

DESCENDANTS' PROPOSAL FOR MEMORIALIZING THE WALTER PIERCE PARK CEMETERIES – P. 1

In August 2018, descendants, anthropologists, and volunteers who have worked since 2005 to protect the African American and Quaker cemeteries at Walter C. Pierce Community Park, proposed a memorialization plan to the DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). The group acted at this time because DPR had announced that it planned to make upgrades to the park. (The work is now slated to start in Fall 2019.)

The memorialization plan arose from individual interviews with descendants and supporters who had been most active in preserving the cemeteries. Common themes and concerns emerged in the interviews, which were conducted by an American University anthropology grad student. These led to a group meeting to agree on a way to honor the 8,428 people buried in the cemeteries.

Descendants and their supporters want a memorial that illuminates the past and relates to the present. They want it to send a message of resilience, respect, healing, and benevolence. They want a beautiful memorial that enhances the park. They've asked the city to set aside adequate space for memorialization in a good location.

They propose an ANCESTORS PAVILION at the brick wall facing the grassy oval on the Adams Mill Road side of the park. It would convey the cemeteries' vastness, the stories of the people, and the archaeological finds. The Pavilion could be a space for story-telling, readings, and performances.

AN ANCESTORS PAVILION FOR WALTER C. PIERCE COMMUNITY PARK: DESCENDANTS' PROPOSAL TO MEMORIALIZE THE PARK'S HISTORIC CEMETERIES

- We request that there be no disturbance of the land in the creation of a memorial.
- We propose that the 66'-long brick wall just west of and facing the grassy oval on the Adams Mill Road side of Walter Pierce Park, and the paved-brick area in front of it, be designated as an Ancestors Pavilion to memorialize the cemeteries.
- The wall would support a series of 2'-high signs ranging in width from 1' to 6', containing the names, ages, and years of death of the 8,428 known burials in the cemeteries. The alphabetical name lists would be interspersed with images and stories of the cemeteries, the people, the archaeology project led by Howard University, and the citizen activism by Walter Pierce and others that led to the park's creation. Signage would be bilingual.
- The existing brick paving in front of the wall would be replaced with a more distinctive brick pattern to better define the space. Design motifs should reflect historical aspects of the site. Genuine or fabricated millstones could be used for seating in honor of the Quaker miller who founded the first cemetery at the site in 1807. The Ancestors Pavilion could be designed to provide a space for story-telling, readings, and performances. We want it to be a space for the living!
- This is the best space for a memorial because: (1) it's the focal point of the Adams Mill Road side of the park; (2) it's not claimed by other activities; (3) it's on center with the historical entry road into the cemeteries; and (4) it should occupy a prominent location because unmarked graves and cemetery materials are scattered through the landscape.

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ROUGH MOCK-UPS, ANCESTORS PAVILION PROPOSAL FOR WALTER PIERCE PARK



Cumber, James, 45, 1885	Dangerfield, William, infant, 1888	1875
Cumber, Solomon, 7, 1885		Davis, Joseph, 45, 1883
Curry, David T., 68, 1881		Davis, Lucy, 30, 1885
Curry, Eva, Infant, 1889		Davis, Mary Elizabeth, 14, 1885
Curry, Joseph, 3, 1885		Davis, Mary Jane, 27, 1884
Curtis, Alexander, 1, 1875		Davis, Minnie, 12, 1885
Curtis, Bertha, 8, 1885		Davis, Parthina, 9, 1890
Curtis, infant of Mary, 1887		Davis, Philip, infant, 1879
Curtis, Mary, 21, 1880		Davis, Pigeon E., infant, 1878
Curtis, Mary E., infant, 1889		Davis, Reuben, 39, 1887
Curtis, Rose, 45, 1886		Davis, Robert, 18, 1882
Curtis, Sarah F., 30, 1884		Davis, Sarah, 30, 1885
Curtis, William, infant, 1886		Davis, Thomas, 30, 1886
Curtiss, Arthur, infant, 1878		Davis, Thornton H. 2, 1884
Curtiss, infant of Mary, 1885		Davis, William, 17, 1882
Curtiss, Lucy, 4, 1885		Davis, Zachariah, 13, 1876
Curtiss, Mary Ann, 50, 1884		Dawson, David Paul, infant, 1877
Curtiss, Pinkie Jane, 2, 1885		Dawson, Joseph A., 4, 1885
Custis, Martha, 81, 1880		Dawson, Martha, 3, 1888
Custis, Joshua, 62, 1883		Dawson, Rachel, 6, 1883
Cutler, George, infant, 1879		Dawson, William, infant, 1882
Cutter, Virgie, 2, 1878		Day, Annie, 21, 1876
D		Day, Charles, infant, 1883
Dabner, Elsie, infant, 1882	Dannan, James E., infant, 1889	Day, Charles Junian, infant, 1876
Dabney, Anderson, 1, 1884	Danwood, Otto, infant, 1890	Day, Mary, 2, 1883
Dabney, Carrie, infant, 1881	Davener, John, infant, 1879	Day, Mary Jane, infant, 1876
Dabney, Charles, 50, 1879	Davenport, Mary E., 42, 1885	Day, William, 63, 1878
Dabney, Charles, infant, 1880	Davenport, Melinda, 35, 1875	Deal, Stephen, 50, 1882
Dabney, Charles, 16, 1886	Davinport, Clara, 101, 1884	Dean, Anna, 24, 1879
Dabney, Isaac, 1, 1879	Davis, Alice, 72, 1880	Dean, Jane, 20, 1881
Dabney, Lilis May, 3, 1877	Davis, Anna, 28, 1887	
	Dangerfield, Willis, 80, 1887	
	Daniels, Robert Oscar, infant, 1888	
	Dannan, James E., infant, 1889	
	Danwood, Otto, infant, 1890	
	Davener, John, infant, 1879	
	Davenport, Mary E., 42, 1885	
	Davenport, Melinda, 35, 1875	
	Davinport, Clara, 101, 1884	
	Davis, Alice, 72, 1880	
	Davis, Anna, 28, 1887	



HOW WERE GRAVES MARKED?
Some with wooden headboards; others with stones, such as the one above found by Howard University archaeologists. Some people decorated graves with shells, ceramics, toys and other objects.

Top left: The existing 66'-long wall area as seen from the Adams Mill Road entry to park.
Top right: Detail of alphabetical listing of names for signage.

Below: The Ancestors Pavilion, featuring a series of signs, 2' tall and 2'-6' in length, anchored to the wall at a slight angle for ease of reading. Names would be interspersed with pictures and stories.



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ROUGH MOCK-UPS, ANCESTORS PAVILION PROPOSAL FOR WALTER PIERCE PARK



Above left: Existing bricks at Ancestors Pavilion wall. A more distinctive brick pattern could be used, including millstones (real or fabricated) honoring the milling history of the site.



EXISTING PARK ENTRY SIGNS, which now say “Walter Pierce Park,” could be repainted to say “Walter Pierce Park – Site of historic African American and Quaker Cemeteries.”

