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Finding Emily Arents

# A Chance Meeting Leads a California Woman to “Miss Grace”

Although she grew up hearing stories about her relative Lewis Ginter (1824-1897), the tobacco magnate and real estate developer, Emily Arents knew little about Grace, his niece, and her great-great aunt. A chance conversation with a friend in January inspired her to take a long-planned trip to Richmond with her daughter, Leilani Cochran, to learn more about her mysterious family member.



**Grace Evelyn Arents  
(1848-1926)**

“All of this was prompted by a friend of mine at church,” says Arents, speaking by phone from her home in Arcata, California. “My friend was doing some research last fall and when we were meeting at an outreach event, she said, ‘Emily, are you related to Grace Arents?’ And I thought, Oh my gosh, I know that name— yes.”

was Rev. Barbara Ambrose, a vocational deacon at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church in Richmond, for which Grace had funded the construction.

“I am such a fan of Grace,” says Ambrose, who had also written an article about the prominent Richmonder for a *Friends of Hollywood Cemetery* newsletter. Working with Emily, she helped coordinate a Grace-focused trip around Richmond. “It was fun on our end because I realized Emily had no idea what she would be walking into, and people were just really, really excited about this whole prospect.”

### The trip begins

Emily Arents grew up outside New York City. She remembers passing through Richmond on her way to boarding school at Chatham Hall but had never visited. For their two-day trip in April to the capitol city, Arents and Cochran stayed at the Jefferson Hotel, a Richmond landmark which Lewis Ginter had helped develop.

On the first day, Ambrose led them on a tour of St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, a Gothic Revival church in Oregon Hill noted for its steep bell tower. At a luncheon afterwards, they met people who were able to share stories about “Miss Grace” they had heard from family members.

*(continued on page 2)*

Emily’s friend had learned about Grace Arents (1848-1926) and her transformative philanthropic work from a classmate’s postings in an online class. The classmate

Emily Arents Pages 1-3	Arbor Day Pages 4-5	Charles Minnigerode Page 6 Overlooks Dedication Page 7	Recollections Page 8	Photo Contest Page 9	Partial 2018 Donor List Pages 10-11
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## “Miss Grace” (continued)

Arents learned she had much in common with her Aunt Grace – from her occupation (she is a parish nurse at St. Alban’s Episcopal Church in Arcata; Grace, also a nurse, helped establish the Instructive Visiting Nurses Association to provide health care to poor families), to her love of horticulture, and to her belief “that money is a tool and it has no value if it isn’t used well,” she says.

Grace is often compared to Jane Addams, who founded Hull House in Chicago in 1889 to support the social and educational needs of poor immigrant families. At the time, Addams and other women turned to the settlement houses after not being permitted to start the programs in their churches, says Ambrose. “They were told, ‘You are women, you can’t do this.’ One of the things that really struck me about Grace Arents was that she was doing a lot of the same kinds of things...but she had the ability to build her own church, so nobody could say ‘you can’t do this.’”

Records from the time show Grace was closely involved in the planning of St. Andrew’s. Although a modest and humble woman, “she was not a shrinking violet by any stretch of the imagination, and I don’t think she was particularly easy to work with,” says Ambrose, with a laugh, “But she got it done.”

### A visit to the gravesite

After the luncheon, the group headed to Hollywood Cemetery. Although she had never visited it before, Arents possesses a copy of the original deed to the plot signed by Lewis Ginter.



From left: Leilani Cochran, Emily Arents, and Rev. Barbara Ambrose

“I was thrilled to meet Emily and Leilani,” says Kelly Jones Wilbanks, Executive Director of Friends of Hollywood Cemetery. “Lewis Ginter and Grace Arents were the only members of their family who lived in Richmond – most of them lived in New York – and neither of them had children. So, I’d never met any of their descendants before.”

Arents enjoyed her visit to the cemetery. “It’s a gorgeous place,” she says. Wilbanks brought the group to Grace’s grave—a simple headstone at the end of a line of boxwoods—and then led them inside Ginter’s mausoleum. Arents had seen the ornate marble structure from family photos but had never known what it was. “And I had no idea at all about the windows,” she says, referring to the mausoleum’s three Tiffany windows. “They are absolutely breathtaking.” Inspired, she gave a donation to support their planned restoration. “To be able to participate in making them as lovely as they once were seems to be a wonderful thing to do.”

### A whirlwind second day

The next day, the mother and daughter visited St. Andrew’s School, a tuition-free K-5 school started by Grace that is affiliated with the church.

“They had the opportunity to spend a little bit of time with the children in each one of the grades. The kids all know about Miss Grace and her contributions to the school,” says Ambrose. They also toured the former William Byrd Community House, where the school plans to expand. The building once housed another of Grace’s projects – the first free lending library in Richmond.

Arents enjoyed seeing an organ given to the school by Grace in memory of her mother, Jane Swain Ginter Arents. “That was very touching to me because my grandfather, Grace’s nephew, gave a fabulous organ to St. Thomas on Fifth Avenue in New York in honor of my grandmother. How amazing that my grandfather followed in his aunt’s steps.”

Next, Ambrose took them to Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden where they learned more about Grace’s love of horticulture.

“We had a marvelous luncheon at Bloemendaal House,” says Arents. At her great-great aunt’s home, she learned more about Grace’s life from representatives of the Garden as well as local librarians. Among them was Wendy de Groat who has recently written a book of poems drawing from Grace’s history and her own.

(continued on page 3)

## “Miss Grace” (continued)

Grace inherited the Dutch Colonial building, which had previously served as a bicycle club, from her uncle. She remodeled it into a home for sick children. Surrounded by 85 acres of gardens, she renamed it Bloemendaal, which means “valley of flowers.” She later lived in the home with her longtime companion, Mary Garland Smith. The house and surrounding gardens now are part of Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, which she bequeathed to the city.

The day ended with a tour around Ginter Park, a neighborhood of beautiful homes developed by Lewis Ginter.

### Impressions

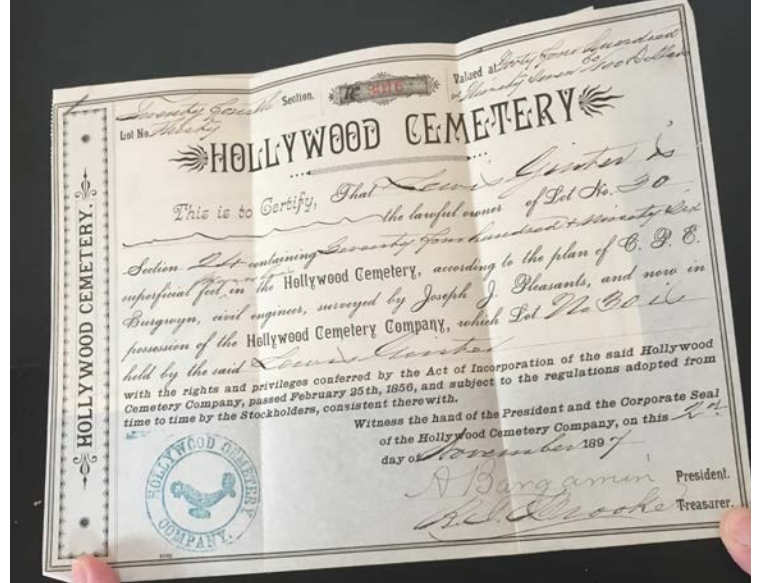
By the end of the day, the mother and daughter were tired but happy and inspired by what they had learned about Grace.

“I think the impression I have of her is being a feminist way before her time. She must have been a real powerhouse,” says Arents. Additionally, “It was mind-blowing how much work Grace had done that is dear to my heart without ever having known her.”

She also enjoyed learning more about Lewis Ginter, who supported his sister, Jane Swain Ginter Arents, and her six children (George, Minnie, Joan, Frederick, Franklin, and Grace) after her husband Stephen’s death in 1855. Grace and her mother moved to Richmond and lived with Ginter, as did George (Emily’s great-grandfather), for a brief time.

While alive, Ginter encouraged his niece in her many efforts. When he died, he left Grace what would be a \$20 million fortune today.

“He was an extraordinary man to have helped his sister and niece so much and to have helped my great-grandfather get started,” says Arents, noting that George joined his uncle as one of the founders of American Tobacco Company. “My great-grandfather came into successes in his life thanks not only because of his native abilities but to the incredible support and encouragement of his uncle.”



*Original certificate of ownership issued to Lewis Ginter for the cemetery plot overlooking the James River where he and his niece, Grace Arents, are interred (Courtesy of Emily Arents)*

As for her great-great aunt, she says, “my daughter and I were overcome with the enormity of the effect that Grace had on the city and what her drive was to educate children and to improve the circumstance of people who were suffering. Just an amazing lady.”

2018

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# Hollywood Walking Tour Celebrates Arbor Day, 2018

April 27, 2018 was the most perfect Arbor Day! The weather was amazing and it was the perfect day to be in the cemetery.

Arborist Mike Van Yahres, who holds a Master's Degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Virginia and who has published numerous articles on tree management is the owner of Van Yahres Tree Company from Charlottesville, Virginia. In fact, he is the third generation of Van Yahres in the business. Throughout the morning, Mr. Van Yahres led a walking tour to view some of Hollywood Cemetery's most prized trees, including some of the Monarchs, trees that are considered outstanding examples of their species.

Although many visitors come to see the resting spots of presidents or have an interest in Civil War history, Hollywood contains some of the finest examples of native trees and historic roses in the Commonwealth. There are



*White Oak (Quercus alba)*



*Bald Cypress (Taxodium distichum)*

over 2,000 trees in the cemetery today, of which some predate the cemetery's opening in 1849.

Trees are part of what makes Hollywood Cemetery so beautiful, especially this time of year with all the native ornamental trees being in bloom. Mr. Van Yahres is much more interested in hardwoods, especially the White Oak, which is his favorite tree (*see photograph #1*). Yet, when asked if he had a least favorite tree, he hesitated for a moment as those on the tour offered many suggestions.

I learned about the tallest tree in the cemetery, a 142' tall Bald Cypress (*see photograph #2*). It stands in "Long Bottom" and can be easily viewed from the intersection of Freeman Road and Westvale Avenue.

*(continued on page 5)*

## Arbor Day (continued)

I learned that Mr. Van Yahres' favorite tree in the cemetery, "because of its shape and its size," is the Black Gum (*see photograph #3*), which is frequently considered Virginia's most beautiful native tree. This particular Hollywood tree was included in *Remarkable Trees of Virginia* (2008). Mr. Van Yahres explained that Black Gums typically have a single stem so this one is atypical. I have to say that I love that his favorite tree is not one that seemingly follows the rules.

The largest tree in the cemetery is the Tulip Poplar (*see photograph 4*) located near the large obelisk for Dr. R.W. "John" Dove, who served as the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Virginia for over 30 years. It is common for Tulip Poplars to grow to great heights. While children have delighted in finding a secret passage to another world in the open trunk bottom, I always worried about this tree. I was thrilled to learn that it is common for mature Tulip Poplars to be hollow inside. Mr. Van Yahres stated that this tree was structurally sound and he would sleep under it.



*Black Gum (Nyssa sylvatica)*

Finally, Mr. Van Yahres discussed the Cemetery's new tree digitization program. To conclude the tour and celebrate Arbor Day, a White Oak sapling (6 feet in height) was planted in the cemetery.



*Tulip Poplar (Liriodendron tulipifera)*

This was an excellent opportunity to learn more about a place that I adore.

To learn more about Hollywood Cemetery's trees, pick up their Notable Trees & Roses guide.

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*Contributed by Sharon Pajka, Ph.D.  
Professor, Gallaudet University*

Dr. Charles Minnigerode (1814-1894)

## A German Immigrant Introduces First Christmas Tree to Virginia

As the holiday season nears, it's a fitting time to reflect upon the life of Dr. Charles Minnigerode. A college professor and well-known Episcopal priest, one of his many achievements includes introducing the first Christmas tree to our state.



Charles Frederick Ernest Minnigerode was born in Ahrensburg, Germany on August 6, 1814. Classically educated, he studied law at the University of Giessen. Soon after, he was imprisoned for his political beliefs. He sailed to America in 1839, and, according to some accounts, learned English in a mere three months. As a young language teacher in

*Dr. Charles Minnigerode*  
(Courtesy of the Virginia Museum of History & Culture)

Philadelphia, he met writers Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Washington Irving.

In 1842, he joined the College of William and Mary as a professor of humanities, teaching Latin and Greek. He was a friend of Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, one of fourteen children of prominent judge, Revolutionary War officer, and abolitionist St. George Tucker. Nathaniel raised his family in his rambling, white clapboard childhood home at 113 Nicholson Street, which was built in 1716.

Minnigerode was fond of Nathaniel's children. As a treat to them – or also, some say, as a cure for his homesickness, he introduced a beloved German Yuletide tradition by setting up a Christmas tree in the parlor of their home on December 24, 1842. The family helped decorate it with gilded nuts, marbled paper, and strings of popcorn. Minnigerode's evergreen was the first Christmas tree in Williamsburg and the first documented in Virginia.

The tradition caught the fancy of his Williamsburg

neighbors, many of who put up their own trees the following year. The tradition spread throughout Virginia and grew more popular after U.S. President Benjamin Harrison placed the first Christmas tree in the White House in 1889 – 47 years after Minnigerode's tree. In 1843, the young professor married Mary Carter, with whom he had three children. He joined the Episcopal Church and was ordained to the priesthood in 1847. After serving various small parishes, he was named minister of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond in 1856. He remained there for 33 years and drew large crowds for his sermons. The Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) attended one of his services on his visit to Richmond in 1860. Minnigerode conducted the funeral services of many prominent individuals, including President James Monroe, when his remains were moved and reinterred to Hollywood Cemetery in 1858.

*(continued on page 7)*



*The Christmas tree grew in popularity after the 1848 publication of this drawing of Queen Victoria and the royal family—Prince Albert had brought the Christmas tree tradition to England from his native Germany* (www.PorterBriggs.com)

## *First Christmas Tree (continued)*

During the Civil War, his services drew many military leaders, including General Robert E. Lee and Confederate President Jefferson Davis. He was preaching on April 2, 1865, when Davis received a telegram from Lee, anticipating Richmond's fall.

Charles Minnigerode died on October 13, 1894; his wife, Mary, on October 30, 1898. Both are buried in Hollywood Cemetery under a rugged cross monument, in Section V

sub-division, Lot 1. His spirit still lives on in the annual Christmas tree set up by the St. George Tucker House (now a reception center for Colonial Williamsburg) and in the twinkling lights of Christmas trees everywhere throughout the Commonwealth.

*Sources for this article include EncyclopediaVirginia.com and History.org.*

## James River Overlooks Dedicated

Two enthusiastically anticipated, terraced overlooks were dedicated on Tuesday, October 16. Construction began in November, 2015. These blue stone and granite additions to Hollywood Cemetery provide magnificent vistas of the James River, Kanawha Canal, Richmond skyline and downtown bridges. Their locations at either end of the Palmer Chapel create a finished and picturesque destination for visitors and families.

The easternmost overlook was made possible through generous gifts from **Dominion Energy**, the **James River Garden Club** (in celebration of its 100th anniversary), the **Richard S. Reynolds Foundation**, and **Bob and Anna Lou Schaberg**. On the western end of the Chapel, the second overlook was given in memory of Lettie Pate Whitehead Evans by the **Lettie Pate Evans Foundation**.



1. Attending members of the James River Garden Club
2. Bob and Anna Lou Schaberg
3. Seated: Dr. Herbert Claiborne, Jr., (Trustee, Lettie Pate Evans Foundation) and Catherine Claiborne; Standing from left: Herbert Claiborne III and William Claiborne



## *Friends of Hollywood Marks a Special Anniversary*

Ten years ago, in 2008, Friends of Hollywood took its first steps. Getting to that point involved an intensive process. Agreeing upon the need for a “friends” organization in the first place and, then, upon an appropriate mission required almost a year of discussion, due diligence, legal research, tax hurdles, and patience. A great deal of patience!

It is not this planning period but all that has occurred since that I wish to share in this piece. I believe that it is a story worth telling – certainly not to engage in self-congratulation but rather to express our delight and deep appreciation to all who have shared that journey with us.

Friends was established with a number of stated goals: to refresh and tell the story of Hollywood, increase awareness and visitation, identify and explain the Cemetery’s needs, and develop a broad base of financial support.

Mary Hoge Anderson, Fielding Williams, and I comprised the original board of directors. Mary Hoge was our first Chair. David Gilliam, Cemetery General Manager, possesses an encyclopedic knowledge of Hollywood and guided us then as he does today. And for the last eight years, Kelly Wilbanks has been our inspirational executive director, assisted by Nancy Rowe. We have also received a lot of professional help from our fundraising consultant, Laurie Rogers. And yes, our working Board of Directors has actually grown from three to seven members.

Our first year of fundraising (2008) was directed to the Hollywood family of lot owners, many of whom were accustomed to responding to Hollywood’s annual appeal. Historically, that appeal generated +/- \$20,000; funds were used exclusively to build the Cemetery’s endowment. In 2008, the appeal focused attention on the new Friends organization and its mission. For the first time, the mailing list included a small number of individuals in the community with no prior giving history to Hollywood. In 2008, a total of \$32,367 was raised from both prior as well as new donors. In 2009, that amount exceeded \$60,000. It was a most encouraging beginning.

In 2009-2010, Friends launched an exceptionally ambitious campaign to raise funds to repair and restore over 4,200 stone monuments and iron fences in Hollywood – abandoned and untouched for decades. In each case, original lot owners/families had passed away. It seemed a perfect fit for Friends and gave us an opportunity to introduce ourselves to many new potential donors, including corporations and foundations. The project was executed in phases and completed in 2016. It included the architecturally significant Palmer Fence and Nace Monument. We continue to raise funds to address ongoing repair as needed.

Over the years, Friends has attempted to be a thoughtful steward of the generous philanthropy that it has enjoyed. Much has been accomplished. In addition to restored

monuments and fences, Presidents Circle has been completely restored and re-landscaped. Two overlooks with spectacular views of the James River have been constructed on either side of the Palmer Mausoleum. Also, the Jefferson Davis Circle has been redesigned and surfaced in cobble stones. As one enters the Cemetery (on your right side), the Glade has also been made more distinctive through design and landscaping. It continues to be a work in progress. Currently, a funding effort is underway to conserve three exceptional Louis Comfort Tiffany windows in the Lewis Ginter Mausoleum.

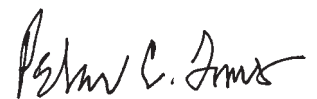
Awareness and outreach have been central to our mission.

1. A first-time, semi-annual newsletter (*Gateway to History*) is in its 8th year of publication.
2. A Hollywood website provides essential information about the Cemetery and has a national and international following.
3. A new application on that site allows one to locate any “resident” within the cemetery and read what may appear on that individual’s monument or marker – a valuable tool for both visitors as well as researchers.
4. One may also enjoy a digital tour to each of the Cemetery’s most notable sites by accessing a new Hollywood application available through our web site.
5. Friends has resumed the annual Hollywood picnic tradition, conducted numerous tours, and sponsored a number of popular lectures, free to the public.
6. And finally, Friends has shared its own experiences and knowledge with several cemeteries planning to launch friends organizations similar to our own.

Our notable collection of nearly one hundred heritage roses has never looked better thanks to the selfless commitment and leadership of Connie Hilker, a nationally recognized rosarian from Fredericksburg, VA. Our seventh annual rose maintenance day will take place in March, 2019. This has been an opportunity for rose lovers to volunteer their time and skills in cleaning and pruning the collection before new blooms of spring appear.

These and other achievements could only have been possible through the generosity of faithful individuals, foundations and corporations. Over our short existence, a total of \$3.4 million has been raised – a sum that we could not have imagined ten years ago. The Cemetery has begun to emerge once again as a significant destination – a place of rare natural beauty, irreplaceable art, and timeless stories of individuals who have helped to enrich our community, state, and nation.

It has taken a “village,” and we are extremely grateful. We believe that Hollywood “sells itself.” Ours has been but to point the way.





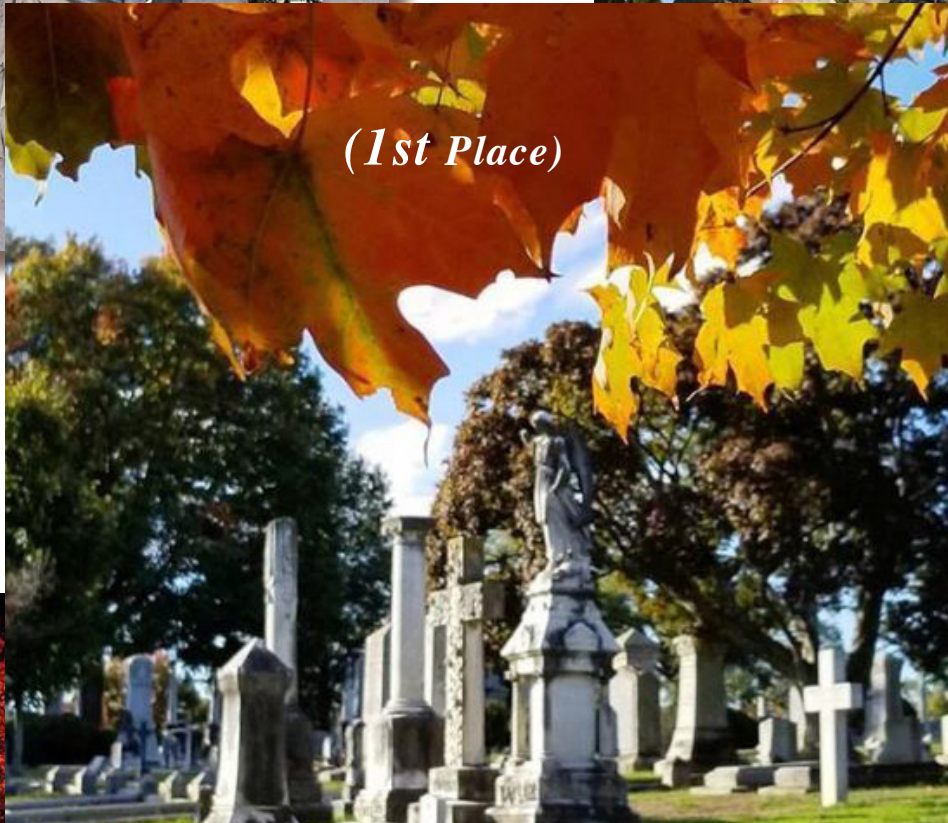
# *Examples from Ninety-One Submissions to the 2018 Instagram Photo Contest*



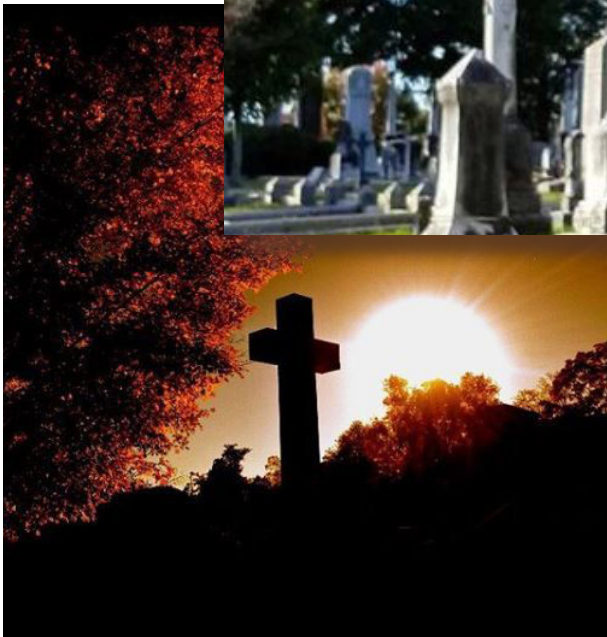
A.



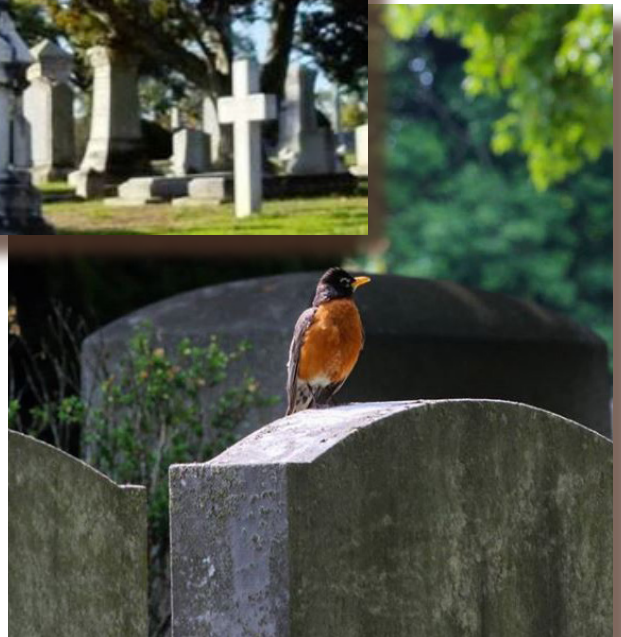
B.



*(1st Place)*



C.



D.

*First Place – @lookuprichmond*

*A. – @erikaforsack; B. – @hartwoodroses; C. – @tracieaglemusic; D. – @alison.greenlee*

## 2018 Contributors to Friends of Hollywood Cemetery

*We are indeed grateful to the following donors for their generous support of Friends in 2018 through October 31, 2018. You have enabled us to raise awareness of Hollywood and to continue vital monument and fence restoration. Thank you for helping us to preserve Hollywood Cemetery for generations to come.*

*Ed*

Edward M. Farley, IV  
Chair, Friends of Hollywood Cemetery

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A complete listing of all gifts for the full calendar year of 2018 will be included in our 2018 Annual Report published in early 2019. This will include Gifts In Kind, Gifts In Memory, Gifts In Honor and Matching Gifts.

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