

After a period of financial instability, the cemetery's land was sold to developers in 1959, with the promise that all remains would be transferred to a new location. Approximately 37,000 graves were exhumed and moved to National Harmony Memorial Park in Hyattsville, Maryland. The original site would be completely redeveloped to build the Rhode Island Avenue-Brentwood Metro station and surrounding commercial and residential properties. All evidence of this historic cemetery was erased save for a memorial plaque, although human remains continued to be found there during subsequent construction into the 21st century.

Tragically, cherished family headstones, monuments, and mausoleums were not transferred along with their remains, and the individual identities of many gravesites were not marked in their new location. The headstones disappeared and remained lost for fifty years, until many were rediscovered in Virginia, where they had been used as riprap on private property along the Potomac River.

In response to the desecration of these monuments, a restorative justice initiative called Project Harmony was launched. In collaboration with the descendant community and the governments

of Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia, the project is recovering and repatriating the headstones and memorializing ancestors at Columbian Harmony Cemetery and at Caledon State Park, King George, Virginia.

The Harmoneon is one of a number of Washington, DC burial grounds for people of African descent lost to development over the course of two centuries. Efforts to reclaim their stories are part of a nationwide movement to honor the historic resting places of African Americans, both free and enslaved, that have been desecrated or erased throughout American history.



Recovered headstone at Caledon State Park. Office of the Maryland Governor, Maryland State Archives

To learn more about the history of the Columbian Harmony Cemetery and its origins in Shaw as the Harmoneon, visit HarmoneonShawDC.com.

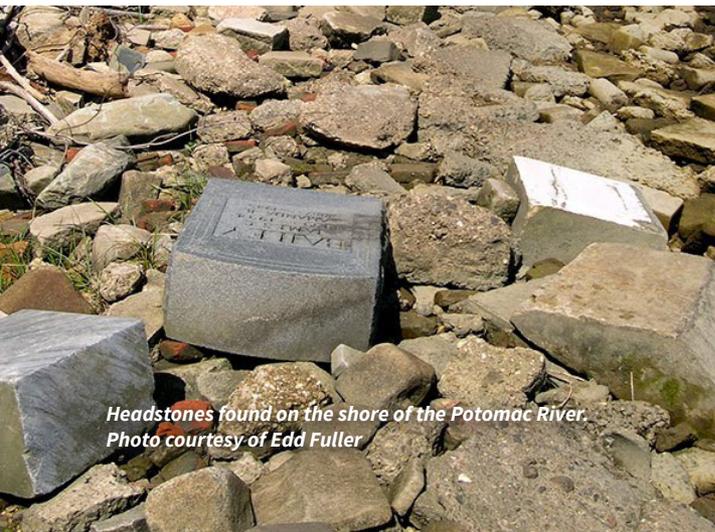
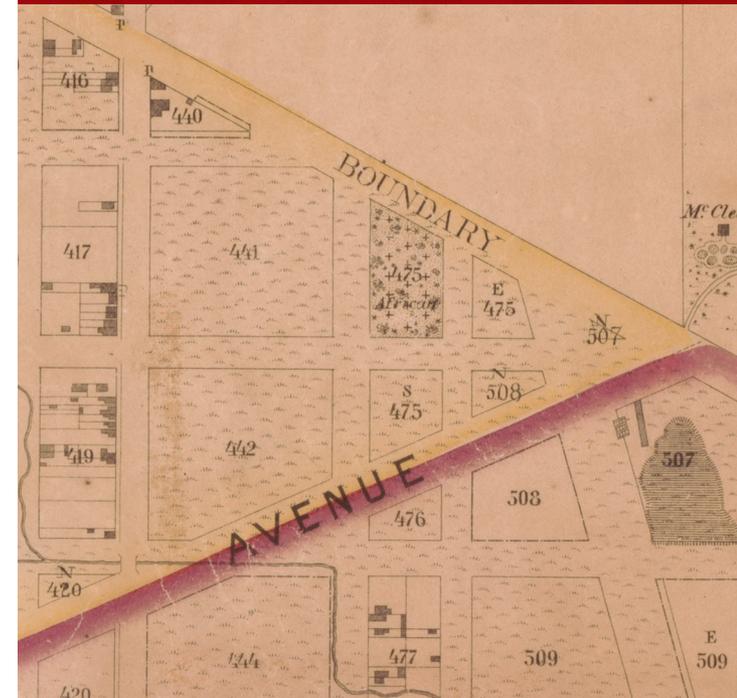
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The DC Community Heritage Project is a partnership of HumanitiesDC and the DC Historic Preservation Office.

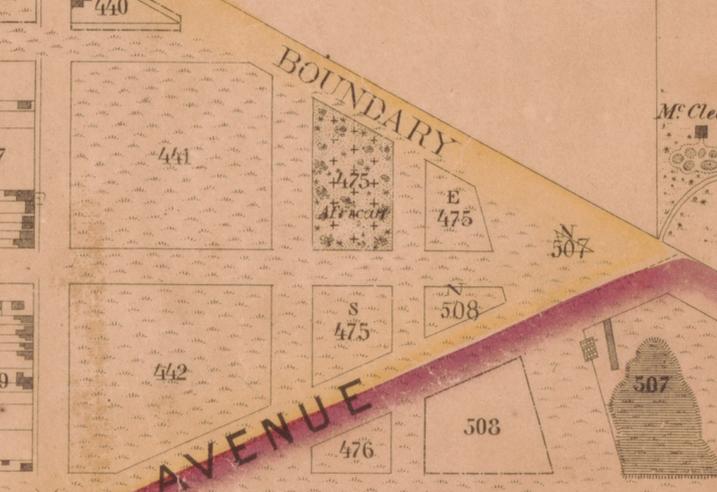


THE HARMONEON

Shaw's Lost African American Cemetery



Headstones found on the shore of the Potomac River. Photo courtesy of Edd Fuller

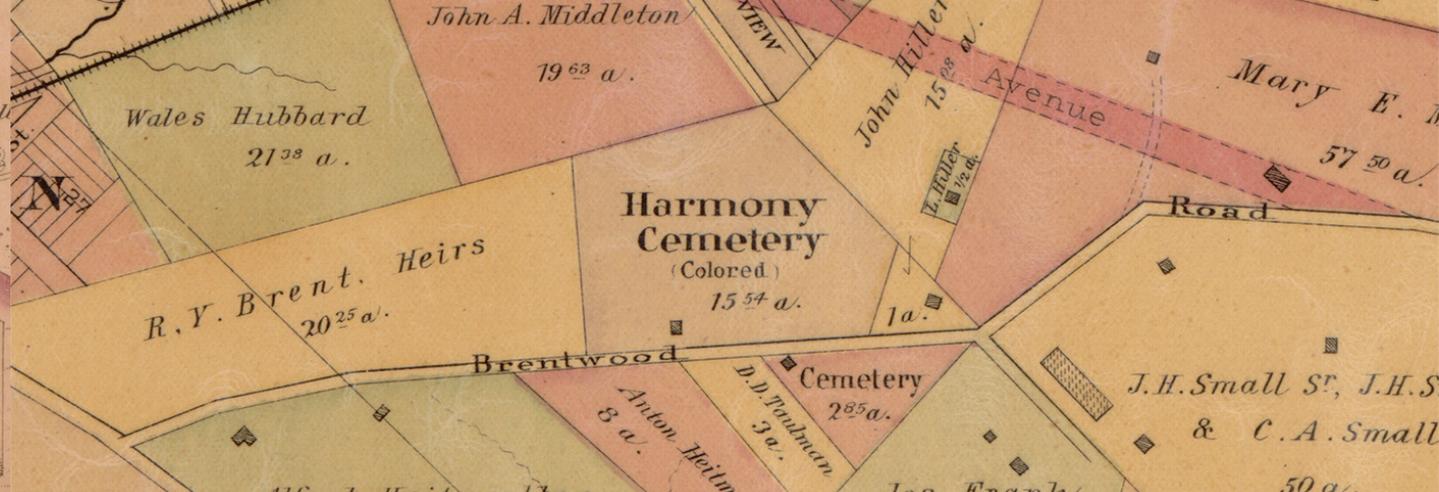


1857 map of Washington showing Harmonion (African) Cemetery. Library of Congress

The Columbian Harmony Cemetery, one of the District of Columbia's most important and historic African American cemeteries, traces its roots to Shaw in the early 19th century. It was known as the Harmoneon, and it was the first major cemetery established by and for African Americans in Washington, DC.

In 1825, the Columbian Harmony Society was established by free African Americans as a mutual aid and burial society. They paid an initiation fee and monthly dues, pledged to help other members when ill, attend each other's funerals, and support their widows and orphaned children.

In 1828, the society purchased Square 475, an undeveloped 1.3 acre site at the northern edge of the city, from the District of Columbia for \$100. It created the Harmoneon cemetery in the portion bounded by Fifth and Sixth Streets NW and S Street and Boundary Street (today's Florida Avenue), in what would become the Shaw neighborhood. Referred to as the African Cemetery on maps of the time, the Harmoneon served as a key burial ground for people of African descent for the next thirty years. One of the most notable was George Bell (1761–1843), a founder of the city's first school for African Americans on Capitol Hill in 1807.



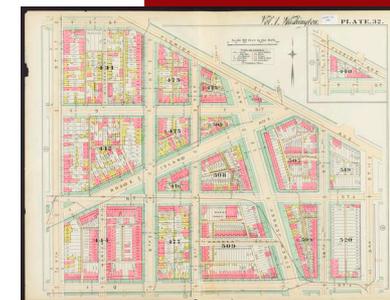
1887 map of Washington showing Columbian Harmony Cemetery. Library of Congress

After local ordinances prohibited the establishment and operation of cemeteries within city limits, the society received Congressional permission in 1856 to sell Square 475 and purchase property outside of the boundaries of the city. A pastoral, 17-acre site bounded by Brentwood Road, NE and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and Rhode Island Avenue and T Street, NE was purchased for a new burial ground in 1857.

The Harmoneon's graves were transferred to this new site, known as the Columbian Harmo-



Columbian Harmony Cemetery, 1960. Scurlock Studio Records, Smithsonian Institution



1892 map of Washington showing Square 475. DC Public Library

ny Cemetery, by 1859, however, human remains were reportedly found during excavation on the Harmoneon site in the 20th century.

Following the relocation of graves, the society's Square 475 property was divided into lots, the last of which were sold after the Civil War. Almost all the historic buildings on the former Harmoneon site were built before 1887.

With the addition of 18 more acres in 1886, the Columbian Harmony Cemetery became one of the most active African American cemeteries in Washington, DC, well into the 20th century.

The Columbian Harmony Cemetery was the final resting place for many of Washington's most prominent Black citizens, from activists, abolitionists, and Civil War veterans to entrepreneurs, educators, and entertainers.