INSIDE THE BELLEVUE CEMETERY

LAWRENCE, MASSACHUSETTS

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The Bellevue was established in 1847, at 170 May Street in Lawrence, MA.

Styled after Boston’s Mount Auburn Cemetery, founded eleven years earlier, it remains one of few landscaped cemeteries in the area.

It was added to the list of National Historic Places in 2003.

Most of the people covered in this report died after 1865, but the major events in their lifetimes took place before.
The Hearse House was where the hearse and horses were stored to carry a coffin to the gravesite. Although officially named the "Hearse House", the title is currently disputed; the building may have served simply as the Gatehouse; its current purpose is for housing of records and clerical work.
Stunning terraces and granite staircases are found throughout the grounds, a tribute to Victorian standards of nature and architecture.

(The winter season pays little justice to the cemetery’s beauty- in just a few weeks when everything is green, it is easy to forget one is in the heart of a thriving city.)
From the top of the hill, the terraces drop away and the city can be seen on the horizon’s edge.
This empty area in the middle of the cemetery is a filled-in pond. Victorian era landscaped cemeteries more resembled parks than the somber graveyards of previous times.
The cemetery is open to the public from dawn to dusk every day, and people coming to pay their respects are always welcome, as well as artists, historians and photographers.

Official tours and cleanups frequently take place on holidays like Memorial Day and Veteran’s Day. Tours are also offered in the fall, surrounding Lawrence’s participation in the Civil War.
Some of the Oldest Graves

Anne Miriam Barnes (1837)

Both of these stones are slate. Most of the stones in the Bellevue are marble or granite, which was traditional for the post colonial and Victorian era.

Anne’s grave is interesting. Little is known about her life, other than she was previously buried elsewhere and reinterred in the Bellevue.

Phebe Merrill (1847)
A close up of the masonry on Merrill’s stone shows an urn and willow, common headstone motifs.
Residents of the Bellevue are representative of common communities at the time. Many church founders, early politicians, and Civil War veterans are buried there, as well as teachers and those who established schools.

There are also many charitable communal plots, which served to give dignified burial grounds to veterans, mill workers, and the poor.

The Pauper’s Lot, seen below, is one of the earliest in the area.
At one point in time, Lawrence was known as “the city of churches”. The Bellevue was founded as a Protestant cemetery, and many pastors, reverends, and church founders reside within its grounds.

George Littlefield (1901) was one of the Lawrence Universalist Church founders. He was also a Civil War veteran.
The Reverend Packard founded the Grace Episcopal Church, the oldest church in Lawrence (built in 1851). The church is still used today, and stands on Jackson Street on the edge of the common.

Packard also founded the Rose and Thistle Society, a relief fund that aided in the burial of poor Episcopalians, specifically of English (rose) and Scottish (thistle) descent.
Above is the Rose and Thistle Monument. The smaller marker in the foreground was purchased by a member for a small fee.

Organizations like this would generally ask for a few cents a week, on a sliding scale based on need, and provided an early form of burial insurance.

The Pacific Mills Relief Society lot nearby offered a similar service to indigent mill workers. That there are few burials in the lot show evidence that although these options were available, families with means preferred to purchase their own plots (no different than today).
The Pemberton Mill collapse in April of 1860 was probably the most devastating industrial disaster in the region. In the midst of a shift, the mill, overburdened with machinery, caved in on the workers and subsequently caught fire. Many workers were killed, a lot of them young women and children.
The Pemberton Monument in the Bellevue provided burial service for those who were unclaimed after the disaster.
Many Lawrence school founders are buried in the Bellevue.

John Rodman Rollins, a Newburyport native and Dartmouth graduate, founded the Rollins School.
The Wetherbee School is named for Emily Greene Wetherbee, who taught there for years. Like many teachers of her time, she died a spinster (in the 1800s, teachers were not usually allowed to marry), and the Clarkes added her to the family plot. It was common for families to provide for people in situations like hers. The Clarkes also took care that the school be named for her.
Reverend John W. Adams (1832-1915) Adams served as chaplain in the Civil War for the 2nd NH Regiment from 1863-65. While he was a New Hampshire and later Methuen resident, he opted for burial in Lawrence. Some speculate this was because of the cemetery’s prominence at the time.

George Bodwell aided in the capture of Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy in the Civil War.
Arthur T. Shuyler (1866) was a member of the famous 54th regiment, the all black troops showcased in the movie “Glory”. His mother was an “Indian doctress from New York, his father an escaped slave from Virginia.” Shuyler was a Lawrence resident.
Moulton Batchelder served first as 2\textsuperscript{nd} Lieutenant for the 40\textsuperscript{th} Mass Volunteers and then as 1\textsuperscript{st} Lieutenant for the 6\textsuperscript{th} Mass. He later went on to be a detective in the sensational Lizzie Borden case.
Sumner H. Needham is a little known soldier from the Civil War. Although Luther Ladd of Lowell is widely known as the first casualty of the war, Needham was actually the first to fall. While not involved in a battle, he received mortal wounds in the Baltimore riots only a week after the war was declared.
Needham’s Monument, commissioned by the city of Lawrence in 1862, is the oldest Civil War monument in the country.
The Needham GAR Post (Post 39) is one of the oldest Civil War posts in the US. It provided burial services for indigent soldiers in good standing.

The term GAR stands for Grand Army of the Republic, and their flag-holding markers grace the graves of Civil War veterans.
Charles Hammond is another veteran buried in the Bellevue. He, his brother and father enlisted in the war as Confederates, but Hammond jumped sides and fought for the North. After the war he worked as a salesman for Cold Spring Breweries, but succumbed to what Victorians termed “nostalgia” (today post-traumatic-stress-disorder), and killed himself.
William Sharrock’s war story is particularly ironic. He enlisted in Mass Heavy Artillery, Company F, and survived many devastating battles including Cold Harbor and Gettysburg, sustaining only two injuries.

After returning from the war, he was participating in a Fourth of July celebration on the Lawrence Common in 1865 when a cannon misfired and he lost both arms.
Sharrock later went on to become an artist, painting watercolors, and was also the city messenger. His obituary states that he “accomplished more with no arms than with”!
Local historian Joseph Bella of Methuen and Chairwoman of the Bellevue Cemetery Elizabeth Charlton provided me with a personal tour of the cemetery. While regular tours are not advertised, both Beth and Joe are more than happy to walk the grounds and provide animated local history to anyone expressing interest.
My tour of the Bellevue covers only a small corner of the cemetery’s grounds, and even then barely cameos the lives of those I researched. The cemetery is comprehensive of the community and the times, but much more professional research is still needed to document the stories of the grounds and the residents.

Unlike cemeteries such as Mount Auburn, historical information is not currently readily available to the public. However, historians like Mr. Bella and Mrs. Charlton enjoy offering intimate tours and information, and are very passionate.

If you do visit the grounds, wear sturdy shoes and bring a camera— the Bellevue welcomes you!
Bella, Joseph G., Lawrence Civil War Memorial Guard, Secretary, Historian
Charlton, Elizabeth, Bellevue Chairwoman
Wadsworth, H. A., A History of Lawrence, MA. Lawrence Eagle Steam Job. 1880.
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