

*Jeff St Cemetery*

March 4, 1931

Hon W. B. Harrison,  
Mayor of Louisville, Kentucky.

Dear Mr. Harrison:-

Our attention has been called to the fact that the headstones in the old Jefferson Street Cemetery are being hauled away.

We were under the impression that this cemetery was to be taken care of as a cemetery. Will you therefore please let us know if this is being done by individuals or by authority of the city. If the latter, will you advise where these <sup>stone</sup> are being placed and if they will be cared for. We frequently have calls for information regarding this cemetery. Fortunately the members of the Society of Colonial Dames had copied many of the inscriptions, or rather <sup>some of the data</sup> the information from the tombstones, and this information has been printed in the Register of the Society of Colonial Dames. They were not however able to copy all, as some were lying down with the inscription toward the earth and they of course could not turn them over. This old cemetery contains the remains of many of our early prominent citizens.

Yours very truly,

Otto A. Rothert, Secretary

# CITY OF LOUISVILLE

THE GATEWAY TO THE SOUTH

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

W. B. HARRISON, MAYOR

LEW ULLRICH, SECRETARY

HAZEL TRUAX, ASST. SECRETARY

LOUISVILLE, KY.

March 5, 1931.

Mr. Otto A. Rothert, Secretary,  
Filson Club,  
118 West Breckinridge St.,  
Louisville, Ky.

RECEIVED

MAR 6 1931

My dear Mr. Rothert:

I have referred your letter of  
March 4th. to the Director of Welfare, whose de-  
partment has supervision of the Jefferson Street  
Cemetery. Mr. Marvin will reply direct to you.

Sincerely yours,



W. B. Harrison  
Mayor

WBH:FT

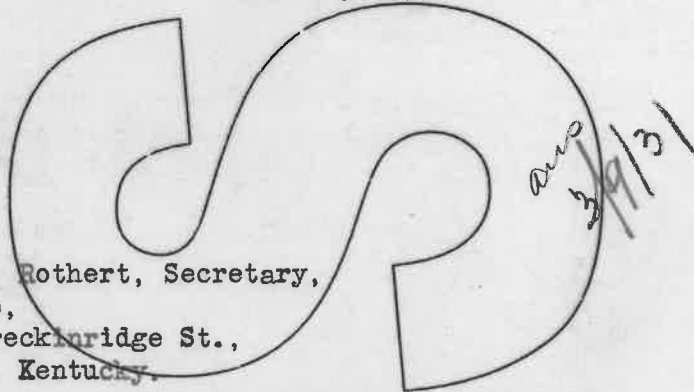
CITY OF LOUISVILLE  
KENTUCKY

FAY H. MARVIN  
DIRECTOR  
BERNADINE LUBBERS  
CLERK

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE

RECEIVED  
MAR 7 1931

March 5, 1931.



Mr. Otto A. Rothert, Secretary,  
Filson Club,  
118 West Breckinridge St.,  
Louisville, Kentucky.

My dear Mr. Rothert:

Your letter of March 4th. addressed to Mayor Harrison,  
has been referred to this department.

During the last two months the Cemetery Division of  
the Department of Public Welfare has been endeavoring to clean  
up the old Western Cemetery and make it a place of beauty, rather  
than an eye-sore. Refuse and old stones which were knocked down  
and could not be replaced and where the inscriptions were defaced  
to such an extent that they could not be deciphered, have been re-  
moved. Other stones, where they could be replaced or repaired,  
have been protected and the ground has been put in shape so that  
the old cemetery can be re-seeded and properly cared for.

Some of the trees have been trimmed up and the hedges  
have been trimmed.

We hope, in this way, to make the cemetery a place  
for which we may feel some degree of pride, rather than chagrin.

If there are any other questions than these which  
you desire answered, please do not hesitate to call upon us  
as we will be glad to co-operate with you.

Very sincerely yours,

Director of Welfare

FHM  
mb

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March 9, 1931

Department of Public Welfare,  
Mr. Fay H. Marvin, Director,  
Department of Public Welfare,  
Louisville, Ky.

Dear Mr. Marvin:

Your letter of March 5th is before me and we want to thank you for your comprehensive reply to our inquiry regarding the old Western Cemetery. We are glad to know that you are putting this cemetery in condition.

Do you know whether the city has any records of burials in the cemetery, other than the tombstones?

I will pass the information you have given us to those making inquiry.

With thanks for your letter and information,

I am,

Yours very truly,

Ludie J. Kinhead, Curator.

P.S. We have found when it is very, very difficult to read tombstone inscriptions, by rubbing over the surface a large

piece of chalk, or a mixture of plaster of paris that has been mixed up the night before, if the letters are cut into the stone, that the inscription stands out darker on the white surface and thus we have been enabled to read inscriptions that we could not before.

Jefferson County

Board of Park Commissioners  
City Hall  
Louisville, Kentucky.

MAP OF OLD JEFFERSON ST. CEMETERY

Minutes of a regular meeting of the Mayor and Board of Council of the City of Louisville, 22nd October 1832,

"Resolved that the plat and division of the New burying ground this day reported by E. D. Hobbs, City Surveyor, be received, adopted and recorded as a permanent plan and division of said burying ground and that Geo. W. Meriwether be and he is hereby appointed a committee to remodel the ordinance on the subject and report to the (?) or some subsequent council and that the surveyor proceed and stake off the same agreeable to the Platt and that said Meriwether direct the burying untill otherwise ordered."

Recorded in City Journal No. 4, page 55.

Map of Louisville Grave Yard filed in City Journal No.4, page 56.

MAP OF PRIVATE GRAVE YARD (a portion of the Louisville Grave Yard) filed in City Journal No. 4, page 57.

These maps were surveyed and plotted by Edward D. Hobbs and are recorded at the office of the Clerk of Board of Aldermen, City Hall, Louisville.

This grave yard is now known as the Western Cemetery and is located on the south side of Jefferson Street from the first alley west of 15th Street to the first Allen east of 18th Street and is no longer used.

Chas. Eppihimer,  
May 1, 1933.

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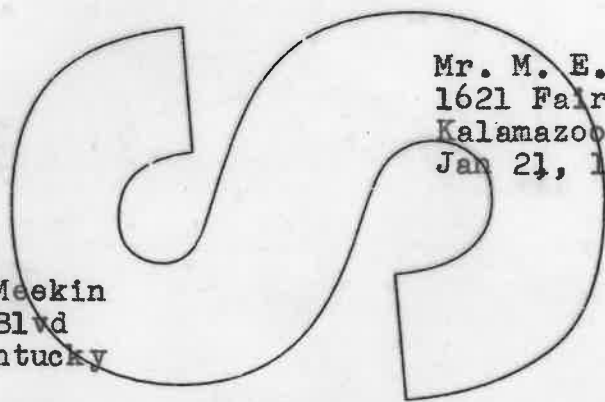
WESTERN CEMETERY

Jefferson Court

MAR 11 1959

From  
The National Society  
of the  
Colonial Dames of America  
in the  
Commonwealth of Kentucky

PRESENTED TO  
The Filson Club, Inc., Louisville, Kentucky  
By National Society of the Colonial  
Dames of America  
Date March 11, 1959



Mr. M. E. Woods  
1621 Fair Street  
Kalamazoo, Michigan  
Jan 21, 1959

Mrs. Sam H. McMeekin  
2240 Douglass Blvd  
Louisville, Kentucky

Dear Mrs. McMeekin;

One of my neighbors takes the Louisville Sunday Courier Journal, then passes it on to me. I was very much interested in the magazine section of January eleven, and thought of what a shameful sight of the old cemetery, as I look back as a boy of seven and eight years of age, passing through the cemetery to school at Seventh and Madison. One of my most prize possessions is a class picture of forty-four boys and the teacher of that school.

As I remember, that beautiful old cemetery in those days was well kept by an elderly man by the name of Patrick Cody. Some of the most beautiful roses were all through the place and in the Spring, violets covered most of the graves. I will say one thing for Mr. Cody, he took care of that cemetery like a mother would care for a child. In later years, I often wondered about a man of his age that could do the work -- keeping it in as nice condition as he did. As you know, he did not have the modern equipment that we have today. I can still see him, to this day, coming up out of the cemetery with the scythe on his shoulder and carrying a cane.

It was surrounded by a barb wire fence. The only funeral entrance was at Sixteenth Street; long side of that was an opening for pedestrians, passing on a brick sidewalk between Jefferson and Grayson Streets, later changed to Cedar Street. About one hundred feet of the east end of the cemetery was Catholic. It was separated from the west section by a large brick wall about six feet high and two feet thick and extended from Jefferson to Grayson with no opening between the two. I have often wondered why that wall was ever built. In studying about it, there must have been some kind of a dispute between the two, causing its erection.

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The article mentions the last funeral there was in 1894. I remember seeing that funeral. One reason for remembering it was my playgrounds was right around Jefferson and Sixteenth and it was very seldom those gates were open.

A year or so ago the magazine section showed a picture of the park at Thirteenth and Jefferson and said that it was once a cemetery and when it was filled is when Western was started. That must go back for at least three hundred years or more, because as I remember in passing through, one thing that impressed me was a very old willow tree that had grown on top of a grave and the headstone growing into it.

I remember one time standing there watching a colored man, supposed to be taking up a body, but while I stood there, all I could see was his picking up nothing but pieces of the old decayed casket and putting them into a basket.

Right at the east side of the entrance at Sixteenth St. was the office and tool shed and about Seventeenth St. and center stood the old vault built of brick with a large wooden door.

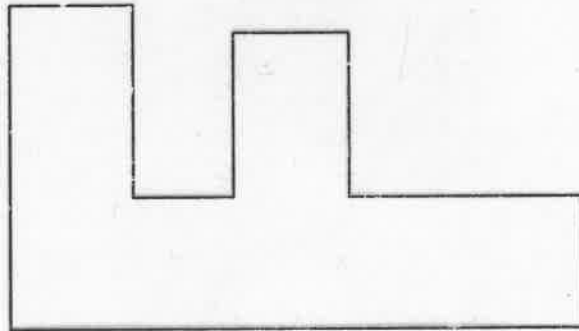
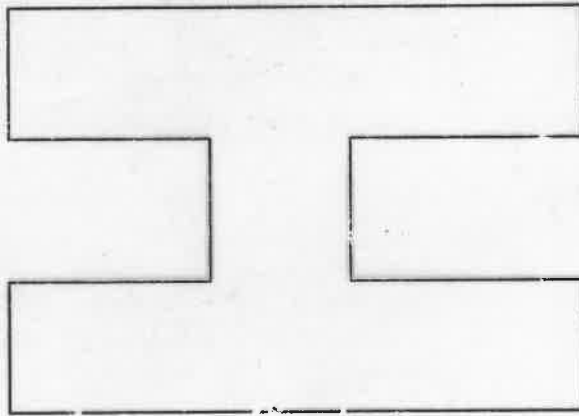
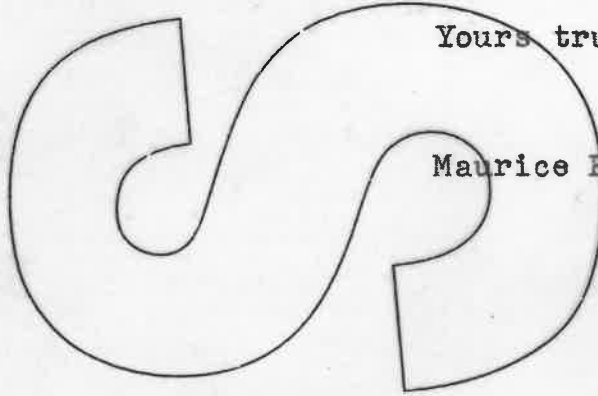
I left Louisville more than fifty years ago, to come here and had not been back there to stay any length of time, until 1943 and 1944 to work for some relatives I have there. Then is when I went around to see some of the old places of my boyhood days and it made me heartsick when I saw the condition of that old cemetery.

Now, regarding some of the surroundings of the old cemetery; on the northside of Jefferson lived prominent and wealthy people; on the northeast corner of Jefferson and Seventeenth stood an old house owned and occupied by Captain Gilmore, a river captain; this house was taken down about 1892 and the present one built; in the rear, on the corner of Congress was his stable with servants' quarters above. About the center of the block, between 16th & 17th, lived Samuel Querbacker. The two parties mentioned, formed the wholesale grocery of Querbacker & Gilmore. A little further east, the second house west of 16th St., lived Dr. Wintersmith, owner of a large wholesale drug company. Then on the northeast corner of Jefferson and Sixteenth lived a doctor who became a dope addict. His daughter became one too. I had not seen them at least ten years, so while driving down Cane Run Road one day with my father, we saw an old broken down man and woman, trudging along the road and my father said to me: "Do you know who they are?" and said they were the doctor and his daughter. Later, we read in the paper that they had found him and his daughter in an old shack almost starved and frozen to death. Next to the doctor was a man by the name of Head who it was said owned the old McCauley Theater.

Next to the Auerbacker home stood a little old house that was at least one hundred or more years old and I always thought that no doubt, the first caretakers of the old cemetery lived here.

Yours truly,

Maurice E. Woods.





Maurice E. Woods  
1621 Fair Street  
Kalamazoo, Michigan  
February 24, 1959

Dear Mrs. McMeekin:

In reply to your letter of January 9, not only will I give my consent for you to use my letters as you see best, I will consider it a great honor and hope what I have written will benefit someone someday.

Since looking and studying the picture over in the magazine, I have thought of a few more things that may have some value to someone someday.

As you know, I mentioned the brick walk through at Sixteenth Street and Jefferson. It was right in line with the east side sidewalk of Sixteenth Street. It went straight through to within about fifteen feet of Cedar Street. There it angled over to some old wooden steps, four in all, leading down to the street level and on a line with the west side walk. Another thing I want to mention is the east end, the Catholic Section. I don't think there were many burials there, as I remember. I would say, as I remember, that not more than thirty or forty monuments in the whole section and they were mostly back near the brick wall. Also the west end, just below Seventeenth Street - the land dropped two or three feet. In this lower part, I am almost positive, there were not more than five monuments all small ones.

Another thing that may be of some interest, was the damage done to the cemetery by that terrible cyclone that hit Louisville on the evening of March 27, 1890. I remember it well, several of the large trees were uprooted and some of the monuments knocked over.

In regard to the school picture taken in 1892, I would be very glad to send it to the Courier Journal. I am sure the teachers and children of today would get quite a kick out of forty-four boys in one class, all wearing knee pants and high button shoes. Also two of the boys with long curls and the teacher with her floor length black dress. The picture is not faded; it is as clear as the day it was taken. They talk about schools being crowded today. I don't think they can compare with Old Madison school in those days. Besides the old building that still stands, there were two six-room cottages, one on each side of the old building. I believe children came there from miles away.

I have enjoyed very much writing these letters and hope that they will be of some help to someone someday.

Sincerely yours,

Maurice E. Woods.

Louisville, 4, Ky. Nov. 16th, 1948

Mr. Ben F. Ewing

Dear Sir:

I am very much interested in an item in today's Times concerning the Western Cemetery. Why you have become interested is surprising to me, due to the fact, that since 1931 - I personally have made every effort to do or have something done about this matter only to be shunted off by the excuse and I will quote from Mayor Farnsley under date of October 18th. "Quote "The Cemetery in question bet 15th & 17th , and Jefferson and Cedar Streets is one of the oldest in the City, and the records of burial rites and privileges which were kept at one time by the City Clerk, cannot be found. The City has absolutely no authority to dispose of, or utilize this property without first acquiring title, since the property actually belongs to the persons who purchased it for burial purposes" unquote.

You will no doubt find on file the correspondence regarding some plan to utilize this property. This place is an eyesore and is desecrated to the lowest level. Part of this Cemetery is Catholic east of 16th St - and west of 16th is protestant. I trust a way will be found. Since the records are lost, and taking the trouble to look thru the local papers since 1815 to get such information as is available regarding births and deaths of my grandparents. The last member to be burried there was Mrs. Eliza Speer, July 10th 1893. Every identifying mark has been destroyed. Will be glad to work with you in this matter.

Very truly yours,

John H. Remfry (S)

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Louisville 4, Ky. Nov. 27-1948

Mr. Ben F. Ewing.

Dear Sir

Since receiving your letter of the 18th, with reference to Western Cemetery on last Thursday I made a trip to this place and endeavored to get what information I could from the remaining stones standing and lying broken on the ground. I further took some snapshots of a few pieces to show just what is taking place. One picture I failed to get as the clouds began to gather, making pictures impossible, and that was horses roaming over the entire grounds.

Today I visited the library to get what records were available from Ky. State Historical Society Register #28 - Regr. 47 to 60 which contained the Ky. Tombstone Inscriptions. Only a handful still remain.

Clippings on Western Cemetery as taken from Newspapers revealed an interesting item, and if Mr. Matt J. Holt, Atty. or his successor as general Council for legal Aid Society could be contacted a more detailed record could be obtained. The item of interest was a suit on behalf of one Mr. Beard, jeweler, located at Bullitt and Main for molestation of of grave markers. This item appeared in the Louisville Herald, August 10-1922. Mr. Beard purchased his lot from the City, July 2-1835 this being about three years after deeding to city 1832 from Morcomo B. Beall.

It is further noted in Annual Reports - R 352 - L 888 A. Page 239-1893 that many enterments have been removed and interred elsewhere. This was the case of one Samuel R. Cook notation on stone

states removal to Cave Hill.

It is further noted in this report that "In many respects the uses of this Western Cemetery are said not to be respectable, and we respectfully urge the City of Louisville transfer the entire property to the Board of Park Commissioners for a public park with the following provision - Viz - Unquote. The provisions you will find in above reports.

This report was made about the time Mrs. Eliza Jane Speer was entered July 10 - 1893 - there is one other person burried since, Mrs. Sarah Ann Sewers, born 1804 - Died 1894.

In the clipping of August 10 - 1922 it is inferred that all are most all the heirs were contacted with reference to the removal of remains to another cemetery. One grave was opened and nothing but dust was found. There are only two heirs remaining in the Speer Family. My sister Mrs. H. H. Adams and myself.

You mention "The law governing Cemeteries of course, is a creature of the Legislature" and if I am sincerely interested before the next meeting of the Ky. Legislature, I might remind you again".

Do you doubt my sincerity? ~~would I go to all this trouble?~~

As to the location of the Speer Lot, I am in doubt, and if a plot of the grounds could be found it would of much help, for if any change is made, the locations would be necessary.

I have written at great length and hope the efforts made will not be in vain, I am

Sincerely yours

John H. Remfry

BEN F. EWING  
ATTORNEY  
KENTUCKY HOME LIFE BUILDING  
LOUISVILLE, KY.

DEC 8 1948

December 7, 1948

Filson Club  
118 West Breckinridge  
Louisville, Kentucky

Attention: Mr. Richard H. Hill, Secretary

My dear Judge:

I am enclosing two letters from Mr. John H. Remfry, with reference to the cemetery at 15th and Jefferson Streets, Louisville, Kentucky.

This cemetery is in a deplorable condition, and is a disgrace to the city, but under our laws, it seems that nothing can be done.

It seems to me if we can get enough information, we might get the Kentucky Legislature to pass an Act concerning cemeteries so situated.

I would appreciate it very much if you would have the Filson Club's records examined for any information concerning this cemetery. If you do find such information, I would appreciate it if you would advise me.

Very truly yours,



BFE:lg

Enclosures

Notes of visit of Bruce Hoblitzell, Mayor of Louisville  
to Richard H. Hill, Secretary, The Filson Club  
August 10, 1960 - 11:00 a.m.

1. Western Cemetery.

Mayor Hoblitzell said a group of ladies representing the people called upon him to petition the City to do something for Western Cemetery. They asked for a monument or marker, bronze or granite, giving history of the cemetery, copy of the plat, and notation like "for additional information, see The Filson Club." It was suggested that the names of everyone buried there be listed, but that is impossible because no complete list has been found.

The Mayor is considering dividing Western Cemetery into 4 parts. The East end, to be taken over by the Park Department put fence around to protect markers, etc., to be used by the neighborhood as a park for adults - pioneer-type fence. The West End, to be made into a play area for children. There have been no burials back of the library and the play area would be possible.

The Western Cemetery is in the midst of the rehabilitation area of Louisville. The Urban League would help. There would be extra lights, etc., to make cemetery attractive.

Mr. Hill to be chairman of a group to carry out this project. He to appoint his committee, decide on wording of marker, etc.,

2. Marker in Cave Hill Cemetery over grave of John C. Bucklin, First Mayor of Louisville.

The grave in Cave Hill - stone going apart. No mention of Mayor on it.

Mayor Hoblitzell proposes to have City of Louisville get permission from heirs to mark the grave with a bronze plaque First Mayor of Louisville (1832). John C. Bucklin died in 1844 and was buried in Western Cemetery. Cave Hill open in 1848. Mrs. Bucklin died in 1850s and his body must have been moved to Cave Hill, as both are there.

Mr. Hill to head committee to decide what to put on bronze plaque, etc. Mr. ~~Walt~~ Nunn (with Mayor Hoblitzell today) to be on that committee. Mr. Hill asked him. The Mayor to get permission to put marker on grave. Mr. Hill to appoint Committee

Fragmentary remarks about Col. Bing. Our 1851 map of Louisville (Mayor wants photostat for City Hall). At City Hall are extra copies of Municipal Reports which will be given The Filson Club to supplement and fill in gaps in our Reports.

Notes of visit of Bruce Hoblitzell, Mayor of Louisville  
to Richard H. Hill, Secretary, The Filson Club  
August 10, 1960 - 11:00 a.m.

3. The Mayor has an idea - a Contest (Essay contest) for  
all schools in the Metropolitan area. To be participated  
in by students in public, private, parochial schools and  
colleges in Louisville and Metropolitan Area.

Several prizes. Scholarships to University (if a senior  
student wins, a refund of tuition). Prizes to be determined  
later.

Essay to be on "What the City of Louisville Means to Its  
Metropolitan Area."

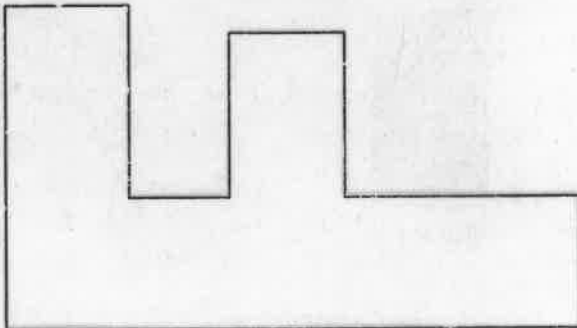
The young people would be made aware of what parents and  
grandparents, etc., did for them to make Louisville the  
Metropolitan City it is.

Employ publicity man - Commisar (?)

Who put down first streets? What Made Louisville Grow? Business  
Transportation? General Electric? University of Louisville,  
first municipal University in the South.

A Citizens Committee to be appointed to promote City of  
Louisville.

Fragmentary note:  
Irvin Marcus ?



September 13, 1961

Mr. John H. Remfry  
3014 Roselawn Blvd.  
Louisville 20, Kentucky

Dear Mr. Remfry:

Many thanks for your letter enclosing a clipping from the Courier-Journal Magazine about "Louisville's Big Ha'nt," being a story by Mildred S. Landau of the old Western Cemetery on Jefferson Street. I have read this with great interest and am wondering if you intend for me to keep it. If so, I will place it in The Filson Club's files.

Your remarks relative to the old cemetery are most interesting and your letter will be filed in our collection.

I have been consulting with Mr. Riebel and the Muldoon Monument Company about the marker to be placed in the old cemetery by Mayor Hoblitzell. Mr. Rehm of the Muldoon Monument Company has submitted a design to Mr. Riebel and the Mayor, and if it is accepted, he will furnish me with copies of the design to be mailed to all the members of the Mayor's Committee. So you will doubtless be hearing from me again soon.

I am

With kindest regards and best wishes,

Cordially yours,

Richard H. Hill  
Secretary

REH:td





Courier-Journal Photos by Jim Harlan

Youngsters frolic around fallen tombstones and over the many invisible graves that extend throughout the playing field in the background shown at the left.

## Louisville's Big Ha'nt

*From the files of J. H. Kempf*

Forsaken for years, ugly Western Cemetery  
is a monument to forgetfulness of the dead

By MILDRED S. LANDAU

**I**F YOU are one of the people who have passed the abandoned graveyard at 16th and Jefferson and wondered why it's so neglected and forgotten, then this story is for you.

This is the famous old Municipal Western Cemetery, resting place of many of Louisville's 19th Century elite and Revolutionary War heroes—and there *have* been many unsuccessful attempts during the last 50 years to convert it to other uses.

Every year the few remaining gravestones become more battered and crumbled. Weeds grow high each summer, horses graze, children run wild, and undesirables of every description populate the area day and night. But there is at least one person today who is trying to do something about the place. He is State Senator B. J. Bonn, 4020 W. Broadway.

Senator Bonn is deeply interested in a bill to have this session of the State Legislature enable the City to convert the property to other purposes. The bill, approved by the Mayor's Legislative Committee and drawn up by the City's Law Department, would pave the way for municipal use of the 1,000-front-foot area on Jefferson Street, which Bonn terms now an affront to decent people and a disrespect to the dead.

Senator Bonn's interest stems from 1912, when, as a boy, his neighborhood team played baseball with a team from the Jefferson Street territory on a baseball diamond laid out right on top of the graves. Bonn saw many evidences of vandalism and destruction. Vaults were torn open, he recalls, and the beautiful mausoleums wrecked. Through the holes, he says, you could see the under

ground caskets, and right into the coffins. The boys continually threw rocks at the tombstones.

A senator for almost 20 years, Bonn has tried to interest the City in doing something about this area. He thinks the ground ideal for a municipal building, a housing project or school.

Land for the Western Cemetery was acquired by deed from Norbourne B. Brall and the Commonwealth Bank of Kentucky in October, 1830, but it was October, 1832, before an ordinance was read before the Louisville General Council setting up the cemetery. Two weeks later a revised ordinance was passed. It read in part: "Be it resolved that James Rudd and George Meriwether be authorized to lay off a part of the lot purchased for burying ground and attached to the city, and to direct the sexton to dig graves in the part they shall designate."

The ordinance set aside at the eastern end 150 feet fronting Jefferson Street for the burial of Roman Catholics, the burials to be subject to the regulation of the Mayor and Council. Adjoining the Catholic section was 348½ feet devoted to the interment of "strangers," whose identity could not be ascertained. West of the strangers' section was 440 feet for white persons, then 166 feet for persons of African descent. Appointment of a sexton was to be made annually by the General Council, and it is said that the sexton's job in those days was considered quite a plum.

Many attempts have been made to use the area for other purposes, particularly a park, but opposition always arises, chiefly from the descendants of the persons buried

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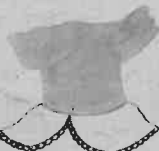
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(Incorporated)  
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*Byck's* **YOUNG WORLD**

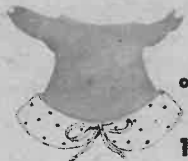
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to delight the Younger  
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Sweet scalloped collar adds Spring prettiness to school sweaters and Sunday dresses. Washable white with red or navy trim, or all white.



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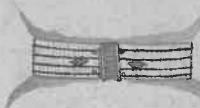
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1.00



Bright stripes with tiny turtle or gay ballerina pins—an unusual cinch-belt that's sure to please. Elasticized—in white, red or navy with multi-color stripes.

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there. Some of the heirs hold as sacred the very ground in which heroes of the Revolution are buried. In 1905 and again in 1914 attempts were made to have action taken. In October, 1921, it was announced the Outdoor Art League was planning to convert the ground into a park. Many articles appeared in the newspapers of that time about the "dark square where dangers lurk in the shadows."

The City communicated with as many descendants of the original lot owners as it could find and offered to remove whatever remained of the bodies to Cave Hill. In many cases, however, when the tombs were opened no trace at all of the bodies remained. Not even the bones were there. There was much public discussion of the project, but in August, 1922, the heirs of Evan C. Beard filed suit to enjoin the City from removing the members of their family from their lot and also to recover \$1,500 damages for the alleged removal from the lot of various grave markers.

In addition, many public protests have been made about the condition of the area. At one time a mass meeting was held at Macauley's Theater at which a vigorous protest was made against the seeming disrespect to the dead and especially the war heroes. In 1920, a special P.T.A. meeting was called of the Madison and Western Departmental Schools to discuss the subject. Other P.T.A.'s were enlisted, too, but nothing came of this attempt.

In 1922, The Louisville Herald reported, a meeting of 75 boys between the ages of 12 and 15 was brought about by Mrs. John H. Miller, who lived opposite the cemetery for many years. Each of the youngsters pledged himself not only to help the sexton keep the place in order, but "never to venture again onto the old burying grounds for pleasure."

About 1905, according to The Courier-Journal, "the brick wall which bounded the cemetery was torn away and stone curbing which outlined many of the lots disappeared. Tombstones which had fallen were cleared to the back of the graveyard and lay in a pile. Tethered

#### NAMES OF PIONEERS MINGLE IN TOMBSTONE PILE

Oblivion Follows Decay For Some Whose Bodies Were Laid To Rest By Past Generations In Louisville's Abandoned Western Cemetery



RELIGIOUS BEGGAR BECOMES A POWER IN RUSSIA

Photo from Courier-Journal Microfilm Files by Jim Harlan

The sad plight of the old cemetery was evident back in 1912, as this big Courier-Journal story related.

to the tombstones, goats were cropping the young grass . . . Violets and myrtle run riot all over the place and of the tall trees few show any signs of life."

The Herald reported in August, 1922, that comparatively few of the bodies that were buried in Western Cemetery remain. Most of them had been removed to other burial places years before. The graves opened more recently contained only dust. There was no trace even of the "oddly shaped iron coffins" that were the vogue when the old Western Cemetery was the last resting place for many of the city's fashionable citizens. The Courier-Journal said about that time almost all the Catholic bodies had been removed around 1880.

About the year 1900, Mrs. James Moreland Johnson and Mrs. James Wilder McCarty, of the Colonial Dames, copied epitaphs and family names from the tombstones standing at the time. In 1912, they again visited the cemetery. Less than a half-dozen of those tombstones were

Continued on Page 36

## Many of the graves were robbed of bodies

LOUISVILLE'S HA'NT *Continued*

still standing. In 1929, the Colonial Dames, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Samuel H. Stone, copied down what remaining inscriptions were still legible. Dates of death ranged all the way from 1810 to 1890. Many of the inscriptions were long and fanciful.

One read:

*A faithful friend, a father dear  
A tender parent lyeth here  
An upright man in all his ways  
In truth and justice spent his days  
Repent in time, make no delay  
For I was quickly called away.*

Another:

*Thou art gone from us, dear one,  
That thou should'st die!  
No life be left to the butterfly.  
Thou art gone as a dewdrop  
Is swept from the bough  
Oh, for the world where thy  
home is now.*

A stone about two feet high read, "Rebecca Bakewell, aged 130. Died 1821."

And on one large monument erected to Thomas Yeatman was the line: "He was the poor man's friend."

Many of the "clients" of the old graveyard were captains and majors from the Revolutionary War, but there were many other soldiers as well.

Once a Revolutionary soldier's cap appeared on some stones children were playing around, and it was said the cap came out of a tomb.

There is also a record of an official denial that children were playing with human skulls from the graves.

In the early days there were many grave robberies, and stories have it that most of the grave openings were the work of medical students who lacked facilities in those days to practice on the human body. They reportedly stole bodies from the graves in order to have something to practice on. Many dead cats and dogs of the neighborhood, it is said, were buried by children in their own backyards, and the graves marked with footstones surreptitiously removed from the unobjecting dead in Western Cemetery.

THE Herald of November 13, 1915, shows a picture of a vault which became well known to the neighborhood as the rendezvous and junk shop of a gang of bicycle thieves, who, after hiding their loot, would lie about the vault at night and make unearthly noises to keep neighbors away from the place.

Numerous other stories are told about the old Western Cemetery. One is about the two boys of good family, Tom and Harry, who lived on the same street and were constant companions until they grew up and fell in love with the same girl. Before she chose between them, the Civil War began. Harry joined the Confederate, and Tom the Union forces.

A month before the end of the war, the girl died of a fever contracted while nursing wounded soldiers. She was buried in the cemetery.

Soon Tom and Harry returned and insisted on seeing their loved one again, even though she had been buried. After much difficulty, Tom's father arranged for the

grave to be opened under pretext of removing the body to another grave. Before sunrise one morning, the coffin was dug up and opened.

Tom tried to shield Harry from the sight, but Harry pushed forward, took one look at the remains and promptly fainted. That night he shot himself and was subsequently buried close beside the girl. The girl's tombstone remained a landmark for many years, but when a curious investigator went to look for Harry's, there was no trace of it.

Another tale is about a gathering of mourners who were lowering a coffin into a grave amid prayers and cries so loud that none noticed a coming storm. A sudden violent clap of thunder scared everyone into looking away from the grave. At the same moment the bottom of the wooden coffin broke loose, and the body fell into the grave. Before the astonished mourners could collect their wits, a torrential rain came down and poured into the pit with its body. It was hours before they could get the body back into the coffin and restore order.

Although it is probable that few, if any, burials took place in Western Cemetery after 1890, memorial services of some nature were held occasionally for years afterwards.

IN 1911, the western end of the cemetery, most of which had not been used for burials, was purchased from the City. The Jefferson Street Branch of the Louisville Free Public Library was built on the site and opened in March, 1913.

Money was raised to buy the land by dividing the lot into tiny segments and selling shares to 347 interested persons. The school children of the area also entered into the enterprise, this being the first time school children in Louisville had participated in efforts to help establish libraries in the city. After the library was dedicated, efforts were made to get the children to play behind the library building, in two acres known as Jefferson Park, rather than among the graves.

But, through the years, the cemetery has continued an untended space open to children, horses, bums, loiterers and night prowlers alike.



A broken whisky bottle adds to the litter that abounds throughout the old graveyard.

Mildred S. Landau is a native of Louisville and active in club work. She has written several articles for this Magazine in the past. She is the wife of Joseph Landau of The Courier-Journal Magazine staff.

The Western Cemetery Committee  
Appointed by Mayor Holtzjell

Richard H. Hill, Chairman  
Secretary of The Film Club. -- Jan 7-1532.

- ✓ Mrs. Dwight Anderson (Author - music & poetry)  
2450 Valetta Ln. GE1-9676
- ✓ Mrs. Edward R. (Dorothy) Clark (Author - History)  
2250 Rutherford Wynd. GE4-4495-
- ✓ Mrs. John A. Davenport (Author)  
Jarvis Lane TW7-2539.
- ✓ Mrs. F. Closett Hoke (D.A.R.)  
3214 College, Jeffersontown, AN7-5435-
- ✓ Mrs. W. W. Jacobs (Western Cemetery investigator)  
1240 Everett GE1-5710
- ✓ Mrs. W. P. R. LaVieille (D.A.R.)  
2709 Lexington Rd. TW7-2245-
- ✓ Mrs. Sam H. (Isabel M.S.) McMeekin (Author - History)  
2240 Douglass Blvd. GE2-9282
- ✓ Mrs. Richard R. Richardson (Warg 1812)  
4500 So. Parkway Em 6-6458
- ✓ Mr. Lawrence A. Cassidy (S.A.R.)  
Wood Road, Lyndon, TW5-3876.
- ✓ Mr. Joe C. Creason (Civil War)  
4000 Druid Hills Rd. TW6-0498 - Jan 5-2211
- ✓ Mr. Doug Nunn (Newspaper)  
500 N. Hubbard Lane, TW6-0117 - Jan 5-2251
- ✓ Rt Rev. Msgr. Felix N. Pitt (Catholic)  
Catholic School Board Jan 5-4158
- ✓ Mr. Frank G. Rankin (Masons)  
1340 W. Ormsley ME5-5221
- ✓ Mr. Charles J. Steele (African)  
Urban League Jan 3-4835-
- Mr. John E. Tilford, Jr. (Chamber of Commerce)  
S. N. R. R. Co. Jan 7-1121



# LEWIS A. WALTER

## Real Estate Exchangery

GENERAL MANAGER UNIVERSITY PARK

LEWIS A. WALTER BUILDING

N. E. Cor. 3rd and Main

LOUISVILLE, KY.

### INVESTMENTS

Gentlemen-I Lewis A. Walter

Dec 11-32

I am at work compiling data on the City Burial Ground known as Lower Burying Ground Jefferson South Side between Sixteenth and Eighteenth Streets, to begin with I need this deed----which may be identified by these fragments---

"William Niven, Trustees as aforesaid and their successors as aforesaid, that they will and their successors shall forever warrant and defend the said lots of land against the claim or claims of all and every person or persons whatsoever claiming or to claim the same by, from, thru or under them. In witness whereof William A. Cocke, Mayor of said city, hath hereunto subscribed his name and affixed the seal of the said City of Louisville this first day of July, eighteen hundred and thirty six. Will. A. Cocke Mayor.

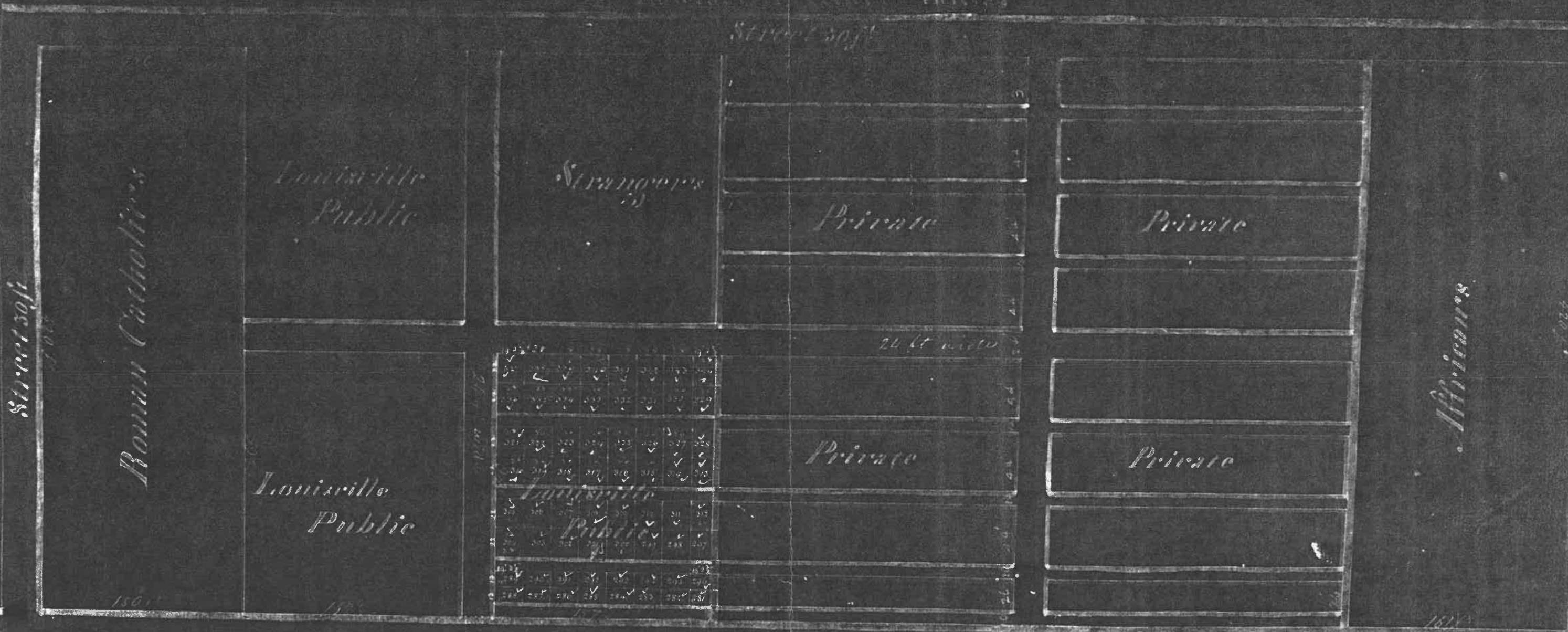
Now on the reverse is found City of Louisville to deed-- Martin, Ainsley, Fulton, Adie, & Niven. Examined & Recorded in City Deed Book of Lots sold Page 93. Now here is the - *Please locate for all*

Whereas a Society of Native Scotchmen have been formed in the City of Louisville Kentucky, amongst other things for obtaining and holding a cemetery or burial place and said Society of Native Scotchmen have appointed a Board of Trustees consisting of five, to purchase of the City of Louisville a lot of Land to be held by them and their successors forever in trust as a place of burial for the Members of said Society and native Scotchmen in the city of Louisville and by a resolution of said Society, said trustees are to continue in office for the space and term of one year with power to fill any vacancy that may occur during the year, from among the Society, or on failure of said Society from among the native Scotchmen living in said city and whereas said Society have elected and appointed John Martin, Hugh Ainsley, William Fulton, Alexander Adie, and William Niven Trustees of said Society for a year and with the power aforesaid and the said Trustees in fulfillment of the purposes of said Society have purchased in the City of Louisville the following described pieces of land, lying and being in the LOWER BURYING GROUND of said City on Jefferson Street, to wit: Lots Numbers 264-265 & 266 each lot being 22 feet from East to West and 36 feet from North to South more or less being the width between North and South from an alley to the South Boundary Wall, the same as laid down by an authenticated plan of the City Grave Yard-- Now this Indenture Witnesseth that the Mayor and Board of Councilmen of the City of Louisville, for and in consideration of the sum of \$ 60.00 to them in hand paid the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged have granted, bargained and sold and do hereby sell and convey to said John Martin, Hugh Ainsley, William Fulton, Alexander Adie and William Niven Trustees as aforesaid and above described lots and parcels of Land- To have and to hold the same described Lots to the said Trustees aforesaid and to their Successors, to be appointed as aforesaid forever, for the uses and purposes herein before mentioned. And the said Mayor and Board of Councilmen of the City of Louisville do covenant to and with the said John Martin, Hugh Ainsley, William Fulton Alexander Adie and William Niven Trustees as aforesaid that they will and their successors shall forever warrant and defend the said Lots of Land against the Claim or Claims of all and every person or person whatsoever claiming or to claim the same, by, from, through, or under them.

Sarah relict of Jno Patten born in Amherst Co Va 2-11-1789- 9-22-37  
Our mother Mrs Sophia Crawford born in Amherst County Va. 12-19-1766  
While returning from New Albany this A.M. we stopped for a few moments at the old Sixteenth Street Cemetery and found that during this unemployed crase they had vigorously cleaned this rare old spot with a fine toothed comb as it were going so far in the east end as to use a plow smoothing over the ground making it impossible from now on for any one to find their families graves as all alleys and lines have been obliterated - Why will such ignorant people be permitted to touch such a sacred place - there are many persons who have not had the money to remove their dead who now will not find it possible to locate their dead as the records are very meagre and nothing like complete records exist I Lewis A. Walter have perhaps the most complete records as I went to this Cemetery about .1905-6 and with my Stenographer made a rather exhaustive record of the stones remaining and today there are not 1 in 10 standind or remaining which were there that day- I know of no copy to equal mine as I have found there is nothing in the City Hall or Cave Hill or elsewhere which approaches a record - they must be somewhere- But Where Near the 16 st & Jefferson walkway a fairly preserved stone marble Louisa---- consort of Willis Levi Died Feby 6- 1848 48 in the 48 year od he of her age Stone rounded with a wreath of flowers with the suns rays pouring over the woman standing with a book in her hand- This is Lily Levi grandmother the mother of her father Willis whose father was also Willis Levi who married a second time and their only child is this Louise Warren born Mch 17 1860 whose mother was the second wife of the middle Willis Levi whose father was the first bell ringer or town crier whose oil painting I have which as reported 1925 when I bought this painting that it had been painted then at least 80 years or 1846 and this man is as I make it between 60 & 70 and the 71 year old Mrs Warren states she was 2 years old when her father died at 66 born 1797 Mrs Warren has photographs of her father and her mother this painting does not resemble this father of hers born 1797 so I am convinced that this portrait is of the first bellringer ( father and son were town criers) who was born approximately 1770-74 and his mother the other portrait approx as was said she had been painted approx 1835 and shows her to be without teeth and perhaps 70 making birth 1760-65 Unsigned and undated are these portra

*Fragment*

*teeth*



JEFFERSON ST. Extended

Reference.

For subdivision and numbers of lots in private graveyard, see next page.

The Lots from N<sup>o</sup> 281 to 296 inclusive are 19 feet 3 inches front by 13 feet deep and from N<sup>o</sup> 297 to N<sup>o</sup> 344 inclusive are 19 feet 3 inches front by 22 feet

Scale of 500 feet.



pp

Placed by [illegible]

M.A.P

of the

PRINCE GEORGE V. ROAD.

Scale of Plot

1 inch = 100 feet

Width 50 feet wide

Surveyed & plotted by

John W. McCallister

ms. A. 9.1. 101  
p. 10

Part of  
Whitaker's grave yard

180	181	182	183	184	185	186	187	188	189	190	191
190	191	192	193	194	195	196	197	198	199	200	201
200	201	202	203	204	205	206	207	208	209	210	211
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Part of  
Louisville public square

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