City of Danville

City-Owned Cemeteries

HISTORY & PHOTOGRAPHS

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GROVE STREET CEMETERY

– Established prior to 1833 –

The first known interment here dates coincidentally to Danville's incorporation in 1833, when Grove Street Cemetery was well outside of the City limits. In antebellum days, the cemetery and the high ridge along Grove Street were known simply as "The Grove" for its dense oak, hickory, and chestnut forest whose remnants are the massive oaks remaining in the cemetery and in the yard of the Sutherlin Mansion, now the Danville Museum of Fine Arts & History.

Many of the families buried there parallel the names of many of the early thoroughfares, Cabell, Chambers, Craghead, Dame, Patton, Robertson, Ross, and Wilson.

There were likely burials before 1833, but no records exist. A few gravesites have been moved here since the last official interment in 1920.

Since 1937, the Garden Club of Danville, in cooperation with the City's Department of Public Works, has made this cemetery a continuing project of preservation and beautification. The granite wall was built in 1939.

GREEN HILL CEMETERY

– Established approximately 1863 –

The origin of the name "Green Hill" has been lost. The name has been used for many older cemeteries, chosen perhaps for the peaceful scene it suggest or for its serene sound. People have sought a restful "sleep" for their dead since the dawn of civilization. The Green Hill Cemetery of Danville, VA, however, most likely acquired its name in honor of the man from whom the site was purchased.

Dr. Nathaniel T. Green was born in Halifax County, Virginia. After studying medicine in Philadelphia, he came to Danville and started his practice in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. He purchased a parcel of land, commonly known at that time as "Thompson's Grove." It was this land that was purchased for a new cemetery when the old one on Grove Street was reaching its capacity.

A committee consisting of John M. Johnston and W. J. Crews, both town council members, was authorized to purchase the land needed for a "park and cemetery" from Dr. N. T. Green at a Town Council meeting on August 10, 1863. The committee performed its assigned task well, for at the next regular monthly meeting of council, it reported the acquisition of the property. Seven lots were purchased containing approximately ten acres, for the price of $125 per acre. In addition, thirty-five acres adjoining these seven lots were purchased at $500 per acre. If this cost seems high, one must remember that the purchase was made during The War Between the States and the medium of exchange was the inflated Confederate dollar.

A few weeks after the purchase, the town of Danville entered into contract with J.J. Hill to enclose the yet unnamed cemetery. Hill was to receive $11 for each of the five-foot panels needed to enclose the grounds. The front enclosure was to be four feet high, the rear eight feet high. Mr. Hill agreed to construct the gates, with the town furnishing the necessary hinges and latches.

The new cemetery received its name on February 5, 1864. The minutes of council for that date simply state, "resolved that the new cemetery be called Green Hill Cemetery." No mention of discussion about the selection of names is recorded. One may assume that the council felt that Dr. Green's name should continue to be associated with the land.

Captain E. D. Myers, an engineering officer in the Confederate Army, was involved with the construction of the Piedmont Railroad south to Greensboro, NC, from Danville. The town sought his help and paid him $1,000 for his services of surveying and laying off the plots in Green Hill. John M. Johnston was named the first treasurer and W.B. Watson the first sexton. The sale of lots began in March 1864.

Federal prisoners who died in Danville's prisons and hospitals were buried in the northeast corner of the new cemetery. In the short span of sixteen months, 1,413 would be laid to rest here. This portion of Green Hill became The Danville National Cemetery on August 14, 1867. A stone wall separates this area from the graves in Green Hill.

A Federal Calvary raid on June 25, 1864, led by General James H. Wilson, on the Richmond and Danville railroad bridge across the Staunton River fifty miles northeast caused a stir in Danville. The destruction of this important bridge would disrupt rail traffic and prevent the arrival of needed supplies to the town. In haste, regular military units and militia were dispatched from Danville to defend the bridge. Their efforts succeeded, but not without the loss of lives. The town was aware of its obligations to these local defenders. On July 5, 1864, lot number 174 in Green Hill Cemetery was donated to the family of T. Wilkerson "in consideration of his death in defense of the interest of Danville at the Battle of Staunton Bridge." Wilkerson was possibly the first Confederate casualty buried in the cemetery. The location of his grave is unknown.

No record of burials exists prior to 1883. Therefore persons buried before this date, without headstones, cannot be identified. During this same period, 1864-1883, the system for numbering the plots was changed. Wilkerson's grave cannot be located for this reason.

FREEDMANS CEMETERY

– Established prior to 1864 –

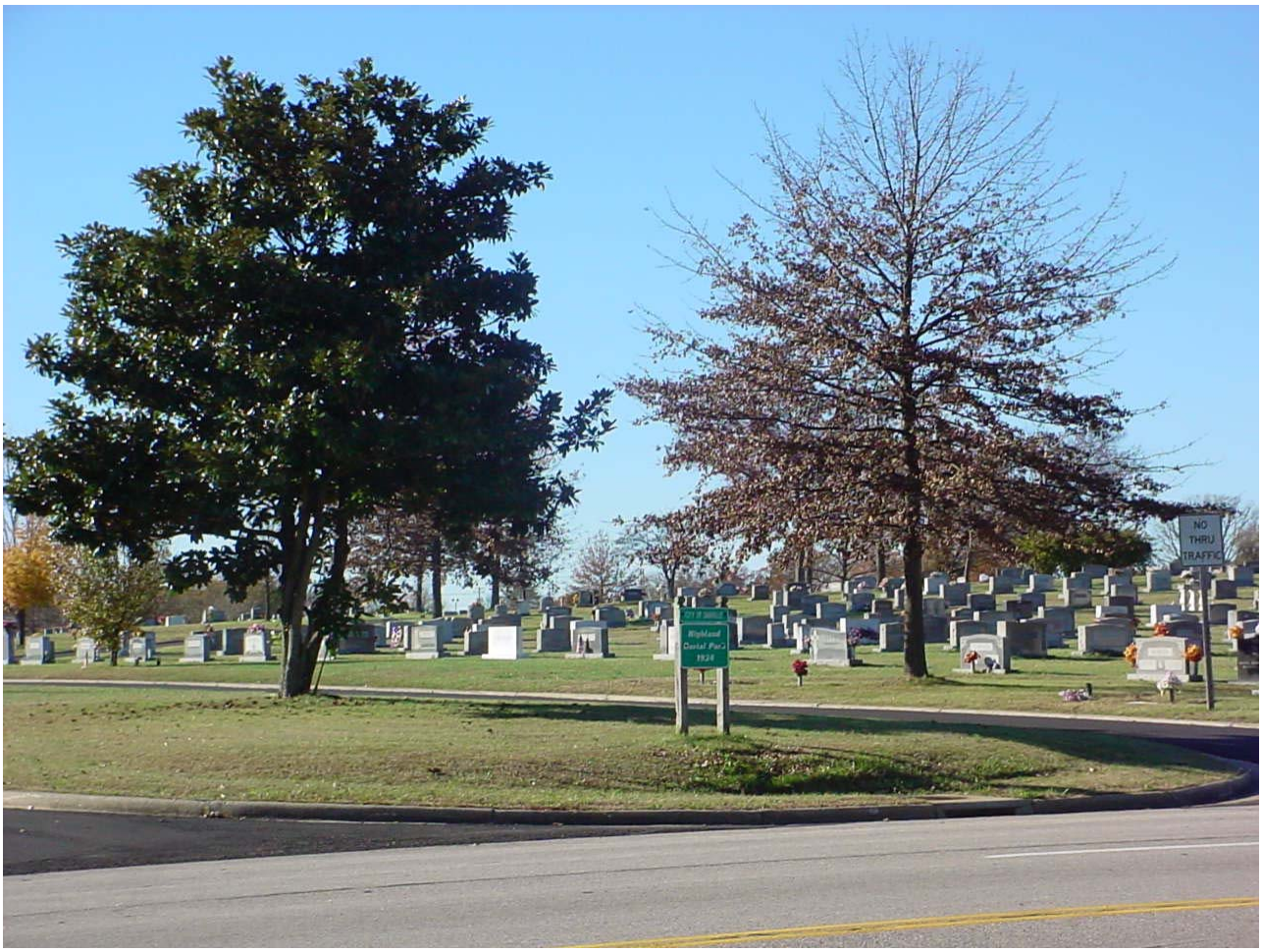
This four acre plot first appeared on an 1877 map of the City by F. W. Beers. However, it was not until 1892 that the City acquired the plot. According to L. Beatrice W. Hairston in A Brief History of Danville, VA 1728-1954, the land had been owned by the Green family, who used that area for a burying ground, but without keeping records of the burials. Moses Green gave the land to the City, which did not keep records of burials there either. Most of the marked graves show burials in the 1880s and 1890s, but the dates of marked graves range from 1875 to 1954.

Without records, it is impossible to determine how many people were buried in Freedman's Cemetery. Additionally, some initially buried in Freedmans may have been reinterred elsewhere. Originally, over 100 graves had markers of some type, but less than thirty are standing now.

HIGHLAND BURIAL PARK

– Established 1924 –

The property for Highland Burial Park was purchased from Mr. Thompson who lived on 29 North of Danville. The first layout of the cemetery included the property where the National Guard Armory now stands. North Main Street was later cut through the property and was taken away from the original layout. Seventy acres remained in the layout. Highland Burial Park was annexed in 1951. The first burial was recorded as December 3, 1924. Now the records show 20,318 burials and 7,850 remain for sale.



LEEMONT CEMETERY

– Established 1878 –

When the Town of North Danville was organized in 1877, little thought was given to the need for a cemetery. The new mayor and town council were busy drafting and approving ordinances that would provide a safe, comfortable life for the citizens of Virginia's newest town. A place for burials would come later.

It was not until October 1878 that a cemetery committee was appointed. Before the close of the first meeting, the committee announced the purchase of a lot from W. A. Baugh to be used as the town cemetery. The committee was composed of William A. Baugh, Thomas J. Lee, George Corbin, and Thomas B. Fitzgerald. It also announced the purchase of land, then being used as a cemetery, from Mrs. A. M. Keen. It is believed that this property lay adjacent to the lot purchased from Baugh.

The cemetery committee was authorized to "lay-off, grade, fence, and otherwise improve" the new cemetery. Chairman Baugh exhibited a letter to council in February 1879 from John Liversedge. Liversedge agreed to plant trees of "various kinds" throughout the cemetery for the sum of ten dollars. A thrifty council consented to have him plant only half of his trees so that the cost would be reduced to five dollars.

In April 1879, Baugh reported that half of the cemetery, now called North Danville Cemetery, "had been laid-off in squares, streets and walks constructed, the land seeded, and the fences whitewashed."

June brought a report to council that Liversedge had prepared a framed map, covered with glass of North Danville Cemetery. The cost of eleven dollars was approved.

North Danville's new mayor, John T. Keen, was appointed July 13, 1880. Under his guidance, work on the cemetery continued. A charge of one dollar was initiated for residents of the county buried in the cemetery. After a request by a citizens' committee, the town council referred to the street committee their request for the building of a plank walk on Cemetery Street. This street led to the cemetery from Main Street. It is speculated that there was considerable pedestrian traffic by those visiting the cemetery, especially on weekends. Cemetery Street joined Main Street between the properties on Lee and Linden.

Lee was an early spokesman for the establishment of the Town of North Danville. After the town was formed, he served as a councilman, as a member of numerous committees, and as mayor. His early death on October 8, 1887, was a result of blood-poisoning. He left an estate valued at $150,000. Lee was laid to rest in North Danville Cemetery. A beautiful granite vault was erected by John A. Rowe, a marble and granite dealer of Danville, at a cost of $2,900. The simple inscription reads, "Lee."

After Lee's death, Mrs. Lee donated additional land to the town for use of the ever-expanding cemetery. It was given in return for perpetual care of the Lee plot and vault.

The cemetery, referred to as North Danville Cemetery, later as Neapolis Cemetery, is known today as Leemont Cemetery in memory of Thomas Jefferson Lee. The various parcels of land that made up the cemetery are enclosed by a low hedge row. It lies on the eastern side of Claiborne Street, bounded by Clement Avenue on the north and First Street on the south. Thomas J. Lee, had he lived, would have witnessed much change from the vantage point of his vault. He would have seen the cemetery surrounded by houses and the town develop to an unimaginable size. Recently he would have seen genealogists recording the inscriptions from the stones, seeking a permanent record that otherwise might be lost. Lee would be proud of these people. He would be proud too, of his town, North Danville.

MOUNTAIN VIEW CEMETERY

– Established 1920 –

Mountain View Cemetery's property was originally a truck farm operated by Mr. Giles and was planted with vegetables. The City purchased the land and laid it out for a cemetery. The property was annexed into the City in 1932. The first map showed the cemetery going back to Memorial Drive. The back of the property was deeded to the Danville School Board and it is now a football stadium and ball field for George Washington High School.

The first burial recorded was February 2, 1920. There were 44 burials in the first year of operation. To date there have been 6,727 burials in Mountain View Cemetery's 18 acres. All graves have been sold and there is no room for development.

OAK HILL CEMETERY

– Established 1901 –

This cemetery was acquired by the City of Danville in 1931. There have been burials since before the 1900s when Oak Hill Cemetery was part of Almagro, a neighborhood of the City of Danville. Oak Hill opened Section A in 1963 to accommodate the addition of the Liberty View Housing Development, which opened in 1961. Later in 1979, Section B was added. There have been 11,390 burials at Oak Hill. Five acres of land remains to be developed which will amount to approximately 2,000 graves.

Oak Hill Cemetery is located in Liberty Hills on Walters Mill Road and has a total of 30.3 acres.

SCHOOLFIELD CEMETERY

– Established 1922 –

The Schoolfield Cemetery was originally a village cemetery owned by Dan River Mills, Inc. and used for the burial of its employees. The first recorded burial was in 1922. It was incorporated into the City of Danville in 1951 and the City began conducting burials in 1953. The records received at the time of annexation are some of the old records kept by the sexton for Dan River. There are approximately 3,196 burials, 564 graves sold not used, 225 graves available for sale, and room for the development of 2,000 more graves.