Bethesda Meeting House Foundation
Cemetery Committee Meeting (Virtual)
March 12, 2024
7:30 p.m.

Attendees:
Ronald Grim (Chair), Dave Chase, Renata Lisowski, David Schardt, Hank Levine, Bob Eisinger, Paul Dudek, Wendy Kaufman

Ronald welcomed meeting participants.

Introductions and Perspectives on Project:
1. Ronald - BPC member, church historian, historical geographer
2. Hank - BHS early member, BMHF president, retired lawyer, working on BMH since 2021
3. David S. - VP/BHS, VP BMHF, wants to see cemetery preserved
4. Paul - member of BPC since 1990s. Chair of church's administrative committee Interested in Bethesda history
5. David C. - Native, attended BMH services years ago, interested in restoring it
6. Bob - Got involved in June through BHS facebook posting. Grew up here and developed much of Bethesda
7. Wendy - BHS president/BMHF Secretary-Treasurer - attended BMH services in 2019

Hank - both properties (church/parsonage and cemetery) are connected.

Ron - heard Renata's talk about a Black cemetery.

Dave S. - Renata has a graduate degree in cemetery preservation and is excited about this project.

Ron - Eileen McGuckian will be joining us. She sent me links to videos on cemetery preservation.

Ron has cemetery plats. Hasn't found a map showing different plots. There is a 1909 minute book of the cemetery association that mentions creating a survey, but there is no comment that it was completed. We have Chevy Chase DAR's 1950s transcription of graves/comments on gravestones and scattered notes of 1920s and 1940s. *The Spirit of Captain John* book mentions a pastor wanting the cemetery cleared. Oldest grave is dated 1820.

Bob - clarified finding of 1820 grave that was hidden.

Ron - Wendy and Nick counted graves. Many graves without markers. Some might be enslaved people's graves, possibly 5 of these.

Bob - We cleared the site ($5000) of leaves, etc. Cut hole in fence to make access easier. We should continue to paint orange stripes and prepare a map of graves. Ones in back are probably graves of enslaved people with nondescript stones at head. There is lots of ground with no graves.

Hank - Proposal was to explore feasibility of opening up with a columbarium wall. First, clear land, 2nd - ground radar.

1)Can we get someone to do a preliminary with rough budget/financial feasibility design?

2) BHS track - whatever we do has to be approved by HPC. It's going to be delicate to do.

Regardless, cemetery needs rehabilitation as BMH is.

Bob - "Capacity" is driving this. Contacted a group who does this. Went to school with Pumphries and Gawlers. Can't go to them yet until we have a design, pictures, etc. Could have services at the church. How many niches could you put in there?

David S. - There is space not just along perimeter based on radar guy's comments.

Hank - Maybe a scatter garden in the middle with columbarium along the edges. Columbarium could replace fence as demarcation. Church has to find this suitable.

Ron - 1960s refurbishment was meant to last forever. I think it's been a burden for the church. Session has moved on moving ahead on getting a proposal.

Paul - Does church have any vision for cemetery - no positive response to this.

Hank - It is a preserved historic site - can only be a cemetery. Could be self-sustaining, a community asset. Open to the community - not just church members.

Paul - agreed with Hank's comments.

Bob - St. Francis in Potomac has a nice columbarium.

Renata - Do mapping with GIS and GPS.

Coordinates will be determined next week when work is being done at BMH.

Ronald - There are ranges divided into lots - will send survey plats to Renata.

Bob found property cornerstone.

Renata - There could be GIS subscriptions we could use.

Dave - will look into buying a GMS receiver.

Wendy - described possibly drawing graves on paper.

Ron - this could be helpful. Let's number graves together. I want to compare historic church documents with find-a-grave.

Find-a-grave might have a lot of BPC graves.

Ron - I question find-a-grave accuracy.

Hank - an intern could cross-reference find-a-grave with church records.