

# Mount Moriah Cemetery Preservation Corporation

c/o Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority  
1234 Market Street, 16<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
(215) 209-8720

Dear Mount Moriah Cemetery Stakeholder:

Thank you for your interest in Mount Moriah Cemetery.

As you are probably aware, over the last several years, the cemetery has been greatly improved due to the efforts of the Friends of Mount Moriah Cemetery, Inc., the volunteer organization that was formed to steward the cemetery after its abandonment in 2011. The Friends have reclaimed many parts of the cemetery from woody, invasive vegetation and much of the cemetery is now being mowed on a regular basis. Through the tireless efforts of the Friends, not only has the physical appearance of the cemetery improved, but the organizational affairs have improved as well. The Friends offer comfort for families and direction for those doing genealogical research. We can't thank them enough.

In September 2014, the Mount Moriah Cemetery Preservation Corporation was appointed receiver of Mount Moriah Cemetery. The former owner, the Mount Moriah Cemetery Association, whose last member died in 2004, was dissolved by the Orphans Court of Philadelphia and a group of volunteers, the Mount Moriah Cemetery Preservation Corporation, was appointed by the court to act as the receiver. The receiver is not the legal owner but works under the auspices of the Court to discharge the business affairs. The court order allowed the Corporation to determine the Cemetery's assets and liabilities but also required that the Corporation attempt to better secure the site, work with others to better maintain the property and, most importantly, determine a strategic direction for the long-term viability of the Cemetery.

This letter is meant to provide you with an update on the Corporation's activities as the receiver.

## **Current Governance**

The current board and officers of the Corporation are:

Brian Abernathy, President (Philadelphia appointee)  
Executive Director, Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority

Paulette Rhone, Vice-President (citizen appointee)  
President, Friends of Mount Moriah Cemetery

Nevin Mann, Secretary/Treasurer (citizen appointee)  
Deathcare Industry Consultant

Hon. Rohan Hepkins (Yeadon appointee)  
Mayor, Borough of Yeadon

Clifford Brock (Yeadon appointee)  
Brock Brothers Construction

Martine DeCamp (Philadelphia appointee)  
Philadelphia City Planning Commission

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Michael Nairn (citizen appointee)  
Associate Professor, Urban Studies, University of Pennsylvania

## **Finances of Mount Moriah Cemetery Association**

As reported in March 2015, the Association's operating account at Citizen's Bank has had a zero balance since June 2011. The Association's perpetual care fund account has a balance of approximately \$12,435.

As a result of an inquiry by the Corporation, PNC Bank has recently disclosed several Trust accounts held for perpetual care. These accounts were reported by PNC's Cleveland office as well as from local law firm Feldman & Feldman. Because the cemetery is in receivership, the Corporation is in current discussions with legal counsel to determine how to access these accounts and how these accounts must be used.

In our March report, the Corporation reported that it had received notice that the City of Philadelphia intended to sell the cemetery at Sheriff Sale. According to the City Law Department, a portion of the Cemetery has been assessed property taxes for a number of years and that the former Association had been paying those taxes until 2011. Since that time, the City has agreed that the property should be listed as exempt and has corrected its records.

Additionally, we have learned that the Cemetery had a significant water and storm water liability. Those liabilities have been waived by the City.

## **Fundraising and Strategic Planning**

Efforts to secure support and embark on a strategic planning effort continue. Specifically, the Corporation and the Friends of Mount Moriah Cemetery have submitted a Letter of Intent to the William Penn Foundation to fund a strategic plan. The Foundation has invited the Corporation to submit an application and the application was submitted on November 2. We hope that funding will be secure by December 2015. Additionally, the Freemasons have expressed an interest in funding a portion of the strategic planning effort.

Conversations have also continued with a number of stakeholders and potential advisers, including Jessica Baumert (The Woodlands Cemetery), Scott Quitel (LandHealth Institute) and PennPraxis.

## **Security and maintenance**

The Friends of Mount Moriah Cemetery have held weekly volunteer restoration events throughout the Spring and Summer. These volunteer efforts include students from local universities as well as the family's of those who are buried in the cemetery. Collectively, they have successfully maintained a larger number of sections and areas than had been maintained by the original association.

As previously reported, the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority installed cyclone fencing around the perimeter of the Cemetery in October 2014. It continues to make spot repairs if and when necessary to deter dumping and other illegal activity.

The Borough of Yeadon has repaired a portion of the Cemetery's roadway to maintain access to the entire Yeadon portion of the Cemetery.

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The City and the Borough police departments have agreed to regularly patrol the site.

The Preservation Alliance named the historic gatehouse one of the City's most endangered structures. As a result, the Corporation has applied for and been awarded funds to stabilize the structure by the Mayor's Fund for Philadelphia. The Corporation has signed an agreement with Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. to prepare engineering reports and plans. The Corporation hopes to complete stabilization by the end of the calendar year.

## **Burial and Information Requests**

There have been a number of inquiries regarding burial and disinterments. For each request, the Corporation informs the family or funeral director of the Cemetery's current legal state, that a petition must be filed with the Court and that the Court must order the burial or disinterment. The Corporation also expresses concern about the Cemetery's records and admits to not having a full understanding of where all burials are located.

The Friends of Mount Moriah continue to field the majority of information requests. They receive 3-5 requests per week and at least once a week a volunteer is required to visit the plot and clear the grave to gather information.

## **Records and other Administrative Issues**

The Cemetery's burial records are currently being held by the City of Philadelphia Department of Records. The Friends of MountMoriah has organized volunteers to scan those records and distribute the electronic copy to volunteers nationwide so that a database of plot owners and burials can be created.

Approximately 90% of burial records have been photographed. The records consist of the 7 initial Registers, the Day Books, Burial Cards and later the Burial Forms. These photos are sent out in batches of 25 to volunteer transcribers who send the transcribed information back in an excel spreadsheet. The information is proofed and then uploaded into the database.

The City of Philadelphia has paid for the Corporation's General Liability insurance. Ballard Spahr has updated a waiver and release for volunteers that work at the Cemetery.

In closing, the Corporation feels that it is beginning to make progress. Admittedly, the Board often feels overwhelmed by the scale of this project and the host of difficulties that it must overcome. The size of the property, the lack of financial resources, the poor organization of the former Association and its records and the challenges found in the surrounding community all weigh heavily on the Board. At the same time, each of these obstacles reinforces in the Board the need to persevere.

On behalf of the Board, we appreciate your support.

Sincerely,

Brian Abernathy

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