

# Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery

A Historic Landscape In Our Community



## GINKGO biloba

The ginkgo is considered the oldest living tree species, dating back some 200 to 250 million years, 'a living fossil' in Charles Darwin's words. The tree's hearty nature makes it a symbol of longevity and hope, even of everlasting life, a link between those who have lived in the past and we who live in the present.



The Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery, if read carefully, tells a story of Wilmington and of society. Founded when its land stood at the city's edge, it has been engulfed by development, has seen automobiles replace horses, and has lost its elegant, Gothic entry gates with Delaware Avenue's widening. Its monuments record losses due to old age, war, disease, and life's misfortunes and offer lessons from the past. Yet it remains a changeless place of quiet comfort.

### DEEP ROOTS IN THE WILMINGTON COMMUNITY

In the mid-19th century, many cities, established in earlier times when burying grounds were next to houses of worship, found themselves short of space for burials and sought land for gravesites farther afield. In 1843, Samuel Wollaston determined to create such a cemetery on ten acres just outside Wilmington. His tract lay along Kennett Turnpike [Delaware Avenue] where it met the Old King's Highway [Adams Street]. Wollaston invited several leading citizens to invest in his venture, Wilmingtonians who knew one another from their positions in the community as elected officials, businessmen, and philanthropists.

The founders incorporated the cemetery in 1845 and engaged engineer George Read Riddle to divide the now twenty-four acres into plots and lay out curving paths and hillside terraces. His design included an elegant entrance road and gently sweeping side avenues named for trees and for famous Americans.





#### MAUSOLEUMS, MONUMENTS, AND MEMENTOS

Wilmington's leading families soon began erecting mausoleums. These stone structures employ simple classical elements, not the fussy architectural fashions of the Victorian era, and have unadorned gable roofs and classical columns flanking the

entry doors, surmounted by the family name and occasionally with a wreath or other emblem on the pediment. The Harlan and Gause families, linked in life by bonds of commerce, chose identical designs for their mausoleums, built side by side and differentiated only by the names on the shields over the arched entries.



While the cemetery's natural features have a restorative influence, its monuments encourage contemplation that brings soothing memories of departed loved ones and provides uplifting moral influence. The draped urn invites the viewer to mourn earthly death but also to anticipate spiritual immortality. An angel pointing upward with one hand

*Admire the intricate carvings*



*Reflect upon the inscriptions*

while grasping an anchor in the other represents Faith holding firm to the Anchor of Hope. Roses speak of death during the prime of life, ivy of memory and fidelity, the fern of sincerity, and the oak of immortality and endurance. A broken column symbolizes death in the midst of life, as does a representation of a tree stump. One has but to observe such didactic statuary to receive gentle comfort and pious instruction.

Words on the monuments speak directly. One reminds viewers of loss—"Loved Honored Mourned—We Are Lonely Without Thee." Another reflects an unfulfilled wish, sighing "Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still." Others address both departed and living. The children of a mother who died at a young age inscribed on her stone "Sleep on dear mother in peace / Till that great day of heavenly feast / When we thy children all will meet / With thee in heaven the Lord to greet."



In 1913, the Board of Directors hired architect Elijah Dallett, Jr. to design a chapel. Dallett already had a local reputation for the design of Central National Bank and of Rockford Tower, projects done in collaboration with Louis C. Baker, Jr. The chapel, of soft grey-tan, roughly coursed stone, is a cruciform shape around a square central block and features Gothic windows and doors.



**A CURIOUS ADDITION**

In 1917, construction began on a new library facing what would become Rodney Square. The land for the project had been the site of a 1740 church and its adjacent cemetery. The church was moved, brick by brick, to Brandywine Park and the remains in the cemetery were relocated to graves on the lower slopes of the Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery. Thus in a cemetery established in the 1840s, one can find the grave of John McKinly, first "president" (governor) of Delaware who died in 1796.

**Ranked headstones in the Soldiers Section mark the final resting place of soldiers who served in the Civil War, part of the Grand Army of the Republic.**

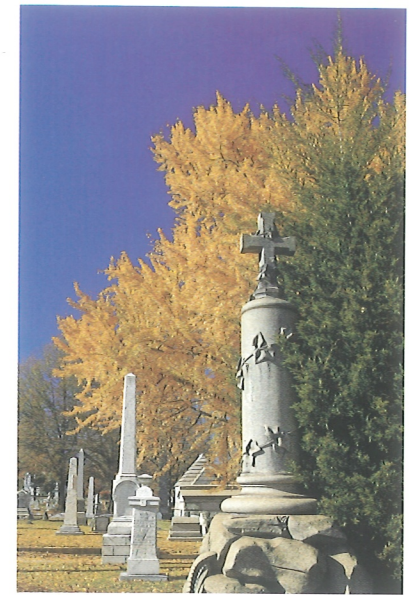
**CHANGE AND CONTINUITY**

In spite of the changes that have swept over city and society during the past 160 years, the Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery remains a garden of quiet repose in the midst of our altered circumstances, a place of comfort for those mourning the loss of loved ones. Its design

and monuments articulate the values of earlier times in a foreign voice, but however strange the voice, it answers an unchanging need for courage and hope and reminds visitors of the fragility, brevity, and uncertainty of life.

With the passing years, the Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery has also evolved into a significant historic resource to the community, recognizing leading citizens, celebrating the lives of ordinary folk, and providing a valuable glimpse backward to earlier times, so different in many ways and yet so familiar in others.

In looking ahead, we recognize the demands that stewardship of this irreplaceable resource puts upon us. And we seek like-minded guardians who care to join us in preserving and maintaining Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery.



*Learn how you can help today*

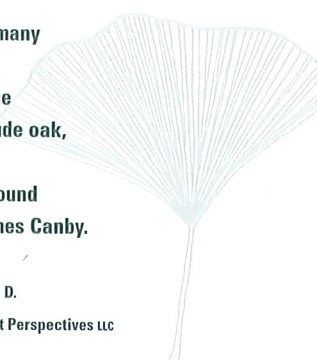


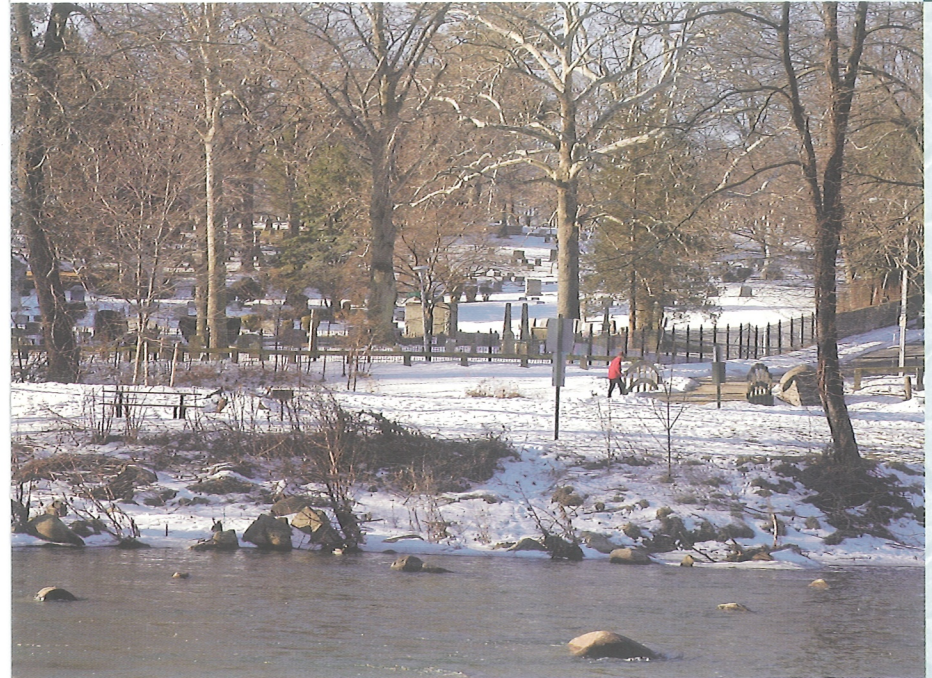
**There are at least two large, ancient ginkgo trees, among many beautiful specimen trees, at Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery. Other species include oak, ash, poplar, maple, and this Cedar of Lebanon, donated around 1850 by founding director, James Canby.**

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**Charles Dickens wrote, "The flowers . . . floated away upon the river; and thus do greater things that once were in our breasts, and near our hearts, flow from us to the eternal seas." When the founders established the Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery, they selected a place where the tumbling rush of the beautiful Brandywine would be both constant witness to the onward flow of time and poignant reminder of the seamlessness of past and future.**

**For more information or to help with preservation efforts, please write or call:**

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