

THE LAUREL CEMETERY MEMORIAL PROJECT

← UNCOVERING OUR FORGOTTEN PAST →

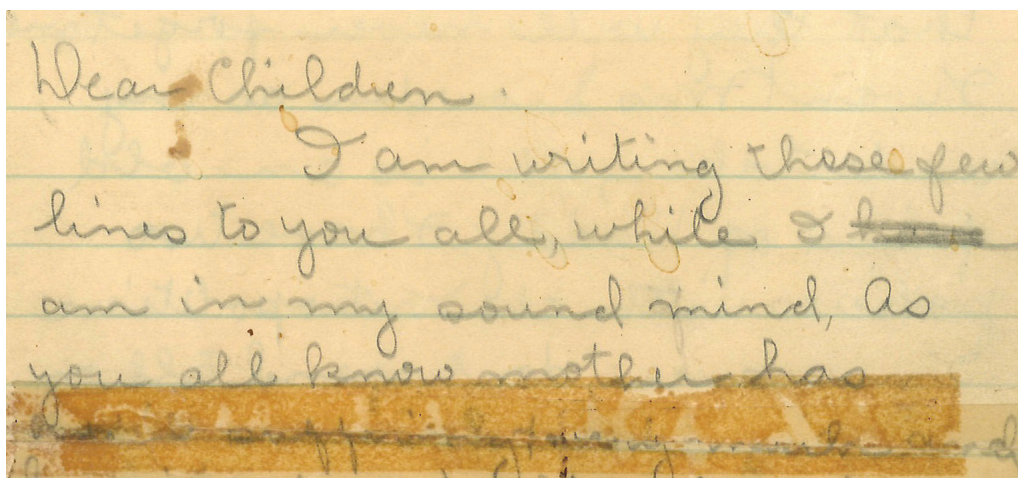
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1852 – 1958

A LITTLE FANFARE FOR THE “ORDINARY” FOLKS

/ SHARON L. HAYNIE

THE ANCESTORS: Five of my ancestors were buried in Laurel Cemetery between 1916 and 1927: great-Uncle Lawrence Haynie (15 months); great-Aunt Edith Earl Haynie (19 months); great-Aunt Inez Haynie, (a 12-year-old schoolgirl); my maternal great-grandmother Rachel Collins – a lunchroom worker (age 37); and a maternal 2nd great-uncle, Alexander Jones – a widowed cook (age 65). None died of “old age”; without modern medical therapies, they succumbed to diseases that afflicted vulnerable infants and children or the 1918 influenza virus that ravaged adult populations worldwide. Each of these ancestors was a first-generation or a recent migrant to Baltimore City. »



The mission of the Laurel Cemetery Memorial Project (LCMP) is to erect a permanent memorial in recognition of the thousands of African Americans who were laid to rest at the historic Laurel Cemetery, ensure the safety and stability of the site into the foreseeable future, and to educate the public about the rich history of the cemetery and the lives of those buried there.

laurelcemetery.omeka.net

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FEATURES

My great-grandparents George and Ella Haynie migrated in 1912 with their large family from their farming and fishing home in Reedville, VA, and settled in West Baltimore. My great-grandmother Rachel left her daughter (my grandmother Mary Unella DeFreitas) behind in the port town, St. John's, Antigua, British West Indies and emigrated to America in 1906 to work in a West Baltimore lunchroom alongside her uncle. I suspect their modest lives are representative of the many souls buried in Laurel Cemetery.

DISCOVERING LAUREL CEMETERY AND ITS LEGACY:

Some might use the adjectives providential or ironic to describe that my awareness of the Laurel Cemetery burial ground and its fate occurred on the Feast of the Epiphany, Sunday January 6, 2019. In my family, I am the caretaker of family “stuff not-yet-ready-to-throw-away”. That afternoon, I opened a small folder I had not excavated since acquiring it after my Uncle Billy's death in 2012 and discovered a folded document that was an original deed – #3343 – to a plot in Laurel Cemetery in Baltimore Maryland. On the back of the deed was a hand-written entry of the interred: Rachel Collins, November 1918. The death date confirmed my mother's family's suspicion that Grandmother Rachel had died at a young age. Excited, I called my Aunt Lillian and mother, Inez, to inform them of their grandmother's death date and to suggest that we arrange a visit to her gravesite to pay homage to her. I had a church writer's group meeting to attend, so I would do an internet search on the cemetery location that evening. My optimism and excitement were dashed as the internet search yielded a link to the *Baltimore Sun* article¹

that described Professors Elgin Klugh and Ron Castanzo's work uncovering the graves under the Belair-Edison shopping center. I dashed off an email to Klugh describing my poignant loss and find (the deed); thankfully, he responded within 15 minutes and informed me of the symposium planned for June 2019. Five family members and I attended the June 2019 Symposium and I volunteered to join the Laurel Cemetery Taskforce.

THE MEMORIAL PROJECT AND WHY IT MATTERS:

Grandmother Mary Unella (nee DeFreitas) – the only child of Rachel Collins and the original owner of the Laurel Cemetery Deed #3343 – wrote words that have haunted and hooked me into work to uncover family and family history. Two months after giving birth to her 7th child (my mother, Inez) Grandmother Mary anticipated her death and wrote a letter² to her husband and children (*Figure 1*) with two lines that I can't hide from:

“...always tell them about their mother so that they will never forget me...and on my birthday and decoration day and most any time your feel like it put flowers on my grave even if you can only afford two....”

I imagine if the many souls buried at Laurel Cemetery could speak they would call out with a plea similar to that of my ancestor: remember me. ★

1. C. Tkacik. “Rediscovering the African-American graveyard beneath a Baltimore shopping center”. *The Baltimore Sun*, March 20, 2018.

2. Laurel Cemetery's name was mentioned in my grandmother Mary's death letter; however, for decades no one in the family paid attention to this detail hidden in plain sight. On page 3 she says “...I had one [lot] in Laurel Cemetery where my mother was buried...”.

Nov 27, 1938

Dear Children.

I am writing these few lines to you all, while I ~~am~~ am in my sound mind, as you all know mother has ~~been~~ having this terrible heart attack so close together, that I really believe I will not be with you all very long, then on the other hand I may be with you all a long, long time, but I doubt it. I want you children to stay together, take care of each

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other, especially the older ones, Taking care of the younger ones until they can look out for themselves, have manners for everybody and you will find out how nicely you'll get along. Sam & Bell will help you all they can as they say. you know Waddy will do all he can for you all but he needs the help of some one else, ^{but} don't care what any one try to tell you stick with Sam and Bell, I don't want you all to be separated while the others are so small, and always tell

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them about there mother so that they will never forget me. I want Mrs Snowden as my undertaker, she is an old friend of Waddy, I have two policies with the Metropolitan Insurance, don't spend all on ~~me~~ over as you will have to buy a lot I had one in Laurel Cemetery where my mother was buried but I guess I have lost it, any way I ~~want~~ want to be buried at Mt Auburn Cemetery, while buying get a lot for three, and on my birthday and decora-

Write to Miss & Virginia and Mrs Campbell
Don't spend all you have but please give me flowers and buy an inexpensive white dress I want white.

day, and most anytime you feel like it put a bunch of flowers, on my grave, if you can't even afford more than 25c or some of my friends that have flowers will don't for get mother, you know while I lived I live for you all regardless of what I didn't have just so you ~~all~~ all had. I was happy. Let my funeral be held at the house, I haven't been to Church for so long Well my blessing on you all, God bless you children dear Mother.

Figure 1. A letter of four pages from Mary Unella DeFreitas to her husband and children. Images used with permission of Inez Penn Haynie-Dodson.

PROFILES

TO BENEFIT THE COMMUNITY GEORGE ALEXANDER HACKETT (1806-1870)

/ DONNA T. HOLLIE

His marble tombstone identifies him as **Captain George A. Hackett**, an honorific conferred due to his recruitment of African Americans for the Union Army or due to his leadership in the Sheridan Invincibles, an African American military/ceremonial unit. Hackett, however, was a man of many talents and skills which he used to serve his community. Born in Baltimore to an activist father, he was exposed to community service through his family's membership in Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

He joined the U.S. Navy in 1839 and was a steward on the U.S.S. Constitution, the only position available to African Americans at the time. His travels to Central and South America enhanced his awareness of the benefits of collective action as he observed how the newly emancipated in those areas worked to become integrated into free societies. On his return to Baltimore he became increasingly active in the political arena and like most African Americans of the era, supported the Republican Party.

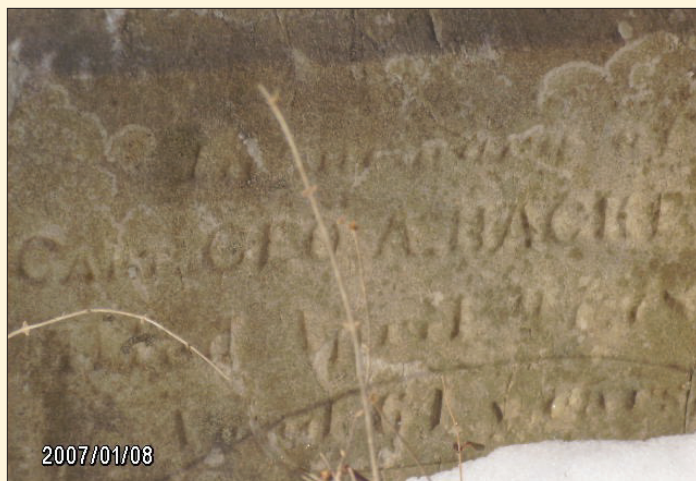
Hackett was extremely involved in efforts to bring about African American male suffrage. Unfortunately he died not long after the ratification of the fifteenth amendment, granting African American men the franchise, and he was not able to exercise the right he had fought for. Because of his desire to have his people reap the benefits of education, he lobbied for city supported high schools for African Americans, and for African American teachers in African American schools. These were other goals he worked to achieve but did not live to see.

The Jacobs Bill, the purpose of which was to deport Maryland's free Blacks, confiscate their property and enslave their minor children was defeated in the Maryland legislature, in large measure, due to Hackett's leadership, organizational and protest efforts. He also established The Protection Association which worked to eliminate the all too frequent kidnapping and enslavement of free Blacks taking place after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

Employed as a claims agent and a collector Hackett also operated a stable and a coal yard. Additionally, he was one of the founders of the Chesapeake Marine Railway and Dry Dock Company, America's first shipyard owned and operated by African Americans. This company provided employment for Baltimoreans of both races.

Hackett was instrumental in the establishment of The Douglass Institute, the city's African American cultural center, the site of many of the community's protest meetings. In conjunction with Bethel A.M.E. church members, Hackett founded a facility for the care of aged, indigent women.

Mississippi Senator Hiram Revels, the first African American to serve in Congress, and Bishop Daniel A. Payne of the A.M.E. Church, spoke in tribute at Hackett's funeral. He was interred at Laurel Cemetery in Baltimore and his tombstone is now located at the Laurel site in Carroll County Maryland.



George Alexander Hackett's
tombstone photo was found at
www.findagrave.com

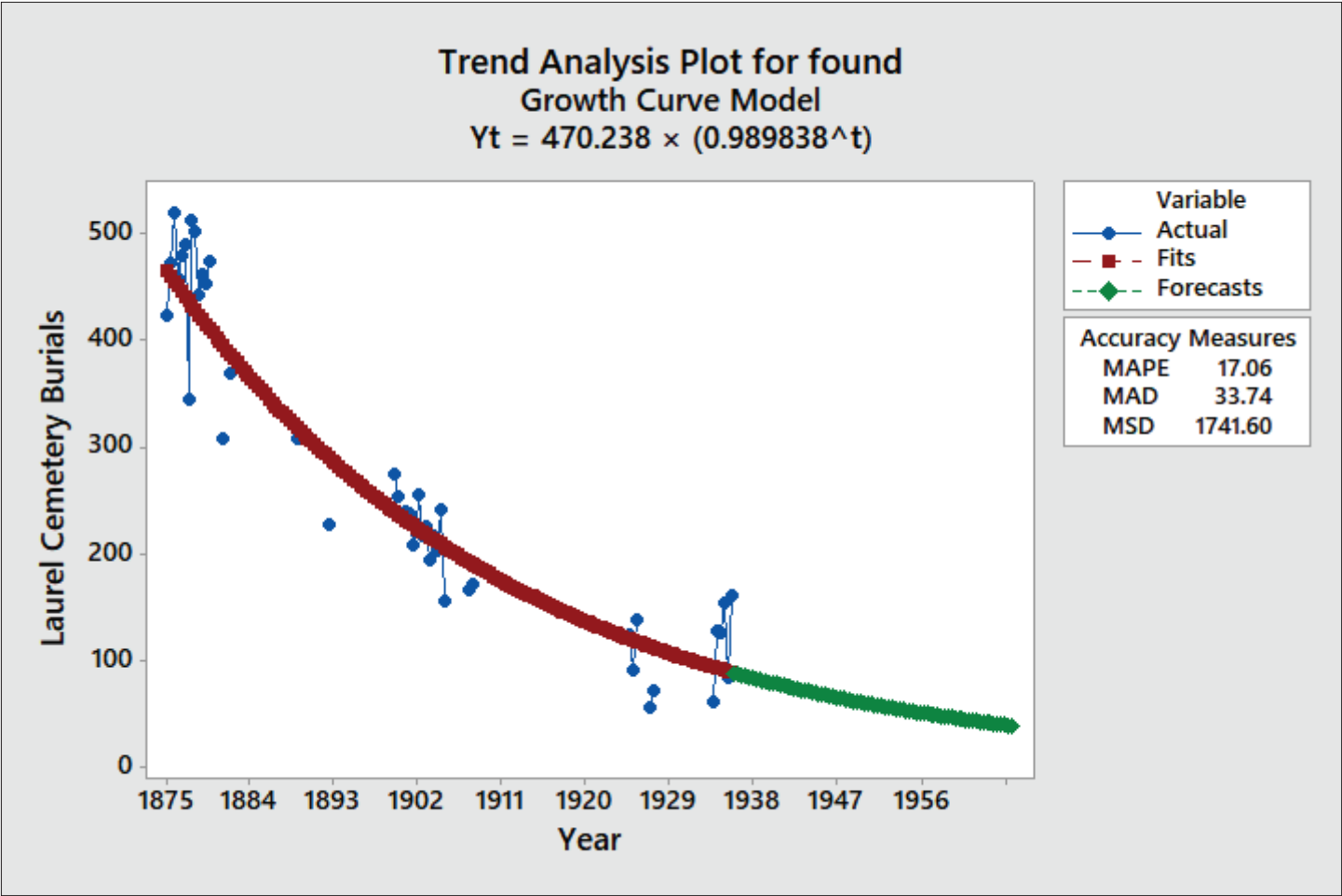
RESEARCH

ESTIMATING THE NUMBER OF BURIALS AT LAUREL CEMETERY

/ ELGIN KLUGH

As of December 1, 2022. The death certificate transcription volunteers, led by Glenn Blackwell, have searched approximately 30% of available records and already identified 19,100 Baltimore City death certificates indicating burials at Laurel Cemetery. To make an approximation of the minimum number of individuals, Isaac Shearn plotted the number of burials for years that had already been completely transcribed. He then used the trend analysis function in the Minitab statistical software package to fit a curve to the known points and to calculate an estimate for years not yet transcribed based on that curve. Using this method, he

estimates that a minimum of 37,049 burials occurred at Laurel Cemetery between 1875 and 1956. It is therefore safe to assume that between forty-five to fifty-five thousand is a more accurate estimate for the period between 1852 and 1956. This information and much more is included in our forthcoming book, *A Place for Memory: Baltimore's Historic Laurel Cemetery*, expected to be released in March 2023. In the Archival Research chapter, written by Glenn Blackwell with technical assistance from Isaac Shearn, we share further insights gained from our analysis of Baltimore City death certificates, such as trends in age of death over time, occupations, and residential patterns. ★



CONNECTIONS

THE BLACK CEMETERY NETWORK BLACKCEMETERYNETWORK.ORG

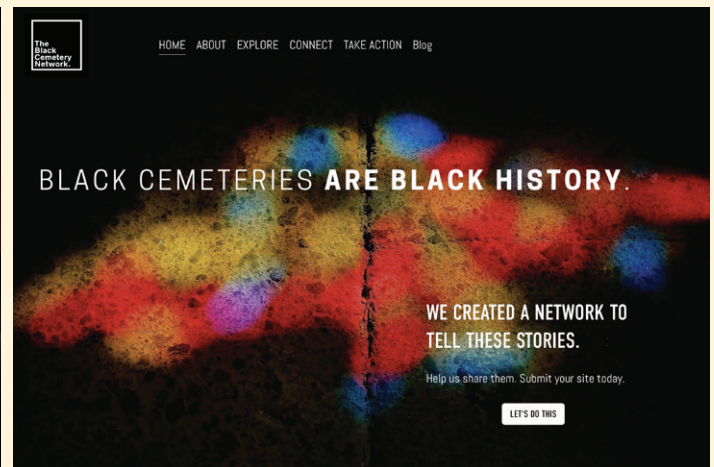
/ ELGIN KLUGH

Did you happen to watch 60 Minutes on Sunday, November 27, 2022? There was a segment titled, **“Grave Injustice,”** profiling recently discovered black cemeteries in Clearwater, Florida. This segment featured Dr. Antoinette Jackson, creator of the Black Cemetery Network. **The Black Cemetery Network (BCN)** is a platform created to highlight and connect people and activities engaged in identifying and preserving African American burial grounds. This network engages in research and advocacy, and is building a virtual archive of African American cemeteries throughout the United States. Please visit the BCN site and read about its activities. The Laurel Cemetery Memorial Project is a registered member of the Black Cemetery Network.

The 60 Minutes segment can be viewed at:

Watch 60 Minutes Season 55 Episode 11: 11/27/2022: Grave Injustice, Survival of the Friendliest, Comparative Oncology - Full show on CBS.

You can also find the segment on **YouTube**.

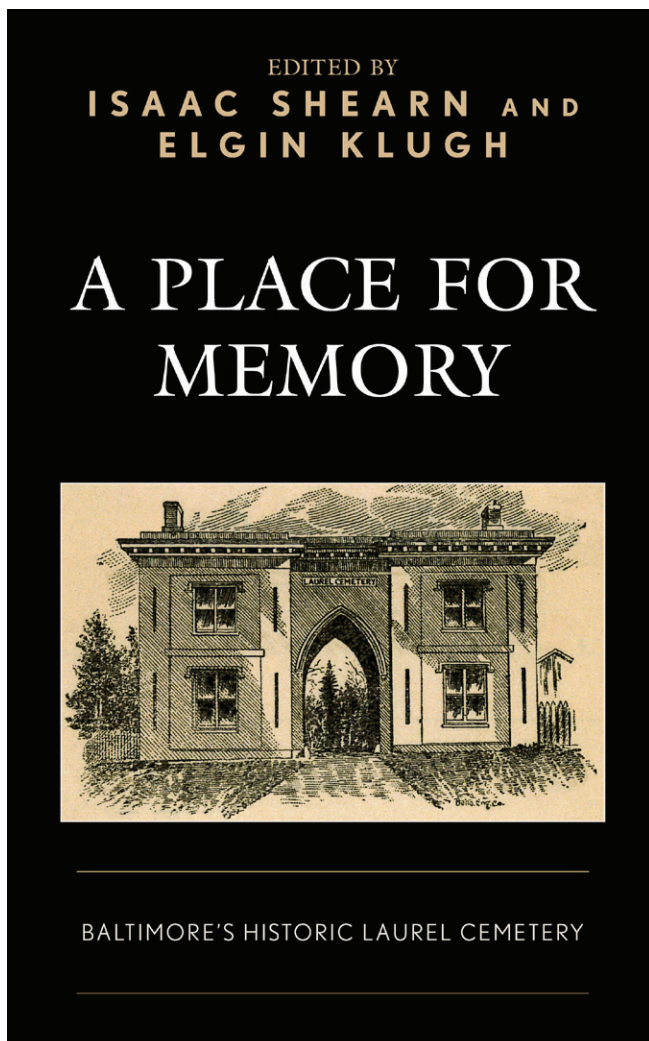


UPDATES

FORTHCOMING BOOK

Be on the lookout for our forthcoming book, *A Place for Memory: Baltimore's Historic Laurel Cemetery*.

We anticipate that it will be released in March 2023 by the Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Company. ★



BALTIMORE HERITAGE MICRO GRANT

On Thursday October 13, 2022, Baltimore Heritage, Inc. held the Preservation Celebration 2022 (<https://baltimoreheritage.org/event/preservation-celebration-2022/>). This event included a Pitch Competition. Six finalists each made a three-minute pitch, competing for 1st and 2nd place \$1000 prizes, and 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th place prizes of \$500. All attendees were afforded one vote. The Laurel Cemetery Memorial Project was represented by Elgin Klugh, and earned an unprecedented tie for 2nd place. The two 2nd place contestants split the difference, and each was awarded a micro-grant of \$750. This funding will assist in the development of an historic interpretive sign to be installed in a new park adjacent to the Belair Edison Crossing Shopping Center. The park, will be located off of Elmley Avenue near Catholic High School. This park is also the site of the mural featured in our Fall 2022 newsletter. ★



5487 Halflight Garth
Columbia, Maryland 21045

laurelcemetery.omeka.net

DONATIONS

To donate to the project, please send a check or money order to:

Laurel Cemetery Memorial Project, Inc.

5487 Halflight Garth

Columbia, Maryland 21045

INQUIRIES

Questions about the Laurel Cemetery Memorial Project?

Email rememberlaurelcemetery@yahoo.com

MEETINGS

The Laurel Cemetery Memorial Project meetings are on the 3rd Friday of the month at 3:00pm (in months with 5 Fridays we will meet on the 4th Friday). Since the start of the Pandemic, all meetings have been virtual, via Zoom.

For information about meetings and/or volunteering, please contact rememberlaurelcemetery@yahoo.com or visit laurelcemetery.omeka.net.



LCMP OFFICERS

Elgin L. Klugh, *Chair*

Molly Ricks, *Secretary*

Deidre Ferron, *Treasurer*