

# Spring Grove Cemetery and Arboretum

Cincinnati, Ohio

Photographs by Alan Ward 1977

# Notes on the Making of the Photographs

Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. judged Cincinnati's Spring Grove the best cemetery in the nation, "from a landscape gardening point of view." Founded in 1845, Spring Grove remains the finest design of the Rural Cemetery Movement that swept across America, beginning in the 1830s with Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery. In the 1840s, Cincinnati was only fifty years old and the nation's fastest growing city, as well as the fourth largest. A confluence of factors led to the making of rural cemeteries, including growing romantic sensibilities put forth by writers such as William Cullen Bryant, William Wordsworth and others, that encouraged burial in a pastoral setting. Country estates were increasingly being built by the wealthy - guided by Andrew Jackson Downing's books that praised rural environments and encouraged horticultural pursuits. Like other cities in the East, Cincinnati had overcrowded urban burial grounds, and with escalating urban land values, the idea of a cemetery in the natural scenery outside the city was appealing.

The selected site was a farm four miles north of the city with diverse topography, including a well-drained plateau ideal for burials, as well as low-lying land along creeks. An initial rectangular layout for the area on high ground by Philadelphia architect John Notman was rejected, because it did not work with the varied topography. Howard Daniels, a local designer, then laid out a curving pattern of drives fit to the slopes on the site; but it was composed of a series of tight reverse curves that tended to disorient visitors to the cemetery. Daniels was followed by

Adolph Strauch, who was appointed superintendent in 1855. Strauch was a Prussian-born landscape gardener, who had studied under Prince Herman von Pückler-Muskau, a prominent park designer and reformer, who urged his protégé to study English garden theorists. Strauch learned from Pückler-Muskau "to develop a controlling scheme... and carry it out with entire consistency." Pückler's insistence on wholeness in landscape design through a sequence of visually unifying spaces and vistas, ultimately guided Strauch's transformation of Spring Grove after 1855.\*

The photographs illustrate the principles guiding Strauch's design for the cemetery. His aim was to make the grounds a park or garden "so attractive, so useful they would never be overturned." Several images show sweeping lawns defined by carefully placed trees, rather than fences and other evidence of property lines, allowing for views to large-scale tombs and mausolea. Strauch transformed the low-lying farmland to a park-like setting, making ornamental ponds with small peninsulas and islands resembling Liverpool's Birkenhead Park and Stourhead, where the limits of the water are never quite perceptible, so they seem much larger. It is this continuity and scale of spaces in Strauch's design for Spring Grove that transcends other Rural Cemeteries. It proved to be very popular, so that by the 1860s, Spring Grove attracted nearly 200,000 visitors annually and served as an inspiration to Americans for making public parks.\*\*

# List of Photographs

1. Gate house and historic office
2. Railroad line over Central Avenue north of gate house
3. Geyser Lake and Spring Avenue
4. Ringgold monument and Geyser Lake
5. Bates and Taylor monuments and large Gingko trees
6. Monuments and Gingko trees
7. Lake in summer
8. Lake and stone bridge
9. View over Cedar Lake to Burnet vault
10. Cedar Lake and Burnet vault
11. Judge Jacob Burnet marble vault
12. Flush markers to maintain open lawns
13. Cypress grove at lake edge
14. Cypress knees and stone bridge
15. Stone bridge to island
16. Monuments amidst trees
17. Trees reflected in lake
18. Fleischmann mausoleum and Geyser Lake
19. Fleischmann mausoleum modeled after Doric temple
20. McAlpin monument
21. Bronze Erkenbrecher monument near Cascade Lake
22. Hord monument and Geyser Lake
23. Dexter family mausoleum modeled after Sainte-Chapelle, Paris
24. Life-size Charles W. West, founder of the Cincinnati Art Museum
25. Avenue to plateau and early phase of the cemetery
26. Cluster of monuments from early phase
27. Monuments and preserved woodland area on plateau
28. Early drives designed with reverse curves
29. Walker monument and preserved woodland area
30. Sphinx atop Lawler monument
31. Child's tomb and recumbent dog
32. White Pine Chapel
33. Rotunda and sculptural figure
34. Civil War Section
35. Sarcophagus and trees















































































# Notes

## Selected Publication of the Photographs:

Linden-Ward, Blanche and Ward, Alan, "The Role of the Rural Cemetery in American Landscape Design," *Landscape Architecture*, September/October 1985

Findsen, Owen, "Spring Grove: Museum Without Walls," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 21, 1985

Linden-Ward, Blanche, "Landscape as Art," *An Art Journal Dialogue*, September/October 1986

## Exhibitions of the Photographs:

"The Cult of the Melancholy: The Rural Cemetery Movement in America," Harvard GSD, 1982

"Nature by Design: Spring Grove Photographs by Alan Ward", Taft Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1985

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

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

\* For a more complete history, including primary research from Adolph Strauch's papers, see "The Role of the Rural Cemetery in American Landscape Design," *Landscape Architecture*, September/October 1985. The article won the Bradford Williams Medal for excellence in writing about landscape architecture in that year.

\*\* The cemetery changed its name from Spring Grove Cemetery to Spring Grove Cemetery and Arboretum in 1987