

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

# DRAFT

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Graceland Cemetery Receiving Vault

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

name of related multiple property listir N/A

## Location

street & number 680 Delaware Avenue  not for publication

city or town Albany  vicinity

state New York code NY county Albany code 001 zip code 12209

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,  
I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

    national      X statewide      X local

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

    entered in the National Register     determined eligible for the National Register

    determined not eligible for the National Register     removed from the National Register

    other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**

(Enter "N/A" if the property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY/mortuary

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY/mortuary

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN/High Victorian Eclectic

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: STONE/granite

walls: STONE/granite

roof: STONE/slate

other: METAL/bronze

METAL/iron

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**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

**Summary Paragraph**

The receiving vault at Graceland Cemetery is located at 680 Delaware Avenue in Albany, New York. Albany lies along the Hudson River in the northeast corner of Albany County. The cemetery is at the south edge of the city limits on the border with the Town of Bethlehem. The receiving vault is a solid granite masonry structure in the form of a rectangle with a slate roof. Its rough-faced stone walls contrast with the smooth texture of the stone cornice and portico. It has Romanesque, Neoclassical, and Gothic stylistic elements. It was designed by Garnet Douglass Baltimore, a civil engineer and landscape designer from Troy who was involved in the design of several other cemeteries in the area. As it has continued in its original use throughout its history, it has received continual maintenance, preventing deterioration from neglect, and it has undergone very little alteration. It therefore retains integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. It has not been moved and remains in its original place in the heart of the cemetery, leaving it with integrity of location, setting, and feeling. Still in use as a receiving vault, it has maintained its integrity of association. The nominated property is the receiving vault only; the entire Graceland Cemetery has not been included in the nomination because the cemetery is still active and large portions have not yet achieved historic significance.

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**Narrative Description**

The receiving vault lies near the center of the relatively flat main portion of the cemetery, located about 550 feet from the entrance. Arriving visitors see it framed between the entrance gate pillars—a deliberate design decision that rendered it, originally the only building on the grounds, the central focal point of the cemetery. Although other non-historic buildings—a community mausoleum, an office, and a maintenance shed—were added later and large trees have grown to partially obscure views of the receiving vault, it remains a prominent feature that is not greatly diminished by the modern buildings, which sit off to the side of it in the west corner of the cemetery grounds. The main road extends from the entrance towards the receiving vault until it splits about two hundred feet in front of it into two roads that loop around it on either side and meet in the rear. There is also a short crossroad connecting the two and passing directly in front of the portico of the receiving vault. An irregular network of other moderately winding roads extends throughout the rest of the cemetery, helping to define the cemetery's thirty-seven sections. The receiving vault is in Section M. It is surrounded by relatively small and simple upright grave markers in its section and the six sections that border it. There is also one small granite mausoleum across the road from it. Some trees stand near the receiving vault, and numerous trees line the edges of the cemetery. Delaware Avenue runs diagonally along the northwest edge of the property.

The receiving vault is a mortuary structure designed to temporarily house remains awaiting burial. It appears rectangular in plan and consists of a front portion with a cross-gable roof and a rear portion, slightly narrower than the front, with a hipped roof. There is a portico with a hipped roof projecting from the central two-thirds of the front portion. The front serves as a chapel, while the rear contains the receiving vault. It is a single-story

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building with no attic. It is about forty-seven feet in length, thirty feet in width, and twenty-five feet in height. It was constructed with solid masonry load-bearing walls consisting of granite blocks with rough-faced rustication separated by beaded mortar joints. The blocks vary somewhat in width and are about one foot tall. They rest on a tall granite plinth which itself sits on a narrow granite water table. Wood roof framing and sheathing support multicolored slates with copper ridge caps and valley flashing. There is a smooth-faced granite cove cornice around the perimeter at the roofline.

*Exterior*

The portico that extends from the façade (north) is Neoclassical in style, with four granite Tuscan columns supporting a stone frieze and cornice. The central block of the frieze has the name GRACELAND carved in relief across its face. The ceiling of the portico is a suspended grid of tin squares with egg and dart molding at their edges. The tin exhibits significant corrosion and some of the squares are missing in one corner. A recent, non-historic concrete pad serves as a floor beneath the footprint of the portico. Centered beneath the portico is the only doorway into the building. It contains a double-leaf solid bronze door with ornate applied decorative molding and fleur-de-lys in the bottom panels and curvilinear metal scrollwork over a glass pane in the upper panels. Each leaf has a horizontal metal handle molded in the form of a rope. The outer door surfaces have developed a thorough green-blue patina from oxidization. Above the door is a large transom with metal muntins supporting stained glass panes. On either side of the doorway is a rectangular stained-glass window with an exterior cast-iron grille and integrated decorative scrollwork.

The gable ends of the east and west elevations each have one round-arched stained-glass window with an exterior iron grille. The round-arched openings together with the rusticated stone masonry of the exterior give the building some elements of the Romanesque Revival style. Centered on the south elevation is a fixed rectangular eight-light window with a plain iron grille. A historic photograph shows that the lights of this window used to contain stained glass; it is not known when the current clear float glass was installed.

*Interior*

The interior of the chapel at the front (north) end has walls faced with white glazed brick (referred to as enameled brick in the original drawings) with a stone base trim. The floor consists of hexagonal ceramic tiles with a perimeter band of mosaic tiles forming a Greek key pattern, another Neoclassical element. The ceiling, by contrast, is a Gothic Revival timber-framed hammer beam roof of three bays and four trusses. Marble corbels support the hammer-braces, and the lintels of the windows and interior door are also marble. The door between the chapel and the vault in the south portion of the building, has two sets of double-leaf painted iron doors that swing into their respective rooms. The vault has the same hexagonal tile flooring as the chapel and the same glazed brick on the exposed portion of the south wall, but behind the loculi (wall niches) on the east and west walls is plain molded red brick and on the north wall is plain molded brick painted white. The loculi extend from a one-foot stone base up to the ceiling and are made of slabs of marble. There are a total of sixty; those in the top row on both sides have marble doors, and evidence of lost hardware indicates that the rest used to have this feature as well. The ceiling is faced with tin squares with diagonal geometric molding and an edge molding of egg and dart.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

**Period of Significance**

1902

**Significant Dates**

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Baltimore, Garnet Douglass (1859-1946)

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

(Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The receiving vault at Graceland Cemetery in Albany, New York, built in 1902, is representative of early-twentieth century mortuary architecture and provides insight into funerary practices of the time. It is a rare example at the local and state levels of the large, fully above-ground type of receiving vault combined with a chapel and is significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Bearing the distinctive characteristics of a receiving vault—a solid masonry structure, stained-glass windows with metal grilles, heavy metal doors, and interior finishes conducive to sanitation practices and standards of the time—it serves as a true representative of its type. It is noteworthy for having an eclectic mix of stylistic elements drawn from several popular styles of the early twentieth century, exhibiting Romanesque, Neoclassical, and Gothic features. It was designed by Garnet Douglass Baltimore, a versatile civil engineer and landscape architect from Troy, New York who worked on numerous railroad, canal, park, and cemetery projects throughout the state. It is an excellent intact example of his mortuary building work and represents his contribution to and impact on cemetery design throughout the region. It is the only known example of a large above-ground receiving vault at a cemetery in Albany County and one of a small number within the state. As such, it is an important representative at the state level of a rare type of receiving vault design.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance**

*History of Graceland Cemetery*

Graceland Cemetery, founded in 1902 and located just north of the Normans Kill, lies at the border between the City of Albany and the Town of Bethlehem in Albany County, New York. Initially settled as early as 1630 and later forming part of the Town of Watervliet, Bethlehem became an independent town on March 12, 1793. Throughout the nineteenth century, Bethlehem was a rural town known for its rich soil and agricultural productivity.<sup>1</sup> Its principal exports were corn, rye, potatoes, apples, and oats.<sup>2</sup> Though Bethlehem had a population of 4,430 in 1810 and experienced a significant influx of European immigrants in the late 1840s, it had only grown to have 5,151 residents by 1860 due to losing territory when the Town of New Scotland was created in 1832. The City of Albany steadily expanded its borders throughout the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries at the expense of surrounding towns, including the Town of Bethlehem. In 1870, Albany annexed Cherry Hill and Groesbeckville, reducing Bethlehem's population to 3,746.<sup>3</sup> Further losses of territory to the City of Albany occurred in 1910 and 1967, and in 1976 Albany annexed Graceland Cemetery, leaving Bethlehem with its present boundaries.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Floyd I. Brewer, editor. *Bethlehem Revisited: A Bicentennial Story, 1793-1993*. (Albany: Lane Press, 1993), 75.

<sup>2</sup> Brewer, *Bethlehem*, 81.

<sup>3</sup> Brewer, *Bethlehem*, 77-78.

<sup>4</sup> Susan E. Leath. *Historic Tales of Bethlehem, New York*. (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2016), 144-6.

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As of 1902, most cemeteries in the Town of Bethlehem were associated with a local Christian or Jewish church congregation.<sup>5</sup> There were only two cemeteries that were officially non-denominational: Elmwood Cemetery (also called Bethlehem Rural Cemetery), founded in 1860, and Bethlehem Cemetery, founded in 1865. Both were formed as not-for-profit corporations by local churches whose private burial grounds had exceeded their capacity, and though they were not officially associated with any denomination, they were still Christian. There was thus a need in the area for a place of burial open to people of all faiths. Graceland Cemetery addressed this need when it was established in 1902 as a non-sectarian cemetery, the first in the town that was not affiliated with any religion and therefore truly secular. Sitting on the boundary line between the Town of Bethlehem and the City of Albany, it was ideally situated to serve the people of both municipalities in this capacity.

The Graceland Cemetery Association, which established and manages the cemetery, was organized as a not-for-profit corporation under the applicable laws of the state of New York. The corporation has a president and a board. The cemetery adopted a set of rules and regulations intended to benefit and protect burial plots and their owners. They address, among other things, record keeping, interments, and placement of flowers and memorials, and one of the rules states that “Graceland reserves the right to inter any bodies placed in the receiving vault whenever it deems it necessary.”<sup>6</sup> This regulation, still included in the current set, underscores the fact that the receiving vault remains in use. Graceland Cemetery is subject to regulation by the New York State Division of Cemeteries.

Graceland Cemetery was designed by Garnet Douglass Baltimore.<sup>7</sup> Baltimore was born in Troy, New York on April 15, 1859, and he lived in the city for his entire life. He attended Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute from 1877-1881 to study civil engineering and became the first African American graduate of that institution. Immediately following graduation, he began work as the assistant engineer for the Albany and Greenbush Bridge. He then worked on the Granville and Rutland Railroad in 1883, and the following year he began a series of appointments working on canals. As assistant engineer for the New York State Canal System, he worked on the Erie Canal, the Shinnacook and Peconic Canal, and the Oswego Canal, for the last of which he developed a novel cement mixture to stabilize a lock built upon quicksand and mud.<sup>8</sup> In 1891, he became Troy’s Assistant City Engineer, and from 1902-1906 he worked on his most notable project for the city, designs for the new Prospect Park. In 1906 he left his position with the city, though he continued to work with them as a consulting landscape engineer for many years. He continued to be professionally successful, becoming a member of the New York State Society of Professional Engineers, and he was very active in the community as well, giving lectures on civic improvement projects and serving on the Civic Art Committee of Troy from 1912-1913.

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<sup>5</sup> Florence Christoph and Peter Christoph, editors. *Records of the People of the Town of Bethlehem*. (Selkirk: Bethlehem Historical Association, 1982), 137.

<sup>6</sup> Graceland Cemetery Association. “Regulations.” *Graceland Cemetery & Mausoleum*. <https://www.graceland-cemetery.org/about-us/regulations/>.

<sup>7</sup> Suzanne Spellen. “Garnet Douglass Baltimore: Troy’s Landscape Master.” *New York Almanack*. September 7, 2020. <https://www.newyorkalmanack.com/2020/09/garnet-douglass-baltimore-troys-landscape-master/>.

<sup>8</sup> Suzanne Spellen. “Garnet Douglass Baltimore: A Son of Troy.” *Spellen of Troy*. February 15, 2023. <https://suzannespellen.substack.com/p/garnet-douglass-baltimore-a-son-of>.

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While working for the city, Baltimore also undertook private consulting work, which is how he first became involved with cemetery design. In 1897, the new Forest Park Cemetery in Brunswick, New York was incorporated as a for-profit business enterprise. The founders hired Baltimore as the cemetery's surveyor, architect, and engineer, a position which he held for three years. He developed elaborate plans for a rural cemetery that was to have winding trails, groves, and statuary, and he designed an entrance gate and receiving vault. The vault was built of granite and marble and consisted of a square structure with a large dome topped by a small cupola. It had a porte-cochère extending from the front with a pediment, and the door and window openings were all round-arched with keystones. Its features collectively gave it a Beaux-Arts style. It is now in ruins, having lost its roof and interior finishes, including the loculi. Although the gate and vault were built, most of the plans for the cemetery were never executed due to the bankruptcy of the cemetery corporation in 1914.<sup>9</sup> Descriptions of Baltimore's design suggest that it was intended to be largely in the form of a rural cemetery, though the portion that was completed was relatively flat and reflected the appearance of a lawn cemetery. Following his work at Forest Park Cemetery, Baltimore went on to design Graceland Cemetery in Albany, and he was also involved with the design of cemeteries in Amsterdam, Glens Falls, and Hoosick Falls. For over thirty years he served as the consulting architectural engineer for Troy's Oakwood Cemetery (NR listed, 1984), where he laid out several new sections and was ultimately buried.

At Graceland Cemetery, Baltimore pursued a design similar in some ways to what he had employed for Forest Park Cemetery. He laid out a network of winding roads that divided the cemetery into irregular sections, and he situated the receiving vault near the center of the cemetery such that it would be framed by the entrance gate when viewed from just outside, as he had done at Forest Park. The entrance gate is very similar at both cemeteries, consisting of four stone pillars connected by iron grilles and gates. If he had any more elaborate plans, such as groves or statuary, for Graceland, they were never executed, and the resulting design is essentially that of a lawn cemetery, having curving roads, generally flat topography with some natural sloping, limited vegetation, and simple upright grave markers.

While the blueprints for the combined receiving vault and chapel at Graceland do not bear the name or mark of an architect or designer, comparative evidence suggests that Baltimore designed the receiving vault at Graceland as he did at Forest Park, for the receiving vaults bear several identical features that seem to be signatures of his work. They both have a large covered exterior front area (a porte-cochère at Forest Park and a portico at Graceland) a practical feature that is surprisingly extremely rare on receiving vaults, research having revealed only a few other examples with such a feature. They also both have the name of their cemetery carved in relief in a stone feature of their respective fronts (in the pediment at Forest Park and in the frieze at Graceland). This is another uncommon feature, for the date of construction, if anything, is normally what was carved, not the name of the cemetery. Especially significant is that they are both fully above-ground receiving vaults, a rare type and, although the vault at Graceland contains a chapel while that at Forest Park does not, the chapel was treated as part of the larger receiving vault building and did not alter the style or form from what is

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<sup>9</sup> Sharon Zankel. "Garnet Douglass Baltimore Also a Part of Brunswick's History." *Brunswick Town Newsletter*, Spring 2005. (Brunswick: Town of Brunswick, 2005).



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typical for a receiving vault. Additionally, both buildings were designed in pronounced, though different, architectural styles.

Graceland Cemetery's first burial occurred on May 12, 1902, and this was followed by a small number of additional burials throughout that year. The records of interment show that no burials occurred after late December 1902 until May 1903, when two individuals who died in the previous December were buried.<sup>10</sup> These two individuals must have been placed in a receiving vault during the winter, so construction of the receiving vault appears to have been completed by the end of 1902, enabling it to serve as a secure temporary resting place for them.

*Architecture of Receiving Vaults*

Receiving vaults were a type of mortuary building that many cemeteries built throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were used to temporarily house corpses awaiting burial, either during the winter when graves could not be dug in the frozen ground, or at any time of year when a final resting place such as a mausoleum was not yet completed. There was usually only one receiving vault at a cemetery, and, despite the guidance in a 1912 book on 'modern' cemetery construction and management methods directing that they "should be as near the entrance as possible,"<sup>11</sup> receiving vaults show little consistency in their placement, being variously located near the entrance, the center, or the edges of cemeteries. The same authority notes that already by 1912 receiving vaults, hitherto "an essential feature of a cemetery...are not now so much used as in former years, and they are needed only in the more northern states, where the severe winters do not allow of convenient burial at that season."<sup>12</sup> By the 1940s, they were rendered largely obsolete by mechanical excavation, embalming, and refrigeration, though they are still in occasional use.

The first receiving vaults appeared in the early 1800s as dignified but relatively modest and unadorned underground chambers either dug into the side of a hill or covered with earth to form a hill, one wall face containing the entrance being left exposed. Throughout the century they became increasingly large and ornate, resulting in their resembling—often closely—other mortuary buildings like mausoleums, for which they are sometimes mistaken. Some cemeteries periodically built new receiving vaults to replace their old ones to accommodate increased demand, and, though the old ones were often demolished, where they remain, they demonstrate this increase in size and style. The original 1865 receiving vault at Hill Side Cemetery in North Adams, Massachusetts, for example, is a small underground chamber containing stone shelves with a plain stone entrance portal and an iron door, while the 1893 receiving vault that replaced it is a much larger structure (containing nearly one hundred wooden shelves) built of rusticated stone blocks with a plinth and cornice, entered through a Romanesque arch with decorative iron gates.<sup>13</sup> Albany Rural Cemetery in New York,

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<sup>10</sup> "Graceland Cemetery, Albany, Albany, County, New York." *Interment.net: Online Cemetery Records*. March 8, 2022. <https://www.interment.net/data/us/ny/albany/graceland/index.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Howard Evarts Weed. *Modern Park Cemeteries*. (Chicago: R.J. Haight, 1912), 43.

<sup>12</sup> Weed, *Modern Park Cemeteries*, 112.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Marino. "The Hill Side Hotel." *PaulWMarino.org*. No date. <http://paulwmarino.org/the-hill-side-hotel.html>.

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meanwhile, built no less than three receiving vaults between 1849 and 1883, though only one survives. It is monumental in scale, having two entrance doors each centered on an Egyptian style mastaba with a forest of columns on the inside supporting brick groin vaults.

Overall, receiving vaults have become a relatively rare building type due to the deterioration and demolition that have followed their general disuse. Research has only revealed a handful of other extant below-ground examples in New York. Woodlands Cemetery in Cambridge built a Neoclassical vault in 1905 with columns flanking the doorway and an ocular window above; Glenwood Cemetery in Lockport has a vault with a rusticated stone entrance and some vaguely castellar stylistic elements; Oakland Cemetery in Yonkers has a vault again with rusticated stone but with a round arch and alternately protruding voussoirs which suggest Beaux-Arts inspiration; Dale Cemetery in Ossining has a Greek Revival example from 1851 with smooth-faced stones and curving wing walls topped by urns; Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn has a Gothic Revival vault with a pointed arch opening and pinnacles; and Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Tarrytown has a Neoclassical vault from 1900 with rusticated stone walls terminating in a cornice and an entrance portal with columns. As demonstrated by the above examples, a variety of architectural styles were employed by the designers of receiving vaults. Notably, Egyptian features were sometimes introduced due to the ancient culture's associations with death and the afterlife. Gothic and Neoclassical elements seem to have predominated in the first two decades of the twentieth century, and contemporary writing on the subject reflected this preference. In an article for *The Cemetery Hand Book: A Manual of Useful Information on Cemetery Development & Management*, published in 1921, Sid J. and S. Herbert Hare opined that the Gothic Revival style was particularly appropriate for cemetery buildings due to its religious associations and the "permanence and solidity" that it expressed, while also asserting that "the classic styles in the various orders seem especially suited to small private vaults and mausoleums."<sup>14</sup>

In the middle of the nineteenth century, above-ground receiving vaults began to appear in the form of standalone structures, invariably built with solid masonry walls and heavy metal doors. Below-ground vaults continued to be more common because rural cemeteries, being volunteer associations, as well as most small cemeteries, were usually unable to afford the increased cost of constructing a fully above-ground vault. However, with the advent of the lawn cemetery, run by a business organization, above-ground vaults did increase somewhat in popularity, explaining why the majority date from the period 1890-1910. Those which are from the earlier nineteenth century tend to be relatively small and simple in style, such as the cobblestone vaults at Prospect Hill and Guilderland cemeteries in Albany County, New York, constructed in 1863 and 1872, respectively. Some, but by no means all, of the later examples built in the 1890s and early 1900s are far larger and more ornate. As with below-ground receiving vaults, there was no single preferred architectural style for above-ground vaults, and surviving examples exhibit an even greater variety of styles than what is seen for below-ground vaults, despite their greater rarity. Research has shown that the surviving number of large above-ground receiving vaults is quite limited, and they seem to be concentrated in the Midwest. A few examples include Greenwood Cemetery in Ohio, which constructed a massive two-story receiving vault in the

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<sup>14</sup> Sid J. Hare and S. Herbert Hare. "Organizing and Developing a Modern Cemetery." In *The Cemetery Hand Book: A Manual of Useful Information on Cemetery Development & Management*. (Chicago: Allied Arts Publishing Co., 1921), 30.

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Romanesque Revival style in 1892; Forest Lawn Cemetery in Michigan, which has a very ornate Byzantine style receiving vault from 1899; and Allegheny Cemetery in Pennsylvania, which built an elaborate Gothic Revival receiving vault in 1905. The following five are the examples identified in New York. Forest Park Cemetery in Troy built in 1897 in the Beaux-Arts style, though the cemetery is now abandoned and the vault in ruins. Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Hawthorne built in 1898 in a mixed Egyptian and Italianate style, the two-story building having widely overhanging bracketed eaves and an entrance portal flanked by obelisks. Pine View Cemetery in Queensbury, founded in 1899, has a simple rectangular vault with rusticated stone walls and brass doors but without any stylistic features. The nominated Graceland Cemetery in Albany, built in 1902, has a mixed Romanesque, Gothic, and Neoclassical style, and Forest Hill Cemetery in Utica built in 1905 with rusticated stone walls but no distinct style.

Receiving vaults were sometimes combined with chapels. This combination was considered advantageous since bodies would sometimes be placed in a receiving vault before a funeral service in a chapel,<sup>15</sup> often being stored in the vault after a service for varying lengths of time, depending on the season. As funeral services came to be held at churches or funeral homes increasingly throughout the twentieth century, this function eventually became obsolete.<sup>16</sup> Another reason why the combination of a chapel and a receiving vault was valued is related to the funeral custom of holding vigil over the deceased until they were buried. This practice was still customary as late as the 1890s, and as receiving vaults were not comfortable places to spend lengthy amounts of time, especially in the winter, proponents of the vigil argued that the combination with a chapel would offer a more hospitable adjacent space to keep vigil.<sup>17</sup> Already by 1912, however, this use was declining, with one author on cemeteries declaring that the vigil “is no longer considered necessary,” though he allowed that it was “still in vogue in many localities.”<sup>18</sup>

When combined with a chapel, a receiving vault would ideally constitute the lower level of the building, which would be sited on a slope to allow the chapel and the vault to have separate entrances. However, it was sometimes in a fully underground basement which could only be accessed through the chapel, as at Pleasant View Cemetery in Hartley, Iowa. Alternatively, some receiving vaults were connected to the rear of a chapel. Almost invariably they were below-ground vaults built into a hillside next to which the chapel had been deliberately sited, as is the case at Mount Hope Cemetery in Rochester, New York, Oakwood Cemetery in Syracuse, New York, and Forest Lawn Cemetery in Omaha, Nebraska. As of 1921, professionals in the field were advising that receiving vaults be placed below chapels, rather than behind them.<sup>19</sup>

These designs all relegated the receiving vault to a position of secondary importance. The chapel, above or in front of the vault, inevitably obscured views of it. In a few instances, the receiving vault was given precedence by being designed to include a chapel within it, but this was a very rare design. Two below-ground examples

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<sup>15</sup> Hare, *The Cemetery Hand Book*, 578-579.

<sup>16</sup> Howard Brochard. “About Cemetery Chapel.” *City of Hartley*. 2015. <https://www.hartleyiowa.com/cemetery-chapel/about-cemetery-chapel>.

<sup>17</sup> Marino, “The Hill Side Hotel.”

<sup>18</sup> Weed, *Modern Park Cemeteries*, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Hare, *The Cemetery Hand Book*, 579-580.

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are found at Maplewood Cemetery in Norwich, Connecticut, and Cedar Lawn Cemetery in Paterson, New Jersey. The latter, which with a single exposed masonry wall has the typical appearance of a below-ground receiving vault, was described as having a chapel that “serves as an ante-mortem room to the vault” and was “well suited to the holding of services prior to the commitment of bodies to the vault”, which “opens out of the chapel and is built into rising ground.”<sup>20</sup> The only two identified above-ground examples of a receiving vault containing a chapel are the receiving vaults at Graceland Cemetery in Albany and Forest Lawn Cemetery in Saginaw, Michigan, both of which have a chapel in the front portion and a vault in the rear portion of the building.

Receiving vaults were built with solid masonry walls, granite being the most common stone type. Above-ground vaults typically had windows, often containing stained glass and always covered with metal grilles if on the ground floor. The larger and more ornate receiving vaults normally had bronze or brass doors with some form of surface motif. These features were intended to render them secure against body snatchers, who sought to steal bodies to illicitly sell to medical institutions for anatomical research.<sup>21</sup> The interiors of receiving vaults were usually plain and contained loculi, or wall niches, to hold bodies or coffins. By the turn of the twentieth century, walls and floors usually had finishes that lent themselves to easy cleaning to comply with public health regulations. Concerned about the spread of infectious diseases from decomposing corpses, the Public Health and Marine-Hospital Service of the United States issued regulations concerning the proper sanitary measures to be applied to receiving vaults. Its 1910 *Municipal Ordinances, Rules, and Regulations Pertaining to Public Hygiene*, for example, stipulated that receiving vaults “must be cleared, cleaned, and disinfected before the 1st day of May in each and every year, and the keeping of a dead body in a receiving vault for more than 72 hours is prohibited between the 1st day of May and the 1st day of October,” and they also ordered that “the chief inspector of nuisances shall cause an examination to be made of each receiving vault in the city after the 1st day of May in each year and report to the board whether this rule has been obeyed.”<sup>22</sup> When a receiving vault was combined with a chapel, the chapel portion was more decorative. At Albany’s Graceland Cemetery, for example, the chapel portion has a vaulted hammerbeam ceiling and Greek key mosaic tile flooring, while at Saginaw’s Forest Lawn Cemetery, the chapel portion takes the form of a Byzantine church with a dome and cupola and stained-glass rose windows.

The receiving vault at Graceland Cemetery is an excellent and rare example of the large above-ground type of receiving vault. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of the type and dates from its period of greatest popularity, ca.1890-1910. It represents the typical form and design of the type through its solid masonry construction and metal doors and window grilles, and with glazed brick walls and mosaic tile floors, it demonstrates how early-twentieth-century public health concerns influenced receiving vault materials. Its

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<sup>20</sup> Hare, *The Cemetery Hand Book*, 182.

<sup>21</sup> James Mann. “Waiting Room to the City of the Dead: The Receiving Vault at Highland Cemetery”. *Ypsilanti Gleanings*, spring 2015, 28.

<sup>22</sup> Public Health and Marine-Hospital Service of the United States. *Municipal Ordinances, Rules, and Regulations Pertaining to Public Hygiene: Adopted from January 1, 1910, to June 30, 1911, by Cities of the United States having a Population of over 25,000 in 1910*. (Washington, D.C.: Washington Government Printing Office – Treasury Department/Public Health and Marine-Hospital Service of the United States, 1912), 523.

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stylistic elements are drawn from popular styles of its time seen in other contemporary receiving vaults, though it is remarkable for its eclectic combination of features from several styles, as receiving vaults usually exhibit the elements of a single style. It is significant as a surviving example of a mortuary building designed by Garnet Douglass Baltimore, who worked on several cemeteries in upstate New York and impacted the design of cemeteries and mortuary buildings in the area. There are no other examples of large above-ground receiving vaults at the local level and very few at the state level, and the vault at Graceland Cemetery appears to be the only, and is certainly one of very few, examples of the extremely rare subtype that is both above-ground and combined with a chapel.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number  
(if assigned):

23NR00102

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**10. Geographical Data**

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**Acreage of Property** 0.17 acres

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS 84:

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

Latitude: 42.634126

Longitude: -73.792484

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed maps with scale.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the footprint of the nominated building and the lawn on either side to indicate the setting of the building within the cemetery.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title Alec Colpo / Architectural Historian

organization Thaler Reilly Wilson Architecture and Preservation date October 31, 2023

street & number 25 Monroe Street, Suite 202 telephone 518-375-1485

city or town Albany state NY zip code 12210

e-mail admin@trw-arch.com

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**Additional Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

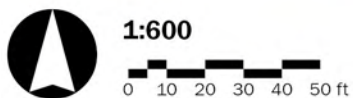
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)



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 Nomination Boundary (0.17 ac)



Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 18N

New York State Orthoimagery Year: 2021

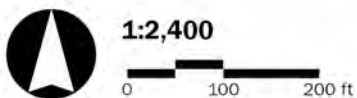
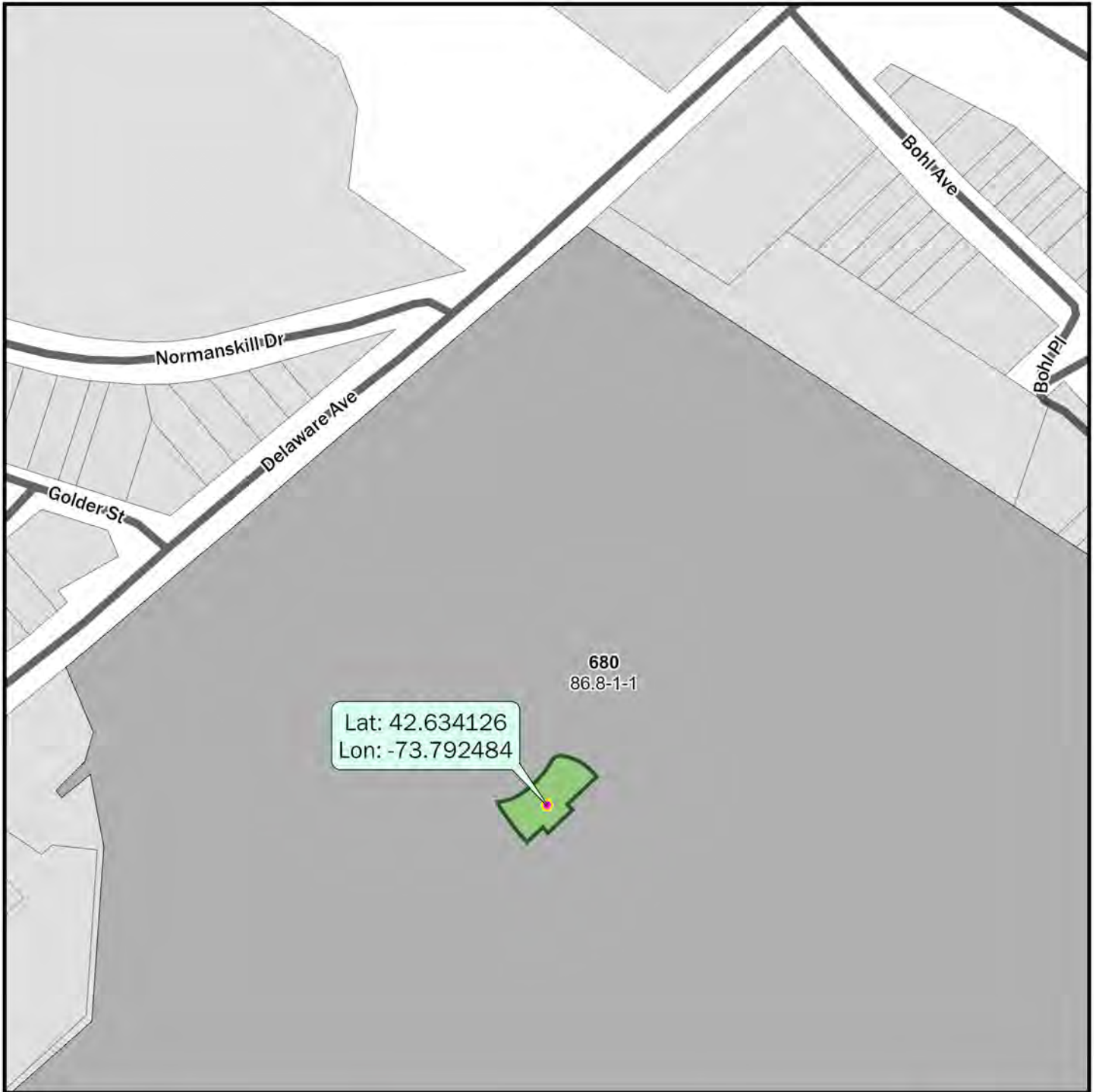
Mapped 01/05/2024 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO

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Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 18N

 Nomination Boundary (0.17 ac)  Tax Parcels

Albany County Parcel Year: 2021

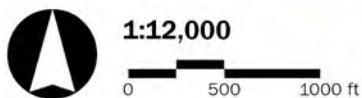
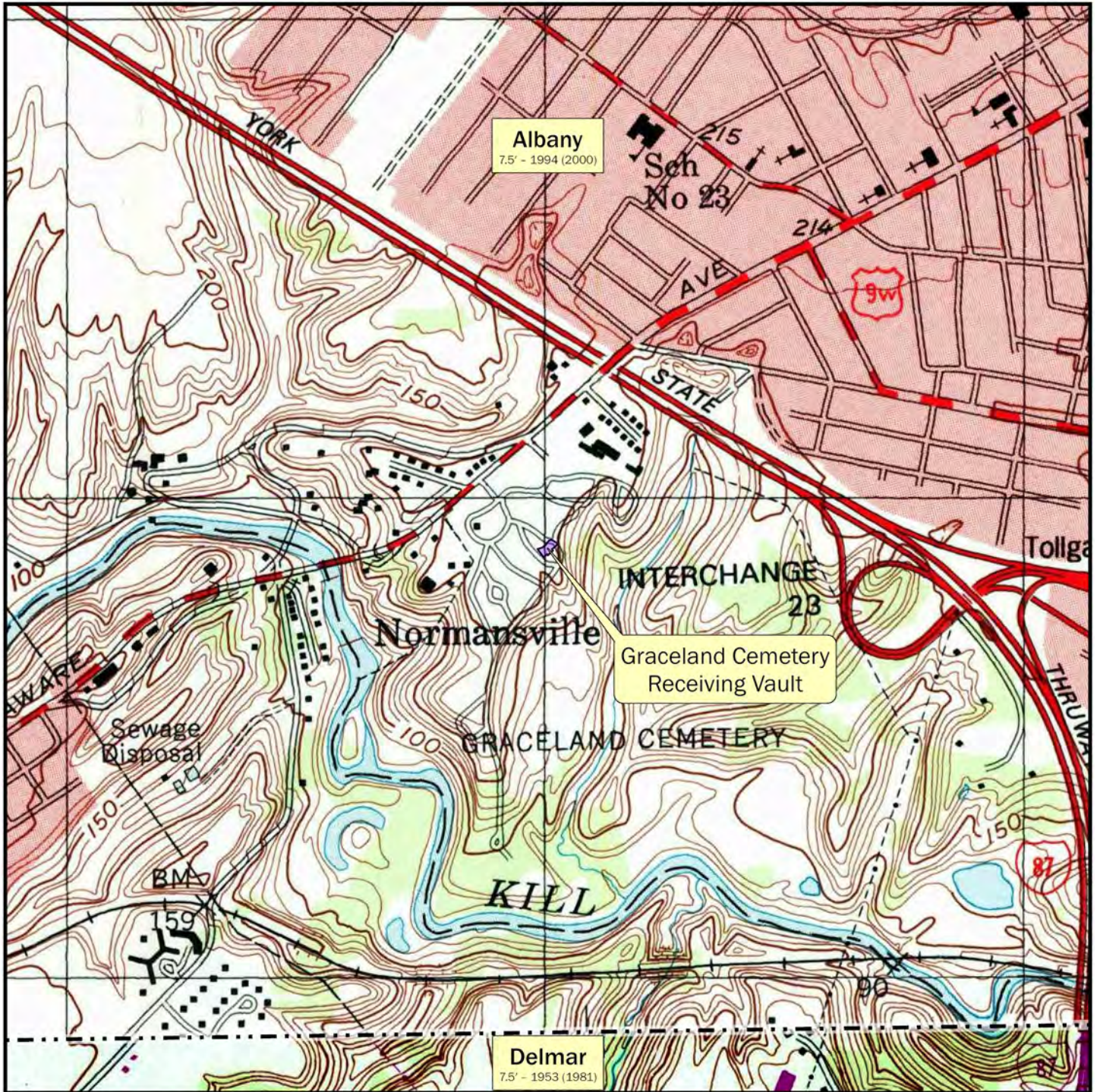


Mapped 01/05/2024 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO

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 Graceland Cemetery Receiving Vault



Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 18N

Mapped 01/05/2024 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO

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**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Graceland Cemetery Receiving Vault

City or Vicinity: Albany

County: Albany

State: New York

Photographer: Charles Volans

Date Photographed: 16 August 2023

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

NY\_Albany County\_Graceland Cemetery Receiving Vault\_0001

Looking south at façade (north) entrance

NY\_Albany County\_Graceland Cemetery Receiving Vault\_0002

Looking east at west elevation

NY\_Albany County\_Graceland Cemetery Receiving Vault\_0003

Looking northwest at east elevation

NY\_Albany County\_Graceland Cemetery Receiving Vault\_0004

Looking south at front door

NY\_Albany County\_Graceland Cemetery Receiving Vault\_0005

Interior of chapel looking southwest

NY\_Albany County\_Graceland Cemetery Receiving Vault\_0006

Interior of chapel looking east

NY\_Albany County\_Graceland Cemetery Receiving Vault\_0007

Looking north interior of receiving vault

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



GRACELAND















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