

Lower Merion Cemeteries Open House

Sunday, October 13, 2024

Open House 1-4pm

Reception & Light Refreshments at the

Lower Merion Historical Society 4-5pm

The Lower Merion Historical Society will sponsor an Open House featuring four of the township's earliest cemeteries. All are relatively small in size, yet remain active burial spaces, and reflect varied burial traditions and monument forms.

Representatives from each cemetery will be on site during the Open House hours to greet visitors and answer questions. We will mark specific points of interest within each cemetery, but encourage you to explore these burial spaces and take note of things that pique your interest.

You are invited to come to the Lower Merion Academy, home to the Lower Merion Historical Society, at 4pm for light refreshments and a chance to discuss what you saw.

Historical Information and Maps

Table of Contents

The Harriton Cemetery (Harrison Family Cemetery)	2
Lower Merion Baptist Church Cemetery	4
Saint Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church Cemetery	6
Merion Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends Meeting House Burying Ground	8
Lower Merion Historical Society	10

The Harriton Cemetery (Harrison Family Cemetery)

Off Caversham Road, Bryn Mawr



Parking is available along the 300 block of Caversham Road. The cemetery is reached on foot by following the signs placed at the cul-de-sac at the end of the street.

Richard Harrison opened the Harriton Cemetery in 1719. There is a datestone, placed much later, in the stone wall surrounding the cemetery. The wall surrounding the burying ground was rebuilt about 1900, utilizing the stone from the old stone wall around the cemetery, under the supervision of architect and family member William Sansom Vaux. The date of the first burial in the cemetery is not known; however, it is presumed to be the 1719 opening date, the year that Harrison purchased the Harriton estate from Rowland Ellis.

Burials in the cemetery are principally Richard Harrison's immediate family and descendants. Family tradition tells us what little we know about those interred in the burial ground through the 18th century, as graves from that era are mostly unmarked. The placed field stones were not memorials in a conventional sense; they simply marked the location of graves. Over the years, these simple stones have been moved, pulled up as weeding was done, etc. There are two marked graves with dates before 1800, that of Benjamin Cochran in 1794, and that of his brother Richard in 1796. The earliest marked grave of a Harrison descendant is that of Charles McClenachan in 1811.

Except for the marked 19th century graves, it is unknown precisely who is buried in the cemetery or where. A "map" of burials started by Richard Harrison once existed. Charles Thomson notes the long-lost "map", and references to it are found in family papers from about 1840. Although locations are unknown, family tradition tells us a little bit about the use of the cemetery. The cemetery contains the remains of Richard Harrison and his descendants (Harrison's wife, Hannah Norris Harrison, died in 1774 and was buried at Arch Street Meeting in Philadelphia). Richard Harrison is said to be buried next to the wall to the left at the foot of the steps which go up and over the wall. His daughter, Hannah Harrison, and her husband Charles Thomson are said to have been buried "nearby." The cemetery also contains the remains of the people enslaved by Harrison who worked in the house. There was a separate cemetery "on the rise behind Harriton House" for enslaved people who worked in the fields, and this second cemetery was visible on the landscape into the 1870's. At the extreme south end of the little walled Harriton cemetery are found several inscribed headstones. The headstones, together with footstones, are separate from those of the family, and mark graves containing remains of people that Harrison family tradition termed "Strangers to the Family." Family lore tells us that Charles and Hannah Thomson were buried in the cemetery (in 1824 and 1807, respectively). Three bodies, presumed to include theirs, were removed in 1838 and reinterred at the new Laurel Hill Cemetery overlooking the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia. Because the graves were unmarked at Harriton's cemetery when the removals were made, no one knows with certainty whose remains were taken. Today there is a Thomson family lot at Laurel Hill, marked by a great granite obelisk and three graves: Charles Thomson, Hannah Harrison Thomson, and young Charles Thomson.

Lower Merion Baptist Church Cemetery

911 New Gulph Road, Bryn Mawr



Parking is located in the lot adjacent to the church, is accessible from New Gulph Road.

The Lower Merion Baptist Church was founded in 1808 and built in 1809. It was rebuilt in 1875, and stands on ground given to the church by Charles Thomson. Veterans of our country's wars lie in this burying ground, as well as sixteen descendants of William Penn. Thomson is memorialized in the largest of the church's many stained glass windows.

The cemetery was opened in 1811, with an initial restriction that stones be placed horizontally, no more than 18 inches above the ground level. This restriction was lifted in 1833. The cemetery has always had an open policy for burials, accepting members of all faiths. A section was set aside at one time for “strangers and persons of color.”

The Merion Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution placed a granite monument with a bronze plaque in 1931 at corner of the cemetery at Old and New Gulph Roads, memorializing the services of Charles Thomson, secretary to the Continental Congress, and soldiers from the township who served in the Revolutionary War. Steps leading to the memorial represent the thirteen American colonies, and were dedicated to the memory of Margaret B. Harvey, historian and botanist, and Louisa Harley Arnold, mother of Gen. Henry H. (Hap) Arnold, both members of the DAR.

Saint Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church Cemetery

415 East Athens Avenue, Ardmore



Parking for a limited number of cars is available within the cemetery inside the East Athens Avenue entrance. Additional space is located in the lot just south of the church, across West Wynnewood Road from the cemetery.

On August 16, 1765, the German Lutherans of “Merrion (sic) Township” banded together to purchase land for a place of worship and burial ground for “German Protestants, German Reformed and Lutherans, conjointly.” The earliest tombstone today in the Colonial Section is that of Johanna Müller, who died July 25, 1766. In 1809 the trustees added $\frac{1}{4}$ acre to the burial ground by purchase of additional land, and 19 years later, a wall was built enclosing the cemetery. Burial permits were first sold in 1833.

By 1844 the community had grown, and the cemetery was so well utilized that three additional acres were purchased, which became a redeeming venture by the creation and sale of burial lots to “Church Members and the public in general.”

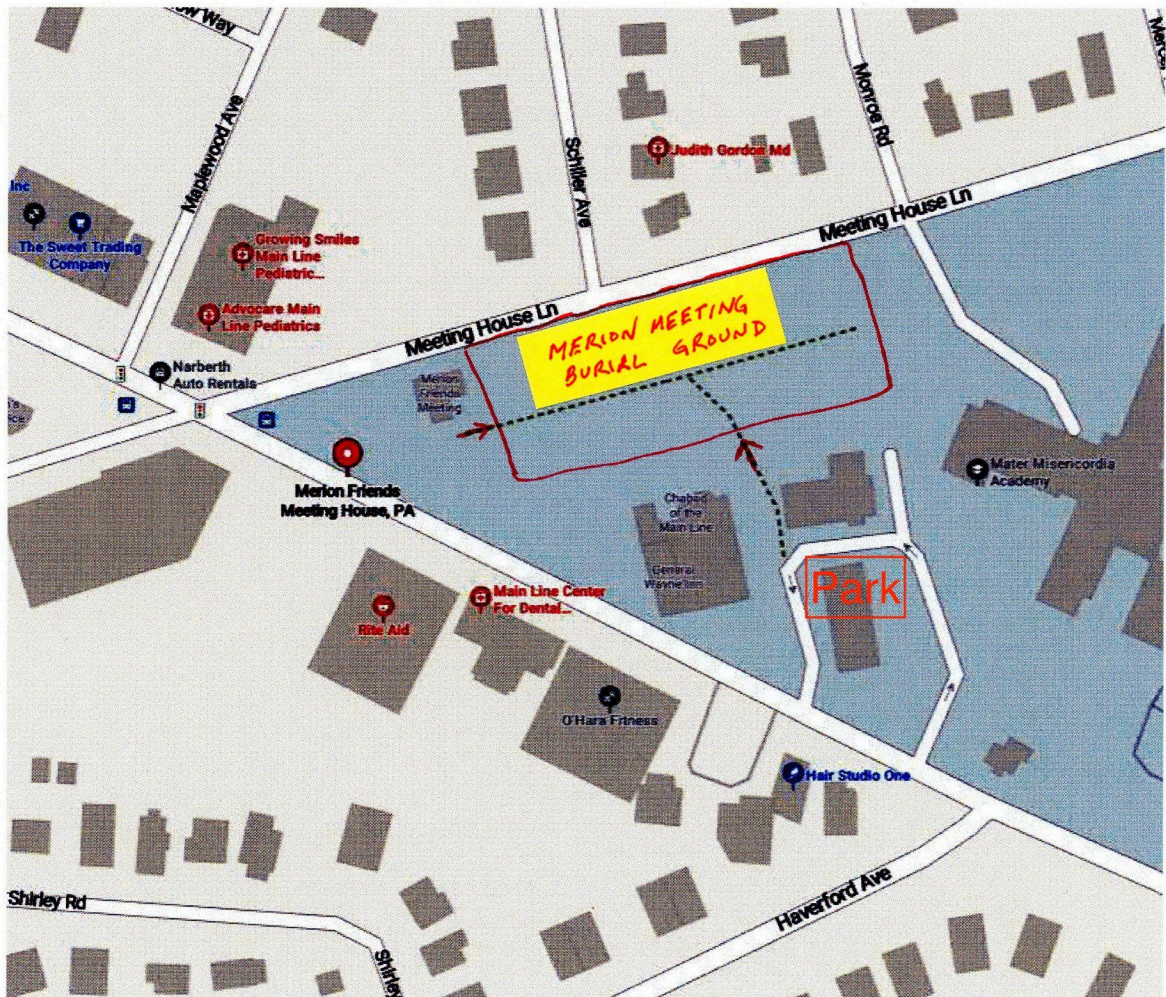
The present frame and stone house was built that year; in 1852, the large stone house was erected. Land used for these houses is dedicated to cemetery use when the demand arises. A sexton and cemetery caretaker were employed for the first time in 1844. Today, a full-time caretaker lives on the grounds.

In 1888 and 1889 an additional five acres of ground were purchased, filling out the entire block bounded by Argyle Road, West Wynnewood Road, Athens Avenue, and Hood Road, its present boundaries, and all laid out in lots 8 feet by 16 feet.

The cemetery also features an underground crypt, accessible within the stone schoolhouse in the southeast section of the cemetery. It was used for temporary interment of caskets when cold winter temperatures made the digging of graves difficult.

Merion Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends Meeting House Burying Ground

615 Montgomery Avenue, Merion Station



*Parking is located at the Activities Building adjacent to the
burial ground*

The Meeting began in 1682 upon arrival of the First Company of Welsh Quaker families fleeing persecution for their non-conformist worship in Wales. Edward Jones, son-in-law of Dr. Thomas Wynne, Quaker physician and friend of William Penn, led them.

Catherine Reese, a two-year-old who died soon after the Welsh settlers arrived, was the first burial in what would later become the burial ground. Thirteen years later, Edward Rees sold ½ acre to the Overseers for a burial ground. During the nearly 350 years that followed, about 2700 burials have been added, mostly Quakers, but also strangers, enslaved people, casualties from powder mill explosions on Mill Creek and perhaps Native Americans. About 90% of those buried at Merion do not possess individual grave markers; nearly all of the 240+ grave markers present to date are from the 19th and 20th centuries.

Within twenty years of the first burials at the site, the thriving community in “Merion,” named in honor of their Welsh Merionethshire, had completed construction of a stone meeting house, later to be enlarged. It stood on a well-used path linking the Welsh farms with Philadelphia. Tradition says William Penn visited and preached here. In the loft above the meeting room, school was held for girls and boys, including Native American children.

There is evidence that this is the most pictured Friends meeting house in the United States, probably because of its age, and because it was easily accessible from a growing metropolis that was once a publishing center. Two additional acres were given to the Meeting in 1801 and 1804 by John Dickinson, a participant in founding our nation who had family ties to Merion

The Merion Friends Meeting House was designated a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1999. Weekly meetings for worship, as well as occasional weddings and burials in the adjacent grounds, continue to the present day.

Lower Merion Historical Society

506 Bryn Mawr Ave, Bala Cynwyd

The Lower Merion Historical Society is located on the 2nd and 3rd floors of the Lower Merion Academy, built in 1812.

The Lower Merion Historical Society is an organization dedicated to “Preserving Our Past for the Future.” This is accomplished by stewardship of local history, education of the community, preservation of historic resources, and outreach to promote awareness of the cultural heritage of the Township of Lower Merion and the Borough of Narberth.

More information is available at lowermerionhistory.org

The Lower Merion Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) organization, and is 100% donor-supported, sustainable only through your generosity. Please help us preserve the unique history of our area by making a tax-deductible donation [here](#).