

## A Walk through the Stones

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Not many people would initially think of a cemetery as an ideal place for a picnic, let alone a wedding, but Lynchburg's Old City Cemetery has both—regularly. Nestled at the end of Taylor Street, the cemetery serves as much more than a place of rest for many of the City's earliest citizens. Housed within its walls are several museums, a butterfly pond and garden, a shrub garden, medicinal herbs, and antique roses.

A Virginia Historic Landmark on the National Register of Historic Places, Old City Cemetery—also known as the Old Methodist Cemetery to some locals—was established in 1806, with the first acre given by the City's founder, John Lynch. Originally, burials were divided according to who you were; strangers, paupers, and locals were buried in separate areas. Eventually, this arrangement no longer worked. Burial sites were added as the need arose. Currently, the cemetery meanders across twenty-five acres of rolling green hills.

Over the past few years, the cemetery has undergone a tremendous amount of reconstruction. Research into the cemetery's history is an ongoing process. To date, the locations for most of the 20,000 graves are only known through the assistance of people who have visited the sites in the past. Many tombstones are either missing or non-existent; only about 2,000 markers are evident at this time. Few records exist to locate graves. By 1965, burials were restricted to only those obtaining special permission and then only allowed outside the wall of the older section. Today, only the Scatter Garden for cremated remains, and the New Potter's Field for the indigent, are in regular use.

Historical tidbits are offered at several locations throughout the grounds to provide visitors some of the details of the cemetery's diverse and lengthy history. Symbolism within the grave decorations reflects many of the characteristics of 19<sup>th</sup> century mourning rites. As stated in *Stories of the Stones*, a book on the interpretive plaques in the cemetery, such carvings as weeping willow trees, urns, open heavenly gates, a hand pointing toward heaven, and drooping roses were "typical symbols of death" for the era.

But why select such a site for a picnic or a wedding?

Certainly, the grounds alone make it an ideal spot to stroll leisurely under the canopy of towering pecans, gnarled catalpas, magnolias, white cedars, oak, and over a hundred other varieties of trees. Then there's the view of the Blue Ridge Mountains as you walk along the entrance driveway, which captures the essence of the natural beauty and peace that offers comfort to the soul. What

better place to stop a moment, relax and enjoy the whirring and chirping and warbling of the growing bird population.

Listen to the bullfrogs hidden among the lotus blossoms as you sit on the bench near the butterfly pond and garden. From March to October, watch the seasons pass according to the “cycle of bloom.” During the winter months, enjoy the berries and the hollies.

History buffs, too, have much to stimulate their curiosity. Take a tour, visiting the many museums: learn about 19<sup>th</sup> century medicinal practices; see the turn-of-the-century hearse owned by Diuguid, the “second oldest funeral establishment in the United States”; visit the Confederate section and see some of the oldest representatives of rose history planted along the 500-foot Old Brick Wall; appreciate the scope of 19<sup>th</sup> century mourning customs and artifacts; take a trip back to the days of World War I at the refurbished Stapleton Station House Museum. Each museum offers recorded information to help visitors appreciate the various exhibits.

Brochures outlining the numerous museums and horticulture are available at the Information Gatehouse, located at the entrance to the grounds and along the cemetery driveway. For information about tours, events, programs, books, and gifts, the Cemetery Center is open daily from 11:00 to 3:00 or by appointment at (434) 847-1465. The Center also houses the Lucy Baber Research Library for Cemetery Records.

A walk through the stones at the Old City Cemetery is a walk into the City’s past. With its exhibits and museums, the cemetery offers a unique view of the “old days.” The history housed here is not the stuff you’ll find in dusty old history books. Rather, it is a window into a world of everyday people who loved and hated, laughed and cried, lived and died. The good, the bad, the indigent, the wealthy, the famous, the infamous, the soldier, the civilian, the child, the adult, the resident, the stranger — all these and more have found rest here. Take a moment to walk with them, hear their stories — and find your own peace.

**(NOTE: INSERT FOR THE STATION HOUSE MUSEUM)**

The railroad helped make Lynchburg one of the most prosperous cities in the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Three major lines terminated in the City by 1860: Virginia & Tennessee Railroad, Southside Railroad, and Orange & Alexandria Railroad. These railways made Lynchburg the second largest Civil War hospital center in Virginia. The railroad was one of the largest employers from 1850 to 1920. Many railroad workers are buried in the cemetery.

As a way to interpret the importance of the railways in the City's history, the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway Station, in use at Stapleton in Amherst County from 1898 to 1937, was dismantled and rebuilt in the Old City Cemetery. Artifacts located in the Station Agent, Passenger, and Baggage Rooms reflect the era of World War I. As with the other museums on site, recorded messages provide visitors an overview of the exhibits and history behind the railroads in Lynchburg.