

Presbyterian Cemetery

The Presbyterian Cemetery, a seven-acre burial ground located on Hamilton Lane a mile west of the Meeting House, was established by the congregation in 1809. Prior to that date, congregation members were interred in the churchyard Burial Ground. The cemetery was created in response to the passage of an 1804 Common Council ordinance forbidding further burials within the town limits. When founded, the cemetery was located in open countryside, just across the boundary line between the Commonwealth of Virginia and the District of Columbia, of which Alexandria was then a part. The rear portion neighbors the Alexandria National Cemetery, created as one of the initial seventeen national cemeteries in July 1862.



The history of the Presbyterian Cemetery can be divided into four periods. The first period extends from 1809 to the beginning of the Civil War. The second, from 1861 to the end of the nineteenth century, saw the end of the Civil War, the ascendancy of Second Presbyterian Church, and the eventual decline of the Meeting House. During the half-century from 1899 to 1949 neither the Meeting House nor the Presbyterian Cemetery received much attention until the mid 1920s. Then, Second Presbyterian Church led a major restoration of the old Meeting House, and the Court appointed a group of prominent Alexandrians to oversee cemetery operations. The Meeting House was re-colonized by members of Second Presbyterian in 1949, and both the church and the cemetery have since experienced a true renaissance.

In 1960, the late Reverend Dr. William Randolph Sengel was called to become the ninth pastor of the Old Presbyterian Meeting House. He became interested in the Presbyterian Cemetery, felt that the Meeting House should reclaim it, and worked gradually and patiently toward this end over the next two decades. In January 1999, the Presbyterian Cemetery once again became a part of the ministry of the Old Presbyterian Meeting House. It operates today as an independent entity overseen by a Presbyterian Cemetery Board under the authority of the Session of the Meeting House.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, to meet a growing demand for a facility suitable for the interment of cremated remains, the Presbyterian Cemetery Board constructed a columbarium at the base of the U-shaped roadway through the cemetery. Finished in early 2008, the graceful limestone-and-granite structure stands more than five feet high. Its north and south wings house 192 niches, and space is available to expand it in later years, if needed, to at least double the current size.

Alexandria's Presbyterian Cemetery is neither the largest nor the oldest cemetery in the United States, but it is of particular interest because the history reflected in its graves extends back in time to the origin of our country, from a vantage point intimately connected with the nation's capital. A cross-section of Alexandria's citizenry, as represented primarily in its Presbyterian

congregations, has been buried there. Some were merchants, some were ship's captains, and many were veterans of the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Civil War, including those who served for both the North and South. Several gravestones indicate long-term service as elders of the Presbyterian Church, some extending to decades. Among the church leaders are the Reverend Dr. Elias Harrison, the congregation's fourth minister, and members of his family. In addition, a half-dozen mayors of Alexandria, numerous members of the city's governing council, and at least one member of the U.S. House of Representatives (Lewis McKenzie), are interred in its hallowed ground.