

Early burials in Cuba occurred on residents' farms or in neighborhood burial lots. By 1841, many residents believed the community needed a common burial ground. A public meeting that September resulted in formation of the Cuba Cemetery Association and appointment of a committee to identify and acquire a site. A few days later, the committee reported that Mr. Lewis Nash was willing to sell a two-acre plot behind his house for \$300. After reaching an agreement with Mr. Nash to purchase his land, the trustees began organizing the laying out of burial plots and roads, and interments in the new cemetery soon began.

Despite this auspicious beginning, the Association struggled to collect money from lot purchasers and did not pay their debt to Mr. Nash on time. After concerned citizens mounted short-lived efforts to revive the Association in 1850 and 1869, the state government intervened in 1898, legally re-forming the Cuba Cemetery Association with a new board of trustees. This time, the director's instituted better fiscal management, including an assessment on lot owners to pay for general maintenance of common areas and unoccupied lots; this finally led to consistent upkeep and beautification of the grounds.

By 1902, the efforts of the revitalized Cuba Cemetery Association were paying off. An article in the *Cuba Patriot & Free Press* noted:

Three years of time, much hard work and inconsiderable amount of money has worked wonders in Cuba's silent city. This long neglected resting place of our dead, has in three short seasons by the untiring efforts of the officers and directors of the Cuba Cemetery Association, assisted by many public spirited citizens, been transformed from an eyesore to all who visited it, into a beautiful spot, where we can in some measure of comfort consign the bodies of our loved ones to their last long sleep. It were a sin that this peaceful village on the hillside was so long allowed to remain a tangle of wild plants and vines, but all is changed now and velvety green grass now flourishes where weeds and vines formerly grew unmolested. Carefully graded lots, paths and drives, and well trimmed shrubs and trees, made the Cuba Cemetery of the present a place of beauty for the living, and a fitting resting place for the dead. ("Cuba Cemetery," *Cuba Patriot*, 27 March 1902.)

In 1855, a Roman Catholic cemetery was consecrated in Cuba, on a half acre of land immediately to the east of the existing Cuba Cemetery. Cuba's Catholic population at the time was overwhelmingly Irish, consisting of laborers who had come to the area to work on railroad or Genesee Valley Canal construction. It was important for the Catholic community to have its own cemetery because of devout Catholics' need to be buried in consecrated ground; establishment of separate Protestant and Catholic cemeteries was common in communities with both Protestant and Catholic residents.

By 1898, the Catholic cemetery had expanded to the south, into roughly a trapezoidal shape. In 1923, Cuba Cemetery and the adjacent Catholic cemetery merged. Today the two are fully integrated, with no fence or border distinguishing between the two; only the prevalence of Irish names indicates the location of the former Catholic section.

Cuba Cemetery has long been admired for its beautiful, peaceful setting. It is an excellent example of the mid-nineteenth century *rural cemetery style*. Based on contemporary English cemetery and landscape design, the American rural cemetery movement was inspired by romantic perceptions of nature, art, national identity, and the melancholy theme of death. Rural

cemeteries were typically located on hilly sites at the outskirts of cities and villages, both due to concerns about sanitation and disease and to foster the sense of a special place, apart from the ordinary world, set aside for contemplating and honoring the memory of the dead. Rural cemetery landscapes are characterized by curving forms, irregular massing of plant materials, and asymmetry rather than a formal, regularized layout. While meant to look like the work of nature, in reality rural cemeteries were carefully designed and usually required extensive earth moving as well as thinning and replanting of trees.

Cuba Cemetery is the final resting place of many of Cuba's most notable citizens, including many members of the first families to settle in Cuba, business leaders, veterans of wars dating back to the War of 1812, politicians, abolitionists, and philanthropists. Also buried here are farmers, laborers, shopkeepers, homemakers, and other typical citizens who made their homes in Cuba.

The cemetery has grown many times over since its origins on Mr. Nash's two-acre plot. Additional land was purchased in 1854, 1869, 1898, 1899, 1957, and 1981, bringing the cemetery to its present size of 11.9 acres, including the Catholic cemetery added in 1923. Newer sections are distinguished by their flatter topography and more modern monuments; Section E is developed in the twentieth-century memorial park style, with markers flush with the ground to give the appearance of unbroken lawn.

In 2014, Cuba Cemetery was nominated to the State and National Registers of Historic Places, in recognition of its historical importance to the town and village of Cuba and its notable design. Still run by the Cuba Cemetery Association, it remains a peaceful place of contemplation and scenic beauty. The cemetery is located on Medbury Avenue, on the northeast outskirts of the village of Cuba.