

Real business: Maryland's first black cemetery journey's into the enterprise of death (1807-1920)

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Abstract

This article is specifically situated on Mount Auburn Cemetery, Maryland's first Black owned and operated cemetery, examining the numerous social and historical factors that shaped, transformed, and ultimately led to a small African American burial ground becoming a business. Founded in 1807 by the seven trustees of Sharp Street Memorial United Methodist Church (Baltimore's oldest African Methodist Church which dates back to 1787), Mount Auburn Cemetery gave African Americans, free and enslaved, a right to freedom through death. African Americans could not control their enslaved and marginalized lives, but they could control their deaths. Post emancipation, the cemetery strategized a move to South Baltimore, bought more land, embarking on an economic partnership with a newly formed African American community by the name of Hullsville. The cemetery professionalized and became a business paving the way for independent African American undertakers. This article places Mount Auburn Cemetery as a unit of analysis in order to illustrate the historical significance of Mount Auburn Cemetery to the African American community.

Key words: Death – African American business – Death ideology – Cemetery

*Introduction*¹

For African Americans, death in the 19th century marked an important social and historical moment. A claim to freedom, death – specifically cemeteries – from the 1800s was undergirded with an element of economic autonomy. Mount Auburn Cemetery, founded in 1807 by free and enslaved Blacks – and stands as the first Black owned and op-

erated cemetery in Maryland – made Black peoples landowners while developing into a business enterprise that aided Hullsville, the nearby burgeoning Black town, and the greater Black community at large.² This article demonstrates how Mount Auburn Cemetery, founded as a call for Black freedom, transformed itself into a business enterprise through four distinct phases. Each phase is listed as a subheading helping readers navigate the social history, inclusive to cultural and racial factors, that developed, affected, and ultimately propelled the cemetery to move with the changing needs of the Black community. These needs paralleled the changes of the burial ground. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to also show how 19th century cemetery reform affected the change-to-business. The African American experiences were the catalyst for Mount Auburn cemetery to become a business and even the manner in which it functioned, but it was through the professionalization and efficiency of the national cemetery reform that *made* it a business. Ultimately, this article argues that as a Black cemetery its cultural influences were foundational to its transition into a business.

Unique to this article is the rich source material preserved for a detail level of understanding of just how this 19th century African American cemetery became a business. Many different types of records were created from Mount Auburn Cemetery and fortunately many were preserved. Each record left a trail in which a distinct aspect of the cemetery's existence was uncovered. Land deeds, plats, maps, and church class rosters all identified who purchased land for the cemetery and from whom it was purchased which helped to pinpoint the historical location of the different phases of the cemetery on its path into the death business. Land deeds for the four phases of Mount Auburn Cemetery provided fundamental logistical and background information about the different cemeteries. The price of the land, purpose of the land, and location of the land were all ascertained from these documents. Uncovering this information, led to questions about the layout of the cemetery itself. Deed books that were organized by year of sale shed light on the owners of the cemetery lots. Deed records spanning over a century, list the owners' names and addresses as well as the location and cost of the lots. The mortician employed was also listed for many. These deed books, although receipts for cemetery lots, represented land ownership and autonomy for African Americans. As early as 1837, African Americans

(enslaved, fugitive or free) were found owning a piece of property and controlling a part of their life-their death. Called deed owners (not just simple lot owners), these African Americans could transfer their small piece of property to another owner or deed it to heirs and assigns.

Trustee minutes (which included monthly and weekly financial reports) were also used. They gave an insider's view regarding the overall governance and day-to-day operations of the cemetery. In their own words, trustees discussed their ideas about how the cemetery should be governed. They voted on the position of «Superintendent of Cemetery», debated over the rules and regulations of cemetery grounds, and called special meetings over the selling of Belair Burial Ground, the third cemetery phase. These minutes illustrated how the cemetery changed, grew, and evolved into a business. Going through four phases, the financial records helped to further illustrate this evolution from a single service organization to a multi-layered business enterprise.

Phase one: African Burying Ground, the service operation (1807-1839)

Prior to the African Burying Ground, African Americans were either buried in Potter's Field or slave cemeteries.³ Potter's Field was a burying ground established on the outskirts of town in order to combat the issue of unclaimed dead bodies that were becoming health hazards around the city.⁴ Beginning in the late 1700's, burying grounds for strangers and the destitute were established in Baltimore city. East Potter's Field was founded in 1796 and was a burying ground with no physical or legal protections, and above all, no respect. The bodies interred there were only identifiable by a number on an «old piece of dry-goods casing».⁵ Buried in Potter's Field, as one writer of Maryland cemetery history put it, was «without roots – unknown, unmissed, and unmourned».⁶ However, African Americans did have roots. They were missed. They were mourned. But because there were not burial grounds for African Americans, none that allowed them to be lot owners, they were relegated to the Potter's Field.

Not only did enslaved African Americans not have a choice over where they were buried but they also faced the reality that they would spend eternity within the keep of their slaveholder. It was common for large slaveholders to set aside land for a «slave cemetery». Henry

Sater, a wealthy colonial slaveholder of tobacco who acquired 1170 acres in Baltimore County between 1716 and 1748, had one such slave cemetery.⁷ Even if death meant freedom for the enslaved African, the earthly body and burial were for the family left behind. The burial site is often visited by family and becomes an important place where family can communicate and feel connected with deceased kin. Therefore, an enslaved African American buried within the slaveholder's keep meant that his/her ties with kinship were severed.

In a very direct and indirect way, Potter's Field represented the seemingly invisible yet oppressed life African Americans lived on Earth. Potter's Field and slave cemeteries on slave plantations were symbolically at odds with African Americans and their beliefs about a) death and freedom and b) burying grounds and their role in kinship preservation. Ultimately, Potter's Field highlights the importance of the final resting place to African Americans for two main reasons: first because as a burying ground for the unclaimed dead, it separates African Americans from their kindred; and secondly, this fear of separation, loneliness and outright rejection of pauper status based on their just simply being African American propelled a real urgency for African Americans to establish a burying ground of their own.

The African Burying Ground was established by the African Methodist Church (now Sharp Street Memorial United Methodist Church) in 1807. Two and one quarter acres and eight square perches⁸ of land were deeded to the seven trustees of the African Methodist church on June 16, 1807. The deed recorded in the Maryland Land Records by county clerk William Gibson in book 94, page 229 goes on to list the seven trustees Jacob Gilliard, Richard Russell, William More, Joseph Sollers, Richard Mathew, John Sunderland, and John Mingo. The land was purchased for \$ 690.00 from Francis Hollingsworth and was located on the «northwest side of Madeira Alley [now Madeira Street] and running and bounding on Hague Street [now Cross Street]»⁹ (see Figure 1). The African Burying Ground was located within the Middle River section of the Town of Baltimore called Spring Gardens. «Spring Gardens is the section of South Baltimore lying along the north shore of the Middle Branch of the Patapsco River in what is known as Ridgely's Cove, to the northwest of the Hanover Street Bridge»¹⁰ (see Figure 2). This is consistent with cemeteries during

this early nineteenth century time period in that burying grounds were located next to churches and community town meeting houses, structures that served as the center of town.¹¹

The original trustees of the African Methodist Church and those to whom the African Burying Ground was deeded were among the leading African Americans in Baltimore. For example, historian Leroy Graham lists Jacob Gilliard as being part of the «more outstanding families» because his granddaughter, Maria, (his son Jacob Gilliard, Jr.'s daughter) later married Daniel Coker, a key organizer of Bethel African Church in Baltimore that would later, with Philadelphia Methodists, organize the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816.¹² Furthermore, Richard Russell is listed as a «prominent free Negro» who aided in the manumission of an enslaved male by the name of Lant. Lant, was not listed as being a kin relative. Nevertheless, Russell along with another African American, Ebo Prince, are cited as helping a fellow African American escape human bondage.¹³

The African Burying Ground was not just deeded to Gilliard, Russell, More, Sollers, Mathew, Sunderland, and Mingo, but also to their heirs and assigns. This is important in that the deed was specific about the burying ground remaining in the care of the original trustees or their heirs. However, if this was not cement enough, the deed also provided a clause reverting ownership back to the original trustees of the African Methodist Church.

Trust that whenever the [...] trustees [...] shall be reduced to the number of two by death, resignation, or any of the ceasing to be members of the said church reads the deed, the surviving or remaining trustees shall and will [...] convey said premises [...] to names prescribed in a deed with James Carey to Jacob Gilliard and others for a lot of ground on which the African church has been erected.¹⁴

The land was never meant to revert back to the umbrella Methodist church and furthermore was not meant to inter anyone but Africans and people of color.

It was through this burial ground that African Americans, free and enslaved, were able to become independent. The African Burying Ground gave African Americans decision-making power in where they were bur-

ied. The African Burying Ground was established as a service operation to African Americans. Internment reports in years 1818 and 1838 show that the burials in Potter's Field decreased by 56%.¹⁵ Therefore, in this first phase there were no hard and fast rules nor a solidified structure with tasks assigned to certain cemetery laborers. There was only one cemetery laborer, the Sexton, and it was this person's job both to provide maintenance to the church and bury the dead.¹⁶ But with loved ones just as likely to dig the grave and bury their own dead, this was not a definitive position that functioned like a cemetery employee. Cemetery revenues might have been generated from digging the lot and cemetery expenses from repairing tools such as shovels and scythes. But most likely the trustees allocated church funds for the necessary expenses.

Ultimately, Sharp Street Church trustee reports identify at least twenty African American benevolent and aid societies. The church organized and sponsored one of the earliest beneficial societies in 1820.¹⁷ Its purpose was to assure a decent burial and financial aid during sickness.¹⁸ By 1835, Sharp Street Church boasted of having «between thirty-five and forty benevolent institutions, both male and female, for mutual aid relief, each of which number[ed] from thirty-five to a hundred and fifty members».¹⁹

Sharp Street Church saw themselves as responsible for the betterment of their fellow people of color. In founding one of the first benevolent societies and confronting the racism in the Methodist church, Sharp Street Church saw themselves as helping themselves when they helped the collective Black community. The African Burying Ground was established in order to continue to help the Black race progress.

Phase two: Belair Burial Ground, structured self-sustainability (1839-1870)

Unlike the African Burying Ground that was located among the community of Spring Gardens, Belair Burial Ground was located in what was then Baltimore County among farm land and other grave yards. Examining the 1852 Thomas H. Poppleton map, there are at least a handful of graveyards within a few miles of Belair Burial Ground, namely the R.C. Cemetery, the African Independent Burial Ground (owned by Bethel Church), the Universalist Burying Ground and East

Potter's Field. Cemeteries were increasing in size and number and therefore thought needed to be separated from expanding city populations.

Cemeteries in the 1830's were thought as the curator of filth and disease and therefore moved to the outskirts of town. In this way, the Belair Burial Ground moved from south to north Baltimore and was pushed to self-sustain. This move also signaled their transition to the rural/garden model. The burial grounds were called «rural» because they were located in isolated, woody areas outside the city and referred to as «garden» because they invoked the nineteenth century Romantic picturesque style of art by occupying open meadows, encompassing naturalistic lakes and encouraging the construction of bigger-than-life monuments to the deceased. And because they were arguably styled after European gardens, they were designed to fit the landscape. Rural/garden burying grounds included paved walked ways which led them to be referred to as «cemeteries» – «dormant places of sleep or repose».²⁰ These rural and garden cemeteries easily incorporated dozens of acres, unlike the city burial grounds of the early nineteenth century. The rural cemetery quickly gained momentum for three reasons: 1) these large cemeteries on the outskirts of town addressed the overcrowding and health issues that city cemeteries created; 2) all revenue were put towards grounds maintenance preventing desecration from vandals and relieving loved ones of the responsibility of cleaning the grave site; and 3) these cemeteries were said to not be for the affluent but for people of all classes even people of color.

This transition to the rural/garden model put lot owners in control of the cemetery. Belair Burial Ground followed this trend allowing enslaved and free Blacks freedom and autonomy from white control. This freedom and autonomy was symbolized through the land ownership. Belair Burial Ground allowed African Americans to be property owners by purchasing land deeds for burial plots for \$ 6.00, \$ 8.00 or \$ 10.00 per lot.²¹ This was important because as land owners African Americans were able to bear the fruits of their labor. No longer were they just economically exploited by Whites to no end but now able to accrue capital and use it to benefit themselves, the collective African American community, and ultimately their descendants.

The social climate may have been hostile to Blacks and their job opportunities reduced to menial labor regardless of skill set but

through cemeteries, they could be land owners. Although, it is true that there were African American land owners during the antebellum period, this was not the norm and they were far and few between. In Baltimore in 1815 only 5,3% of the African American population owned property and in 1850 it went down to 4%.²² Belair Burial Ground allowed African Americans to own land without the involvement of Whites. Belair Burial Ground gave the ability to successfully circumnavigate the paternalistic system of slavery that *all* African Americans were forced to operate within – that is that land was controlled by White males. Through Belair Burial Ground, African Americans were now able to turn around and sell small plots of land to other African Americans.

Belair Burial Ground provided African Americans the opportunity to create land owners out of hundreds of African Americans. Records indicated that about 469 African Americans bought lots at Belair Burial Ground.²³ Of this amount, about fifty bought either two or three lots, mostly at different time periods. Taking into account these multiple lot owners, there are still 419 separate African American land owners in Belair Burial Ground in Baltimore between 1839 and 1867.

This idea of viewing death as an opportunity for autonomy is clearly illustrated in the numerous benevolent societies where Belair Burial Ground benefitted. African Americans got together and started benevolent societies so that this autonomy and control over a portion of one's life – his/her death – was able to be extended to all African Americans. Burial was always an important part of African American life and scholars such as Melville Herskovits have argued, it was an Africanism, an «element of culture found in the New World that was traceable to an African origin».²⁴ As early as 1847, Sam Ware, a class leader in 1815, put forth a bill to incorporate a burial society called the «First John Mingo African Benevolent Society of Baltimore».²⁵ By 1835, Sharp Street Church boasted of having «between thirty-five and forty benevolent institutions, both male and female, for mutual relief, each of which number[ed] from thirty-five to hundred and fifty members».²⁶

Members of these benevolent and burial societies pooled their money to make sure that all African Americans, not just members of these societies, had a proper burial, inclusive to burial plot and coffin. Therefore, those African Americans who could not afford to buy a burial

lot in Belair Burial Ground could still be given a proper burial and not thrown away to the Potter's Field. In conjunction, Belair Burial Ground set aside a section of the cemetery, noted in the records as «Stranger's Ground» for those presumably not members of Sharp Street Church as well as too poor to pay for their own burial lot.

By 1839, Belair Burial Ground remained a service operation, but now had an organizational structure, an established set of rules, and was generating revenue and incurring expenditures. Figure 3 lists the four rules that governed the burying ground. The rules outline cost for digging graves. With new found autonomy, Belair Burial Ground interred many more bodies that a fee and completed application, prior to burial, was required. Internments were now being scheduled, relegated to the sexton, and purchased. Belair Burial Ground allowed African Americans to preserve kinship ties.

Deed holders filled out order application forms that were then turned over to the Sexton who buried the bodies. Figure 4 is an example of such forms which notified the sexton of a) the date and time of internment, b) person(s) to be interred, c) the type and dimensions of the grave to dig, and d) just what he/she died from. The later part was important due to concerns about communicable diseases. Reports were compiled in the form of Trustee Cash Books. These cash books outlined the expenses incurred and revenues generated by all church properties. As Table 1 points out, the Belair Burial Ground generated more than enough money to sustain itself with expenditures reduced to fixing spouts and revenues from digging graves.

Table 1. Belair Burial Ground Revenues and Expenses, 1867-1869

Date	Revenue	Expenses
1867	\$ 190.13	\$ 15.05
1868	\$ 246.00	\$ 42.50
1869	\$ 371.75	\$ 186.38
Total	\$ 807.88	\$ 243.93

Source: Sharp Street Memorial Church Records, Board of Trustees Cash Book, 1863-1873, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, microfilm MdHR M Reel 3114-6

As Belair Burial Ground, the cemetery had organized in structure, started generating revenue and accruing expenses, although minimal. The structure kept the cemetery functioning in an efficient manner so that internment services could be carried out smoothly. With the apparent increase in burials, the «Order to Sexton at Belair Burial Ground» forms allowed the Sexton to know all the logistics for interring the dead and be able to plan accordingly. Since the applications were filled out ahead of time, the Sexton could plan the day knowing the amount of burials as it correlated with other church maintenance. The burial ground was easily self-sustained and managed by just the trustee board and church Sexton.

Measuring two acres and ten perches²⁷ in size, Belair Burial Ground filled up in 1867. Land for a new burial ground was purchased in December 1871. From 1871 until 1881 Sharp Street Cemetery functioned the same way as its two predecessors; it was a service organization.

Phase three: Sharp Street Cemetery, professionalization and efficiency (1870-1894)

With the closing of Belair Burial Ground, Sharp Street Church was forced to move its burying ground from north back to south Baltimore where an African American community called Hullsville (now Mount Winans) was forming. Hullsville was started in 1869 as a result of the growing industry in the county. Since the factories, iron works, and railroad yards where the people worked were miles from where they lived, people began to settle where they worked. Of those who settled Hullsville in its first three years of existence were thirteen families from Sharp Street Church. Soon after, an outreach mission to the people of Hullsville was established by Sharp Street Church. This mission soon developed into a permanent church (present-day Mount Winans United Methodist Church) and became an integral part of the community through its outreach work but also its role with the cemetery (see Figure 5).

This area of Baltimore County was an industrial hotbed. Within Hullsville's borders alone, there were four factories by 1876: Harrington & Mills Furniture Factory, Otto & Garrison's Moulding

Factory, Millier's Safe Works, and Heinekamp's Piano Factory. The Mount Winan's Post office sat at the southernmost edge of town while the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad ran along Hullsville's direct western border (see Figure 5). Seeing the industry and growth of this Black town, Sharp Street Church moved its cemetery there. This move was instrumental to Hullsville and beneficial to Mount Auburn Cemetery because it would prove fruitful to Sharp Street Cemetery starting a relationship between the cemetery and the town that would span into the twenty-first century.

As early as 1878, the Baltimore City Street Commissioners started making assessments of properties and financial returns to property owners located on the path of Patterson Park Avenue.²⁸ This required Sharp Street Church to disinter all 469 deceased persons within Belair Burial Ground serving as the catalyst to professionalization and efficiency.

The move from Belair Avenue all the way down to Annapolis Road put what would become Sharp Street Cemetery on the path to professionalization. This was not a simple disinternment where relatives could reinter at their leisure. This was, instead, a state mandated time sensitive endeavor that was orchestrated on two levels. First, a group of individuals facilitated the move by issuing notice to those who had kin buried in Belair Burial Ground and outlining the plan and rules.²⁹ Secondly, an appointed trustee³⁰ executed the plan overseeing the labor making sure that a) all tools and hauling supplies were provided; b) the needed amount of laborers were hired and that, c) hired laborers were fully informed of their tasks (i.e. disinterring the correct lot, and reintering to the correct lot and burial ground), and d) monthly internment logs outlining lot owner, lot number, number of graves disinterred were updated. The necessary logistics brought about professionalization and e.

The move started Sharp Street Cemetery on the path to becoming a business enterprise. In the twenty-eight years of Belair Burial Ground 475 deeds were sold, whereas, in less than half that time, Sharp Street Cemetery sold 617 deeds. Their development into a business that began with preserving the dead quickly turned to them seeking to improve the cemetery. First, Baltimore's finest surveyor, Simon J. Martenet, surveyed the cemetery in October 1871 to de-

termine the correct boundaries. Later in September 1879, Martenet came back and divided the cemetery into six sections with equal-sized lots within each section: Section A-499 lots; Section B-617 lots; Section C-117 lots; Section D-525 lots; Section E-408 lots; Section F-244 lots. Where there were around 420 lots available in Belair Burial Ground, there were 2,410 lots in the new Sharp Street Cemetery. Then, in addition to buying a vault in September 1874, the trustees made improvements to better the cemetery roads in February 1875, new panels were bought for the gate in September 1880, and a new well was installed May 1885.

Sharp Street Cemetery was established during the Reconstruction Era of American history. The institution of slavery had just been abolished in Maryland in 1864. In the same year, the Rev. Benjamin Brown, Sr. was assigned as the first African American senior pastor to Sharp Street as well as one of the first two African American preachers to be seated in the law making body of Methodism at their General Conference that year. Life for African Americans in the United States as well as Baltimore was seemingly improving. Sharp Street Cemetery was following this progress as well as helping to foster it.

The cemetery was riding the same progressive wave that some African Americans in Baltimore were during Reconstruction. This was reflected by the structure of the cemetery as it began to form and cement. The layout divided the cemetery into six lettered sections – sections A-F. Between each section were walks. These walks were named after significant members of Sharp Street Church. Of these seven walks were Peck Avenue, Brown Avenue, and Young Ave. James Peck was pastor of Sharp Street Church (1868-1869) at the time Sharp Street Cemetery was founded and dedicated as «The City of the Dead for Colored People». Research suggests that Brown Avenue is named in honor of Reverend Benjamin Brown, Sr., the first African American preacher of Sharp Street and first preacher to be seated in the law making body of Methodism in the history of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Young Avenue, then, is believed to be dedicated to Jacob Young, one of the handful of African American preachers that petitioned the right to form the Washington Mission Conference that was the «first session of the Colored Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church».³¹

Sharp Street Cemetery also included an onsite office to handle the increasing business of the cemetery. This increase in lots led to a restructuring in staff and increase in revenue. Financial records from 1863-1871 list a lone Mr. E. Atkinson as the sexton. On May 19, 1863 he is listed as receiving a salary of \$ 2.50. On August 8, 1864 he is listed as receiving \$ 0.75 and \$ 0.50 for digging graves and cemetery general maintenance. During this time period, Belair Burial Ground profited \$ 279.60 a year with minimal repairs and service maintenance. In comparison, Sharp Street Cemetery lists John T. Parker and unnamed sexton assistants in financial records. As Table 2 indicates, in 1882 the sexton is listed as paid \$ 320 for the year.

Table 2. Salary of the Sexton, 1882

Date	Paid Sexton
January 9, 1882	\$ 48.00
February 6, 1882	\$ 32.00
April 6, 1882	\$ 50.00
April 24, 1882	\$ 50.00
May 29, 1882	\$ 50.00
June 26, 1882	\$ 40.00
July 31, 1882	\$ 50.00

Source: Sharp Street Memorial Church Records, Reel 3114 Board of Trustees Cash Book, 1863-1873

Furthermore, Sharp Street Cemetery received much more in revenue and extended more on expenses than Belair Burial Ground. On average, between 1874 and 1893, Sharp Street Cemetery received \$ 66,783.96 in burial lot sales, lot orders, and vault rentals which averages \$ 3,514.95 per year. During this same nineteen year time period, the cemetery accrued \$ 25,288.25 in expenses inclusive to setting tombstones, sharpening/repairing tools, sexton assistants, and cemetery agents which averages to \$ 1330.96 per year. Table 3 illustrates the yearly breakdown within a three-year time period. All in all, Sharp Street Cemetery was organizing into a separate business for the church.

Table 3. Belair Burial Ground and Sharp Street Cemetery
Revenue and Expenses, 1867-1869

Belair Burial Ground			Sharp Street Cemetery		
Year	Revenue	Expenses	Year	Revenue	Expenses
1867	\$ 237.96	\$ 9.95	1884	\$ 2,172.87	\$ 2,481.98
1868	\$ 229.10	\$ 42.50	1885	\$ 2,316.50	\$ 2,387.11
1869	\$ 371.75	\$ 111.32	1886	\$ 2,366.21	\$ 1,869.04

Source: Sharp Street Memorial Church Records, Reel 3114 Belair Burial Ground Financial Records

The lots for each section had increased. Sections C and F, the two oldest sections, priced lots at \$ 10.00. Sections A and B priced lots at \$ 12.00 and section D and E priced lots at \$ 14.00. Furthermore as a business, Sharp Street Cemetery implemented four rules and regulations regarding internment, vault rental at their respective prices. Figure 6 shows these regulations as: Rule 1, money for digging the lot must be paid at time of application; Rule 2, money must be paid in full at the time bodies are placed in vaults; Rule 3, if bodies from the vault are not removed on time, parties will be subject to additional charges, and if not paid, the body will be removed by Sexton; Rule 4, those of Sharp Street, Orchard, John Wesley and Saratoga Mission Churches are subject to discounts in ground, digging, and vaultage prices.

These regulations were just the tip of the iceberg when it came to the changes taking place with the new Sharp Street Cemetery. The cemetery was not just a place for interring African Americans due to racial discrimination, it was now a business quickly developing into its own financially sustaining entity. And a key component to this development were new paid employers.

Up until 1882 trustees were not paid employees of the cemetery; they were administrators. They collected revenue from the cemetery and allocated money for its expenses. Trustees such as J.A. Harris and J.W. James listed collected monies from lot sales and cemetery lot orders in their Trustee Cash Books. However, after 1882 designated trustees were listed in cumulative cemetery financial reports as Ceme-

tery Agents collecting commissions on completed lot sales. This was a significant turning point from service to business enterprise because a church trustee did not oversee the internment service, but a paid cemetery employee. Further, paid employees received *incentives* for selling the most lots while Cemetery Agents only received commission on lot sales that were paid-in-full by deed holders at the time of transaction.

By the 1870s, cemeteries were controlled by Cemetery Superintendents, who as professionals that represented cemetery corporations, were responsible for the longevity and prosperity of their companies.

Phase four: Mount Auburn Cemetery, the business enterprise (1894-present)

Using the momentum of professionalization as a catalyst, Chair of the Sharp Street Church Trustee Board, Thomas Brooks believed that Mount Auburn Cemetery should head in the direction of a multi-layered business enterprise and so tried to propel it so. «We should get our business», started Brooks at the March 6, 1911 trustee meeting «in such shape as to make it real business».³² The «our business» to «real business» transition was one from a single service operation to an expansive business enterprise. After 1871, providing service out-of-need shifted to providing quality service to an increasing number of patrons. Once internment was no longer the primary duty but selling lots, taking lot orders, making and distributing deeds, constant cemetery maintenance were the pressing obligations, the cemetery expanded adding twenty-six more contiguous acres in 1886. This exponential growth required a new paid staff with a professional cemetery manager for all cemetery tasks.

The «our business» to «real business» transition marked a shift from a church property with governing trustees to a self-sufficient multi-layered business venture with its own staff. As a church property, the trustees were in care of the cemetery. Their main task was to compile and compose reports on its status and varied activities. Trustee reports from 1863 through 1873 reported simple revenue and expenditures: \$ 25.00 for removing dirt, \$ 24.00 for repairing a fence and \$ 687.57 for lot sales. The reporting style indicates that the cemetery was not seen as a separate property. Over the next ten years, however, it became the primary graveyard, increasing responsibilities and expenses. These increasing responsibilities started it on its way to becoming a business.

Brooks advocated for a business-like operation that invoked a sense of pride while addressing accountability. On New Year's Day 1885, sexton John F. Parker was charged with leaving a corpse to lie exposed on the burial grounds. Although found innocent, over the next five years several written complaints were filed against Parker, many of which attacked his character. Then in 1899 twenty citizens from communities surrounding the cemetery all drew up a formal petition against Parker for «drinking beer» and «using the [cemetery] as a political headquarters». ³³ Changes were made and the trustees decided that they did not need to employ someone who reflected negatively on the cemetery. In 1902 Charles T. Parker (with no clear relation to John Parker) was hired on a trial basis but then resigned in May 1906 leaving the position to be primarily filled by local temporary employers Berry Sherman or George Robinson.

Brooks' comments pertaining to getting the cemetery in «shape» to be a real business were spot on here because although business development was the aim, professional reputation was the foundation from which the business would develop. Brooks advocated for business development and via three recommendations. First, he suggested putting into place a more accountable system to report cemetery lot sales. Second, appoint one Cemetery Agent to deal directly with the day-to-day obligations of the cemetery. ³⁴ Third, provide compensation for all laborers involved with the management of the cemetery and its records. The recommendations did not fall on deaf ears or even enter into debate or dispute. Instead, all were swiftly seconded and approved.

As a business enterprise, Mount Auburn Cemetery must be effectively maintained, which was illustrated with a new physical cemetery structure and internal flow chart. On May 31, 1886, Mount Auburn Cemetery put all lot owners and undertakers on notice that there would be «no more wooden fences enclosed around lots in Sharp Street Cemetery». ³⁵ Later in 1903, three galvanized iron gates with inscriptions were placed at each entrance of the cemetery – the main entrance, on Annapolis Road, read «Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord» and other two entrances at Hollins Ferry Road read «And this mortal shall put on immortality» and Waterview Avenue read «The dead shall be raised». ³⁶ They followed the cemetery reform of the time and became a lawn-park cemetery. Lawn-park cemeteries of the late nineteenth and

early twentieth century were distinguished by their picturesque landscape. Headstones were flat and unobtrusive. The lawn-park was to be as flat as a front lawn and as open and as a park.

In addition, Mount Auburn Cemetery set out to establish a perpetual care fund, another key characteristic of the lawn-park cemetery. Initiated October 16, 1900, it was decided that «10% of the gross receipts be set aside each year».³⁷ From the records, it was clear that the perpetual care of theory was not so easily set into practice because three years later they put only their «best [section] under perpetual care».³⁸ This too was unsuccessful and by 1906 they were charging a flat \$ 20.00 for perpetual care to individual cemetery lots. By 1916 ads continuously ran in the «Afro-American» newspaper telling lot holders that «\$ 1.00 will be charged against the account of each lot owner» and they would not be allowed to bury their dead until the perpetual care had been fully paid.³⁹

The internal structure was now separated from Sharp Street Church with an entire system of employees and cemetery management. A Superintendent of Cemetery and staff was in charge of the day-to-day operations while the trustee board was pushed further and further back from governing the cemetery. As Figure 7 points out, there was a three-tier structure with the superintendent at the top, a cemetery assistant as next in command with extra help, hired as needed, on the bottom tier. The trustee's role became limited and designated to a cemetery committee composed of trustees who dealt with the governance of the cemetery.

Mount Auburn Cemetery was a business that created a new economy for African Americans. The changing social status of African Americans throughout this post-Reconstruction/Progressive period was key factor in how the cemetery became a business enterprise. These circumstances all led to the rise of African American undertakers. As early as 1865 African American undertakers were present in Baltimore and around 1882 undertakers appear in the Mount Auburn Cemetery records. Understanding that death, but more so the ceremonial prepping and sending off to the afterlife, was of high priority, undertakers were able to capitalize and fulfill a greatly needed service in the Black community. During slavery, many African Americans were not allowed the privilege of elaborate burial ceremonies that signified a proper burial

for their kin. Nor were they allowed the ceremonial space to grieve the abrupt departure of life that is death while simultaneously celebrating the next phase of life, the afterlife. Once slavery was abolished and Blacks experienced the spacial freedom that comes from the absence of slavery, they immediately sought to take part in elaborate death ceremonies for their kin.

Many African Americans, who were adopting some Western cultural funerary norms, used expenditures as a way to signify their immense love for their deceased kin. Undertakers funeralized the dead with beauty and expressiveness.⁴⁰ However, meeting this demand of providing a proper late nineteenth century funeral required capital. It is instructive to note, because this 1870-1907 time period was post-slavery, African Americans (and not slaveholders) were economically benefitting from their labor. Therefore, African Americans became undertakers because African American death and burial norms created a demand for which they had the cultural skill-set and capital to fill.

Within the first decade of the twentieth century, the lucrative financial enterprise of African American undertakers became well-known. Conducting a meeting of the National Negro Business Men's League (NNBML) in August 1908, Booker T. Washington intently listened to discussions of the financial success men from Baltimore and throughout the country were having from the undertaking trade. The meeting, held at Sharp Street Church, reported that undertakers were grossing from \$ 5,000 to \$ 150,000.

Early African American undertakers in Baltimore were also among the wealthiest. All were active undertakers at Mount Auburn Cemetery. Felix B. Pye, who provided only funeral directing and superb embalming services, charged \$ 35.00 for his services. In 1906, he buried 152 deceased persons in Mount Auburn Cemetery earning \$ 5,320 from this cemetery alone.⁴¹ What's more is that one newspaper article lists both Pye and John H. Toadvin as having net incomes exceeding \$ 3,000 in 1915 after taxes and other expenses had been paid.⁴² Upon his death in 1913, an inventory of Alexander Hemsley's estate totaled \$ 19,000 of which included cash bank accounts as well as real estate throughout Baltimore city.⁴³

This entrepreneurial spirit is one of collective capital gain because African American undertakers, as well as their businesses, were part of

their communities and not entities apart from them. Their goal was not to simply profit from the community, receiving maximum gain in exchange for a service. No, their goal was to move in and establish worthwhile businesses that would build up their Black communities with industry while providing a quality service in the process. This communal attitude is further exemplified by not only the reason why many African American undertakers went into the undertaking trade and started funerary businesses but also with their volunteer service activities on behalf of the betterment of their community as a whole or both. Two of the oldest African American undertakers, James Anderson Handy and Alexander Hemsley, were prominent members in several fraternal societies devoted to the uplift of the African American community. Anderson helped found the Grand Order of Nazarites in 1854.

Conclusion

Understanding the internal and external factors that led to Mount Auburn Cemetery becoming a business is important. It is this analysis that tells the story of both survival and growth of the burial site. As Maryland's first African American burial ground, this article documents efforts to professionalize the craft of funerary practices reflecting a people and an era. Mount Auburn Cemetery's continued existence is one of sheer resilience and ingenuity.

What came to be known as Mount Auburn Cemetery was once a simple two and one-fourth acre graveyard. However, this graveyard changed and developed into a thirty-four acre cemetery generating revenue and serving as a cultural institution symbolizing the struggle and perseverance of African American people. The transition from the African Burying Ground to Mount Auburn Cemetery was grand but smooth. It followed the needs, social condition, and progress of the African American people. The first phase, the African Burying Ground, allowed autonomy and independence during the institution of slavery. It gave Blacks the freedom to bury their own without the hand of white control. Blacks could openly and freely practice the burial rites of their African ancestry. The second phase, Belair Burial Ground, was another blow to slavery. It was fueled by benevolent and burial societies, societies organized to pay for proper burials inclusive to buying a coffin and

digging a grave. The free Black population in cities around the country was increasing; Baltimore was no exception. Free blacks were capitalizing on this strength-in-numbers, founding these societies, and providing a way for their enslaved brethren to fight enslavement by buying property and controlling a part of their life, their death. Once slavery was abolished, the cemetery was transformed in its last two phases, Sharp Street Cemetery and Mount Auburn Cemetery respectively. In these phases it became a place where African Americans asserted their citizenship, wealth-building. The cemetery generated revenue for the Black community by servicing Black business, mainly Black undertakers. Prominent African Americans in the community bought lots and were buried there leaving it to serve as a cultural reminder of Black perseverance during this long struggle for freedom.

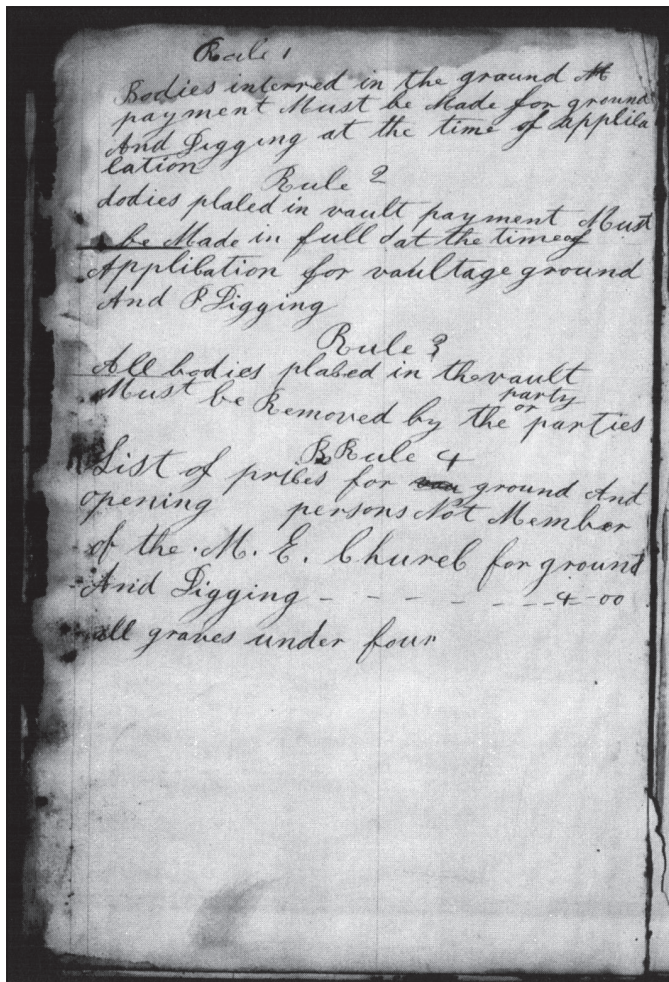


Figure 3. Belair Burial Grounds Rules and Regulations. Note: [transcription] «Rule 1 – Bodies interred in the ground, payment must be made for ground and digging at the time of application; Rule 2 – Bodies placed in vault, payment must be made in full of at the time of application for vaultage, ground, and digging; Rule 3 – All bodies placed in the vault must be removed by the party or parties; Rule 4 – List of parties for ground and opening – persons not member of Methodist Episcopal Church for ground and digging is \$ 4.00. All graves under four» [the record is incomplete]

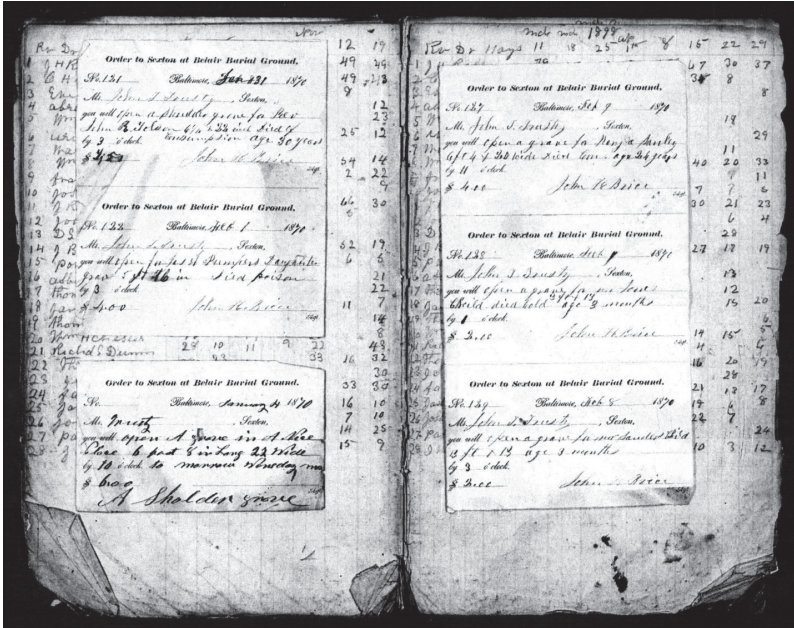


Figure 4. [transcription] «Order to Sexton at Belair Burial Ground, Baltimore, January 4, 1870. Mr. Trusty, Sexton. You will open a grave in a nice place 6 feet 8 inches long 22 wide. By 10 o'clock tomorrow Wednesday morning; \$ 6.00. A Shoulder Grave»

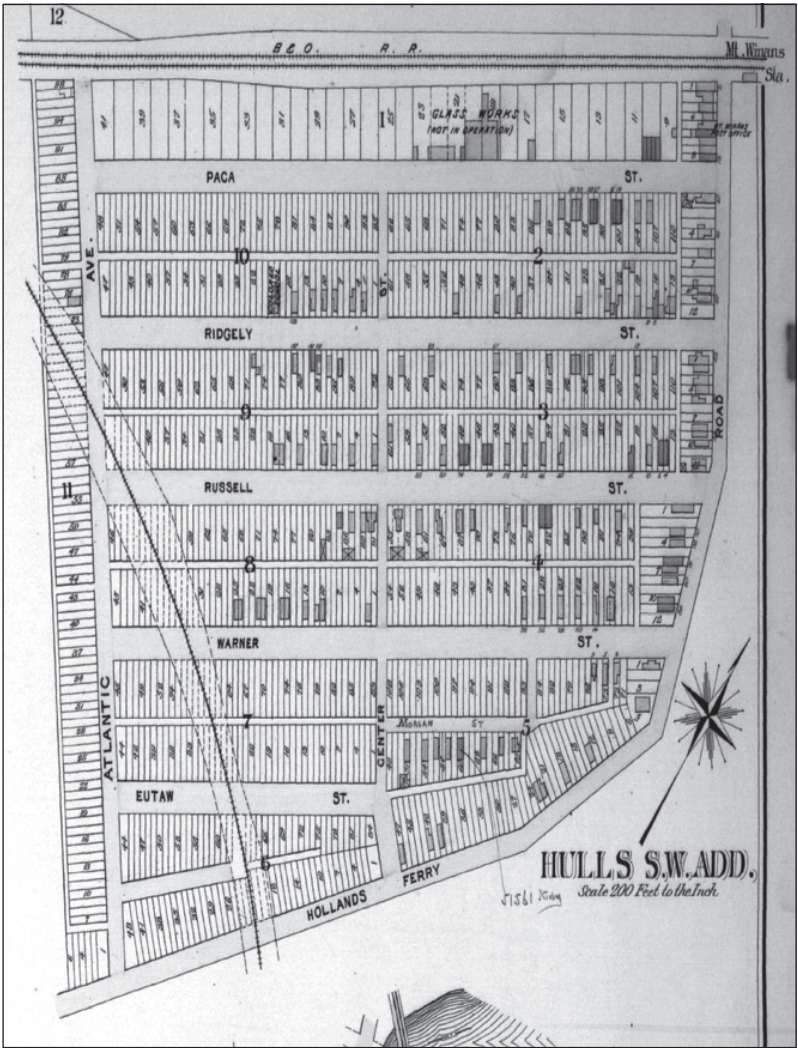


Figure 5. Plat of Hullsville, dated June 20, 1873, subdivision along the Southeastern side of the B&O Railroad. A-D label the economic, social, and educational industries of Hullsville. A: Mt. Winans train stop on the B&O Railroad; B: Mt. Winans Post office; C: Glass Works; D: Colored School, segregated school for African American children (source: Baltimore City, Baltimore County Atlas Collection bc-ba-atlas-1876-1915)

REGULATIONS
FOR
Sharp Street Cemetery,

Situated on the Old Annapolis Road, just
beyond Mt. Winans.

1st.

Bodies interred in the Ground, payment for the same must be made in full for Ground and Digging at the time of application.

2d.

Bodies placed in the vault, payment must be made in full at the time of application for Vaultage, Ground and Digging.

3d.

Parties having bodies placed in the Vault must have the same removed, or pay one or more month's additional Vaultage at the expiration of the time for which application was made; if not, such bodies will be subject to removal by the Sexton.

4th.

Prices for Ground, Digging, Vaultage, &c., for members of the following Churches, namely:

Sharp St. Station, M. E. Church, Orchard St. M. E. Church, John Wesley M. E. Church, or Saratoga Mission M. E. Church.

For Plain Grave, Ground and Digging,	- - -	\$2.00
" Shoulder " " " " " "	- - -	5.00

Persons not members of either of the above named Churches will be subject to the following rates:

Plain Grave, Ground and Digging, (over five feet,)	\$4.50
Shoulder " " " " " "	6.00
Grave from 4 to 5 feet, Plain,	\$4.00, Shoulder, \$5.00
" 3 to 4 " " "	3.50, " 4.25
" 2 to 3 " " "	2.50, " 3.00
" for Still Born, " "	2.00.

For Digging Graves in Lots:

Grown Persons,	Plain,	- - - - -	\$1.25
	Shoulder,	- - - - -	3.00
Children,	2 to 3 feet, Plain,	\$1.00, Shoulder,	\$1.50
	3 to 4 " " "	1.00, " "	2.00
	4 to 5 " " "	1.25, " "	2.50

VAULTAGE.

Grown Person, 5 ft. or over,	\$1.25 1st month; \$1.00 per month thereafter.
Children, 1.00	.75 " "

All work not mentioned in these Rules will be subject to such terms as the Parties and Sexton may make.

Figure 6. Regulations for Sharp Street Cemetery

Mount Auburn Cemetery		
Sharp Street Church Trustee Board		
Cemetery Superintendent		Trustee Board
Cemetery Superintendent Assistant		Cemetery Committee
Extra Help	Cemetery Agent	Secretary

Figure 7. Organizational Chart of Mount Auburn Cemetery, 1896

Primary sources

*Baltimore City Archives,
201 Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21202*

- Baltimore City Archives Health Department, BRG 19
- Baltimore City Health Department Bureau of Vital Statistics, Death Record, CR 48045, Microfilm
- Baltimore City, Baltimore County Atlas Collection bc-ba-atlas, 1876-1915
- Weekly Report of Internments, BCA BRG 19

*Lovely Lane United Methodist Museum and Archives,
2200 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21218*

SHARP STREET MEMORIAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH COLLECTION:

- Baltimore-Washington Conference minutes, 1794-present
- Historical Facts about Sharp Street Memorial Methodist Church booklet

*Maryland Historical Society,
201 West Monument Street, Baltimore, MD 21201*

BOOKS:

- L.G. Browne, *Baltimore in the Nation, 1789-1861*
- A. Land, *Colonial Maryland: A History*

- The Commissioner of Health of Baltimore, Maryland, *Baltimore City Health Department: The First Thirty-Five Annual Reports, 1815-1849*

NEWSPAPERS:

- McCardell, *John Moale Started Something When He Moved Baltimore North*, n.d.
- C.C. Hartman, *Mount Winans Seeks to Retain Its Own Character*, «News-American», February 23, 1969

*Maryland State Archives,
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SHARP STREET MEMORIAL CHURCH COLLECTION, SC4010 COLLECTION
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- *History of the Baltimore City Sharp Street Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church 1787-1920*, by B.C. Thomas from the «One Hundred and Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Journal», October 1977, MdHR M 3112-1
- Class Book 1825-1841, MdHR M 3112-2
- Class Leaders Roll Book 1896-1907, MdHR M 3113
- Cemetery Records 1839-1884, MdHR M 3113-8, pp. 343-89
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- Cemetery Records 1883-1901, MdHR M 3114-3, p. 410
- Cemetery Lot Owners Book 1872-1893, MdHR M 3114-2
- Cemetery Records 1885-1892, MdHR M 3114-1, pp. 413-60
- Board of Trustees Cash Book 1863-1873, MdHR M 3114-6
- Board of Trustees Cash Book 1874-1893, MdHR M 3114-7, pp. 573-619
- Board of Trustees Minutes and Financial Records 1882-1893, MdHR M 3115-1
- Board of Trustees and Financial Records 1906-1911, MdHR M 3115-3

Real business: Maryland's first black cemetery

- Board of Stewards Treasurers Book 1874-1880, 1914-1922, MdHR M 3116-5
- Board of Stewards Treasurers Book 1897-1927, MdHR M 3117-1

*Sharp Street Memorial United Methodist Church,
Dolphin and Etting Streets, Baltimore, MD 21217*

SHARP STREET ARCHIVAL CENTER:

- Trustee Minutes, 1897-1905
- E.N. Wilson. *Historical Facts About Sharp Street Memorial Methodist Church*

MOUNT AUBURN CEMETERY HOLDING:

- Financial Department Records, Feb. 9, 1925-April 14, 1930
- Record book of SSMED, 1894-1914
- Belair Burial Ground, 1895-1902
- Church Records, 1895-1904
- Folder of Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Internments
- Cemetery 1879-1893
- Deed Books, February 20, 1888-March 24, 1972
- Death Books, December 31, 1920-January 28, 1999
- Cemetery ledger, 1872-1901
- Cemetery ledger, 1875-1946
- Order books, 1898-1909

NEWSPAPERS:

- «Afro-American»
- «Baltimore Sun»

Notes

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Myron Strong and Dr. Lauren Kientz Anderson for reading and providing critical feedback to the content and naming of this article.

² Mount Auburn Cemetery is owned by Sharp Street Memorial United Methodist Church, the oldest African Methodist church in Baltimore, MD which dates back to 1787. Founded by free African Americans, it was a result of push back to racial discrimination and push forward for racial progress. For a history of Sharp Street Church, see *History of the Baltimore City Sharp Street Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church, 1787-1920*, by B.C. Thomas, Maryland State Archives, MdHR M 3112-1.

³ In 19th century Maryland, there are accounts of African Americans buried within one Quaker, three Catholic burying grounds. However, with close examination of these burying grounds, it was concluded that even though African Americans were buried there, they were interred out of some religious obligation to bury foreigners, strangers, and the destitute but not because these African Americans were on equal footing. They were buried at the mercy of whites and not of their own choosing.

⁴ The burial grounds were called Potter's Fields after its biblical namesake. The Bible states that after Judas discarded the thirty pieces of silver he received for betraying Jesus, the priests retrieved the coins. Upon counsel, they decided to use the silver to buy the potter's field and make it into a «cemetery of foreigners» (Matthew 27:7).

⁵ *Batting Skulls Around Affords Amusement to Small Boys in Potter's Field*, «Baltimore Sun», November 5, 1924.

⁶ J. Bromley Wilson, *The Very Quiet Baltimoreans: A Guide to the Historic Cemeteries and Burial Sites of Baltimore*, White Man Publishing Company Inc., Shippenburg (PA) 1991, p. 99.

⁷ *Maryland Heraldry: Histories of Distinguished Families and Persons THE SATER LINEAGE*, «Baltimore Sun», January 14, 1906.

⁸ A perch is a unit of measure commonly used during this time period; 1 perch equals 16.5 feet.

⁹ Maryland State Land Records, Deeds, Book 94, pp. 229-32.

¹⁰ Spring Gardens, vertical file, Maryland Historical Society (Baltimore, Maryland).

¹¹ D.C. Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London 1991, pp. 13-15.

¹² L. Graham, *Baltimore: The Nineteenth Century Black Capital*, University Press of America Inc., Washington (DC) 1982; G.F. Bragg, *Men of Maryland*, Church Advocate Press, Baltimore (MD) 1914, pp. 37-40.

¹³ C. Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African-American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago 1997, p. 51.

¹⁴ Maryland State Land Records, Deeds, book 94, pp. 229-32.

¹⁵ The Commissioner of Health of Baltimore, MD, *Baltimore City Health Department: The First Thirty-Five Annual Reports 1815-1849*; Weekly Report of Internments, Baltimore City Archives, BCA BRG 19-1-10-1-2. These reports show that in 1818, 395 free and enslaved African Americans were interred in both East and West Potter's Field; and that in 1838, 220 free and enslaved African Americans were interred in both East and West Potter's Field. This shows a 175 person deduction or 56%.

¹⁶ A sexton is an official of a church charged with maintenance of the church and the church gravesite including burying the dead.

¹⁷ E.N. Wilson, *Historical Facts About Sharp Street Memorial Methodist Church* (Sharp Street Archival Center).

¹⁸ Ivi, pp. 7-12.

¹⁹ J.T. Scharf, *History of Maryland from the Earliest Period to the Present Day*, Tradition Press, Hatsboro (PA) 1879, III, p. 324.

²⁰ J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1980, p. 111.

²¹ Sharp Street Memorial Church Records, Board of Trustees Cash Book, 1863-1873, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Microfilm MdHR M Reel 3114-6.

²² C. Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African-American Community of Baltimore* cit., p. 99.

²³ Sharp Street Memorial Church Records, Cemetery Records 1839-1884, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Microfilm MdHR M Reel 3113-8.

²⁴ J.E. Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture* [second edition], Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2005, p. 2.

²⁵ *Twenty-Ninth Congress*, «Baltimore Sun», February 27, 1847.

²⁶ J.T. Scharf, *History of Maryland* cit., p. 324.

²⁷ A perch is a unit of measure commonly used during this time period; 1 perch equals 16.5 feet.

²⁸ *New Church Building at Canton: Brief Locals*, «Afro-American», December 23, 1881; *Hotel Thieves*, «Afro-American», December 25, 1879. City Commissioners surveyed property along Patterson Park Avenue that would be affected what the street was extended and those affected would be paid compensation. Because it was a burial ground, Belair Burial Ground was rendered «impractical» for burial purposes due to these advancements and improvements.

²⁹ Notices by way of newspaper ads were issued and reissued. In 1884, an ad for reinterment was still running in the «Baltimore Sun» and the «New York Herald». Notices were also carried via church announcements as well as word-of-mouth.

³⁰ At the June 13, 1884 trustee meeting, it was determined that George Milbourne, devoted trustee and active church member, was elected «superintendent for removal at Belair Burial Ground». He enlisted the help of trustees and other hired hands paid \$ 2.00 per grave, \$ 1.00 for half graves, and \$ 0.50 for one-fourth graves (Sharp Street Memorial Church Records, Cemetery Records 1839-1884 [Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Maryland], microfilm MdHR M 3118-8).

³¹ *First session of Colored Conference*, from Sharp Street Archival Center, Baltimore (MD).

³² Sharp Street Memorial Church Records, Board of Trustees Minutes and Financial Records 1882-1893, MdHR M 3115-1.

³³ «Baltimore Sun», January 18, 1899. That coming fall Parker was nominated by the Independent party for a Baltimore county office representing the 13th district. Democrats endorsed the nomination.

³⁴ Up to this point, the Cemetery Agent only sold cemetery lots receiving a miniscule \$ 0.08 commission off each other. Within this recommendation was also the notion to form a three-person committee to «give special thought to the care and development of the cemetery».

³⁵ Sharp Street Memorial Church Records, Board of Trustees Minutes, 1882-1893, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Maryland, microfilm MdHR 3115-1.

³⁶ Ivi.

³⁷ Ivi.

³⁸ Ivi.

³⁹ *Harper's Ferry Briefs*, «Afro-American», January 1, 1916.

⁴⁰ R.W. Habenstein, W.M. Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing* [revised edition], Bulfin Printers Inc., Milwaukee (WI) 1962, pp. 391-432. Proper funerals in 1880 required that undertakers: a) cleaned, preserved, and laid out the deceased for viewing; b) provided an option of casket choices; c) provided a floral backdrop alongside the casket; d) made a hearse and carriages available to transport the deceased and surviving family to the cemetery.

⁴¹ U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, MSA_SC4126.

⁴² *Did These People Escape Tax: Some Prominent Baltimoreans Whose Incomes May Exceed Three Thousand Dollars*, «Afro-American», March 14, 1914.

⁴³ *Inventory of the Estate of the Late Alexander Hemsley*, «Afro-American», April 26, 1913.