Death Among the Palmettos: Southern Burial Practicies and Society, 1775-1850

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Death Among the Palmettos:
Southern Burial Practices and Society, 1775 - 1850

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

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Abstract

Using burial as a way to view social and political anxieties in the Antebellum South, “Death Among the Palmettos: Southern Burial Practices and Society, 1775 - 1850” argues that the treatment of the dead was based squarely in the social concerns and situation surrounding the living. Specifically examining Charleston, South Carolina, the ways people used burial to make statements about themselves and their class standing both established their status in an ever-shifting society while simultaneously regulating it in ways that became exclusionary to others. Considering Charleston as a microcosm of statewide and national tensions over class, economics, and slavery, I argue that the concerns over these uncertainties played out in Charleston’s churchyards and cemeteries as well as in the city’s daily life.

When Magnolia Cemetery opened on the outskirts of Charleston, South Carolina in 1850, it seemed to address many of the problems that had plagued the city for years. Due to disease, epidemics, and natural disasters, over its nearly two hundred year history, Charleston gained a deserved reputation as an especially deadly place. While religious intuitions throughout the city maintained their own cemeteries, these were restricted on the basis of both class and race. Charlestonians who were poor or non-white found themselves relegated to public city lots. Following the Revolution, these groups will debate the role of race and class in cemetery construction, and fight for space for independent cemetery construction. For the city’s post-Revolutionary government, burial laws will offer a new way to establish authority. Throughout the nineteenth century, city residents saw changes with the introduction of new religious groups, evolving ideas about the cause of disease, and an increase in migrants from different parts of Europe. These developments, combined with the concerns upper class Charlestonians had over
their waning influence in both state and national politics, led to uncertainty and a resistance to change on the part of Charleston’s elites.
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Introduction

In early America, the treatment of the dead was based squarely in the social concerns and situation surrounding the living. Americans used burial to make statements about themselves and their class standing, both establishing their status in an ever-shifting society while simultaneously regulating it in ways that became exclusionary to others. Members of the lower classes and people of color were often relegated to public cemeteries that closed after several decades of use and the land was sold for redevelopment, while those in the higher classes were buried in more permanent religious cemeteries. Over the course of the Early Republic and antebellum periods, excluded social groups began to push back against these practices. African Americans petitioned for separate cemeteries to be opened to accommodate black members of local churches, while members of the middle class enthusiastically joined the rural cemetery movement as it expanded across the United States. “Death Among the Palmettos: Southern Burial Practices and Society, 1775 - 1850” considers Charleston as a microcosm of statewide and national tensions over class, economics, and slavery, I argue that the concerns over these uncertainties played out in Charleston’s churchyards and cemeteries as well as in the city’s daily life.

Charleston’s cemeteries provide a new way to view and understand the changes taking place in the city between 1775 and 1850. During this period, Charleston wrestled with issues facing much of the growing nation, like the challenge growing democratic feelings presented to those who were traditionally in power, or how to interpret and apply new medical and scientific ideas. By considering the city’s burial spaces, we can better understand social shifts and changes occurring in the city. For example, the Brown Fellowship Society, a fraternal organization made up of wealthy, free black Charlestonians, opened its own burial ground in Charleston at the end
of the eighteenth century. This allowed those buried in the Society’s lot to be set apart in death, and avoid burial in the city’s public cemetery. While during this period cemeteries were frequently referred to as cities of the dead, in Charleston burial spaces never physically replicated the city’s diversity and complexity, but illustrated the upper class’s ideas of social status and value. However, as indicators of class and status, burial space also allowed groups, like the Brown Fellowship Society, religious organizations, and the city’s middle class, to define their own position in the city, and create a legacy they might not have been able to gain through other social or civic means.

Historiographically, much has been written about southern and South Carolina history and death; few works have combined the topics. Many well known monographs consider death on a regional or continental focus. One of the earliest works in this category, David Stannard’s *The Puritan Way of Death*, considers death in Puritan New England. Stannard traces Puritan practice from its English roots to the eventual shift away from stereotypical Puritan beliefs that occurred in the late eighteenth century. Life in Puritan New England focused on death; from childhood to old age, in schoolbooks and church services, messages about death surrounded members of the community. Puritan practices adapted and changed over time, moving toward more elaborate and expensive funerals, and, with the influence of the Great Awakening, away from such overwhelming anxiety regarding an individual’s salvation. These changes ultimately changed Puritan concepts of death from the more fearful practices of early Puritans in New England to a means to rebirth and reunion.¹

¹ Interestingly, Stannard notes that one way this can be seen is through changes in tombstone art, as deaths heads began changing to images of cherubs.
Gary Laderman’s *The Sacred Remains* focuses on death in the Early Republic and antebellum north. Using the burials of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln to begin and end his study respectively, Laderman discusses the various ways American’s response to and relationship with the dead changed in the ensuing years. Due to the high mortality rates of the time, society developed specific ways of dealing with death, including proscribed behavior both before and after death for both the dying and those being left behind, ways of dealing with the body, and mourning expectations. As the North became increasingly urban during the nineteenth century, death behaviors that had been suitable in a rural environment changed; this increased visibility also brought shifts in mourning behavior. Northerners developed what Laderman calls “morbid obsessions,” which included painting posthumous portraits, interest in continuing to look at a corpse until decay began to set it, and consolation literature.

In *Death and the New World*, Erik Seeman addresses the issue of death in the Americas between 1492 and 1800. He considers the traditional death ways of Africans, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Indians, and views the changes these practices underwent in the New World. While these groups all had different mortuary traditions, because of their familiarity with death, they had far more in common with each other than we do with these groups today. Once these people groups began interacting in North America, they all sought to answer basic questions about death, which were especially pertinent because of the vast losses of life on all sides during these years of settlement. Over time, death practices for all of these groups changed; while in some cases these changes stemmed from adaptation to a new location, in many instances they were forced in an attempt to change or dominate cultures.

While these books offer regional or continental views of death outside of the South, shorter works, like edited collections, articles and book chapters, take a more southern focus. In
the collection *Death in the American South*, Randy Sparks’ “The Southern Way of Death,” which discusses the impact of evangelicalism on the change in Southern death practices between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his article, “And Die in Dixie,” David Roediger considers the importance of death and funerary customs in Southern slave communities between 1700 and 1865. Robert Harris’ “Charleston’s Free, Afro-American Elite” considers a specific part of life for free African Americans in antebellum Charleston – voluntary associations. The city’s two associations, the Brown Fellowship and the Humane Brotherhood, not only provided friendship and social opportunities for their members, but they also offered burial space, bereavement support, and, in some cases, financial support and education for widows and orphans.

Although Drew Gilpin Faust’s *This Republic of Suffering* and Mark Schantz’s *Awaiting the Heavenly Country* focus on the ways the American Civil War, in doing so both discuss late antebellum death culture. Schantz contends that during the nineteenth century, Americans recognized that death was simply a part of life, and embraced it in their literature, religious messages, and even in children’s schoolbooks. These actions not only continued the familiarizing process with death, but also taught others how to die. These were also the years that saw the rise of the rural cemetery movement, through which these antebellum ideas regarding death could be re-enforced and strengthened. However, the war disrupted these ingrained ideas, abruptly forcing Americans to face death in a different, and much larger, way. Faust notes that, although Americans in the mid nineteenth century were used to death because of high infant mortality rates of the time, there was the expectation that once one reached young adulthood he or she would live until middle age. The war changed those expectations and the death of young men
rapidly shifted away from being shocking, and forced families to learn to live without the
expected stories regarding the “Good Death” that was so important in the pre-war period.

As a city, Charleston itself has a long history, which has been both a point of pride for
natives and a point of interest for the numerous tourists and visitors the city receives each year.
Because of this, a variety of works have been written on the city since the colonial period, giving
it a long and varied historiography. One of the most comprehensive is Walter Frazer’s
Charleston! Charleston!, which presents a general history of the city from 1670 through the
city’s experience with Hurricane Hugo in 1989. Others, like Charleston in the Age of the
Pinckneys, focuses on the city’s important and influential Pinckney family, which includes
Mayor Henry Laurens Pinckney, who campaigned for a rural cemetery. However, like works
relating to death in the broader South, works specifically focusing on death in Charleston is also
limited. Some literature regarding the cemeteries in Charleston has been produced; most of this,
though, has been written for the popular and tourist audiences. City of the Silent, a book on the
history of Magnolia Cemetery, was published in 2010. While it includes some introductory
information regarding the cemetery’s history, its focus is on the individuals buried in Magnolia.

By considering the ways Charlestonians used death and burial as a means to grapple with
local and national questions surrounding race, class, and social status, “Death Among the
Palmettos” will fill a gap in the existing historiography. This dissertation argues that
Charleston’s churchyards and cemeteries were often the front lines for establishing social order,
denying status to some while privileging others, and defining communities. In doing so,
Charleston’s burial spaces reinforced the position, power, and values of the city’s upper class.
“Death Among the Palmettos” will also challenge ideas of southern exceptionalism that continue
to surround the city; many issues and concerns Charlestonians had during this period were not
unique experiences based on their location and regional identification. While being a southern, slaveholding city were important facets in shaping Charleston’s identity, it was also a growing American city, facing many of the same challenges as other areas in the country. Just as in the north, Charleston’s medical schools had to find ways to secure cadavers for dissection without disturbing the broader community. Middle class Charlestonians saw the rural cemetery movement as a way to establish legacies for themselves and their families in ways they previously would have been unable to, as did middle class Americans across the country. Similarly, Charlestonians and others throughout the country on the periphery of the middle class chose to use their limited resources to bury their dead in the city’s rural cemetery because of what they believed burial signified. While Charleston’s situation in terms of social structure, wealth, and large enslaved population might make the solutions they chose to solve some of these problems different than in other areas, ultimately it is important to recognize Charleston as an American city, looking for solutions to American problems.

“Death Among the Palmettos” offers a new way to understand the changes taking place in Charleston between the Revolution and 1850. Free people of color, historically marginalized religious groups, and even Charleston’s white middle class all used burial grounds to establish legacies in a city where they could very easily be overlooked or forgotten. Debates and dissention in religious bodies played out in cemeteries; the dead were involved in discussions over medicine, science, and disease. While it is easy to assume that when Charleston’s rural cemetery Magnolia opened in 1850 it was to relieve the space pressure present in city cemeteries, in considering the larger history of cemeteries and burial in the city, it becomes clear that this was the culmination of decades long debate about the place of the dead in the city and the social opportunities burials could provide.
Figure 1
University of Alabama W.S. Hoole Special Collections
Chapter One: “Death and the prison-ships was the unanimous determination:” Death, Memory, and the American Revolution

The events that occurred in Charleston during the Revolution in terms of death and burial accelerated processes already in motion regarding the city’s management of burials. During the Revolution, Charlestonians found themselves facing death on a previously unseen scale, as the war killed hundreds of people in the city, mostly prisoners from disease. As a city built on a peninsula, space was always at a premium, and, as an area with historically high disease rates, death was no stranger to Charleston. By the time the Revolution began traditional interment spaces had already started to prove insufficient; the war only accelerated that process and challenged the city to find adequate burial space and to mourn and memorialize their dead. Thus, the war had long ranging consequences for how the city handled burials and the dead; this was challenging for Charlestonians during the war, but provided opportunities for the city government in the post war period. Occupation also impacted the way Charlestonians interacted with the dead; British occupation ensured the mourning only of loyalist heroes. However, throughout this process, whether loyalist or patriot, one constant remained – in life or death, social status was incredibly important to the experience one had in Revolutionary Charleston.

In many ways, when the Carolina colony was founded in 1670, it stood a much better chance of survival than earlier colonies had. Rather than recruiting colonists who lacked the skills for settlement, as happened in other areas like Jamestown, many of Carolina’s early settlers were from Barbados, and had experience with life in the Americas. Even with a population better suited to success, there were still many challenges. It quickly became obvious that Carolina’s
first major settlement, Charles Town, was a very unhealthy place. While the city’s location offered an easily protected harbor, the surrounding swamps were a breeding ground for mosquitoes carrying deadly diseases, like yellow fever. The city was soon notorious for its high mortality rates. Historian Water Fraser explains, “Most white settlers died before reaching the age of forty, and Charles Town acquired a reputation among the sophisticated of western Europe as being the “great charnel house” of America.” The plight of European ministers illustrates the problems settlers encountered. During the first half of the eighteenth century South Carolina’s Anglican churches were never fully staffed with ministers. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts was responsible for supplying clergy to the colony; while they did their best to keep ministers in all churches, high disease and mortality rates made that impossible. Twenty five percent of ministers sent prior to 1750 died within their first five years in South Carolina. Ultimately, almost 61 percent of ministers sent during this period died while in the colony. Those who survived were not always able to successfully carry out their work, and several had to leave the colony because of poor health. Even though these ministers were stationed throughout the lowcountry, their experiences mirrored those in Charleston. Peter Coclanis has estimated that between 1722 and 1732 Charleston’s death rate per 1000 white residents was between 26.1 and 140.87. Comparatively, between 1725 and 1744 Boston’s

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2 The city will be known as Charles Town until after the Revolutionary War; I will use “Charleston” for consistency moving forward.
mortality rate was between 32.8 and 42.5 per 1000 residents. These differences are historically unsurprising; life expectancy for men in the southern colonies was between 10 and 20 years below men in the middle and New England colonies, and in the country of England itself. The lowcountry’s high mortality rates would challenge Charlestonians for years to come.

With such high death rates, burial space was an early necessity. On March 1, 1711, the colonial legislature authorized the construction of a new brick church to house the congregation of St. Philip’s, the city’s first Anglican church. This project included a provision for “a cœmtery or church-yard, to be inclosed in a brick wall, for the burial of christian people.” Even though a cemetery for St. Philip’s was formally created in the early 1700s, evidence shows that land associated with the church had long been used for this purpose. The original building housing St. Philip’s was constructed between 1680 and 1681; the congregation moved to its present location following damage from a hurricane in 1710. St. Michael’s, the city’s second Anglican church, was built on St. Philip’s former location between 1751 and 1761. Following the 1886 Charleston earthquake, workmen repairing St. Michael’s found a coffin under one of the church’s stairways. The letters J.O.B. and date 1678 were on the coffin’s lid in brass tacks, leading Charlestonians to believe that, prior to housing church buildings, the land had been used as a burial ground. As

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8 Because England was using the Julian rather than Gregorian calendar until 1752, the new year started on March 25 rather than January 1. For this date, English sources of the time date it as March 1, 1710, but, using Gregorian dating, it occurred in 1711.
Charles Beesley notes in his guide to the church, because a brick arch had been built around the coffin, the builders of St. Michael’s were aware of its presence.10 As this situation illustrates, by the start of the Revolution some of Charleston’s cemeteries had been in use for almost a cemetery. Church and city leaders were not only aware of the challenges at hand, but were also working to address the fact that cemeteries, like St. Michael’s, were filling. In 1773, St. Michael’s vestry began limiting the size of burial markers and monuments in the churchyard to save space.11 When the Revolution started, issues of burials and space would have weighed all the more heavily on church leadership.

Although the Anglican church remained the established church until the Revolution, as an economic colony South Carolina welcomed a variety of religious groups. In Charleston, religious bodies constructed church buildings and opened cemeteries throughout the colonial period. Several churches and their corresponding burial spaces were established by the end of the seventeenth century; the Independent Church (which became the Circular Congregational Church) was organized in 1681, the French Huguenot Church was built 1687, and land was given for the Anabaptist Meeting (later First Baptist Church) in 1699. More groups formed in the eighteenth century prior to the Revolution; the German Lutheran Church (now St. John’s) started construction on their building in 1759, the Scotch Presbyterian Church (known currently as First (Scots) Presbyterian) cemetery was in use by the 1760s, the city’s first Jewish congregation, Beth

Elohim’s cemetery started in 1764, and the Second Independent Church (which later became the Unitarian Church) started construction in 1772.\(^{12}\)

While these churches’ cemeteries accommodated some of Charleston’s burials, ultimately, due to a growing populace and the transient population associated with a busy port city, the local government was forced to create new, public cemeteries. In 1748 the Colonial Assembly formally established a burial space for Africans and African Americans in the city, and in 1768 a cemetery for poor white Charlestonians and “strangers” was created.\(^{13}\) In their ordinance, City Council noted, “by the increase of inhabitants in, and resort of strangers and transient persons to, Charlestown, the church yards or burying grounds of the Parishes of Saint Philip and Saint Michael are now found to be insufficient for the interment of such persons as happen to die in the said Town,” necessitating the creation of this new space.\(^{14}\) As the city entered the Revolution, it was with an expanding population and recent government efforts to address the logistical challenges that presented.

Although Charleston faced an early threat of invasion in the British attack on Sullivan’s Island in 1776, after turning back the British the early years of the war were peaceful and, for some, even profitable. While some of the more vocal loyalists left the city (both voluntarily and involuntarily) many residents were initially able to continue with their lives in a relatively normal fashion. For some business-minded residents, the first years of Revolution presented new opportunities for trade as northern ports were engaged in warfare. Yet life became increasingly strained as the years of conflict passed. Prices of basic necessities like food increased, and the

\(^{12}\) Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 3. Strangers were defined as people who were not residents of the city but were there at their death, like sailors and merchants.

\(^{14}\) McCord, 92.
poor were forced to appeal to Anglican churches for relief. Meanwhile, tensions rose between elites, artisans, and the working class as support for independence divided the city. While this was occurring, the city faced a constant influx of people. By 1777 the city’s population swelled; it is estimated that there were approximately 1,000 soldiers and 1,000 “mixed-national sailors.” While these sailors and soldiers placed increasing pressure on the city’s limited resources, because they were new to the city and more susceptible to disease, this strain also impacted the public cemetery.\(^\text{15}\)

As southern cities like Savannah began to fall, Charleston’s defenders quickly instituted plans to fortify the peninsula. Unfortunately, these ultimately aided the British troops. Remembering the embarrassment they suffered in their failed attack on Sullivan’s Island in 1776, the British returned to Charleston well prepared to take advantage of the faults in the city’s defenses. A siege began on March 29, 1780, and Charleston fell to the British May 12, remaining under their control until 1782.\(^\text{16}\)

Under occupation, the health and survival of prisoners was tied to their class and status. While prisoners from the upper classes were treated well, common, enlisted troops faced overcrowding, rampant disease, and material shortages. Due to the disparity, enlisted men faced high mortality rates, contributing to public health challenges and cemetery overcrowding.

Charleston was an important prize for the British; both houses of Parliament passed resolutions acknowledging Sir Henry Clinton and Vice Admiral Marriott Arbuthnot’s “eminent and very important Services … in the reduction of Charlestown.”\(^\text{17}\)

\(^{15}\) Fraser, 155-156.


\(^{17}\) Stoenensen, 71.
their success to regain control of the North American colonies. In occupying the city, they were responsible for thousands of people. The Articles of Capitulation stipulated that, “the town and its fortifications be surrendered, all Continental troops become prisoners of war until exchanged; militiamen be returned to their homes as prisoners on parole; and everyone in the city become a prisoner on parole.”\textsuperscript{18} Of the roughly 5,500 men who were taken with the city, 2,861 were enlisted soldiers eligible to be held as prisoners, the majority of whom were from other states. Of the 2,861 enlisted troops captured in the city, 1,312, or 46.1 percent, were from Virginia. Seven hundred and fifty two were from North Carolina, and 755 were from South Carolina.\textsuperscript{19} Managing the surrender of 5,500 men, as well as 2,800 prisoners was a large task in its own right, and would have been challenging in ideal conditions. With its years of disease, epidemics, and high mortality rates, Charleston was anything but ideal. These problems were compounded by the well-known fact that Charleston was a notoriously deadly place for those new to the area. The susceptibility of prisoners to disease presented a challenge to British officials they would struggle to address, leading to the deaths of hundreds of prisoners.

Initially, enlisted troops were housed in the town barracks. The location of the barracks and the overall lenience and freedom of movement the British offered prisoners enabled many to escape the city. Between June and July, 233 prisoners died, and several hundred escaped. Although these death rates were not ideal, the number of escaped prisoners was especially concerning to British leadership. They soon reconsidered their options; four months after

\textsuperscript{18} Stoensen, 72.  
\textsuperscript{19} Carl Borick, \textit{Relieve Us of This Burthen: American Prisoners of War in the Revolutionary South, 1780-1782} (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), 4. The remaining 36 were listed as being members of the “Light Dragoons;” no place of origin was included.
occupation, they began housing enlisted prisoners on ships. This would present new and more deadly health hazards for prisoners.\(^{20}\)

Per the Articles of Capitulation, commissioned officers were granted parole and separated from their men; they were initially housed across Charleston Harbor at a fort at Haddrell’s Point, where they lived in relative comfort.\(^{21}\) They were allowed “to retain their servants, swords, pistols, and their baggage unsearched,” and were well fed and well supplied, unlike their men.\(^{22}\) While many officers were quickly exchanged, some, along with other city leaders, found themselves in trouble with British authorities. In August, after letters were intercepted showing communication with Governor John Rutledge\(^{23}\) and discussing secret meetings, these men were deemed to pose a significant risk to British control of the city. Because of their status, rather than being sent to a prison ship they were taken to the *HMS Sandwich*, and sent to St. Augustine. Although this was an undesirable situation for a variety of reasons, the prisoners retained many privileges. In St. Augustine they lived in rented houses, purchased food and alcohol to their tastes, and retained their personal servants. They also maintained their personal and professional relationships in Charleston, attempting to manage their plantations and business affairs from Florida.\(^{24}\) These elite prisoners were in St. Augustine for slightly less than a year; in July 1781 they were given their freedom and sent to Philadelphia along with their families, where they

\(^{20}\) *Ibid.*, 7, 16.

\(^{21}\) Richard H. Tomczak, “”A Number of the Most Respectable Gentlemen”: Civilian Prisoners of War and Social Status in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1780-1782,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 116 no. 3 (July 2015): 202.

\(^{22}\) Stoesen, 76; Tomczak, 202.

\(^{23}\) Governor Rutledge was personally the state government during the years of Charleston’s occupation and heavy British activity in the state. He escaped Charleston just before the British took the city, and spent the rest of the war traveling around the state, and functioning as the government wherever he was, all while avoiding capture by the British on several different occasions.

\(^{24}\) Tomczak, 205.
stayed until late 1782, not returning to Charleston until early 1783.\textsuperscript{25} Although these prisoners saw these experiences as an inconvenience and, in some cases, a slight to their personal honor, they were very fortunate in many respects. Their generally good health stood in stark contrast to the experience enlisted men had while prisoners in Charleston. Wealth and a higher class status was associated with a more comfortable, more privileged existence. For Revolutionary prisoners, class could be the line between life and death.

Imprisoned officers generally retained good health, but those in the prison ships did not have the same good fortune. Prison ships were not unique to Charleston. Their reputation preceded their use, and the British used their notoriety to recruit troops. Governor Rutledge believed the British separated enlisted men from their officers and used prison ships because it made it easier to get the enlisted men to “enter into the British Service, which some have done already, & many with[ou]t doubt will.”\textsuperscript{26} Yet the results were mixed. While Brigadier General William Moultrie reported that after being given the option to join the British or be put aboard prison ships, “for a few seconds the unhappy victims seemed stupefied at the dreadful prospect; a gloomy and universal silence prevailed…This was followed by a loud huzza for General Washington; death and the prison-ships was the unanimous determination.”\textsuperscript{27} Meanwhile, David Ramsey estimated that 530 Continental troops took the offer.\textsuperscript{28}

Prison ships were first instituted in New York in 1776; British leadership believed they offered a variety of benefits. Because by their nature prison ships were more secure, they

\textsuperscript{25} Stoesen, 78-79.
\textsuperscript{26} Borick, 5.
\textsuperscript{27} William Moultrie, \textit{Memoirs of the American Revolution, so far as it related to the States of North and South Carolina, and Georgia, Volume 1} (New York: David Longworth, 1802), 403.
\textsuperscript{28} Stoesen, 75.
required fewer guards. The ships also provided a purpose for naval ships at the end of their seaworthy lives. As such, most were in poor shape, and had been stripped of everything useful or comfortable. With even the hammocks removed, prisoners often had to sleep on the floor of the ship with no padding or blankets. As the war continued, prisoners were not supplied well with food or adequately clothed. When Benjamin Burch, who served in the Sixth Maryland, returned home after being held prisoner in Charleston, his wife described him as “without hat, Coat, Jacket, Stockings, or shoes,” wearing “only an old broken shirt & a pair of tattered & worn out short-breeches.”

These ships posed a severe threat to health. Generally unsanitary, they were not well ventilated, often filled with rats (which could carry typhus), and, because the prisoners lived in such close quarters, communicable disease, like smallpox, spread quickly. Because prisoners rarely received adequate food, many faced malnutrition; food smuggling was rare because of their isolation. Some prisoners were ill or wounded when they were put aboard, and these maladies worsened during the warm summer months.

Such conditions made prison ships deadly. In 1779, Moultrie described the conditions on prison ships in Savannah. Not only were prisoners poorly supplied, but, he writes, “our men die fast on board the prison-ships, are carried a-shore on the marsh, and buried so slightly as to be a horrid sight for those left alive, who see the buzzards picking the bones of their fellow soldiers.” Others reported that the dead were simply thrown overboard. In Charleston at least 150 prisoners died in September and October 1780, leading British leaders to observe that “the rebel Prisoners die faster, even than, they used to desert.”

Disputes about the reasons for high

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29 Borick, 20.
30 Moultrie, 369.
31 Borick, 6.
32 Ibid., 18.
mortality did not improve the situation. The commandant of Charleston, Lieutenant Colonel Nisber Blafor was aware of the high number of prison ship deaths. One study he ordered confirmed that the prisoners were indeed in poor health, but that finding was overruled by Dr. John McNamara Hayes, a surgeon and the inspector of the American hospital. He reported “that the ships were not overcrowded, that the environment onboard was “perfectly wholesome,” and that there was “no appearance of infectious disorder amongst the prisoners.””\textsuperscript{33}

Patriot leaders were concerned by this report, but they did not just blame Dr. Hayes for the continued health problems their troops faced. Moultrie held Balfour responsible. Dr. David Oliphant had been making reports to Moultrie about the health conditions present in the city. On November 14, 1780, he reported:

\textit{The mortality is great; by much the greater number of deaths happen to those patients from on board the prison-ships: within these three days, there is an appearance of a jail fever from the ship Concord; she has been a prison ship throughout the summer. No less than nine of the sick, sent from that ship, died in the space of 24 hours; all of them bear the appearance of a putrid malignant fever.}\textsuperscript{34}

While Oliphant wanted to do more to help the troops, he had been confined by the Board of Police in the city because of a conflict surrounding security for a debt, limiting his ability to treat prisoners. Moultrie contacted Balfour regarding the situation, and asked him to do what he could to keep prisoners healthy, writing “I must begin to by calling on your humanity, and request you, for God’s sake, to permit Dr. Oliphant to attend the hospital whenever he shall judge it necessary: and also beg you will order the prisoners from on board the Concord ship (where they are infected with jail fever) to some other vessels, if they cannot be permitted on shore.”\textsuperscript{35}

Balfour responded by referencing Moultrie’s “pathetic” letter, blaming Oliphant himself for

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Moultrie, 142.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 143.
much of the trouble and claiming that his absence had not been of much consequence. Balfour
told Moultrie that, although he had the *Concord* inspected and no problems were found with it,
the British still took all the troops off the ship and sent them to shore.\textsuperscript{36} This attitude could have
been influenced in part by the conflicting reports Balfour was receiving in regards to prison ship
conditions. These disagreements about the conditions and health aboard the prison ships
ultimately had the most impact on prisoners. Although Balfor did remove prisoners from the
*Concord*, the other prison ships in the harbor remained in use for the duration of the war.
Although prisoners were exchanged throughout the war, as fighting continued in South
Carolina’s backcountry, a steady stream of new prisoners came to the city to be housed. This
only increased the strain the city, and its cemeteries, were under.

Although most who died as a result of their time on Charleston’s prison ships were those
unfortunate enough to be housed on them, civilians who boarded to care for the sick and injured
faced the same dangers as the inmates. After two of her nephews were captured and brought to
Charleston, Elizabeth Jackson left her son Andrew, who was recovering from wounds he had
received at the hands of the British, to care for them. Like many of the prisoners she
encountered, Elizabeth became ill with what was described as “ship fever,” and died in June
1781.\textsuperscript{37} As a common, patriot woman from the Waxhaws, Elizabeth would have received a burial
similar to those of the enlisted soldiers, in a poorly marked or anonymous grave in a public city
lot. Like many other family members who lost loved ones in Charleston, when Andrew Jackson
attempted to find his mother’s grave following the war he was unable to.\textsuperscript{38} While civilians, like

\textsuperscript{36} *Ibid.*, 144-145.
\textsuperscript{37} Ship fever was most likely typhus.
\textsuperscript{38} Mark Renfred Cheathem, *Andrew Jackson, Southerner* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State
University Press, 2014), 19.
Elizabeth Jackson, were necessary for the care of soldiers aboard prison ships, in providing these essential services they voluntarily put themselves in a potentially fatal situation.

Regardless of the debates about the health and merits of the prison ships in Charleston harbor, many troops died on them. David Ramsay estimated “that eight hundred prisoners died in thirteen months of imprisonment.”\(^{39}\) Because Charleston occupies a peninsula, throwing bodies into the harbor or marshes, as reportedly happened in Savannah, was not an option because they would wash back into the rivers surrounding the city.\(^{40}\) As such, the dead were returned to the city for burial, putting pressure on already strained cemeteries. The city’s public cemetery had only been in use since 1768, but between the city’s normally high mortality rates and the large number of people who flooded into the city once the war started, the space was quickly used. On April 13, 1780, the Board of Police published a notice stating “The Ground heretofore allotted for the Interment of Strangers and transient Persons is filled.” To accommodate new burials, they ordered a new section of the city be used, which included land that had been used for burials in the past, which the Board of Police referred to as the “old Burying Ground.”\(^{41}\) While this space had the benefit of being located beside the barracks, where prisoners were staying at the time, because it had been used previously it was not a viable, long term solution for managing the city’s dead. This would be a challenge Charleston’s post war government would have to face.

Although the British occupation had the biggest impact on captured soldiers, it also challenged the city’s civilian population. Loyalists heralded the British return. On June 3, 1780,

\(^{39}\) Stoenson, 75.

\(^{40}\) This will be a problem for the city in the early nineteenth century, as it was a tactic of slave traders disposing of enslaved persons who died on their way to Charleston. The city will have to make laws against it. For more information, see chapter 2.

\(^{41}\) Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, 3.
less than a month after the town surrendered, 110 of the “principal and most respectable inhabitants of Charlestown” sent a memorial to Sir Henry Clinton congratulating him on bringing Royal government back to the city.\textsuperscript{42} Enslaved people from around the region flocked to the city, drawn by the hope that a British victory could bring their freedom. However, Charlestonian patriots were unsettled by reports of impending punishment or even imprisonment under British control. Those civilians who were arrested were not housed with military prisoners. As Moultrie described, “the place allotted to confine their prisoners, was a part of the cellar under the Exchange, and called the Provost; a damp, unwholesome place, which occasioned amongst the prisoners much sickness, and some deaths…The unfortunate citizens of Charleston, who would not take the British protection, on the slightest pretence were hurried away to the Provost.”\textsuperscript{43} This “slightest pretence,” he claimed, might be something as small as “to look at a British officer and smile.”\textsuperscript{44} Eliza Wilkinson, a young, upper class widow, was warned to be careful when she ventured out into the city. In a letter to her correspondent, Mary, she wrote, “I have also had a letter from Capt. ****; he advises me to take care whom I speak to, and not to be very saucy; for the two Miss Sarazens were put in the Provost, and very much insulted for some trifle or other.”\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{42} Stoenson, 73.
\textsuperscript{43} William Moultrie, \textit{Memoirs of the American Revolution, so far as it related to the States of North and South Carolina, and Georgia, Volume 2} (New York: David Longworth, 1802), 299-300.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., v. 2, 211.
\textsuperscript{45} Eliza Yonge Wilkinson, \textit{Letters of Eliza Wilkinson}, Caroline Gilman, ed. (New York: New York Times, 1969), 93. It is worth noting that in several letters Wilkinson discusses how she was, in fact, “very saucy” to a number of British officers; she began one of her letters by stating that she had “been to town, and seen all my friends and quarreled with my enemies.” (95) Her status as a young, attractive widow in whom several British officers expressed interest probably helped keep her out of some of the trouble others faced.
As time passed, the British only reinforced their control. As some Charlestonians continued to resist taking the loyalty oath, in May 1781 the town Commandant put all of them under house arrest, in his order stating that these people would “remain as Prisoners in their respective houses, and on no account, be found out of them, and all his Majestys Loyal Subjects are required to take notice hereof, and abstain from any connection with Persons under such predicament.”

Public celebrations were also regulated. Under British control, the city celebrated the King George III’s birthday by playing “God Save the King” on city church bells throughout the day. But, when American officers imprisoned at Haddrell’s Point and leading Charlestonians celebrated the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, their behavior was reported. Charleston’s British leadership clearly demonstrated that, while the city was under their control, they would regulate public celebrations and only allow those they supported to occur.

Along with attempting to control celebrations and Charlestonians’ personal interactions with British troops and officials, the British and their supporters also used the dead to promote their cause and control over the city. During British occupation the city paper, the Royal Gazette, focused on supporters of the British cause in its printed death notices. William Wragg, a South Carolina loyalist and former member of the colonial government, provides an example. As a vocal loyalist Wragg found himself confined to his plantation and, eventually, exiled to Europe. His death in Europe in a shipwreck in 1777 went unreported in Charleston while the paper was still under patriot control. Yet by 1780 the Gazette not only included a notice of Wragg’s death,

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46 Josiah Smith and Mabel L. Webber, “Josiah Smith’s Diary,” South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine, 33, no. 3 (July 1932), 204.  
47 Stoensson, 79.  
48 Edgar, 223.
noting that he died while trying to save his infant son, it also printed the text on a monument to
him erected in Westminster Abbey, which characterized him as having a “Love of Justice and
Humanity, [which] Form’d the compleat Character of A Good Man.” 49 Wragg was the first
American to have a memorial marker placed in Westminster Abbey. 50 For longsuffering South
Carolina loyalists, the treatment William Wragg enjoyed in his death would have been both
encouraging as a celebration of his loyalty to the King and his good character.

The paper noted that British officers, while strangers in the city, were afforded burials
that accorded with their social standing. On March 14, 1781 the Gazette reported on the death of
Lieutenant Cresswell, a member of the Royal Marines whose “remains were conducted to St.
Michael’s Church, and interred with the honours of war.” 51 Burial location was an interesting
detail for the editors to include; most death notices did not supply these details, but instead
focused on basic information, like the deceased’s identity and date of death. This omission was
not tied to class; in this period, very few people’s deaths were announced in the newspaper, and
those who did have a death notice tended to be of a higher status. Location also does not appear
to have been a factor. During the war, the Gabriel and Ann Manigault’s deaths were included in
the death notices with no place of burial given, but their grandson Gabriel’s letters show that
both were buried in their family’s vault in the churchyard of the “French church” (the French
Huguenot Church). 52 That Cresswell was buried in such a high status location, and that his death

49 Mabel L. Webber, “Death Notices from the South Carolina and American General
Gazette, and Its Continuation the Royal Gazette: May 1766-June 1782 (Continued),” The South
50 “Wragg, William,” The South Carolina Encyclopedia Guide to the American
Revolution in South Carolina, Walter Edgar, ed. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina
Press, 2006), 121-122.
51 Webber, 158.
52 Gabriel Manigault and Maruice A. Crouse, “Papers of Gabriel Manigault, 1771-1784,”
The South Carolina Historical Magazine, 64, no. 1 (January 1963): 11-12.
notice includes this information, may have been done to both reinforce the status of British officers, as well as their rightful place in the city’s social hierarchy.

American leaders did not receive this kind of treatment in the paper. While Colonel Isaac Hayne’s execution is one of the best known deaths in Charleston during the Revolution, his death receives no mention in the *Gazette*. Hayne was publicly executed August 4, 1781 after being captured fighting with American forces and found guilty of breaking his parole. Observers claimed that “thousands of anxious spectators” were present for the event. Following his death, Hayne’s son Isaac was allowed to collect his body and took him home for burial. A coffin had been specially prepared for the occasion, and was actually kept in Hayne’s cell as he awaited execution. Hayne’s son William Edward noted that “upon one side of the door of the room of his confinement a Hessian Soldier or Centinal on the [other] side a Coffin covered with Black Broad Cloth & lined with white.” Following his death, his lawyer, John Colcock noted that “much has been said of the manner in which many of the old Romans met Death – but I am convinced no Man, on so serious an occasion cou’d have exhibited more Heroick Fortitude & Christian Resignation, than the unfortunate Col. Hayne.” While he was remembered well by his family and friends, his name only appears in the death notices in conjunction with the fight in which he was captured. This notice mentions the death of British officers killed and wounded in the fight, and notes that Hayne was taken prisoner and was imprisoned at the Provost. The only record of his death was a news story that noted he had been “executed as a Traitor.”

56 Webber 159.
57 Bowen, 34.
Hayne’s posthumous treatment is not entirely surprising considering the nature of his death, it does bring several important points to light. Just as captured upper class patriots were given special treatment commensurate with their status, even as a member of the lowcountry elite found guilty of treason, Hayne also received some class based preferential treatment. Due to his social status and acquaintances, he was granted several stays of execution.\textsuperscript{58} Rather than being interred in a public burial space, Hayne’s family was allowed to collect his body and bury him respectfully with the rest of his family.\textsuperscript{59} Even after execution as a traitor, Hayne was given privileges the hundreds of men who died on prison ships and faced burial in the overcrowded public cemetery were not. In this case, class was more important than crime regarding posthumous treatment of the patriot dead.

One person excepted from the newspaper’s prohibition on patriot obituaries was Lieutenant Colonel John Laurens. A native of Charleston living in London, Laurens quickly returned to South Carolina when the war broke out. On August 27, 1782, he was killed in a skirmish with the British at Chehaw Neck over rice. Not only did the \textit{Gazette} acknowledge his death, the editors dedicated a large section of the death notice column to honoring him. The editors explained their decision to include such a lengthy description of the life of an opposing military leader because, they argued, his “single deviation from the path of rectitude” was his decision to fight in favor of independence, but otherwise they knew of “no one trait of his history which can tarnish his reputation as a man of honour, or affect his character as a gentleman.” He “condemned every oppressive measure adopted against the Loyalists, and always contended that

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Ibid.}, 32.
\textsuperscript{59} In Charleston’s history, those who were executed generally did not receive this right; while posthumous treatment was often commensurate with the crime, pirates were buried off the city battery, below the high tide line.
a steady and disinterested adherence to political tenets, though in opposition to his own, out to render their possessor an object of esteem rather than of persecution.” They argued that, “while we were thus marking the death of an enemy who was dangerous to our Cause from his abilities, we hope we shall stand excused for paying tribute, at the same time, to the moral excellencies of his character. –Happy would it be for the distressed families of those persons who are to leave this garrison with his Majesty’s troops, that another Laurens could be found.”60 Because Laurens had often been at odds with American leadership over the issue of the humane treatment of the British, he was apparently accorded these unusual honors by the editor.

As the first and only member of Washington’s staff to die during the war, Laurens was mourned throughout British North America.61 He was a close friend of Alexander Hamilton who believed that in Laurens’ death, America lost not only a military leader, but also a potential statesman and leader in an independent country. Yet even with all of Laurens’ posthumous honors and as a member of the lowcountry elite, in death he continued to be treated as a soldier. His military colleagues decided the fate of his personal belongings. His friend and fellow general Thaddeaus Kosciuszko recommended that his “clothing and linen should be distributed among his brother officers “as is the custom in Europe.” Kosciuszko also suggested that some of Laurens’ clothing should be given to the two slaves he had with him at his death who were in need of new clothes because “their skin can bear as well as ours good things.”62 Laurens was given a small military funeral rather than a large public one, and was interred at the Stock family plantation on the Combahee River, where his body remained until the 1820s. In his will, his

60 Webber, 163-164.
brother Harry stipulated he should be moved to Mepkin Plantation and be buried next to their father, Henry Laurens.  

Thus, even as the one seemingly acceptable American death to be mourned in Charleston, Laurens’ body never made it to the city, denying patriot supporters the opportunity for public display not only for Laurens himself, but for everyone else they had lost during the war who had gone unacknowledged for so long.

The ways death and burial were treated in British controlled Charleston was important for several reasons. During these years, Charlestonians not only had to face the traumas of war and occupation, but they were also denied the right to publicly mourn or remember those who had died supporting American independence. While common Charlestonians had to mourn their dead privately, they watched as the royalist controlled newspaper and city government celebrated the lives of those fighting for the opposing cause. These events also would have reinforced the social structure as it stood; even though Lieutenant Cresswell was a stranger to the city, as a British officer his status allowed him the privilege of being buried in St. Michael’s churchyard. At the same time, they were well aware that common, imprisoned American troops were anonymously buried in the city’s overfull public burial spaces.

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63 Massey, 235, 234. Interestingly, when Henry Laurens died in 1792 he stipulated that he be cremated at Mepkin, his plantation. He was, and his remains were then buried in the family cemetery.

64 Future events offer insight into what public mourning might have looked like. During the Civil War, following the return of Charleston’s dead from the first Battle of Bull Run, businesses around the city closed, three cavalry companies were sent to escort the bodies from the train station to City Hall, and the soldiers lay in state until their funeral. Although the social situation, technological advancements that allowed the easier return of bodies, and more unanimous support of white Charlestonians for the war made the situation surrounding the Civil War dead somewhat different than that of Revolutionary troops, it is still enlightening to see the lengths residents would go to for public mourning when they were not being restrained by another group. Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 154.
When the final British troops left Charleston in December 1782, after two and a half years of occupation, it was with the disappointment of failed plans and a lost war. Although the British believed that the siege and occupation of Charleston would be a key turning point to ensure their victory over their rebellious colonies, they were mistaken. Not only did their southern strategy for the war not go to plan, but Charlestonians, and many South Carolinians, were not as cooperative or willing to align themselves with the Crown as the British might have hoped. Many even contended that the occupation of Charleston created an opposite impact on the British war effort. The *Annual Register* argued that the failure of the British tactic in Charleston was evident as early as 1781, writing

> The loss of Charleston produced a directly contrary effect to that which might have been naturally expected. For instead of depressing and sinking the minds of the people to seek for security by any means, and to sue for peace upon any terms, the loss being now come home to every man’s feeling, and the danger to his door, they were at once awakened to a vigour of exertion scarcely to be expected in their circumstances… The very loss of Charleston became a ground of hope, and an incitement of vigour.\(^65\)

Eliza Wilkinson expressed similar sentiments when she wrote, “Do the Britons imagine that they will conquer America by such actions [of jailing civilians for criticism]? If they do, they will find themselves much mistaken. I will answer for that. We may be led, but we never will be driven!”\(^66\) These defiant attitudes followed many of Charleston’s patriots into the post-Revolutionary period.

The Revolution left a long legacy in Charleston. The years both before and during the war were filled with social unrest and upheaval. While the city’s upper class tried to maintain its power, even after some members were exiled for several years, others in the city believed that, regardless of their class position, their support for the Revolution should be rewarded, and the

\(^{65}\) Stoesen, 71.
\(^{66}\) Wilkinson, 94.
old order should be overthrown. Members of the upper class were certainly not interested in this mindset and as the city’s society adjusted to independence, the city’s elite fought to maintain as much of their previous power as possible.

The place of loyalists was contentious in the post-Revolutionary period. While 3,794 “British citizens and South Carolina Loyalists took advantage of the opportunity to quit Charleston with the British fleet,” many former loyalists who had been exiled hoped to return to the city and resume their previous lives as if nothing had happened. The city’s working class and artisans, many of whom had personally suffered through the years of occupation, resented this. With all these bad feelings and contests over leadership, Charleston’s new government had to work quickly to establish their authority and maintain peace. Addressing problems caused by the Revolution, including the overfilled cemeteries left behind by the years of occupation, provided one avenue for their efforts.

Another legacy of the Revolution was tied to emotion and memory. During the war years, supporters of the patriots were not given the opportunity for public mourning or memorialization, nor could they care for the bodies of their loved one in death. Due to the war and its constraints, many Charlestonians who died outside the city were not returned for burial. As time passed, Charlestonians did what they could to remember those lost in the Revolution. While St. Michael’s church granted permission to very few people who petitioned to place monuments on the church walls to lost family and friends, one exception they made was for Henry William DeSaussure. In August 1806 he was granted permission to erect a monument to the memory of his uncle, Louis DeSaussure; in his letter requesting this, he explained, “I had an Uncle who was an Officer in the American Army during the Revolutionary War. He was mortally Wounded in

67 Stoenson, 82.
the Assault on the British Lines at Savannah in the Year 1779, and he died of his wounds a few
days later….It has ever been my intention to express my affectionate respect for him by the
Erection of some Memorial…recording his fate.” On this occasion the vestry granted their
permission, “provided the concurrence of the owner of the Pew (over which the Marble may be
placed) can be obtained.” The pew owners consented, and the monument was erected, only the
third in the church. In the coming years the vestry received many more requests to erect
monuments, which they rejected; in one case they explained to the petitioners that, “The Walls of
the Temple, [vestry members] Conceive, Should be reserved for perpetuating the memory of
Public Characters of this State, or for the United States, or other very distinguished
Personages.”

Like St. Michael’s, other city churches also erected monuments to Revolutionary
heroes. St. Philip’s had monuments to General William Moultrie, Philip Neyle, and Major
Benjamin Huger. The scene created there was described as a “mausolea of heroes [where the]
latent spark of patriotism may be kindled.”

While DeSaussure’s monument illustrates one way Charlestonians memorialized the
Revolutionary dead in the Early Republic, it also further showed the impact of class on death
during the period. Due to the expense of having a tablet made, few Charlestonians would have
had the means to erect such a memorial. However, this memorial was made for someone who
had died outside of the city and been buried anonymously or in a lost grave. In his petition to the
vestry, Henry DeSaussure notes that his uncle’s body made it back to Charleston, and that he was

68 St. Michael’s Vestry Minutes, August 31, 1806. In the vestry minutes his name is
spelled “Lewis Desaussure,” but other sources, including a publication that notes the church
memorial, spells it as indicated in the text.
69 Beesley, 72.
70 St. Michael’s Vestry Minutes, June 25, 1810.
71 Maurie McInnis, The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston (Chapel Hill and New
buried in St. Michael’s churchyard. That DeSaussure could both be transported home for burial and be publicly memorialized inside a socially prestigious church, two things a common soldier would not have expected or received, demonstrates the way public memory skewed in favor of the upper class.

As Revolutionary leaders began dying of old age in the Early Republic period, newspapers commemorated the lives and deeds of influential men. John Rutledge, who served as the state’s governor during the Revolution, died in 1800. His City Gazette obituary highlights the increasing responsibility he bore throughout the war years and the success he had in carrying out these duties. “What could be done by any man for his country, invaded, distressed and over-run, was done for South-Carolina by her highly-favored son.”\(^{72}\) In November 1802 the state lost another former governor, John Mathews. Although Mathews served the state in a variety of ways throughout his life, the first section of his lengthy obituary was dedicated to his service in the Revolution, noting that he was one of the first “to resist the wrongs imposed on his country,” leading him to be appointed to be a delegate to the Continental Congress. Following the British invasion of South Carolina, he returned to the state to serve with General Greene, “assisting with his counsel.” Through his death, not only had the United States lost another member of the Revolutionary generation, but “South Carolina is deprived of one of her most deserving citizens, and his friends of a most agreeable and edifying associate.”\(^{73}\)

When General Christopher Gadsden died in August 1805, his obituary in the City Gazette not only highlighted his Revolutionary service, but also marked him out as a true patriot. Gadsden was not a latecomer to the Revolution, but rather “as early as the year 1765, he was

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\(^{72}\) City Gazette, July 24, 1800.
\(^{73}\) Carolina Gazette, November 4, 1802, page 3.
appointed a delegate to meet delegates from the other parts of the continent, at New York, to consult on measures to ward off the dangers that then threatened America” and in the years leading up to the war worked to draw others to “the righteous cause.” During the war he was taken prisoner and sent to St. Augustine, and following his return to Charleston after the war served in city government for many years. Gadsden’s obituary also recounted public acts of mourning and recognition throughout the city following his death. The commander of Fort Johnston had the fort’s colors hung in mourning and “fired a gun every ten minutes, from the morning of yesterday until the body was interred.” Ships in the harbor flew their flags at half-mast. Members of the artillery regimen he founded, officers from the city infantry, the state governor, city and federal government officials, “all the clergy of the city,” and his friends and neighbors processed with his body from his home to St. Philip’s for his funeral service and burial.74 Charleston’s Cincinnati and Revolution Societies also planned a joint ceremony with a funeral discourse to be held for Gadsden at St. Michael’s in September.75

Commemorative events were also held in Charleston for national Revolutionary leaders at their deaths. Following his death December 14, 1799, on January 4, 1800 Charleston’s American Revolution Society held a special meeting to arrange a memorial service for George Washington. They planned to hold a special “Oration” the following Friday, and called on members to commemorate Washington’s life and service “by wearing crape on the left arm for thirty days.” Members also decided that at the next formal meeting of the society, which was to be on Washington’s birthday, the would request Reverend Richard Furman, who was also a member of the group, to present a funeral sermon for Washington, at which “this Society do

74 City Gazette August 30, 1805.
75 City Gazette, September 1, 1805.
walk in solemn procession (with a band of Music, playing a *Funeral Dirge*) to attend the service.” Members were informed that the traditional meal they held for Washington’s birthday would not be held as it was incompatible with “the mournfulness of the occasion.” They also planned to invite members of the Society of the Cincinnati to all their events.76

In February the *Carolina Gazette* reported on the event. Not only did the Revolution Society and the Society of the Cincinnati hold a joint procession from City Hall to the Baptist Church where Revered Furman gave a funeral sermon, but “during the procession the bells of Saint Michael’s church, which were muffled, were tolled, and minute guns fired from Fort Mechanic.” The church was full for the service, and the ceremonies included a band and choir. Memorial activities occurred throughout the day; “The day was ushered in by a discharge of minute guns from Fort Johnson; respectfully observed by the shipping in the harbour, by hoisting their flags half mast; by the citizens at large, who shut up their stores and places of business; and was closed by a discharge of minute guns from Fort Moultrie.”77

The ceremonies and services Charlestonians held and the obituaries they wrote for Revolutionary leaders were meaningful ways for them to commemorate the life and death of local and national figures. While these memorialization efforts occurred on a local scale, through them Charlestonians were a part of a national movement. Throughout the United States cities and communities held similar memorial events, both for Washington and for their own local Revolutionary heroes. By participating in this larger national process, Charlestonians joined in the search for ways to appropriately remember the lives and service of the Revolutionary generation.

76 *South-Carolina State-Gazette*, January 11, 1800. In various articles the society is referred to as both the Society of the Cincinnati and the Cincinnati Society.
77 *Carolina Gazette*, February 27, 1800.
The importance of Charleston’s Revolutionary experience would have other far reaching consequences for the United States. Along with losing his mother during her service on the prison ships in Charleston harbor, both of Andrew Jackson’s brothers also died of diseases they caught while part of the Patriot war effort. While Jackson himself was fortunate enough to make it through the war alive, for the rest of his life he bore physical and psychological scars from his experiences with the British. This had long ranging consequences few could have assumed in the final years of the Revolution. For the rest of his life Jackson had a deep hatred for the British, and these feelings and experiences shaped his outlook as a general and a politician. 78

Later generations did not long remember the hardships Charlestonians faced during the war years, nor did they take the restrictions placed on the city by the British or the difficulties of dealing with the dead during a war when criticizing their forbearers. In 1850, in the published proceedings of the dedication of Magnolia Cemetery, Charleston’s rural cemetery located outside the city, Magnolia’s promoters were critical of the Revolutionary generation, stating that the bodies of many of the city’s Revolutionary heroes could not be found, and recommending that those whose burials were known should be transferred to Magnolia, where they would be treated with the respect they deserved, rather than face the public neglect and abandonment they had received. This view was unfair on several levels. The burial locations of many of Charleston’s upper class Revolutionary heroes were well known. By 1850, both Isaac Hayne and John Laurens were buried on their family plantations. Along with Louis DeSaussure, many Charlestonians who were prominent in the Revolutionary era were interred in St. Michael’s churchyard. In his 1908 guide to the church, Charles Beesley notes that the Revolutionary

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governor of South Carolina, John Rutledge, was buried at St. Michaels, as was Major General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and Major General Mordecai Gist. Magnolia’s promoters also ignored the experiences of Charleston’s citizens during the war. Many would have been happy to bury their Revolutionary dead with honors, but because of British occupation unfriendly to patriot celebrations, the inability to transport bodies easily, the financial troubles many faced, and the shortage of burial space, it was not possible. It is, of course, important to remember that Magnolia’s published material was promotional, so any claims they made would have been in the interest of attracting new customers, as chapter five will explain, Magnolia’s Board of Directors was also interested in raising the cemetery’s status. As such, they most likely would have been far less interested in the bodies of common soldiers than those of officers and leaders. While during the war years higher class individuals received the best treatment in life and in death, seventy years later their bodies were still seen as the most desirable.

Ultimately, the Revolutionary War accelerated the challenges Charleston was beginning to face with providing adequate burial spaces for city residents. In the newly independent city, in their attempt to restore order and establish their legitimacy, Charleston’s new city government took up the cause of better cemetery regulation.

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79 Beesley, 71.
Chapter Two: “It appears that no place has been hitherto set apart:” Burial, Laws, and the Challenges of Independence

The years following the American Revolution were ones of change for Charleston. While salutary neglect and the city’s position as the colonial seat of South Carolina’s government had given Charlestonians practical governing experience in the years prior to the Revolution, life in an independent nation would prove different and sometimes difficult for residents. As Charleston’s City Council worked to establish their authority and manage various challenges, one major legislative issue to be addressed was the city’s public burial situation. Burial was not only viewed as official government business; members of Charleston’s free African American elite also had an interest in providing alternate burial opportunities for their own community. In the post Revolutionary period, burial regulation presented one avenue for city government to establish its authority, address longstanding problems, like disease and special limitations, and illustrate the general uncertainties Charlestonians felt in regards to class and race.

When British troops finally left Charleston December 14, 1782, Charlestonians were ready for life to return to normal. For the city’s upper class, this meant regaining their social and political power within both the city and state, and creating an independent society aligned with their interests. It quickly became apparent that this goal would not go unchallenged by other residents. In Charleston and South Carolina as a whole, many from the lower and middle classes who heard the Revolutionary rhetoric of liberty and freedom and had been involved in the fight for independence hoped to claim their place within the new country as equal citizens with a legitimate right to express their opinions and have a say in these formative years. This was something the state’s lowcountry elite neither expected nor welcomed. In the coming years, they
would work to maintain as much power and influence as possible while allowing others the bare minimum of self-determination that would satisfy their desires for equality.\(^80\)

These power struggles played out in Charleston’s city government. After the Revolution, those who suffered through occupation as dedicated Patriots resented the ease with which upper class loyalists and British merchants returned to lowcountry life. This opposition led to a variety of protests, including street demonstrations and several murders. To address these problems, in August of 1783 Charleston incorporated. City governance was placed in local hands, the city was divided into thirteen wards, and its name was changed from Charles Town to the modern spelling. City and state leaders hoped that local control would help bring some peace to the city. Even though two artisans gained seats on the City Council, because the majority of power remained in the hands of the elites, protests continued. These post-incorporation disputes included at least one case of arson, and the formation of the Marine Anti-Britannic Society. Led by aggrieved merchants and artisans, members of the society published tracts to voice their disapproval of issues such as the state of town governance and power structure and to make Loyalists feel unwelcome. In 1784 new city elections were held to settle these issues. A leading artisan, Alexander Gillon stood for the position of City Intendant against the upper-class incumbent, Richard Hutson. Because a number of lowcountry planters who were not permanent residents of the city were eligible to vote in the election, the incumbent Hutson won over Gillon. Following the 1784 elections, “the city’s laboring class believed that at both city and state level “a few ambitious, avaricious, and designing families” have “wriggle[ed] themselves into

Power in Charleston ultimately remained in the hands of the upper class, but this grasp on power was tenuous in the years after the Revolution. Similarly, Charlestonians faced challenges to their power on the state level during this period. In 1786 the state’s capital was moved from Charleston to the more centrally located Columbia. While once again the lowcountry elite would continue to hold the bulk of political power in the state for the decades to come, they again had to reconsider their position. That they had been challenged in these areas was a surprise to many, and would be an impetus for the gradual crystallization of the upper class.

As Charleston’s City Council faced questions about what they believed was their legitimate claim to power, they turned to new regulations impacting burial grounds as a unique opportunity to solidify their power. Through the regulation of cemeteries, Council members created a system that privileged those who were currently of a high social rank while continuing the position of those more marginalized Charlestonians, even into their death. Throughout the period of Revolutionary occupation, the growing number of dead in Charleston was at the forefront of many residents’ minds, and following the war the City Council had a chance to step in and address these problems in the manner which they saw fit.

In 1784 the city took one of its first steps in regulating burial in the city by requiring that between April 1 and October 1 all burials had to take place before 6:00 pm. The concern here might have been that the night air could spread disease, or, because disease was most prominent

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during this time of the year, that the city government wanted to be actively aware of local deaths in hopes of catching a potential epidemic in its early stage.\textsuperscript{82}

This regulation could also have been intended to regulate the behavior of Charleston’s large African and African American population. In many parts of Africa funerals traditionally took place at night. This practice was broadly transplanted to the Americas through the Atlantic slave trade, and many owners allowed their slaves to continue this custom. As the years passed, though, white Southerners became concerned about potential slave insurrections and believed that events like evening funerals, when large numbers of slaves were gathered with limited white supervision, could be a time used to plan them. If Charleston instituted these time restrictions as a way to limit slaves meeting in groups, it would be in line with a 1772 New York City law that restricted slave funerals to daytime hours and specified that only ten people could attend the wakes of enslaved people. Gabriel’s Rebellion in Richmond, Virginia 1800 would create further links in the minds of many whites between funerals and uprisings as it was reported that Gabriel used an infant’s funeral as one of the meetings to organize his planned revolt. Interestingly, in two sets of cemetery regulations passed after Gabriel’s Rebellion, Charleston not only retained the daylight hour provision for burials but also extended the restriction to last all year.\textsuperscript{83}

Most major burial reforms were not taken up until the 1790s. Along with social unrest related to the war and the governing class, in the 1780s Charleston, as well as the rest of South Carolina, faced an economic depression. As a city focused on trade in a region dependent on agriculture, poor crop yields had far reaching consequences for Charlestonians and lowcountry

\textsuperscript{82} Michael Trinkley, Debi Hacker, and Nicole Southerland, \textit{Silence of the Dead: Giving Charleston Cemeteries a Voice} (Columbia, SC: Chicora Foundation, 2010), 4.

residents. Rice, one of the region’s major crops, experienced such a downturn in the period. Between 1773 and 1785, rice exports decreased by more than 60%. Because this was prior to the cotton boom, many South Carolinians were limited in the crops they could fall back on. The restrictions placed on the international slave trade starting in 1787 also cut off access to what had been a lucrative trade in the city. South Carolinians also struggled to gain access to currency. Prior to the war, trade with the British West Indies had been the primary source of hard currency, but following post Revolutionary trade restrictions, that avenue was cut off. These challenges, coupled with low tax returns throughout the state, made finance rather than funerals a far more pressing concern for many Charlestonians.84

The 1780s also presented new social challenges for the city. Immigration continued to bring both those who were migrating internally as well as new groups of European immigrants. With this population increase, space, which was always a concern for a city on a peninsula, was increasingly at a premium. In a decade in which the city faced so many economic challenges, many of these new residents found employment to be a difficult thing to come by, and joined the city’s impoverished population. Immigrants also suffered disproportionately from diseases. Those who could survive their first several years in the city were considered to be seasoned, and afterwards had better disease resistance. This increasing population and their susceptibility to disease only contributed to the cemetery and space issues the city would have to address. Because many of these immigrants were poor and newly moved to the city, they would be buried in the city’s already crowded burial space.

While the 1780s were not high times for the city of Charleston, at their outset the 1790s looked to be years of increasing prosperity. Throughout the decade new denominations moved

84 Edgar, 246.
into the city, and many groups were incorporating, including the new Catholic Church. While Catholicism had been legally banned in the colonial period, Charleston’s new Catholic residents would soon develop into a flourishing community. The College of Charleston began accepting students, and other civic organizations, like the Charleston Orphan House, opened. 

Demographically, Charleston also had a growing and diverse population; in the first federal census, conducted in 1790, the city had 8,089 white and 8,831 black residents, maintaining its position as the fourth most populated city in the United States.85

With the calm of the early 1790s, the city was finally able to more fully address the many problems burial grounds faced as a result of population growth and high rates of disease. In 1792 the city purchased land outside the city, lying directly above Boundary Street, for a new public cemetery as “a burying place for strangers and negroes.”86 This would not prove to be an optimal location; while outside the city at the time it was purchased, the rapid expansion that was occurring up the peninsula would quickly make this area increasingly desirable for use by the living. Even with this new purchase, the years of neglect cemeteries in the city had faced would not be fixed by simply adding another burial lot; many still did not consider this addition adequate to meet the city’s needs. Just a year later, in 1793, the city’s Intendant and Wardens petitioned the General Assembly requesting the authorization of a new burial lot. They suggested the city consider using land that formerly belonged to the General Baptist congregation and had escheated to the state. This suggestion obviously did not get much traction, because in 1796 they made the same request. 87

85 Fraser, 178-179. Numbers were far more racially skewed outside of the city; Charleston County had a population of 11,801 white and 34,846 black residents.
86 Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, 4; people who were white and not residents of the city were classified as strangers.
87 Ibid.
Some free people of color in Charleston took their opportunity in the 1790s to address the need for burial space themselves. Charleston’s free black population was relatively small; according to the city’s 1790 census, 586 Charlestonians, or about 3.5 percent of the total population, were free African Americans. On November 1, 1790, five wealthy men from this community joined together to form the Brown Fellowship Society. These founders were all members of St. Philip’s Episcopal Church; while they could participate in many aspects of membership and church life, which included baptism and marriage, because of their race they were not allowed burial in the church cemetery. The Brown Fellowship Society would be an elite institution. Membership was limited to fifty free men. Along with regular dues, members had to pay a $50 fee to join, something most Charlestonians, regardless of their race, would find outside of their financial means.  

As with many African American mutual aid societies, the Brown Fellowship Society offered a variety of benefits to its members. While this included help for members who were ill and financial assistance to their widows and orphans, the Society also provided death benefits to its members. On October 12, 1794, the Society purchased land near the city’s northern boundary to be used as a burial ground for both its membership and the black community at large. For members, the society was obligated to provide a funeral if a deceased member was unable to fund one through his estate, and members and their immediate families could be buried in the Society’s plot for free. Society members were not only obligated to attend members’ funerals,

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but also to wear a black arm band on their left arm in honor of the member they lost. The burial ground, and the Society’s burial services, were open to others in the community, as well. Subscribers to the organization could be buried in the Society’s lot for $1, and non-subscribers could be buried for $10. For an additional $4 fee the Society would provide other funerary necessities, like a horse and hearse. The only requirements for interment in the Brown Fellowship Society’s burial ground were that the deceased was baptized and that all fees were paid.89

Even though these requirements technically made the Brown Fellowship Society’s cemetery accessible to Charlestonians regardless of their race or condition of servitude, they were in fact very limiting. Most of the city’s African and African American population was ineligible for membership in the society based on their status as enslaved people or their financial situation. However, even the options available for those who could not be members of the Brown Fellowship Society posed financial challenges. To be a supporter of the organization entailed a financial commitment, and a $10 burial fee was beyond the means of most Charlestonians. For wealthy free black Charlestonians, who occupied a liminal space within the city, this separate burial lot allowed them a space to set themselves apart and establish their own identity even in death. While they were wealthy, generally well respected, attended a prestigious church, and many had familial connections to Charleston’s white elite, because of their race these free Charlestonians were limited throughout their lives in what they could do and accomplish in the city. Without the Society’s burial lot, in death they would have faced being relegated to the city’s public lots. By creating their own cemetery, for Brown Fellowship Society

members and those who could afford to be buried there, the cemetery allowed them a space to control their post-death experience, and set themselves apart from the broader African American community.

While most African Americans in Charleston would not be able to be buried in the Brown Fellowship Society lot, burial space for people of color was a real point of concern during this period. In 1798, eleven of the city’s religious bodies requested that the city purchase land for the burial of those who were strangers to the city or without religious affiliation, as well as purchase a space for black Charlestonians. The City Council supported this recommendation and also noted, “It appears that no place has been hitherto set apart for the burial of negroes, other people of colour, and slaves.” This statement is surprising because the city already had a burial ground for African and African American residents. Opened in 1746, the Negro Burial Ground was supposed to provide burial space for black Charlestonians in perpetuity. This burial ground was presumably used for many years, and was referenced in a 1784 Act of Assembly which gave the city ownership of “such parts of the Negro Burial Ground as is public property.” However, not only did these religious bodies seem unaware of this burial space in 1798, but in 1799 in a study of city owned property the Committee on City Lands found that, based on the descriptions given in the 1746 act, they could not identify where exactly this cemetery was located. While it seems strange that between 1746 and 1799 a working cemetery could be lost, that this confusion could occur in a fourteen year span is all the more remarkable.

While at its outset the 1790s appeared to be a decade of promise, by 1800 the situation in the city showed that this had not necessarily been the case. For years residents of the

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90 Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, 4.
91 Ibid., 5.
92 Ibid., 3.
backcountry fought to gain more influence and control in the state, and referenced the lowcountry’s declining population and unhealthy climate as a reason that power should be shared. While lowcountry leaders were offended by these assertions, much to their concern the 1800 census proved some of these previous arguments about the sectional population differences to be true. Between 1790-1800, the low country only gained 4,800 new white inhabitants, while the backcountry saw a gain of 42,000 new white residents. For Charleston these race based population changes were even starker. While the city as a whole added approximately two thousand new residents over the decade, only 731 of them were white. In 1800, Charleston had 10,104 black and 8,820 white residents. The city was also losing its place nationally, dropping to the fifth most populous city in the country.\textsuperscript{93} The lowcountry’s comparatively limited population gains only added to the overall concern many had in regards to the general health and wellbeing of Charleston, and were subjects city and lowcountry leaders sought to address. Because Charleston’s public health and sanitation levels left much to be desired, the city’s first Board of Health was formed in 1796 and tasked with identifying and providing solutions for public health problems. In the new century increased measures, which included burial ground regulation, would be needed.\textsuperscript{94}

In order to better account for deaths in the city, in 1800 regulations required the City Marshall to visit the cemeteries within the city limits daily between July 1 and October 31 and, after talking to the sexton or caretaker, make a report of the burials that had taken place. This regulatory theme continued with an ordinance approved by the City Council July 2, 1801 addressing the city’s public burial ground opened in 1792. The City Council was to elect a

\textsuperscript{93} Fraser, 186.
\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Ibid.}, 184.
superintendent for the “City Burial Grounds,” who would “keep the keys, and have charge of the said burial ground, and under whose superintendence and privy, the same shall, from time to time, be opened and internments made as hereinafter directed.” ¹⁹⁵ As such, the superintendent’s interactions with burials was also stipulated. He was to be the only person to open graves in the cemetery, and burials were only to occur between sunrise and sunset, an apparent expansion of the previous law limiting burial times in the warmer months. This ordinance also outlined the fees he was allowed to charge for his services. While the superintendent was to bury anyone sent over from the Orphanage or Poor House for free, the charge for burying strangers, mariners, and seamen was $2. The cost for slave burials was based on height; for adult slaves over four feet six inches the burial fee was $1.25 while for slaves below that height the fee was $1. Burial for all free people of color, regardless of height, was $1.25. Along with burial fees, the superintendent also charged for a variety of other services. Cemetery visitations cost 6 ¼ ¢, as did the registration of an interment and any requests to examine the cemetery’s record books; city officials were exempt from visitation fees and charges to view the books. If friends and family of the deceased wished to erect a monument in the cemetery, the cost was 25¢ for a wooden monument and $1.50 for a monument made of anything other than wood. Finally, if anyone needed a certificate from the superintendent’s books, it would cost 25¢. ¹⁹⁶

This ordinance also regulated the segregation of the city’s public burial grounds. An acre was to be set aside and fenced for the burials of white Charlestonians and strangers while the larger remaining section of the cemetery was reserved for the burial of “slaves, and people of

¹⁹⁵ Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, 4.
These divided sections for the cemetery were often referred to as two cemeteries, and the superintendent was responsible for keeping a separate record book for each of the cemetery’s sections. With this stipulation and the necessity of building new fences and partitions, it appears that the cemetery had not been as rigorously segregated in the past. As Charleston’s African and African American population was growing and some residents had increased concerns with the reopening of the international slave trade, it is reasonable that city leaders would work to solidify the city’s racial order whenever possible.

In a June 1802 ordinance titled “An Ordinance to amend an Ordinance, entitled “An Ordinance for the better regulation of the Public City Burial Ground,”” the City Council re-set the fee schedule for burials in the public lot as previous fees had “been found to be too exorbitant.” Under this new scheme, the superintendent was allowed to charge $1 per burial for a stranger, mariner, or seaman, while burial for a person of color, regardless of his or her height or condition of servitude, cost 75¢. The erection of a wooden monument over a grave still cost 25¢, but the fee for anything other than wood was lowered to $1.00. While the costs for most clerical fees remained the same, the cost for a certificate was lowered to 12 ½ ¢. All clerical fees, as well as the visitation fee, would be waived for City Officers.

In establishing these rules, the City Council was finally working to regulate a space that, while very necessary, appears to have been poorly managed over its first nine years of existence. Instructions in the ordinance, like the necessity of leveling parts of the ground, imply that cemetery had been in use since it was purchased. With the concern city residents showed for additional burial space, it is unlikely that any land set apart for a cemetery would lie unused. It is

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97 Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, 4.
99 Ibid., 243.
also very surprising that until this point the cemetery had not been formally segregated. An explanation could be that, even though this cemetery was initially purchased by the city, because it lay outside of its boundaries, the ability of city government to regulate its use was limited. As Charleston expanded, it may have formally come under the City Council’s control, allowing for this new ordinance.

With its notorious reputation as an unhealthy place, public health was constantly on the minds of many Charlestonians. Charleston’s physicians, the Medical Society of South Carolina and the city Board of Health worked to attend to health threats as they occurred, as well as anticipate potential problems. Along with the increasing watch city officials kept on Charleston’s cemeteries, the city also established a series of lazarettos in the surrounding areas in order to quarantine immigrants lest they have any contagious diseases. In 1804, the Board of Health was challenged when a hurricane hit the city, causing large scale flooding, which impacted the city’s drinking water, and contributed to an increase in disease. In its response, the Board of Health tried to address the challenges posed by low areas and standing water, something the city constantly struggled with. They required quick lime to be put in privies monthly and in coffins prior to burial. This link between water, cemeteries, and the potential spread of disease would continue to be a major argument for some Charlestonians in the future regarding cemetery regulation.100

The constant concern over public health did not mean that some Charlestonians were not open to new, and sometimes counterintuitive, ideas in regards to the spread of disease and health of the city. In 1799, the Medical Society of South Carolina took the position that yellow fever was not contagious. Many people in this period believed that yellow fever epidemics were often

100 Fraser, 189.
introduced to areas by people entering the city, like immigrants and slaves, necessitating measures like quarantines. Charleston’s physicians were not unique in this theory; led by Benjamin Rush in Philadelphia, in the 1790s doctors throughout the United States were beginning to believe that yellow fever was of domestic rather than foreign origin, and therefore was not introduced by travelers. While many remained unconvinced by these new arguments, interestingly the Medical Society decision occurred around the same time others in the state were discussing reopening the international slave trade, something that would provide a useful argument to its supporters.  

Slavery and the slave trade had been a contentious issue in South Carolina since the end of the Revolutionary War. While the closure of the international slave trade was initially intended as a three-year moratorium between 1787 and 1790, it would be repeatedly extended. The outbreak of the Haitian Revolution also concerned many South Carolinians, especially the white minority in the lowcountry. Many planters were sympathetic to the plight of white Haitians, some of whom settled in Charleston. To address broader fears of black Haitians inspiring ideas of rebellion in American slaves, South Carolina passed special measures to restrict Haitians of African descent from entering the state. The state’s financial difficulties also contributed to restriction of the slave trade, much to the dismay of backcountry slaveholders. Lowcountry leaders, who still held the majority of power in the state, believed that the

102 James Alexander Dun, Dangerous Neighbors: Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 69-70. These concerns lead to arrests of people believed to be acting suspiciously. One group captured in Charleston was accused of being French agents transporting information to them, turned out to be a woman who was pregnant by a prominent Charlestonian, her brother, and several of her slaves. The “mysterious documents” they were found to be carrying were just financial records.
opportunity to purchase new slaves would be far too tempting for lowcountry debtors, who would be unable to help themselves and be driven deeper into debt in their desire to expand their chattel holdings. These concerns overrode the wishes of backcountry residents who hoped to purchase slaves, much to their frustration.103

Even with the support slavery had in the backcountry between local leaders who were slaveholders and those who wished to join that class, there were some influential groups in the area that opposed the system. A number of backcountry churches were preaching antislavery messages and supported antislavery positions. In 1784 the Methodist General Convention stated that owning slaves was a serious enough offence for a member to be removed from the church, and in 1800 told clergy to sell all of their slaves.104 While this prohibition was dropped by 1805, these ideas and attitudes were extremely concerning to lowcountry leaders who already felt threatened by those in the backcountry they believed were infringing on their power.

While ultimately it seems that the Medical Society of South Carolina’s beliefs about the transmission of yellow fever were held in good faith, this will be an encouraging idea for those across South Carolina who wanted to reopen the slave trade.105 Through a combination of factors, including pressure from the backcountry and the potential profit to be made from doing business with the new Louisiana Purchase territory, the international slave trade was reopened in South Carolina in late 1803.106 Between 1804 and 1808, forty thousand enslaved people passed

103 Edgar, 247.
104 Ibid., 258-259.
105 While Smith does make some solid arguments about why reopening the slave trade potentially could have been a very good thing for Dr. David Ramsay, one of the leaders of Charleston’s medical community, he cannot find evidence to support the idea that personal financial gain would have been the reason for his theories on yellow fever.
106 Michael E. Stevens, ““To Get as Many Slaves as You Can”: An 1807 Slaving Voyage,” The South Carolina Historical Magazine, 87, no. 3 (July 1986): 187.
through Charleston’s harbor as a part of the trade. Because of the process of transshipment many slave traders used, few of these people even left their ships in Charleston, and most were sent directly to their final destinations. By 1810, only eleven thousand slaves in South Carolina had come to the state through any means but natural increase, meaning that only about a quarter of slaves that passed through Charleston as part of the international slave trade entered the state.\(^{107}\)

The presence of so many slaves, even if ultimately they moved on to other places, affected local death rates. In 1805 a new ordinance made it illegal for human bodies to be thrown into the waterways around the city.\(^{108}\) This directly related to the reopened slave trade. The combination of a booming business, Charleston as a main entry point for enslaved people on their way in to the United States, and poor treatment and unsanitary conditions led to the deaths of many slaves. Once they reached Charleston, many slaves stayed onboard their ships, which were notoriously unhealthy. If they were to be sold in the city, slaves were held in a ten-day quarantine on James Island; those judged healthy after their time in quarantine were then returned to their ships and taken into the city. Prior to their sale, they were housed in cramped, unsanitary buildings with other enslaved people on Gadsden’s Warf. While these conditions would have been challenging for anyone, for many of these new slaves it provided the perfect storm of disease and exposure.

As enslaved Africans moved within Africa to port cities and then on to the Americas, they encountered a variety of new diseases. Africans faced the most risk when they finally arrived in Charleston. In the cramped slave ships and buildings on Gadsden’s Warf, enslaved people shared close quarters with people from across the African continent, as well as a variety of diseases.

\(^{107}\) Smith, 42, 46, 54-55.
\(^{108}\) Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, 5.
of sailors, dockworkers, townspeople, and others. The new diseases they encountered, combined with the hardships they experienced crossing the Atlantic, led to many deaths.

By 1805, city ordinances stipulated burial fees for each enslaved person to be interred in the city burial ground. As slavers were often far more interested in the profit that could be made from selling their human cargo than in losing any more money by having to pay for their burials, many took to dumping the bodies in various lots around the city and the surrounding marshes and waterways. At one point “so many bodies were thrown into the Cooper River that Charleston residents stopped eating fish for several months.” The November 1805 ordinance attempted to stop this practice, banning anyone from throwing “any human body or bodies, into any of the rivers, creeks or marshes, within the harbor of the city.” If a person was caught disposing of a body in this way they would be fined $100, their name would be published in city newspapers, and the fine collected would go to the person who reported the illegal activity.

While the new ordinance did help keep bodies out of local waters, it did nothing to preserve the lives of enslaved people being brought into Charleston. As the date for the end international slave trade drew nearer, slave traders made one final push, bringing a larger number of enslaved people into the city than they could sell at that time, and ending up with people who needed much longer care prior to their sale. As such, these slaves faced a high mortality rate. John Lambert, a British visitor to Charleston, was in the city two weeks after the international slave trade ended. He observed “close confinement, scanty clothing, sharp weather, and improper food created a variety of disorders; which, together with dysentery and some contagious diseases

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110 George B. Eckhard, *A Digest of the Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston the Year 1783 to October 1844* (Charleston, SC: Walker and Burke, 1844), 129.
to which the Negroes are subject, considerably increased the mortality. Upwards of 700 died in less than three months and carpenters were daily employed in making shells for the dead bodies.”

One trader reportedly paid $54 total for the burial of nine slaves who died in the city.\textsuperscript{111}

After years of concern about space, the City Council decided the burial ground that opened in 1792 would close on August 1, 1808, and a new lot would open in the city’s Cannonborough district, on the west side of the Charleston peninsula.\textsuperscript{112} While previous public cemeteries had been regulated in hindsight, in June 1807, “An Ordinance to Regulate Interments on the City Burial Ground” was passed, establishing the structure for the new cemetery. As in the 1801 ordinance, the superintendent was responsible for the cemetery’s upkeep, for segregating the burial areas, and for maintaining books for each section. Burials were again restricted to daylight hours. However, a number of significant changes came with this new cemetery and its regulation. While the 1801 ordinance began by establishing the roll of the superintendent, the 1807 ordinance first regulated the qualified burial spaces within the city, stating “that neither the Superintendent of the City Burial Ground, nor any other person or persons whatsoever, shall make or cause to suffer to be made, any interment or interments in any part of the city, except the cemeteries attached to and owned by the different religious congregations or societies.”\textsuperscript{113} Those who attempted to bury a person outside of Charleston’s defined burial spaces were subject to fines if they were free people or to time and lashings at the Work House if they were enslaved, reinforcing the goal of the 1805 ordinance.

\textsuperscript{111} McMillin, 110 – 113.
\textsuperscript{112} Cannonborough is labeled on Figure 1. The land that constituted this cemetery was built over and is now part of the Medical University of South Carolina’s campus. Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, 164.
\textsuperscript{113} Eckard, 126.
In this new cemetery, the city addressed the problem of space by requiring that the superintendent keep “the ground economized as much as possible.” He was also instructed to make sure that graves were dug at least five and a half feet deep. While previously the superintendent was responsible for opening all graves, in Cannonborough he was given the assistance of two gravediggers, probably to help meet the demands of a busy city while staying within the time requirements for burials set forth by the City Council.

The fee schedule for burials in this new cemetery also changed, making the position slightly less lucrative. The superintendent received $1.06 ¼ for white burials and 81 ½ ¢ per burial of a “negro or person of color.” He was also instructed to bury anyone sent by the Poor House, Orphan House, and Marine Hospital at no charge. In 1809, the rate for Africans and African Americans was raised to $1.114 While in the previous cemetery the burial of anyone who died outside Charleston’s city limits was prohibited, in the Cannonborough cemetery the superintendent was authorized to allow burials of those who died outside of Charleston for an additional $2 fee on top of other burial charges. It appears that, at least in its initial years, the City Council was optimistic about the amount of space available in the new city cemetery. Monuments would also be allowed in the new cemetery at the same prices as in the old cemetery.

In 1809 the superintendent’s powers were further extended, giving him the right to refuse the burial of any body brought to the cemetery except those from the Poor House, Orphan House, or Marine Hospital.

In Cannonborough the superintendent also faced more supervision and government regulation. The City Marshall was required to visit once a week, and the City Council could visit at any time. While the superintendent was still an elected position, he was required to post a six

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114 Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, 6.
hundred dollar bond “for the due and just performance of the duties of his office” and swear an oath that he would do his duties as required. Even after this bonding process, the ordinance stipulated that if a burial did not take place within four hours of the paperwork being filled out and the burial being paid for, the superintendent could be fined $20 per offense.\textsuperscript{115} In considering these service regulations and requirements, it makes sense that in the Cannonborough cemetery the superintendent was required to live on the premises and was given two acres of land for his personal use.\textsuperscript{116}

The City Council’s optimism in the space they set aside for the Cannonborough cemetery and the space economizing measures they put in place were well founded. While the previous public burial ground was only in use for sixteen years, the Cannonborough lot would be used until 1841.

The post Revolutionary and Early Republic years were ones of transition for Charleston. After feeling confident of their place in the new order, the upper class found that the power they expected to continue to wield in the new country would be challenged on all sides. From backcountry pushback, their inability to build the new nation into the aristocratic republic they desired, to desire for increased middle class power, elite Charlestonians and lowcountry leaders found themselves in an unexpected post Revolutionary position.

City ordinances and regulations provided a means for Charleston’s governing class to exert control socially and regulate public behavior. Burial regulations, especially during the Early Republic period, illustrate issues the city was facing at the time and the way upper class Charlestonians used cemeteries to reinforce social structure. White Charlestonians in good

\textsuperscript{115} Eckard, 126, 128-129.
\textsuperscript{116} Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, 5.
financial positions could posthumously maintain their status by being buried with their religious community, lower class and non-religious whites, as well as Africans and African Americans only had the option of burial in the city’s public cemetery. Not only were many buried with no monument or memorial to mark their resting place, but with a visitation fee, many might not even have friends and family visit their graves in later years. With the closure of the 1792 public cemetery, city ordinances make no mention of what was to happen to the former cemetery and monuments; in the space hungry city it was quickly reused or redeveloped. In the 1920s, while reminiscing on his childhood, one Charlestonian recalled

The old Vardell house stood near the corner of Vanderhorst and Coming streets and was built for himself by my grandfather Vardell, being the first house erected on the square now bounded by Vanderhorst, St. Philip’s, Coming and Boundary (Calhoun) streets…The house was built on the site of the old city Potter’s field and the bones of many British soldiers were buried there. I remember that one of my childish amusements was to dig for these bones.\textsuperscript{117}

Charlestonians who would be buried in these public lots would know that a future of anonymity awaited them while upper class residents could rest with the knowledge that through their church burials their memories would live on.

One group, the elite free blacks who formed the Brown Fellowship Society, found their own way to circumvent this situation. Occupying a liminal space in Charleston’s community, in death they found a way to create a separate place for themselves and their community. Exclusionary in nature, this cemetery set them apart from enslaved and poorer members of Charleston’s African and African American community. In 1843 the Brown Fellowship Society would be joined by the Humane Brotherhood, another mutual aid society for free people of color who would have their own cemetery adjoining the Brown Fellowship Society’s lot.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 220.
While the bulk of the Charleston City Council’s burial ground regulation occurred in the post Revolutionary and Early Republic periods, a slow down in regulation did not mean that challenges related to burials in the city ended. While, for the time being, city burial space and regulations were functioning fairly well, churches and religious bodies would have their own burial concerns to manage and address.
As the capital city of an economic colony, Charleston was religiously diverse from early in its history, and served as a refuge for groups unwelcome in Europe, like French Huguenots and Jews. Catholics were the only major Christian group not allowed in colonial Charleston; following the Revolution, they quickly developed a thriving community. By 1798 the city had a variety of religious bodies, including two Episcopal churches (St. Philip’s, the colony’s first, and St. Michael’s), the Independent church (which will become the Circular Congregational Church), St. John’s Lutheran church, two Methodist churches (Trinity and Bethel), First Baptist Church, First (Scots) Presbyterian, St. Mary’s Catholic church, and the French Huguenot church.\(^{118}\)

Charleston’s religious bodies replicated the city’s class and race conscious nature. Because of the city’s majority black population and white Charlestonians’ constant fears of slave uprisings, independent black churches were discouraged, leading Charlestonians of all races to worship together. Historian Maurie McInnis describes the way space was allocated in St. Philip’s; upper class families listened to the minister from the comfortable boxes close to the altar (implicitly, closest to God). The less affluent paid less for pews in the back, while the poor, who attended church at no cost, sat on hard benches on the periphery, replicating physically their marginality in relation to the rest of white society. Slaves sat either in the aisles near their master’s pew or in the balcony galleries.\(^{119}\)

This segregated system extended into death, as only white Charlestonians were allowed churchyard burials. However, even for much of the city’s white population, burial in a church


cemetery was not guaranteed or expected. By considering church and pastoral records in light of the events of the time, it is apparent that throughout the antebellum period, the social and theological changes and challenges these religious bodies faced were duplicated in their burial spaces.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, Charleston’s churchyards were already feeling the strain of decades of use, forcing some groups to reconsider their criteria for burial. Even though St. Michael’s was the newer of the city’s Episcopal churches, because it was built on the spot of the original St. Philip’s, its burial ground had been in use since early in the city’s colonial history. After almost a century’s use, in 1773 the vestry of St. Michael’s published a notice in the city papers that, because of their small burial space, churchyard monuments would be limited. Graves could not be enclosed, nothing could be put up that extended the whole length of the grave, and “none but Board or Stone at the Head & feet of Graves should be permitted.”

This space saving measure soon proved insufficient. Following the Revolution and its many deaths, St. Michael’s cemetery became even more crowded. In 1787 the vestry outlined burial fees, which could quickly become expensive – to be buried at St. Michael’s there were fees for the minister, organist, church clerk, and sexton. If the minister went from the deceased’s house to the churchyard his fee was $4; if he only “attends the Corpse from the Church Yard Gate to the Place of Interment” the fee was $3. Both registering the death and searching the death registry were an additional 50¢, and providing a certified copy from the registry was $3. If the

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120 This issue of who could be buried next to the church is part of a far longer standing issue. Historically, those who were more important and wealthier in a community would be buried closer to a church’s alter; the farther a person was located from the alter, the lower their social status.

121 St. Michael’s Vestry Minutes, April 27, 1773.
organist’s services were required, it cost $4.50. The clerk had several jobs. If a body was to be taken into the church the cost was $4.50, but if said body was only going into the churchyard his fee was $3. Providing a hearse, pall, and attendant was $5.50; inviting families to the funeral was 3¢ per family. For his work, the sexton received $2 for digging the grave, and $1 for ringing the bell. There were special rates for the poor; both the minister’s and clerk’s fee dropped to $2 each. These fees would have made burial more accessible for poor congregants, but at $6.50 it was still much more expensive than being buried in the city’s public cemetery, which cost $2. There were also means for those outside the church to be buried in the churchyard; “the Corpse of any Citizen, who is not a Member of this Church, or stated Worshipper therein, for the Space of two Years, or that of any Stranger or transient Person” could be interred at St. Michael’s with vestry permission. These burials would be charged the fees already outlined, as well an additional $15 charge. With these regulations St. Michael’s vestry was trying to balance space concerns and the desire people had to be buried in the churchyard.

These regulations soon came under review as they proved insufficient. In September 1798 the vestry decided “that in future no person – excepting the proprietors or renters of pews and their relatives resigning in their families – shall, under any pretense whatever, be interred in St. Michaels Church Yard, unless by consent of the Vestry convened for that purpose.” While giving the vestry the opportunity to grant exceptions provided some flexibility for poor members and attendees with long ties to the church, these further restrictions illustrate the concern church leadership had about burial space. Even with these new regulations, vestry records indicate that exceptions were still occasionally made for poor congregants. In March 1799 a Mr. and Mrs.

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122 St. Michael’s Vestry Minutes, June 1787.
123 St. Michael’s Vestry Minutes, September 30, 1789.
Salts, who already had ten children buried at St. Michael’s, requested permission to inter the body of their eleventh child. The vestry approved this request “altho’ the family of Mr. Salts does not in any respect contribute to the Church.” Even though the Salts did not meet the pew rental requirements for burial, the vestry saw fit to honor their long-term commitment and tie to the church by allowing the burial of their eleventh child. The rarity with which cases like that of the Salts family appear in the vestry records indicates that this event was the exception rather than the rule.

St. Michael’s was not the only religious body concerned about burial space. In 1798 they and ten other religious bodies in the city sent a resolution to city council calling for additional public burial space be opened for “strangers…and such Citizens as are not members of a Church and their families,” as well as some space for the burial of black Charlestonians. Although the city government seemed supportive of the idea at the time, a new public cemetery was not opened until 1808.

Concerns about burial space continued into the antebellum period. In 1813 while considering updating their burial policies, St. Michael’s vestry reviewed St. Philip’s rules. St. Philip’s had a more inclusive policy, requiring those buried in their churchyard to have been a member or “Stated Worshiper” at the church for at least two years. Anyone else would have to have written permission from three members of the vestry. Fees were also much higher for those who did not attend the church. They had a tiered fee schedule for burial for both members and “strangers.” The total cost for a class one burial of a member in which the minister “attends at

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124 St. Michael’s Vestry Minutes, March 30, 1799.
125 St. Michael’s Vestry Minutes, November 25, 1798.
the House & the Corpse be carried into the Church” was $15. A class two burial, when the minister went with the body from the house to the churchyard cost $13.50. In class three, the minister went from the churchyard gate to the burial space and cost $9.50, and for class four, the service was performed at home and the body was sent outside of town for burial, costing $4. Fees for those not meeting the membership and attendance requirement were much higher. A class one burial was $75, class two was $67.50, and class three was $47.50. These fees would have been prohibitive for all but the wealthiest Charlestonians. St. Michael’s vestry decided that adopting a similar pricing model would be appropriate for their cemetery. For church members, a class one burial was $18.50, class two $17, class three $13, and class four was $4.50. Burials for strangers cost $75, $73.50, or $69.50, depending on the class. St. Philip’s also allowed members of St. Michael’s to be buried in their cemetery at member rates, something St. Michael’s vestry decided to reciprocally adopt.127 In 1828 they extended this reciprocal right of burial to members of St. Paul’s, an Episcopal church that opened in the city in 1816.128 This change in language also suggests that, over the years, St. Michael’s had relaxed their burial rules a bit, allowing members as well as pew renters to be buried in the cemetery at lower rates and without vestry permission.129

The issues St. Michael’s faced during this period illustrate the conflicting impulses at hand. The vestry had to balance the practical matter of a very full cemetery with the needs of

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127 St. Michael’s Vestry Minutes, September 5, 1813. Regarding class four burials, apparently there was no difference in cost for members and strangers, as none is listed.
129 For comparison, in 1818 the price of cotton was high, selling at 30.8¢ a pound. At that rate, a class one burial for a stranger in St. Philip’s churchyard would have been equivalent to the cost of about 243 pounds of cotton. After the Panic of 1819 the price dropped to 12¢ a pound in 1823, making class one burials equivalent to 625 pounds of cotton. Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: a History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 273.
their congregants. Although the rules were written in ways that made expectations for the poor, ultimately the system still favored the very wealthy. At either $9.50 or $13, churchyard burial would have been out of the reach of many.

Concerns about burial space and who should be allowed to be buried in religious cemeteries were not unique to the city’s Episcopal churches. Charleston’s synagogue, Beth Elohim, also had burial restrictions; to be eligible one had to be a member of the synagogue, rather than simply a Charlestonian who was Jewish.\footnote{James Hagy, \textit{This Happy Land: the Jews of Colonial and Antebellum Charleston} (Tuscaloosa \& London: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 181. Exceptions could be made for people who had recently moved to the city; in these cases, a member would make a request of the trustees. In 1842, one such request was granted, and the burial fee required was $25.} Even at the Circular Congregational Church, which had a variety of burial options available to both members and non-members, cost could quickly become prohibitive to the bereaved. While at one point members debated whether those who were not church members should be buried on church property at all, in 1796 they agreed to lay at least a $4 tax on burials of strangers “to be applied towards a fund sufficient to purchase a piece of Doctor Harris’s Garden lott adjoining the back Ground of the Tenements on Archdale Street.” In 1820, after considering the burial fees charged by others in the city, the congregation devised a new fee schedule they believed was more in line with other city churches. For members who were over 15 burial cost $4, for those between 10 and 15 the charge was $3, and burial for those under ten was $2. For “strangers of the same denomination” (which included those from Independent and Presbyterian congregations) burial for those over 15 was $35, those between 10 and 15 was $25, and those under 10 was $15. For those outside the denomination, burial cost $50 regardless of age.\footnote{Circular Congregational Church Regulations of the Corporation 1796 – 1824. Circular Congregational Church (Charleston, S.C.). Records, 1732- (bulk 1800-1910s). (1302) South Carolina Historical Society.}
Ultimately, Charleston’s religious bodies were faced with a dilemma – how to balance a limited, heavily used space with the needs of a continuously growing population. Church and synagogue leadership attempted to manage these competing impulses by limiting the number of people who could be buried without question as much as was reasonable, leaving room for possible exceptions, and making it prohibitively expensive for everyone else. Although this was a process borne of necessity, it still privileged those who were better off. When even the special rates for poor congregants were well above those charged by the city’s public cemetery, dedicated members of the congregation who were poor could be unable to be buried with members of their church body, while wealthy, non-practicing Charlestonians could easily find a place in a prestigious cemetery.

Even in a city with so many churches, much of the burden fell to public burial space. Due to their race, lack of religious affiliation, or financial concerns, most people were buried outside of religious cemeteries. Although burial in the public cemetery was not free, at between $1 and $2 per burial based on the individual’s race, height, and condition of servitude, it would have been much more affordable than a church burial. Even with the popularity of the public cemetery, the number of church graveyards expanded in Charleston during the antebellum period through the effort of groups, like some African and African American Christians and the quickly growing Catholic church.

While most residents in the city were African American, burial options for both free and enslaved people of color were limited. The wealthy and well connected of Charleston’s free black community could be buried in the Brown Fellowship Society lot, but for most the only option was the city’s segregated public burial ground, or possibly in a private farm or plantation cemetery outside the city. Many planters had homes in the city and plantations nearby and the
sometimes took deceased slaves back to their plantation for burial rather than interring them in the city. Because church cemeteries in the colonial and Early Republic were racially exclusive, African and African American Charlestonians could not be buried in churchyards.

In the 1810s, several congregations petitioned the city to purchase burial lots for their African and African American members. In 1816 the Independent Religious Congregation was granted a cemetery lot for their free black members by city council; the following year the Methodist church made a similar request. In 1818 black members of Charleston’s First Baptist Church purchased land for their own cemetery. This would be a permanent and successful endeavor for them as in an 1844 city plat the land is identified as “The Burial Ground of the Free Colored People.” In 1818, the Trinity Church Colored Burial Ground was conveyed to the trustees of the Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, and was in use until at least the 1870s. The First Presbyterian Colored Cemetery was established the same year. Unlike white churchyard burials, all these lots were located away from the church building.

In creating these burial spaces, African American church members were able to make claims for themselves regarding both space usage and group belonging. Rather than being relegated to burial in the city’s public burial lots, which were not places of permanence or areas where families could be interred together, these Charlestonians chose to identify themselves with their religious communities in ways they had been previously denied. They, and their churches, were also able to gain enough support in a city already facing space related challenges to be granted land to create their cemeteries. Just as the Brown Fellowship Society members and

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132 Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, 126.
133 Ibid., 224-226.
134 Ibid., 70.
supporters set themselves apart through their cemetery, these city residents gained the same privileges through a more accessible and affordable alternative.

These new burial spaces were part of a larger period of limited religious independence for African and African American Charlestonians in the 1810s. The previous decade had been legally challenging for the city’s black population as a whole. While reopening the international slave trade provided wealth, opportunity, and new slaves to white South Carolinians, the presence of so many new Africans in Charleston ultimately made white residents increasingly uneasy, leading them to institute several new policies impacting people of color throughout the city. In 1806 a new, far reaching city ordinance was passed limiting the right to assemble and trade for Africans and African Americans. Black Charlestonians were prohibited from independently gathering in groups larger than seven except in the case of funerals, and had to have a city issued badge or license to sell most goods. In addition, James Fraser writes, “they were prohibited from ‘whooping or holloring’ in the streets, from smoking a ‘pipe or segar,’ and from walking with a ‘cane, club, or other stick’ unless ‘blind or infirm.’” That same year the city also reorganized the police force to help enforce this new ordnance. Instead of constables elected by ward, a City Guard was created. Among their responsibilities, Guard members were to undertake night patrols, arrest any person of color out after the city’s 9:00 pm curfew, and assist Charleston’s volunteer firefighters.  

Even with laws and ordinances on the books regarding the actions of black Charlestonians, in a city where whites were so long the minority the situation required negotiation. While many white Charlestonians liked the idea of regulating the movement and

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business opportunities of enslaved persons, that opinion generally did not extend to their own slaves or the people they hired. As time passed, many of the provisions of the 1806 ordinance were ignored, as restrictions often had been previously. However, the religious and social freedoms black Charlestonians gained in the 1810s went much farther than cemeteries. As the 1806 ordinance addressed, gatherings of people of color were always considered dangerous and necessitated white supervision. As such African and African American Charlestonians had not previously had their own independent church body, and were restricted to worshiping in white churches. This was to change in 1818.

In 1818 Charleston’s African Methodist Episcopal Church was formed under Reverend Morris Brown, an African American pastor who had been influenced by A.M.E. church leaders in Philadelphia. While this church was always unpopular with white Charlestonians (and Reverend Brown was briefly jailed), it soon had a large membership. Its independence was short lived. In 1822 Denmark Vesey and his associates were captured and charged with planning a rebellion in the city. As many who were involved in these plans were members of the A.M.E. church, white residents felt that their concerns regarding the danger of an independent black congregation were justified, even after Vesey and his co-conspirators were tried and executed. Reverend Brown was put under court order to leave the state, and the A.M.E. church building was demolished. From 1822 until after the Civil War, black Charlestonians had to attend churches in which they would be supervised by whites.137

Following the discovery of Vesey’s plans, African and African American Charlestonians quickly lost the limited religious freedoms they had gained in the 1810s. Along with their

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inability to have an independent congregation, their activities as members of white churches were also heavily monitored. As well as losing freedoms for living city residents, while those church cemeteries that already existed for black church members stayed open, in the next several decades no other churches opened cemeteries for people of color. As the living were being punished and regulated, so too were the dead.

In the future, white Charlestonians continued to be suspicious of African and African American religious groups. In the 1840s white Episcopal and Presbyterian groups worked to create congregations that, while supervised by whites, were focused on serving and ministering to black Charlestonians. Anson Street Presbyterian Church was initially planned as an outgrowth of Second Presbyterian Church; it became very successful in the 1850s after a preacher was hired who was able to connect with the African American population. It was so popular that it was eventually able to break away from Second Presbyterian (changing its name to Zion in the process); the church building was expanded, and although all the officers of the church were white, they made up the minority of the congregation. Erskine Clarke notes the way this church inverted the usual order in the city, explaining that these white officers “were the ones who sat in the gallery and listened to sermons directed primarily to members of another race. This time they were the familiar guests.” Similarly in 1847 the Episcopal Convention of the Diocese of South Carolina took up the question of creating a church for black Charlestonians, leading to the creation of Calvary Church. These churches faced resistance (as well as some threats) before their eventual, peaceful openings. As these new churches were being established, long standing

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congregations returned to the practice of purchasing cemeteries for their black congregants. Just as in the 1810s, when the concerns regarding the infusion of new slaves into the city started relaxing, by the 1840s the panic and concern of the early 1820s had started to abate. In 1845 St. Michael’s purchased land that was initially indicated as “Burial Grounds” in City Ward Books but by 1856, was identified as the “cemetery for colored members of St. Michael Church, 62 Line Street.”

These incidents demonstrate that access to or denial of religious and burial opportunities were not perceived as fundamental rights for Charleston’s African and African American population, but rather were contingent on the perceived danger of the group.

Although in the 1820s African American Charlestonians found their independent religious activities curtailed, the prospects of Charleston’s Catholics were on the rise. While Catholicism had been banned in South Carolina in 1716 due to fears that Catholics in the colony might conspire with the Spanish in Florida, in the years following the Revolution, Catholicism would be officially introduced into the state; those Catholics already present could worship openly, and Catholic church bodies could legally form. A Catholic congregation formed in the city, holding its first Mass in 1786, and in 1789 purchased a former Methodist church building to serve as their meeting place. In 1791, following the removal of the last Catholic-exclusionary regulations in the state congregation, the Roman Catholic Church of Charleston was incorporated. The wood frame building where the congregation was meeting was soon replaced, and the new brick church was finished in 1806. Charleston’s Catholic population was

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140 Trinkley, 207.
diverse; while many early Catholic residents were Irish, they were soon joined by immigrants from Germany and Haiti. Even though Catholicism was a latecomer to Charleston’s religious community, the city quickly became its regional center. After years spent under the Archdiocese of Baltimore, in 1820 the Reverend John England was sent from Ireland to serve as the first Bishop of the diocese of Charleston, which included North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and some areas in Florida. England reported that he did not find large congregations in his new diocese; he found two churches in all of South Carolina, one in Georgia, and one in North Carolina. From these churches there were 375 congregants in total; 200 of them were in South Carolina. Following his consecration in 1821, England became active and well known throughout the country, and Charleston became the hub of Catholicism in the Carolinas and Georgia.

As Charleston’s Catholic population grew, burial and burial space was a constant concern. Because church doctrine calls for Catholics to be buried in consecrated ground, Catholic cemeteries became far more extensive and inclusive than the city’s Protestant burial spaces. Bishop England noted that the congregation’s diversity could be seen in its cemetery, writing:

You may find the American and the European side by side; France, Germany, Poland, Ireland, Italy, Spain, England, Portugal, Massachusetts, Brazil, New York, and Mexico, have furnished those who worshipped at the same altar with the African and Asiatic, whose remains are there deposited: during life they were found all professing one faith, derived from a common source; after death their remains commingle.

144 Raymond H. Schmidt, “An Overview of Institutional Establishment in the Antebellum Southern Church,” in *Catholics in the Old South*, Randall Miller and Jon Wakelyn, eds. (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1999), 63.
145 England, 252.
The sacramental nature of Catholic burial meant that the church ensured that impoverished congregate could also receive an appropriate burial. With the Bishop’s approval poor Catholics could be buried for free, but this right could be revoked if the funeral was deemed too costly or extravagant; King notes that the Rules of the Cemetery for St. Lawrence Cemetery stated, “that where more than three carriages are present at such burials, the permit for a Free Grave shall be revoked.”

As Bishop England notes, many Africans and African Americans were members of the city’s Catholic churches throughout the antebellum period. Bishop England himself attributed much of this membership to free and enslaved people moving to the city from predominantly Catholic areas, like Haiti and Baltimore. He estimated that one thousand of the city’s Catholics were enslaved, the majority of whom were owned by Protestants. Suzanne Krebsbach argues that the popularity of Catholicism among black Charlestonians was not simply that they came from a Catholic background, but rather because they were allowed to fully participate as members of the church, regardless of their race.

Burial was certainly a concern for black Catholics in Charleston, and the church opened several cemeteries to accommodate that, including St. Patrick’s. Although the cemetery has been described as having been used by the African Americans in St. Patrick’s parish, it was in use

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146 King, iv.
147 England, 258. Susan King quotes Bishop England on this matter; he wrote, “Probably one thousand for the Catholics are slaves belonging to Protestant masters, for the Catholics are generally to poor to possess this or any other kind of property.” King, iii.
before the church was established. The land for the cemetery was purchased in 1828 and in use the following year, but the church of St. Patrick was not founded in 1836.\textsuperscript{149} Needs would soon force new land acquisitions, and in 1843 six more lots were purchased to be held “in Trust for the use of the colored Roman Catholic population of the City of Charleston and the Charleston Neck, as a cemetery or Burial ground for the said Colored Slaves or free under such regulations…as the Church might establish.”\textsuperscript{150} The ongoing acquisition of land for cemeteries illustrates that the number of black Charlestonians joining the church during the antebellum period was significant enough to necessitate the purchase of substantial amounts of new land for burial. However, it is also important to note that Charleston’s Catholic churches were faced with concerns Protestant bodies did not have, namely that of consecrated burial space for marginalized groups.

While Catholics were newcomers to the city following the Revolution, Charleston’s Jewish population was long established; Jews have called Charleston home since at least 1695.\textsuperscript{151} Unlike the persecution they faced in other areas, Jews were generally treated well in the city and accepted by Christian Charlestonians. The synagogue, Beth Elohim, was seen as an equal and valued member of the city’s religious communities; in 1798 representatives from the synagogue were invited to join ten other religious bodies in the city to create a joint resolution calling on the city to purchase land for a new public cemetery.\textsuperscript{152} The acceptance Jewish Charlestonians found may have been impacted by the community’s support of the white status quo in Charleston. Not only were longtime Jewish residents supportive of slavery, but even those who were recent

\textsuperscript{149} Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, 211.
\textsuperscript{150} Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, 196.
\textsuperscript{151} Hagy, 6.
\textsuperscript{152} St. Michael’s Vestry Minutes, October 28, 1789.
European immigrants quickly threw their support behind the institution. James Hagy found that in 1790 eighty three percent of Jewish households in the city either currently owned or previously held slaves.\(^\text{153}\) Many Jewish Charlestonians were solidly in the middle class, and worked as merchants, accountants, and physicians. The community was also politically active – four Jewish residents from the city attended the state’s Nullification convention.\(^\text{154}\) As Thomas Tobias writes, “With a heritage of religious freedom from its founding, Charleston’s Jews participated in their city’s prosperity and shared in its culture, developing men who contributed to the community and left their mark in all walks of life.”\(^\text{155}\) Along with their willingness to fully integrate into Charleston society and the respectable positions many held, Christian Charlestonians’ support for the Jewish community and their openness to Jewish migration may also have been racially motivated; Jewish residents helped increase the city’s white population, something that was always of concern in the majority black city.\(^\text{156}\)

Jewish immigrants faced the same high mortality rates and health challenges as their neighbors. In 1760 the Beth Elohim synagogue, which was established in 1749, purchased land for a cemetery. Also referred to as the Coming Street Cemetery, its earliest grave dates from 1762.\(^\text{157}\) The cemetery was open to members of the congregation; those who could not afford

\(^{153}\) Hagy 91. \\
\(^{154}\) Ibid., 104. \\
\(^{156}\) This is similar to the situation that will occur in Cuba in the early 1900s. Following their independence, the Cuban government wanted to whiten the island’s population, and were thus very welcoming to Jewish immigrants in a period many others were not. For more information, please see Ruth Behar, An Island Called Home (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2007). \\
membership fees had to seek burial elsewhere. While it is often challenging to find descriptions of eighteenth century burial services, in 1795 a visitor to Charleston recorded the Jewish burial he witnessed, writing that

among other peculiarities in burying their dead, [Jewish Charlestonians] have these: After the funeral dirge is sung, and just before the corpse is deposited in the grave, the coffin is opened, and a small bag of earth, taken from the grave, is carefully put under the head of the deceased; then some powder, said to be earth brought from Jerusalem, and carefully kept for this purpose, is taken and put upon the eyes of the corpse, in token of their remembrance of the holy land, and of their expectations of returning thither in God’s appointed time.158

While in its first several decades Beth Elohim had a peaceful existence, starting in the 1820s the synagogue faced a series of challenges that not only threatened the congregation’s existence, but also the cemetery’s peace.

Due to declining attendance and a worship service many believed was time consuming and inaccessible to much of the community, in 1824 several members of Charleston’s Jewish community proposed changes they believed would update the religious services and bring back members who had strayed. They argued that one improvement would be using English in religious services versus the more traditional Hebrew and Spanish. While these languages made sense early in the predominately Sephardic congregation’s history, by the 1820s few members of the congregation spoke or understood Spanish. Service length was also of concern. The petition noted that a full-length service read at a reasonable rate could take five hours. Petitioners were also worried about the way offerings were collected, which they believed put many in an awkward financial position. The suggested changes this group put forward were not met with the

approval of many in the congregation, leading those who supported them to break off and form the Reform Society of Israelites.\(^{159}\)

While those who had been members of the Reform Society of Israelites rejoined Beth Elohim in 1833, in 1836 the synagogue wrote a new constitution, adopting some of the reform ideas, like including English in services and ending public offerings. While the 1836 constitution was important in healing the split, it had far deeper implications. With this constitution, by September 1836 Beth Elohim was the first synagogue in the United States to adopt reform principles.\(^{160}\) The peace this new constitution brought about was ultimately short lived. After years without a permanent rabbi, in January 1837 Beth Elohim selected Gustavus Poznanski of New York for the position. The next year, in April the Great Fire of 1838 swept through the city, destroying numerous homes, business, and Beth Elohim.\(^{161}\) Disagreements broke out during the rebuilding process; some congregants wanted an organ in the synagogue, while more conservative members believed it would be incompatible with Jewish law and practice. After Rabbi Poznanski sided with those in favor of the organ and a small majority of congregation members voted in its favor, those opposed ultimately left Beth Elohim and formed their own more orthodox body, Shearith Israel. Rabbi Poznanski’s reform positions soon led further members to leave the synagogue. After he questioned the idea that there was a Messiah to come and attempted to change the structure of festivals and festival days, many members found that

\(^{159}\) Hagy, 129-130. Interestingly the Reform Society of Israelites’ constitution did not include many of the provisions members were so concerned about; it “said nothing about beliefs, the form of worship, the use of English, or anything else about services,” 145.

\(^{160}\) Ibid., 237. Although the Reform Society of Israelites followed Reform ideas, they were never able to officially establish themselves as a synagogue.

\(^{161}\) Not only were donations solicited for rebuilding from the city’s Jewish community and communities around the country, but also from Charleston’s other religious bodies, further highlighting the good relationship the congregation enjoyed with other groups in town. Hagy 238.
the amount of reform they believed acceptable was exceeded, creating a further rift in an already fractured congregation. The waves of congregational division led to debates and court battles about who controlled the synagogue building and cemetery. Both groups claimed a right to them; ultimately, courts ruled in favor of Beth Elohim, allowing them to retain control of the synagogue and cemetery. While maintaining control of these properties would have solved many practical matters for the congregation, they also gave them a greater claim to legitimacy. By controlling both the religious space and the community’s dead, even with the drastic theological changes that took place within the congregation, members of Beth Elohim were still able to claim legitimacy as a body with the weight of history, represented by congregation’s dead, behind them, in opposition to the heresy some opposing community members claimed they were committing.

As such, Shearith Israel proceeded to incorporate in 1846 and purchased land for their own synagogue and cemetery. The land for the new cemetery adjoined the land of Beth Elohim’s cemetery, so a tall wall was constructed, separating the two. This community was now visibly separated in death as well as in religious life. When the synagogues reunited in 1866, along with returning to a single congregation, they also removed the cemetery wall, symbolically erasing the split among the living and the dead.

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162 Prior to reform, the creed used by Beth Elohim stated their views on the Messiah, which were “We believe that the Redeemer will come at the time appointed, which is known to God alone; who will gather the dispersed of Israel, and restore the government up to the house of David.” Poznanski’s updated version stated, “We believe that the Messiah announced by the prophets is not come – the prophecies in relation to his coming not being fulfilled.” Hagy,156-157, 245.

Another burial issue the Jewish community faced was the challenge posed by African Jews. Billy Simmons was a Charlestonian who was described as being “black, a slave, and a Jew;” he claimed to be descended from the African Jewish Rechabites, and was a devoted attendee of Beth Elohim. Even though Beth Elohim’s 1820 and 1836 constitutions prohibited “people of color” from membership, Simmons’ presence in worship did not appear to be a point of concern. Maurice Mayer, the synagogue’s hazan in the 1850s, stated “that Simmons was ‘the most observant of those who go to the synagogue’ and that he sat in the nave of the synagogue with his white co-religionists.” While Simmons seemed content to worship at Beth Elohim, one religious concern he had regarded his future burial. Simmons wanted to be buried with the city’s Jewish community but, because he could not be a member of the synagogue according to its constitution due to his race, he also could not be buried in the cemetery. While Simmons asked a white congregant for help in achieving this goal, unfortunately his wishes do not appear to have been carried out. While the congregant Simmons spoke with was amenable to the idea, he left the city prior to Simmons’ death, and there is no record of where he was buried.

Unconverted spouses of synagogue members were also ineligible for burial in the cemetery. In 1843, Catherine, the wife of synagogue leader David Lopez, and their infant son died. David wanted his wife and child buried in the synagogue’s cemetery, but because she had never officially converted Catherine was ineligible. To address this issue, David purchased a small piece of land adjoining the burial ground, where he buried Catherine and their child. Eventually, as the cemetery expanded over time this piece of land was incorporated, allowing

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164 The Rechabites are referenced in Jeremiah 35; in some translations it is also spelled Rekabites.
165 Hagy, 101.
Catherine to finally lay at rest with her husband and the rest of the congregation.\textsuperscript{166} The experience of the Lopez family illustrates the connection between the living and the dead in communities; while in life Catherine was a member of the community on the periphery, in death she remained in a similar position.

While religious cemeteries can illustrate the social shifts taking place in the city and disagreements among congregations, they can also tell us more about individual church populations. Although none of Charleston’s congregations had any official rules preventing residents of any racial or social status from attending their churches, not all churches served the entire city’s population equally. By considering the private registers of pastors at the Circular Congregational Church and St. Michael’s Episcopal Church as well as the burial register for St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, it quickly becomes apparent that, even without any official regulations, the social and religious divisions present in the city extended to religious bodies.

The Circular Congregational Church has had a building on its current site since its founding in 1681, with the first circular church structure constructed in 1804. Benjamin Morgan Palmer served as the church’s pastor from 1813 – 1835; his personal register records his various activities through his years of religious service, including the funerals he officiated. While Palmer did not list the burial location for all the services he performed, by comparing his records from 1819 – 1836 with Charleston’s city death records, it quickly becomes apparent that, even though the church history claims a large and interracial membership between 1820 and 1860, the majority of funerals Palmer performed were for white Charlestonians. While not every name could be matched within the city’s records (indicating either a discrepancy between the records

\textsuperscript{166} Tobias, “Some Foundation Stones,” 8-9.
or that the deceased died outside of Charleston’s city limits), of the 343 funerals he records during these years, only one person is listed as being African American. All the burials with an identifiable location were either in a churchyard (179 of the deceased were buried in the Circular Church’s yard) or the body was removed for burial in the country, suggesting that these were people of some means. From the available information, Palmer appears not to have performed many services for those in more marginalized situations.

Reverend Paul Trapier’s personal register shows a bit more variety. Trapier worked in and around Charleston for many years, serving in St. Andrew’s Parish (located about ten miles outside of Charleston) from 1830 to 1835, at St. Stephen’s Chapel from 1835 to 1840, at St. Michael’s from 1840 to 1846, and at Calvary Church in Charleston, with a focus on the city’s African American community, from 1846 to 1857. While his personal register does contain some gaps, the funerals he performed demonstrate that in the congregations he served he saw slightly more social, racial, and economic variety than Reverend Palmer. Of the 191 services listed, 32 were performed for African Americans, 16 of whom were enslaved, reflecting his more involved work with the black community. However, even with a more diverse population, Trapier only lists two of the deceased for whom he performed funerals as having been buried in the city’s Potter’s Field, one of whom was an enslaved African American while the other was white. The rest of Trapier’s deceased black congregants were buried in cemeteries with religious affiliations, in private grounds, outside the city, or no burial location was listed. Most of the white Charlestonians he performed services for were buried in religious cemeteries; unsurprisingly a

large number (109) were interred in Episcopal Church yards. However, Trapier also performed services for people buried in Presbyterian, Methodist, Unitarian, Huguenot, and Baptist lots.

Reverend Thomas John Young began his pastoral work at St. Michael’s in 1847, where he remained until his death in 1852. Between 1847 and 1851, Young recorded performing sixty-two funeral services. Of those funerals, sixteen of the deceased were African Americans, and of those sixteen five were enslaved. Of all of the services Young performed, he lists no one as being buried in the city’s public lot. The African Americans for whom he performed services were buried in religious and private cemeteries. Thirty-three of his white congregants were buried in Episcopal cemeteries, while the rest were either buried in other religious lots or outside of town.

While the Circular Church and St. Michael’s had a long history in the city and well established burial spaces by the 1820s, St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church was organized in 1822 by the Charleston Female Domestic Missionary Society. St. Stephen’s was created to serve Charlestonians regardless of their class or race, and claims to be the first Episcopal Church in the country in which pews were not rented or sold. Because of these goals and stipulations, St. Stephen’s was expected to have an economically and racially diverse population.

Because of its status as a mission church (in fact, the first pastor lists himself as “missionary” on the first page of the church register), St. Stephen’s had a revolving pastorate, and several ministers, including Reverends Trapier and Young, spent time working with and

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performing services for the church.\textsuperscript{169} As such, the church’s burial records are not entirely standardized, as some pastors felt the need to include information others did not. The records for St. Stephen’s are unique because, unlike other record sets, some pastors included both the place a deceased person’s funeral service was held and where he or she was buried, which frequently were different. From 1822 through 1850 the pastors of St. Stephen’s record 456 funerals. Eighty-six of these services were performed for people of African descent, a much higher population than other pastors. Of these burials, only 24 were for people who were enslaved. By considering burial location, it is clear that many members of St. Stephen’s free African American population were of relatively high social status, as 17 people are recorded as having been buried in the Brown Fellowship Society burial ground. Thirteen were buried in the Macphela Cemetery, which was associated with St. Philip’s, and several others were buried in various other church cemeteries. Of the white congregants, a large number were buried in the city’s Episcopal cemeteries. Eighty-two were buried at St. John’s, seven were buried at both St. Michael’s and St. Paul’s, another 82 were buried at St. Philip’s, and 46 were buried at St. Stephen’s, bringing the total to 244, slightly over half of the total burials recorded.\textsuperscript{170} Services were also performed for people buried in other church yards across the city, including the French Huguenot, German Lutheran, Presbyterian, Circular, and Trinity Methodist churches, as well as at least one person who was interred in the Catholic cemetery.\textsuperscript{171}

Funeral services performed by clergy from St. Stephen’s also took place in an array of locations across the city. Of those with funeral locations listed, 167 of the deceased had their

\textsuperscript{169} Surprisingly, although both Trapier and Young’s private records include burials from their time at St. Michael’s, and the years they spent at other churches, there does not appear to be any carry over between their personal records and St. Stephen’s burial registry.

\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Silence of the Dead} cross lists St. Stephen’s cemetery as the Anson Street Cemetery.

\textsuperscript{171} One other entry, which is hard to decipher, appears to say “Romanish.”
services performed at their own or a family member’s home. Thirty-six services were performed at the house of another individual, and three enslaved people’s funerals were held at their owner’s homes. Only twelve had their services in churches, and all of these took place at the same church where they were interred. Four other people had their funerals at various other public locations, including the Planter’s Hotel and the New Theater.

As a mission church established with the goal of being inclusive, it would seem that there should be a large marginalized population present in the records. Surprisingly, in considering burial and funeral service locations, this does not appear to be the case. Of the 456 funerals performed by St. Stephen’s ministers, only 22 people were reported as being buried in the Potter’s Field; of those seven were black and 15 white. Only five services were listed as having been performed in the Alms or Poor House, all for white Charlestonians. While the data from St. Stephen’s burial roster is incomplete (not only are not all service locations listed, but some burial locations are left blank as well), it does seem to indicate that while the church was established to serve Charlestonians who may be less fortunate, the population it attracted was still fairly well off.\footnote{Records of St. Stephen’s Parish, 1754-1890. (322.00) South Carolina Historical Society.}

However, its status as a mission church and philanthropic venture could have some influence on burials and burial locations. While Benjamin Jenkins’ funeral was held October 9, 1836 at the city’s poorhouse, he was interred at St. Stephen’s rather than at the public city lot. George Revel, who died in July 1838, found himself in a similar situation. While two burials may be scant evidence from which to draw a conclusion, as St. Stephen’s was created to serve the economically less fortunate by not having the standard pew rents, it would seem that similar accommodations could be made in terms of burial space. The lack of African American funerals
in the records could also be illustrative of norms of the period. Even though Trapier and Young were the official pastors at St. Stephen’s and there were legal restrictions in the city regarding African Americans and independent worship, Eugene Genovese argues that broadly in the South during this period it was usual for the funeral to have been handled within the black community. “Black preachers, despite restrictive laws, appeared everywhere, and where they were unavailable, drivers, craftsmen, exhorters, or other prestigious slaves filled in. The most common slave funeral had a black man, trained or untrained, literate or illiterate, to add the necessary solemnity, dignity, and religious sanctification to the ceremony.” 173 While this makes the race related gap in the burial records more understandable, it still leaves questions about poor whites, both in terms of the churches they attended, and the ministers who performed their services.

While the records for the Circular Congregational Church, St. Michael’s, and St. Stephen’s indicate that Charleston’s broader social and racial divides are present in city churches, these records do not include denominations more frequently associated with the lower classes, like the Catholics and Methodists. As such, perhaps it is not surprising to find so few marginalized people in these records. There is also the possibility that, even as attendees of these churches, people in the lower classes could have requested that other ministers perform their funerals. Ultimately, though, it is interesting to explore the information these records can show, and see that, even in churches like St. Stephen’s explicitly created to serve the lower classes, social divides were reflected in attendance.

Charleston’s many church and synagogue cemeteries highlight the social divides, power struggles, and conflict revealed by the question of urban burial during the early antebellum

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period. Although some churches tried to provide services across race and class lines, they were impacted by the city’s longstanding class divides and segregationist policies. However, with all their differences, one thing the aforementioned churchyards and cemeteries had in common was their proximity to the city. For years questions had been building about the potential health challenges cemeteries posed to Charleston. In 1799 the city’s Grand Jury published a report stating that the church burial grounds in the city were “extremely injurious” to residents’ health, suggesting the city purchase a burial ground outside the city to help make Charleston a healthier locale.\(^{174}\) While the Grand Jury’s advice was initially ignored, as the city moved into the 1830s, science and medicine increasingly called the city’s dealings with its dead into question.

\(^{174}\) Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, 4.
Chapter Four: “By cutting off as many heads as possible of this fatal hydra:” Science, Medicine, and the Dead

Throughout Charleston’s history, health, disease, and burial have been constant concerns. The city and colony had a well deserved reputation for poor health based on a history of epidemics, high disease rates, and low life expectancy. This stigma, and the concern it caused residents, followed the region into the post-Revolutionary period, as illustrated by the offense the lowcountry took in response to backcountry accusations of the area’s unhealthy climate and its contribution to a declining white population. With these concerns in mind, Charleston’s city government took increasing steps to control the spread of disease. In 1796, the city created the first of its several iterations of boards of health. Soon after, in 1800, city government made a more concerted effort to monitor disease and potential epidemics in the city by instructing the City Marshall to make a record of daily interments in the city’s cemeteries between July 1 and October 31, one of the worst periods in the year for disease.

A more permanent Board of Health was created in 1815 with the major goal of preventing the spread of epidemic disease. The Board met weekly from June and November, and was responsible for publishing the number of interments in city cemeteries between June and October, as well as in any other time epidemics might arise. While they could request information from city physicians about diseases in the city, the Board of Health did not have the power to require this information be provided. They were also empowered to order areas of the city to be cleaned, potentially removing filth believed to pose a public health risk. This system would grow and expand over the years, and in 1820 the Board of Health became a permanent entity, with a clerk maintaining health records for the entire year. In 1842, the Office of the City
Register was created, and took charge of many of the city’s vital records.\textsuperscript{175} While these measures were put in place because of longstanding problems with disease, through these developments Charleston was well ahead of the rest of the state in recording health data and city deaths. South Carolina lacked a means of tracking vital statistics until a legislative act in 1853 created a system for reporting births, marriages, and deaths; even with this structure in place, in many parts of the state there would continue to be gaps in the records for years to come.\textsuperscript{176}

While city government worked to ensure Charleston’s public health, local physicians in the city were also concerned. Although a city with such high rates of disease would be an attractive area for someone interested in practicing medicine, Charleston’s doctors had long been active and involved participants in working to help make the city healthier. In 1789, physicians established the Medical Society of South Carolina through which they discussed health concerns, new ideas in medicine, and made public health recommendations. Many were active in city government, taking part in health boards and entering the broader conversation surrounding the city’s public health.\textsuperscript{177} During this period, most doctors still held a traditional view of the cause of disease. In the years before germ theory, the idea that disease was transmitted by miasma was prominent. As Steven Stowe describes, many physicians believed that disease came “from the

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\textsuperscript{175} James Hagy, “The Death Records of Charleston” \textit{The South Carolina Historical Magazine} v 91, no 1, Jan 1990, 32-33, 34.
\textsuperscript{176} Joseph I. Waring, \textit{A History of Medicine in South Carolina} (Charleston: South Carolina Medical Association, 1964), 67. As a general note, it is not that Charleston’s system did not have problems; their system was just more effective and efficient than those that developed elsewhere. However, because the City Council was only interested in deaths occurring within the city, those who died outside of Charleston’s boundaries were not included in the records. As the antebellum period progressed, the city continued to spread up into the Charleston Neck area but the official city boundaries shifted little, excluding these deaths from the records.
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ripening of some complex mixture of environmental conditions and personal susceptibility.\textsuperscript{178}

Adhering to this theory, those who could relocate for the “sickly season” did to escape the dangers the city’s environment posed. The majority of the population, though, was unable to leave, and lived with the fear of miasma and fever throughout the summer months.

As Charleston entered the 1820s and 1830s, new ideas about medicine and health affected both the living and the dead. Through burial and the treatment of the dead, we can better understand how Charlestonians processed and applied the new scientific and medical thoughts abounding in the period.

Although medical professionals had long been a necessary part of the Charleston community, those in the city and state who wished to train as doctors had to leave the area and travel to schools located in the northern states or in Europe. In the 1820s and 1830s, two medical schools opened in Charleston. While these schools provided new opportunities to aspirant southern physicians and to city residents, their existence would make the repose of some of the city’s dead far less peaceful and permanent than it had been previously. In 1824, the Medical College of South Carolina opened in Charleston; not only was it the first medical school in the state, but it would also be the first of its kind in the region.\textsuperscript{179} Following a variety of internal and interpersonal problems, former faculty members of the Medical College of South Carolina opened in Charleston; not only was it the first medical school in the state, but it would also be the first of its kind in the region.\textsuperscript{179} Following a variety of internal and interpersonal problems, former faculty members of the Medical College of South Carolina


\textsuperscript{179} John Harley Warner, “The Idea of Southern Medical Distinctiveness: Medical Knowledge and Practice in the Old South,” in \textit{Sickness and Health in America: Readings in the History of Medicine and Public Health}, Judith Walzer Leavitt and Ronald L Numbers, eds., (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 59. While the Medical College of South Carolina was formally founded in late 1823, it did not begin operating until 1824, leading different sources to cite its opening date differently.
founded the Medical College of the State of South Carolina in Charleston in 1833. The schools operated simultaneously until 1839, when the Medical College of South Carolina closed.\textsuperscript{180}

Having the first medical school in the lower South, Charleston’s physicians had an influential place in shaping regional conceptions of medicine and medical practice.\textsuperscript{181} As they practiced in the region, many physicians had a dual focus on their medical work and the idea of a southern medical distinctiveness. This concept stemmed from the belief that medical treatment could not be standardized, and from the large number of African Americans in the South. The belief that the successful treatment of disease varied by location was widely held. Because of the impact the South’s climate was believed to have on the human body, an effective treatment in the South might not be appropriate in other areas. A reputable physician would take factors like location into account when making his diagnosis and prescribing a treatment; the idea of one standardized remedy for a disease was often associated with medical quackery. Thus, some methods that were popular in the northern states and Europe, like venesection (bloodletting), were not widely practiced in the South. Conversely, a sick southerner might be prescribed more medicine than a northerner for a similar disease. In 1834 a medical student noted that “10 grs. of calomel is as effectual in Pennsylvania, as 50 in the Valey of the Mississippi.”\textsuperscript{182} As southern doctors worked to hone their skills and develop new treatments, the region’s large black population came in to play. Although there was some thought about racial differences and how they might impact the treatment of white and black southerners, in the eyes of most doctors and

\textsuperscript{180} Waring, 71, 80.
\textsuperscript{181} The first medical school in a slave holding state was Kentucky’s Transylvania Medical College, which was founded in 1799 but only started operating in 1817. Stowe, 21.
\textsuperscript{182} Warner, 57.
medical students, African American bodies were not only appropriate for dissection and experimentation, but they were preferable to white bodies.

Although this idea of medical distinctiveness was accepted across the country, southern physicians had other reasons to constantly reinforce their knowledge and the importance of southern medical distinctiveness. “The pivot upon which physicians’ anxieties turned was the low, marginal status of the medical profession in the South.”183 Southern physicians experienced skepticism on several fronts. Broadly, they were not well respected in the northern states and by prominent medical professionals. Not only did these groups hold southern doctors and their treatment methods in low regard, but southern doctors were independently aware of how underdeveloped their medical and training programs were, and how much they still depended on outside groups. At the same time, southerners themselves frequently did not hold doctors in very high regards, and physicians worried about the influence of other doctors in this issue. John Warner writes, “thinking southern physicians plainly perceived intellectual lethargy to be a characteristic feature of the medical profession in their region, and regarded the lack of an active professional community to appreciate and reward medial enterprise as both a cause and illustration of the region’s professional degradation.”184 Facing these disadvantages, physicians in Charleston had to find ways to both encourage faith in their abilities and validate the quality of the medical education they could provide. To do this, medical school promoters focused on the benefits that Charleston’s unique situation offered. This included promoting the numerous opportunities students would have to perform dissections in Charleston, and the benefits that southern students who hoped to practice medicine in the South would gain from studying at a

183 Ibid., 62.
184 Ibid.
southern school. Although modern understandings of medicine and disease do not hold these regional views, historically this issue is necessary to keep in mind when discussing southern medical education and treatment because of its prominence at the time.\textsuperscript{185} This had a very real impact on the way southern medical schools operated, as well as on the hundreds of black bodies that were used for dissection.

At medical schools throughout the Western world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one course that was deemed necessary by professors, doctors, and medical students, and frequently viewed as questionable by the general public, was anatomy with human dissection. In many parts of the United States and Europe obtaining bodies for dissection was a longstanding and contentious issue. For many years medical dissections were only legally allowed on the bodies of executed criminals. As medical education expanded in the late eighteenth century these already limited sources proved increasingly insufficient to meet the needs of growing medical education programs. With this dilemma at hand, anatomy professors and students were left to consider their alternatives, ultimately leading many colleges to do business with (or directly employ) grave robbers\textsuperscript{186} to ensure a sufficient supply of cadavers. This added expense was outside of the means of some students, who began robbing graves themselves to acquire their own cadavers for class. Even as larger cities, like Boston and New York, had many cemeteries from which bodies could be obtained, medical students and professors faced riots and the threat of violence on the occasions their activities were discovered. While states continued passing regulations to limit medical access to cadavers, the growing

\textsuperscript{185} Stowe, 4.
\textsuperscript{186} During this period, grave robbers went by several titles, including resurrection men and body snatchers; all three terms appear to be used interchangeably for someone stealing a body from a grave (versus stealing items from a grave).
needs of colleges simply increased the illicit trade. Ultimately, in some areas, professors orchestrated a variety of legally questionable arrangements between medical schools, city officials, and burial ground employees that allowed them to acquire bodies with limited interference. In many cities, public cemeteries had caretakers who lived on site; these men might be bribed to ignore the activities of grave robbers, or were even complicit in organizing bodies for acquisition. In New York, cemetery caretakers arranged bodies based on their desirability for dissection without complication. “Those “most entitled to respect, or most likely to be called for by friends” were buried in Pit No. 1 and exempted from dissection; the rest were buried in Pit No. 2, which was plundered to supply the medical colleges.” Some schools with easy access to slave states also purchased bodies from those areas. Enslaved people were seen as easy targets, especially because even in death their bodies remained the property of their owners. Slave owners would sometimes consent to selling bodies directly to schools, leading to a single business transaction with no illegal activity, or, theoretically, unhappy family members to challenge the process. While northern professors did not speak openly about acquiring bodies that were not legally available through the state, in letters references to the practice are occasionally present. In an 1845 letter Francis Bowen, editor of the *North American Review* and former Harvard professor, wrote to his friend Dr. Jeffries Wyman about the “price current” of a black cadaver. Although Dr. Wyman was a professor at Hampden-Sydney Medical College in Richmond, Virginia, rather than a slave trader, he supplied northern schools with cadavers,

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especially Harvard, his alma mater. Wyman’s profession, location, and ties made him the ideal broker between schools, slave owners, and grave robbers involved in this cadaver trade.¹⁸⁸

Many of the problems in northern and European cities regarding dissection and anatomy were not issues in Charleston due to its large enslaved population. While many northern schools often had to conceal the extent of their dissection programs and from whence the bodies they used came, in Charleston’s medical schools the opportunities for anatomy lessons with dissection were a point of advertisement. In an 1824 pamphlet promoting the school to potential students, after discussing the anatomy facilities at the new Medical College of South Carolina, Thomas G. Prioleau specifically explained how the large number of African Americans in the city allowed for ample opportunities for dissection. At the same time, he worked to reassure the white population that they would not be impacted, noting that all their dissections would be done on black bodies, “without offending any individual in the community.” White Charlestonians would not have to worry about the threat of grave robbers, and medical students would also not have to worry about the potential need to learn the skill of grave robbing.¹⁸⁹ The security of the community, he argued, gave students better opportunities than they might have at northern institutions, as Charleston’s residents were not “hostile” to anatomy lessons as people in other areas of the country were. Prioleau’s advertisement also addressed the benefits the college offered to students who would be practicing medicine in the southern states. Tying his argument to the prevailing belief in southern medical distinctiveness, he explained that, “the southern student can no where else receive correct instruction on the diseases of his own climate, or the

¹⁸⁹ In some northern schools students were responsible for supplying or directly paying for their own cadavers. Those students who could not afford the high prices of bodies would sometimes personally turn to grave robbing.
peculiar morbid affections of the coloured population.”¹⁹⁰ Not only would the Medical College of South Carolina’s graduates be better able to treat southern diseases, but they would be specifically trained to treat diseases affecting slaves. For slaveholders concerned about keeping their property healthy, this would have created a high demand for doctors with this training.

Medical students seemed comfortable with this arrangement, and some even showed morbid interest in local accidents involving African Americans. In 1854, A.V. Carrigan, a medical student in Charleston who would be staying in town over the holidays, wrote his brother that he was excited to do so because six people (“mostly negroes”) had been killed in a recent steamboat explosion. He planned to spend the Christmas period dissecting them.¹⁹¹

This use of the enslaved for dissection was not unique to Charleston, as Harriet Martineau noted, “In Baltimore the bodies of coloured people exclusively are taken for dissection, ‘because the whites do not like it, and the coloured people cannot resist.’”¹⁹² The ease in obtaining bodies for dissection and the general comfort of the local population offered other opportunities for those interested in providing medical training outside of the medical schools. While students who were accepted to either of the city medical colleges took anatomy as part of their course of study, several of Charleston’s doctors ran their own private “Anatomical Rooms,” promising to prepare aspiring medical students for the classes they would later be expected to take. In 1828 Dr. Eli Geddings offered lectures on anatomy, physiology, and “the practice of medicine and surgery.” These courses ran from November to March as was standard for

¹⁹¹ Stowe, 34.
Charleston’s medical schools, and cost between $50 and $100.\textsuperscript{193} As such, when split between the two medical schools and private teachers, Charleston had a sizeable need for dissectible cadavers during the antebellum period.

As well as offering anatomical training to aspiring physicians, both of Charleston’s medical schools operated hospitals that provided practical experiences for students and a charitable service for Charlestonians who might be otherwise unable to afford medical care. While residents would take advantage of the opportunities these hospitals provided, the treatment patients received often came with questions and suspicion. Many worried about both the standard of care they would receive and what might happen to their body should their treatment be unsuccessful. However, for many patients of these hospitals, gambling with their own lives was the only way they could receive access to potentially life saving medical treatment. The concerns patients had about their wellbeing and the future of their bodies at times proved legitimate; as Todd Savitt writes, “In 1861 a resident doctor at Charleston’s Roper Hospital made the following entry in his case book after one of his white patients died: “No autopsy could be held in this case, as his friends by some accident heard of his death immediately on its taking place, and forthwith came for the body.””\textsuperscript{194} It is worth noting that, for as much as many members of the population opposed dissection, autopsies were frequently viewed in a different light, without the negative social connotations. Sappol writes that

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the cutting open of the body in autopsy was limited to the parts believed to be involved in the cause of death; and the autopsy was performed in a private room, often before a coroner’s jury, and not by medical students in dissecting rooms or an anatomical theater…members of the aristocracy and gentry sought out private autopsy almost as a matter of privilege – their bodies were important enough to warrant some medical explanation of the death.\textsuperscript{195}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{193} Waring, 87.  
\textsuperscript{194} Savitt, 337.  
\textsuperscript{195} Sappol, 103.
Although these voluntary autopsies were viewed as a sign of status by some, for members of Charleston’s poor, black, and enslaved communities, questions regarding the involuntary posthumous uses of their bodies were unsettling.

In their attempts to find patients, Charleston’s medical schools also specifically targeted slave owners by advertising that all medicine and medical care in the hospitals was free of charge; owners would only pay for nursing and food for any enslaved person they might send. Some doctors even advertised to purchase slaves with a variety of illness, including those “affected with scrofula or king’s evil, confirmed hypochondriasm, apoplexy, diseases of the liver, kidneys, spleen, stomach and intestines, bladder and its appendages, diarrhea, dysentery, &c.” Enslaved patients were also seen as especially desirable because their bodies were the property of their owners in life and death, leading decisions about treatment and dissection to the owner rather than the individual or his or her family. While some owners did respect the wishes of their slaves and their families and did not allow dissection, many had no qualms about the prospect. African Americans were well aware of their lack of rights in this situation as well as the very real possibility of their posthumous dissection. In Charleston in 1856 Reverend Robert Wilson reportedly heard one older African American woman(2,5),(998,993) outside the medical school, “Please Gawd, when I dead, I hope I wi’ dead in de summah time.” Those who died in the summer had both the advantage of dying in a part of the year when school was not in session

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196 Savitt, 336, 343, 334-335. The “king’s evil” was another term for scrofula.

197 Ibid., 340. Fears relating to the use of bodies do not go away following the Civil War; Gladys-Marie Fry discusses the prevalence of the term “night doctor,” which used in black communities in the post-Reconstruction period to discuss this threat of both cadavers being stolen and living people being kidnapped to be sold to physicians for medical experimentation. Gladys-Marie Fry, Night Riders in Black Folk History (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 171.
as well as in a season that made dissection impractical. Because of the decay process, medical schools planned dissections outside of the summer months. A cadaver was most desirable when it was collected within the first 24 hours after death (and not useful if acquired after 72 hours); it would quickly need to be preserved to last through the seven to ten day dissection process.\textsuperscript{198} The heat of a Charleston summer would have made dissection unreasonable regardless of how recently deceased a cadaver was. The concern among the black community about the practices of medical schools was not limited to Charleston; in 1854 the \textit{Richmond Daily Dispatch} noted, “among [black residents] there prevails a superstition that when they enter the [medical college] Infirmary they never come out alive, although no where are they better treated.”\textsuperscript{199} While whites throughout the country frequently mocked the concerns of black Americans as unreasonable, aside from several northern anatomy professors, very few were willing to donate their own bodies to this cause.

While the class and race of those deemed appropriate for medical experimentation and dissection suggest how white Charlestonians valued black bodies, the medical use of bodies can also be understood in terms of the city’s slave economy. Although in many areas the cost of illegally obtaining cadavers for dissection was a financial drain on schools and students, the availability of enslaved bodies and the willingness of owners to part with them presented less of an expense to the Charleston schools. This was not just beneficial to the medical schools, but, as Diana Berry argues, also for slave owners, as it provided a market for enslaved people at the end of their useful lives. By sending their sick slaves to teaching hospitals, owners were able escape

\textsuperscript{198} Berry, 155.  
the time and expense of caring for their slaves at home. While Charleston’s hospitals required
owners to feed their slaves, in many areas this was not the case. For many owners, sending a
slave to a teaching hospital could be financially advantageous regardless of the outcome. Not
only would most hospitals take over all the costs of maintaining slaves while they were in for
treatment, but “if the slave died, his owner was spared the inconvenience and expense of burying
him, because the hospital would retain the body for dissection or experiment. If the slave
recovered, the master would once again profit from his or her labor and breeding. Moreover, the
slave owner could lay claim to benevolence; after all, he was sending his old or sick slaves to a
hospital for expert care.”200 While most owners sent their slaves for medical care in hopes that
they would recover, for owners with slaves with chronic or severe medical conditions they
viewed as untreatable, the opportunity to receive “the highest cash price” from the medical
school for someone who would sell poorly (if at all) at auction was an incredibly attractive
offer.201 Similarly, some owners sold their slaves’ bodies to medical schools for dissection as the
last bit of profit they could make from them. Throughout their lives, enslaved people were
denied their freedom (and often their humanity) for the benefit of those who owned them and
profited from their labor. At the ends of their lives, through medical experimentation and
dissection, the knowledge gained from these enslaved bodies would benefit many who believed
their own lives to be of far greater value.

While concerns about public health were not new in Charleston in the 1830s, an increase
in disease and epidemics pushed the city to adopt new tactics in their fight against these threats,
which included attempts to regulate the city’s long established cemeteries. Between 1822 and

200 Ibid., 104.
201 Savitt, 343.
1836 the city’s population increased from 24,780 to 29,673. These population increases placed increasing stress on both the city’s cemeteries and space on the peninsula. There were yellow fever cases in the city in 1827, 1828, 1834, and 1835, and a cholera epidemic in 1836. The 1848 city census reports that there were 7,523 deaths in the city from 1822 to 1830, and 7,663 between 1831 and 1840.\footnote{J.L. Dawson and H. W. DeSaussure. \textit{Census of the City of Charleston, South Carolina, For the Year 1848, Exhibiting the Condition and Prospects of the City, Illustrated by Many Statistical Details, Prepared Under the Authority of the City Council} (Charleston, SC: J.B. Nixon, 1849), 261, 201-202, 211.}\footnote{Ordinances of the City of Charleston: from the 5th Feb., 1833, to the 9th May, 1837. Together with Such of the Acts and Clauses of Acts of the Legislature of South Carolina as Relate to Charleston, passed since December, 1832 (Charleston, S.C.: A. E. Miller, 1837).} Considering these high mortality rates, and remembering how long the city had been occupied, city official’s increasing interest in regulating burials and burial space in the 1830s is understandable. An ordinance ratified July 2, 1836 made it illegal to establish any new burial space within the limits of Charleston; extant spaces could continue to be used. Anyone violating the ordinance faced steep financial penalties. If an individual buried a body anywhere in the city that was not an established burial lot he or she would be fined $1000. Any individual or corporation that opened a new cemetery would be fined $5000, plus $1000 for every day the space was in use.\footnote{Waring, 30.} These years of high disease and mortality rates, combined with epidemic outbreaks, made the city government increasingly concerned about addressing any possible causes of contagion in the city.\footnote{Waring, 30.}

Following the yellow fever epidemic that killed 353 Charlestonians, in November 1838 Mayor Henry Pinckney made a report to City Council concerning the city’s health. He argued that, because the city’s cemeteries were so poorly maintained, they should be suspected of, at the very least, contributing to the recent epidemic, and a new cemetery should be opened outside the
city. Soon after his report, a letter from a city resident, identified only as “R,” was published in a local newspaper questioning Pinckney’s assertions about the city’s cemeteries in a way Pinckney described as being “apparently fortified by specious references to authority, and therefore tends to mislead the public mind upon a subject of vital importance to the public welfare.” Feeling the need to further explain his position as well as refute “R’s” claims, in 1839 Pinckney published a pamphlet that expanded his reasoning for encouraging the measures he suggested to address the public health challenges Charleston was facing. He especially focused on the role played by cemeteries in contributing to epidemics, which he argued necessitated the development of burial space outside the city. Pinckney acknowledged that cemeteries were not the only culprits contributing to poor health in Charleston, and that other measures, like draining low areas and dealing with damp cellars, would also be necessary to ensure future good health. However, as he explained,

I sincerely believe that [the recent epidemic] was owing to their combination; that, without such combination, it would not have existed; and that the grave yards were more instrumental in diffusing it than any other cause. The great object at which I am, therefore, is to destroy this combination, by cutting off as many heads as possible of this fatal hydra...I shall certainly do all in my power to remove these causes, until I am convinced that they really have no agency in the production of disease, and that the late epidemic arose either from a mysterious constitution of the atmosphere, having no connexion whatever with animal or vegetable putrefaction, or from an uncontrollable fatality, which sets all speculation at defiance, and renders all exertion unavailable.207

205 Jeff Strickland, “Nativists and Strangers: Yellow Fever and Immigrant Mortality in Antebellum Charleston, South Carolina,” in Death and the American South, Craig Friend and Lori Glover, eds., (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 132. Strickland provides a mortality breakdown by age (but not race) reporting that of the 353 people who died, 281 were adult males, 31 were adult females, and 28 were children.
207 Ibid., 5.
By considering the historical treatment of burials and the opinions of current medical science, Pinckney believed that by changing Charleston’s burial structure the city could be rendered far safer for future generations.

In defending his contention that cemeteries should be moved out of Charleston, Pinckney appealed to history. Reviewing the history of burial in the Western world, he noted that city and church burials were relatively new in human history, and unique to the Christian era. Citing sources like the Bible, Pinckney argued that within the early Judeo-Christian tradition the dead were buried outside of town, a practice that corresponded to other ancient civilization. It was only in the sixth century A.D. that Christians began being buried in and around churches. While the practice was initially limited to martyrs, dignitaries and church leaders were soon included, until the practice ultimately reached a point where “lucre and vanity had converted churches into charnel houses, disgraceful to the clergy, and perilous to the community.”

Arguing that epidemics directly spread through church burials, Pinckney noted the success (and wisdom) of those in other areas who discontinued the practice of burying their deceased near the living. He cited major cities in Europe that had taken up the practice, including Dublin, Venice, Constantinople, and Vienna, as well as all of France and Denmark. Nearer to home, Pinckney noted that, along with Paraguay and much of Peru, city burials had been abolished in, among other places, New York, Albany, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Boston, and Washington. If, he argued, European cities and northern states had moved away from city burials, how much more necessary was it for southern states, with their warmer climates aiding decay, to adopt similar practices. With the influx of new burials around city churches brought about by recent

\[\text{\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., 16.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{209} Ibid., 23.}\]
epidemics, it was incumbent on citizens and city leaders to reevaluate these practices in light of current knowledge. Modern medical opinion increasingly supported the idea that church burials were harmful and unhealthy, introducing contagion to the city in several different ways, something necessary for Charlestonians to address.

While Pinckney’s focus on current medical thought is an obvious and relevant choice when discussing disease and other issues related to public health, it was also necessary to refute “R’s” arguments, which also included medical opinions. In his letter, “R” discussed the position of French physicians, the leaders of the anatomical field at the time, on the impact of decomposition on the living. He specifically referenced a French anatomy professor, who “not only denies that animal putrescence contributes to disease, but ascribes his own good health, and that of his pupils, and attendants, to the peculiarly genial and delightful atmosphere, generated by the balmy and odoriferous vapours of his dissecting room.” Pinckney calls this in to question, accusing “R” of misleading his audience by choosing to cite the few doctors who agreed with his position. Most medical authorities of the time disagreed with these assertions, as well as the French government, which had made laws in opposition to this physician’s opinions. Pinckney cited local, national, and international medical authorities in his argument, including five city physicians whose opinions on the subject were appended to the pamphlet. All five doctors, Eli Geddings, William Hume, Thomas Simons, James Moultrie, and A.G. Howard (who was also the City Inspector) agreed with Pinckney’s assessment that animal putrefaction was a contributing cause of disease and epidemics in the city. This was an important issue, the doctors argued, to address on multiple levels.

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211 While city regulations stated that all humans had to be buried in established burial spaces, animal carcasses were generally collected and thrown into the marshes around the city.
Two of the doctors consulted, William Hume and A.G. Howard, argued that epidemics were unique to cities, making it all the more necessary that Charleston address any potential cause. Hume noted that animal matter and vegetable decomposition “produces those modifications of disease which infest cities, and from which the surrounding country is exempt.”212 This idea did not appear to be one up for much debate; Howard stated, “everyone knows that epidemic yellow fever, is contained to cities, or densely crowded places.”213 Thus, it was incumbent on the city government to do what it could to address the matter as quickly as possible.

Hume also argued that dead and decaying matter in the city presented far more health challenges than miasmas and noxious gasses, but also had a negative impact on Charleston’s health through the water supply, writing

our city well water is a strong solution of animal and vegetable matter in every process of decomposition, with its constituent salts, and as such, we drink not only the soluble filth, and excretions of men and animals, but the very mortal remains of our citizens, who are interred in the city. Disgusting as this idea may seem, and revolting to human nature as it may appear, it is nevertheless true.214

Not only did rainwater run through a variety of matter as it entered city wells and groundwater, but even the simple act of burying the dead created problems. With such a high water table, not only were vaults in city cemeteries dug deeply enough to frequently be below the water level, but during rain storms groundwater levels rose high enough to include more deeply dug graves, leading to a variety of undesirable matter leeching out into the water system. However, Hume

Much of the city today is built on landfill; on Figure 1 you will note that much of the left side of the peninsula is not solid ground. Because of the years of deposits of city waste, like animals, today that side of the peninsula has been completely filled in and developed. Fraser, 304.

212 Ibid., Appendix p. 1.
213 Ibid., Appendix p. 3.
214 Ibid., Appendix p. 1.
did not blame all water problems on the city’s dead. He argued that, while some people attributed the saltiness of some city wells on the brackish water around the city, it was also impacted by the city’s living residents. Along with salts that leached out through the decomposition process, he calculated that through elimination alone 30,000 people would produce over 400,000 pounds of salt annually on top of what all the city’s animals would simultaneously contribute. Hume argued that it would only be through a combination of ceasing burials within the city limits and creating a clean water supply that the city’s health would be improved. Ultimately, this situation persisted for decades to come, as Charleston did not install a sewage system for many years. It was estimated that in 1880 “about 50,000 Charlestonians were living on 3,300 acres, using some 7,000 privies, and depositing into them every twenty-four hours approximately 100,000 pounds of solid and fluid excreta.” Charleston did not begin installing sewers until the 1890s, but even then the installation focused on a small section of the city south of Broad Street; modern sewers would slowly expand into the rest of the city in the years to come.

Broadly, all five doctors consulted agreed that cemeteries in the city posed a threat, even if they were not the sole cause of disease, the city should address their negative impact on public health. As Simons wrote

> It is the part of wisdom and prudence, and a rule in medical police, to remove all causes which may, but a possible contingency, create disease; and such a course is likewise in accordance with the dictates of common sense. Having made these brief preliminary remarks, I respectfully give my individual opinion and belief, that the burial of the dead among the living, is an agent, with other causes, in producing disease – and that it is a wise system of medical police, especially in warm latitudes, to have cemeteries beyond the precincts of a city.

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215 Fraser, 304.
216 Ibid., 330.
217 Pinckney, Appendix p. 3.
With the majority of history and medical opinion on his side regarding limiting city burial, Pinckney then made an appeal to modernity. In many of the world’s major cities, like New York, London, New Orleans, and Paris, burial reform was being discussed, and city burials had already been banned in some of these areas. Following the creation of the country’s first rural cemetery, Mount Auburn, in Massachusetts in 1831, cities across the United States began opening their own rural cemeteries, like Philadelphia (1836), Baltimore (1838), Cincinnati (1844), and Richmond (1847). Moving away from the outdated practices of burying the dead in cities “is recommended by a just regard to the spirit of the age, and the progress of society; to the improvement of our city, and the welfare of posterity; to the protection of strangers, and the safety of our children – to the preservation of the living, and the repose of the dead.” A rural cemetery could provide Charlestonians from across the city’s classes and religious groups peace in death they were currently being denied by city burials. When describing Paris’ rural cemetery, Pinckney wrote, “it is a spot without the walls, where the ashes of Jew and Christian, Catholic and Protestant, repose in charitable vicinity.” This rural cemetery could provide “motivation of moral and religious principles in the living, a public cemetery, rurally situated and tastefully arranged, would possess a vast superiority over the numerous, desecrated, and unsightly grave yards, which now occupy and deform so many portions of our city.” By making these changes, Charleston could show itself to be a modern city. For a city that had been slipping in national importance in the past several decades, this message would have been attractive. Pinckney argued that as good citizens and good Christians, Charlestonians had the responsibility to protect the vulnerable in the city, like children and immigrants, and that the changes they made to

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218 Ibid., 24-25.
219 Ibid., 28-29.
220 Ibid., 5.
improve the city’s health would allow all citizens to enjoy their rights in more security. He asked, “shall we establish for Charleston a permanent character of healthiness, which is all important to its welfare, or shall we fold our arms in indolence, and make no effort either to elevate its character, and promote its commerce, or even to secure the lives of its inhabitants!”\textsuperscript{221} This, he argued, could only be done with the cooperation of the citizens of Charleston themselves.

In his pamphlet Pinckney cited modern science, medicine, and the example of other cities. Over the next twenty years, some Charlestonians continued to question the science behind improving public health by relocating cemeteries outside the city center. In the late 1850s, a group of citizens objected to moving cemeteries outside of the city. They could not “perceive any conclusive reason why this usage should be deemed injurious to the public health,” arguing that health was better in Charleston than in other port cities.\textsuperscript{222} They also claimed that there was no real evidence to support the idea that epidemics started in cemeteries, arguing that, while the vast majority of yellow fever victims at the time were buried in Magnolia Cemetery outside the city, epidemics had continued to be as bad, if not worse, than they were before it opened in 1850.\textsuperscript{223} At the same time, some members of city churches also questioned the scientific evidence regarding the ties between disease and cemeteries, and argued that keeping people from being buried in churchyards violated their rights.

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid., 27-28.
\textsuperscript{222} Report of the Committee of the City Council of Charleston, upon Internments Within the City, and the Memorial from Churches and Citizens (Walker, Evans & Co. Steam Printers; Charleston, SC, 1859), 3.
\textsuperscript{223} Magnolia Cemetery opened outside Charleston in 1850; please see Chapter Five for more information.
With these memorials in hand, in 1859 the City Council published a response considering the condition of city cemeteries and the need for burial reform. In addressing memorialists’ concerns, the City Council argued that there were real examples of the health risks church cemeteries in the city posed. Just as in 1839, council members argued that the health threats putrefaction posed to residents were obvious when considering the condition of city churchyards. Noting that there was concrete evidence of gasses and miasma coming from local burials, they asked

To what cause are the lambent lights, so often seen flickering over the burial places of the dead, to be ascribed, but to the exhalations from beneath? And who has not, many and many a time, observed upon the walks and paths of our own church yards; aye, even in the streets before them, on a warm, damp summer evening, the phosphorescent sparkle that glitters amid corruption and death.224

While there was some debate about whether these miasmas directly caused yellow fever, council members argued that if nothing else they were known to cause a variety of other health problems, and therefore broadly posed a threat. Even with this caveat, using public health and death records, they noted that “it is still a singular fact that during the yellow fever epidemics of the last few years, the locations of the severest type have been in the streets and squares embraced by Archdale, Queen, State and Market Streets, and that within this circuit, several of the largest and most crowded grave-yards are located.”225 These facts were fresh on council members minds; in 1859 they also published a report on the previous year’s yellow fever epidemic, elaborating on the negative impact it had on city residents.226 However, regular burials were not cemeteries’ only means of contributing to ill health. Water and vaults continued to be a

225 Ibid., 15.
health hazard in the city. As well as the nearness of cemeteries to drinking water sources, burial vaults could also hold water. One resident relayed his experience, stating

There was a vault opening this morning in ---- church yard, the stench from which was so great, and occurring just as the family were sitting down to breakfast, I went over myself to see what had occasioned it. On looking into the vault I saw four coffins floating within three feet of the surface, and the smell was so strong I had to order them to burn tar. This vault is about four feet wide and five or six feet deep, and only covered with a slate slab. The water which the workmen bailed out was a deep green color, and appeared to be very slimy. I, as well as the whole of my family, can vouch that these things occur frequently.  

Council members noted that the water that was drained from this vault was poured on to the ground, presumably to reenter the water supply. From this example and others, City Council believed that vaults should be disallowed in the city as they offered no dignity to the dead, quickly filling with generations of intermixed bones and body parts, all while allowing gasses to escape into the air to the detriment of city residents.

Council members also addressed issues surrounding the repose of the dead. Rather than being peaceful, as memorialists claimed, reports indicated that it was anything but that. Quoting from two reports that were presented to the St. Philips’ Church vestry regarding the churchyard in 1825 they note, “the Clerk informs us that the time within which a body and coffin become so decayed that the same place may be used for another interment is three (3) years. Let us call it five (5) years. Now, it is manifest that if we have ground enough for any number of periods of ten years, even to one thousand.” By 1859, they argued, the issue of churchyard overcrowding and an uneasy rest for the dead had only increased. In referring back to St. Philips in the current day they noted that in the church’s history “about seven thousand dead bodies have been placed

\[\text{Report of the Committee of the City Council of Charleston, upon Internments Within the City, 25.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., 22.}\]
there, of which number twenty-five hundred had been interred within twenty-five years! The
Report claimed all the ground, except that occupied by tombs, monuments, slabs, and head
stones, as open for burials. What has become of the six thousands and six hundred? 229
Because of these overcrowded conditions, there was no chance that those previously buried were allowed
to be undisturbed. Using recent examples to elaborate, the city council noted that bodies that had
not fully decayed were being disturbed and often mutilated in the process, as graves were being
cut on top of previous interments leading bodies to become intermingled, and that graves that
were being sold as free from burials often contained previous remains.

Council members saw several potential options to solve burial problems in the city. They
included closing all African American cemeteries and replacing them with one large cemetery
outside the city divided into organizational plots. While this particular plan was never
accomplished, their argument was consistent – regardless of what citizens and memorialists
believed, City Council was firm in their trust of current medical thought regarding the health
threats posed by cemeteries.

This incident illustrates the ways in which Charlestonians had been consistent in their
messages and beliefs over the past twenty years. As City Council stood firm in their position that
moving burials outside of the city was the best possible course of action, other residents had not
changed their minds about city burials over the course of twenty years. Many people were not
convinced by the argument that moving burials would change or improve health in the city. In
the twenty years between Pinckney’s initial arguments and the memorial presented to the City
Council, there were a number of increasingly deadly epidemics in Charleston. Since Magnolia
Cemetery opened outside of town in 1850, there had been two yellow fever epidemics; the 1854

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
epidemic killed 627 while over 700 people died in the 1858 epidemic. In the eyes of the
memorialists, moving burials had not kept Charleston safe. However, when considering events in
Charleston, social concerns must always be taken into account. Until after the Civil War the
highest status burials in Charleston were in city churchyards. While Magnolia eventually became
a more prestigious place, for Charlestonians who viewed churchyard burials as a way to maintain
their social status in death, the idea that these spaces could be closed to burials based on what
many considered to be questionable science was a socially threatening prospect. In this instance,
as in many others, burial was far more important to the living than to the dead.

Although the antebellum years in Charleston were clearly ones of high disease rates and
serious public health challenges, the 1859 memorialists were statistically correct about the
comparative challenges the city faced. Even with the epidemics that plagued the city, between
1830 and 1880, Charleston’s mortality rates were quantifiably better than those in other major
port cities, like Savannah, New Orleans, Baltimore, and New York. These statistics, though,
would have been cold comfort for Charlestonians in the midst of an unhealthy city summer.

As Charlestonians worked to use scientific and medical advancements to address pressing
health concerns, measures intended to help the living had a number of repercussions for the
city’s dead. City cemeteries became battlegrounds in the fight to explain the cause of contagion.
While medical authorities and the city government blamed the city’s overflowing and long used
cemeteries for dangerous miasmas and contamination of the city’s water, many residents
questioned these assertions, as this was a period when opinions of physicians were not always
valued. Some Charlestonians argued instead that not only should the dead be allowed to continue

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230 Waring, 65.
to rest in city cemeteries, but they, too, ought to be able to join their family members and friends at their own deaths. Even with the regulations city government attempted to put in place, residents continued to push back against further action. Even some Charlestonians who supported moving burials out of town would ultimately not take that own path at their own death; when he died in 1863, rather than being buried outside of the city in Magnolia Cemetery, former Mayor Henry Pinckney was buried in the Circular Congregational Church’s cemetery. For many Charlestonians with longstanding family burial locations, sentiment would prove to be far stronger than scientific rationalism while making personal choices.

While issues surrounding antebellum churchyard burials were most often applicable to the more well off, white Charlestonians, medical advances would impact some of the city’s most marginalized dead. Although medical schools in Europe and the northern United States faced challenges to their anatomy programs performing human dissections, Charleston’s large enslaved population provided a plethora of subjects for medical education. Not only were enslaved people unable to successfully protest the posthumous use of their bodies in this manner, but because of their presence, white Charlestonians were far more accepting of the medical schools’ dissection programs than were residents of other cities. While human dissection continues to be viewed as a necessary part of medical education and has helped advance science and medicine, by using some of the city’s most vulnerable residents as subjects, medical schools and approving white residents again reinforced the value and position of slaves and free people of color in city society.

As Charlestonians contemplated Mayor Pinckney’s calls for a cemetery to be opened outside of the city, at the same time the rural cemetery movement was spreading rapidly throughout the United States. Middle class Charlestonians will sense a new opportunity.
Constrained for years by Charleston’s inflexible class system, the prospect of a rural cemetery offered these residents a new opportunity to secure a lasting legacy for themselves and their families in a way that had previously been impossible. While some members of the upper middle class were very well off and could have afforded burial in a church cemetery, because they were not from established families, it would have been unlikely that they could have purchased land for a family plot, or left much of a mark of their own existence, let alone for the rest of their family for posterity. For members of the upper class, this was less of a problem. Their names were already established in the city, and, while burial in the church cemeteries remained an important signifier of their class position, throughout the city there were also other indicators of their status. For members of the middle class, burial in a rural cemetery offered something more than just a place for the dead. A rural cemetery would allow members of the middle class to build monuments in honor of their families, hopefully establishing their family’s name and reputation for posterity. While some city residents continued to fight with the city government for years to come over burial restrictions, for one group of Charlestonians, death began to offer a social opportunity life could not provide.
Chapter Five: “In this City of the Dead:” Magnolia Cemetery and Middle Class Aspiration

As the antebellum period drew to a close, the years of epidemic disease, overcrowding, and social immobility led some Charlestonians to consider what benefits a rural cemetery might present. Following the calls of Mayor Henry Pinckney, some white, middle class Charlestonians saw an opportunity to establish a rural cemetery that would provide a lasting legacy for themselves and their families. For these residents, a good burial could help them supersede the social ceiling that restricted them in life; as Michael Sappol notes, in antebellum America, “death was regarded as the epitome of life. How one died, and how one’s body was treated after death, fixed for eternity one’s moral, aesthetic, and social status.”231

While on paper a rural cemetery was presented as a city of the dead, somewhere Charlestonians could rest in decency and security, Magnolia Cemetery did not live up to that aspiration. The burial ground was designed to be intentionally exclusive; many were excluded from interment there by social status and race. Although Magnolia’s organizers courted the city’s elite, they continued to bury their dead in the already crowded city churchyards. The development of Magnolia Cemetery illustrates middle class aspiration in the late antebellum period, and the way that class based tensions played out in Charleston’s burial spaces.

For years prior to Magnolia’s opening, some of Charleston’s citizens had recognized the need for a cemetery outside of town. Charleston had been occupied since the late seventeenth century; by the early 1800s Charleston’s peninsula had seen decades of building and re-building, destruction by fire and hurricane, and an ever-growing population. The need for a new cemetery

was not unique to Charleston, as other cities with long settlement histories faced similar problems. While the rural cemetery movement initially became popular in Europe, as its length of settlement and spatial limitation placed it in far greater need of these cemeteries, American cities, like Boston, New York, and Richmond, soon joined.

The first rural cemetery in the United States, Mount Auburn near Cambridge, Massachusetts, was, in many ways, an experiment when it opened in 1831. Although modeled in part on Paris’ Père Lachaise cemetery, which opened outside the city in 1804, the goal of Mount Auburn’s founders was to meld burials with nature and horticulture. These goals were reflected in the name “rural cemetery.” David Sloane explains

The founders of new cemeteries throughout America named them rural cemeteries: cemeteries from the Greek word for “sleeping chamber,” because they were considered temporary resting places during the wait for Judgment Day: rural because their landscapes embodied the founders’ respect for nature and provided a counterpoint to the chaotic commercialism of the city, over which the founders felt a strong moral disquiet.232

Mount Auburn’s size was also part of its experimental nature. It was established on seventy-two acres of land; the earlier burying ground in New Haven had been considered large at six acres. The cemetery was also a departure from New England’s long-standing burial practices. New Englanders had been burying their dead on the village green for two centuries by the time Mount Auburn opened, so the idea of moving burials outside of town was both a change and a potential business risk.233

To help mitigate these challenges, Mount Auburn’s planners included the local horticultural association. Because agriculture was viewed as a virtuous profession in Early

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233 Ibid., 45.
America, horticultural clubs were believed to reinforce America’s moral virtue.\textsuperscript{234} Mount Auburn’s landscape was intended to be used by both mourners and visitors as a space in which to experience the benefits of nature. Many families quickly bought lots, planning to enjoy them before they were necessary for their intended purpose, and began building large family monuments and otherwise improving their plots. These activities underscored the less democratic side of the rural cemetery movement – that of cost and accessibility. Some local residents could not afford a family plot. The cemetery sold less expensive single plots that restricted monuments and barred lot holders from becoming members of the corporation, giving them no say in cemetery matters.\textsuperscript{235}

Rural cemeteries also offered a permanence that historically had been inaccessible to many. In European tradition, it was unusual for common people to own burial plots and use them in any sort of perpetuity. Prior to the opening of Paris’ Père Lachaise, the French, excluding royalty, rented graves for six years. While Père Lachaise offered more permanence to families, it still operated on a renewable lease system.\textsuperscript{236} Traditionally, once a grave rental period ended, the renter’s bones would be removed and placed in an ossuary or charnel house. In early American city churchyards, rather than removing remains to reuse a burial space, burials were continuously placed on top of the previous ones. In 1800, officials at Trinity Church in New York City estimated that, over the century the churchyard had been in use, “burials raised the level of the churchyard by several yards.”\textsuperscript{237} In Charleston, by the mid-nineteenth century several of the city’s churchyards had been in continuous use for 150 years. Rural cemeteries offered both

\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 53-54.
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., 20.
permanence and single use spaces to families that purchased lots; the establishment of companies to build and run the cemeteries further reinforced this feeling of security. For middle class families hoping to permanently establish a legacy, American rural cemeteries offered a perfect opportunity.

Mount Auburn was ultimately successful, leading rural cemeteries to open throughout the country. Some Charlestonians were very supportive of the idea. The commissioners of the city’s Temporary Hospital, which included religious leaders like the Catholic Bishop John England, Episcopal ministers Paul Trapier and William Barnwell, and community leaders like the merchant Bazile Lanneau, Jr., planter N. R. Middleton, and the attorney R. W. Seymour passed a resolution recommending that the City Council consider opening a public cemetery outside the city with lots designated for various religious groups and societies, as well as for use by individuals.  

The City Council, too, was concerned about burials within the city; an ordinance was passed in July 1836 prohibiting new cemeteries from being created within the city limits, but allowing those already open to continue to be used. 

In 1839, Charleston Mayor Henry Pinckney made an appeal for a rural cemetery based on the health and disease challenges the city faced. Not only did Pinckney’s argument have the support of medical opinion and current scientific thought behind it, but he also had statistical proof that burial spaces were filling rapidly. Pinckney argued that epidemics were filling the extant cemeteries at an incredible rate noting that, while Charleston averaged one thousand

\[238\] H.L. Pinckney, *Remarks Addressed to the Citizens of Charleston. On the Subject of Interments, and the Policy of Establishing a Public Cemetery, Beyond the Precincts of the City* (Charleston, SC: W. Riley, 1839), 24. In 1852, Charleston’s Catholics purchased land adjoining Magnolia for a Catholic cemetery. Named St. Lawrence, this cemetery was viewed as a good option to allow Catholics a consecrated burial space outside of the city limits.

burials a year, six hundred people were buried in the city during the last two months of the most recent epidemic.240

There were also questions and criticism regarding the aesthetics of city burial spaces; some residents argued that they were needed to provide necessary green space in the city. Pinckney countered that the state of the graveyards in Charleston did no honor to the city’s dead. Churchyards were subject to passing traffic, noise, and were, “the frequent theatres of idle merriment, or the vicious dissipation.”241 These will be longstanding concerns; in the 1850s it was reported that in one city churchyard “a gentleman…observed several boys running about the graves. On going in, to ascertain what they were about, he discovered that they were actually playing “football,” by kicking a couple of skulls around, that had just been thrown from a new made grave,” something City Council members compared to Hogarth’s Idle Apprentice gambling on a tomb stone.242 There was also concern that space might be reused in a large city, disturbing or causing the loss of graves, which was historically valid.243 In 1825 a committee at St. Phillips’ Episcopal Church found that burial spaces were frequently reused; reportedly a body and coffin would decay at a rate that would allow a space to be reused after three years. The committee estimated that there were around seven thousand bodies buried in the lot.244 Burial grounds outside of town could guarantee families peace for their dead relatives without concern

240 Pinckney, 26.
241 Ibid., 30.
243 This was something that had been done in the past; it was common for graveyards to only last a generation or two in large cities like New York (as discussed in The Last Great Necessity).
244 Pinckney, 22.
of being disrupted by city life, overcrowding, and that “the sacred remains of the dead will never be transferred from the grave yard to the street, by the Spirit of Improvement.”

Criticism of the appearance of churchyards was probably warranted. Throughout the United States churchyards had often developed with very little planning. Burials were not done in any sort of orderly fashion, and early churchyards often lacked paths to save space. Even locating the actual spot of a burial could be challenging after “well-meaning caretakers “beautified” many churchyards by straightening the lines of memorials and establishing pathways for visitors.” Due to these aesthetic concerns, arguments about providing better looking areas for burials gained some traction.

Regulations passed in the 1840s furthered the city government’s push to move burials out of town. In 1841 the South Carolina Legislature passed “An Act for the Better Regulation of the inhabitants of Charleston Neck,” which made burials within the Charleston Neck, located above the older sections of town, illegal (excepting several extant burial grounds) and requiring that graves be dug at least six feet in depth. That same year the City Council closed the burial ground located in the Cannonborough area of the city that opened in 1801, and opened a new burial ground at a location known as Tower Hill. The fate of the Cannonborough burial ground illustrates that public cemeteries were still not seen as permanent fixtures. In 1838 the city contemplated selling the filled burial ground to the Federal Government, which planned to expand their nearby arsenal onto the former public cemetery. While Charleston had long been ahead of the rest of the state in regulating and tracking burials, measures were soon put in place to further track those who were being interred. An 1849 act, passed by the General Assembly,

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245 Ibid., 30.
246 Sloane, 20.
247 Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, 6.
allowed the City Council to prevent burials without a physician’s or coroner’s certificate stating cause of death. An ordinance the following year required City Board of Heath Commissioners to inspect the city cemeteries, gave them the power to license trades relating to burials within the city, and required those within the city in charge of city burial grounds to only allow burial with proper permits.248

It was in this environment that Magnolia Cemetery’s founders saw their opportunity. As a rural cemetery, Magnolia would address some of the concerns being discussed in the city by taking burials out of the crowded town cemeteries and providing an aesthetically pleasing place for Charlestonians to remember their lost loved ones. Magnolia’s founders, Edward Sebring, William C. Dukes, George N. Reynolds Jr., William S. Walker, Frederick Richards, and William D. Porter, received a charter from the state legislature in 1849 to make Magnolia a cemetery in perpetuity. This charter granted that the land Magnolia was established on “shall never be granted but for Burial Lots; and that the Lots so granted shall be held by the proprietors for the purposes of Sepulture alone,” and put penalties in place for anyone who may attempt to destroy any property within the cemetery.249 These would have been encouraging guarantees, especially since the Cannonborough lot had so recently been sold, and there were so many reports about the poor condition of the city churchyards. The company hired Edward C. Jones to design the cemetery’s grounds and buildings, and they soon constructed a number of structures that would further Magnolia’s permanence and prestige. These included a chapel, where funeral services

248 Ibid., 7.
could be held, and a receiving tomb to house bodies prior to burial.²⁵⁰ Along with their
collection projects, the founders secured a labor force for the cemetery by purchasing two
slaves to do much of the work that sextons performed in churchyards.²⁵¹ The land chosen for the
cemetery, formerly Magnolia Farm, contained one grave when construction began - that of a
young man who, after telling his mother goodbye under a large tree as he left for the Mexican
American War, was buried under that same tree when he died of disease at war’s end.²⁵²

In promoting the cemetery, the company used arguments similar to Mayor Pinckney’s,
noting that all the major northern cities already had rural cemeteries, and with Charleston’s much
warmer weather, the city was in far greater need of one. They also aligned Magnolia with current
city law; the cemetery contained ample amounts of land to accommodate Charlestonians who
could no long be buried in town because of the city council’s ordinance forbidding new burial
grounds to be opened. The members of the Magnolia Cemetery Company believed that Magnolia
would not only provide for Charleston’s practical needs but also the emotional needs of the grief
stricken and mourning, and would offer a place for families to rest together. While this might
seem to be a common arrangement, because city cemeteries saw such frequent (and
longstanding) use, unless a family owned a delineated space or vault within a churchyard family
members might not be able to be buried together. There was certainly no guarantee that a space
where a family member was buried was not being reused, nor that it would not be reused in the
future. Even if a family did hold a plot in a churchyard there was no guarantee of a peaceful

²⁵⁰ There was a $1 a day charge for using the receiving tomb. In the Magnolia Cemetery
Daybook there are several entries for people who were held in the receiving tomb for a very long
time. In 1853 one body was kept there from August 26 until December 28; in 1864 there was a
charge for someone using the space for a year.
²⁵¹ Trinkley, Hacker, and Southerland, xvii.
²⁵² Ibid., xiii.
repose; one Charlestonian reported that in his family’s lot, which should have held sixteen burials, between thirty and forty people were already interred and others were being added.\textsuperscript{253} Even at the time of Magnolia’s dedication in November 1850, not only had a number of burials occurred in the cemetery, but some Charlestonians had already elected to have family members disinterred from their previous places of burial and reburied in Magnolia, already fulfilling the Company’s goal.\textsuperscript{254}

In their published rules, the board of directors established Magnolia as a solidly respectable, middle class institution. Much of this information regards the use of space within the cemetery. While lot holders had the right to enclose their lots, the type of wall they could build was regulated. And, while lot holders were “requested” to improve their lots though landscaping, monument building, and the like, cemetery rules dictated that their improvements must be well kept and could not infringe upon any other plots. For those who did not hold whole plots, the rules were different. There were two large lots the company referred to as being “public or general burial lots.”\textsuperscript{255} In these areas, an individual burial space could be purchased. These were differentiated by both price and the rights associated with them. In one lot, burial cost ten dollars, and no headstones or markers were allowed. In the other lot burials were fifteen dollars, but headstones could be erected if the friends of the deceased so chose. Regardless of which of these areas an individual was buried in, he or she was not given the same rights as those owning full family lots, like the right to vote on company decisions.\textsuperscript{256} Burials were not free for those owning

\textsuperscript{253} Pinckney, 25.
\textsuperscript{256} The Magnolia Cemetery Daybook seems to indicate that most of these lots were purchased for someone who was already dead rather than someone purchasing a spot when he or
plots; there were fees for opening graves and vaults, and the fees varied based on whether the individual being interred was a child or an adult, as well as the depth the grave was to be dug. The company also planned to maintain detailed records of those interred in Magnolia; the rules state

> In each case of a burial, a statement giving the name, place of nativity, residence with the number of the street, age, a certificate of the attending Physician or Coroner concerning the disease of the person to be interred, and also whether married or unmarried, must be handed to the Keeper, who is required to keep in a proper book an accurate registry of the same.\(^{257}\)

In requesting this information, Magnolia’s founders could both argue that their cemetery was conforming to the same standards of data collection as town burial spaces and again ensure that all burials taking place in Magnolia were reputable.

Magnolia Cemetery was dedicated November 19, 1850 with a service that included a prayer, a speech, and a poem that was written for the occasion to further legitimize the cemetery’s founding. Charles Fraser, a well-known Charleston artist, former lawyer, and popular orator, described the rural cemetery movement and revisited arguments made by Mayor Pinckney. Because the living owe so much to the dead, it was their responsibility to provide the dead a place of peaceful rest where they would receive the appropriate respect. With the many benefits of being surrounded by the beauty of nature, mourners, too, would have a place to privately, and appropriately, express their grief without the interference of the city in the form of things like noisy streets and unsympathetic passers by. Fraser argued that not only were city burials not conducive to those mourning, but that city graveyards posed a health threat to the

\(^{257}\) Magnolia Cemetery Proceedings, 84.
living. By opening Magnolia, he argued, Charlestonians were taking a step towards protecting the health of the living while treating their dead with appropriate respect.

William Gilmore Simms wrote a poem for the occasion. In it, he focused, in large part, on mourning, reminded listeners of the hope death could bring in regards to eternal rest and ultimate reunion, while also touching on Charleston’s history. Simms’ poem remembers Isaac Hayne, John Laurens, and John Rutledge, Revolutionary War heroes, as well as prominent Charleston families and the recently deceased Senator and former Vice President, John C. Calhoun, none of whom were buried at Magnolia. In regards to the line stating, “There sleep the Pinckneys, Gadsdens, Rutledges” the cemetery company explains that, while no members of these leading Revolutionary families were buried in Magnolia, “it is one of the purposes of the proprietors of the Cemetery, to procure, if possible, the transfer of their remains to this spot from the places where they at present sleep. Some of these places, are – we shame to say it – not only without a monument, but without a mark, - and it is believed to be doubtful, in one or more instances, where the remains are found.” They expressed similar hope in regards to Calhoun, noting “a noble monument raised to him here, would be a conspicuous object of attraction and admiration.”

The impetus for these statements appears to be twofold. Magnolia company officers made the case that the graves of these figures had been both neglected and, in some cases, even lost. Through their promise of perpetual and dedicated care, Magnolia Cemetery could offer a place where these notable South Carolinians would be taken care of in a lasting way that paid adequate and appropriate respect to their memories and deeds. In this criticism, cemetery promoters were ignoring the reality and constraints of death during the Revolution, as well as the

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258 Magnolia Cemetery Proceedings, 80-81.
fact that the graves of the men they named were in well-known locations. Conversely, while these claims were made under a guise of concern, having members of these families in Magnolia would serve to both legitimate the cemetery in the eyes of the community as well as raise its status. While throughout the country members of the middle class were leaders in the rural cemetery movement, in a city as class and status conscious as Charleston, participation by the upper classes was still necessary for Magnolia to take on the social importance its founders desired. Yet Magnolia did not see a rash of disinterments of notable South Carolinians in their favor, nor was Calhoun buried in the cemetery.

Burying Calhoun in Charleston rather than in the upstate near his Fort Hill plantation, or in the state capital of Columbia, illustrates the city’s enduring importance in the minds of many in the state. As South Carolina’s most important political figure, it was symbolically important to bury his body in the churchyard of the state’s first established church, which held the remains of many notable figures. Regardless of the size of the monument or the quality of perpetual care Magnolia’s founders offered, their new cemetery could not offer the status city and state leaders believed a hero like Calhoun was due. Although this was a disappointment for Magnolia, the process of Calhoun’s burial illustrates once more how closely death and burial were intertwined with the concerns of the living. While many believed that burying Calhoun at St. Philip’s was one of the highest honors they could afford him, some who knew him, like his wife Floride, believed he would have been unhappy with a Charleston burial. Calhoun

259 Fort Hill was located outside of the town of Pendleton. Following the death of Calhoun’s daughter, Anna, and her husband, Thomas Green Clemson, Fort Hill was given to the state as land for an agricultural college. Today, Calhoun’s house stands near the center of Clemson University’s campus.

260 Even though she was a native of the lowcountry, when she died, rather than being reunited with her husband, Floride Calhoun was buried in the Episcopal Church graveyard in Pendleton, South Carolina, close to their Fort Hill Plantation.
famously did not like Charleston. He briefly lived in the city while studying law with Chancellor DeSaussure in the early 1800s, and did not enjoy his time there. In letters he referred to Charleston as being “so corrupt,” and at the completion of his studies he never lived in the city again nor took part in any of the city’s society and life. While it is obvious that Magnolia Cemetery founders wanted Calhoun’s body to enhance the reputation and standing of their cemetery, this was not an original idea. Calhoun’s posthumous experiences demonstrate the ways that other South Carolinians viewed his death and the importance they attached to obtaining and controlling his body. By ignoring his wife’s suggestions about his burial and his feelings towards Charleston, state and city leaders themselves used the event to enhance their own position, and to reinforce the importance of the city of Charleston.

Following the dedication service, the Magnolia Company directors published the proceedings because “the gratification of those present was unqualified; and that their fellow-citizens might have an opportunity of enjoying and appreciating the exquisite productions of the Orator and the Poet on this occasion, the Directors of the Company resolved to embody in a permanent shape the entire proceedings of the day.” The directors included a variety of information for those readers who might want to purchase space. A copy of the Cemetery’s rules and regulations lay out the responsibilities of both the cemetery’s President and Directors as well as lot holders in the cemetery. These rules and regulations described the security and advantages burial in this new rural cemetery could provide to potential customers.

Magnolia was to be a religiously inclusive cemetery. In the introduction to the proceedings the directors wrote, “In this City of the Dead no distinction of sect or religion is

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recognized. How populous will be that city! This is an important point. As an old city with a diverse religious background, it was important for Magnolia to accommodate Charlestonians of various religions and denominations. However, there may have been some commercial considerations for this regulation rather than sheer magnanimity. Because new cemeteries were not to be opened within the city, Magnolia’s organizers and supporters hoped that churches would purchase lots in the cemetery to allow congregants to be buried there with their co-religionists.

Historians of the rural cemetery movement have noted the relationship of the middle class and rural cemeteries. Rural cemeteries were places that the middle class could use to show their status and influence and leave their own legacies. Magnolia’s founding fits this description. Even though Mayor Henry Pinckney was an early supporter of the creation of a rural cemetery, and while Magnolia’s opening was partially in response to a larger problem the city was seeking to address, the cemetery’s founders were middle class Charlestonians. The names of the traditional Charleston upper class, like Pinckney, Ravenel, Drayton, Manigault, and Laurens, are nowhere to be found in regards to Magnolia’s founding and opening. Even though members of the upper class do not appear to have been involved in the project, they are invoked in the process. In the dedication proceedings, the Company suggested that notable South Carolinians would be better served by being moved to Magnolia. By appealing to members of the Revolutionary families, the city’s upper class, and the Calhouns, Magnolia’s founders still needed the validation that could be gained through association with the upper classes as they worked to socially establish themselves and leave legacies for both themselves and their families. Due to its well-established and immovable social system, Charleston was an especially

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263 Ibid., 4.
understandable place for this to be an issue. These middle class Charlestonians had little hope of ever being accepted as civic or social leaders; even though Magnolia could provide them some social presence, they still needed others to legitimize their position. In his address Fraser criticized the way other groups had used burials as a means of showing status and argued that rural cemeteries would ultimately be more uplifting for those mourning lost family and friends, stating

The temples and obelisks and pillars, and other costly structures of former times, were as much the monuments of living vanity as of departed worth. But the taste of the present day is to invite contemplation, with all its soothing influence, by some modest memorial of the departed, more eloquent in its appeals to the heart than the proudest monument – to exchange the crowded church-yards of cities, whose associations, beyond the claims of private feeling, are neither pleasing nor profitable, for the quiet and secluded walks of a rural cemetery, where the mourner may withdraw, and indulge, unseen, the luxury of grief.²⁶⁴

Even though Fraser claimed there was a difference between the pride and vanity of the living in past years and the current privacy and contemplation of rural cemeteries, the differences were limited. By the mid-nineteenth century, the monuments and statuary previously the prevue of the upper class were still present, but could now be copied by the middle class. Behind the sentiments about the value of nature and space for uninterrupted mourning, the goal of Magnolia was still to serve the living and acknowledge their accomplishments.

Class was a problem for the rural cemetery movement. While much of the language used to describe these cemeteries throughout the country and discussions of their benefits were broadly democratic, in practical application they often were not. Cemetery rules were based on middle and upper class values. While most cemeteries were initially open to the public throughout the week, many, after being open for several years, began to limit visits from the

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 13.
general public to Sundays. Even within the physical organization of the cemetery, lots for individuals were segregated from areas reserved for family lots. However, this exclusivity was not limited to the poor and lower middle class, but also caused tension between middle and upper class lot holders. In many rural cemeteries families built increasingly ornate and elaborate monuments on their lots. Not only did this often inspire a system of one-upmanship that some families were financially unable to keep up with, but critics also argued that all these monuments and structures defeated much of the purpose of displaying and enjoying nature in a rural cemetery. As early as 1841, the North American Review suggested that rural cemeteries were becoming “increasingly private” as they feared the increase in competitive construction excluded families who were less well off.265

For middle class Charlestonians, Magnolia offered social opportunities that the city did not. Historically, entry into Charleston’s upper class was not as difficult or restricted as nineteenth century Charlestonians thought. Throughout the eighteenth century Charleston had a large, wealthy, upwardly mobile merchant community. By the nineteenth century, though, successful merchants found themselves consigned to Charleston’s growing middle class. The focus on wealth and social status now sat squarely with the planters, who increasingly focused on the idea of their class as an aristocracy, working to align their ideas and habits with behaviors seen as appropriate for this group. One Charlestonian claimed, “The possessions of an inferior population, and of various castes, makes us, in a certain extent, an aristocracy. Our manners are decidedly those of an aristocracy…we would not wish them to be, otherwise.”266 To support

265 Sloane, 84-87, 90.
these claims and ambitions they worked to retain and promote English behaviors as much as possible, as they “self consciously pursued manners and past times of English gentry.” These Charlestonians continued to seek an English education for their children longer than many other Americans. The Charleston elite also relied on the city’s extensive slave population for facets of their identity. Part of being aristocratic was having the time and leisure to pursue refined activities, like art and music, and that was something slave labor provided. Any threat to the slavery system was seen as a threat to their way of life.

Self-designation is often validated by the acknowledgement of others, and the Charlestonians’ aristocratic claims were accepted by those both within and outside of their community. Notably, Europeans visitors recognized Charlestonians as aristocrats. In reporting on his trip to Charleston, Louis Tasistro, who was originally from the British Isles, wrote, “There is no city in America where the gradations in the great social system are so distinctly marked as in Charleston,” noting that the planters, “ap[ed] European Continental manners” and were on par “with the most refined English gentlemen in external polish and address.” A visiting Englishman further supported these claims, writing, “The Planters formed a kind of landed aristocracy, who associated chiefly among themselves & considered merchandize [sic] as belonging to a rank decidedly below their own.”

Even though Charleston elites maintained their aristocratic status and aims until the start of the Civil War, throughout the antebellum period Charleston’s social system was shifting. Because of the country’s general increase in democracy and a growing electorate, there was a

268 Ibid., 22-23.
269 McInnis, “Our Manners,” 2.
consistent threat that the elites might lose much of the power they had collected, leading many to retrench themselves in formality, manners, and their version of the past. Members of the upper class not only had to deal with local threats, like the growing power of the city’s middle class and the potential for slave rebellion, but throughout the antebellum period South Carolina’s upstate grew increasingly prominent and powerful, challenging the control and influence of Charlestonians in state politics. Additionally, they faced financial concerns. Even though they behaved like aristocrats, Charlestonians did not practice primogeniture, which meant that their plantations were constantly being divided and redistributed, breaking up large land holdings and making it increasingly challenging for all members of these families to have or acquire sufficient land for their economic and social aims. At this same time, Charleston was in a period of relative economic decline. From the colonial through the antebellum years, Charleston’s free population was financially far better off than most other Americans, but the decline they experienced, rather than national statistics, informed their opinions.270 The Charleston elite were also well aware of the city’s waning national prominence. While in 1790 Charleston was the fourth largest city in the country, by 1860 it was only ranked twenty-second.271 Charleston’s troubling economic situation, coupled with concern over possible loss of social and political status made behaving “like an aristocrat” and controlling anything one could control that much more important.

In order to do this, Charleston’s upper class increasingly focused on maintaining the status quo and rejecting change. This behavior pattern can be seen in the way they responded to crisis. When in 1835 St. Philip’s, the city’s longest established Episcopal church, burned, a

270 In 1774 the per capita free wealth in the Charleston district was approximately ten times greater than that of New England. The gradual economic decline that occurred throughout the antebellum period meant that by 1860 the per capita free wealth in South Carolina’s lowcountry was still three times more than most northern cities. McInnis, *Politics of Taste*, 8, 28.
debate broke out about how to rebuild the church. While some believed that St. Philip’s should be redesigned to allow Church Street to be widened and to remove some of the pillars inside the sanctuary that blocked the view of some congregants, many members were incredibly averse to the idea of change. As Maurie McInnis explains, those who disagreed with changing the church did not do so on the basis of cost, stylistic differences, or strong feelings about street width. Rather, the issue centered on “their collective past. As the oldest church in Charleston, as the first seat of Episcopalian power in the city, and as a symbol of familial lineage and the city’s history, prosperity, and taste, St. Philip’s was an important link in the chain of past associations...they confirmed their definition of the present through the lens of the past.”

This same impulse drove upper class rigidity regarding burial space and location. Continuing to use burial grounds that were obviously over filled when there were other options available seems unreasonable, but to the city’s upper class burial spaces were an important link to family ties, status, and the past. In such an insecure period, being buried outside of Charleston’s long established cemeteries would have been out of the question. Even though being buried in city churchyards increasingly led to a body’s unintentional desecration and disturbance, to members of the Charleston elite, continuing the tradition of using these spaces was more important than providing a peaceful repose for the dead. Being buried in Magnolia would have disrupted this practice, severing an important link to the past.

As the upper class was having their own social crisis, members of Charleston’s middle class had to find ways to adapt for their own future. Even as the middle class grew over the antebellum period as Charlestonians joined the city’s expanding professional class and took advantage of increased educational opportunities, members could not gain some of the social and

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272 Ibid., 120-121.
civic advantages or opportunities that might be available to them in other areas. City records show that Magnolia’s founders were wealthy men. Historical data indicates that these men would be better off than most simply based on their membership in the middle class. McInnis notes that “throughout the antebellum period, the top 4 percent of the population controlled more than 50 percent of the city’s wealth, while the bottom half of free society possessed no wealth whatsoever.”

When considering these statistics, it is important to remember that in the 1840s, as for much of the city’s history, roughly half the city’s population was enslaved. When taking population into account, these numbers show that 50% of the city’s wealth was divided between 21% of its population. Being a part of Charleston’s middle class was generally not an indication of middling financial standing.

For Magnolia’s founders, this was certainly the case. As Figure 2 illustrates, these men were business owners or in the professional class. All had been financially successful enough to have thousands of dollars worth of real estate, and all were slaveholders. Both were important points of wealth and status; “Charleston’s slaveholders accounted for 82% of all the wealth in the city.” Tax records indicate that their real estate holdings compared favorably to those in the city’s planter class. In the 1860s census, there were 75 men who were identified as planters and could be matched to the tax records for that year. Of those, 54, or 72% had real estate valued at $12,000 or more, and only 33, or 44% had real estate valued at $20,000 or more. Of Magnolia’s founders, seven of the eight had real estate valued at or over $12,000, and William Dukes’ personal real estate was valued at over $20,000.

In other cities and under other circumstances,

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273 Ibid., 28.
274 Ibid.
some of these men might have been able to join the upper classes based on their wealth.

However, as Charlestonians in the mid nineteenth century, they did not meet the social criteria. Because status and position were tied to plantations and family ties, even though many of Magnolia’s founders may have been better off than some of the city’s planters, their careers and lack of family connections put them in a lower class. For these Charlestonians, the permanence and modernity of the rural cemetery movement offered a new social hope. Lot holders would be
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<th>Real Estate (1860 Tax Records)277</th>
<th>Other - Financial</th>
<th>Slaves</th>
<th>Other - Taxable Goods</th>
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<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>$474.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederick Richards</td>
<td>Draper and Taylor</td>
<td>$12,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1 carriage, 2 horses, 1 dog</td>
<td>$249.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Sebring</td>
<td>President – State Bank</td>
<td>$15,500</td>
<td>$4,000 shipping</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1 carriage, 2 horses</td>
<td>$352.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Walker</td>
<td>Marble Cutter</td>
<td>$12,000</td>
<td>$1,250 shipping</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1 horse</td>
<td>$229.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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276 J. H. Bagget, *Directory of the City of Charleston, for the Year 1852. Containing the Names, Occupations, Place of Business & Residence of the Inhabitants Generally, with Other Information of General Interest* (Charleston: Edward C. Councell, 1851).

able to design attractive, well-decorated lots with monuments bearing their names, creating monuments to their success that Charlestonians would visit for generations to come. This would not only be a credit to the original lot holder himself, but would also display the family dynasty he created over the years. For Charlestonians who knew their options for this kind of legacy within the city’s boundaries were nonexistent, Magnolia’s opportunities would have been very attractive.

Magnolia Cemetery was established to be attractive to middle class Charlestonians focused on leaving their legacy; through its rules and regulations founders worked to ensure beauty and respectability. At the same time, the cemetery excluded the poor. Family plots cost several hundred dollars, but even a ten to fifteen dollar burial charge would have been prohibitive to many. Public lots were restricted in terms of who did and did not have the right to erect a monument; memorialization and the right to be remembered was based on class and wealth. The family and friends of those buried in the ten dollar lot would have had the satisfaction of knowing that in death they would be in a middle class space, not in the anonymity of a public city lot that would only be in use for a while before it was repurposed. However, they were not given the right of public remembrance; outside of close friends and family no one visiting the cemetery would know that person was buried there. While the first rule for visitors states “persons on foot will be admitted at the lodge without tickets, on all days” (italics in original), through their provision denying admission to “improper persons” poorer guests were unlikely.

Lower class white Charlestonians taking up the offer to be buried in a space where they might not be entirely welcome and could not be publicly remembered, fits in to broader trends of the time. For decades burial in the city’s public cemetery had been viewed as undesirable as
demonstrated by groups that opened their own private burial spaces, like the members and supporters of the Brown Fellowship Society. Even without a grave marker, burial in Magnolia would have been of a much higher status than burial in the public cemetery. This interest in providing the best possible burial for a friend or family member is consistent with the broader death practices of the working class of the time. Michael Sappol explains that “death provided the space in which people could act out their social identities and invest them with ontological gravitas.” He argues that in antebellum America the working class viewed burial in middle and upper class spaces to be very desirable, and something to be achieved at whatever cost necessary, as it “symbolized inclusion in the social order.” Many poor Americans would invest what little savings they had in making sure their family members were provided with the most respectable funeral and burial possible. While reform minded middle and upper class citizens in the late antebellum period criticized the poor for putting their limited resources towards funerals, for the poor and working class these expenditures were deemed necessary and appropriate ways to ensure security and an appropriate memory for their deceased family and friends.

Although cemetery organizers purported to be inclusive, there is no information within the proceedings, rules, or company related information regarding the burial of people of color, suggesting that, regardless of their social status or condition of servitude, they were excluded. Later city documents attest to this explicitly. In a 1859 report, City Council suggested that one way to help relieve space related pressure and public health challenges within the city due to cemetery space would be to close all independent cemeteries for African Americans. These

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278 Sappol, 30.
279 Ibid., 35.
cemeteries were owned by religious and fraternal organizations, and City Council had a solution for their removal. They recommended that part of the city cemetery be separated out for these groups and that it be subdivided by neat railings and pathways into lots, large enough for each Society, and given to them for the purpose of burial, and that all burials then be under the regulation of the Ordinance concerning public interments. This being done, the colored population could have the same privileges allowed them as now exist, but under the supervision and regulation of the law and of the proper officer.280

While this suggestion was not carried out, that these groups would have been given lots in the public cemetery rather than instructed to obtain space in Magnolia (as white churches and fraternal organizations were encouraged to do), shows that space was not available to them on the basis of their race. Magnolia’s founders frequently referenced their goal that the cemetery be a city of the dead; their ideal city overlooked many of Charleston’s actual residents.

In his 1839 pamphlet discussing the need for a cemetery outside Charleston’s boundaries, Mayor Pinckney argued that opening a rural cemetery could in all probability be done with little, if any, cost to the city, while offering a variety of health and space related benefits. As a private company, Magnolia Cemetery fulfilled at least part of that hope. Following a successful advertising campaign, in its first ten years in operation Magnolia had hundreds of burials as Charlestonians either chose to be buried there at their death, or as lot-holders moved family members who had been interred elsewhere so they could rest together.

Even with this popularity, in many ways Magnolia failed to meet Pinckney’s goals. Because poor and black Charlestonians were excluded from the cemetery, and the city’s upper class chose to continue using church cemeteries, Magnolia was not a demographically inclusive

280 Report of the Committee of the City Council of Charleston, 27.
city of the dead, and the pressure it relieved on city cemeteries was limited. The hope many held for the public health benefits a rural cemetery could offer were also not fulfilled; epidemics plagued the city throughout the 1850s, and some claimed that yellow fever had been worse in the city since Magnolia opened.281

For middle class Charlestonians, though, who wanted a space where they could leave a legacy for themselves and their families, Magnolia was perfect. Even though there was no mass disinterment and reburial of Revolutionary or upper class dead that could have given the cemetery further legitimacy, middle class residents now had the space they needed to erect lasting monuments to their families while also reaping the benefits of being associated with such a modern movement. Their dreams of higher status burials would also be realized, but only after the crisis of the coming Civil War had passed.

281 Ibid., 4.
Conclusion

Following his death in Washington, D.C. March 31, 1850, John C. Calhoun’s body was transported to Charleston. Although he was a native of the upstate, Calhoun was buried in St. Phillip’s churchyard April 26, 1850. His body’s time in this space was short lived. In 1863, Confederate forces evacuated Morris Island and city residents feared Union invasion. Concerns mounted that Calhoun’s remains were in danger of being desecrated, and plans were made to move his body. Years later, St. Philip’s former sexton, John Gregg recounted what had happened. He was approached by R.N. Gourdin who, after ensuring Gregg’s ability to keep their venture a secret, told him “we want to remove Mr. Calhoun’s remains for fear that they might be disturbed by the ‘Yankees’ when they take possession of the City.” Working under the cover of darkness, Gregg was joined that evening by several other citizens, a stonemason and his assistants, the local undertaker, and the sexton of the Huguenot church. After Calhoun’s coffin was removed, it was hidden in the church, and reburied the next evening at the foot of Mrs. James Welsman’s grave in another section of the cemetery. Even though invasion never occurred, Calhoun’s remains were not returned until April 8, 1871. This did not take place in secret but rather “in presence of the Vestry and Clergymen of St. Philip’s & others they were conveyed back to the West Yard & replaced in the vault originally intended for them.”

The story of Calhoun’s less than peaceful repose illustrates that, even with the fear of invasion looming, protecting the dead was a priority. Although an extreme example, Calhoun’s posthumous adventures illustrate the ways that some continued to be privileged over others, even in death. The concern Charlestonians exhibited about the potential fate of Calhoun’s body stands

283 Ibid.
in stark contrast to the thousands of anonymous poor, African, and African American Charlestonians who were buried in the city’s public cemeteries and whose graves were soon lost as the cemeteries closed. Because he had such high social value, John C. Calhoun’s body was worth protecting; the bodies of low ranking Charlestonians were not. This trend continued into the twentieth century. While the impermanence of cemeteries was limited to public burial grounds in the antebellum period, by the 1930s, many African American church cemeteries were seized and auctioned to pay outstanding taxes. Construction projects continue to find the dead around the city; several black cemeteries were discovered on land used to build the College of Charleston’s Addlestone Library, which opened in 2005.\footnote{An archaeological investigation was done on the site; the bodies were removed and reburied. A monument was erected nearby.}

For some Charlestonians, burial underscored their social standing and shaped their legacy. For the city’s wealthy free black population, burial in the Brown Fellowship Society’s lot offered posthumous distinction from other people of color who were buried in Charleston’s public cemetery. In the 1810s, city churches opened separate cemeteries for their African and African American members. White middle class Charlestonians also recognized this opportunity, and opened Magnolia Cemetery in the middle of the nineteenth century. Even with their aspirations, historian Thomas Brown argues that it was only after the Civil War that Magnolia gained the prestige its proprietors hoped for. Over eight hundred Confederates were buried in Magnolia, leading the cemetery to become an important site of Confederate memory.\footnote{Michael Trinkley, Debi Hacker, and Nicole Southerland, \textit{Silence of the Dead: Giving Charleston Cemeteries a Voice} (Columbia, SC: Chicora Foundation, 2010), xiv.} For many years following the war several thousand white Charlestonians gathered annually at Magnolia to celebrate Confederate Memorial Day and decorate the graves of the soldiers. Over
time, Confederate remains were transferred from other cemeteries to Magnolia, and veterans chose to be buried there. As recently as 2004 the bodies recovered from the CSS Hunley, a Confederate submarine that sank in Charleston harbor, were buried in Magnolia. Brown also notes, that, while Confederate history maintains a presence at Magnolia, over the years burials have become increasingly diverse, and Magnolia now holds the remains of notable Charlestonians who participated in the civil rights movement.

Charlestonians who supported the Confederacy were not alone in burying their war dead in Magnolia. In 1863, Dr. Albert Mackey, a Union sympathizer, had the body of a Union officer who had been killed at Fort Sumter buried in Magnolia. This proved to be such an unpopular move among the city’s white residents that the officer’s body was soon moved to the city’s public cemetery. In March 1865, with the city under Union control, not only was the displaced officer re-interred in Magnolia, but as Union troops died in the city moving forward, they were also buried in there. Although many white Charlestonians resented Union graves in a cemetery that already had a strong Confederate presence, until a national cemetery could be established in the region, there was little they could do.  

Although the burials in Magnolia were unpopular, it did not contain the only Union burials in the city. Two hundred fifty-seven Union prisoners of war died while being housed at the Washington Race Course (now Hampton Park), and had been buried there in unmarked graves.  

In early 1865 African Americans and white Union supporters in the city decided to make the land into a proper cemetery to honor these men who were referred to as the “Martyrs of  

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287 The Washington Race Course is marked on the top left hand corner of Figure 1.
the Race Course.” On May 1, 1865 ten thousand Union supporters attended the cemetery’s dedication, in what would be the first Decoration Day celebration. While this well attended celebration was meaningful to many in the city, Union memorialization in this space was short-lived. In antebellum Charleston, Race Week had been important in both lowcountry society and state politics, and many Charlestonians were eager to reestablish the event as soon as possible. In 1866 the South Carolina Jockey Club regained possession of the racecourse and quickly began refurbishing the track to restart the tradition, ignoring the over 250 graves on the premises. The racecourse burials were moved in the late 1860s and early 1870s, and the existence of the cemetery quickly faded in the minds of many Charlestonians. Reports from later years illustrate that, when references to the Martyrs of the Race Course occasionally surfaced, white Charlestonians had no knowledge of the group.288

Following the Jockey Club’s reacquisition of the city racecourse, Decoration Day celebrations moved to Magnolia where they were well attended; in 1870 two thousand people were present for the services. However, these memorial events soon ended in the city. As the bodies of Union soldiers were moved to a new national cemetery near Beaufort, Dedication Day ceremonies moved with them. For the rest of the nineteenth century, regional Dedication Day events generally took place in either Beaufort or Florence.289

Even though these ceremonies were short lived in both the city of Charleston and the minds of many white Charlestonians, they had much greater, and longer lasting, national significance. The 1865 Decoration Day ceremony to honor the Martyrs of the Race Course is recognized as the first Union Memorial Day in the United States, and inspired others around the

289 Ibid., 654. Beaufort is 70 miles south of Charleston while Florence is 120 miles north.
country. On May 30, 1868 events were held in twenty-seven states; in 1869 thirty-one states participated. While these early proceedings were organized locally, “in 1873, the New York legislature designated May 30 a legal holiday, and by 1890 every other Northern State had followed its lead.”

What started as a local event in Charleston to commemorate prisoners of war who had died in the city quickly assumed national significance, becoming an important holiday in the remembrance of Union soldiers and sacrifice across the United States.

While it was only with the Civil War that Magnolia reached the prominence its founders hoped for, over time the cemetery has continued to transform, from being a bastion of the Lost Cause to becoming a more inclusive institution. Change over time is an important point to acknowledge when considering the place of burial grounds in a society. Although cemeteries seem like permanent and unchanging spaces, just like other organizations and institutions they also adjust to meet current needs. This adaptability underscores the tie between the living and the dead in a community. While cemeteries are spaces for the dead, they are shaped and used by the living to meet their needs or address concerns they have at the time. For upper class antebellum Charlestonians, churchyard burials provided an important link to the past in a time when they felt their status was threatened. For wealthy free people of color, separate burial grounds further distinguished their community from the city’s large enslaved population. Magnolia itself was opened to provide its founders with social status and a family legacy they were denied in the city. As Charlestonians faced the changes brought about by the passage of time, the city’s burial grounds were adapted to reflect those developments.

Cemeteries are often referred to as cities of the dead. The history of Charleston’s cemeteries reflected that idea in spirit but not in practice. None of Charleston’s cemeteries contained the full multitude and diversity of the city’s population. These spaces mirrored the value of Charlestonians as designated by those groups in power. While Charleston was ethnically and economically diverse, because of the power of the white upper class, religious cemeteries were permanent spaces worth careful preservation while public cemeteries were frequently closed and the space reused. In Charleston, cemeteries were cities of the dead only according to the vision of white upper class and middle class residents – they were segregated places of permanent rest only for those who socially mattered. However, just as the middle class fought for their own space with Magnolia, groups outside of the upper class used cemeteries to support their own claims to memory in a changing society.
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