

BACKGROUND...

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FOREST HILLS CEMETERY & The Forest Hills Educational Trust

A rustic and picturesque retreat founded in 1848

Long before Boston had public parks, Forest Hills Cemetery was created to offer visitors a serene place where they could enjoy a magnificent landscape while remembering friends and family. In 1848, the mayor of Roxbury, Henry A.S. Dearborn – a founder of the Mass. Horticultural Society, and designer of Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge – established Forest Hills. He was inspired by the grand estates of aristocratic England and Napoleon's Pere Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, and envisioned a place very different from the crowded church graveyards of city centers.

Dearborn's innovative design culminated in 250-acres of elegant romantic landscape, laced with winding paths and shaded by mighty canopy trees. Entering this tranquil sanctuary, visitors leave behind the stresses of urban life and the concerns of commerce. They reconnect with nature in a setting of exceptional beauty intended to invite reflection and contemplation. As a



cemetery, the environment of Forest Hills lends itself especially to memories of those who have passed on, and to reflections on the cycles of life.

In 2004, Forest Hills was inducted into the National Register of Historic Places in recognition of its significance in landscape design, art, and architecture, as well as its role as a repository of history. Among the notables buried here are abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, industrialist Francis Cabot Lowell, and poets e.e.cummings and Anne Sexton. Forest Hills continues to serve as an active cemetery, with 300 burials every year.

Historic and contemporary sculpture

In Victorian Boston, Forest Hills was a fashionable place and a popular destination for weekend excursions. Sculpture became an essential feature of this environment, as the wealthy and successful commissioned the great artists of the 19th century to commemorate their achievements. Just as beautiful are the

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countless poignant memorials carved in marble by anonymous artisans. Today, Forest Hills is an open-air museum, home to one of America's finest collections of Victorian sculpture.

In 1998, the Forest Hills Educational Trust initiated exhibitions of contemporary art. A permanent Sculpture Path and temporary outdoor exhibitions offer contemporary interpretations of Victorian themes: identity, family, nature, memory, history, mortality and the cycle of life. "What better place than Forest Hills Cemetery to mount an outdoor sculpture show?" wrote Cate McQuaid in *The Boston Globe*, "Life and death meet here like old friends, amid the terraced pathways and wooded groves."

Stairways lead to entrances flanked by urns or small yards. Familiar details from the parlor appear on monuments: the family bible, carved curtains, upholstery, ornamental motifs, even faithful pets – all made of stone.

A final home

From the beginning, Forest Hills was shaped by society's ideals of continuity between the living and the dead. Victorians conceived the cemetery as the ultimate domestic space: a final home where relationships could be kept intact. Dramatic monuments with ascending angels or grieving maidens serve as charming focal points. However, the essential character of the Cemetery is found in thousands of family lots, outlined in granite curbstone and sited along paths. These lots reflect the structure of each family and the proprietary boundaries between one family and another. They mirror town residences arranged into neighborhoods, and incorporate the comforts of a Victorian home. Stairways lead to entrances flanked by urns or small yards. Familiar details from the parlor appear on monuments: the family bible, carved curtains, upholstery, ornamental motifs, even faithful pets – all made of stone. Inscriptions indicate and preserve the relationships of people buried in the lot, ranging from the simplest identifiers ("beloved husband," "devoted mother") to poems and symbols expressing unique personalities.

The Forest Hills Educational Trust

The non-profit Forest Hills Educational Trust exists to celebrate, preserve, and enhance the landscape, art, and history of Forest Hills Cemetery. The Trust organizes innovative programs to expand and diversify public use of this magnificent site, including exhibitions of adventurous contemporary art, walking tours, concerts and poetry readings in Forsyth Chapel, and educational programs for children from urban schools and summer camps. The Trust's largest event is the annual Lantern Festival, a memorial event inspired by Buddhist ritual, which draws over 5,000 people every summer.

