# 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



































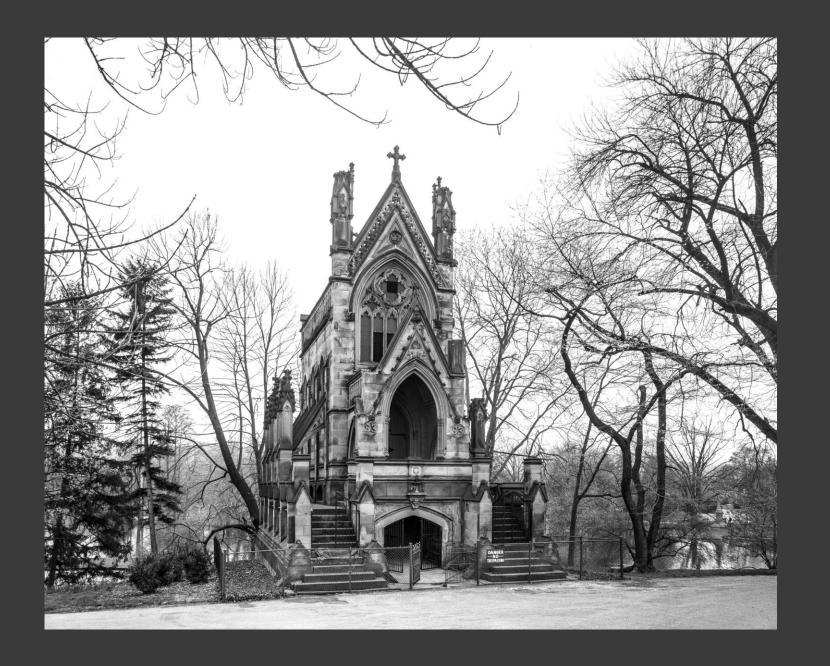




















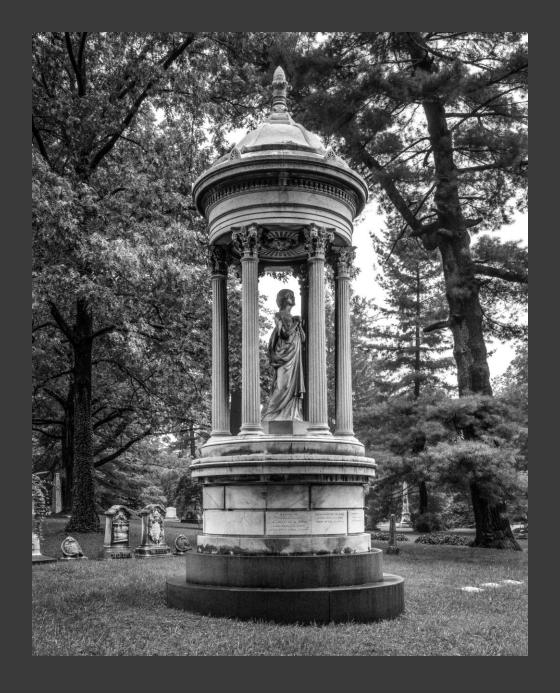
















### Notes

#### **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

All Photographs © Alan Ward

- \* 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