

We typically visit graveyards when we're placing flowers, communing with those who've passed, or researching family trees. We usually don't visit for sightseeing or a picnic lunch on a pleasant day. But the Old City Cemetery in Lynchburg is more than a graveyard—it's a tapestry of cultural history, social diversity, stark and somber beauty decorated with horticultural delights. In the words of a child in the 1960's, it's a Grave Garden.

A decade ago, the cemetery was overgrown and unkempt with little thought or attention paid to the many 19th Century plantings which make the grounds a virtual arboretum. A storm brought change.

In the late afternoon of June 4, 1994, the sky turned gray-purple with a strange yellowish light. The winds increased to gale force and rain descended. The "treetop tornado" was—in correct meteorological terms—a "wind-shear." Lynchburg church steeples toppled and trees were uprooted. The cemetery was not spared. Jane Bader White, the current volunteer director, was the first to view the damage. "This place was a mess," she says. "There were trees everywhere, and you couldn't even get in."

Jane's interest in the cemetery has been long-standing. In 1965 her mother, Lucy Harrison Miller Bader, wrote *Behind the Old Brick Wall: A Cemetery Story*. The daughter's new vision for the cemetery was born from the chaos of the 1994 storm, and her vision became reality. Today, the twenty-six acre cemetery includes several museums, a research library, picnic area, and a visitor's center. Today, the cemetery is also a rose garden.

The Antique Rose Collection predates the restoration to 1986. The sixty rose varieties planted inside the old brick wall of the



By Sharon Tabor Warren

Confederate Section represent rose history from mid-16th to 20th Century. The collection includes all the classes and colors represented in the ancestral plants. Antique varieties are also located in the cemetery's Cato Rose Collection.

Thelma Chow, a part-time professor of Chinese at Randolph-Macon Women's College, is the cemetery's current rosarian. She allows no use of chemicals. She noted, "The city mulches; I fertilize and prune."

Cemeteries and roses have a long-standing partnership. For centuries roses have been planted on or near graves in remembrance of loved ones, and the flower is among the most prolific of decorative symbols on tombstones. Near the Entrance Gate is one of three rose bushes, probably planted by loved ones, which has survived in the cemetery for many years.

The Grave Garden is more than just a pretty place to visit. In one area, picnic tables and chairs have been placed on an open stretch of lawn. Nearby, an old-fashioned rope swing beckons visitors to push off and revel in soaring the heights above Lynchburg. The Lotus Pond and Butterfly Garden is shaded by a graceful weeping willow. It's difficult to imagine how the cemetery

appeared before 1994's storm because it seems perfect with its sweeping view of the City and Tobacco Row Mountain, a foothill of the Blue Ridge.

Ted Delaney, Archivist and Curator, estimates 150 tours were conducted last year, which would account for almost 4,000 visitors. In addition to those who requested guided tours, Ted said, "I'd guess double or even triple that number for those who come and tour on their own."

"Many visitors come because of the Confederate Section," Jane added. "We're included in many publications about the Civil War." Lynchburg was the site of the second largest Confederate medical facility in the South. More than 2,200 soldiers are buried in the cemetery's walled section, identical markers on each grave, whether Confederate or Union. Jane says that, ironically, "...only two casualties of the Battle of Lynchburg are among the Confederates buried here." A kiosk lists the names of the soldiers and grave locations. Rows of stately roses stand sentry.

A visit to the cemetery is sure to relieve stress. There are no lines or pushing crowds, and noise is minimal. You'll leave fulfilled, with an appreciation of the fabric of the place, the individuals and events it honors. Take away with you a bit of its ambience, peace, preservation and beauty.

The Old City Cemetery is open daily, dawn to dusk. There is no charge to visit. Wear good walking shoes and plan to take more time than you think you will need. The Grave Garden is a treasure trove of history and horticulture and there's something for everyone, including a special Kid's Guide for the youngsters that includes a treasure hunt. Above all, don't forget to stop and

smell the roses.

\* To reach the Old City Cemetery, leave U.S. 29 at the Main Street Exit toward downtown. Continue on Main to 5th Street and turn left (U.S. 29 Business). It's less than a mile, and marked with a sign for a right turn on Taylor Street. Call ahead for a guided tour or more information: 434-847-1465 or visit the website at [www.gravegarden.org](http://www.gravegarden.org)

