

HILL HAVURAH AT CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the key elements of a traditional Jewish cemetery?

A traditional Jewish cemetery is typically owned by a Jewish community or a Jewish group, and has some kind of barrier around it demarking it as a cemetery for Jews. Usually, there would be a rule that only Jews can be buried there, although sometimes there are interfaith areas out of the formal boundaries of a Jewish cemetery. Such a cemetery also would not have other religious symbols or ceremonies held on site, and there would usually be no food, fun, or other activities that emphasize the living. Bodies are also buried in simple fashion, without embalming or cremation.

How would burial at Congressional Cemetery differ from these elements?

There are a number of ways in which Congressional Cemetery differs from a traditional Jewish cemetery. For congregants who have purchased at Congressional, all of these differences are part of what makes it attractive – including, as discussed below, the fact that it is an active and vibrant place with many ongoing activities. At the same time, the Cemetery can accommodate all key elements of Jewish burial, including the quick timetable required. Jewish burial homes in the area have worked with Congressional Cemetery (CC), and there have been a number of Jewish funerals there.

- CC is formally owned by the Christ Church. However, it is separately administered on an entirely secular basis, and there is no interaction with the Church in arranging burial or any other part of the process.
- CC has a chapel that has Christian iconography. However, CC itself is non-denominational, and people of many faiths are buried there. Upon request and with sufficient notice, the Staff covers iconography when the Chapel is being used.
- CC allows groups to purchase plots near each other, but a group may not erect any formal barriers demarking a section of the cemetery.
- People of many faiths are buried in CC. People buried there may also choose to be cremated.
- CC is an active cemetery. For example, CC has a separate group of “K9” members – people who pay an annual fee to be able to let their dogs run free there. The K9 program is a critical part of CC’s budget. That said, CC is often closed to dogs for funerals and other events, including from 9-3 every Saturday. CC also hosts many other events, such as John Philip Souza’s birthday party (he’s buried there), Halloween events, movie nights, and much more.

How do Hill Havurah plots at CC work?

Anyone can buy plots wherever they like at CC at any time. However, a group of Hill Havurah members worked with the Cemetery in early 2023 to identify an area with approximately 40 plots near each other. More than half have been sold. If you would like to purchase in that area, please reach out to Michael Allen at mballendc@gmail.com or 202-281-9955 or Howard Crystal at howard.m.crystal@gmail.com.

However, we have no control over when these plots are sold or to whom (they are available for general purchase) and all of the interactions for purchase will be directly between members and CC – Hill Havurah will play no direct role. When you are ready to purchase, contact the Cemetery directly from their website.

CC also accommodates double burials in single plots, so a couple could purchase one plot for both (one is buried beneath the other).

How did you select the specific area in the Cemetery where the group will buy plots?

Cemetery staff initially identified three areas they thought we might be interested in. While there is a fair amount of open space as you walk around the Cemetery, it is deceiving because many plots have been purchased but are not yet “filled.”

On further investigation, Cemetery staff concluded that only one of the areas has a sufficient number of available sites near each other. Fortunately, it was also the best of the three areas, located near one of the cemetery “intersections” – which will make it relatively easy to access by vehicle for those who might not be able to walk.

In what ways could we identify the plots as belonging to members?

Several ideas have come up for identifying Hill Havurah members:

- People could choose to put some kind of Havurah insignia on their headstones, perhaps the one of the logos we have used elsewhere such as this:



- There could be some kind of list and/or map on the Havurah webpage of members and where they are buried (which, as noted, could include Congressional Cemetery and elsewhere)
- If we ultimately have a Havurah headstone for a Geniza, we might put some kind of list and/or map of Havurah members there (that list would of course change over time).

How would a Geniza work?

A group of the participants in this effort have also discussed funding a separate plot which would be dedicated for the Geniza. HH could decide later if it wanted to fund a headstone.

The Cemetery charges approximately \$100-\$200 each time a plot is opened up, which is what we would need to do when we want to deposit materials there. So if the Havurah decided to do a sacred texts burial, that would be the cost. The cemetery is responsible for digging in the plot and we would arrange for it to be filled right after texts are deposited. We could use it in this way as frequently – or infrequently – as we choose.