

## HISTORY AT YOUR FINGERTIPS: GREEN-WOOD'S NINETEENTH-CENTURY HANDWRITTEN BURIAL REGISTRY NOW SEARCHABLE THROUGH ONLINE DATABASE

More than 433,000 Burial Records, Dating From Between 1840 to 1937, That Include Cause of Death, Place of Birth, Last Street Address, Marital Status, and More

**(BROOKLYN, NY – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)** From the date of the very first burial at The Green-Wood Cemetery in 1840 through the year 1937—nearly a century—burial data was meticulously recorded in a series of sixty handwritten ledgers known as the Burial Registry. The result was key vital records on 433,192 individuals, spanning more than 17,000 pages. Now, after an arduous three-year process of transcribing every word in these books, the data is available through an online database. Entitled **Burial and Vital Records 1840-1937**, this is the first project of its kind to make detailed, historic cemetery records completely searchable and free to the public.

Each entry—handwritten by Green-Woods's recordkeepers—captured twelve categories of demographic information. They include the name of the deceased, age at death (in days, months, and years), burial date, place of birth, marital status, street and house number of late residence, cause of death, location of burial, and name of undertaker. Occasionally the recordkeepers drew small diagrams of the burial lots and made ancillary notes in the margins. Users can see all of the handwritten entries through linked images to the actual ledgers. The centuries-old handwriting, with its loops and swirls, is itself an artifact of the era.

These records offer invaluable information for scholars in the fields of urban studies, urban planning, public health, anthropology, epidemiology, immigration statistics, and more. The new database is now accessible at green-wood.com/burial-and-vital-records.

Researchers have already noted entries for victims of the **sinking of the steamship Arctic** (1854), the **Civil War Draft Riots** (1863), the **Malbone Street Train Crash** (1918), and more. But perhaps more interesting are the **trends that these data reveal.** For example, details of Brooklyn's **cholera outbreak** in the 1830s and 1840s, which caused the deaths of over 5,000 persons, are given new depth with these records. One can track the daily, weekly, and monthly death toll from the disease and then overlay the neighborhoods where the cholera outbreaks took place, how old the victims were, and whether there were patterns around age.

About Black Brooklynites and New Yorkers buried in Green-Wood's Freedom Lots, Jim Casey, assistant professor of African American Studies at Penn State, notes "It is really rare to find any data on early African Americans as complete as the Green-Wood's burial registry." Casey goes on to say, "That's especially true for the period before the U.S. census started recording racial identities in 1870. I'm not aware of any publicly available datasets that come close to the comprehensive coverage of the Green-Wood materials on the Freedom Lots."

"Here at Green-Wood, we are deeply committed to preserving history and making it accessible to all," said **Richard J. Moylan**, president of Green-Wood. "For decades, we have utilized these records within the everyday workings of the cemetery, and we have always wanted to make them available to researchers around the world. Today we're proud to announce that, with the support of the NEH, we've done just that."

The initiative was made possible by a generous grant of \$144,940 from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). In 2020, the NEH awarded Green-Wood funds from their Humanities Collections and Reference Resources grant program, which supports scholarship, education, and public programming in the humanities. Green-Wood officials hope that this project can serve as a blueprint and raise awareness of cemetery archives across the country. Collectively, America's cemeteries contain millions of burial records and present a unique picture of our shared history.

# # #

**About Green-Wood:** Established in 1838, The Green-Wood Cemetery, a National Historic Landmark, is recognized as one of the world's most beautiful cemeteries. As the permanent residence of over 570,000 individuals, Green-Wood's magnificent grounds, grand architecture, and world-class statuary have made it a destination for half a million visitors annually, including national and international tourists, New Yorkers, and Brooklynites. At the same time, Green-Wood is an outdoor museum, an arboretum, and a repository of history. Throughout the year, it offers innovative programs in arts and culture, nature and the environment, education, workforce development, restoration, and research. For more information, please visit www.green-wood.com.