

Mount Auburn Cemetery

Cambridge and Watertown, Massachusetts

Photographs by Alan Ward 1977-87, 2002

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

I first photographed Mount Auburn Cemetery when I was a student studying landscape architecture at Harvard. I had practiced architectural photography, and a colleague of mine Michael Robinson, suggested photographing the cemetery. It was my first attempt at applying the methods and principles of architectural photography to a designed landscape.

Mount Auburn Cemetery was founded in 1831, beginning the Rural Cemetery Movement in America, where burials occurred outside the city in natural surroundings. This quiet place was created to honor the natural processes of life and death with monuments and buildings built for commemoration, making it an outdoor museum of sculpture and architecture. It was a distinctly different subject to portray the subtlety of landscape design as compared to architecture. The photographs show how curving roads and paths are adjusted in response to changes in the topography and how monuments and memorials are positioned in an idyllic setting.

Mount Auburn has evolved and changed over the years, including 2002 updates by Reed Hilderbrand. However Consecration Dell - a bowl-shaped glade near the center of the cemetery (2), is most like the character of the landscape that characterized the first decades of the

cemetery. These images of the dell include stone monuments under a canopy of mature trees, which required soft and subdued light to reduce the contrast in the scene and render the details with luminosity.

I photographed Mount Auburn Cemetery many times over the years, and in all seasons. One of the images from my first visit that expresses the design intention of the founders, is the view of Halcyon Lake in the spring (28). I initially thought this was an intriguing subject and visualized the photograph. It was early evening with light wispy clouds that were transformed by using a red filter to darken the sky, as well as the vegetation. When first viewing a print in the darkroom, I realized the transformation that had taken place from the reality of the perceived scene to the image in the photograph. It almost appeared like an eighteenth-century English landscape garden with monuments and temples along a lake in an idealized naturalistic setting. It also seemed to convey the mood of romantic landscape paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Both of these analogies seemed appropriate, because the cemetery design was influenced by each. It reinforced the idea that one of the inherent characteristics of photography is the way that it can emphasize and transform the everyday seeing of the world into a distinctive expression of a place embedded with meanings.

List of Photographs

1. Egyptian Revival gateway built in 1842, ca. 1980
2. Consecration Dell, 1977
3. Consecration Dell from Mountain Avenue, ca 1985
4. View north on Walnut Avenue, 1977
5. View north on Fern Path, ca. 1985
6. View from Mountain Avenue, ca. 1985
7. Kendall family lot, ca. 1985
8. Stanton family lot, ca. 1985
9. Path from Consecration Dell, ca. 1985
10. Harvard Hill, ca. 1985
11. Family lots along Chapel Avenue, ca. 1985
12. View from Beech Avenue, ca. 1985
13. Scots' Charitable Society Lot, ca. 1985
14. Auburn Lake, ca. 1985
15. Willow Pond, ca. 1985
16. Flowering tree, ca. 1980
17. Asa Gray Garden from Lawn Avenue, ca. 1985
18. Asa Gray Garden and Bigelow Chapel, ca. 2002
19. Bigelow Chapel built in the 1840s, 1977
20. Bigelow Chapel in winter, ca. 1985
21. Civil War Memorial, completed in 1872, in winter, ca. 1985
22. Civil War Memorial, ca. 1980
23. Edward Everett Monument and Washington Tower, ca. 1985
24. Washington Tower, built in 1854, ca. 1985
25. Washington Tower from Mountain Avenue, ca. 1980
26. Tombs built into hillside and Story Chapel, ca. 1985
27. Central Avenue and Story Chapel built 1896-98, 1980
28. Halcyon Lake in spring, 1977
29. Halcyon Lake and Mary Baker Eddy Memorial, 2002
30. Halcyon Lake and Kingfisher Path, 2002
31. View north in Halcyon Garden, 2002
32. View south of Halcyon Garden, 2002

































































Notes

Selected Publication of the Photographs:

Linden-Ward, Blanche, "Putting the Past in Place: The Making of Mount Auburn Cemetery," *Cambridge Historical Society: Proceedings for the Years 1976-1979*

Linden-Ward, Blanche, *Silent City on a Hill: Landscapes of Memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery*, 1989

Tishler, William H., *American Landscape Architecture: Designers and Places*, 1989

"Silent City on a Hill: Landscapes of Memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery," Book Review, *The Boston Sunday Globe*, March 11, 1990

"Silent City on a Hill: Landscapes of Memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery," Book Review, *Landscape Architecture*, August 1990

"Silent City on a Hill," Awards Issue of *Landscape Architecture*, November 1990

Ward, Alan, *American Designed Landscapes: A Photographic Interpretation*, 1998

Ward, Alan, "American Designed Landscapes," *View Camera: The Journal of Large-Format Photography*, January/February 1999

Freeman, Allen, "The Silent Edge," *Landscape Architecture*, June 2004

Brown, Jane Roy, "Preservation in the Midst of Change," *The View*, Summer 2006

Exhibitions of the Photographs:

"Luminous Landscapes: Photographs by Alan Ward" The National Building Museum, 2016

"American Designed Landscapes: Space and Light" Sarasota Center for Architecture, 2018

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