# Valentine Richmond History

## Self-Guided Driving Tour of Selected Richmond Cemeteries
Text-Only Version

**This tour is for personal educational use. The Valentine is not liable for any injury, incident or consequential damages resulting from the use of these materials. Participants are encouraged to follow traffic rules, bring water and wear comfortable shoes.**

*All directions are in italics. Please check the visiting hours of each cemetery before starting your tour.*

## Richmond Cemetery Tour

The practice of burying the dead, and establishing funerary practices indicative of certain groups is one of the biggest things that separates humans from animals. But burials often can tell us more about the living than about the dead. That can clearly be seen in the cemeteries of Richmond, which reflect the racial and religious diversity of the Richmond population throughout history, as well as the legacy of inequality that has defined the city from its very beginnings. As you drive through these cemeteries, note what they look like – what might this say about the community buried there or the community that built the space?

The cemeteries are arranged in a loop, so that you are able to jump in and follow the list depending on which location is closest to your starting point. The total drive time is about an hour and a half, not including time spent exploring the cemeteries. You are also welcome to complete the driving tour in multiple stages, or pick and choose the sites that most meet your interests. Please remain respectful in these spaces.

**Maury Cemetery/Mount Olivet Cemetery**
*2700 Maury Street, Richmond VA 23224*

*Maury and Mount Olivet are easily drivable, with plenty of room to pull over and explore on foot if desired.*

Maury and Mount Olivet Cemeteries are located on a 90 acre complex in the Southside of Richmond. In 1872, the City of Manchester (then an independent city) passed an ordinance outlawing burials in town limits. In 1874, Maury Cemetery opened, though you might see some earlier markers, as some older burials were moved to the cemetery when it opened. Initially, burials were segregated by race and separated by a barrier, though today there is no barrier between the two. In 1910, the City of Richmond annexed Manchester and took control of Maury Cemetery. That same year, a Manchester beneficial society, called the "Love and Union Club," petitioned the city to change the segregated section to be named Mount Olivet Cemetery. In 1930, the United Daughters of the Confederacy raised a Confederate monument and flagpole in Maury Cemetery. Later wars are also memorialized with WWI and WWII monuments that stand near the Maury Street entrance.

**History Hunt: Can you find the WWI monument?**

**African Burial Ground**
*1540 E Broad Street, Richmond VA 23219*

*The African Burial Ground is located on a narrow, cobblestone road that comes up quickly on the left of Broad Street as you drive east on Broad. Drive slowly so you don't miss the turn – you will need to park and walk inside the African Burial Ground.*

The African Burying Ground, or "Burial Ground for Negros," as it is titled on an 1809 map, is Richmond's earliest designated burying ground for the city's Black community, and likely one of the earliest in the country. Though the exact beginnings are unsure, it would have come into use sometime in the late 18th century. However, the land was of poor quality and was used as a gallows for public executions as well. The Black community in Richmond protested this, and in 1815 purchased land several miles north of here that would become Barton Heights Cemetery. As the burial ground fell out of use, the city used the land to build a schoolhouse for poor white children, and later a jail. Nearby stood streets of slave auction houses. In 1958, the Richmond-Petersburg turnpike was built through the property. Since the 1990s, there has been slow work by activists to reclaim and properly remember the space, but it still stands as an in-between place. While the location is safe and recognized by the city, it is difficult to access, and continually awaits final plans for its visibility to the community at large. The city recently announced a significant investment into developing the site.

**History Hunt: Can you find the Richmond Slave Trail markers to learn more about the history of this space?**

**St. John's Church**
*2401 E Broad Street, Richmond VA 23223*

*You will need to park on the street and walk up into the grounds of St. John's Church, which are surrounded by a brick wall. Check St. John's Church website for hours.*

St. John's Church graveyard was the first official burying ground of Richmond when the church was built in 1741. A graveyard differs slightly from a cemetery in that it is smaller, and specifically part of a churchyard. Once Richmond became the capital of Virginia in 1780, the graveyard filled quickly and was declared full in 1820. Plans were made to open Shockoe Hill Cemetery quickly for additional burying grounds.

Though the graveyard appears small, there are over 1,000 burials, including Eliza Poe, the biological mother of Edgar Allen Poe, and George Wythe, signer of the Declaration of Independence and teacher of Thomas Jefferson, and John Marshall. As St. John's Church became a popular tourist destination due to its fame as the location of Patrick Henry's "liberty or death" speech, the St. John's Church Foundation formed to protect the grounds. Today, the foundation and the St. John's Historic District oversee the grounds, which are in good shape, though many of the markers need conservation.

**Richmond National Cemetery**
*1701 Williamsburg Road, Richmond VA 23231*

*Richmond National Cemetery is easily drivable, with plenty of room to pull over and explore on foot if desired.*

Richmond National Cemetery was opened in 1867 by the US Federal Government after the Civil War to provide a place for Union dead to rest together. Initially, about 6,000 Union burials were moved to Richmond National from scattered grave sites around the Richmond area, including Oakwood and Hollywood Cemeteries, Belle Isle, Cold Harbor, and Seven Pines, among others. Confederate dead were excluded from the cemetery, making it a controversial site among Confederate veterans and their families. The African-American community actually took on responsibility for upkeep of the site, to pay thanks to Union Soldiers who gave their lives in the war that ultimately ended slavery. After the Civil War, Richmond National remained open to burials of US servicemen and their spouses from other wars, including the Spanish-American War, both World Wars, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

**History Hunt: Can you find a plaque with the words of the Gettysburg Address? Why do you think this might have been placed at this cemetery?**

**Sir Moses Montefiore Cemetery**
*1489-1553 Jennie Scher Road, Richmond VA 23231*

*Sir Moses Montefiore is a little overgrown, and doesn't feature wide or easily drivable roads. We would recommend parking and walking through the cemetery.*

Sir Moses Montefiore Cemetery was founded in 1886 by a group of orthodox Russian immigrants. Though Richmond's Jewish population was firmly established by the late 1800s with other congregations and designated burial grounds, this group preferred not to assimilate into the preexisting Jewish communities and instead raised funds for their own congregation and cemetery, though it is bordered by two smaller Jewish cemeteries. The cemetery is still active, and generally follows orthodox traditions such as plain coffins and hand-dug graves. The cemetery is named after Moses Montefiore, a Jewish philanthropist and humanitarian, and sits on Jennie Scher Road, named for one of the founding members of the Sir Moses congregation.

**History Hunt: The Star of David and Menorah are symbols important to the Jewish faith. Can you find examples on the gravestones?**

**Oakwood Cemetery**
*3101 Nine Mile Road, Richmond VA 23223*

*Oakwood Cemetery is easily drivable, with plenty of room to pull over and explore on foot if desired.*

Oakwood Cemetery was founded in 1854, with the first burials in 1855. As the earlier Shockoe Hill Cemetery filled up, the city of Richmond looked for an answer to the need for more space, and decided to follow the rural cemetery model that had proven so popular with the private Hollywood Cemetery. Rural or garden cemeteries were built to be elaborately landscaped and decorated spaces for the public to enjoy art and community in a park-like setting.

Though the earliest burials were poor African Americans, the cemetery quickly turned to wealthy white Richmonders. Additionally, as the Civil War decimated the population, nearby Chimborazo Hospital began using Oakwood as a primary burial location and the city set aside a separate section of the cemetery for Confederate burials, which currently contains about 17,000 burials. In 1866, the city designated one acre of the cemetery for use to Jewish congregations, and a Ladies Oakwood Memorial association formed to take care of the Confederate section, which included funding and erecting a memorial obelisk in 1871. In the 1880s, Oakwood was the subject of much controversy over graverobbing from the poorer sections of the cemetery in order to procure specimens for the Medical College of Virginia. In 1896 a lot bordering Oakwood Cemetery was sold to the Greenwood Memorial Association, who then sold it the city for specific use as a burial ground for poor African Americans. While the cemetery began at only about 60 acres, various expansions means that today the cemetery covers almost 200 acres.

**History Hunt: Oakwood Cemetery features quite a few grave markers shaped like trees, which can be found all over the country, and mark a movement toward more natural gravestones and the rural cemetery model. Can you find a few different versions of these in Oakwood?**

**Evergreen and East End Cemeteries**
*50 Evergreen Road, Richmond VA, 23223*

*As you drive into Evergreen Cemetery, note East End Cemetery to the right. As you reach Evergreen, there is a large driving circle, but further exploration will need to be done by foot. You can park by the picnic tables and silver planters slightly down the driving circle once you veer right.*

Evergreen Cemetery is an African American cemetery that was founded in 1891 by the Evergreen Cemetery Association in response to a need for more African American burial grounds generally and a prestigious African American burial ground specifically. The space was envisioned as the premier Black cemetery at the height of Jim Crow, and hosts many prominent Black leaders in Richmond from the early 19th century, including John Mitchell Jr. and Maggie L. Walker. In the mid-20th century, Evergreen and East End fell into significant disrepair – as you can see from driving through, many of the graves and markers are overgrown and invisible. In the late 20th century, renewed interest in Maggie Walker and Richmond's African American history prompted

interest in the cemetery, which is currently owned by the Enrichmond Foundation. An active volunteer effort from the community is ongoing to restore both of these burial grounds.

**History Hunt: Can you find John Mitchell Jr.'s grave and Maggie L. Walker's grave? Walk past the silver planters and take a left down the path to find Mitchell's grave (flat on the ground beside an upright female statue designating his mother's burial spot) and Walker's grave (marked by a large cross).**

**Woodland Cemetery**
*2300 Magnolia Road, Richmond VA 23223*

*Woodland Cemetery is easily drivable, though the overgrown nature of the space means many places aren't suitable for walking.*

John Mitchell Jr., a prominent Black activist in Jim Crow Richmond, led the Woodland Cemetery Corporation to purchase the land for Woodland Cemetery in 1917. The cemetery was meant to pay tribute to African American leaders, with roads named after Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass, and was designed in the rural cemetery style that incorporates winding roads and landscaped areas, as we've seen in many other Richmond cemeteries. The impressive front entrance and location earmarked this cemetery as an elite burial ground for the African American community, though time, neglect, and vandalism had all taken their toll by the 1970s. National attention to the cemetery in the 1990s prompted cleanup, in much the same way that Evergreen and East End Cemeteries prompted action. Richmond tennis champion and humanitarian Arthur Ashe is buried here.

**History Hunt: Can you find Arthur Ashe's black and gold grave marker? It is surrounded by a wrought iron fence, and visible from the cemetery entrance.**

**Forest Lawn Cemetery**
*4000 Pilots Lane, Richmond VA 23222*

*Forest Lawn is easily drivable, with plenty of room to pull over and explore on foot if desired. There are two entrances, one to the main cemetery, and one to a smaller Jewish cemetery.*

Forest Lawn Cemetery was founded in 1922 by a private corporation – Myrtle Grove Corporation. Landscape architect Charles Gillette, who designed notable gardens including the Virginia Executive Mansion, University of Richmond, Virginia House and Agecroft Hall, was a shareholder and designer of the cemetery plan. While many cemeteries in Richmond held closely to their historical ties, Forest Lawn Cemetery advertised the modernity and size of the project, which totaled 210 acres. After WWII, Forest Lawn was chosen as a site to offer a memorial to victims of the Holocaust by installing a central stone flanked by two side panels inscribed with the names of 200 family members lost to the genocide. Nearly that many bodies of Holocaust survivors surround the memorial. In 1999, two more flanking panels with additional names were added.

**History Hunt: Leaving pebbles on top of gravestones is a Jewish mourning tradition. Can you find the rows of gravestones marked by small pebbles?**

**Barton Heights Cemetery**
*1600 Lamb Avenue, Richmond VA 23222*

*Barton Heights Cemetery is not drivable.*

Barton Heights was established in 1815 by the Burying Ground Society of the Free People of Color of the city if Richmond as an answer to the City of Richmond's lack of appropriate burial spaces for the African American community. It is a series of cemeteries with names that historically included The Phoenix Burying Ground and Cedarwood. During the decades after its establishment multiple African American organizations joined forces to purchase markers, provide for the dead, and care for the grounds. In 1865, two additional groups purchased more land, and in 1881 the site had grown to 12 acres with thousands of burials. During the spring, the Black community would hold "Whit Monday" celebrations, which brought together parades of different clubs and societies to celebrate life and mourn death. However, in 1890, the white streetcar suburb of Barton Heights was established adjacent to the cemetery complex, and racial tensions grew.

In 1904, the Barton Heights suburb closed the cemeteries to new burials and changed the name to Barton Heights Cemetery. In the 1930s, the City of Richmond took control, and in the 1990s a group of volunteers succeeded in adding the cemeteries to the National Register of Historic Places and restarting an annual Whit Monday celebration.

**Shockoe Hill Cemetery**
*4th and Hospital Streets, Richmond VA 23222*

*Shockoe Hill is drivable, though many of the streets do come to dead end and require backing up. We would recommend parking and walking through the cemetery. Shockoe Hill Cemetery is located near the Hebrew Cemetery.*

Shockoe Hill Cemetery was operated by the city, secular, and carefully landscaped. It was an early precursor to the rural cemetery movement, as some Richmonders advocated for it to be opened as a public park as well as a cemetery. Growing need for burial space meant that the land was purchased in 1799, though the cemetery didn't open for burials until 1822. The cemetery opened as a whites only burial space to many of Richmond's elite, including Revolutionary War hero Peter Francisco, Supreme Court Justice John Marshall, and lawyer John Wickham, who represented Aaron Burr at his trial for treason, and whose house you can tour at The Valentine Museum. During The Civil War, Confederate and Union soldiers were buried in Shockoe Hill, though some Union soldiers were removed to Richmond National Cemetery later. Elizabeth Van Lew, famed Richmond spy and abolitionist, is also buried here. As the 20th century approached, the cemetery had neared capacity and faced competition. It began to fall into disrepair, which increased after

highway construction in the 1950s. In 2006, the Friends of Shockoe Hill began to care for the site and promote its history.

**History Hunt: Shockoe Hill has black markers pointing to some of its more prominent burials. Can you find Elizabeth Van Lew and John Marshall's graves, which are located across the path from each other?**

**Hebrew Cemetery**
*436-498 Hospital Street, Richmond VA 23219*

*Hebrew Cemetery has land on both sides of Hospital Street. The smaller enclosure, located next to Shockoe Hill Cemetery is easily drivable. The larger cemetery, located across the street, will require you to park and explore on foot.*

Hebrew Cemetery opened in 1817, near Barton Heights Cemeteries, at the request of Congregation Beth Shalome. Need for a new, larger Jewish burial ground had grown as the earlier, smaller Franklin Street Burying Ground became full. In line with Jewish traditions, the graves face east, and there is a ritual house on site to help prepare bodies for burial. In 1841, Congregation Beth Ahabah formed and began to operate the cemetery alongside Beth Shalome. As with many cemeteries in Richmond, there is a Confederate Soldiers Section, formed by the Hebrew Memorial Association in 1866, though it is believed to be the only Jewish military cemetery in the United States. Today, the cemetery holds over 2600 burials and has been expanded multiple times, though it is currently operated only by Congregation Beth Ahabah.

**History Hunt: Can you find the Confederate soldier's section?**

**Hollywood Cemetery**
*412 S Cherry Street, Richmond VA 23220*

*Hollywood Cemetery is easily drivable, with plenty of room to pull over and explore on foot if desired.*

Hollywood Cemetery is easily Richmond's most famous cemetery, and a popular tourist attraction in its own right. The 135 acres of grounds were inspired by the rural cemetery movement in general, but more specifically by Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery. Philadelphia Architect John Notman designed the grounds in 1847, but the cemetery did not achieve widespread popularity until 1858, with the reburial of James Monroe. Today, the cemetery hosts James Monroe (5th President), John Tyler (10th President), and Jefferson Davis (President of the Confederate States of America), alongside other notable individuals from around Virginia. During The Civil War, the Hollywood Association donated land for confederate burials, which totaled more than 11,000 by 1865. In 1866, a Ladies Hollywood Memorial Association formed to care for the confederate graves. This included erecting the iconic 90 foot tall pyramid monument in the confederate section, as well as reinterring other confederate burials, raising the number to 18,000.

Hollywood Cemetery is the second-most visited cemetery in The United States, behind Arlington National Cemetery. The Valentine Museum offers multiple themed tours of Hollywood Cemetery throughout the year, and hollywoodcemetery.org hosts a variety of online guides.

**History Hunt: In 1968, James Monroe's "Birdcage" tomb was named a National Historic Landmark. Can you find it? When entering from Cherry Street, follow Eastvale Avenue, which will connect to Waterview Avenue. James Monroe's tomb is located in President's Circle, near John Tyler's grave, next to Waterview Avenue.**

### Riverview Cemetery
*1401 S Randolph Street, Richmond VA 23220*

*Riverview Cemetery is easily drivable, with plenty of room to pull over and explore on foot if desired. The entrance is next to Mount Calvary Cemetery.*

Riverview Cemetery stands immediately to the west of Hollywood. Owned and operated by the City of Richmond, Riverview was a response to the success of other city owned cemeteries in the northern and eastern parts of Richmond. After opening in 1887, various civic and religious groups created burial clusters in different sections of the cemetery, including Greek Orthodox and Armenian immigrants. Despite this, segregation continued and African-American burials weren't allowed until 1968. Recently, a group of Muslim faith established an Islamic section. Administrative offices for all city cemeteries stand near the entrance.

**History Hunt: Can you find a gravestone from before 1900? Can you find one after 2000?**

### Mount Calvary Cemetery
*1400 S Randolph Street, Richmond VA 23220*

*Mount Calvary Cemetery is easily drivable, with plenty of room to pull over and explore on foot if desired. The entrance is next to Riverview Cemetery.*

Mount Calvary Cemetery was founded in 1885 by the Diocese of Richmond to provide a designated resting place for the area's Roman Catholics. While earlier Catholic cemeteries included St. Joseph's and Holy Cross, along with inclusion of Catholic burials in Shockoe Hill and St. John's, an increase in the Catholic community led the diocese to desire a more prominent place in the city's cemetery landscape. Collinson Burgwyn, who had just handled an expansion at Hollywood, designed the Mount Calvary landscape. Graves radiate out from a central crucifix, with specific sections set out for different female religious orders. Today, there are over 30,000 burials and the cemetery is open to all religions and ethnicities.

**Additional Suggested Activities**

- Research the different symbols, phrases or statues when you get home.
- Take white paper and a dark pencil or crayon with you to the cemeteries. As you find images, people, or dates that you want to remember, place the paper flat on the gravestone (make sure it isn't fragile!) and rub the writing utensil over the raised stone to create your own copy.
- Cemetery Math – Figure out how old a person was when she or he died.
- Take pictures! Many of Richmond's cemeteries grew out of the idea that they would also serve as public parks and places of beauty, and so offer beautiful views of the city's landscape.

**Explore Richmond Stories**

Richmond's City history museum, the Valentine has been collecting, preserving and interpreting Richmond's 400-year history for over a century. Located in the heart of historic downtown, the Valentine is a place for residents and tourists to discover the diverse stories that tell the broader history of this important region.

**Visit**

**Tuesday - Sunday | 10a.m. - 5p.m.**

**1015 East Clay Street, Richmond, VA**

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