it was originally installed in 1884). However, after reaching out to officials at the Longfellow House in neighboring Cambridge, Meg and I determined that the replacement was never more than a proposal. These kinds of puzzles (or snares?) lurk everywhere and it is important to understand and accurately interpret the material so as not to introduce errors into the record.

I included some rarer forms such as the stupa monument on Story Road, the Kepes “fejfa” monument posts on Oxalis Path, and the Mountfort monument on Willow Avenue (a hillside tomb composed of varied pyramidal forms). These distinctive monument forms add important texture to the overall feeling of the Cemetery.

In addition to the significant monuments, I included a representative sample of more ordinary monuments. I chose notable persons such as Julia Ward Howe and Dorothea Dix (both on Spruce Avenue) to document monuments of this type. These stones tend to be unadorned and simple, but also tasteful and elegant in their own way.

Part of my project involved investigating sculptors, architects, artists, and other makers. The Carew brothers (Joseph and Thomas) were sculptors well represented here at Mount Auburn. We knew that they emigrated from England and were of Irish extraction, but research revealed that Joseph had a short career in England before



David Russo leads a tour about the topography of Mount Auburn in 2011.

FORM B – BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Assessor's Number: 15005 Quad: Arcata: Form Number:
1621 2 0 | Newton & Lexington | J | 411
NRHP: 421/1976, NL 5/27/2003

Town: Watertown
Place (with borough or village): Mount Auburn

Address: 500 Mount Auburn Street
Historic Name: Story Chapel and Administration Building
Use: Present: Chapel and Administrative
Original: Chapel and Administrative

Date of Construction: 1896-1898
Source: National Landmark Nomination, August, 2001
Style/Form: Gothic Revival
Architect/Builder: Architect: Willard T. Sears; Allen & Collins and Earl E. Sanborn (1909 stained glass); Ann Beha Associates (1990 lantern); McKinley Kalkow & Associates (2013 porte cochere addition)

Exterior Material:
Foundation: Brick/Stone
Wall/Trim: Sandstone and Limestone
Roof: Slate/Copper, Rubber
Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: None

Major Alterations (with dates): Stained glass windows added (1926); small addition to house restrooms (1930); spire removed (1935); porte-cochere removed (1971); skylight removed and lantern added (1990); porte-cochere added (2013)

Condition: Very Good
Moved: no | X | yes | | Date: _____
Acreage: 20,000 sq. ft.
Setting: Site just behind the front gate along busy Mount Auburn Street at the corner of Central and Garden Avenues.

Photograph

Topographic or Assessor's Map

Recorded by: David J. Russo
Organization: Watertown Historical Commission
Date (month / year): October, 2016

Follow Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey Manual instructions for completing this form.

Massachusetts Historical Commission Record, Form B.

he left. While his training remains obscure, research did turn up two of Carew’s early English commissions: a memorial tablet for Sir John Floyd and a sculpture of Dick Whittington, the Lord Mayor of London, as a boy. Further research revealed that, in America, Joseph Carew was an “Associationist,” that is, a member of the famed Brook Farm (a utopian experiment in communal living) in West Roxbury, who sought to combine Transcendentalism with social reform. Associationist connections likely served him and his sculpting business well.

A few personal insights occurred to me during my research. For example, I realized that Washington Tower and the Bigelow Chapel are both “follies”; that is, they are fanciful embellishments to the landscape that emphasize the visual and imaginative pleasures of variety and irregularity.

For this project, the research resources at Mount Auburn Cemetery helped immeasurably. In addition to the paper records in the Archives that include lot cards, correspondence, work orders, and trustee’s minutes, the human resources were immensely valuable. The assistance, motivation, commentary, best efforts, and even connections provided by the Curator made my work infinitely easier and more fruitful.

Whoever coined the phrase “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” must have been thinking about a place like Mount Auburn. The bits and pieces that I have captured on the inventory forms together paint a picture of cultural and historical life. But it’s the layers upon layers of varied meaning when combined that ultimately create the significance of Mount Auburn.