GREEN-WOOD CEMETERY

Finding Beauty Among the Dead
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By the 2018 Young Scholars of PS 312

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Pages 2 & 35, back cover: Green-Wood sold burial tracts to religious societies in New York and Brooklyn. Different church re-interred bodies to Green-Wood Cemetery.

Photographs courtesy of Lita Riddock.
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Stopping at a red light, a bumper sticker caught my eye. It read, “I brake for cemeteries.” What some see as macabre, others find fascinating. When I lived in the neighborhood of Park Slope/Greenwood Heights, I often passed by Green-Wood Cemetery. For years, I walked past the marble statues and elaborate tombstones without knowing its rich history, until recently.

When I had the pleasure of introducing myself to the Young Scholars of PS 312, I explained that our topic this year would focus on Green-Wood. Jaws dropped, eyes widened, and more than one student muttered “yuck.” I knew this theme would take more convincing. For our earliest assignment, students read reviews of Green-Wood from TripAdvisor. I asked students to find out where the reviewers were from, general impressions of the cemetery, and whether they recommended it. Poring over the reviews and accompanying images, it wasn’t long before the students were demanding to know when they could visit Green-Wood. A few weeks later, we took our trip to Green-Wood. As the bus approached the entrance, a few students exclaimed they thought that they had entered the pearly gates of heaven! The first words mentioned that day went something along the lines of: “This is unbelievable.” As we got our bearings for a brief moment, we were distracted by a raucous family of monk parrots nestling in the crevices of the entrance gates.

Watching the students enjoying themselves outdoors, one would imagine this was a city park, not a cemetery. We ran up hills, slid down grassy slopes, and laughed. The two hours spent wandering through Green-Wood gave us a wealth of information about Brooklyn and its inhabitants. Green-Wood is full of natural and artistic beauty. The tombs are some of the finest examples of sculpture anywhere in the city, and the bird watching is superb. Our visit gave us lessons about history, art, and science. Green-Wood is an oasis in the heart of Brooklyn. It was one of the first public greenspaces in Brooklyn. Green-Wood offered peace and serenity in an increasingly crowded city.

The Young Scholars at PS 312 looked over primary and secondary source documents. We studied the history of the rural cemetery movement and its connections to public uses of greenspaces today. We questioned how we can continue to enjoy the beauty of Green-Wood while respecting these final resting places for the dead.

We would like to thank Shirley Brown-Alleyne, Ilk Yasha, and everyone at Brooklyn Historical Society who helped make this possible. A special thank you to Ms. Debra Quigley, who provided unmeasurable support. And special thanks to Andrew Gustafson of Turnstile Tours and Lita Riddock, who made our trip so memorable.

Janise Mitchell
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THE RURAL CEMETERY MOVEMENT
Before the creation of Prospect Park in Brooklyn and Central Park in Manhattan, Green-Wood Cemetery was New York’s first major urban greenspace. Green-Wood was more unique and tranquil than other cemeteries in New York. It was the place to go to meditate, retreat from busy city life, smell fresh air, and take a ride in a horse-drawn carriage. People could picnic while looking at some of the finest sculptures in the world, all for the price of a trolley ride, likely 5 cents! At the turn of the nineteenth century, Green-Wood was the second-most-popular tourist attraction in the United States; only Niagara Falls was more popular! Today, Green-Wood has over 560,000 graves, surrounded by 478 acres of landscaped hills, with miles of peaceful trails and glacial ponds.

In the nineteenth century, most burials took place in churchyards. As towns grew into small cities, overcrowded cemeteries were becoming a problem. With more urban settlement, it was not uncommon for graveyards to be moved to a large cemetery. As people were reinterred, there were concerns for the corpses of people that had died from diseases such as yellow fever or smallpox. No one wanted those diseases to spread. Vandals and thieves also desecrated graves in search of bodies for medical study.

At this time, many areas in Brooklyn were still rural. The rural areas of Brooklyn could accommodate larger burial grounds.

Americans were also developing new attitudes towards death and nature. In time, Americans came up with a different way of burying people. In the 1800s, cities wanted to create more park-like cemeteries. This was called the Rural Cemetery Movement.

“It is the ambition of the New Yorker to live upon Fifth Avenue, to take his airings in the [Central] Park, and to sleep with his fathers in Green-Wood.” — New York Times, March 30, 1866

In the 1800s, over 500,000 visitors visited almost every year!

Green-Wood was the inspiration for creating Prospect Park in Brooklyn.

Edwin C. Litchfield built a mansion on sixty-three acres of land in Brooklyn. The land and mansion were taken in 1869 to create Prospect Park. Edwin C. Litchfield is buried in Green-Wood Cemetery, but his grave faces south, away from his beloved home.

For more information about Prospect Park, please see Brooklyn’s Gem: The Formation of Prospect Park by the 2018 Young Scholars of PS 282.
GREEN-WOOD’S LANDSCAPE
Andrew Jackson Downing was a genius. Downing was a famous landscaper, horticulturist, and architect who wanted people to appreciate nature. Downing wrote many books on landscape design. Downing believed the most beautiful gardens should include trees, grass, and water. The topography of Green-Wood was created by massive glaciers, which left behind lakes and hills. Green-Wood was created using many of Andrew Jackson Downing’s landscaping ideas. Instead of changing the landscape, Downing used the natural features of the land to enhance its beauty. The green hills, with views of distant rivers surrounded by massive trees, created one of the most beautiful greenspaces in Brooklyn.

Henry E. Pierrepont was a city planner. In 1832, Henry E. Pierrepont decided that Brooklyn needed a new cemetery. Pierrepont suggested that the area above the Gowanus would make an excellent location for a rural cemetery. The quiet, remote area known as Gowanus Hills stood on the highest point in Brooklyn. The land was owned by some of the oldest Dutch families in Brooklyn, including the Bergens, the Bennetts, and the Wyckoffs. At first, many of the farmers were not interested in selling their land. That changed in 1837, when real estate prices dropped. Desperate for money, farmers sold their land to Green-Wood owners.

“We only regret that the people of our large cities, generally, cannot see, with their own eyes, the beauty and realize the advantage of such parks in the midst of towns. New York, for instance, now one of the largest cities in the world, has no public park, whatever, no breathing place, no grounds for the exercise and refreshment of her jaded citizens.” — Andrew Jackson Downing, 1851

Downing was commissioned to design the landscape for the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

In 1837, there was a financial crisis called The Panic of 1837. It created a recession, so wealthy white landowners sold their land very cheaply to make money to pay off their debts.

For more information please see The Road to Weeksville: A Community of Refuge and Hope, by the 2018 Young Scholars of PS 233.
DEWITT CLINTON • GREEN-WOOD’S FIRST FAMOUS RESIDENT
When the Erie Canal opened on October 26, 1825, it covered 425 miles of waterways. It connected the waterways of the Hudson River to the Great Lakes. Goods and products from farms and cities could be shipped from east to west in half the time.

Other Famous People Buried at Green-Wood Cemetery

- Jean-Michel Basquiat, American artist of Puerto Rican and Haitian descent
- Henry Ward Beecher, abolitionist and minister of Plymouth Church
- Leonard Bernstein, composer and conductor
- Clarence McKenzie, twelve year old drummer boy and Brooklyn's first casualty of the Civil War
- Dr. Susan Smith McKinney, New York State's first African-American female doctor
- Louis Comfort Tiffany, artist, designer and first design director for Tiffany and Company
- George Tilyou, creator and founder of Steeplechase Park in Coney Island
- William Magear “Boss” Tweed, former New York State Senator, Democratic County Chairman, School Commissioner, Deputy Street Commissioner, President of the Board of Supervisors, and corrupt politician.
THE GATES TO HEAVEN AND OTHER FAMOUS LANDMARKS
Church graveyards are very small compared to Green-Wood. When you enter Green-Wood, you pass through a very fancy gate designed by Richard Upjohn and his son, Richard Mitchell Upjohn, from 1861 to 1863. Upjohn and Sons were architects famous for designing buildings in Victorian Gothic style. Gothic-style buildings resemble castles from the Middle Ages and have archways and towers with carved figures depicting the Resurrection.

Green-Wood is also known for its chapel, gatehouse, and the Weir Greenhouse. The chapel is filled with beautiful Tiffany-like stained glass windows created by the Willet Stained Glass and Decorating Company of Pittsburgh. The Green-Wood Chapel is another example of Gothic design. It has a tall tower surrounded by smaller round domes. The Weir Greenhouse provided flowers and wreaths for elaborate funerals. The gatehouse was also designed by Richard Upjohn. The gatehouse located on Fort Hamilton Parkway was the second entrance for Green-Wood. Visitors to Green-Wood were greeted by two caretakers.
To the Memory of
Edward Morley late Master
Of his Majesty's Ship Phineas
Who Departed this Life
August 8th 1783 Aged 40
As you walk through Green-Wood, you may see many unique symbols on headstones. Have you ever wondered what these symbols represent? Headstones give us information about the person, while symbols give us insight into a person’s attitude towards death. An angel with open wings symbolizes the flight of the soul to heaven. A broken column can represent someone who died early or very young. At Green-Wood, many of the tombstones had book symbols representing the book of life. A draped funeral urn is the symbol for immortality. Small lambs and angels on headstones could indicate the death of a child. Old colonial graves are marked by winged death hands. You can learn a lot about family customs by looking at these headstones.
EXPLORING NATURE: THE BIRDS · ANIMALS AND TREES OF GREEN-WOOD
Even though Green-Wood is a cemetery, many visitors come to watch the birds and animals. Bird watchers come from all throughout the city to spot migrating birds such as the pied-billed grebe, the green-winged teal, and the American coot. There are several thousand trees and over two hundred different species of trees in Green-Wood Cemetery.

Image shows some of the mausoleums across from Green-Wood Cemetery. Photograph courtesy of Lita Riddock.

Hundreds of monk parrots live in the crevices of the main gate at Green-Wood.

The Green-Wood Cemetery entrance. Photograph courtesy of Lita Riddock.
NOT YOUR AVERAGE JOB
Have you ever thought of working at a cemetery? One of the most interesting jobs out of all the others is checking the headstones for damage and removing those that are unsafe. Every day, workers have to keep headstones neat and tidy, and remove dirt for new burials. They measure and mark out grave spaces using a mechanical excavator and hand tools to dig and prepare graves for burial.

One of the most important jobs at the cemetery is the landscaper. The landscaper has to work outdoors in all types of weather. It’s a physically demanding job. If you are clumsy, then this is not the job for you!

One of the biggest problems facing Green-Wood is acid rain. Acid rain has been destroying some of the beautiful statues at Green-Wood. Acid rain is caused by air pollution. Rainwater picks up particles and gases when it falls through the sky. When air is polluted, the rainwater becomes polluted. Over time, acid rain dissolves stone, marble, and limestone. Eventually, words and artwork become faded and difficult to recognize.

People are still buried in Green-Wood. People can buy a new lot to be buried in, and some families bought mausoleums or plots years ago with enough room for their descendants.

https://www.green-wood.com/burial/
NOT JUST FOR THE DEAD
Green-Wood isn’t just a place for the dead. There’s plenty of things to do for the living. One of the most popular activities is the twilight tour. This tour takes place in the evening, right before twilight. In this tour people take a historic trolley tour with a guide through the cemetery. They get to see Green-Wood’s world-famous gardens, landscaping, and sculptures. Some other activities include concerts, lectures, movies night, and a popular forum called “The Death Cafe,” where people discuss thoughts about death while having coffee.

He’s gone! The friend of many years, ’Neath Greenwood’s sod he lies; Worthy was he of all our tears As when a human dies. His name was “Gipsy,” and his race Though not of men, was pure and true; His soul was pictured in his face, And he could love and reason too. No more upon the chimney hearth His crouching form we see; He moulders now beneath the earth, But he’s not dead to me. He gone! This faithful, darling friend, Where truth and virtue dwell; Say not that this shall be the end Of him we loved so well.

— Henry Bergh, 1879
REFLECTIONS OF GREEN-WOOD CEMETERY

ON February 28, 2018, the students of PS 312 visited Green-Wood. Andrew Gustafson of Turnstile Tours was our guide. We toured the grounds of the cemetery as Andrew gave us insight into the history of the cemetery. Here are some reflections of their tour by the Young Scholars.

AMELIE  There is something quite different about this cemetery. Even if you stayed for an hour, you would not even get halfway through. It’s really big! I loved the chapel with its amazing Tiffany-like window.

BRIANNA  It was such a marvelously wonderful place. Some people memorialize the dead by placing coins, candy, and toys on headstones.

DANICA  Green-Wood is special because greenspace is so important in urban areas. There aren’t too many places like that in the city.

ELIZABETH  I was really excited by the beauty of this cemetery. It exceeded my expectations. I loved the rolling hills.

ETHAN  I would recommend that you visit Green-Wood Cemetery. They have the most beautiful chapel filled with Tiffany-like windows. It was more like a museum. It’s not scary at all!

GEOVANNI  When I entered the cemetery, the entrance was like a palace from a movie. I knew that this was more than a cemetery. This was special.

JONATHAN  I was shocked when I saw Green-Wood for the first time. It has a lot of nature, unlike many other cemeteries. We only saw a small part of the cemetery. It’s that big.
Laila I was blown away by the landscape. It was an amazing experience. From the highest part of the cemetery, we could see the Statue of Liberty.

Matthew I loved the statue of Minerva waving to the Statue of Liberty. This place did not feel like a cemetery at all. It felt more like a park because of all the trees and hills. It was fun going into the chapel and looking at the Tiffany-like windows. They were beautiful.

Michael The monuments and graves were very fancy. Some of the Dutch headstones were from the 1600s.

Peter Green-Wood was totally different from what I was expecting. It had the tallest point in Brooklyn! Across the river, we could see the Statue of Liberty.

Samia I had only read about Green-Wood Cemetery. When I went there it was awesome. Now I know why people go there. I was starstruck when I saw its simplicity yet elegance of the landscape. I thought it would be a place of grief, but it ended up being a place for remembrance and peace.

Nicholas The trip to Green-Wood was fun! There were a lots of hills with grave-stones. Our tour guide Andrew said that we only saw 6 percent of the cemetery! It’s that large. There is even a chapel filled with stained-glass windows. I love the statue of Minerva waving to the Statue of Liberty.

Abigail It was unbelievable. I can’t believe this is Brooklyn. It was like Prospect Park with more hills and less people. I’m glad I brought my camera.

Olivia My legs were tired from climbing the hills! I’m glad we could take the trolley to ride around. I have never seen such a big cemetery. This place was beautiful.
Glossary of Terms

**Acid rain**
rainfall made so acidic by atmospheric pollution that it causes environmental harm

**Desecrated**
to damage or treat something with disrespect

**Elaborate**
having a fancy design

**Glaciers**
a slowly moving mass or river of ice formed by the accumulation and compaction of snow on mountains

**Gothic**
style of architecture characterized by pointed arches, large windows, and elaborate styling

**Greenspace**
an area of grass, trees, or plants set apart for recreational or aesthetic purposes in urban areas

**Middle Ages**
the period of European history from about A.D. 500 to about A.D. 1500

**Reinterred**
buried again, often in a different place than that of the first burial

**Resurrected**
restored to life, raised from the dead

**Rural**
pertaining to agricultural areas or countryside

**Smallpox**
a highly contagious disease; victims develop high fever with pustules usually leaving permanent scars

**Topography**
the arrangement of the natural and artificial physical features of an area

**Tranquil**
calm, peaceful

**Twilight**
period before darkness when the sky is lit by the sun from below the horizon

**Yellow fever**
a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that causes high fever and often death

**Victorian style**
period of style in the mid-to-late nineteenth century
Bibliography


Photographs courtesy of Lita Riddock.
HERE
LIE
THE
SECRETS
OF
THE
VISITORS
OF
GREEN-WOOD
CEMETERY
Incorporated in 1838, The Green-Wood Cemetery stretches across 478 pastoral acres in Brooklyn and boasts extraordinary works of nineteenth- and twentieth-century sculpture, statuary, and architecture. Home to thousands of historic figures, The Green-Wood Cemetery offers tours of its grounds, concerts, book readings, and other public events throughout the year. Green-Wood has been designated a National Historic Landmark by the United States Department of the Interior. The Green-Wood Historic Fund is a registered 501(c)(3) not-for-profit membership organization created to maintain Green-Wood’s monuments and buildings of historical, cultural, and architectural significance; to advance public knowledge and appreciation; and to preserve the natural habitat of one of New York City’s first green spaces. [www.green-wood.com](http://www.green-wood.com)
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