On October 24, 2019, the Friends sponsored an evening of short talks titled “Remembering New Haven Women: Four Centuries of Women’s History Inscribed in Grove Street Cemetery.” The event was held at the New Haven Museum and presented seven speakers who showcased more than a dozen women who made their marks both locally and internationally before entering eternal rest in Grove Street. Karyl Evans opened the program with remarks following a viewing of her 2017 film on the cemetery, which highlighted notable women including Mary Clap Wooster (1729–1807), Mary Lucas Hillhouse (1786–1871), Sybil Moseley Bingham (1792–1848), Delia Bacon (1811–1859), and Ada Comstock Notestein (1876–1973).

Vera Wells, a Yale alumna, spoke about her friend and mentor Sylvia Ardyn Boone (died 1993), a scholar of African art and the first African American woman to receive tenure at Yale. Channing Harris talked about Harriet Trumbull Silliman (1783–1850) and her circle of friends and family living on Hillhouse Avenue. Darlene Casella focused on Mary Goodman (1804–1872), an African American laundress who believed that education was the key to progress for black Americans, and left her estate to Yale for a scholarship to prepare young men “for the Gospel ministry, preference being always given to young men of color”; it still supports scholars today.

The New Haven philanthropist Lucy Hall Boardman (1819–1906) was one of two women discussed by Christine Janis. Boardman gave substantial support to several local churches and to institutions including the New Haven Orphan Asylum, The Home for the Friendless, and the Boardman Manual Training School. Janis also talked about Mary French Weir (1846–1927), who was an active participant in the founding years of the Yale School of Fine Arts with her husband John Ferguson Weir, the school’s first director and dean.

Sandra Markham profiled two authors, Catharine Potter Stith (1795–1839) and Elizabeth Barber Barrett (1827–1863), the former a Philadelphia teacher and composer who lived in Gibraltar before settling in New Haven, and the latter a New Haven poet who married a sea captain and died on board a ship off the coast of China.

Judith Schiff closed the evening by speaking about a pair of twentieth-century notables: Laurel Fox Vlock (1926–2000) and Elga Wasserman (1924–2014). Vlock was a television journalist whose videotaped interviews with local Holocaust survivors became the founding collections of Yale’s Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies. Schiff circled back to the topic of women’s education through the career of Wasserman, who became special assistant to Yale’s President Kingman Brewster on the education of women and chair of the university’s Committee on Coeducation, thereby ushering in the school’s first class of female undergraduates, among whom was Vera Wells.

Afterward, the audience enjoyed a reception where animated discussion of the evening’s topics continued over refreshments provided by Millie Legenhausen.
Grove Street Cemetery has a new audience: The cemetery has recently been certified as a Level I arboretum by the internationally recognized ArbNet Arboretum Accreditation Program.

arbnet.org/morton-register/grove-street-cemetery-arboretum

Master Gardeners Karyl Evans and Marilyn Elsworth facilitated the certification when they undertook a University of Connecticut Extension Community Outreach Project to establish a self-guided tour of forty significant trees on the grounds. Because there were so many great trees to consider, selecting just forty was an arduous decision based on several criteria: the overall quality of the plants, the presence of specimens common to the region and some more rare species, the diversity of the collection, and the proximity of the trees along a viable tour route. Their project successfully represented the wide diversity of plant materials on the property and distinguished Grove Street Cemetery as an official arboretum.

Arboretum Designation and Tour

Grove Street Cemetery has been graced with the beauty of trees since 1798 when James Hillhouse began planting rows of Lombardy poplar trees along the avenues of family burial plots. By the 1840s, inspired by a rural cemetery movement that promoted the aesthetics of nature, a greater variety of trees and shrubs were planted. Sporadic beautification projects by both cemetery staff and individual families over many decades have introduced a wide variety of trees and shrubs throughout the eighteen acres, including an allée of ginkgo trees that was established along Myrtle Path in 1934.

Once the one-mile path was devised, permanent identification labels were created for the chosen trees to display their common and scientific names, family, and place of origin. The self-guided tour brochure, produced by the Friends of Grove Street Cemetery, contains a detailed map with botanical data and illustrations for each tree; it is available for free at the cemetery gate house during office hours, as well as on the cemetery’s website.

grovestreetcemetery.org/explore/visiting/tours

On the tour, visitors can observe native trees including oak, maple, linden, dogwood, paper birch—a and an ancient horse chestnut—as well as rare plant specimens such as Princeton elm, dawn redwood, golden rain tree, and weeping katsura tree. Some of the trees lining the avenues even correspond to the street names in the cemetery: Magnolia Avenue features saucer (Magnolia x soulangiana), star (Magnolia stellata), southern (Magnolia grandiflora), and evergreen magnolias.

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Renovating the Front Border Landscape

When the cemetery was first laid out in 1796, a wide border was reserved for plantings along Grove Street, one of the first times such a landscape feature was implemented in this country. The use of evergreen trees particularly was later copied by many cemeteries. The plantings have since evolved, but in the past few years many of the shrubs, particularly the privet hedge, were suffering from the shade of the adjacent mature street trees and needed removal. A new landscape design was developed to reorganize this 700-foot long border, providing larger groupings of the same species, while preserving better specimens of the existing flowering trees and shrubs.

Several new Roseum Elegans Rhododendrons join one older one in the border, blooming close to Memorial Day with their lavender-pink display.

A group of Minuet Lilacs, Syringa x prestoniae ‘Minuet’ have fragrant flower masses in late May. It is very cold hardy and densely branched.

Volunteers from Towers|Golde LLC joined cemetery staff digging and installing shrubs and trees along the east portion of the front border.

(continued on page 3)
How to Join
Friends of the Grove Street Cemetery, Inc.

Individuals, organizations and corporations interested in Grove Street Cemetery and the objectives of the Friends are encouraged to become members. Annual membership dues are shown below. The membership year is January 1 to December 31. Membership Dues and other contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Contributions in excess of Membership Dues are welcome and, unless otherwise specified, will be allocated to its General Fund. We also maintain two additional funds which may be of interest to donors. The Landscape and Landmark Funds were created to support the on-going horticultural programs of the organization and the ever present need for support of the Cemetery’s renovation and restoration efforts.

Name
Address
City
State
Zip Code
Telephone
Email

Dues:
☐ Individual $35  ☐ Couple $50  ☐ Not-for-profit $50
☐ Corporation $100  ☐ Additional Contribution $______________

Please check areas of participation that interest you:
☐ Preservation  ☐ Program  ☐ Publication  ☐ Horticulture
☐ Docent  ☐ Fund Raising

Join on grovestreetcemetery.org or send check payable to Friends of the Grove Street Cemetery, Inc., with completed form, to: P.O. Box 9238, New Haven, CT 06533-0238.

Order your DVD of the documentary film, “Grove Street Cemetery — City of the Dead, City of the Living”

Produced, directed, and written by six-time Emmy Award winner Karyl K. Evans

Copies of the 30 minute Grove Street Cemetery DVD, nominated for two Emmy awards, are available for purchase at $15.00 (postage prepaid) per copy. Please complete the form below to receive your copy. You should also consider purchasing copies for family members and for friends. Buy it, watch it, and then give it to your local library or school!

No. of DVD copies ______ @ $15.00 = $______________

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(Arboretum Designation and Tour continued from page 2)

2003. The Friends of Grove Street Cemetery have undertaken a replanting of flowering trees and shrubs in the border along Hawthorne Path fronting on Grove Street.

Although Friends and frequent visitors might not be a new audience for Grove Street Cemetery, the Arboretum Tour—celebrating its living residents—will enable everyone to enjoy this historic graveyard with new eyes.
Historic Chapel Transformation

The 1872 Chapel is being restored and renovated to become a welcoming Visitor Center. Planning began under an Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grant from Preservation Connecticut with an analysis of existing conditions and prioritized improvements including a new roof, a barrier-free entrance ramp, and an accessible bathroom. Knight Architecture and Leland Torrence Enterprises worked with the Standing Committee to prepare a Master Plan and cost estimates. A matching grant was secured from the 1772 Foundation for phase one, to restore the roof along with the fascia, crown molding, and woodwork. The team, including Standing Committee member and architect Michael Tucker, also reviewed historic photos so any improvements would be historically accurate to the building’s original design.

The existing roof was removed and selected decorative details salvaged, while new architectural elements were fabricated where needed. Replacements included the “dog houses” and the fascia, raised areas along the gables, and the wooden supports for the gutters. Brackets were removed from the eaves, repaired, primed, and painted. Mortar repointing of masonry and brick replacement in areas at the roof perimeter were also completed. Copper work on the vault and gables was carefully fabricated to match the original, and copper flashing of masonry joints and gutter lining was completed. Leland Torrence Enterprises carried out the work, including replacing old slate with new custom-cut, diamond-shaped slates. The scope of renovation is ongoing, including current restoration work on the building’s front door and windows.

www.grovestreetcemetery.org