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## NYC cemeteries dying from neglect



*A view of the overgrown graveyard at Prospect Cemetery in Jamaica, Queens. (Photo RJ Mickelson/amNY)*

By [Rolando Pujol](#)

The deceased outnumber the living in New York, a reminder that the city is as much a metropolis as it is a necropolis.

That reality is easy to miss, yet tiny cemeteries lie tucked on Manhattan side streets, and 20,000 souls rest fitfully beneath Washington Square Park.

But then there are dozens of smaller historic cemeteries, some of which have been neglected. In certain cases, these outer-borough cemeteries have become trash dumps and havens for drug addicts. They become overgrown with weeds, trees, or worse, attract grave vandals.

### **Neglected sacred ground**

As even more small cemeteries become full and thus lose income, the problem may only worsen, activists say. Solutions can be elusive, and were it not for volunteers and preservationists who essentially adopt them, their descent could be unstoppable.

Several other factors shape their fate -- demographic changes, ownership questions and scarcity of funds among them.

"Everyone thinks it's sinister or horrible, but basically, it's a business. They can't sell new graves, they can't have an income, they can't hire a maintenance guy," said Lynn A. Rogers, executive director of Friends of Abandoned Cemeteries of Staten Island.

### **Prospect Cemetery in Jamaica**

Cate Ludlam understands these problems all too well. She has led an effort to restore Prospect Cemetery in Jamaica, where her forefathers are buried.

Ludlam has rescued Prospect by raising funds and marshaling volunteers. The centerpiece is a once derelict 1850s chapel, which gleams anew as a performance venue.

A landscape architect will craft plans to restore the grounds, thick with vegetation despite earlier clearings.

### **Bayside Cemetery in Ozone Park**

In Ozone Park, Bayside Cemetery, a Jewish burial ground, has fallen into a breathtaking decline, with vast vegetation overgrowth and vandalized crypts. A lawsuit against the Manhattan synagogue that founded it in the 19th century, Shaare Zedek of the Upper West Side, awaits a court hearing next month.

John Lucker, who filed the class-action suit, sees no excuse. His grandparents are buried there.

The suit's allegations include that the synagogue ignored legal obligations to preserve the graves and misappropriated funds for their care.

The synagogue is fighting the allegations and is seeking a motion to dismiss. Rabbi Julia Andelman calls Bayside's state distressing but the suit destructive. She said most of the cemetery was sold to scores of now defunct burial societies, which once looked after their parcels. A new nonprofit group to aid Jewish cemeteries, CAJAC, has begun restoration.

### **Friends of the dead on SI**

On Staten Island, Friends of Abandoned Cemeteries has been rescuing cemeteries since 1981.

Aside from marshaling volunteers and focusing on maintenance, it's vital to tease out the stories of the dead and publicize them, Rogers said. "You need to make it a productive, useful place."

Still, simple societal callousness may ultimately be to blame.

"Young people are not being raised with a sense of their own history or sense of roots ... I know people who don't know where their parents are buried. I think that's very sad," Ludlam said.

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New York is home to many famous bones, and they reside in some of the most unexpected places. Let's forget Green-Wood and look at some interesting celebrities who are buried in our midst:

1.) Ichabod Crane

Yes, a fellow by that name did exist, and his appearance is said to have in part inspired Washington Irving's schoolteacher in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

Cemetery: New Springville Cemetery (Asbury Methodist), Staten Island status: semi-abandoned.

2.) Preserved Fish

Yes, he may not be famous today, but his name always draws guffaws. Preserved was once a common name, and Fish just happened to be the poor guy's last name.

Cemetery: The New York City Marble Cemetery, East Village Status: Protected

3.) Clement Clark Moore

The Chelsea resident is often credited with writing "A Visit from St. Nicholas." You and I know it as "'Twas the Night before Christmas."

Cemetery: Trinity Church Cemetery and Mausoleum, Washington Heights Status: Protected

4.) Peter Stuyvesant

Stuyvesant Town. Stuyvesant High School. Bedford-Stuyvesant. His Dutch name is everywhere, and "Old Peg Leg" was a crucial figure in early Gotham history.

Cemetery: St. Mark in-the-Bowery, East Village Status protected

5.) Former President Ulysses S. Grant

This is but an excuse to trot out an old joke. Who's buried in Grant's Tomb? Nobody. But the Civil War general and his wife are entombed there.

Grant's Tomb, Morningside Heights Status: Protected

Blink and you'll miss them: 4 Manhattan cemeteries you probably never heard of but have walked right past

1.) The two Marble Cemeteries of the East Village

They are separate cemeteries, but are located near each other in the East Village. New York Marble Cemetery is between East 2nd and 3rd streets, between Second Avenue and Bowery. New York City Marble Cemetery is at 52 to 74 E. First St., between First and Second avenues.

2.) Twenty First Street in Chelsea, Cemetery

On West 21st Street between Sixth and Seventh avenues, Congregation Shearith Israel's third city cemetery was closed to burials in 1851 when Manhattan burials south of 86th Street were prohibited.

3.) Milligan Street Cemetery

It's the second cemetery of Congregation Shearith Israel and hasn't seen a burial since 1829. Find it on 11th Street between Fifth and Sixth avenues.

Sources: "The Graveyard Shift" by Carolee Inskip and Forgotten NY