

# Making Room for the Living at Laurel Hill Cemetery



## VOLUME I: RESEARCH REPORT



Graduate Program in Historic Preservation  
University of Pennsylvania  
Fall 2007 Studio



Photo Credits, Cover & Overleaf (L to R): Allegheny West (T. Aphale, Fall 2007); Central Laurel Hill, view to Strawberry Mansion Bridge, (T. Aphale, Fall 2007); Gatehouse (HABS Report, 1999); North Laurel Hill (T. Aphale, Fall 2007); East Falls (A. Finke, Fall 2007). Above (Top to Bottom): Central Laurel Hill, view within (M. Goeke, Fall 2007); Lion Monument (T. Aphale, Fall 2007); View to Dobson's Tower, South Laurel Hill (T. Aphale, Fall 2007).

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# INTRODUCTION

Laurel Hill Cemetery, founded in 1836, holds distinction as being the second rural cemetery established in the United States. First designed by noted architect John Notman, Laurel Hill Cemetery is now a National Historic Landmark. The cemetery has served the city of Philadelphia as more than a final resting place for the mortal remains of the deceased; it has been a place of respite and retreat for visitors. Situated in northwest Philadelphia along the banks of the Schuylkill River, Laurel Hill boasts rolling hills, shaded paths, and spectacular views of the river, attracting visitors to its pastoral environs.

While Laurel Hill will exist in perpetuity as a sacred burial space, much of the surrounding urban composition is of a more transient nature, prone to change and evolution as time passes. What once existed as rural countryside now sits at the confluence of residential, industrial, and established parkland, surrounding Laurel Hill and boxing it in on all sides. With limited space remaining for current burials or expansion, Laurel Hill can no longer depend on revenue from the sale of plots, which has sustained it since its inception. The cemetery must now seek out new sources of dependable income.

Prepared as part of the Historic Preservation Studio for the University of Pennsylvania, this first volume of the preservation plan examines Laurel Hill as it exists now, as part of the complex fabric of urban life, as well as its history of being an isolated retreat for Philadelphia's elite. An intimate and commanding knowledge of the place is vital in the creation of a preservation plan that can conserve existing resources and inherent values but also acknowledge the inevitability of change. Touching on history, tangible resources, landscape, community, and more, this volume presents a framework to inform future decisions affecting the site. The light shed on the current situation surrounding the historic cemetery informs the content of Volume II, which includes policies and actions to guide Laurel Hill toward success as a cultural heritage destination that communicates its many values and history to a new generations of Philadelphians.





# METHODOLOGY

Responsible management depends on a thorough understanding of a site. Uninformed decisions can have profound effects. Therefore, the process of drafting preservation recommendations for Laurel Hill Cemetery began with a detailed investigation of the site.

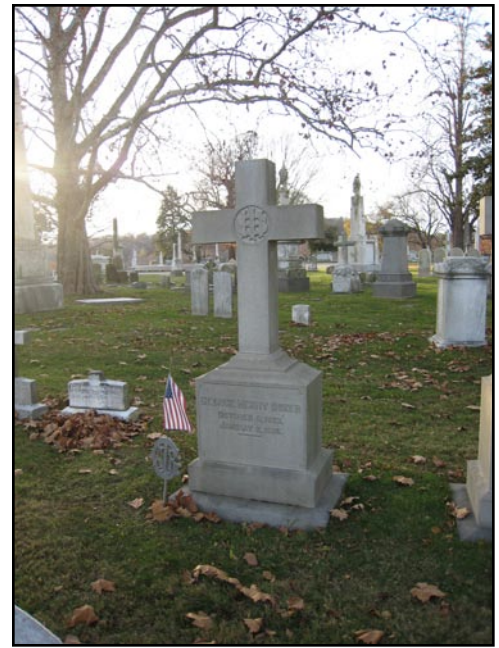
In order to uncover as much as possible within a limited period of time, four task groups were established to look at specific aspects of the cemetery. The aspects of interest were history, social and economic context, mapping, resource conditions, and comparable sites. Investigation into these matters required delving into historic archives, documenting historic maps, interviewing visitors and community members, and conducting site surveys. These efforts were compiled to present a clear and complete picture of Laurel Hill Cemetery.

An additional topic of research came out of this background investigation. While Laurel Hill sits at a lively intersection of river jogging trails, active transportation routes, and residential neighborhoods, the liveliness of these surroundings does not seem to carry over onto the cemetery grounds with any significant amount of visitation. To investigate the reason for this apparent division of space and use, an urban morphology project was undertaken to rigorously document the physical and visual relationship between the cemetery and the complex neighborhoods surrounding Laurel Hill.

Once the research collected over the course of six weeks was assembled, it was possible to identify some of the cemetery's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to preservation. This SWOT analysis, as it is called, informed the development of a statement of significance.

The statement of significance outlines the many layers of values that contribute to making Laurel Hill special and a site worth preserving. The statement as a result provides a guide for creating policies that enhance and improve the site. It also stands as a touchstone to judge the benefit or harm of future decisions.

Analysis of all of these research items, in conjunction with continual reference to the statement of significance, ultimately allowed for the formation of policies, recommendations, and actions. These details of the preservation plan can be found in Volume II.



North Laurel Hill, looking west toward the river with the marker of a Civil War participant in the foreground. Photo: K. Witt 2007.



# STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

While Laurel Hill has long been known as a historic resource, its value as an ecological landscape and open green space has been overlooked. If Laurel Hill is to remain relevant to a wide audience in the long-term, it is vital to embrace the many values that are inherent to a complex site like Laurel Hill. The statement of significance that follows grew out of a recognition of the variety of values embodied by the cemetery over the course of 12 weeks of research.

### Laurel Hill Statement of Significance

Situated at the juncture of parkland, an industrial zone, and several distinct residential neighborhoods, Laurel Hill Cemetery remains an island of the Victorian Era. One of the earliest rural cemeteries in the county, Laurel Hill exemplifies Philadelphia's commitment to reform in the 19th century. Its romantic character and pastoral setting was attractive to the citizens of Philadelphia who enjoyed it as a place of respite and retreat. Shaped by wealthy Philadelphians who commissioned artists to capture their legacies in enduring monuments, Laurel Hill continues to serve the dual purposes of memorial and leisure, remaining a sacred testament to the past and a sanctuary from the surrounding city. It will endure in perpetuity, overlooking the Schuylkill and allowing for the continuity of green space along the river. Its historic, aesthetic, and environmental attributes lend Laurel Hill the potential to serve society as a unique recreational and educational resource.



An outcropping in central Laurel Hill sits above Kelly Drive and looks southwest over the river. Photo: T. Aphale 2007.





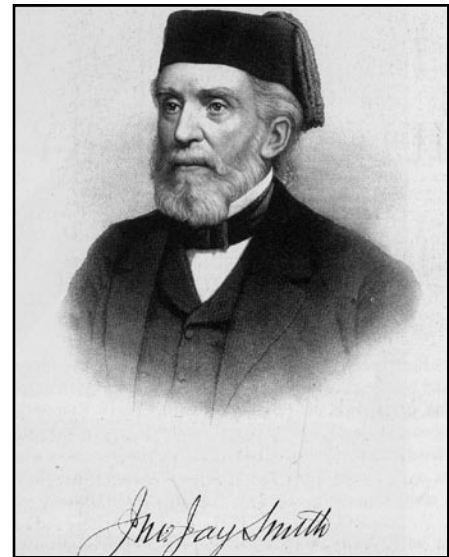
HISTORY

Laurel Hill Cemetery's significance within Philadelphia and the nation's history stems, first and foremost, from its contribution to the rural cemetery movement in the first half of the nineteenth century. However, its status as one of the earliest examples of a rural cemetery in the United States does not compose the totality of its significance. Laurel Hill's myriad historic, aesthetic and environmental values make it a vital cultural resource for today's Philadelphians. This section focuses primarily on its historic value as it outlines the site's development from an idea that emerged from a small group of civic-minded individuals in 1835 to the current-day ventures to create a high caliber heritage destination. A visual chronology summarizing the site's history is included in the appendix.

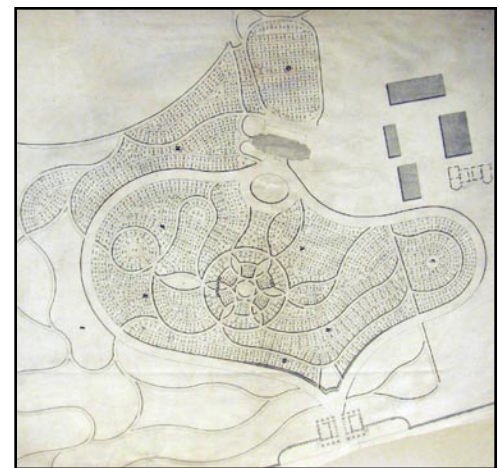
What is seen today as a sprawling 78-acre sculpture garden has its roots in the congested graveyards of Old City Philadelphia. John Jay Smith, the leader of the group that founded Laurel Hill Cemetery, sought to create new burial options after experiencing the appalling conditions of the graveyard at the Arch Street Meeting House when he interred his daughter in a crowded and partially flooded grave. Consequently, in late 1835, Smith made contact with several prominent individuals in Philadelphia to begin exploring the possibility of creating the city's first rural cemetery.

Shortly thereafter, the group set out to find an appropriate site and in February of 1836 the group purchased the former estate of merchant Joseph Sims.<sup>1</sup> The estate was comprised of 32 acres adjacent to the Schuylkill River with a rolling topography and plantings dating to Sims ownership of the land (1724-1824). Following an informal competition, the founders of the Laurel Hill Cemetery Company (LHCC) selected architect John Notman's design for the original 20-acre parcel, which today makes up most of North Laurel Hill.<sup>2</sup> Notman designed a picturesque landscape intended to create a sanitary, pastoral haven, not only for the dead, but also for numerous to visitors who could walk through and enjoy unspoiled vistas and quiet green fields far outside the city limits and free from its noise, crowding, pollution and the foul smelling air associated with municipal and church graveyards of the day.<sup>3</sup>

An important focal point of Notman's design was an intricate interweaving of paths and plantings known as the Shrubbery near the center of the plan. It was supposed to remain free of graves, but by 1839, 45 burial plots had



John Jay Smith. From: *Philadelphia Graveyard and Cemeteries*, p.22.



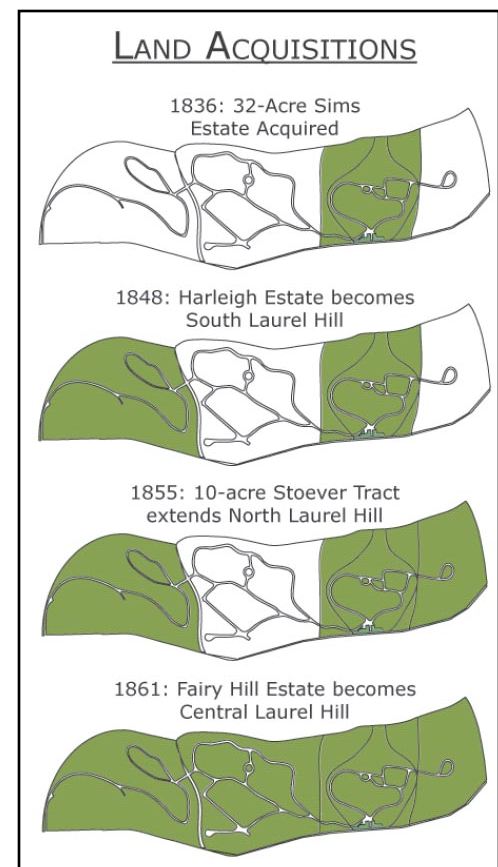
Notman's 1836 design for Laurel Hill. From The Library Company of Philadelphia

been sold in this section of the landscape. Other changes to the original plan revolved around the buildings left from the former Sims estate. Initially, Notman had worked the mansion into his design along with other out buildings, but within a decade of the cemetery's opening some of the smaller buildings—stables and the carriage house—were lost to fire and in 1844, the management voted to raze the mansion. The masonry from the structure was reused on-site for terracing the land and cellar was converted into burial vaults.<sup>4</sup>

Smith and his staff worked to appeal to the upper classes, promoting Laurel Hill as final resting place for entire families through its emphasis on entire plots capable of holding multiple generations in perpetuity. Further support for its targeting the upper class stems from the limited availability of single burial plots, which would have been more attainable for those of modest means.<sup>5</sup> During the early Victorian period, mourning customs and rituals were becoming increasingly elaborate and regimented. Smith also built up the site's status by bringing famous decedents into the cemetery for reburial, thereby attracting visitors and greater publicity. Charles Thomson, the secretary of the Continental Congress, was reinterred there in 1838 as an attraction and symbol of Laurel Hill's social prominence and respectability.

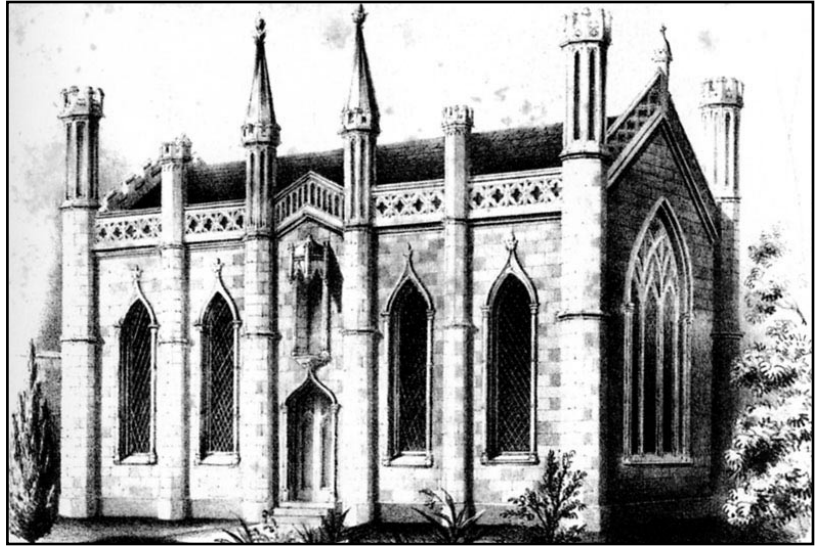
In an effort to symbolize the management's commitment to the safeguarding of the memory of loved ones, they purchased a set of sculptures by Scottish artist James Thom entitled *Old Mortality and His Pony* in the 1830s. It is based on a folktale by Sir Walter Scott in which the character of Old Mortality traveled around Scotland re-carving the epitaphs of Presbyterian martyrs on their headstones to ensure that their identities would not be forgotten.<sup>6</sup> Placed at the main entrance to the cemetery, this work of art clearly captured and communicated Laurel Hill's purpose to visitors and potential clients

Between 1848 and 1861, Laurel Hill's holdings expanded significantly. The creation of South Laurel Hill was made possible in 1848 with the acquisition of the former Harleigh Estate. The Stoever Tract was purchased in 1855, adding 10 acres to the North section and extending the property to the tracks of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad. In 1861, the LHCC acquired the Pepper property, using its twenty-one and a half acres to connect North and South Laurel Hill.<sup>7</sup> Beginning in 1864, the construction firm of Dolan and Shields built a three-arched stone



bridge connecting the Central and South section of Laurel Hill over Nicetown Lane (today Hunting Park Avenue).<sup>8</sup> 1870 saw the closure of a large carriage gate fronting Ridge Avenue in South Laurel Hill.<sup>9</sup>

Beginning in the 1870s significant changes occurred in the administration of the cemetery. The first change arose in the institution's leadership for in 1874, John Jay Smith resigned from the company, ending nearly 40 years with LHCC. Following his resignation the new management reversed some of Smith's policies such as the emphasis on the separateness of each of the cemetery sections (North, Central, and South) to create a more coherent public identity for Laurel Hill, although each continued as a separate administrative unit. The new management practices ushered in a number of capital changes as well. Several structures designed by Notman were lost during this period to make way for more burial space, most notably the Gothic Chapel, which was gone by 1886. Additions to the landscape included the construction of a massive retaining wall along East River Drive (today Kelly Drive) and the continuing development of the area in Central Laurel Hill known as Millionaires Row where some of the wealthiest bankers, merchants, industrialists, landowners in Philadelphia bought plots and erected some of the largest monuments seen in the cemetery along a curving path overlooking the Schuylkill. At approximately the same time, a large greenhouse was built in Central Laurel Hill near Ridge Avenue to provide lot owners with fresh flowers, seasonal plants and of course, funeral wreaths as well as support ongoing maintenance. This structure was eventually demolished to make more room for interments. These changes marked a slow shift away from LHCC being a sales company to a maintenance company.<sup>10</sup>



Notman's Chapel in North Laurel Hill. From *Philadelphia Graveyards and Cemeteries*, p. 23.

During the second half of the 1800s the area surrounding the cemetery became more distinctly industrial as nearby mills, and railroad the traffic that serviced them, expanded. This area, Philadelphia's Twenty-First Ward, also became much more populated with rival cemeteries, some just across Ridge Avenue. Consequently a number



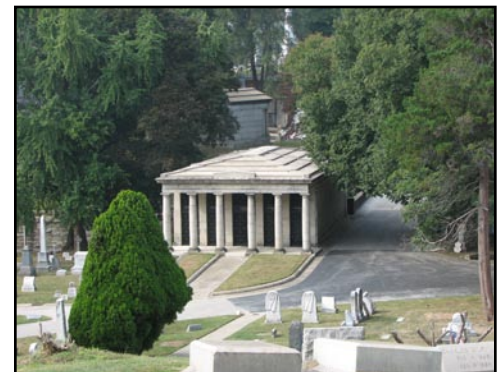


of supporting industries cropped up such as marble yards and florists.<sup>11</sup> With the development of more industries in the vicinity, the population in the area grew significantly between 1880 and 1930 as immigrants settled in the area, making it dense working- and middle-class neighborhood.<sup>1</sup>

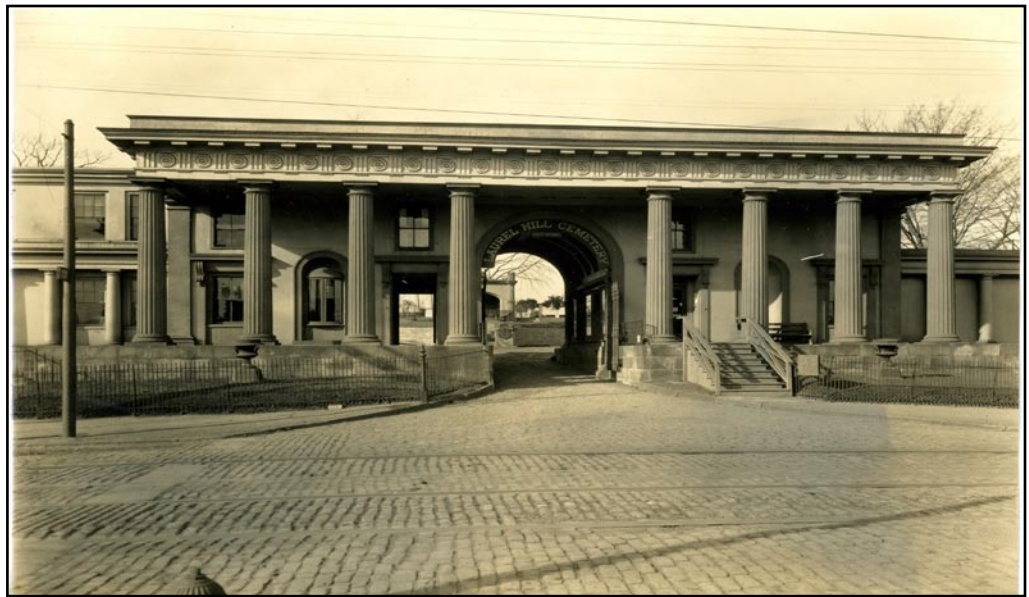
The twentieth century was much less eventful than its predecessor as few capital changes took place beyond the 1910s. The only major addition to the cemetery was the construction of a receiving vault in 1913 in South Laurel Hill. Other capital changes include the remodeling of the gate house to accommodate LHCC offices in the mid-1910s and improve the living space for the superintendent. In 1947, access to the cemetery was altered by the lowering of Hunting Park Avenue by the City of Philadelphia, which resulted in a major automobile thoroughfare being placed through the heart of the cemetery. The 1940s also resulted in the loss of a significant portion of iron fencing to WWII scrap iron drives.

After a period of decline in the middle of the century, the 1970s witnessed a renewed interest in rural cemeteries among scholars and the broader public. Despite the

Circa 1925 aerial photo of Laurel Hill Cemetery looking North. From The Library Company of Philadelphia.



Receiving Vault. Photo: A. Remick 2007.



loss of Laurel Hill's rural surroundings, visitors once again came to the cemetery to tour its landscape and view its monuments.<sup>13</sup> In 1978, The Friends of Laurel Hill Cemetery was established to develop, support, and oversee the interpretation and presentation of the site to the public. Many current and former board members of the Friends group serve as tour guides for the monthly tours offered at Laurel Hill.

In recognition of its contribution to the development of the rural cemetery movement and the field of landscape architecture in general in the United States, Laurel Hill Cemetery was named a National Historic Landmark (NHL) in 1998, the first cemetery in the nation to receive such a designation.

Since its designation as a NHL, Laurel Hill and its management have continued the site's transition to a heri-

Before and after photos of gatehouse remodeling, note the new bay windows used to create more space for offices. From: LHC Archives

tage tourism destination. The leadership team currently in place, headed by Executive Director Ross Mitchell, has developed a creative new marketing campaign to promote the site and raise its profile in the Philadelphia region. It has also expanded fundraising efforts to support the continued maintenance and conservation of the cemetery. Also contributing to the development its new role is community outreach to strengthen the bonds with its surrounding neighborhoods. The flagship program of this effort is the Urban Mourning Project.

Laurel Hill has much to contribute to the understanding of Philadelphia's heritage. It is one of several examples of Philadelphia's commitment to reforming institutions and addressing social problems. The cemetery was also a forerunner to today's Fairmount Park as it was one of the first open spaces in the city accessible to the public for leisure. The future of Laurel Hill builds upon this legacy, and protecting its significance through responsible preservation and management practices, this site will continue to serve Philadelphia for years to come.

### Endnotes

- 1 Aaron Wunsch, *Historic American Buildings Survey: Laurel Hill Cemetery*, (HABS No. PA-1811, 1998) 3.
- 2 Ibid, 12.
- 3 Ibid, 4.
- 4 Ibid, 41.
- 5 Ibid, 22.
- 6 Ibid, 26.
- 7 Aaron Wunsch, *National Historic Landmark Nomination, Laurel Hill Cemetery*, (U.S. Dept of the Interior, National Park Service), 24.
- 8 Wunsch, NHL Nomination, 12.
- 9 Ibid, 9.
- 10 Ibid, 68-71.
- 11 Wunsch, HABS, 65
- 12 Ibid, 70.
- 13 Ibid, 72.





# EVOLUTIONARY MAPPING

To understand the evolution of the cemetery itself, historic documentation was researched and maps were digitized to create a series of images that visually convey the growth of Laurel Hill.

The footprint of the site has grown and changed since the cemetery company first bought the 32 acre Sims estate in 1836 to establish Laurel Hill Cemetery. Its location along the Schuylkill River and Ridge Avenue, an early well-established route into center city Philadelphia, made the site an ideal place to create a rural cemetery. John Notman was engaged as architect and the cemetery was laid out retaining many aspects of the original estate.



Laurel Hill circa 1836

The cemetery proved quite successful and roughly 10 years later, the original Sims villa was cleared to allow more space.



Laurel Hill circa 1844

Not long after, in 1848-9, the 27-acre estate of jurist William Rawle became available and was acquired to form South Laurel Hill to meet the increasing demand for burial plots. By 1854, the design for South Laurel Hill had been completed by engineer James Sidney and architect James Neff.

The 21-acre Pepper estate was purchased in 1861 and served to bridge the north and south portions of Laurel Hill.



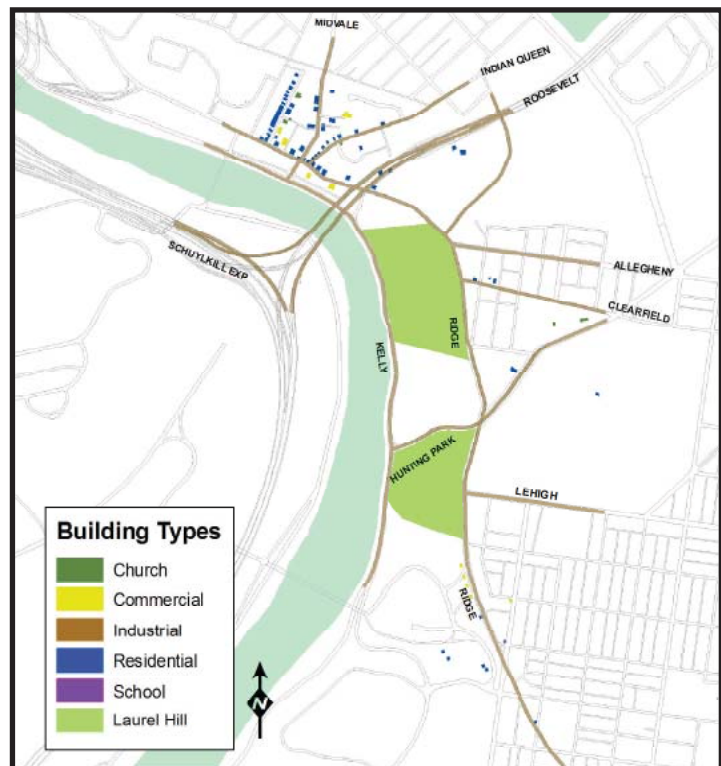
Laurel Hill circa 1854

By 1892 the cemetery had reached the proportions we see today. Changes since that time have included creation of new formal and informal pathways.



Laurel Hill circa 1892

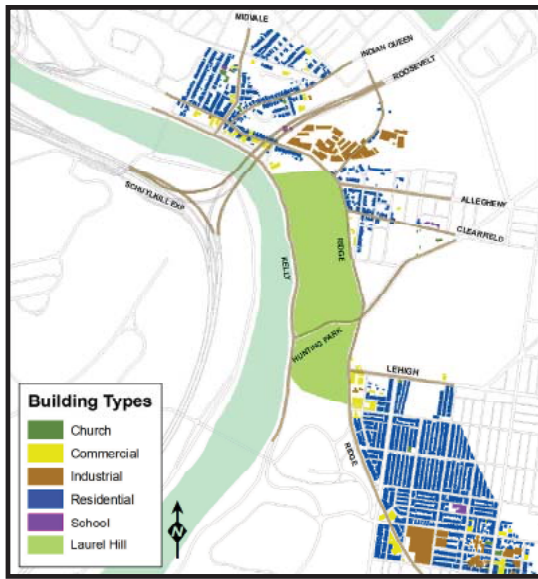
The neighborhood surrounding Laurel Hill has changed dramatically since its creation in the early 19th century. The site was selected for its remoteness from urban residential neighborhoods, serving as a sanitary place for burial as a reaction to the dense and perceived unhealthy graveyards found in center city. When Notman designed the cemetery, the area was a country retreat for the wealthy to escape the unhealthy air and conditions of the city, with villas and other rural residences dotting the landscape. The land directly across from the cemetery was owned by the cemetery company, and strict guidelines limited the extent and style of buildings that were built so as to ensure complimentary neighbors for the cemetery. The neighborhood evolved slowly in Laurel Hill's first 50 years, though small residential clusters were built and the beginning of a commercial and industrial presence began to emerge.



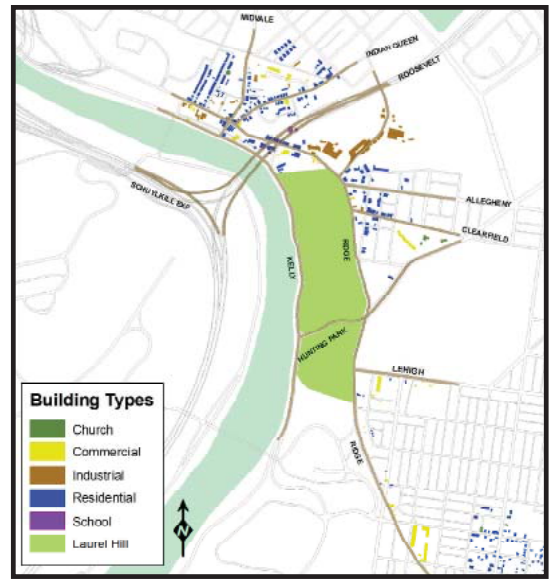
The Laurel Hill neighborhood circa 1860

The pace of development picked up quickly in the first part of the 20th century. Population density grew quickly in this area as the city of Philadelphia grew north, eliminating the rural nature of the cemetery. By this time, the commercial and industrial presence was fully evident in the area adjacent to Laurel Hill. The cemetery company gradually sold off their land that was not used for burials, relinquishing control of the neighboring land. Many of the commercial and industrial operations developing at this time along Ridge Avenue supported Laurel Hill and the other cemeteries nearby. These businesses included marble and brick-works, greenhouses and nurseries and ultimately served to benefit Laurel Hill.

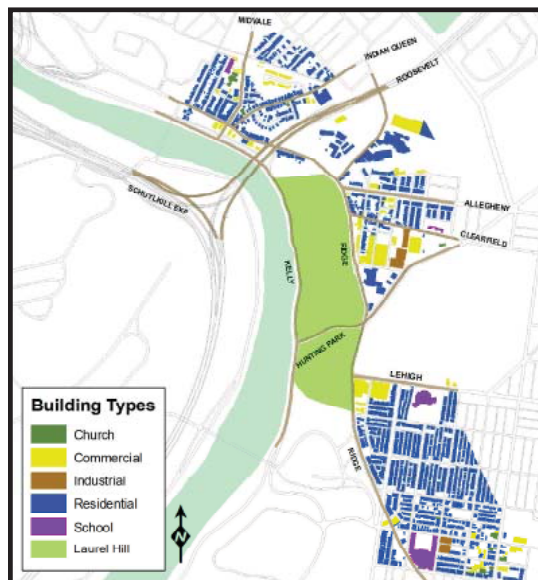
Today, the area would not be recognizable to Notman. Streets are crowded with the aging row-houses of the working classes and the deteriorating remnants of the neighborhood's industrial past. The scene today is clearly a dramatic departure from the landscape within which Laurel Hill Cemetery was designed.



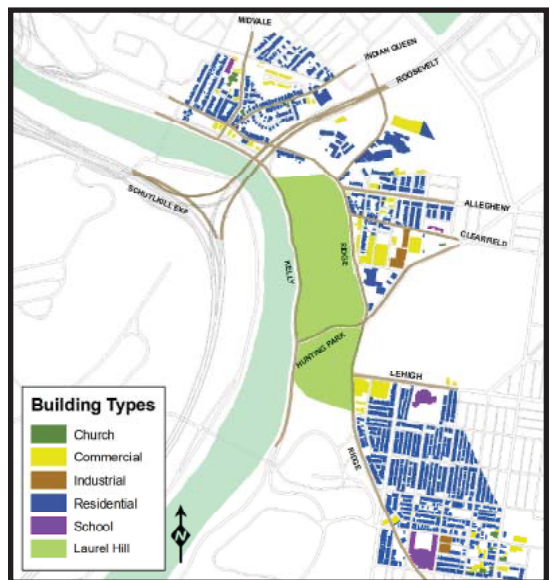
The Laurel Hill neighborhood circa 1923



The Laurel Hill neighborhood circa 1875



The Laurel Hill neighborhood circa 1951



The Laurel Hill neighborhood circa 2005



# URBAN MORPHOLOGY



The urban morphology analysis of Laurel Hill Cemetery serves to visualize the site's connections with the surrounding neighborhoods.

### Methodology

Using Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City*, the studio team canvassed the surrounding neighborhoods of East Falls, Allegheny West, and Strawberry Mansion on foot and by car. Teams looked for specific features of the areas:

- Edges and boundaries, either natural or man made.
- Nodes, defined as points of entrance or intersection.
- Landmarks, or obvious visual makers within the landscape.
- Views, either attractive or unattractive.
- Vacancies, both as abandoned lots and empty buildings.

Sub-groups surveyed on different days at different times of day to understand the neighborhoods as they function not just during cemetery hours, but as living spaces with their own rhythms. The data from all teams was compiled and digitized into one cohesive map.

A similar survey of the cemetery was completed, paying attention to the path systems in particular as well as the points listed previously.

### Neighborhood Morphology

Immediately apparent is the extraordinary insulation of Laurel Hill and between each of the different neighborhoods. Railroad tracks stand between East Falls and Allegheny West; Hunting Park Avenue and Mount Vernon Cemetery separate Allegheny West from Strawberry Mansion; and Ridge Avenue, high walls, and differential topography isolate Laurel Hill from all.

A few islands of activity were found within this segregated landscape. Strawberry Mansion, for all its perceived violence and crime, proved to be the most active neighborhood, with many nodes (vehicular and especially pedestrian), several murals (commissioned through the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program), and a handful of community gathering zones in the form of playgrounds and basketball courts.

New residential developments in the area do very little



East Falls rowhouses. Photo: M. Goeke 2007.



to decrease the island effect. Sherman Mills, for example, is a former industrial site redeveloped into mixed-use residential and commercial space. Lying just to the north of Laurel Hill, off Ridge Avenue, it has claimed some success at attracting tenants and traffic. However, it remains physically isolated due to the single narrow road that leads to the development, nearby railroad tracks, and the physical make-up of the site. The Dobson Mills apartment development, on the other hand, sets itself apart from its surroundings with its scale and defensive facade on Ridge Avenue. It consists of eight buildings offering 306,000 square feet. The development is nearing completion just north of the intersection of the railroad tracks and Ridge Avenue. The face presented to Ridge Avenue is tall and out of scale with the row houses directly opposite. Air conditioner condensers, back doors, and fencing face Ridge Avenue, so the development does nothing to physically reach out to the neighborhood. .

The industrial area directly across from Laurel Hill appears vacant, with its many large and half-empty parking lots, but it is still very much in use. Most of the buildings are occupied. On weekdays, cars fill the parking lots. Pedestrian traffic is absent, however, probably due to the lack of amenities in the immediate area.

The character of the area directly across Ridge Avenue from Central Laurel Hill appears to be in transition. A gym recently opened, as did a produce market. These businesses retain an isolated air, however, by having chain link fencing up around their parking lots and limited access from Ridge and Huntington Park Avenues.

Many important thoroughfares border Laurel Hill. Kelly Drive, on the west, is the direct route to Center City for many residents in neighborhoods to the north. Additionally, Ridge Avenue is a busy road leading into and out of Philadelphia. Hunting Park Avenue bisects Laurel Hill and runs from Kelly Drive to the northeast part of Philadelphia. The Roosevelt Expressway, just to the north of the cemetery, leads into northeast Philadelphia and New Jersey and also carries traffic toward the wealthy western suburbs. Yet, despite Laurel Hill's proximity to so many transit routes, relatively little of the traffic comes into Laurel Hill. In effect, all the roads lead past Laurel Hill, not into it.

The cemetery physically engages with only one of these roads. At the time of survey, the main gate on Ridge Avenue provided the only access to the cemetery. The impos-



Dobson Mills apartment development. The side facing Ridge Avenue consists of unusable doors and air conditioning units, preventing active use of the sidewalk. Photo: M. Goeke 2007.



Roosevelt Expressway crosses Ridge Avenue just north of Laurel Hill. The expressway bridge is visible from Laurel Hill. Photo: M. Goeke 2007.

ing character of the main gate may discourage the casual visitor. A narrow opening in the middle of the three-story gatehouse may seem a strange way to enter the site. It may be confusing for first-time visitors keeping pace with traffic on Ridge Avenue to drive through a building to enter an open landscape. Without adequate signage to encourage an uncertain visitor to enter, many people may miss the turn. It will be interesting to see how opening the gate on Hunting Park Avenue will affect the connectivity of the site to the neighborhood.

The limited number of nodes for the cemetery further enhances the sense of isolation created by the omnipresent wall and fence perimeter. The cemetery is totally surrounding by stone retaining walls, iron fencing, and chain link fencing in various combinations, except where naturally steep topography makes man-made barriers superfluous. The stone walls are visually in keeping with the cemetery and do not obstruct the views any more than the topography does. A few portions of iron fencing remain or have been replicated and also work in concert with the historic nature of the site while remaining an effective boundary. The chain link fencing, on the other hand, is unattractive, historically inaccurate, and, most importantly, unwelcoming. Often, barbed wire sits on top of the fence, calling to the forefront the perceived safety issues of the area.

There are limited views into the cemetery from the exterior. Most of these views are compromised by chain link fencing. Nevertheless, they do provide some relief from the urban landscape, full of smokestacks, transformers, and expressways. Visual penetration of the cemetery proves difficult for most portions due to the raised topography of Laurel Hill. Exceptions to this are portions of Ridge Avenue where the cemetery is level with the surrounding neighborhoods, as in the far southern end, and where Hunting Park Avenue cuts across Ridge Avenue. Here, the landscape of Laurel Hill dips down before rising considerably higher, allowing northbound traffic on Ridge to look into a representative section of the cemetery. The intersection of Hunting Park Avenue and Kelly Drive provides additional glimpses into the cemetery but in a more limited capacity. Many of the views into the cemetery along Kelly Drive are impeded by the invasive floral species that have overgrown the steep hillside.

### Current Cemetery Morphology



Entrance to Laurel Hill Cemetery. The driveway is narrow and can be confusing to new visitors. Photo: M. Goeke 2007.



Fencing along Hunting Park Avenue. Photo: M. Goeke 2007.

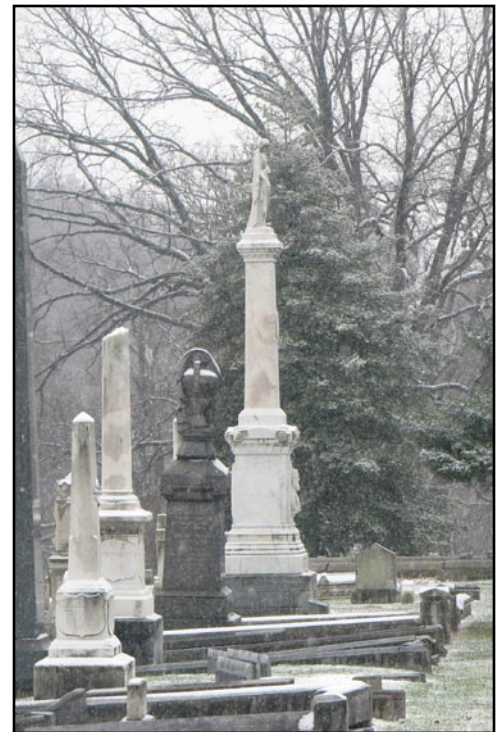
Conditions within the cemetery are simpler than those on the exterior. One node exists at the gatehouse. The creators of Laurel Hill took advantage of the rolling nature of the landscape and incorporated a winding path system, now a paved road allowing for single lane vehicular traffic. From the paved roads, visitors can access the remains of the formal path system. Aerial photography from the 1920s shows very distinct gravel paths. Some of these paths are now identifiable as paved sidewalks, but the majority are grass walkways. Some of the grass walkways are more evident than others, owing to the crowded nature of the cemetery and the continuity of the lawn.

The cemetery is very full. Engravings from an 1844 guidebook show isolated grave sites, a characteristic now completely lost. Today, casual visitors have a hard time deciphering the path systems. Markers arise in the middle of apparent paths, making navigation through certain areas tricky, particularly directly behind the gatehouse. A visitor may become easily disoriented in the sea of headstones. Fortunately, the paved roads are never far off. However, if a visitor is uncomfortable wending his way over and around graves, he may never venture off the asphalt.

Many stairs in the cemetery invite the visitor off the pavement. What greets one at the top of the stairs varies. It could be well-paved sidewalks to the back of a headstone.

Certain criteria were established to identify paths for the purpose of morphological mapping. Most important was immediate visual clarity. Could the path be readily picked out when viewed from the pavement? Once off the pavement, the line of site had to extend at least ten feet without interruption by flora or marker to be considered a path.

A route through the cemetery that team members found compelling was to enter the cemetery, bear right, and follow the pavement and high retaining walls north and west. Coming to a t-junction in the road, one can head toward the highly visible urban edge, catching sight of the smokestack and transformers, or head to more verdant pastures along the Schuylkill River. Choosing to walk along the western edge of Laurel Hill, the visitor is treated to wonderful river views, including scullers, Strawberry Mansion Bridge, and even Memorial Hall in the distance. The visitor's tour can wrap around Millionaire's Row, witnessing some of the more grandiose monuments in the cemetery, before heading back to the main gate along the paved road.

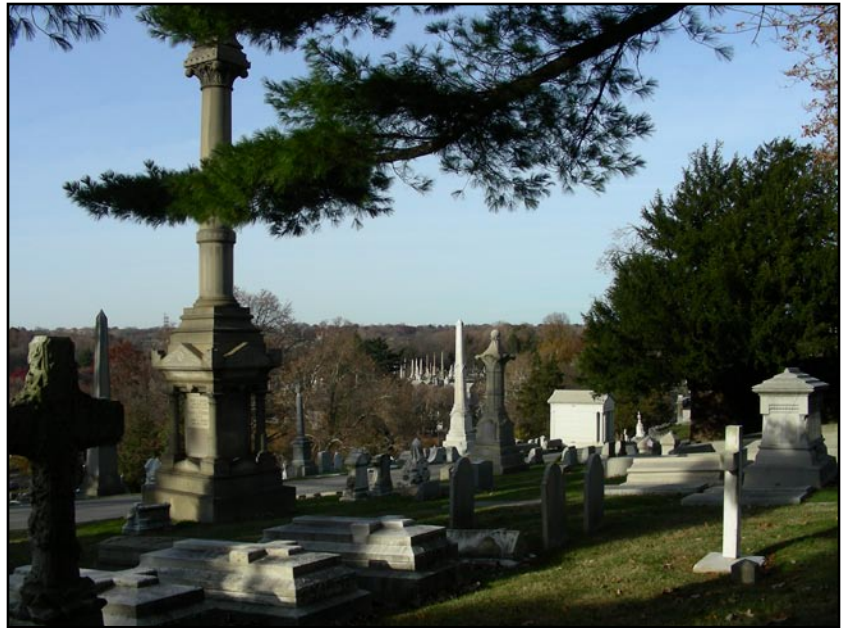


An orderly, if dense, arrangement of markers.  
Photo: A. Finke 2007.



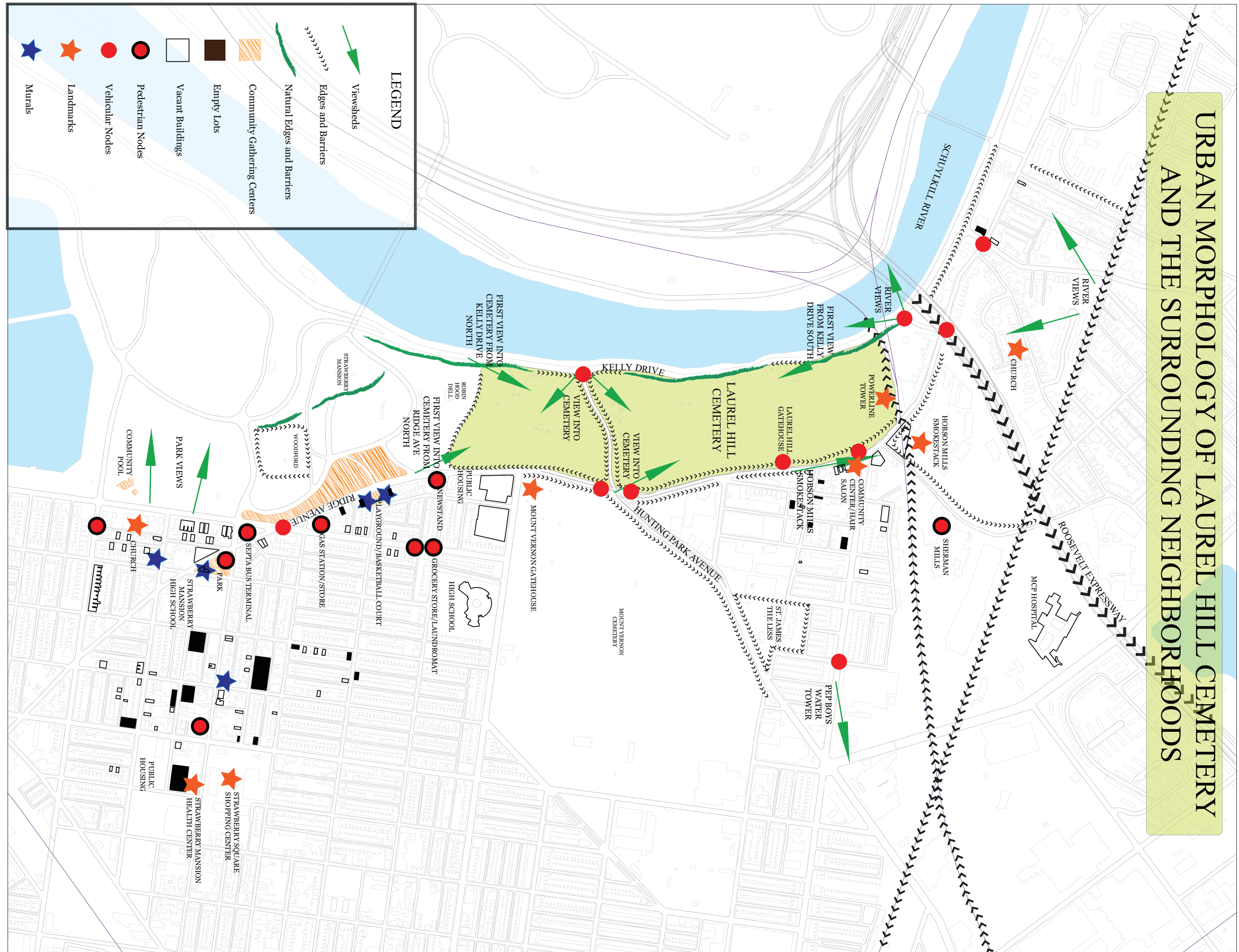
Besides the spectacular views along the river, the drastic drop in elevation between north and south LHC creates stunning views within the cemetery that showcase the remains of the picturesque landscape. The original design intent was to create a cemetery within an arboretum. The cemetery published a guidebook in 1844, eight years after opening, that included a list of species that were “deemed suitable for the adornment of the cemetery.” The guidebook insisted that “at least one species” from its list “shall be found in these grounds forming a species of arboretum.”

There are a number of beautiful specimen trees throughout the cemetery, including ash, oak, and ginkgo. However, tree loss without new plantings has denuded the original arboreal scheme. Current maintenance through biweekly mowing is in keeping with modern cemetery aesthetics, but it does not contribute to the maintenance or restoration of the historic landscape. The dwindling of the picturesque landscape provides an excellent opportunity for the cemetery to restore its arboreal quality and shield itself from some of the less scenic surroundings.

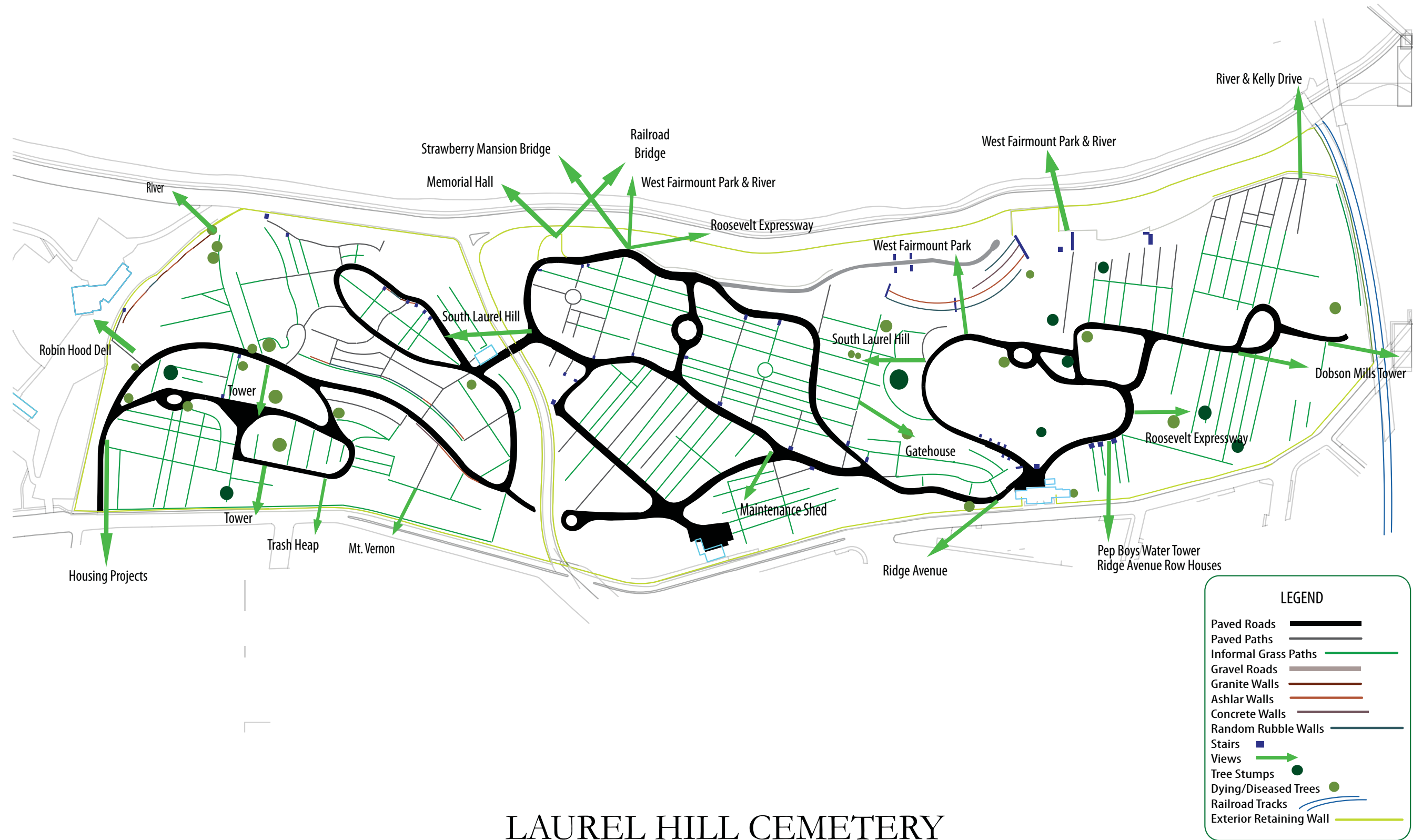


A view back from south Laurel Hill. Photo: A. Finke 2007.

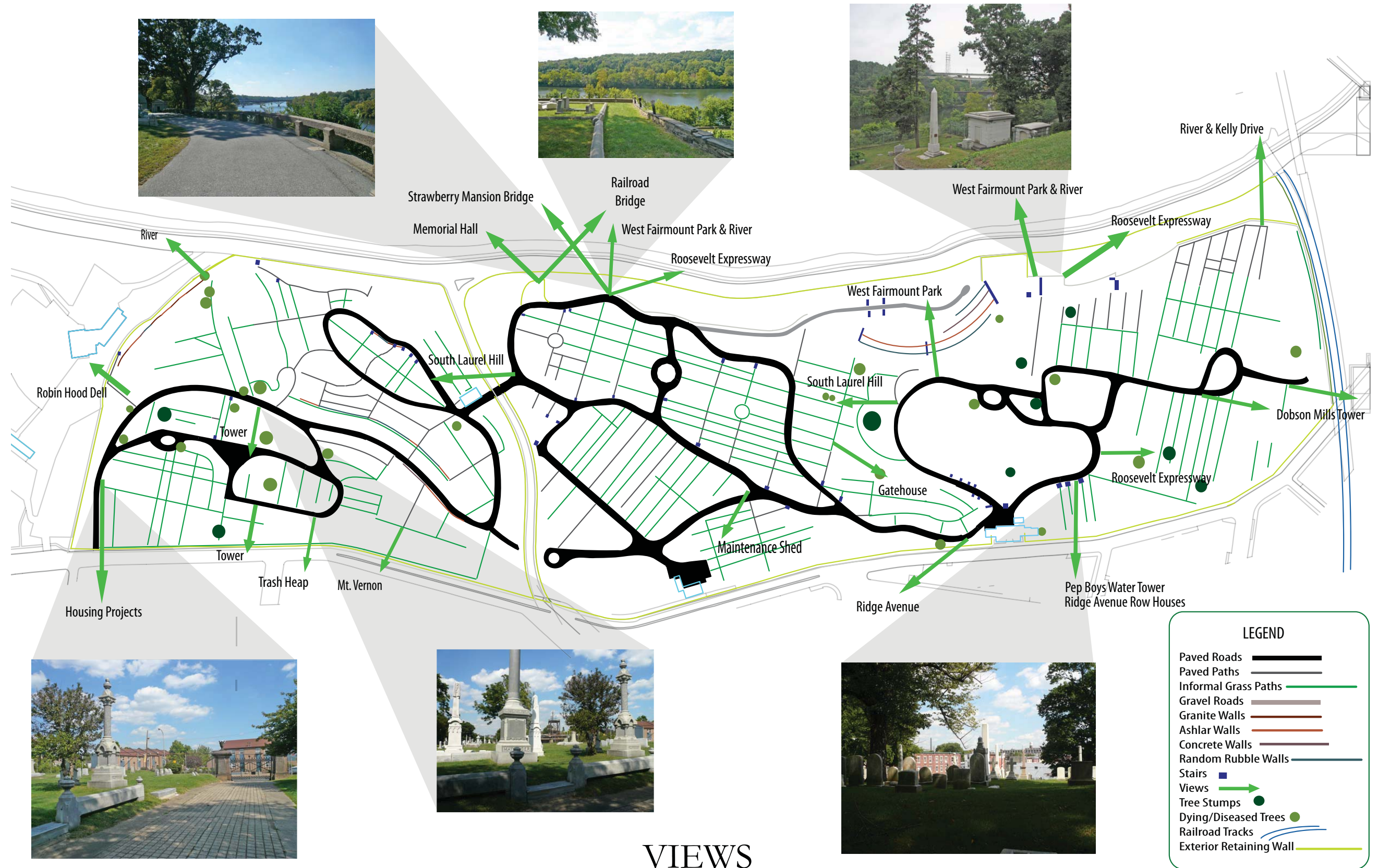
The urban edge of the cemetery provides predictably unappealing urban views of transformers, smokestacks, parking lots, derelict buildings, and a heap of barbed wire fence. As the seasons change and the trees lose their leaves, the views will change considerably. Across the river, the Schuylkill Expressway, already audibly apparent, will become visually apparent as well, and the cemetery as a whole will lose some of its visual barrier. Just as the elevation of Laurel Hill makes visual access from the exterior difficult, it enhances the visibility of the external landscape. There are few places along the edge of the cemetery where one cannot catch a glimpse of the rooftops and blacktop of Philadelphia, but several special places within Laurel Hill enjoy the obstruction of the urban fabric, allowing the visitor to forget the dense city around them and get lost in the landscape.







# LAUREL HILL CEMETERY



VIEWS

Views of Laurel Hill





# CONDITIONS

While the marker types and materials in Laurel Hill Cemetery are varied, some generalizations can be made regarding the mechanisms that cause damage and deterioration. We have divided the marker types into three main categories to isolate problems common to certain features of their construction: horizontally-oriented, vertically-oriented, and mausoleum. Beyond marker type, the particular material employed and the quality of the material will greatly impact the ability of a marker to withstand the outdoor environment of the cemetery.

Marker condition is dependant on type and material, and will vary in severity. To create a baseline understanding of conditions found in the cemetery, typical conditions were noted and documented. A pictorial glossary of the typical conditions follows the discussion of marker types.

### Marker Type Categories

#### *Horizontally-Oriented*

Horizontally-oriented markers have the bulk of their mass spread parallel to the ground. These marker types include ledgers, platforms, plaques, sarcophagi, steps, and benches. Horizontally-oriented markers are vulnerable to alignment problems (tilting, sinking, twisting) resulting from the compression of soil. Alignment problems potentially lead to cracking, and ultimately, collapse.

#### *Vertically-Oriented*

Vertically-oriented markers have the bulk of their mass standing perpendicular to the ground. This category includes headstones and sculptures (obelisks, columns, and statues, often perched atop pedestals). These markers are also vulnerable to alignment problems. Because of their vertical nature, alignment problems (tilting, twisting, sinking) can lead to their fall. Vertically-oriented markers have the potential to cause great damage to themselves, the markers around them, and even visitors by creating tripping hazards.

#### *Mausoleums*

Mauseloums are complex markers, exhibiting problems common to buildings. Mausoleums can be either free-standing or built into the grade of the landscape. The wider variety of materials incorporated means more mechanisms of deterioration may be acting upon them.



Ledger



Platform



Plaque



Sarcophagus



Step





Free-Standing Mausoleums



Bench



Built-in Mausoleums



Headstone (in tact)



Headstone (fallen)



Sculpture (tilting, sinking, and twisted)



Column (upright)



Statue (upright)

**Visible Conditions**

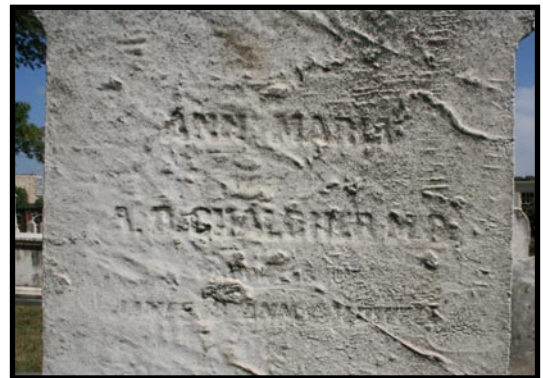
**Cracking:** a break or fracture of material. Cracks can be structural and non-structural. Structural cracks impact the stability of the markers. Non-structural cracks impact the aesthetics of the markers and can lead to conditions like loss.



**Corrosion:** deterioration caused by a reaction with a material, usually a metal, and its environment



**Differential erosion:** surface weathering defined by localized loss of stone or particles.



**Erosion:** Loss of surface particles due to weathering. Erosion is particularly damaging to inscriptions and sculptural details.





**Visible Conditions (continued)**

**Exfoliation/delamination:** surface loss and detachment where the surface layers spilt along bedding planes of the stone. Can lead to loss.



**Friability:** gradual diaggregation of surface particle ultimately causing stone loss. Particularly damaging to inscriptions and sculptural details.



**Groundhog holes:** loss of soil support beneath markers due to animal activity



**Macro flora:** the growth of plants and trees within and around materials that causes damage.



**Visible Conditions (continued)**

**Micro flora:** discoloration and damage caused by growth of biological organisms including algae, fungi, lichen.



**Mortar loss:** complete loss of mortar leaving joints exposed. Exposed joints allow for water infiltration and structural instability which can lead to further deterioration.



**Previous repairs:** areas of repair campaigns or infill. Portland cement is a common repair material that may cause increased damage.



**Surface deposits:** surface accretion from atmospheric soiling, salt efflorescence, and metallic staining. Surface deposits can lead to surface loss.





### Preliminary Assessment of Marker Condition

The preliminary analysis is based on identifying those conditions that pose the most serious threat to the markers within Laurel Hill Cemetery. Hence, structural integrity comes before aesthetic quality.

Of all conditions listed, the one that stand out as causing the most immediate and severe structural damage is alignment. On the 'least damage' end of the spectrum, the monument will simply topple, perhaps breaking the mortared bond at the base, and lie peacefully on the ground. Moving towards the 'most damage' end, the same monument may break on impact. Furthermore, because of the crowded nature of the cemetery, it is unlikely that a monument will fall on to unoccupied ground. The more likely event is that a monument will fall on top of another marker, causing serious damage to one or both markers. This is evident in the oft-repeated domino effect, whereby the falling marker sets off a chain of collapse. Additionally, markers are more likely to break on impact with another maker than with the relatively soft ground.

Groundhogs, abundant within the cemetery, dig their burrows underneath the markers, seriously compromising the integrity of the ground beneath. Without a stable foundation, markers are more likely to fall.

Macro flora presents another serious structural problem for the integrity of the markers. Tree roots can upend even the heaviest of markers. Vines and weeds can penetrate small cracks, exacerbating the condition and leading to larger cracks or breakage.

Cracking can be an aesthetic problem and over time will likely develop in to a structural problem. Cracked markers can lead to loss, particularly as the smaller fragments can more easily walk off the site.

Other conditions may not necessarily affect the structural integrity of the markers, but do affect the aesthetic qualities. Erosion, a condition seen on all marble markers of certain age, can totally erase delicate inscriptions and carvings over time. As the cemetery can be seen as an archive, losing inscriptions through erosion is much like losing printed material through fire. Differential erosion can be more immediately noticeably, as monuments exhibiting this condition have variegated surfaces both in texture and color.



Fallen headstones in Central Laurel Hill.



A severely cracked slab. Cracking can lead to partial loss of the marker and total loss of fragments.

Exfoliation, delamination, and friability are additional conditions that lead to loss at a surface level. It is difficult to quantify condition is most severe, as all conditions are a function of time and weathering and all lead to the disintegration of a marker and loss of information when the inscription is affected.

Microflora does cause damage to stone, but on a very small scale. While the damage is not entirely aesthetic, in comparison to other conditions with the cemetery, its affects on the integrity of the material are minimal. The same can be said of most surface deposits-the visual affect may be obvious, but no serious structural damage is taking place.

Corrosion of metals in the cemetery is also a negligible problem. The 'white bronze' monuments corrode very slowly and are thusly considered stable. The handful of bronze plaques acquire a protective patina and may stain the stone substrate, but otherwise sustain and propagate very little damage. As an exception to this, any iron in the cemetery can present problems. However, since most is located within fencing and hand railing, it poses minimal threat to the markers.

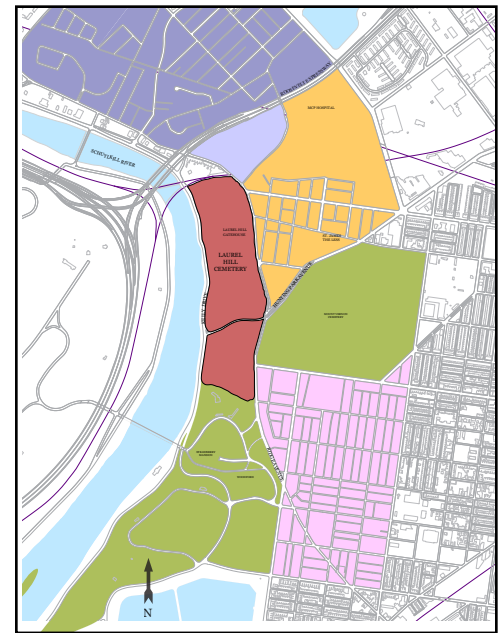
This preliminary analysis is based on a general survey of existing conditions with Laurel Hill Cemetery. Areas of further research will include an in-depth exploration of the mechanisms behind deterioration and conducting a thorough conditions assessment of an existing area in the cemetery, likely of high visibility to both foot traffic within the cemetery and vehicular traffic without.



COMMUNITY

Laurel Hill no longer exists in isolation. While John Jay Smith envisioned a cemetery with an exceptional plan, far removed from the 19th century city of Philadelphia, the past two centuries since Laurel Hill Cemetery's inception have seen remarkable and dramatic change. No longer seen as a distant retreat for urban dwellers, Laurel Hill Cemetery now exists within a complicated and complex urban setting, a part of the warp and the woof of the pattern of Philadelphia. Noted for its historical and aesthetic qualities, as well as the open space it offers, Laurel Hill Cemetery has the potential to enrich the surrounding neighborhoods of East Falls, Allegheny West and Strawberry Mansion. However, this has not been the case. Some of these neighborhoods have been afflicted with declining population and wealth, and more recently mired in violence and urban decay, East Falls has recently experienced a limited renaissance, transforming into a vibrant community of residential and commercial space. At the same time as the fortunes of East Falls have turned around in the past decade, positive change has been slower to take effect in Allegheny West and Strawberry Mansion. Though all of these neighborhoods struggle to reinvent themselves, Laurel Hill Cemetery has thus far played little to no part in those endeavors.

While many residents inhabiting the area directly surrounding Laurel Hill know of the historic cemetery, many will readily admit they know little more concerning the site. The historic pedigree of Laurel Hill has entered into the public consciousness, as evidenced through conversations with community groups, but beyond that, many neighborhood residents take very little advantage of Laurel Hill. As evidenced by surveys conducted on site, the majority of Laurel Hill visitors hail from areas outside the immediate neighborhood, with almost no visitors arriving from Strawberry Mansion or Allegheny West (figures 1 & 2). However, visitorship from the neighborhood from East Falls is a large percentage of visitors from within Philadelphia. This statistic may be a result of the higher income and education attained by the residents of East Falls as compared with the other neighborhoods surrounding Laurel Hill (figure 3), thus leading to a more general interest in history and art. The statistic may instead be due to more general knowledge about the cemetery and the programs they currently undertake, compared to the more southern neighborhoods. Some organizations, especially those located in the southern neighborhood of Strawberry Mansion,



Neighborhood Map. Red area represents Laurel Hill. Blue area represents East Falls. Yellow area represents Allegheny West. Pink area represents Strawberry Mansion. Green area represents Mount Vernon to the east of Laurel Hill Cemetery, and Fairmount Park to the south. Image: K. Witt 2007.



Civil War reenactment encampment. Photo: T. Aphale 2007.

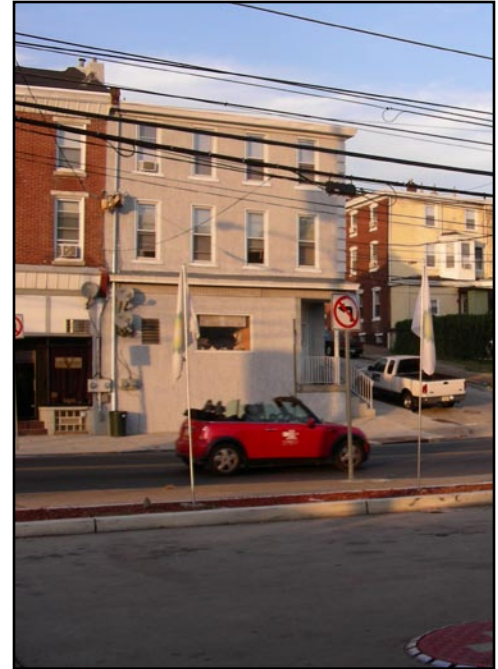


could not even recall the name of the cemetery, knowing it only by its location on Ridge Avenue, while others were not aware of the tours Laurel Hill offers throughout the year. Conversely, the response from community and economic development groups in East Falls focused on how the Cemetery is part of their neighborhood, how they are already currently working with the cemetery and how they plan to continue to work with it and promote it in the future. While the genuine interest in Laurel Hill Cemetery by East Falls may be due to their taking “ownership” of the historic site, there exists real and perceived barriers that have prevented such “ownership” from taking place in the neighborhoods of Allegheny West and Strawberry Mansion.

The disinterest exhibited by the residents in the southern neighborhoods surely has manifold reasons. Various community leaders and organizations have hypothesized as to why Laurel Hill exists within a relative vacuum. Founded largely in part to serve the wealthy white families from Philadelphia and the surrounding areas, Laurel Hill now seems to be disjointed from the largely African-American and minority populations in which it finds itself. Visitor numbers are overwhelmingly skewed toward white visitors (figure 4). Additionally, other community members mentioned that many neighborhood residents do not have family buried within the site and that, because of this, many do not feel compelled to visit a site that is culturally alien to them.

These issues facing Laurel Hill are not unique. The Director of the Urban Morning Project (a program sponsored by Laurel Hill Cemetery) saw the disconnect that exists between Laurel Hill Cemetery and the surrounding neighborhoods as not that different from many organizations run by white individuals in a predominately black neighborhood. While sometimes difficult to initially bridge the differences that are bound to exist between two such groups, the odds are not insurmountable. With the creation and implementation of the Urban Morning Project, Laurel Hill is beginning to take steps to create ongoing and worthwhile relationships with neighborhoods it has so far not been able to reach.

The culture of Laurel Hill may be completely different from the experience of the local residents, but it is not the only deterrent many see in their potential use of Laurel Hill. Due to the confluence of three neighborhoods so



East Falls Neighborhood, along Ridge Avenue.  
Photo: J. Nelson 2007.



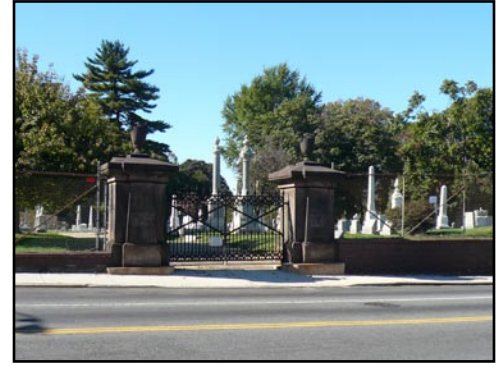
Strawberry Mansion Neighborhood, along Ridge Avenue. Photo: T. Aphale 2007.

close to Laurel Hill, the cemetery marks a natural boundary between them, not only physically, but in the minds of many residents. Some identified it as a physical wall that separates the neighborhoods, others as a visual marker that communicates a transition from one distinct area to another. The stone walls and wire fence serve as a disincentive to potential visitors, likening the cemetery to a walled fortress, visually conveying to the populace that it is a location that is off limits to the casual visitor.

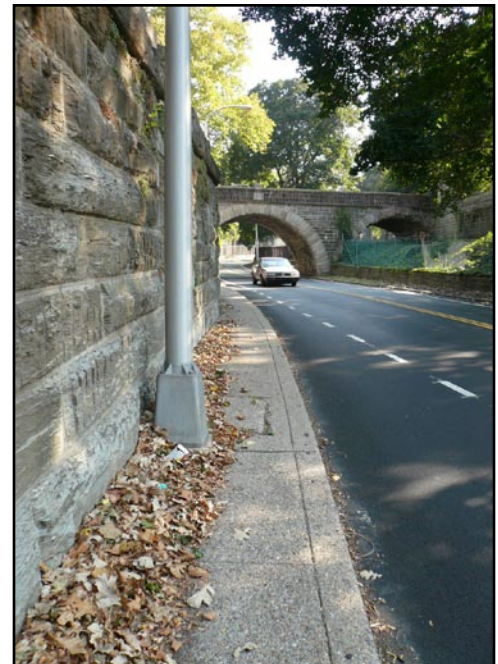
The physical walls of Laurel Hill impart a message to the viewer of being off-limits. The lack of signage and accessibility to the site adds to the problems facing the site. The Gatehouse entrance is located in an area that has traditionally been used for industry, and industrial buildings, both abandoned and used, still permeate the area immediately outside the gatehouse. With limited residents and very little incentive for pedestrians to walk-by, the site must almost rely solely on people in automobiles to drive to their site. However, signage guiding vehicles to the site is sparse, with the few signs that do exist notifying the driver that they are in the general vicinity of Laurel Hill, yet neglecting to offer them clear and concise directions to reach the entrance. The recently opened Huntington Park gate makes steps toward encouraging new visitation from those who use Kelly Drive for recreation and from residents living in Strawberry Mansion and further south.

While the real and perceived challenges facing Laurel Hill Cemetery may be daunting, there also exists an environment within the community that could potentially build collaborations with the cemetery, capitalizing on the strengths of the cemetery and building a symbiotic relationship between Laurel Hill and the surrounding neighborhoods. As already mentioned, many are aware of the historic significance associated with Laurel Hill, but beyond that most basic of knowledge, few know anything of substance concerning the cemetery. The challenge for Laurel Hill, at least in terms of building coalitions and partnerships within the communities which surround it, is to appeal to the neighborhoods by capitalizing on all its inherent strengths of history, art, education and its existence as a green oasis within an urban setting.

To achieve such a goal, many neighborhood and city-wide groups expressed interest in partnering with Laurel Hill. East Park Revitalization Alliance, located in Strawberry Mansion offers after-school programming and sees



Closed gate to South Laurel Hill on Ridge Avenue, near Strawberry Mansion Neighborhood. Photo: M. Goeke 2007.



Hunting Park Avenue, south of entrance to Central Laurel Hill. Photo: M. Goeke 2007.



Ridge Avenue looking north. Photo: M. Goeke 2007.



part of their mission as educating their residents about the area in which they live and learning to take pride in it. Approached with the idea, Halie Johnston, co-founder of the Alliance, seemed eager to create programming for children that capitalizes on not only the history of Laurel Hill, but also its horticultural and botanical strengths. He mentioned that he had successfully partnered with the Arbor Day Foundation in the past to help children and residents be more aware of the trees and plant life that can be found in neighboring Fairmount Park.

Others also recognize the educational value inherent in Laurel Hill. The Laurel Hill Cemetery Educational Project, run by undergraduate Wharton Students at the University of Pennsylvania developed tours specifically tailored to elementary and middle school students, which would not only appeal to them, but teach something of Pennsylvania history by relying on the myriad of important and influential people interred at Laurel Hill.

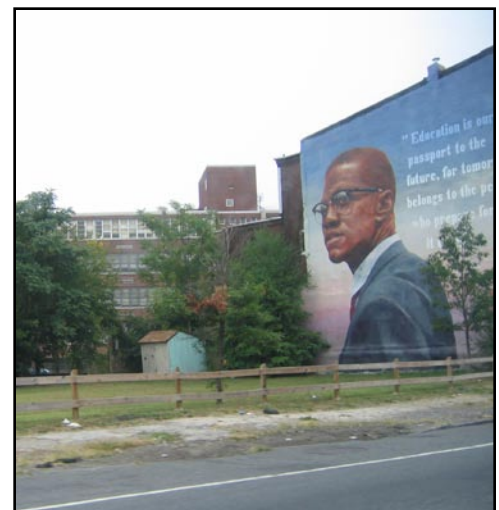
The SHARE Food Program expressed interest in sponsoring a community clean up day of the cemetery and surrounding environs, while the Mural Arts Program saw possibility in a mural along Hunting Park Avenue depicting the shared history of the Cemetery and Philadelphia, as well as the neighborhoods now surrounding it.

In short, the possibilities for partnerships within the community are a definite strength that Laurel Hill can and should seek to cultivate in the future, not only for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the surrounding communities. Such findings are echoed in the voices of the current visitors of Laurel Hill who are almost universal in their praise of the cemetery, remarking that they would indeed come back and visit in the future but much like the community members, they too would like to see Laurel Hill offer more varied and frequent programming (figure 5).

While many historic sites are sometimes blissfully unaware of their need to stay relevant in the modern world, Ross Mitchell, the executive director of Laurel Hill Cemetery, and the rest of the staff have adopted an innovative and creative management style which not only publicizes the cemetery, but creates new uses and partnerships that will benefit the site. Laurel Hill is on the cusp of change, and by embracing their historic past as well as the myriad of future opportunities presented to them, they can remain an integral part of the community and continue to serve the city of Philadelphia well into the future.



Mural in Strawberry Mansion neighborhood. Photo: W. Tsai 2007.



Mural in Malcolm X Park, Strawberry Mansion neighborhood. Photo: W. Tsai 2007.

This research presents a fair and accurate portrayal of the current status of the neighborhoods surrounding Laurel Hill and their varied relationships with the historic cemetery; further research could be employed to further flesh out the perceptions and concepts laid out above. The attached matrix (Figure 6) is a visual representation of the many groups and organizations contacted throughout the course of research. The effort to be thorough and judicious in contacting individuals, organizations, and businesses integral to the three distinct neighborhoods was only compromised by the difficulty of securing interviews with some parties or the disinterest and malaise of the interviewee. Other groups, such as churches, religious institutions and faith communities in the surrounding neighborhoods, which were not initially contacted for this preliminary portion of the research, have the potential of offering worthwhile feedback on Laurel Hill, both from their congregation and preexisting conceptions they may already have concerning the site. And while government officials, such as Councilwoman Carol Ann Campbell of the 4th council district of Philadelphia, were contacted for possible input, proximity to a general election hampered her from offering her and her office's full attention for the project. She remains an untapped source of insight that could result in a deeper and fuller understanding of the many intricacies and layers which form these distinct neighborhoods.

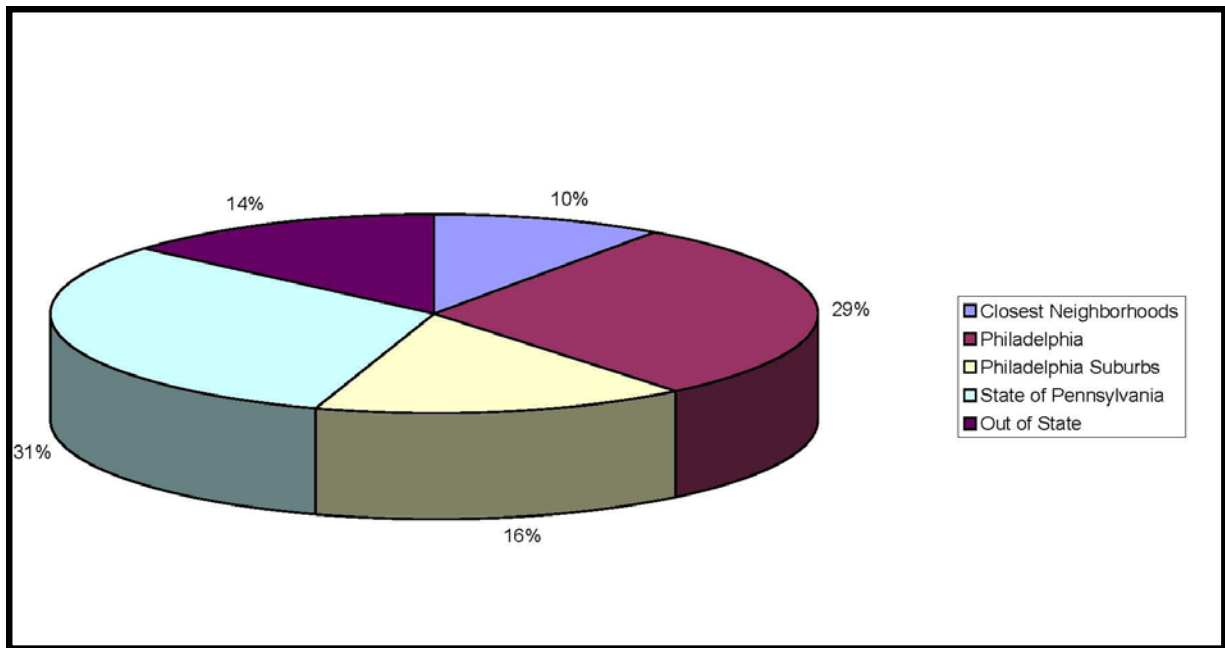


Figure 1. Originating Location of Laurel Hill Visitors.

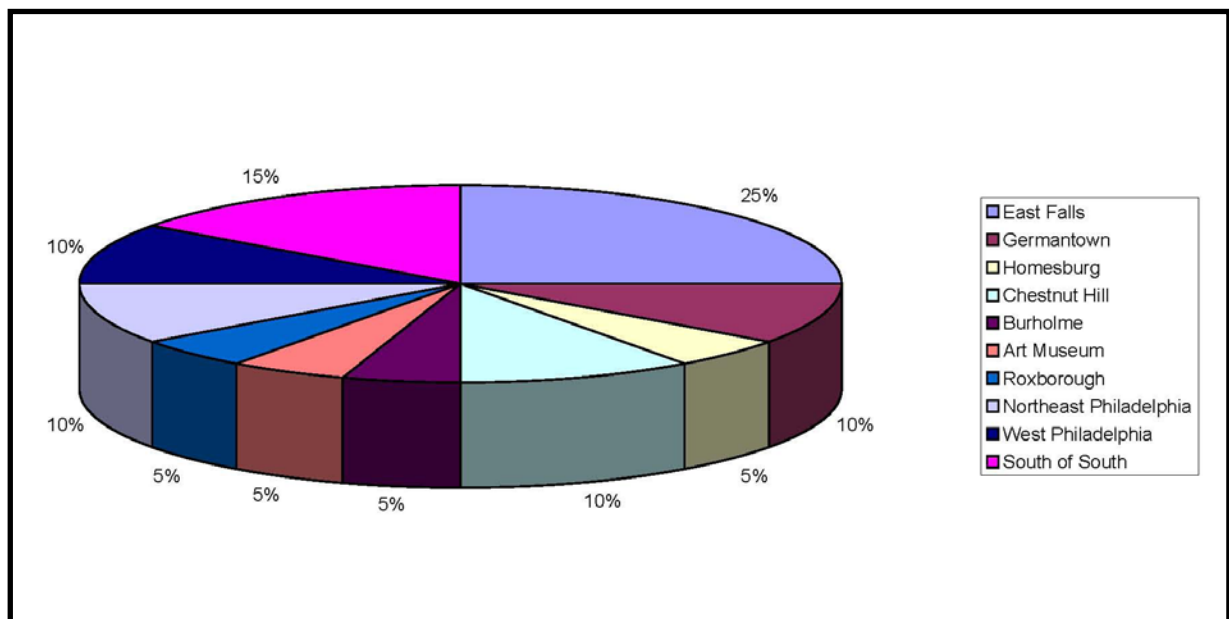


Figure 2. Originating Location of Philadelphia Visitors.

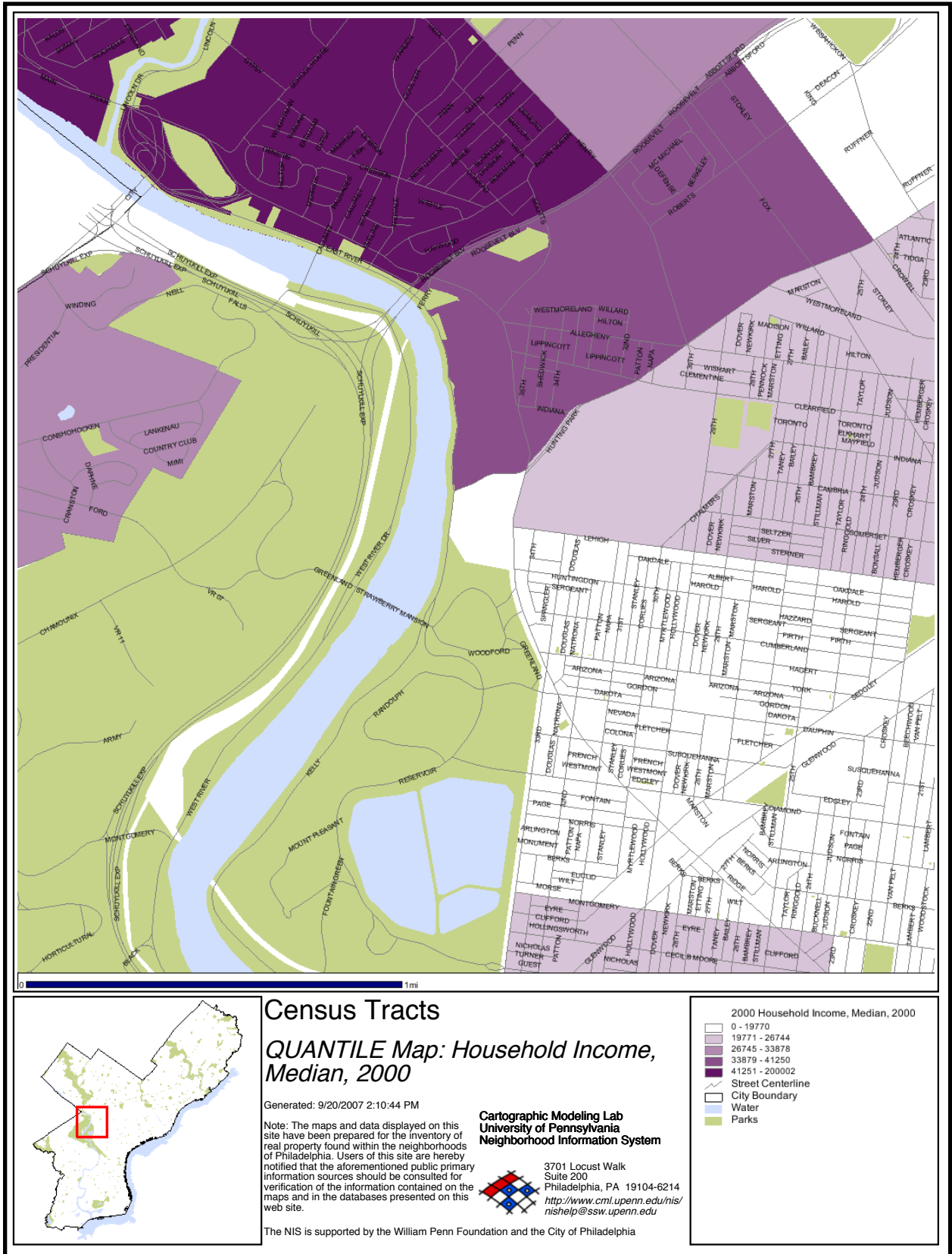


Figure 3. 2000 Census data showing median household income for neighborhoods surrounding Laurel Hill Cemetery. Darker areas correspond with higher median household incomes.

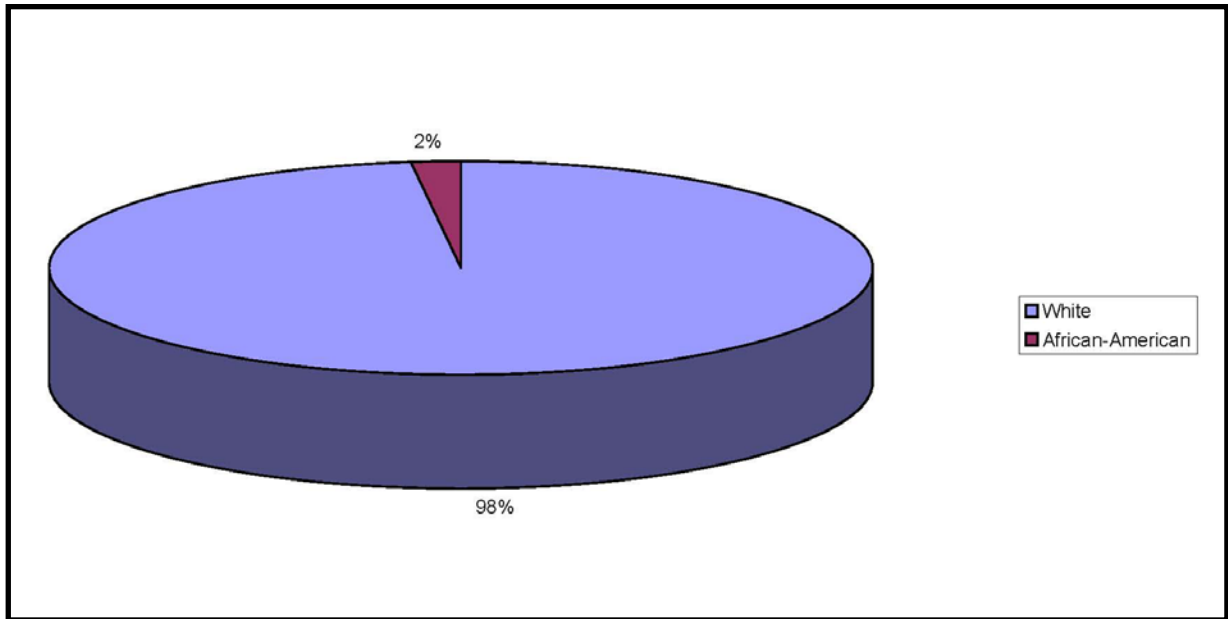


Figure 4. Ethnicity of Laurel Hill Visitors.

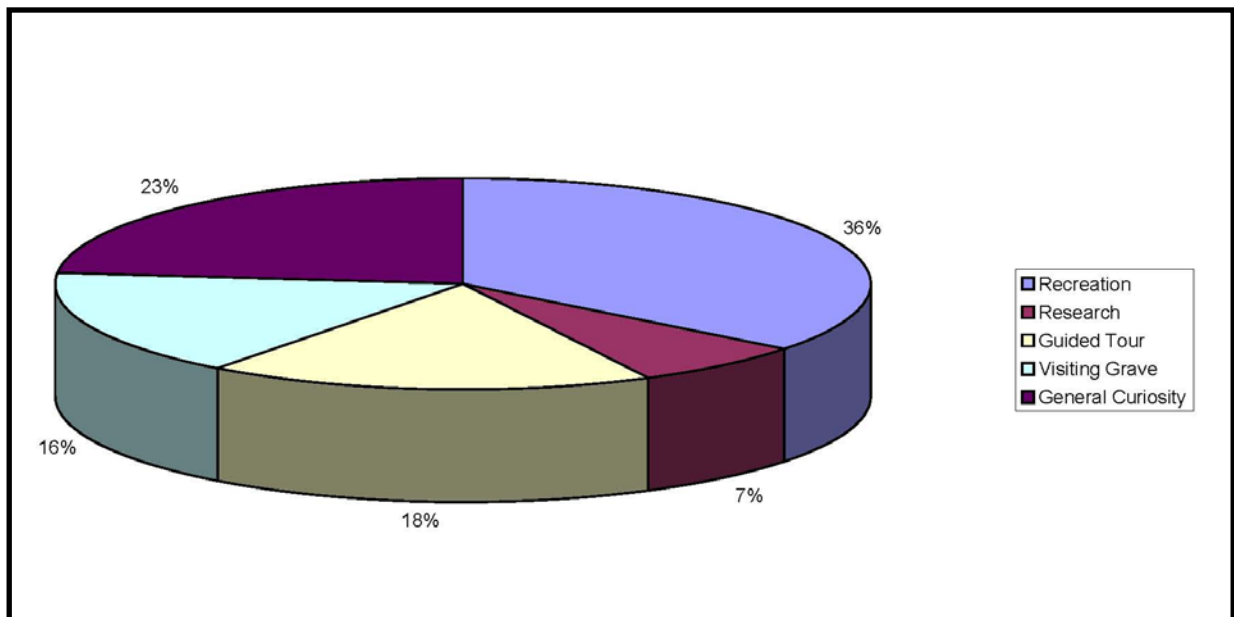


Figure 5. Activities of interest to Laurel Hill Visitors.

	Personal Knowledge of LHC	Positive Impact of LHC		Issues with Site	Value of Laurel Hill			Openess of LHC to Community	Potential Uses of or Partnerships with LHC	Benefit of a Partnership with LHC
		On Neighborhood	On Philadelphia		Intrinsic	On Neighborhood	On Philadelphia			
Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation	general awareness, "historic certification", notable people buried there	community engagement through tours, trying to open itself up	community engagement through tours			historic asset	historic asset	attempting to open up with tours, Halloween tour is well known	education, youth employment	sees potential education and youth employment opportunities with LHC
Allegheny West Foundation	generals from centuries ago buried there	"location and destination"		but with no real use beyond burial		historic asset	historic asset, "pathway to around the city"	identifies it as a part of East Falls		
The Urban Mourning Project	is working directly with LHC in developing and implementing program	help children deal with loss and berevement, outgrowth/further community engagement of LHC, added visitor attendance would help to bring money into the area		visual barrier at the end of the neighborhood		feels there is not current relationship between LHC and surrounding neighborhoods		visual barrier at the end of the neighborhood	only images of the cemetery and markers will be used, with the hope that this will encourage participants to visit on their own	existing program will being addition attention to the surrounding neighborhood, and peak children's interest in the site
The Wharton School, LHC Educational Project	little previous knowledge, "just a cemetery"		educational use	transportation, signage, frequency of tours, maps	seclusion, views			LHC emphasized safety issues, for students/groups visiting	educational tours that engage 6th grade students with games/other creative excercises	looking to market tours and create long-term relationships with schools to bring them to the cemetery
Neighborhood Action Council of Strawberry Mansion	not sure of the name, knew of a cemetery on Ridge Avenue					not a part of the neighborhood				
East Park Revitalization Alliance	large, and one of the oldest cemeteries in the nation			wall and barrier to the neighborhood,		no active use for the neighborhood because no one from the neighborhood is buried there		wall and barrier to the neighborhood,	offer more tours, field trips, afterschool programs aimed at local children,	has worked with Fairmont Park and Audubon Society with great success, potential for collaboration with LHC
SHARE Food Programs Philadelphia	historical cemetery, drives past daily, offer tours					historic asset	historic asset, well maintained site in Philadelphia always a possitive asset, gateway/entrance into Philadelphia		Huntington Park Avenue or Ridge Avenue street clean up, grounds clean up, community service opportunities	encourage community memebers and coporate partners/sponsors to participate and use the site
Philadelphia Mural Arts Program	old cemetery, notable designer, great Halloween tour, filming of latest Rocky					historic asset	historic asset	sees a clearer division between East Falls and neighborhoods to south	mural illustrating history of LHC, as well as the surrounding neighborhoods on cement walls along Huntington Park Avenue	community building, fighting urban blight
East Falls Development Corporation										
East Falls Town Watch	burial place of many famous Philadelphians, uses the space frequently			admission information not clear	recreation resource	historic asset, recreation resource	historic asset	intimidating to new visitors because entrance information is not well marked on Ridge Avenue	Thinks there is potential for partnership, but no specific ideas	
East Falls Tree Tenders	has viewed the trees and landscape				natural beauty of the landscape, trees	potential for recreational pursuits			horticultural programming	expand the physical and educational areas of their programming, would potentially draw a different/new group of visitors to LHC
East Falls Historical Society	very familiar, sponsered a lecture by Ross			intimidating to those unfamiliar with the area		historic resource	historic resource, although underutilized		further lectures by Ross, including one of famous Fallers buried at LHC	could encourage more people from East Falls to tour the site on their own
Falls of the Schuylkill Library	historic site within East Falls			accessibility		unique historic site within East Falls		accessibility, suggests it be open from dawn to dusk similar to most parks	have had lecturesand educational programs about LHC in the past, would consider more in the future but no plans at the moment	interest to residents of East Falls, could encourage more of them to visit the site
Westrum Development				unsure how it can be used as a recreation area		community resource and recreation area				
Sherman Mills	historic cemetery	gateway to Fairmont Park				recreation, painting		can seem isolated from the neighborhood because of walls		use of Sherman Mills space for LHC events
Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area	historic cemetery				views of Schuylkill	historica asset with many activites for tourists and locals	historica asset with many activites for tourists and locals, recreation potential sets it appart from other historic sites in the area			
East Falls Community Council	historical cemetery			not sure of hours because they are not clearly posted	historical site of local importance	historical site of local importance			working with LHC is apart of future plans, usure of how at the moment because involved with other neighborhood projects, doesn't see potential as a recreational resource	

Matrix





COMPARABLES

## Introduction

Laurel Hill is not unique in the challenges it faces. Issues surrounding context, use, management, and interpretation are confronting other historic and recreational sites. Given the peers that Laurel Hill has, it is relevant to evaluate the strategies of these other sites and then use this information to counter the common pressures at Laurel Hill.

Some important variables can be compared across historic and recreational sites, including: original use, current use, size, urban and social context, transportation and physical access to the site, visitation figures, management structure, and interpretation programming. A closer look at each of the comparable sites brings out the nuances of their respective situations, eliciting strategies that may be of use at Laurel Hill Cemetery.

The comparable sites can be grouped in any number of ways: according to the primary variables of interest, based on their historic purposes, or even centered on their modern purposes. Rather than limit the extraction of nuances in variables or perhaps obscure the facts with an overarching intellectual structure, the comparable sites that follow are grouped according to their organizational similarities. In this way, the similarities will be clear, so that we may focus on the differences and what these differences entail.

### **Pere Lachaise, Paris, France**

As the inspiration, in part, for the picturesque layout of Laurel Hill,<sup>1</sup> the Pere Lachaise Cemetery in Paris has historical origins nearly identical to many of those of Laurel Hill: a location on the outskirts of a dense city ravaged by disease provides ample space for new burials and a scenic rural reprieve for visitors. Yet, these two cemeteries have come to receive drastically different levels of visitation and usage. An investigation into the history of the iconic French cemetery may shed light on the factors that led to the historical divergence in their respective levels of popularity.

The land on which Pere Lachaise rests was acquired by the city of Paris in 1804. It was a “hilltop estate” (similar to Laurel Hill’s origin as Joseph Sim’s country retreat) that architect Alexandre-Theodore Brongniart arranged into a picturesque park to be filled with monuments overlooking Paris. Its distance from the city center hindered the cemetery’s popularity at first. In a move identical to the

steps that would be taken at Laurel Hill, Pere Lachaise disinterred the mortal remains of famous personages and transferred them to its site.<sup>2</sup> Among the notable figures added to Pere Lachaise's headlining acts were La Fontaine, Moliere, and the famed lovers Pierre Abelard and Heloise. The strategy worked: soon, the living were clamoring to be buried among the dead celebrities.

While visitation at Laurel Hill dropped, Pere Lachaise has remained one of the great tourist attractions in a metropolitan city filled with competing recreational and historic sites. Why? An explanation may come from two characteristics: engagement with the community and access to the site.

Pere Lachaise has remained relevant to the community throughout its history. In addition to the continued burial of celebrated and often world-renown personages (Jim Morrison, for example), Pere Lachaise has erected war memorials. That is, the site has continued its purpose as a context for memorializing and representing memory to the contemporary population. Laurel Hill, as we well know, dwindled in popularity both as a place of recreation and as a place of interment as space became increasingly limited, patrons moved away, and the demographics of the surrounding neighborhood changed.

Another dimension worthy of comparison is current access to both sites. Pere Lachaise has five entrances, connecting and maintaining a physical relationship to the communities on every side in spite of the iron-work fence that otherwise surrounds the area. Additionally, visitors can reach the five entrances through a variety of convenient public transportation options (car, bus, metro), so even a tourist unfamiliar with the city can travel to the cemetery with relative ease. Laurel Hill, as has been noted, is lacking accessibility in both entry points and transportation.

The diversity of variables at play in history can make it difficult to identify causal relationships. Pere Lachaise's continued preservation does not depend to the extent that Laurel Hill's does on increasing funding and visitation, among other issues. However, the success Pere Lachaise has had in consistently high visitation rates and open access for its hoards of admirers illustrates the surrounding circumstances that might aid another cemetery nearly identical in picturesque founding and design principles. In particular, Laurel Hill may look to reconnect with the city and become more accessible.



Image: Google Maps. Dotted circles added to note entrances.

### Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, MA

Mount Auburn also serves as a worthwhile comparable. It has an historic background and a modern function similar to Laurel Hill's. Both cemeteries are pioneers of the designed rural garden cemetery in the United States, and they are both still functional cemeteries for interments. However, it is their differences that make Mt. Auburn a meaningful comparison. In particular, it is Mount Auburn's successful fundraising, public programming, and ground maintenance that makes it a useful model for comparison.

The first designed rural cemetery, Mt. Auburn Cemetery was founded in 1831, five years earlier than Laurel Hill. Following the development of private, non-sectarian cemeteries, such as the New Haven Burying Ground, Mt. Auburn Cemetery is eminent for being the first case to combine cemetery ground with a picturesque landscape in the United States. It is now a designated National Historic Landmark located in Watertown and Cambridge in Massachusetts, occupying a wooded lot along the Charles River. It is approximately 175 acres—more than twice of the size of Laurel Hill.

The neighborhood around Mt. Auburn Cemetery is mainly residential and commercial. Cambridge and Watertown are both noted for racial and economical diversity, and Cambridge is especially famous for being an intellectual center where Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are located. Moreover, the safety of the neighborhood around Mt. Auburn Cemetery is comparatively better than Laurel Hill's. One travel advisory website (“home & abroad”) lists a safety alert reminding visitors that it is not safe to visit Laurel Hill Cemetery after dark, while no safety alert is noted for Mt. Auburn Cemetery. In short, Mt. Auburn's neighborhood is ideal for visiting.

About 125,000 people visit Mt. Auburn Cemetery every year. The reason for its popularity is not just its historic significance; the beautiful landscape, a plentiful collection of trees, and its easy accessibility have surely contributed to its popularity as a place for visiting and recreation. The grounds are open to the public from 8am to 5pm every day of the year, two trolley lines stop nearby, and a variety of maps including walking and driving routes are available. The attractions in the cemetery include architecture, sculpture, horticulture, and bird-watching.



Photo: Mount Auburn Cemetery.



Mt. Auburn Cemetery is privately-owned. The Friends of Mt. Auburn Cemetery takes charge of fund-raising, holds various educational programs, and manages the interpretation of the cemetery. The income of the proprietors of the cemetery comes mainly from cemetery programs, while the Friends of Mount Auburn Cemetery gains funding from public support—such as grants and gift—and the programs and interpretative materials.

The grant resources are from a different range of sponsors, including institutions and individuals. In general, the Friends of Mt. Auburn Cemetery receives grants and gifts for public programming, for anniversary activities, and for the preservation of the landscape and historical collections; there is even a grant for animal habitat. In the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, the grants received by the Friends of Mt. Auburn Cemetery include funding from: the Massachusetts Cultural Council for educational programming; the Anthony J. and Mildred D. Ruggiero Memorial Trust for educational programming and for a new wildflower meadow; the Cambridge Savings Charitable Foundation and the Cambridge Trust Company for support of the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary; the Cheek Family Foundation for the production of a book of four-color photography of Mount Auburn; the Lowell Institute for the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary lecture series; and the Felicia Fund, Inc. for the design of a protective cover for one of the significant marble monuments. Individual gifts were given for horticultural projects and renovation projects.

The Friends organize various walking tours including bird walks, workshops such as holiday floral decoration, and anniversary events. In fact, the Friends co-sponsored programming with many area cultural institutes, including the Cambridge African-American Heritage Trail, the Cambridge Historic Collaborative, Friends of Fresh Pond Reservation, the Historical Society of Watertown, the Longfellow National Historic Site, and Watertown Citizens for Environmental Safety. The programming is so energetic that in fiscal year 2006, the Friends offered its members and the general public more than 80 scheduled programs.

Mt. Auburn Cemetery can be considered a successful historic site, especially with respect to its efficient management and fundraising. Additionally, cooperation with many cultural institutes puts Mt. Auburn in a good position among the communities and builds a well-functioned network to support the site itself.

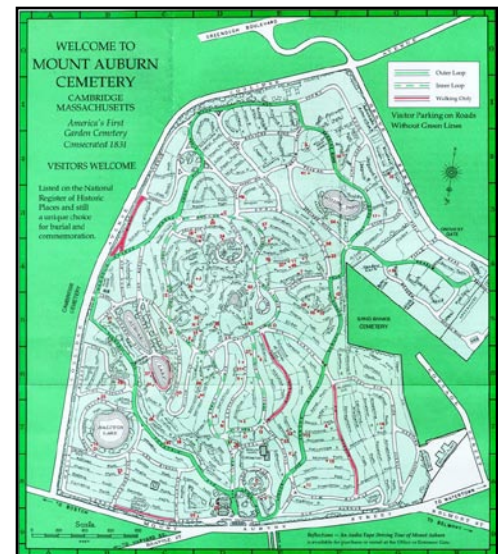


Image: Mount Auburn Cemetery.

Although Laurel Hill is not as big as Mt. Auburn, which makes its natural resources less diverse, Laurel Hill can still be steered in a similar direction toward environmental and historical preservation. A tighter network with other local and cultural institutions would be one of the best ways to increase Laurel Hill's visibility and patronage, just like the case between the Friends of Mt. Auburn Cemetery and many other Cambridge and Watertown organizations.

### Green-wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York

The third of the “big three” rural cemeteries in United States history, Green-Wood Cemetery uses a management model similar to Laurel Hill's in that it operates as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt entity with continued burials and a fundraising ‘Friends’ organization. However, Green-wood's management activities have generated different results: it enjoys higher visitation rates and revenues.<sup>3</sup> An evaluation of the causes for this may shed light on changes Laurel Hill can make to enhance its own operations.

A review of Green-Wood's physical characteristics and environs suggest opportunities for Laurel Hill. Green-Wood spans almost 500 acres of varying elevation in western Brooklyn. Its lush expanse of greenery is emphasized by the density of the surrounding urban infrastructure; residential buildings of 2+ stories, industrial complexes, and an expressway encircle the cemetery. Prospect Park is located just northeast of Green-Wood and is approximately similar in size.

A vast size difference obviously distinguishes Laurel Hill's 78 acres from the Brooklyn behemoth, yet Green-Wood still has lessons to offer. For example, one would expect the complaints of navigability at Laurel Hill to be fewer in proportion to its relatively smaller size, but this is not the case. Green-Wood proved very navigable on a site visit on October 7, 2007 in spite of its daunting expanse, twisting paths, and visibility-impairing topography. How could this be so?

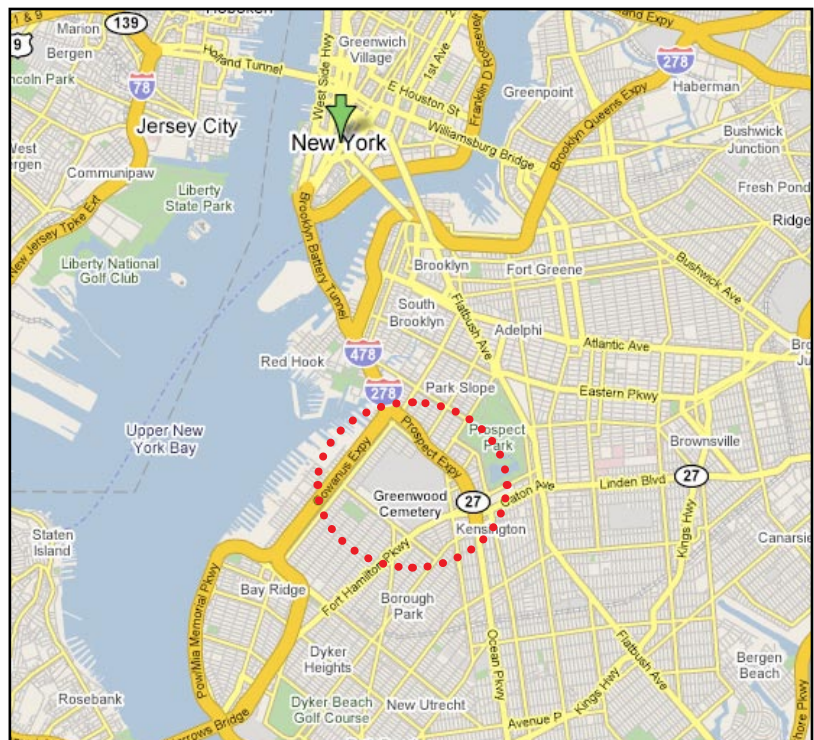


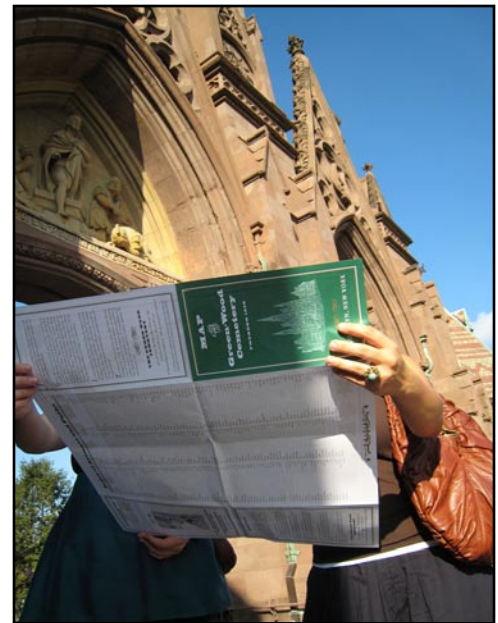
Image: Google Maps. Red circle added for emphasis.



The first feature that enabled navigation was the availability of a large-scale fold-out map from the gate guard. Notably, this document was available even though the administrative office was closed on Sunday. The map identifies both sites and the names of routes. Laurel Hill could benefit from an accurate, user-friendly map that might be retrieved without ringing the office. This could encourage self-guided tours and assure the orientation and enjoyment of visitors.

Crucial to making the map relevant to the site experience at Green-Wood was the consistent identification of roads and paths on the site itself. Signage existed at most intersections to identify the routes, direct traffic, and point toward the exit. Though funding surely limits the signage at Laurel Hill, perhaps low-cost or no-cost alternatives might be found. Options include painting lines on the asphalt for visitors to follow or perhaps loaner compasses.

While navigability may influence visitation numbers, so too may accessibility to the site. For casual neighborhood pedestrian traffic, four entrances offer easy access to the site. Only Green-Wood's southwest border lacks an entrance. Anecdotal information supports the likelihood of accessible entrances encouraging visitation. On the October 7, 2007 site visit, conversation with a man pushing



Checking the map at the gate. Photo: K. Witt 2007.



Signage kept visitors oriented. Photo: K. Witt 2007.



Signage at the intersection of a path with a main road. Photo: K. Witt 2007.

a stroller revealed that he had wandered into the cemetery out of curiosity during his constitutional.

Green-Wood is easily reachable from further afield by mass transit options. The 24-hour subway system has a stop on a busy intersection just one block from the cemetery's monumental front gate. Private cars are allowed to enter the site, and indeed they may be essential if one hopes to reach the cemetery's distant corners.

Relevant to a discussion of the site's physical context is a consideration of the regional competition for Green-Wood's recreational visitors. Green-Wood's proximity to Prospect Park surely supports a mutual exchange of patrons: joggers, strollers, picnickers, and other outdoor recreationists can easily visit either. This is an avenue that Laurel Hill might want to consider. Outdoor recreationists who would otherwise use Laurel Hill may be drawn away by adjacent Fairmount Park trails. However, park-goers might also be drawn away by the cemetery given the opportunity. Laurel Hill might want to take after the manner in which Green-Wood provides the opportunity for impulse visitation: accessibility.

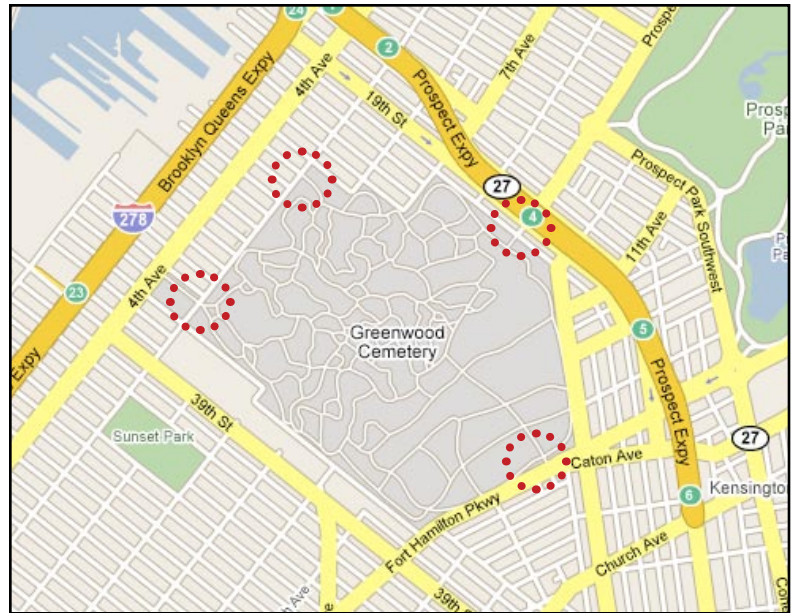


Image: Google Maps. Dotted circles added for emphasis, to identify cemetery entrances.

### **Woodlands Cemetery, Philadelphia, PA**

The Woodlands Cemetery is another rural garden cemetery in Philadelphia and is designated a National Historic Landmark as well. The issues the Woodlands Cemetery faces are similar to those of Laurel Hill in some ways. Both are in less-desirable neighborhoods, although Woodlands is less isolated than Laurel Hill's situation. Conversely, the size of the Woodlands is much smaller, which makes it less attractive than other garden cemeteries. Nevertheless, the Woodlands has continued to be notable and unique.

The Woodlands Cemetery in Philadelphia is located in the University City neighborhood, between Woodland Avenue and the Schuylkill River, just beside the University of Pennsylvania. It was not originally designed as a cemetery. The Hamilton family purchased this land and built their mansion and several carriage houses in the 18<sup>th</sup> century,



Woodlands Mansion in Woodlands Cemetery. Photo: Studio 2007.



but from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, parts of the land was sold to some of Philadelphia's upper middle class and the University of Pennsylvania. In 1840, the Cemetery Company of Philadelphia purchased 75 acres of land, including the core of Hamilton's garden, to be used as a rural cemetery. Woodlands Cemetery is still active, but it was reduced to 45 acres. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1967.

The Woodlands Mansion is now the office of the Woodlands Cemetery Company, which is a non-profit organization that manages this historic site. The mansion and the grounds are open to the public through the main gate. The neighborhood is mainly residential, with some medical institutions nearby. Opposite the gate is a trolley stop transporting passengers to and from Center City, and south and north Philadelphia. Many residents in the neighborhood visit the cemetery grounds for walking or jogging.

The Woodlands Cemetery Company cooperates with the Woodlands Trust for Historic Preservation, and has built a close connection with the Historic Preservation Program at the University of Pennsylvania. The Trust holds a series of tours, lectures, and events every year, while the cemetery and mansion serve as research subjects for students in the Historic Preservation Program. This contributes to the understanding of the historic site and moreover makes it more notable in the academic field.

According to the 990 form, the revenue of the Cemetery Company comes mainly from indirect public support, burial service, and rent. The Trust, on the other hand, raises funds mainly from direct public support and government contributions. Minus expenditures, mainly for program services and management, the fund of the Cemetery and the Trust has a favorable balance. Also of interest, the Woodlands received a 2004 federal Save America's Treasures matching grant in the amount of \$200,000 to replace the deteriorated mansion roof and address structural problems.

While being smaller in size and located in a neighborhood "not safe after dark," the Woodlands Cemetery has found a way to maintain its visibility and to engage closely with preservation groups. Its prominence in historic preservation circles may contribute to its success in receiving government grants. Laurel Hill may benefit from following similar tactics, namely, sustaining relationships with preservation organizations and enhancing its visibility to

joggers and strollers.

### **Old City Cemetery, Lynchburg, VA**

Old City Cemetery has a downtown location in small city, which is not dissimilar to Laurel Hill's situation. It consists of 26 acres total, and was established in 1806.

The primary attractions are the cemetery itself and its arboretum/gardens, which are open free from dawn to dusk, just like at Laurel Hill. The cemetery also includes 5 small "house" museums on the site. The museums are toured by appointment and small fee, and the cemetery may be seen by guided tour, by appointment. There are also monthly scheduled programs and guided tours, similar to those at Laurel Hill. These include concerts, festivals, workshops, services, and special tours. The office is only open limited hours. Free "Quick guide" brochures are available in office and throughout the grounds, and include over 12 on different topics.

Unlike Laurel Hill Cemetery, Old City is publicly owned, but it is likewise run by a nonprofit organization: The Southern Memorial Association, which hosts all tours and events.

### **Awbury Arboretum, Philadelphia (Germantown), PA**

Awbury is situated in a downtown city location in Germantown, Philadelphia, not far from Laurel Hill Cemetery. The area is a lower income neighborhood, similar to some of the neighborhoods around Laurel Hill. Established in 1852, Awbury Arboretum consists of 55 acres of English-style landscape, including meadows, forests, lawns, and a pond.

Transportation to Awbury is primarily through walking and public transportation. It is located directly adjacent to a stop on the R7 rail line, and is also accessible from bus lines. It is possible to drive to the site, but there is limited parking. These parking constraints are comparable to those at Laurel Hill.

The site has many entrances: a main driving entrance, a major open entrance area near the train stop, and other minor gates around the perimeter. Most of them are relatively inconspicuous, but do have some signage. This is in contrast to the single open gate at Laurel Hill.

The grounds at Awbury are quite closed off from the

surrounding community by thick stands of trees and walls, and most views within the Arboretum are inward-looking. This is similar to the physical isolation that Laurel Hill Cemetery experiences from its surrounding community.

The Arboretum is open from dawn to dusk, with free admission. There is minimal signage throughout the grounds, and there are no maps available for self-guided tours unless the Cope House is open. This is also similar to the lack of interpretation at Laurel Hill. Also, not dissimilarly, primary forms of use at Laurel Hill are dog-walking, walking, and recreational activities such as frisbee.

In addition to the landscape, Awbury Arboretum offers a historic house, the Cope House, which is available for guided tours on weekdays. This does provide an extra draw that Laurel Hill does not have, however, the main focus of the site is on the landscape. Concerts, workshops, nature programs, and school groups are hosted at the arboretum, with many of the themes revolving around horticulture.

The grounds are also available for rental for picnics, retreats, and weddings.

Awbury is managed by Awbury Arboretum Association, and offers ten staff positions, plus a Board of Directors.

### **Bartram's Garden, Philadelphia, PA**

Like Laurel Hill, Bartram's Garden is also situated in a city location, in the depressed neighborhood of Southwestern Philadelphia. It is located along the Schuylkill riverfront, surrounded by vestiges of manufacturing. Established in 1728, this 45-acre site includes a woodland garden, fields, and the historic house of John Bartram, a noted Philadelphian.

The historic house and the arboretum/gardens have relatively equal weight in their importance to the site, especially since Bartram was a horticulturalist. This likely draws more tourists than Laurel Hill's landscape alone. The grounds are likewise open free to the public daily from dawn to dusk, and guided tours of house are also available, but require a small fee. Mostly visitors enjoy the site simply by walking around, and maps are available which mark points of interest for self-guided tours. Bartram's Garden offers lectures, workshops, and school programs, among their many programs.

The site also offers rentals for weddings and other

events.

Access to the site is primarily by car, and the grounds have only one entrance, similar to the situation at Laurel Hill. Also similarly, Bartram's Garden is cut off from its neighboring community by being landlocked between the river to the East and a set of railroad tracks to the West. The connection between Bartram's Garden and its surrounding community would be an interesting comparison to that at Laurel Hill. Bartram's seems to neither outright encourage nor discourage participation from the local community.

The site is managed by the John Bartram Association, and offers 10 Staff positions and a Board of Directors in the low twenties.

### **Stenton House Museum, Philadelphia, PA**

Stenton, an historic house museum built c. 1730 by James Logan, suffers from being located in an extremely rundown former manufacturing neighborhood in North Philadelphia. It has a socioeconomic and physical isolation from its surrounding neighborhood that is reminiscent of that of Laurel Hill. Stenton sits on three acres of lawn and woodland.

Stenton is open limited hours, Tuesday through Saturday, for guided tours. The primary focus is the historic house and its outbuildings, while the grounds serve merely as a backdrop. The visitor experience is too dissimilar to that at Laurel Hill to make a useful comparison.

Travel to Stenton is either made by car or by walking from the nearby train station. The single entrance is located in a relatively secluded area that does not get much traffic. Surrounding Stenton are abandoned factory buildings that are somewhat similar to Laurel Hill's neighbors.

Stenton has teamed up with other historic house museums in nearby Germantown for various programs, but does not attempt to reach out to their immediate neighborhood in any meaningful way.

Stenton is owned by the City of Philadelphia and administered by The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and only has three staff positions.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In the Laurel Hill HABS Report, HABS Historian Aaron V. Wunsch writes that Pere Lachaise's creation was a "watershed in the history of landscape architecture" that, as "an international tourist destination," inspired landscape architects in North America (p. 5). Similarly, Richard A. Etlin, in his 1984 work *The Architecture of Death*, begins his preface with the declaration, "The entire 'rural cemetery' movement in America... is greatly indebted to Pere Lachaise."

<sup>2</sup> Amis et Passionnés du Pere-Lachaise [The friends of Pere Lachaise]. [http://www.appl-lachaise.net/appl/article.php?id\\_article=65](http://www.appl-lachaise.net/appl/article.php?id_article=65). Accessed October 2, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> On October 7, 2007 a brief interview of the main entrance security guard revealed her speculation that they typically received 700-1,000 visitors every weekend. It is possible that these figures were inflated in her estimation as a result of the previous day's special event: a day-long range of activities and music as part of Open House New York, the yearly celebration of New York architecture with free tours of notable buildings across the five boroughs. Open House New York as a whole was "expected to draw 100,000 visitors" to its monuments over the weekend, according to the *New York Times*. (Rivera, Ray. "Tours Venture Into Forbidden, or Merely Hidden, Territory." *The New York Times*. October 7, 2007. Available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/07/nyregion/07open.html?\\_r=1&ref=nyregion&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/07/nyregion/07open.html?_r=1&ref=nyregion&oref=slogin). Accessed October 8, 2007.)



## S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS

In order to get a clearer picture of the current situation at Laurel Hill, we came together to analyze the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats that are facing the site. The following represents what are seen as the three most important issues in each category.

### Strengths

The most identifiable strength of Laurel Hill is its historic value. It is only the second landscaped cemetery built in the United States and the first to be designed by an architect, John Nottman. At the time it was completed, it was a popular tourist destination, attracting 30,000 people in 1848. Many notable Philadelphians, including General George Mead and architect Frank Furness are buried there.

The monuments created to these notable people were used as a status symbol and became great sculptural works of art. This is one of the key attractions at the cemetery and contributes to its overall value in a strong way. The various works of art create a sculptural garden that creates the scenic landscape for visitors to enjoy.

Unlike sections of Fairmount Park, which can be de-accessioned, Laurel Hill will always remain a green, open space. There is also a strong connection between the cemetery and the Schuylkill River, originally this was the main point of entry into the site. With the view shed restoration currently in progress, the connection with the river will be solidified and invasive species will be removed. New plantings are underway using native species that will need less maintenance and be more cohesive with the original intent of the cemetery plan.

### Weaknesses

Locating Laurel Hill can be difficult, largely due to lack of signage. There are few directional signs when approaching the site, having the only strong concentration of them on Kelly Drive. Once off Kelly Drive, little to no continued signage can be found. Once inside the cemetery, there are no signs to direct visitors around and no labels on trees, graves and monuments.

Again due to its location, it is hard for visitors from out of town to get to Laurel Hill. It is not within walking distance of any other cultural heritage sites and is difficult to access by public transportation. Even for visitors from

### Strengths and Values

- Open space/Green Space
- Variety of horticultural specimens
- Bird habitat
- Viewsheds and Vistas
- Proximity to Kelly Drive / Fairmount Park recreational facilities
- Artistic Interest/Outdoor sculpture garden
- Paper archive
- Physical history
- Prominence of 'residents'
- Education Resource
- Kitsch factor
- Attitude of management to be enterprising/creative
- Isolation – a place of escape

### Weaknesses

- Lack of parking
- Understaffed
- Many management efforts ongoing
- Lack of signage – directional and interpretive
- Selective funding
- Cost of organized tours
- Accessibility (Kelly Drive, Signage, Only one gate open)
- Physical isolation
- Lack of Interpretive materials
- Inconsistency of tours
- Strawberry Mansion neighborhood (real and perceived issues)
- Isolation from nearby services/amenities
- Isolation from cultural points of interest
- Tactical focus of management efforts
- Low profile among potential visitors
- Difficulty keeping up with physical maintenance requirements (e.g. landscaping, conservation, pathways, etc)

the local area it can be difficult to plan a day trip into the city and include time for Laurel Hill.

Besides going on a guided tour of the site, there are little to no interpretive materials for guests to use. The only available map is outdated and show paths that no longer exist. The only brochure offered gives a schedule of guided tours, which are only offered two or three times a month. For most visitors this leaves them with no option but to wonder aimlessly.

### **Opportunities**

Despite these challenges, more and more people have been visiting the site in recent months and there is a demand for further interpretation. With a more diverse section of the population visiting, there is an increase in the programs that can be offered to display the multifaceted history of the site. Technological advances could be used to offer pod cast tours and cell phone tours to allow visitors to select the experience they want.

The recent efforts of the management to diversify the public perception of the cemetery show that there is an opportunity for change. This is different from many sites, where the resistance to change to a major obstacle to evolving to the new demands of cultural heritage sites. This will help in adding and changing programming and fundraising options to provide Laurel Hill a more secure future.

The former industrial building, located across the street from the entrance to the site, has been recently been purchased by the Friends of Laurel Hill. Many options have been discussed for this site, but the most prevalent ideas are to use the area as an interpretation center and or a revenue generating operation. This is a great opportunity for LHC to reach into the community and also bring some much needed money into circulation.

### **Threats**

Finding reliable sources of funding have been threatening the future of the site. Currently, many of the large programs on site are funded by grants. While grants are a good and much needed source of funding for many non-profits, they are not a reliable source. One can never guarantee that they will receive a particular grant, and once it is acquired, it will have tight restrictions on how it can be used.

### **Opportunities**

Alignment with Mural Arts Program  
Alignment with SHARE Food Program of PA  
Education Resource  
Yogurt distribution property  
Interpretation  
East Falls neighborhood  
Utilizing community networking  
Progressive view of management  
Utilizing professional network/Peer institutions  
Grants  
Fundraising  
Retail sales  
Internet marketing (fundraising, marketing, tourism, membership)  
Refreshing the Board  
Advertising campaign

### **Threats**

Funding  
Continuity of leadership (seed money / sunset provision?)  
Dependency on/Limited availability of grants  
Limited community connection  
Physical conditions/Time  
Environmental Conditions  
Neighboring streets/railroads (pollution, vibration, noise)  
Groundhogs  
Deferred maintenance  
Perception of the neighborhood  
Neighborhood apathy  
Uncertain real estate climate



The physical condition of many of the markers and monuments on site is quite poor. Approximately 300 pieces are thought to fall each year. There is little to no funding for repair and preventative maintenance of the site. This also causes a safety issue for visitors on site and limits the use of some areas where sensitive material is located. Many pieces that do fall are buried in place; a new system should be created to properly store fallen segments until the funding is available for replacement.

A common perception of the cemetery is that it is located in a dangerous section of the city of Philadelphia. While the Strawberry Mansion neighborhood has a high crime rate, the cemetery can easily be accessed without danger. It is necessary for visitors to feel safe if they are going to visit a site.



## CONCLUSIONS

Preservation planning requires vast amounts of knowledge, not merely about the preservation issues confronting a site, but those concerning the historical uses and values of the site, current economic status, and relations with community members and groups. The planning process is not designed to freeze a site in time and ensure that it merely continues to exist; planning is intended to look carefully and critically at a site, examining it in all possible lights in order to make informed decisions that will guide the site into a sustainable and successful future. It was the goal of this studio to examine Laurel Hill Cemetery under such circumstances in order to produce a preservation plan, which follows in Volume II.

The key findings contained in this volume reside in multiple areas. History, current physical conditions of the monuments, neighborhood composition, visitation, community relations, and comparables were all examined thoroughly in order to aid in the production of a worthwhile and succinct plan that will guide Laurel Hill Cemetery, not only in the next few years, but for the foreseeable future.

The findings from this research ultimately led to a preservation plan that focuses on four policy areas. The policy areas encompass many of the issues needing urgent attention in order to improve the overall situation at Laurel Hill. These areas are resource management, economic viability, visitor experience and public relations, and image. These policy areas do not exist in a bubble; they work together to create a complex relationship to sustain and propel Laurel Hill. Only by addressing each of these areas will tangible and real results be achieved to better the entirety of the site.

While seemingly daunting, addressing these issues are both necessary and critical to ensure the future of Laurel Hill. Volume II of this report expands on this, offering recommendations and actions that should be undertaken in each of these policy areas. Furthermore, small projects and reports are included to better illustrate how such recommendations can be implemented.

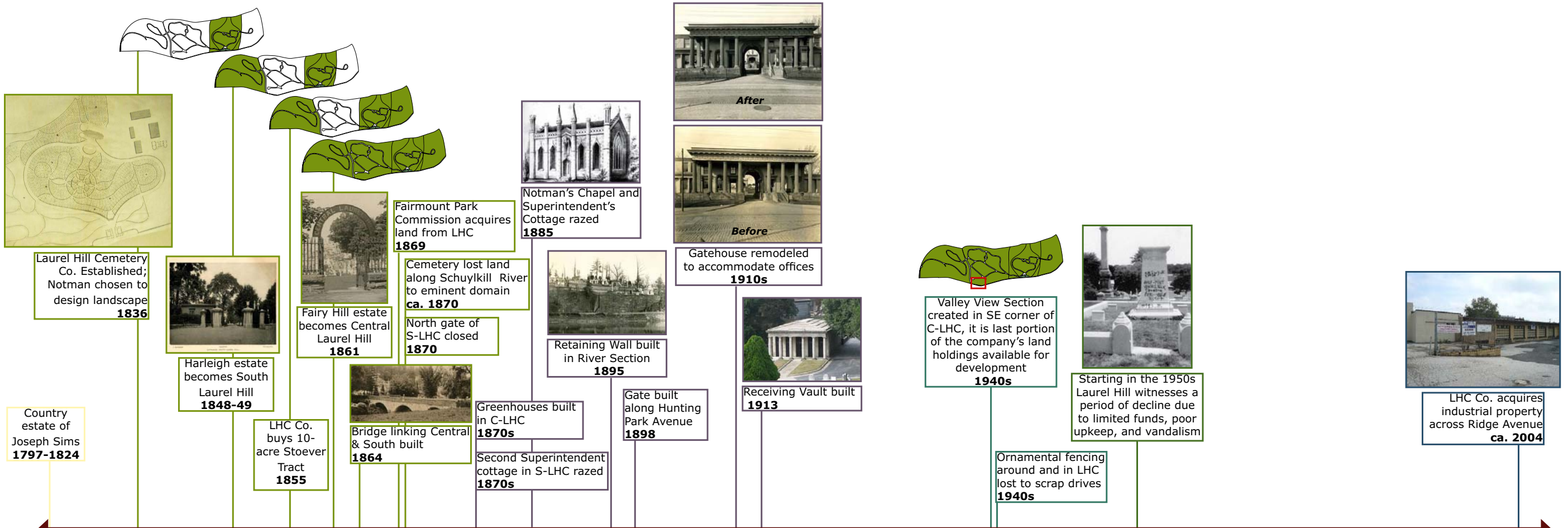
It is our hope, and belief, that the research laid out in this volume and continued in the next will help guide Laurel Hill Cemetery toward a future that is both sustainable and feasible, allowing it to continue to serve the city and region as a cultural heritage site rich with history, meaning, and value.





# APPENDIX

LAUREL HILL CEMETERY CHRONOLOGY



Pre-1835 LAND USE PRIOR TO LAUREL HILL CEMETERY  
 1835-1870 ESTABLISHMENT & EXPANSION  
 1871-1915 ADMINISTRATIVE SHIFTS & BUILD OUT  
 1916-1950 MATURITY  
 1951-1970 DECLINE  
 1971- Present TRANSITION TO HISTORIC SITE

