



A Poetic Remembrance of Cave Hill Cemetery

By Alex Luken

The opening of Cave Hill Cemetery as a Victorian rural garden-style cemetery in 1848 introduced to Louisville a change in how communities mourned their dead. Rather than the gloom and stern reminder of death projected by church graveyards, Cave Hill Cemetery provided an environment where Louisville citizens could mourn in peace, in a natural respite without an air of gloom. Winding roads, grassy lawns, flowering trees and planted flower beds, and monumental works of art made Cave Hill Cemetery a place for the living as well as the dead.


Death was no stranger in Louisville in the 1800s. Community-wide outbreaks of diseases such as cholera, typhus, dysentery, tuberculosis, smallpox, and yellow fever, as well as seasonal ailments such as pneumonia, bronchitis, and influenza, affected Louisville families in some way. The cyclical nature of the passing of seasons in the natural environment of Cave Hill Cemetery offered much-needed hope and comfort.

In 1851, three years after the dedication of Cave Hill Cemetery, a poem by an anonymous writer ran in the Louisville Daily Courier which reflected the impact of the cemetery on Louisville at that time. The words could not be any truer, even to this day.

CAVE HILL CEMETERY



Is this the spot we're taught, by some
To look upon with fear and dread?
This lovely spot, where angels come
To keep their watch above the dead?
Are these green hill, and gentle dales,
With verdant grass and sunny flowers,
These turf-grown mounds and grave-yard pales,
The scenes which sadden happy hours?






These unique tomb-stones, reared to tell
The virtues of departed worth-
Shall *they* too, throw a midnight spell
Around the gladsome things of earth?
Is this the spot some fear to tread
The place they tremble to behold?

Have scenes like *these*, brave spirits led
To shrink from death and call it cold?



Such thoughts, may welcome from the breast
Where guilt, unrivall'd hold its throne;
But ne'er should such disturb the rest
Of those, who only good have known.
And yet 'tis strange, yes, passing strange
That e'en the *good*, doth call this gloom,
This hallowed spot where souls exchange
Earth's sorrows for a peaceful tomb.



'Tis here we've lain our lov'd ones down-
Here, sweetly in Death's arms they sleep;
Here, LOVE that dwells 'neath Heaven's frown.
Hath bid the angels, vigils keep.
Then why, oh why should any dread
The debt of nature to fulfill:
Such a spot, may be their bed,
As dear, romantic, lov'd Cave Hill?

- Flora S

Louisville Daily Courier

