

Riverview is recognized

140-year-old urban cemetery named to National Register

By Terri Sanginiti
The News Journal

Since taking over the day-to-day operations of Riverview Cemetery in Wilmington in 2009, the nonprofit group Friends of Historic Riverview Cemetery has been on a quest to see the city's 140-year-old burial ground attain placement on the National Register of Historic Places.

That goal was realized last month when Riverview Cem-

etry became the first cemetery in the state to qualify for the National Register on its own merits.

"We had to meet certain criteria and fit it into the history of Wilmington at the time and the history of the cemetery movement," said Cheryl Markiewicz, chairwoman of the group's Historic Committee.

The group concentrated

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Riverview Cemetery in Wilmington is now maintained and operated by a group of volunteers. ROBERT CRAIG/THE NEWS JOURNAL

Cemetery: Volunteers reclaim historic graveyard

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mainly on the cemetery's heyday, between 1870 and 1930, long before the cemetery's reputation declined in the 1990s amid tales of poor upkeep, mismanaged funds, misplaced graves and lost remains.

Most cemeteries of that era were affiliated with churches.

"What set Riverview apart was it wasn't attached to a church," Markiewicz said. "It was a public burial ground, so anybody could be buried there."

The cemetery's origi-

nal operators – the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and the Knights of Pythias – purchased farmland on the east side of Market Street in 1872, and 27 years later purchased another 20 acres of farmland on the west side with the intention of establishing a final resting place for people of every race and religion, regardless of their economic status.

The landscaping on the cemetery's east side was designed by prominent Philadelphia architect Herman J. Schwarzmann, who landscaped the grounds of the Philadelphia Zoo and was chief ar-

chitect for the 1876 Centennial Exposition.

Markiewicz's research found that it is the only example of Schwarzmann's work in Delaware.

The public mausoleum, which opened in 1917 and contains the remains of 246 people, was designed in the Greek classical revival style by William E. Hughes, of the American Mausoleum Co. in Ohio. It was one of about 100 such granite mausoleums constructed in the United States before his death in 1921.

"The research was the fun part. It's Riverview telling the story," said

Markiewicz, who worked along with volunteers Libbie Hawes, Jay Brady, Katharine Olinchak and Gretchen Broadwater to complete the 32-page report highlighting the social history, community planning and development, landscape architecture and funerary art of the graveyard.

In November, the initial nomination was approved by the Wilmington Design Review and Preservation Commission. The proposal then gained state approval before the Keeper of the National Register gave its final approval on July 13.

Lee Anderson, who heads the Friends group and authored a 2005 book about Riverview Cemetery titled "Reading the Stones: A Collection of Memories from the First State," said the placement on the National Register is a "real gift to the people of Delaware."

Anderson said the volunteers' next pursuit will be to get a state marker for the site. Then they'll begin raising funds for a national marker.

"From the beginning, it was very clear that there were some buried treasures at Riverview," Anderson said. "It was a dia-

"What set Riverview apart was it wasn't attached to a church." CHERYL

MARKIEWICZ of Friends of Historic Riverview Cemetery

mond in the rough. It is only because the group stayed true to their mission, that we now have the polished diamond. It's a reminder of what ordinary people can do when they work together."

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