

History

By John P. Richardson

TALE OF TWO CEMETERIES

Two of Washington, D.C.'s oldest cemeteries – Rock Creek and Oak Hill – contain silent reflections of the bitter antagonism between two of the city's most powerful personalities in the years after the Civil War – Alexander R. Shepherd, builder of Washington's modern infrastructure, and William W. Corcoran, a wealthy banker and leader of the conservative forces in the city.

The story is that the two men, who once had an amicable relationship, became enemies in the 1870s during Shepherd's whirlwind development of Washington. Members of Shepherd's family are buried in both cemeteries – but when and perhaps why the decisions were

made to divide a family in death that had been close in life is told in the gravestones.

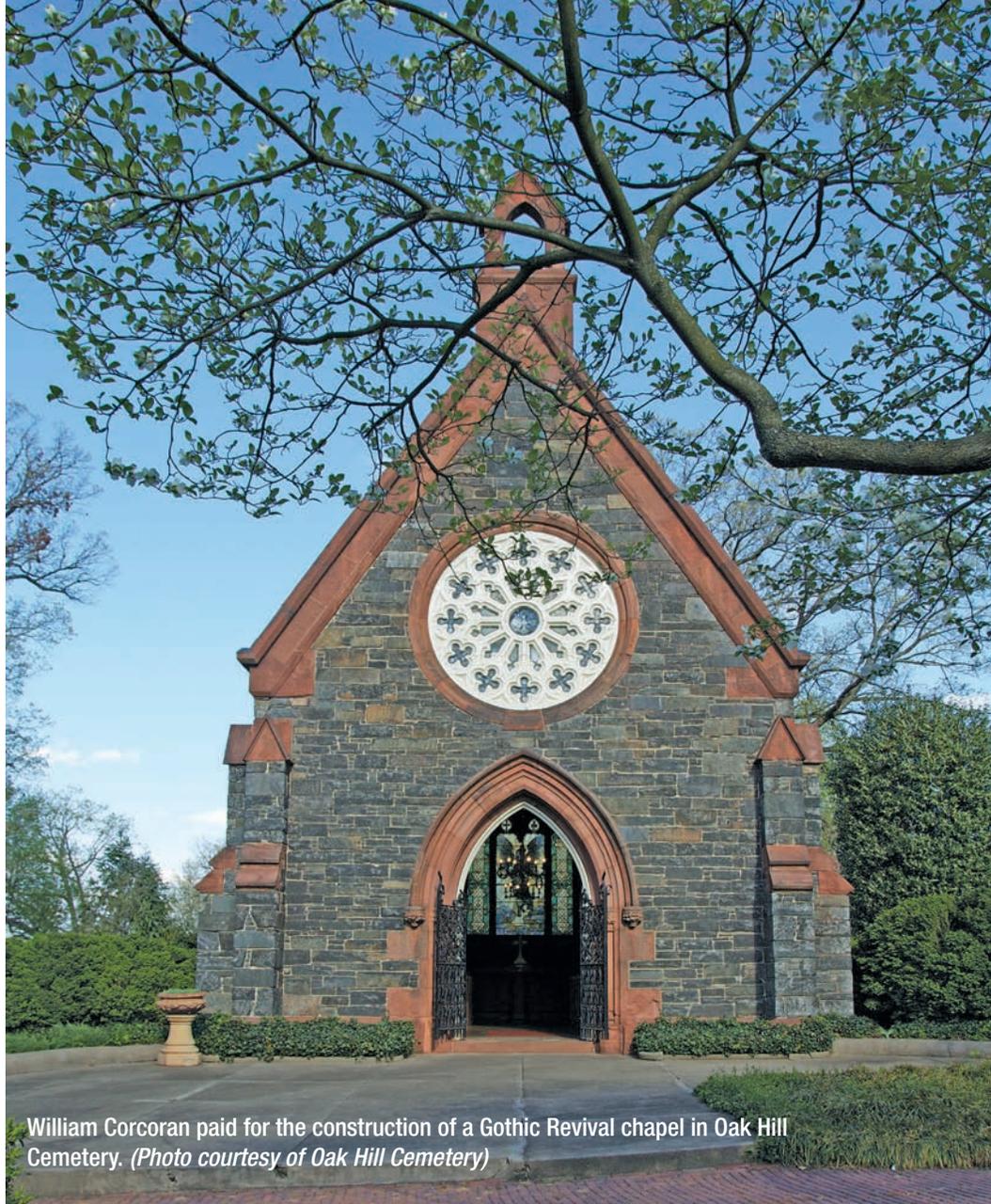
Rock Creek Cemetery, founded by St. Paul's Episcopal Church in 1710 for its parishioners, is bounded on the east by North Capitol Street and looks out on the Old Soldiers Home and the cottage in which President Lincoln rested from his labors during the Civil War. The cemetery is best known for the Augustus St.

Gaudens sculpture commissioned by historian Henry Adams, scion of the presidential family, for his wife, Clover, who committed suicide in the 1880s. The sculpture is a mute, shrouded bronze figure facing a semicircular bench of pink granite; the setting is devoid of text. A stroll through the cemetery further reveals its role in Washington history – among the graves are those of Crosby Noyes, owner of the Evening Star; two contemporary mayors of Washington, Sayles Bowen and Matthew Emery; Shepherd business associate Lewis Clephane; Montgomery Blair, Lincoln's postmaster-general; and many others.

Oak Hill Cemetery, less than five miles from Rock Creek Cemetery, lies on a quiet hill in Georgetown adjoining Rock Creek Park. William Corcoran, the local banker who made his

fortune selling U.S. government bonds to finance the Mexican War in the late 1840s, founded the cemetery after purchasing the land from a descendant of George Washington. It was incorporated by an act of Congress in 1849. The cemetery's Gothic chapel was designed by James Renwick, architect of the original Corcoran Art Gallery and the Smithsonian Castle Building. A walk among the graves reveals many distinguished personalities such as John Nicolay, President Lincoln's secretary and biographer; Joseph Henry, first secretary of the Smithsonian Institution; Secretary of State Dean Acheson; and more recently, Philip Graham, publisher of the Washington Post.

The clash between Corcoran and Shepherd did not come to a head until after 1870, but the rivalry between the two men grew out of the deep social and political cleavages in Washington after the Civil War. Both men were born in Washington, but Corcoran was a well-connected conservative Democrat and strongly pro-Confederacy. His only daughter, Louise, married George Eustis, assistant to John Slidell, who represented Confederate President Jefferson Davis in France during the Civil War, and Corcoran found it politically advisable to leave Washington until war's end. Shepherd was a classic self-made man



William Corcoran paid for the construction of a Gothic Revival chapel in Oak Hill Cemetery. (Photo courtesy of Oak Hill Cemetery)

Franklin Wrap

A Sure Seal at a Fraction of the Cost

Developed by Cemeterians
for use at our Memorial Park.

Now available Nationwide

Our goals were many...

- Leak Proof
- Transparent
- 2 Way Ventilation
- Affordable
- Easy for anyone to apply

Our Solution Simple...

Please visit us at www.FranklinWrap.com or Toll Free 1-877-545-8975

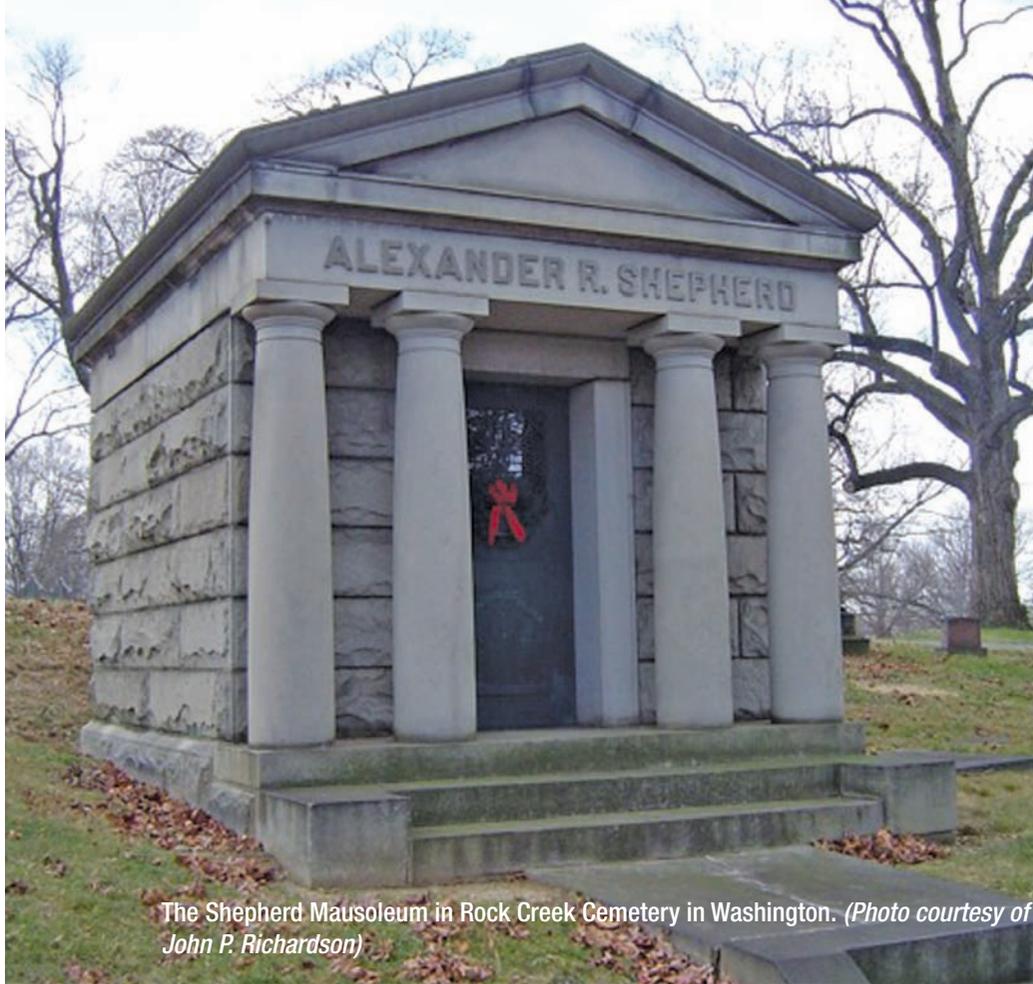
US Patent No: 6,918,163



This casket has been sealed and is now ready for a worry free entombment. The white circle is our 2-way filter that is attached to the surface of the wrap. Six minute process to apply.

Best of all Worlds: Call for Free Video or DVD

- Nice presentation to Families;
- Ventilation allows any problems to dry out;
- Tray with handles makes 1st level entombments a breeze!
- Affordable - \$65 complete



The Shepherd Mausoleum in Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington. (Photo courtesy of John P. Richardson)



Always improving.

In 1985 we invented the casket protection product that evolved the industry. In 2014 we're proudly introducing our improved casket protector. With a new one-piece design and preinstalled acrylic sealing tape, this latest update offers maximized performance and unmatched ease-of-use.

Learn more at ensureaseal.com

1/800.864.4174
ensureaseal.com



who overcame limited formal schooling and difficult family circumstances to build a personal fortune and become the dominant figure in a massive public works program that changed the face of Washington in the 1870s. It was his foresight and work that made a reality of the national capital long envisioned in the plan of Pierre L'Enfant.

During Shepherd's early economic and political rise, relations were amicable between the two men. Shepherd served on the board of Oak Hill Cemetery for a brief period in 1869, and the two shared an interest in the city's economic improvement. But as the scale of Shepherd's development schemes became known after 1870, Corcoran became the rallying point for the city's wealthy, conservative residents, many of whom lived in Georgetown and feared higher taxes. They were uncomfortable with the bold plans of Shepherd, the nouveau riche former plumber, who socialized with a different set, some relative newcomers to Washington from the North and West eager to create an elegant and prosperous capital for the reunited country.

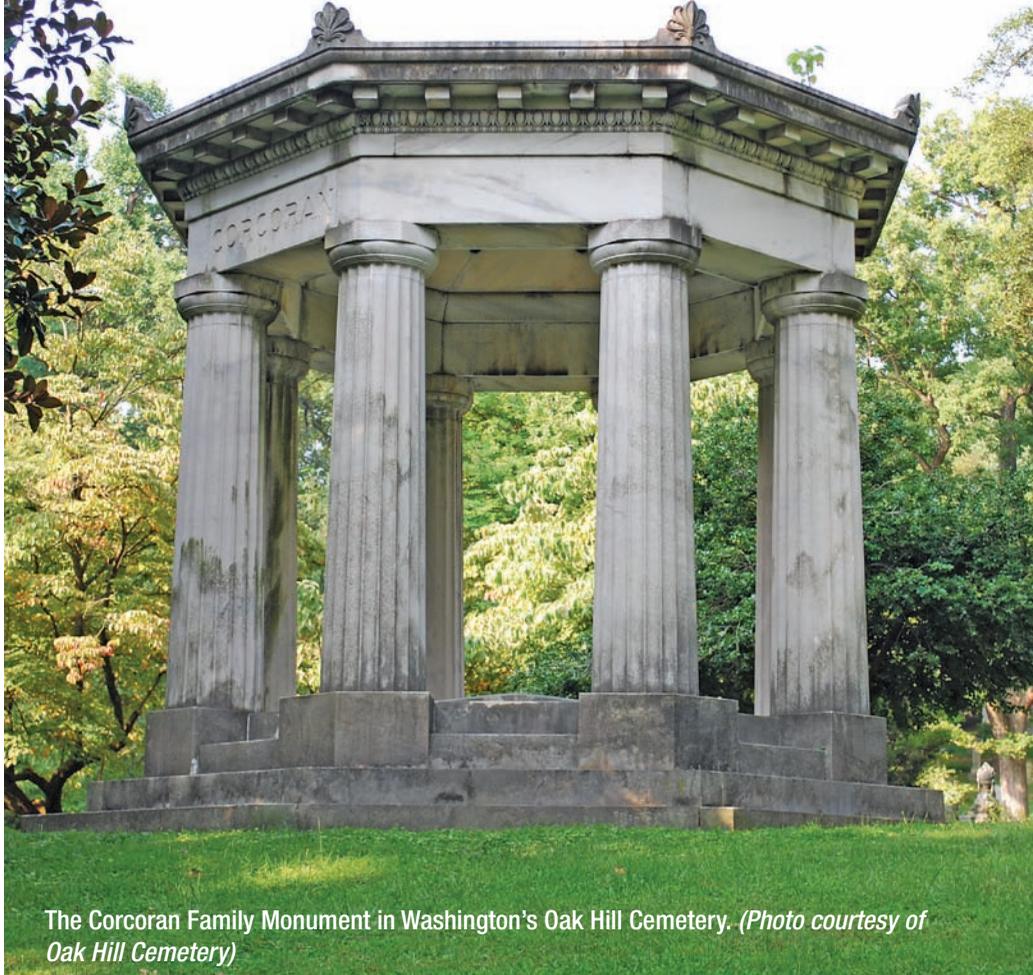
The Shepherd family had developed a link to Rock Creek Cemetery because St. Paul's Church and its adjoining burial ground were a short horseback ride from the farm purchased by Alexander Shepherd Sr. three years before his death in 1845. The elder Shepherd and his wife, Susan Davidson Robey, are interred together behind the church in a marble sarcophagus whose inscriptions have weathered almost to illegibility. Eventually three of Gov. Shepherd's siblings and other family members were buried in the same plot. The site is surrounded by a wrought-iron fence and has a wrought-iron funerary urn in one corner.

Perhaps surprisingly, when Gov. Shepherd's first-born child and original namesake, Alexander, died as an infant in 1864, Shepherd turned away from Rock Creek Cemetery and purchased a plot in Corcoran's Oak Hill Cemetery. The reason is not documented, but it could have reflected the ambitious Shepherd's

wish to improve his social status and relationship with the powerful Corcoran. Within four years two more Shepherd infants, Alexina and William Young, were buried in Oak Hill. Shepherd's parents-in-law, William P. Young and Susan B. Young, who died in the late 1860s, are also buried there, as are Gov. Shepherd's second namesake son Alexander and his wife Phoebe Elliott Shepherd. From the split between Shepherd and Corcoran around 1870 until 1943, no Shepherd family members were buried in Oak Hill Cemetery – all are in Rock Creek Cemetery.

Gov. Shepherd and his wife lie in a massive granite mausoleum with raised marble letters and two pink granite sarcophagi. The building has four columns in front and a heavy metal door with the dates 1835-1902 on an ornamental grill. On either side of the mausoleum are the graves of two of Gov. Shepherd's daughters, Isabel S. Wagner and Susan S. Brodie, both of whom married professional employees of their father in Mexico, where Gov. Shepherd moved in 1880 in an attempt to rebuild his fortunes after leaving Washington, bankrupt and at least temporarily repudiated. A daughter and son-in-law of Isabel Wagner are also buried in the same plot. A short walk across the quiet, hillside cemetery are the graves of two other daughters of Gov. Shepherd and their husbands: Grace S. Merchant (died 1958) and Mary S. Quintard (died 1948), whose husbands also worked for Gov. Shepherd in Mexico. An infant Quintard daughter is also buried in this plot.

The information on Shepherd family gravestones in Oak Hill and Rock Creek Cemetery establishes who was buried where and when. The story of the Shepherd-Corcoran antagonism after 1870 may provide the answer to "why." The turbulent years in Washington, D.C. following the Civil War left their mark on every aspect of the city's history, even the placid hills and walkways of two of the city's oldest and most historical cemeteries. •

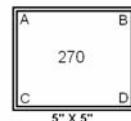
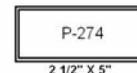
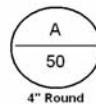


The Corcoran Family Monument in Washington's Oak Hill Cemetery. (Photo courtesy of Oak Hill Cemetery)

ALUMINUM LOT MARKERS

**WHY IS ANDOVER NO. 1?
HIGHEST QUALITY, LOWEST PRICE...GUARANTEED!**

**ALL MARKERS ARE CUSTOM MADE TO CUSTOMERS
SPECIFICATIONS**



ALSO AVAILABLE IN:

OUR MOST POPULAR MARKER
SOLID CAST ALUMINUM
3" ROUND W/ 7" SPLINE
Starting At **\$3.10** EACH

4" ROUND W/ 8" SPIKE
4" ROUND W/ 11" SPLINE
2 1/2" x 5" W/ 8" SPIKE
5" x 5" W/ 8" SPIKE

**SEE OUR COMPLETE PRODUCT LINE & PHOTO GALLERY
AT
www.andovermarker.com**

**CALL, WRITE, OR E-MAIL FOR A FREE BROCHURE!
ANDOVER MARKER COMPANY**

634 BERKLEY STREET • BERKLEY, MA02779

ANDOVERMARKER@COMCAST.NET

TEL.: 508-822-3127 FAX: 508-824-5895