

Laboring Sons Memorial Grounds

121 East Fifth St
Frederick, Frederick Co, Maryland
Today



For Plaques, see

<https://www.usgenwebsites.org/MDFrederick/afriamericans/lsonscem.htm>

History follows:

Ah Wilderness!



Photo by Frank Keeler

This view of the Laboring Sons cemetery, in Chapel alley between Fifth and Sixth streets, was taken from the southeast, where on Fifth street during the current Summer. Thick underbrush has almost entirely covered the grave-stones, the solitary marker at the right being all that is visible here. The trees at the left are located along one side of the north-south driveway that provides ingress and egress, the entrance to which is on Fifth street.

A proposal has been made by the Beneficial Society of the Laboring Sons of Frederick City Inc., whereby the virtually abandoned colored graveyard would be made available to the City for memorial park purposes provided certain recommendations are acceptable to the Mayor and Aldermen.

Proposed Development Of Cemetery Into Park Would Climax Century-Old Project

By JOE EISENHARTER SRD

Proposed transformation of the Laboring Sons cemetery into a memorial park would not only constitute a material civic improvement in southeast Frederick, it would also climax and perpetuate a project launched more than a century ago.

The history of the colored graveyard in Chapel alley between Fifth and Sixth streets actually goes back to 1830, when available records show the organization, as an unincorporated body, of the Beneficial Society of the Laboring Sons of Frederick. Although the society was not incorporated until March 13, 1867 the graveyard property had been previously acquired in 1851 for the sum of \$250 and recorded three years later.

Ninety-four years have passed since the organization of the cemetery has virtually abandoned the site as a burial ground. Grave markers are almost totally obscured, records have become lost, and even the date of the most recent interment there is not officially known.

Overlaid With Weeds

Thick with underbrush and overgrown with weeds, the burial ground has lacked a caretaker since 1927. Residents of the neighborhood have long besought the City to transform the area into a park, or take some suitable steps to eliminate an objectionable condition.

It remained for the Laboring Sons themselves, however, to make

the initial move. Through their counsel, Attorney Edward B. Storm, certain recommendations were made to the Mayor and Aldermen on August 31 whereby the society would present the cemetery to the City for use as a memorial park. Through the vice-president and acting head, James Arthur Bryant, the Laboring Sons have issued a call to lot holders and persons interested in the Laboring Sons cemetery to meet on October 1 to give final approval to the recommendations already adopted by the society officers. If granted, the society will then ask the Mayor and Aldermen to assume ownership and maintenance of the site as a memorial park, erect a suitable tablet or marker and grant certain other privileges contingent upon relinquishment of title. If this be done, the Laboring Sons plan to dissolve.

The Beneficial Society of the Laboring Sons of Frederick has actually been in existence 109 years. It was on Whit Monday a date mentioned—in the year 1839—that the colored residents of the city organized, adopted a constitution and by-laws, the purpose of which was set forth in the following preamble:

"To be afflicted in body is one of the most distressing dispensations of an All-Wise Providence; but this wise dispensation is augmented in terror an hundred fold, if at the same time we be destitute of friends or pecuniary re-

sources. Firmly believing that it is not only an act of justice, but that humanity, mercy and all that is amiable compel us to relieve and assist to the utmost of our abilities our afflicted brethren by temporal and spiritual benefits: We, therefore, by the Grace of God, proceed to organize ourselves into a body for the purpose of relieving or alleviating, both spiritually and temporally, any member of us, who may be distressed by sickness; and in case the All-Wise Providence, may in His great goodness and mercy, design to call him from amongst us, to see that his mortal remains be interred with decency and that they be deposited in a place honorable to contain the precious remains of departed spirits.

"We are all liable to misfortune. The man, who today is basking in the sunshine of wealth and luxury, may, ere the next sun shall have illumined the earth, be destitute of even the necessities of life. God forbid, that we should form ourselves into an association for the purpose of basking, as it were, a tower of Babel that the winds and storm of adversity directed by Providence cannot prevail against us, but as a band of Christian brethren, whose duty it is to love one another, and obey the Holy One of Israel, as

far as weak human nature can do, our funds shall be supplied to afflicted members, not then in favor but as a right, which they not only expect to receive, but which our Constitution allows them to. We hope and pray, therefore, that the only true and holy One will smile upon our exertions and grant us union, peace and prosperity, so long as we shall deserve His favor.

Next of record brings the society up to October, 1831. Land wanted for cemetery purposes was purchased for \$250 from George Houck, who had acquired the property through previous equity proceedings. The lot was bounded East Fifth street; and "Chappel Alley" on the Plat of Frederick Town as Lots 229 and 249 were turned over to the trustees of the Laboring Sons. They were Isaac Preout, William Tinsler, Perry G. Walker, Robert E. Probec, Cyrus Bowens, William Brown and Nicholas Thompson. Their heirs and assigns under perpetual provisions for cemetery purposes. The indenture was not officially recorded, however, September 4, 1834.

Apparently all went well with the Laboring Sons and for 28 years passed from the time of organization until they decided to incorporate. On February 8, 1867 a bill was introduced in the General Assembly entitled "An Act to incorporate the Beneficial Society of the Laboring Sons of Frederick City." Action was swift and the measure was approved the following March 15.

The incorporators were Cyrus Brown, president; Perry Walker, vice-president; Isaac Preout, treasurer, James Weems, chaplain, William Brown Jr., chief manager and John B. H. Beall and Tannehill and Thomas Lyle, assistant managers.

All of that, however, is now history. Since the project has now been launched to replace the century-old graveyard with a memorial park, some earnest realtor effort has resulted in a somewhat interesting discovery. Inasmuch as virtually all old-time records have gone to the limbo of misplaced data, it became necessary to do a little inter-

viewing. Acting President Bryant and Mrs. John J. Mabel, the latter being Sons' treasurer, and one of the former president, proved prolific sources.

Mrs. Mabel estimates she has been the treasurer for about twelve years. She understands that all the burial lots had been sold for some years were purchased during her tenure. She said she hadn't received any funds, adding that there had been no meetings.

On the basis of the land area, in proportion to the size of the lots, it was estimated by President Bryant that there are—should be—about 200 burial plots in the cemetery. And even though there have been no interments there for many years, based on custom of days long gone, the present Laboring Sons officers feel confident there must be some 1-300 bodies beneath the surface. There is no definite way of telling—even most of the stones and markers are obliterated.

It was learned, however, that the size of the lots was 12 x 16 feet.

"What did they sell for?" Mrs. Mabel was asked.

"In 1856, half a lot sold for \$1.50; price of a whole lot up to the 90's was \$3," she replied. Real estate values obviously weren't inflated then.

But here's another interesting angle. If the City does decide to acquire the site in accordance with the recommendations of the recommendations, there will be left but one colored cemetery for Frederick City. That is Fairview.

It hasn't been too many years ago that the old Greenmont cemetery cemetery was discarded. It was located to the west of and in between the present Elm Street school and the Frederick Memorial Hospital, which Board subsequently purchased and utilized the property.

The Laboring Sons cemetery now stands. It represents an area in Chapel alley with a frontage of approximately 385 feet adjacent to both Fifth and Sixth streets with a depth of about 120 feet. Trees line both sides of the center driveway, with the entrance on Fifth street. With proper treatment, the site could be transformed into a distinct civic asset.

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NOTICES

NOTICE TO THE LOT-HOLDERS AND PERSONS INTERESTED IN THE LABORING SONS CEMETERY AND TO ALL MEMBERS AND FORMER MEMBERS OF THE BENEFICIAL SOCIETY OF THE LABORING SONS OF FREDERICK CITY:

A special meeting of lot-holders and persons interested or claiming any interest in the Laboring Sons Cemetery as well as all members and former members of the Beneficial Society of the Laboring Sons of Frederick City, a body corporate of the State of Maryland, will be held on Friday evening, October 1, 1948 at 9:00 o'clock, P. M. at the Quinn A. M. E. Church at 105 East Third Street, Frederick, Maryland to consider the recommendations of the surviving officers and trustees of said corporation, which recommendations are as follows:

1. That the Laboring Sons Cemetery be turned over, given and deeded to the Mayor and Aldermen of Frederick, subject to the following terms and conditions, providing the same shall be acceptable by the Mayor and Aldermen of Frederick:

a. That the Laboring Sons Cemetery will be maintained by the City as a public park and playground as well as a cemetery to be known as **THE LABORING SONS MEMORIAL PARK.**

b. That no further burials will be allowed in said park unless the Mayor and Aldermen of Frederick shall, in their discretion decide to allow some outstanding Negro hero, scientist, artist, or athlete to be buried therein.

c. That a suitable memorial monument or tablet be erected in said park to the memory of those buried therein.

d. That the park shall be open at all times to the colored residents of Frederick, subject to any city-wide police regulations.

e. That the stones, monuments and memorials now in said cemetery shall be left therein at some place or places to be decided by the Mayor and Aldermen of Frederick.

f. That the Mayor shall appoint a committee of representative citizens to study the problem of juvenile delinquency among the colored youth in the City and determine: (1) what, if any, facilities and opportunities should be provided (for example—a Negro Community Center or Y. M. C. A.); (2) and how provision should be made to secure such facilities and opportunities as are recommended; and (3) any other findings or recommendations which said committee shall care to make; that said committee shall report their findings and recommendations to the Mayor and Aldermen of Frederick and to all citizens interested in the welfare of our community for such official and or voluntary community action as may be required, it being the hope of the Laboring Sons of Frederick that the Mayor and Aldermen of Frederick will, in accepting the gift of the Cemetery property, see fit to give some financial assistance to any community effort which might be started to establish and provide for proper facilities and advantages to encourage the proper use of leisure by our youthful citizens.

2. That all of the assets of the Beneficial Society of the Laboring Sons of Frederick City, except for the aforesaid Cemetery property, be turned over to any community campaign which might be started to build or maintain, through the Community Chest of Frederick or otherwise, a Negro Community Center or Y. M. C. A. or other worthwhile health and character-building institution.

3. That after the Cemetery Property has been given and deeded to the City, and all other assets are given away as above provided that the Beneficial Society of the Laboring Sons of Frederick City be legally dissolved as a body corporate of the State of Maryland.

The above recommendations were unanimously adopted by the undersigned officers of the aforesaid corporation at a meeting duly called and held in Frederick City at 9:00 o'clock, P. M. on Tuesday, August 24, 1948, which meeting was also attended by some of the lot holders of the Laboring Sons Cemetery.

BENEFICIAL SOCIETY OF THE LABORING SONS OF FREDERICK, a body corporate, by

JAMES ARTHUR BRYANT,
Vice-President and Acting President.

ATTEST:

Edward W. Walker, Secretary.

Mrs. John J. Makel, Treasurer.

dSept 1, 9, 17, 25

Site Sought For New Negro Graveyard

Possibilities loom for a new colored graveyard for Frederick. They became apparent when the request for action was renewed this week by the Laboring Sons on their proposal for the city to acquire the present burying ground in Chapel alley, between Fifth and Sixth streets.

Several months ago the Beneficial Society of the Laboring Sons of Frederick, corporate name of the owners, formally presented the Mayor and Aldermen a proposal whereby they would transfer title of their graveyard upon certain conditions.

No Action Taken

The matter has been discussed to some length by the city officials, but there has been no action. The subject was again brought before the Mayor and Aldermen at this week's meeting, when counsel for the organization asked for an answer. Considerable discussion resulted in the matter being referred to City Attorney Richard E. Zimmerman and City Engineer W. Raymond Walter for further investigation.

It was this discussion that evolved the possibility for a new colored graveyard, a suitable burial site to be desired.

The Chapel alley graveyard, virtually abandoned for such use for many years, has been the subject of complaint for a long time. Weed-infested, neighbors on both Fifth and Sixth streets have complained, and it has been necessary for the city to cut the underbrush. The Laboring Sons countered last Fall by offering the city the property for a park site under certain stipulations, some of which were also objected to by residents of the neighborhood. The matter has since lain dormant.

May Work Trade

Now that the Laboring Sons have renewed their request for action, and the fact that a new colored graveyard is generally considered needed for Frederick, the suggestion has been advanced that a trade may be possible whereby the city could acquire clear title to the Chapel alley site and in return provide the Laboring Sons with a property elsewhere which would prove suitable for burial purposes.

The only colored cemetery now possessed by Frederick is known as Fairview, located east of the city on the Gas House pike. It is not considered desirable, authoritative sources said, for a number of reasons, one of which is the fact that it lies low, is close to the Monocacy and in times of heavy rains or flood conditions, water overflows much of its confines.

New Proffer In Cemetery Conversion

Laboring Sons May Accept Plan To Make Old Graveyard Modern Park Area

Acceptance is expected in the near future by the Laboring Sons, beneficial Negro society, of counter-proposals just submitted by the Mayor and the Board of Alderman for conversion to park use of the old cemetery in Chapel Alley, between 5th and 6th streets.

Controversy over use of the property has flared many times as city officials sought to convert the overgrown, weed choked plot to a park area. Early in September, 1948, a public meeting was held in the Court House at which white and colored persons expressed many conflicting views, and delegations have appeared at a number of meetings of the Mayor and Aldermen. White residents in the neighborhood last autumn retained Edward D. Storm to represent their interests in the negotiations.

A letter from city officials has been sent to officers of the Laboring Sons and it is believed that the terms will prove acceptable and that the matter will be disposed of finally very soon.

Provisions Of Offer

The city offer includes the following provisions:

That the cemetery property be maintained by the city and be appropriately named as a park;

That no further burials be allowed there unless the Mayor and the Aldermen of Frederick in their discretion decide to allow interment of some outstanding Negro scientist, hero, artist or athlete;

That a suitable memorial monument or tablet be erected at city expense to honor those already buried there;

That headstones and monuments already on the plot be left there but buried under the earth as was done by the city in Memorial Park, and that a record of such markers be kept in City Hall;

That the Mayor appoint a committee of representative citizens to study the problem of juvenile delinquency among colored youth which shall decide what facilities and opportunities are needed and suggest ways and means of securing the same, and that the committee report findings for such official and volunteer action as is needed;

That it be understood the Mayor and Aldermen may make a contribution to supply such facilities but acceptance of the cemetery ground does not bind them to such action;

That the city officials set aside a site near the new municipal airport for a cemetery for Negro residents, to be approximately equal to the old graveyard in area, and that the city maintain the cemetery as a park for at least 50 years.

Prospective Graveyard Sites Viewed

Two prospective sites for a new graveyard for Frederick's colored residents were inspected by city officials Friday afternoon with a view to early selection. One location is east of the city close to the "Gas House" pike. The other is situated along Bales Lane, the road leading southward from the municipal airport to Route 40.

The proposed new graveyard would replace the present Laboring Sons cemetery in Chapel alley between Fifth and Sixth streets and which has been suggested as a park area.

Inspecting the two sites Friday were Aldermen Alvey V. Renn, Jesse C. Shaver, William B. Burall and Charles T. Butcher Sr., accompanied by City Engineer W. Raymond Walter. The decision to personally visit the two most likely areas was made at the special meeting of the Mayor and Aldermen on Thursday night, when it was indicated that a positive move was not only desirable, but was likely in the near future.

Site Abandoned

Decision to seek a new site for a colored graveyard was predicated upon a proposal made last September by the Laboring Sons whereby the city would acquire the existing burial ground, which has long been a virtual eyesore and the cause of considerable complaint due to the prevalence of weeds and underbrush. With a very few exceptions, the site has been abandoned for interment purposes for many years.

In addition the present Fairview cemetery, also located along the Gas House pike, is rapidly filling and its contour is such that it is frequently flooded during periods of heavy and prolonged rains.

More Desirable Site

One of the two sites in prospect is to the east of the present Fairview cemetery, near the disposal plant property. From the viewpoint of the city, it is the more desirable of the two, due to location and the fact that the approximate two acres involved is on high ground.

There are two primary factors which make the Bales Lanes site less desirable. One is that it may be a potential area for residences, and the other—and extremely important—fact is that it may possess a governmental involvement, due to the proximity of the airport, partly financed by Federal allotment.

An official stated after the inspection that a special meeting of the Mayor and Board may be called next week to settle the question. The Laboring Sons desire a new burying ground as soon as possible and by the same token the city wishes to widen and improve the existing property in Chapel alley between Fifth and Sixth streets.

An early accord is in prospect, it was authoritatively stated.

Begin Work On New Park

Work of transforming the old Laboring Sons colored cemetery in Chapel alley between Fifth and Sixth streets into a public park began Tuesday. Barring unforeseen developments, the project should be completed this Fall, said City Engineer W. Raymond Walter.

Park Department employees directed by Superintendent Jesse W. Kolb first began clearing the site of the tangled mass of weeds and underbrush. The next task will be to locate as many of the graves as possible, following which a plat will be made containing the information available.

Location of the graves in the cemetery, generally discarded for all practical purposes some years ago, is expected to be quite a task. Many markers have disappeared, while existing records are expected to be inadequate. At the same time many of the descendants of persons buried there have died or left the community with the result that little information is expected from those sources.

The city will then serve public notice through the newspapers to all persons interested in the cemetery of the action proposed to be taken.

Will Improve Site

In the meantime, it is understood that improvements to the area will proceed. These will include covering grave stones remaining, grading, filling in sunken areas and seeding.

Other improvements to the area include removal of the hedge on the east side of the cemetery-lot and widening of the alley, which in itself will eliminate a traffic bottleneck in this north-south thoroughfare.

When completed the project will provide a public park in the northeast section approximating an area of 120 x 380 feet. It will also eliminate an eyesore that has been the cause of complaint from residents of the area for years.

Under the proposal whereby the

Laboring Sons organization agreed to make the property available to the City, the colored beneficial society receives an approximate two acres of land on city-owned property near the disposal plant, about two miles east of the city limits.

This will be available for a new colored graveyard at such time as the Laboring Sons see fit. Formal possession will become effective next April 1, it was stated. Under the terms of the transaction, however, if the Laboring Sons do not promulgate the new cemetery plan, the City will redeem the disposal plant acreage for the sum of \$600.

Thus far there has been no indication as the colored group's ultimate plans.

The News
Frederick, MD
Wed, Aug 24, 1949

Clearing Site For New Park

No applications have been made to the city as yet for the removal of any bodies from the old Laboring Sons colored cemetery in Chapel Alley between Fifth and Sixth streets, a city spokesman said today.

For several weeks, the city has given public notice to the effect that any relative of persons buried in the cemetery who desires removal of body or bodies to other burial locations should so advise City Engineer W. Raymond Walter before October 1.

The cemetery, under an agreement, is to become a public park and the Laboring Sons organization, which owned it, is to receive in exchange two acres of land on city-owned property near the disposal plant.

How many colored persons were buried in the cemetery is not known, it was said. However, few burials have occurred there in recent years. The cemetery had become a mass of tangled weeds and underbrush, which Park Department employes have been clearing away.

It is expected that soon after October 1, the work of widening Chapel Alley at the cemetery area will get under way eliminating a bottleneck there.

Burying of the tombstones in the cemetery will also start. They will be buried at least six inches below the ground level, it is expected. The city expects to prepare a map of the graveyard, which will be on file at City Hall.

It is understood that under the agreement with the Laboring Sons organization, it will be possible for application to be made to the city in the future for the burial in the park of any outstanding Frederick colored hero.

Benches, walks and improvement to the grounds will transform the old cemetery into a beauty spot in that section.

Another deed transfers from the Mayor and Aldermen to the Beneficial Society of the Laboring Sons of Frederick city approximately two acres east of the county road leading from the Gas House pike to the northern end of the municipal airport for burial purposes only. This deed is in exchange for the transfer of the former cemetery of the Laboring Sons between East Fifth and East Sixth streets, which has been converted into a playground. It is provided that if there are no burials within the new cemetery area within three years from the date of the deed, the city will take back the land and pay \$600.

The News, Frederick, MD
Tuesday, Jun 20, 1950

Laboring Sons Park

The Mayor and Board accepted the formal report of the committee named months ago by Mayor Elmer F. Munshower to make a joint study of problems of juvenile delinquency among colored youth of the city and to make recommendations concerning the use of the park area, formerly the Laboring Sons colored cemetery on East Sixth street. With reference to the park, the committee set forth that the plot be designated "Laboring Sons Memorial Park"; that it shall be a public park, that a suitable plaque be placed, that the area be used for relaxation and pleasure, but not for organized games, and that adequate benches and lights be placed there. The juvenile delinquency problem remains under study.

The News, Frederick, MD
Friday, Jan 12, 1951

Laboring Sons Park Plans Are Given Approval

Will Be Operated Similar To Memorial Ground, Court Park

The Laboring Sons park located on the south side of East Sixth street will be developed as to use in a way similar to Memorial Ground and Court House Park under the recommendations of a special committee which have been adopted by the Mayor and Aldermen.

Funds have been provided in the municipal budget for the development of the property and work on the area is getting under way.

The report of the special committee, made at a recent meeting of the aldermen and adopted at that time, made the following recommendations

That the plot of ground be designated as Laboring Sons Memorial Park.

That the memorial park be a public park open to the citizens of Frederick.

That the park be used, under city care, maintenance and policing as a memorial to the people buried therein and a suitable memorial or plaque be erected at some spot in the park, thus designating its origin as a burial plot and present use as a memorial park.

That the park be used as a place of rest for relaxation and pleasure, but that this shall not be interpreted as including organized games. The intent of the committee as to use shall be the same as applying to Memorial Park, near Calvary Methodist church, and Court House Park.

It was further recommended, to emphasize this use of the park, that the grounds be landscaped and beautified, that large open areas be reduced; that benches be placed in shady areas and adequate lighting be provided.

The committee, headed by Robert L. Smith as chairman, held three meetings prior to making its recommendation and studied certain correspondence and other information relating to the park.

The same committee was appointed to study the problems of juvenile delinquency among the colored youth of the city and recommend what facilities should be provided to correct the problem if one existed. A further and more complete study is being continued and the committee will make a report of its findings at a later date.

It is understood that the committee plans to call persons who come in close contact with the problem to a conference to be held shortly.