



NEW YORK MARBLE CEMETERY

SECOND AVENUE ABOVE EAST SECOND STREET

marblecemetery.org

December 2025

©New York Marble Cemetery, Inc.

IN THE NICK OF TIME

The Cemetery has been saved from destruction several times in the past century: once when social reformer Jacob Riis tried to turn it into a playground for immigrant children, causing families to remove their loved ones; once when a vault in the center of the lawn flooded, necessitating a complete regrading; and most recently when a scarcity of Trustees led it to be almost forgotten.

Jacob Riis (1849-1914) was a Danish-American journalist, photographer and social reformer best known for his work exposing the harsh living conditions of New York City's poor during the late 19th century. His landmark 1890 book, *How the Other Half Lives*, used pioneering flash photography as a tool for social change to document the squalid tenement housing of Manhattan's Lower East Side. Some of the Cemetery's earliest photographs come from this period.

Both Marble Cemeteries had financial hard times, and fell so far out of fashion due to the crowded immigrant neighborhood in the late 1800's that there were moves to have them closed down so that their land could be used for either private development or for public schools or parks, as had already happened to many other cemeteries in the area.

Riis and the East Side Good Government Club led a movement to convert NYMC into a playground. It gained approval of both government officials and the Cemetery's own officers in 1897, who went so far as to gather bids on removing coffins and transporting them upstate by train to rural cemeteries. This scheme failed because fewer than half of the descendants of the original vault owners could be located to give their assent.

In 1905, there was a final attempt by some of the heirs to relocate the remains and abolish the Cemetery. Fearing the worst, relatives removed bodies to the major rural cemeteries in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Westchester County – such as Green-Wood, Woodlawn, Trinity Cemetery and Sleepy Hollow – and dozens of smaller ones in New York, New Jersey, and New England. At the last minute, due mainly to appeals to sentiment, the Cemetery survived. Over the years about one-third of all burials have been removed, with almost one-half of them going to Green-Wood.

In 1906, preservation of the Cemetery was made possible by the renewed interest and significant generosity of many



Archives of The Museum of the City of New York c. 1893

descendants, but especially those of Daniel Parish and Joseph Kernochan. A plaque on the South wall gives their names. In the successful reorganization campaign for funds that followed, enough money was raised to make immediate repairs to the Cemetery, as well as endow it sufficiently to see it through most of the 20th century.

The timing was propitious because in April, 1907, a vault flooded from a pooling of rainwater draining towards the center of the lawn. This necessitated removal of all vegetation and regrading of the grounds. At the same time, the walls were all repointed. The receiving vault (Dead House) was in such poor condition that the permit for its use had been cancelled by city authorities. After an extensive restoration effort, the Trustees declared the site suitable to last for the next 50 years.

The Cemetery was designated a New York City Landmark in 1969 and placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. The sole surviving Trustee, Peter C. Luquer, managed the property long-distance, single-handedly, for years until others began to help identify purchasers and their descendants. Since that time nearly 4,000 owners have been identified living all over the world, the newly landscaped grounds have been opened to visitors on a regular basis. Trustees' efforts to rent the grounds for parties is helping to partially defray costly repairs.



THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS!

WHO WERE THE ORIGINAL VAULT OWNERS?

It was long thought that the original vault owners were all wealthy professionals, well able to pay the \$250 cost of purchasing their family vault, which in 1830 was the cost of a saddle horse or eight acres of good Long Island farm land.

The truth is that many of the vaults were provided by the organizing trustees to tradesmen who were creditors of Perkins Nichols, the developer of both Marble Cemeteries. Nichols was involved with numerous complaints, including mismanagement of construction

finances, renting out the Dead House for personal gain, and his attempt to expand the Cemetery to the north (along 3rd street) without permission of either the Trustees or the City.

The minutes state that when he was finally given the deed to his own vault, it was to avoid litigation, not because the Trustees believed he had lived up to his obligations. Four years later he was one of a dozen NYMC owners who petitioned for bankruptcy under a newly liberalized law.

Occupations of Original Vault Owners

1 Baker	2 Hardware	3 Furs	5 Government, customs house
1 Boardinghouse	2 Pilot , tugboat owner	3 Jewelry, silver	5 Wine, whiskey, tea
1 Butcher	2 Stone	3 Hosiery, shoes, hats	5 Druggist
1 Carpenter	2 Teacher	3 Saddlery, leather	8 Physician
1 Coal dealer	2 Tobacco	3 Sailmaking, shipbuilding, chandlery	11 Attorney, Judge
1 Whip manufacturer	3 Carpets	4 Auctioneer	19 Grocery
2 Architect, builder	3 Clergyman	4 Printing, stationery	20 Banker, commission merchant, broker
2 Blacking manufacturer	3 Commissary General, paymaster	4 Metals, mining	33 Shipping, shipmaster
2 Dentist	3 Criminal justice	4 Importing	45 Dry goods
2 Engineer			

NOTE: Most of what we know about our Vault Owners comes from years of research by our Trustee Emerita, Anne Brown from Chestertown, Maryland, whose *Interments (1830-1937)* book is listed for sale on page four of this newsletter.

NEW YORK MARBLE CEMETERY, INC.

*A New York City Landmark listed on the National Register of Historic Places
A 501(c)(13) registered charity*

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WALL RESTORATION

Progress on our walls was slowed this year by the sudden death in December 2024 of our longtime stonemason, Gregory Pasternak of Kutno Restoration, necessitating the search and eventual hiring of Rafal Zuraw of R.Z. Renovation, as our new general contractor. Completion of the multi-year reconstruction of the North Wall still requires approval by the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission for capstones and flashing materials.

In June, restoration work resumed on all walls, thanks to our master stone mason, who removed and repointed loose marble stones in several large gaps. We soon discovered we were in dire need of scarce Tuckahoe Marble to replace the rotten stones.

We were granted permission by our consultants, Old Structure Engineering, to harvest marble below grade from the stump of the damaged West Wall, thus creating a fifty-foot trench, two feet deep by two feet wide, which we then filled with bags of rubble and protected with plywood.



Contractors removed two dumpsters filled with several hundred bags of the remaining mixed rubble.

Our West Wall was destroyed by adjoining offices sometime in the early 20th Century. The property now belongs to New York City and is used as the Kenton Hall homeless shelter managed by the non-profit Project Renewal.

Rubble bags.



Southwest corner showing homeless shelter's brick wall.

Photographer Joel A. Chaffield


The New York Marble Cemetery was awarded the Candid (formerly GuideStar) Gold Seal of Transparency in 2024. It is given to nonprofits which provide clear and comprehensive information about their mission and financials, and signifies a commitment to transparency and accountability, helping organizations build trust with donors and stakeholders. Every rental and donation to the Cemetery goes towards landscaping, wall building, insurance expenses and outreach to our Owners.

To learn more about our history, go to our past newsletters: marblecemetery.org/more-about-us/newsletter



If you'd prefer to receive this newsletter by email, notify us at info@marblecemetery.org with your name and the preferred email address.

MAKE A TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION A 501(c)(13) registered charity

Online via  at marblecemetery.org

Or send a check to:
New York Marble Cemetery, Inc.
Attn: Treasurer
P.O. Box 315
New York, NY 10159

For information on gifts of appreciated stock or for a financial statement, please email treasurer@marblecemetery.org

ENCLOSED \$ _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TELEPHONE _____ EMAIL _____



OWNERS MEETING SUNDAY MAY 3, 2026 1:30 PM



Wims Product Launch

OPEN HOUSE NEW YORK VOLUNTEERS 2025

Trustees and Volunteers from left to right:

Eliot W. Rowlands (Trustee Emeritus, who picks up our mail);
Helen Dorothea Jorgensen (Owner, who manages our Instagram account);
Daphne Jay Bell (Trustee, Treasurer, who manages our Facebook account);
Joel A. Chatfield (Trustee, who supervises wall construction);
Laura H. Nicholson (Trustee, Secretary);
Caroline S. DuBois (Trustee, President);
David Mulkins (President, Bowery Alliance of Neighbors).



NEW YORK MARBLE CEMETERY INTERMENTS 1830-1937

By Anne W. Brown

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Send inquiries to AWB@chesapeake.net.