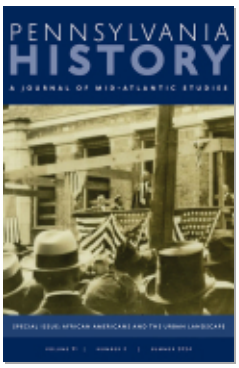
An African American Burial Ground in Philadelphia: "Discovered," Protected, Eradicated



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AN AFRICAN AMERICAN BURIAL GROUND IN PHILADELPHIA

"DISCOVERED," PROTECTED, ERADICATED

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ABSTRACT: Construction in 2018 brought to light a previously unknown Black graveyard that operated from 1826 to 1882 on the outskirts of densely populated Philadelphia. To assure dignified burials, founders of the African Friends to Harmony Burial Ground created a "beneficial," a form widely used by contemporary African Americans. Burials ended in 1882 as urban development encroached on the graveyard. Within a few decades, it had been erased from property deeds and public memory. In 2019–20, the two churches deemed descendant communities by the property owner, the University of Pennsylvania, chose to relocate the remains. This article points to instances where Black cemeteries have been retained in place or emerged as crucial instances of public engagement. Exploring the aspirations and struggles of those who established and tended African Friends to Harmony ground, the article reveals the richness of its history but the missed opportunity to commemorate the region's complex past.
KEYWORDS: Philadelphia, African American, Black cemeteries, historic preservation, collective memory

In early 2018, construction of a three-story apartment building with underground parking began on the 4100 block of Chestnut Street, a short distance from the University of Pennsylvania's (Penn) Philadelphia campus and in the expanding bedroom vicinity of both Penn and Drexel universities. Members of the Philadelphia Archaeological Forum, in particular its president, Douglas Mooney, quickly raised concern that the site was about to impact the unacknowledged westernmost portion of the African Friends to Harmony Burial Ground, a Black graveyard founded in 1826. Mooney's distress call to historians

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reached this author. I had been researching nineteenth-century industrial development along the now culverted Mill Creek in West Philadelphia. I wondered how the creek's pollution impacted the community and whether infrastructure (such as culverts, sewer lines, and water pipes) had been installed to serve Black residents in the same periods White households benefited. I embraced the chance to investigate the burial ground.

Working through FamilySearch.org images of death certificates, which the county of Philadelphia began to require in 1861, this author documented 135 burials in the grounds between 1861 and 1882, the final year of its use as a graveyard. I nominated its easternmost portion, which was not under construction, to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, to which it was added in February 2019 (Figure 1). What this designation meant was that any disturbance or construction considered for the site would need approval from the Philadelphia Historical Commission. (Because a building permit had been issued for the western parcel, which was not owned by Penn, a Register nomination on that section would have had no effect.)[1] Penn, which had been parking security vehicles on the lot, reached out to AECOM, archaeological contractors, to conduct ground penetrating radar and subsurface trenching; exploratory testing confirmed the property's previous use as a graveyard. "As a designated historic property," AECOM concluded, "in situ preservation of the remains at the Harmony Burial Ground" was "preferred."[2]

The University also consulted with two surviving Black congregations that had existed in the community (Figure 2). Monumental Baptist Church, founded circa 1826 as Blockley African Baptist Church, had remained a block from the African Friends to Harmony Burial Ground until the late 1960s. A few streets away, Mt. Pisgah began in 1833, remained a mission church of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) head church "Mother Bethel" in the 1840s, and affiliated with the AME organization in 1847. Mt. Pisgah moved its congregation several blocks north of the original site in 1942. Monumental and possibly Mt. Pisgah had maintained burial grounds adjacent to their churches, but in the case of African Friends to Harmony, the original trustees, at least two of the sextons, and several of the documented interred were connected to the congregations. Thus, Penn deemed these congregations to be descendant communities of the members of the burial ground association and those whose remains rested under the parking lot's surface.[3]

Following conversations among the pastors, congregants, and University representatives, the churches decided that the remains in the protected ground should be exhumed and reinterred, but not subject to laboratory

FIGURE 1. 4111–23 Chestnut Street, April 21, 2018. The nominated and subsequently protected portion is approximated by the outline. To the west (the left in the image), the ground has been cleared in preparation for the apartment house construction. Source: Pictometry at https://atlas.phila.gov.

analysis. With the support of Monumental and Mt. Pisgah, Penn sought permission for their relocation to Eden Cemetery, an African American–owned ground founded in 1902. Over its existence, Eden, located in neighboring Delaware County, has been the recipient of remains from Philadelphia's Black graveyards as they have been overtaken by urban development. The Historical Commission did not oppose the University's petition to excavate.

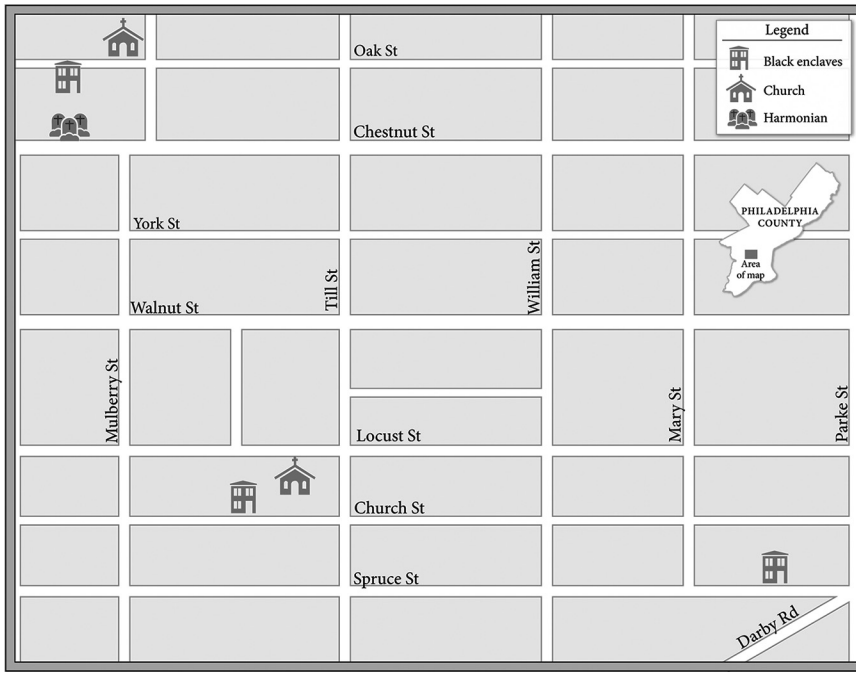

FIGURE 2. West Philadelphia's Black enclaves and institutions ca. 1840. Blockley African Baptist Church (later "Monumental Baptist") is shown at Oak (now Ludlow) and Mulberry (now 41st) Streets. Mt. Pisgah AME Church was located to its south at Locust Street west of Till (now 40th) Street. Map by Gerry Krieg, gkrieg@kriegmapping.com.

After a requisite public notice Penn ran for consecutive weeks in three main newspapers, Philadelphia's Orphans' Court, which has jurisdiction over cemeteries, approved the University's request. AECOM removed remains of 161 burials in late winter 2020 and reinterred them in Eden in April 2020.[4]

Penn's financial resources and organizational apparatus, as well as a concern not to make racial gaffes that had plagued its recent administrations, led to a mixed outcome.[5] The remains of the buried persons, as well as the wishes of the congregations, were respected. While Penn stewarded and paid for the archaeological explorations and reinterment, however, it did not engage historians or Black neighbors beyond the congregations in deciding the future of the burial ground. Several Black students at Paul Robeson High School within a block of the graveyard, for example, were dismayed if not angry that they did not hear about the site until the remains had been relocated; they wanted to investigate the archive to identify descendants of the interred. Unlike well-known Black burial ground discoveries in Lower Manhattan,

New York, in Shockoe Bottom, Richmond, Virginia, and in Mother Bethel AME Church Burial Ground in Philadelphia, wider public participation and grassroots advocacy that might have argued for preservation at the site was unsought and thus absent. In contrast to the 1983–1984 excavation of the First African Baptist Church, Philadelphia, for example, the route of public archaeology—which could have engaged West Philadelphia's community and the general public, as well as the two churches—was not taken.[6]

Clearly, past and ongoing incidences of discoveries of African American cemeteries have led to diverse outcomes. As Steven Burg has recently demonstrated, many Black graveyards throughout Pennsylvania exist only tenuously. More enduring approaches to preserve, nurture and celebrate them are critical. The Anson Street African Burial Ground Project in Charleston, South Carolina, demonstrates potential when members of the public, trusted cultural institutions, and academics collaborate. In 2013, downtown construction revealed an eighteenth-century graveyard of enslaved persons. Charleston's African American community supported bioarchaeological and genetic analyses of the remains as well as historical research that could shed light on the origins and lives of the thirty-six humans disinterred from the grounds. Charlestonian Blacks as well as anthropologists viewed investigation as "an opportunity to understand the health, ancestry, and lived experience among African or African-descended persons." Throughout the process, researchers engaged in "[c]ontinual conversations with the community." Residents shaped and participated in commemorations, including those focused on reinterment "in the grounds of their original resting place." Many also contributed DNA samples to enrich understanding of connections to these early enslaved men and women. It is striking that anthropologists at the University of Pennsylvania are among the collaborators in the ongoing project. Had they been consulted in the case of the African Friends to Harmony grounds? Relocation of the remains, and not reinterment in place, extinguished the last vestige of this nineteenth-century Black community from the urban landscape.[7]

While Penn did not preserve the burial ground in West Philadelphia, the documentary record associated with it nonetheless reveals the struggles and triumphs of the people who established and used it. This essay attempts to restore the humanity of those who were once connected to the graveyard. It explores the historical context of West Philadelphia's Black enclaves and the impetus for the establishment of African Friends to Harmony Burial Ground, also called Harmonian. A dignified place of burial was critical to persons who had been enslaved, had migrated from slave states, or had

navigated free status from birth. Racial segregation restricted burial options, but it also stimulated Black agency to establish independent cemeteries. Blacks in Philadelphia and elsewhere used the beneficial society form, and this author places Harmonian within that context. The essay then moves out from the physical graveyard to construct short biographies of men and women touched by its proximity to their lives. Finally, I explore the afterlife of the grounds once burials halted, the erasure of the memory of its existence, and the field observations of the archaeologists who excavated the site.

ESTABLISHING THE BURIAL GROUND

George Grey was a laborer born about 1850 in the state of Delaware. He and his wife Annie moved gradually through Chester County, Pennsylvania, and began to raise a family. By 1880, they had settled in Philadelphia in a ghetto of ramshackle squat frame buildings that had become a slum for African Americans employed in nearby brickyards, slaughterhouses, and construction sites. Annie added to the support of their six children by working as a washerwoman. Clearly already impoverished, in March 1881, a disaster of another sort struck the family. Toddler Charles succumbed to pneumonia. Three weeks later, ten-year-old Samuel died of a kidney disease. Another few weeks and two more of the Grey children were dead of tuberculosis and "other causes." The attending doctor urged that a County Health Officer be immediately directed to the neighborhood (near present-day 54th and Race Streets) to examine the "Condition of the Houses," though no official seems to have heeded the call. To provide decent burials for each of their four children, George and Annie Grey turned to the African Friends to Harmony.[8]

Local residents formed the African Friends to Harmony in 1826 to establish a burying ground for "people of color." The association's three trustees, Jacob Gardner, Philip Bartho, and Isaac Loyd, purchased a tiny parcel from Peter Rose, a White farmer in rural Blockley Township, Philadelphia County. Gardner was in his fifties and had moved from Maryland as early as 1810. Loyd, a decade younger than Gardner, was freeborn, likely in Delaware. Bartho's origins are unknown, but he first appears in records in 1821. Each man would also be involved in establishing Blockley's African Baptist Church.[9]

The burial property was one of numerous tracts that Rose sold to Black men and women over three decades beginning in 1812. Adjacent to a speculative venture by landowner William Hamilton, the vicinity was often referred

to as Hamilton Village or West Philadelphia, and sometimes eponymously as Roseville. The Black neighborhood that developed there encompassed about six acres in three clusters in the township of Blockley, which Philadelphians in 1854 incorporated into the city as the Twenty-fourth Ward and thereafter generally referred to it as West Philadelphia.

At the time the Black community was forming, slavery was coming to an end in Pennsylvania. A number of factors were at play: the American Revolution's ideology of liberty, which persuaded some slaveowners to manumit persons; the resistance of the enslaved, including running away and/or negotiating with masters for terms of freedom; a growing antislavery stance of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), which ultimately required its members to abjure slave ownership; an import duty on slaves brought into the colony before the Revolution, which (combined with low fertility rates) contributed to a declining population of slaves and replacing their labor with White indentured servants; and the actions and lobbying of free Blacks, often in cooperation with supportive Whites. The state 1780 Gradual Abolition law declared children of enslaved mothers born after March 1, 1780, free after serving in "a twilight zone between slavery and freedom" as indentured servants until the age of twenty-eight.[10] By 1828, Philadelphia County still noted six enslaved persons—five fewer than in 1821—though clearly the statistic failed to capture the portion of Blacks who anticipated serving out their indentures over three decades of their lives.[11]

The significant decline in Pennsylvania's enslaved population is evident in Blockley, where the 1800 federal census enumerated thirty-three free people of color and four slaves—together, a mere three percent of this rural district's population. The census enumerator for adjacent Kingsessing Township noted six independent Black households. In lieu of names, which he accorded White heads of household, he identified them solely as "Black." In Kingsessing, with its large farms, nurseries, fisheries, and a few estates, free persons of color constituted eleven percent of the township's population. By 1810, there were no enslaved persons enumerated in the Kingsessing returns, and a decade later, none in either township.[12]

Pennsylvania attracted manumitted and free persons of color, as well as fugitives. In the Quaker City, the Delaware River wards had the densest population of both Whites and Blacks. But West Philadelphia attracted those who sought a more agricultural environment, and one that appeared a safer distance from violent attacks on Blacks, their property, and their community institutions in the city's wards to the east. Several Black men in Blockley self-identified as "farmers," although officials recorded most as

"laborers." Men hauled, carted, gardened, and provided general labor for White households of Blockley and Kingsessing Townships. Some youths and women worked in the area's two snuff (tobacco) mills. A few persons forged precarious independence as tradesmen.[13] As Hamilton Village and West Philadelphia developed into suburban enclaves, Black labor, such as that done by washerwomen, supported White country residences.

BENEFICIAL SOCIETIES

Securing a place where people of color could be interred with dignity must have been foremost on the minds of those who established African Friends to Harmony. Its trustees focused the community's modest resources first on buying a burying ground property. Only three years later did these members of the newly formed African Baptist congregation purchase a lot on which to construct a church. This timing also suggests that the organizers intended the burying ground to serve the growing Black community in West Philadelphia, regardless of religious affiliation. It would, in fact, also prove a resting place for charitable cases; after 1860, hardship burials likely made up the vast majority of interments.

In 1826, Blockley was remote from private burial grounds that interred Black bodies. The burying grounds of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, First African Baptist Church, and St. Thomas African Episcopal Church lay east of Blockley across the Schuylkill River—a trek of three to four miles. Family grounds such as the Rose Burying Ground east of Harmonian were not options for Blacks who owned small plots of land when they owned any property. Persons of color were likely barred from the few church graveyards that existed in Blockley in 1826. Impoverished persons might be interred in the potters' fields of the Lower and Upper Burying Grounds on the Blockley side of the Schuylkill River. But the founders of African Friends to Harmony clearly sought to provide dignified graves for community members and to meet an immediate need for a growing Black population. Their concerns were justified just a year later when road construction impacted the Lower Burying Ground. A visitor to the site saw "coffins in a half dilapidated state [that] lay exposed to the gaze of the multitude—dry bones dug from their separate resting places, and indiscriminately thrown together."[14]

In forming African Friends to Harmony, organizers drew on previous examples of mutual aid societies. The earliest known free Black mutual

aid society in North America, the African Union Society of Newport, Rhode Island, was founded in 1780 and built networks throughout the North. Shortly after the American Revolution, it sent a representative to Philadelphia to advocate for emigration of people of color to Africa (a cause rejected by Black Philadelphians). He encountered the Free African Society, which Philadelphians had established in April 1787. In 1796, Newport's African Union Society exchanged "rules and regulations as a means of advancing mutual interests" and continued in the next decade to correspond with Philadelphia's African Humane Society. Blacks established other mutual aid societies in 1808 in Newport (the African Benevolent) and New York City (the African Mutual Relief).[15]

Those West Philadelphians who were not born in Pennsylvania migrated principally from Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware, and might well have been familiar with several mutual aid societies of the Upper South. These included the Resolute Beneficial Society of Washington, DC (1818), the Burying Ground Society of Richmond, Virginia (1815), and the Beneficial Society of Richmond, Virginia (1815). The Columbian Harmony Society, established in Washington City (the District of Columbia) in November 1825, foreshadowed the name and purpose of Blockley's African Friends to Harmony. The Columbian society was created "'to aid each other in infirmity, sickness, disease, or accident, and to provide burial for [members] after death.'" By 1828, the Society had purchased a plot for its own burial ground.[16]

The "benevolent society," scholar Robert Harris asserts, "quickly became the most prevalent form of organization for free Blacks." These societies were not modeled on White organizations but created to meet "distinctive needs of the free black populace, many of whom had recently emerged from slavery" and faced racial exclusion, economic hardships, migration, loss of extended kin, and adjustment to a free labor economy.[17]

Philadelphia exemplifies the rapid adoption of the benevolent society form. An 1813 periodical tallied a dozen such associations "established among the coloured people," to which about 10 percent of the city's Blacks belonged. A White writer (no doubt) remarked in 1831 on the "much more extensive system of benevolent operations, than is generally supposed to exist" among Blacks. Among them could be found the African Beneficial Society, the Daughters of Zion Angola Ethiopian Society, and the African Female Benevolent Association ("for the mutual relief & improvement of each other"). Several prominent men testified to the deliberate effort to form mutual aid societies and keep free Blacks from becoming public burdens. They listed

forty-four male and female benevolent societies and suggested more existed. Historian Gary Nash finds that Black mutual aid societies increased in the early nineteenth century in response to the depression of 1817–23 and the erroneous claim that Blacks drained the public relief funds. "By the early 1830s," Nash asserts, these "societies were virtually operating as a privately supported substitute for the public poor relief in the city." They increased in number to close to one hundred in 1837. "Collectively, these societies by 1837 were gathering annually nearly $18,000 in dues and distributing $14,000. . . . Far from living off the tax dollars of their white neighbors, black Philadelphians appear to have been among the most provident and self-reliant of city dwellers." Over time, Harris argues, such organizations furthermore "served as the linchpin of the free black community, generating the church, fraternal orders, insurance companies, and the national convention movement, which became important components of black institutional life."[18]

In 1847, claims of the sort that Nash documented—that Black Philadelphians burdened the poor relief system—as well as concerns for impoverished, often recently manumitted persons, compelled the Religious Society of Friends to embark on a census of free Black households. The published report of the census calculated that "nearly one-half the adult population, are members of Mutual Beneficial Societies, the funds of which are appropriated to support the members in sickness, and to bury the dead." Contributions ranged from 25 to 37 ½ cents per month and "ten to twenty dollars is usually allowed for funeral expenses." (Monthly wages for a male laborer in the West Philadelphia survey were typically around twelve dollars.) Participation among West Philadelphians similarly approached 50 percent. In some households, two or three people paid dues, suggesting strong connections to such associations. Of the West Philadelphians who responded to the 1847 census investigators (a committee composed of two White men and one Black man), only two persons who belonged to beneficial societies did not also attend religious services, underscoring the likely close connection between African Friends to Harmony and the church communities.[19]

WEST PHILADELPHIA'S NINETEENTH-CENTURY COMMUNITY

Two religious congregations anchored the Black West Philadelphia community. The African Baptist Church at Blockley, formed in 1826, gained formal recognition in 1829 from the Philadelphia Baptist Association, an

organization dominated by White congregations but including an increasing number of Black ones. The congregation had twenty-six members. By 1843, the "old frame meeting-house" was "too small" for services. Members completed a new stone church over the next several years. The congregation continued to regularly send representatives to the Association's annual meeting.[20]

The second Black congregation in Blockley, Mt. Pisgah African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, was established in 1833. David Disberry, born free in Chester County, Pennsylvania, was one of the founders of what one adherent in 1843 referred to as "The Harmonian Church," but which would become "Mt. Pisgah." Disberry used his own resources to purchase a parcel a few streets distant from the African Baptist Church. The seller was the White owner of a snuff mill whose lot was partially adjacent to the Harmonian burial grounds. Several nearby African Americans worked in the mill. "After purchasing the lot," Disberry recalled in 1870, "I went forward to build with my own means, and from what help I could get from subscriptions." By 1836, congregants had erected a frame church. In 1847, the congregation incorporated under Pennsylvania Commonwealth laws and (with some rancorous conflict that similarly accompanied such decisions of other congregations) formally joined with the African Methodist Episcopal Church. It replaced its frame structure with a substantial stone building in 1868.[21]

Blockley African Baptist, subsequently named "Oak Street" and now "Monumental" Baptist, and Mt. Pisgah AME exist to this day, and they are communities with whom the University of Pennsylvania consulted regarding the designated portion of African Friends to Harmony grounds. But religious enthusiasm in the 1830s and '40s throughout the eastern seaboard was fervent. At least one other Methodist group met in West Philadelphia, and the head church "Mother Bethel" regularly sent ministers to "Mount Zion" as well as Mt. Pisgah in the early 1840s. With the support of wealthy White Hamilton Village resident Joseph Lehman, the Mt. Zion group acquired property a few lots removed from the African Baptist Church, where they intended to build. Lehman, who held prayer meetings in his parlor on Sundays, stipulated a legacy for the "Coloured Congregations in the West part of Hamilton Village to be used in improving their Meeting Houses." Within a few years, however, the Mt. Zion project was abandoned and some of its early enthusiasts joined Mt. Pisgah.[22]

By midcentury, the households hugging the Baptist and AME church had grown to a stable community. More than half of them were on Oak (now Ludlow) Street between present-day 40th and 42nd Streets. Blacks who had

been freed or bought their liberty, men and women who had completed term servitude or bought the remaining time, freeborn persons, and some fugitives from enslavement gravitated to the neighborhood. By 1847, the community had grown to 338 persons, nearly half of whom were fifteen years and older. (The 1847 census did not extend to all of Blockley but centered on the West Philadelphia Borough and "Roseville" to its west.) Over a third were migrants to Pennsylvania. More than 11 percent of the men and women in West Philadelphia had been born into slavery but had purchased or otherwise earned or taken their freedom.[23]

Although little more than two percent of Philadelphia County's population enumerated in the 1847 census, West Philadelphia's African Americans stood out. The *Statistical Inquiry* aggregating the census results commended its residents for their achievements:

> The superior condition of the poorer class of the people of colour in West Philadelphia above all the other districts of Philadelphia, cannot fail to strike the reader. They are nearly all common labourers, and their houses are frame buildings, presenting little to attract the eye, yet one in three owns the house he lives in, and the property is generally free from incumbrances; and nearly six in ten of the house-keepers own personal effects exceeding one hundred dollars. A larger proportion of their children attend school; and they are greatly better off as regards their general condition, than those of the same occupations living in the City.

In contrast to West Philadelphia's real estate ownership rate of one in nearly three, the rates in other townships were one in seventeen (in Moyamensing) and one in nine (in Northern Liberties), with similarly dramatic differences in other areas of Philadelphia County.[24]

Nancy Maloney was one of the householders the survey had in mind. She had been enslaved in Hanover County, Virginia, and gained freedom in a testamentary manumission. Because a freed person needed to leave Virginia within a year unless accorded special permission for "extraordinary merit" (or was the spouse of such a recipient), the executor of the estate that had owned Nancy brought her and sixty-four other persons to York, Pennsylvania, in 1827. Her husband Isaac (whether they arrived in Pennsylvania together or met there is unknown) was a hatter and officially a resident in the city of Philadelphia in 1829 but had joined Blockley's Black Baptist Church. In June

1832, Isaac bought a lot from Peter Rose. A few months later, he bought an additional lot from Philip and Sarah Bartho. The deed for the later purchase identified Maloney as a stonemason, suggesting he found the building economy a more lucrative occupation than hat-making. Whether he had training in masonry is unknown, but like numerous contemporary Blacks, he might have worked in a variety of jobs as a laborer and picked up diverse skills. Isaac continued to worship with the Baptist Church, and Nancy joined as well. He regularly attended the meetings of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, the final time in 1836 shortly before his death. Isaac's early land purchases, the buildings he constructed on the lots, the laundry clientele Nancy built, and Nancy's astute management and additional property purchases made her the wealthiest Black person in her West Philadelphia tax district. At her death in 1861, her estate was valued at $12,000.[25]

David Disberry, who bought the lot on which to erect the church of Mt. Pisgah, continued throughout his life as a member of the church and served as sexton for Harmonian in the 1860s and '70s. In the 1830s, Disberry was an iron merchant, but the Panic of 1837 and ensuing depression reduced his business. He nonetheless was well regarded in the community. A White merchant in West Philadelphia, the son of the man who had employed and taught Disberry the trade, and perhaps had brought him to Philadelphia from Disberry's native Chester County, bequeathed Disberry $100 in 1851. Disberry also received a bequest from fellow congregant and widow Catharine Ann Smith. Upon her death in 1846, Smith devised "unto my friend David Disberry . . . all my right, title and Estate in the lot in the burial ground of The Harmonian Church subject to my burial therein." She also gave Disberry all her personal estate. Smith had inherited a two-story frame house adjacent to the burial grounds. She gained title to it through a complicated process that required the aid of two of West Philadelphia's White lawyers, to whom she devised it upon her death. Disberry's family had been burned out of their residence the previous year, so he immediately cobbled together the proceeds from the sale of Smith's personal property and other funds he could muster to purchase her former residence. The Smith property put Disberry in easy proximity to the cemetery when he later became sexton. Two of his granddaughters were interred in Harmonian. Disberry's children lived in the house and held on to the property until 1921.[26]

William Washington was one of the earliest trustees of Blockley African Baptist. He married Nancy Francis, a widow who was a founding member of the congregation. He regularly attended the annual Philadelphia Baptist

meeting, witnessed wills of community members (having attained literacy in his adult years, it appears), and pledged to administer Philip Bartho's estate. He and his wife grieved with the community when their fifteen-year-old daughter died. Washington (as in the case of Catharine Ann Smith's lawyers, and Disberry's patrons) also had positive close relationships with White residents of the area. He named his "friend" Hugh McIlvain executor of his 1863 will. McIlvain was a White Quaker and a prosperous merchant who owned a lumberyard. Though Washington was probably McIlvain's employee or a carter who contracted with him, he still counted the man a "friend." McIlvain, in fact, executed meticulously Washington's estate with assets of $536. Not included in that sum was the value of a Bucks County farm and two West Philadelphia building lots, suggesting moreover that Washington was a model the 1847 census takers would have admired.[27]

The Roseville area continued to be the core of the township's (later ward's) African American population for much of the nineteenth century. It was the home of Underground Railroad activists. Reverend William Jackson pastored the Baptist congregation from 1841 to 1854. A month after the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act went into effect, Jackson was involved in rescuing a young man from the custody of a Federal marshal, then disguising and sending him safely to Canada. Jackson was arrested for his leadership in the incident but was quickly released. Cryptic references in correspondence between the Reverend and his wife Jane, however, suggest that the 1850 incident was not his first instance of aiding freedom seekers.[28] In 1852, William Whipper, the Columbia, Pennsylvania-based partner of fellow Black abolitionist Stephen Smith, bought property touching the burial site. Perhaps the lot served their lumber business, but it was suspiciously strategic for Underground Railroad activities for which the pair had become notorious—in particular, for hiding fugitives in their freight cars. A number of West Philadelphia's Black men served with the US Colored Troops in the Civil War. Members from both churches formed a "Union Freedmen's Relief Association" to assist slaves newly liberated from territories held by Federal troops in 1863. They later pushed for passage of the Fifteenth Amendment (voting rights for Black men) to the US Constitution, and when it finally was ratified, neighborhood men stepped forward and joined with the most prominent Black Philadelphians to plan a celebration. The "colored Citizens" of West Philadelphia staged rallies to support political candidates—"*Come one, come all, to the great Republican call!*" The Baptist and AME congregations hosted regional conventions. In the decades after the Civil War, both churches

gained congregants, employed full-time pastors, and engaged in religious, social, and educational outreach, participating in the steady growth and prominence true of Philadelphia's African American congregations.[29]

CLOSURE AND SALE OF LAND

In 1882, the last year African Friends to Harmony buried friends, family, and strangers in the ground, there were eighteen graves. In January, little Rebecca Henry succumbed to pneumonia, following her brother who died the previous year of tuberculosis. Seventy-six-year-old Henry Winder died in the Almshouse in March. Winder was an early trustee of Mt. Pisgah; friends claimed his body and had it interred in African Friends to Harmony ground. Allen Dysberry (elsewhere "Disberry"), a brother of sexton David Disberry, died in adjacent Delaware County in April but was transported to the West Philadelphia graveyard. Four adults died that year of tuberculosis, a fifth of congestion of the lungs, and a sixth of chronic peritonitis (which possibly was also tuberculosis). An eight-month-old boy with the hopeful name of John Wesley Francis Mebston died in July of infant gastroenteritis. Diptheria, malnutrition, diarrhea, croup, and bronchitis claimed several other children. Three-week-old William Henry, who died of a heart deformity, was the last to be interred in the graveyard on December 28, 1882.[30]

Cemeteries near habitations, contemporary public health advocates argued as Philadelphia's population exploded, caused "pernicious" health effects. In keeping with contemporary miasma theory that diseases spread through gaseous vapors from decomposing animal and vegetable matter, including corpses, they warned about continuing to bury bodies in cemeteries close to encroaching residences. Burial grounds were "sources of pestilence," drained surrounding residents of stamina and, moreover, polluted the ground wells or water supply with decomposing bodies. For more than a decade, the Board of Health had advocated with increasing urgency to end "intramural interments" in Philadelphia's populous vicinities. "Could these plots be stripped of their concealment and the earth be made to give forth its dead, the spectacle would convince the most unthoughtful of the enormity of the evil" of burial grounds in areas surrounded by "habitations of the living."[31] Whether the Board pressured African Friends to Harmony directly is unclear; the Black ground had been ignored and did not appear on its list of graveyards. But West Philadelphia was indeed becoming more densely populated.

Shortly after the last interment, African Friends to Harmony sought a buyer for the land. Although established by deed in 1826, the organization did not apply for a charter until 1885, by which time the original trustees had died. At the time of application, the Philadelphia *Times* described the lot as "an old burying-ground" (despite bodies having been interred there as recently as three years earlier). The newspaper stated that the charter was to enable African Friends to Harmony to take legal title to the land in anticipation of selling it.[32]

The Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia granted the charter in January 1886. Still, the association held on to the property. Finally, in 1910, it sold the land for the sum of $3,500. The buyers were members of a White family for many years residing nearby—their deceased father had been the area's district property surveyor—so they clearly knew the history of the parcel. But like their father, they accumulated property and bided their time. Until 1932, deeds continued to note that properties bordered the "graveyard." African Americans remained in what had been Roseville, albeit their distinction as "degenerate" influences on real estate values bore no positive association with the burial ground, churches, and homeownership of 1847. By 1937, the resting place of people of color who had built the community had been forgotten—omitted from the deeds documenting the sales of adjacent properties, and thus extinguished from the public record.[33]

Yet no construction requiring deep foundations had occurred until the 2018 disturbance of the western portion of the Harmonian grounds. On the eastern designated section, the archaeologists contracted by Penn encountered disturbance, perhaps from twentieth-century installation of underground water or sewer lines, as well as construction on adjacent properties, that impacted nearly a third of the 161 graves they found. They documented evidence of wooden coffins, coffin hardware, buttons, pins (possibly used for infants' shrouds), and a few pieces of jewelry among the artifacts. These remains were then removed to Eden Cemetery.[34] One wonders, despite the denials of those involved in construction of the apartment building on the western part of the original graveyard property, how many "dry bones dug from their separate resting places, and indiscriminately thrown together" met the same fate as at potter's field in 1827.

The obliteration of graveyards did not end with the 1827 disinterred dry bones and coffins from West Philadelphia's potters' field. In 2020, yet another cemetery where African Americans had been laid to rest was erased from the Pennsylvania landscape. When the remains from the African Friends to Harmony Burial Ground were relocated, an opportunity to keep the story

of a its nineteenth-century participants at the forefront of the region's historical and public memory was lost. Left *in situ*, the Harmonian burials could have inspired community engagement, reflection, and commemoration—a compelling need particularly in light of the gentrification and whitening of the area. Instead, a solitary marker, erected by Penn, identifies the site.

The documentary record, at least, enables us to celebrate many of the achievements of nineteenth-century persons of color in West Philadelphia and the surrounding area: freedom, property ownership, religious community, political assertion, family formation, and respectable burials among them. But it was no doubt a daily and often dark struggle, as we see if we return to the household of Charles and Annie Grey. Although African Friends to Harmony stopped interments in 1882, the sad fates of the couple's family did not end. Five young children died in the next decade, and George died in 1891. When widow Annie responded to the census taker in 1900, she recalled she had given birth to sixteen children. After nearly three decades of childbearing, however, only two of them were still living.[35]

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NOTES

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1. Portions of this article have been adapted from the nomination of the graveyard authored by this writer. See Donna J. Rilling, "African Friends to Harmony Burial Ground, 4111–4123 Chestnut Street," Nomination to the Register of Historic Places of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, 2018, https://www.phila.gov/media/20190401093121/4111-23-Chestnut-St-nomination.pdf.
2. Mooney initially began collecting burial information from death returns. In April 2018, he declined to participate further in a potential nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. At that time, his employer, AECOM, was retained by Penn. AECOM, "African Friends to Harmony Burial Ground Archaeological Relocation Project," September 2020; Kimberly Morrell, "Management Summary: Archaeological Monitoring of Mechanical Trenching at the African Friends to Harmony Burial Ground," AECOM, March 2019, quotation at 15.
3. Rilling, "African Friends to Harmony Burial Ground," Nomination. For further elaboration on the discussions between Penn and the Philadelphia Archaeological Forum (to which I was not a party), see Elizabeth D. Meade and Douglas Mooney, "'Cursed Be He That Moves My Bones': The Archaeologist's Role in Protecting Burial Sites in Urban Areas," in *Advocacy and Archaeology: Urban Intersections*, ed. Kelly M. Britt and Diane F. George (New York: Berghahn, 2023), 14–44.
4. AECOM, "African Friends."
5. For example, Zoe Greenberg, "Penn denied ties to slavery. Students sought the truth," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 11, 2022. Penn recently stirred controversy for quietly entombing skulls from the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology's Samuel G. Morton Cranial Collection. Penn's ceremony of commemoration occurred after the remains had been removed to Eden Cemetery. Members of the diasporic descendant community objected that the institution that had "caused harm" nonetheless decided the fate of the human remains. Critics also argued that research that might have shed light on the identities of the persons whose skulls Morton had assembled had been rushed. Their contentions emphasized a more expansive definition of "descendant community" than Penn applied in the African Friends to Harmony case; Campbell Robertson, "Amid a Fraught Process, a Philadelphia Museum Entombs Remains of 19 Black People," *The New York Times*, February 3, 2024. For a recent reevaluation of Morton's significance, see John S. Michael, "An 'American Humboldt'? Memorializing Philadelphia Physician and Race Supremacist Samuel George Morton," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, 87, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 279–312.
6. Conversation with Paul Wolff Mitchell, November 13, 2020. Mitchell was then a doctoral student working with Paul Robeson students through the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at Penn. On the expanding definition of "descendant communities," see Michael L. Blakey, "Archaeology in the Blinding Light," *Current Anthropology* 61, no. 22 (October 2020):

183–97; Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground, Richmond, Virginia, https://www.tclf.org/sites/default/files/microsites/landslide2021/locations/shockoe.html; URS, Phase IB Archaeological Investigations of the Mother Bethel Burying Ground, 1810–Circa 1864," October 2013; Rebecca Yamin, *Digging in the City of Brotherly Love: Stories from Philadelphia Archaeology*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2023), 96–110; Jeremy M. Moss, "Introduction to Special Issue: Public Archaeology in the Twenty-first Century: Strength in Breadth," *The Public Historian* 44, no. 4 (November 2022): 6–17. See also Ryan K. Smith, "Disappearing the Enslaved; The Destruction and Recovery of Richmond's Second African Burial Ground," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 17–45.

7. Steven Burg, "The Material Culture of Pennsylvania's African American Cemeteries and Burial Grounds," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 90, no. 4 (Autumn 2023): 542–85; Raquel E. Fleskes, Ade A. Ofunniyin, Joanna K. Gilmore et al., "Ancestry, Health, and Lived Experiences of Enslaved Africans in 18th century Charleston: An Osteobiographical Analysis," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 175, no. 1 (May 2021): 3–24, quotations at 4, 5; Raquel E. Fleskes, Graciela S. Cabana, Joanna K. Gilmore et al., "Community-engaged ancient DNA project reveals diverse origins of 18th-century African descendants in Charleston, South Carolina," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120, no. 3 (2023): 1–9; Caroline Gutman and Emily Cochrane, "Tracing Charleston's History of Slavery, From a Burial Ground to a DNA Swab," *The New York Times*, April 11, 2024.
8. Grey Family Death Returns: Charles, March 18; Samuel, April 28; Mary, May 13; Elmira, May 19, 1881. Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803–1915, FamilySearch.org. On public health and African American burials in the early national period on Philadelphia, see Jubilee Marshall, "Race, Death, and Public Health in Philadelphia, 1750–1793," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 87, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 364–89.
9. 1810 and 1820 US Census of Population, Blockley Twp; 1850 US Census of Population, West Philadelphia, Phila. Co.; 1856 Census of Black Philadelphians, entitled "Education and Employment Statistics of the Colored People of Philadelphia," Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Coll. 490, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter HSP); Peter Rose *et uxor* to Jacob Gardner, Philip Bartho, and Isaac Lloyd, July 14, 1826, Philadelphia County Deed Book (hereafter "PCDB") GWR14: 353ff; Enumeration of Taxables duplicate, Blockley, Philadelphia Co., 1821, RG 1.17a, Philadelphia Archives and Records (hereafter PCAR).
10. Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 173.
11. "Statistics: General Table," *The Register of Pennsylvania* 4 (December 12, 1829), 380.
12. Emily T. Cooperman, "Historic Context Statement for University City Planning District" (2012), 17–18; 1790, 1800, 1810 and 1820 US Censuses.

13. West Philadelphia and Spring Garden, African American Census of Philadelphia, 1847, Friends Historical Collection, Swarthmore College, at Ancestry.com.
14. J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609–1884*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts and Co., 1884), 3: 2358. Beginning in 1849, Olive and Lebanon Cemeteries, established by some of the city's prominent African American leaders, provided additional nondenominational alternatives for Black interments; Aaron Wunsch, "Bethel Burial Ground, Philadelphia, Penna." National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form, Jan. 5, 2016. Blockley African Baptist/Oak Street would have its own church graveyard, but Harmonian continued to serve church members and Philadelphia's extended Black community. Evidence suggests that before construction of Mt. Pisgah AME's stone church in 1867–68, the congregation used a portion of its lot for a graveyard. Death returns of at least two persons identify Mt. Pisgah as their burial site (Joseph Hackett, March 30, 1866; and John Bullet, April 3, 1866, buried "Mt. Pisga (Locust above 40th)"); see also *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 16, 1933, and *Saturday Evening Post* 6 (December 22, 1827), 334.
15. Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom; the Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 98–104; Robert L. Harris Jr., "Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780–1830," *Massachusetts Review* 20, no. 3 (1979): 603–25, 611.
16. Paul E. Sluby and Stanton L. Wormley Jr., *History of the Columbian Harmony Society and of Harmony Cemetery, Washington, D.C.* (Washington, DC: Columbian Harmony Society, 1976; rev. 2001).
17. Harris, "Early Black Benevolent Societies," 611, 609.
18. *Juvenile Magazine*, no. 3, July 1, 1813; "Beneficial Societies," *Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania* 7 (March 1831): 163–64; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 273; Harris, "Early Black Benevolent Societies," 609.
19. *A Statistical Inquiry into the Condition of the People of Colour, of the City and Districts of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Kite & Walton, 1849), 22; African American Census of Philadelphia, 1847.
20. After ca. 1850, Blockley African Baptist was called "Oak Street Baptist" and, after 1884, "Monumental Baptist"; John A. Saunders, *100 Years After Emancipation: History of the Philadelphia Negro* ([n.p.], 1960), 16–17; *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association* (Philadelphia, 1829), and *Minutes* for 1839, 1843, 1846, and 1848; Emily Cooperman, "Inventory of African-American Historic Church Resources, City of Philadelphia" (ARCH Historic Preservation Consulting, 2008); Oscar Beisert, "4101-05 Ludlow Street, Oak Street Baptist Church (1845) / Monumental Baptist Church," Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, Philadelphia Historical Commission," May 2016; https://www.thembc.org.

21. The website of the still extant congregation of the Mt. Pisgah AME Church states that the congregation first met in Richard Berry's home at 4100 Ludlow St. (then the southwest corner of Oak and Mulberry Streets). But Berry did not yet live in West Philadelphia when the church began. Berry was born in Cecil County, Maryland, in December 1815. He moved to Philadelphia with his parents in 1834 and joined Mother Bethel. In 1847, Berry was living in Moyamensing. Sometime that year, he moved with his wife to West Philadelphia and joined Mt. Pisgah, "then in its infancy." In 1833 when Mt. Pisgah was established, moreover, Richard Berry would have been a mere seventeen years old—too young to have his own household. The confusion likely arose because Berry was active in the church by 1847, the year Mt. Pisgah incorporated, http://www.mtpisgahamec.org/church_history; Richard R. Wright, *Centennial Encyclopedia of the A.M.E. Church* (Philadelphia, 1916), 266–67; Philip Hardin *et uxor* to David Disberry, Sept. 18, 1837, PCDB GS38: 317ff (recorded April 4, 1842). Deposition of David Disberry, in Robert Beatie, Michael Johnson, William Harris, John Wesley, and James J. Williams, Trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Mount Pisgah Church v. John Henry, James Kane, Aaron Randolph, Curtis Kane, Mar. term 1870, no. 9, Equity Proceedings, Court of Common Pleas of the City and County of Philadelphia, PCAR; *Christian Recorder*, May 18, 1867; Charles H. Carpenter v. Mt. Pisgah AME Church, Mechanic Liens, Mar. term 1868, no. 186, District Court of the City and County of Philadelphia, PCAR; "Mt. Pisgah A.M.E. Church Celebrates 100th Anniversary," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 16, 1933; "Colored People Spend Millions in Church Houses," *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 2, 1921.
22. Appointment of Ministers from Bethel A.M.E. Church, 1839–1844, HSP; Will of Joseph Lehman, 1845, no. 245, Register of Wills, Phila. Co. The will was contested, and it does not look like the bequest was ever paid. See also https://www.lehmanumc.org/who_we_are; Joseph and Deborah Lehman to Sewell Gibson et al., Trustees of the Zion Methodist Episcopal Church of Blockley Township, April 1, 1839, PCDB GS25: 653ff; Richards v. Sewel Gibson et al., March term 1853, no. 126, Appearance Docket, District Court of the City and County of Philadelphia, RG 22, PCAR.
23. On fugitives arrested in the West Philadelphia neighborhood, see for example: Letter from a Chas E. Heath, February 15, 1836, to T. I. Wharton, Box 17, Legal Papers, Wharton Papers, Coll. 1500, HSP; Acting Committee Minutes, April 3, 1835, 1822–1842, Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, Coll. 490, HSP; *Statistical Inquiry*, quotation at p. 5 (population percentages calculated from table on p. 8). The *Inquiry* stipulated that the figure did not include persons living in White households as domestics. The 1850 US Census, Blockley Twp., however, shows few African Americans living with White families.

24. *Statistical Inquiry*, 14, 41.
25. Nancy gives the name of her manumitter in the 1847 census; for her journey to Pennsylvania, see *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 3 (July 1827), 153, and 1 (September 1825), 213. She is identified as the deceased Isaac's wife in Nancy Maloney to Sarah Bartho, April 8, 1846, PCDB AM41: 162; City directories for 1829, 1830, 1831 and 1833; *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association,* 1829, 1836, and 1839. Peter Rose to Isaac Delony, June 16, 1832, PCDB AM24: 474ff (recorded June 26, 1832); Philip and Sarah Bartho to Isaac Maloney, December 31, 1832, PCDB AM32: 187; *Public Ledger,* November 8, 1862; see also *The Daily Age*, May 11, 1864, for an estimate of $25,000, in part reflecting the erratic real estate market during the Civil War.
26. Deposition of David Disberry; Philip Hardin *et uxor* to David Disberry, September 18, 1837, PCDB GS38: 317ff (recorded April 4, 1842); Will of John R. Hoopes, 1851, no. 230, Register of Wills, Phila. Co.; Deposit of David Hoopes for David Disber[r]y, June 5, 1820, Depositors' Signature Book, Philadelphia Savings Fund Society, database at Ancestry.com; "Local Affairs. Fire," *Public Ledger*, February 15, 1845; Will of Catharine Ann Smith, 1846, no. 70, Register of Wills, Phila. Co.; Jacob Broom *et uxor* to David Disberry, May 8, 1846, PCDB JTO106: 256ff (recorded December 20, 1867). Disberry's infant granddaughter Anna Maria Disberry was interred in Harmonian ground in 1863, as was another granddaughter, Virginia Marshall, in 1871. Return of Interments for "Harmonian" Burial Ground, [September 27, 1863] and Death Return, June 25, 1871, Philadelphia City Death Records, 1861–1915, at Familysearch.org. Another grandchild, Augustus Marshall, was President of the African Friends to Harmony Society in 1910 when the Society finally sold the lot. PCDB WSV1295: 146ff; Louise Disberry et al. to Julia Marshall, November 19, 1921, PCDB JMH1120: 591ff (recorded November 19, 1921).
27. Jane Jackson to William Jackson, December 30, 1851, and January 6 and 12, 1853, Reverend William Jackson Papers, 1842–1934, Mss 171, New Bedford Whaling Museum. Thank you to Valerie Craigwell White and Anne Whiston Spirn for a transcript and copy of this letter as well as a multitude of materials from the Jackson papers. Will of William Washington, 1863, no. 168, Register of Wills, Phila. Co.; William Barton Marsh, *Philadelphia Hardwood, 1798–1948; the story of the McIlvains of Philadelphia and the Business they founded* (Philadelphia, 1948); 1850 US Census, West Philadelphia and 1860 US, Ward 24, Precinct 7, Phila. Co. recorded Washington's occupation as "labourer."
28. Mark Morrison-Reed, *Darkening the Doorways: Black Trailblazers and Missed Opportunities in Unitarian Universalism* (Boston: Skinner House, 2011); https://www.thembc.org/history; Craigwell White points to Jane Jackson's note to her husband, "B. Jones sends his love & says look well to the South" as a likely message for an arriving fugitive slave; Jane Jackson to William Jackson, November 16, 1843, Jackson Papers; personal conversations with Craigwell White.

29. Amelia Carter to William Whipper, April 24, 1852, PCDB TH162: 264ff (recorded August 7, 1854); "Colored Regiment," *Christian Recorder*, April 18, 1863; "Union Freedmen's Relief Association of West Philadelphia," *Christian Recorder*, March 7, 1863; "Equal Rights Demonstration," *Christian Recorder*, September 29, 1866; "Pennsylvania State Equal Rights League," *The Press*, August 9, 1869, and March 1, 1870; "United We Stand Divided We Fall! . . . A Grand Ox Roast and Dinner!" *Christian Recorder*, September 28, 1872; Matthew S. Hopper, "From Refuge to Strength: The Rise of the African American Church in Philadelphia, 1787–1949" (Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, [n.d.]).
30. Rilling, "African Friends to Harmony Burial Ground," Nomination.
31. "Cemeteries a Cause of Disease," *Good Health: A Journal of Hygiene* (Battle Creek, MI: Good Health Publishing), 19 (October 1884): 295–96; "Annual Report of the Board of Health," *Annual Message of the Mayor. . . Containing the Reports of the Departments*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, 1890), 44.
32. *Times* (Philadelphia), December 25, 1885.
33. The charter was granted on January 23, 1886, and recorded February 1, 1886, in Charter Book No. 11, p. 115ff, PCAR; PCDBs, Jacob Gardner, heir at law of Jacob Gardner, the last surviving of three trustees, to African Friends to Harmony, April 15, 1910, WSV1208: 435ff.; African Friends to Harmony to J. Franklin Miller et al., April 15, 1910, WSV1295: 146ff (recorded April 16, 1910); Pennsylvania Insurance and McGlinn to Mary George, March 1, 1937, DWH390: 388ff.
34. If there were grave markers, earlier disturbance had eliminated them; AECOM, "African Friends."
35. Death Return, George Grey, May 12, 1891; 1900 US Census, 34th Ward, E.D. 896, Philadelphia.