

Reading Between Tombstones: Interpreting a Historic Cemetery as an Outdoor Museum

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01. FRAMING

Cemeteries are uniquely localized and intimate forums for history education, yet they are seldom utilized as such. Learning experiences in cemeteries have great potential, yet they have been largely unexplored by American cultural institutions. Many historic cemeteries lack context, making them less appealing to visitors without extensive historical knowledge, thus causing them to face obscurity. One such cemetery is Grand Army of the Republic Cemetery Park, a small cemetery for Union Civil War Veterans and their families in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood, the focus of this project. Despite being a significant historical site within the grand scheme of Seattle's history, the cemetery was lacking in context. **This project aimed to recontextualize the site using museological interpretive strategies in partnership with its caretakers, the Friends of Grand Army of the Republic Cemetery Park.**

02. DELIVERABLES

• A DIGITAL GUIDE FOR USE AT THE CEMETERY

This guide is optimized for use on smartphones by visitors at Grand Army of the Republic Cemetery Park. It includes a curated guided walk through the cemetery, a complete history of the site, profiles of select individuals buried there, the story of the community effort to save the cemetery, and answers to questions visitors may have about the site.

• REIMAGINED INTERPRETIVE CONTENT FOR THE CEMETERY'S ENTRANCE KIOSK

The cemetery's entrance kiosk had not been updated in quite a while, and was lacking approachable and visually appealing signage that clearly communicated basic information about the cemetery. The new signage created for this project was styled after museum labels, and was written and designed using museological best practices.

03. PURPOSE

The main purpose of this project can be summarized in three key goals:

#1: Demonstrate the potential of implementing museum-based interpretive strategies in historic cemeteries.

#2: Encourage the public and museum professionals to view cemeteries as places for learning.

#3: Bring awareness to Grand Army of the Republic Cemetery Park and issues of historic preservation.

04. METHODOLOGY & ACTIVITIES

Four key focuses were prioritized throughout the process:

COMMUNITY

The Friends of GAR Cemetery Park is a community based organization that values this place. **Their experiences and voices need to be included as part of the site's historical record.**

EQUITY & HONESTY

The cemetery's diversity needs to be highlighted, and underrepresented stories should be prioritized. It is equally important to honestly and objectively address some of the difficult aspects of the history of the Union Army and the Grand Army of the Republic as an organization.

ACCESSIBILITY

The digital guide will likely be used by a wide age range of individuals and needs to be easy to use. **The guide's design needs to be created with accessibility in mind**, including color contrast, fonts, and alt text.

PRESERVATION

This site is proof of the value of community organization to save endangered historic sites. **It is important that visitors leave with an understanding of this and feel empowered to take action in their own ways.**

This project began with performing preliminary research into the cemetery, Seattle's history, and stakeholders interested in GAR Cemetery Park. After reaching out to Tom Easthope, a founding member of Friends of GAR Cemetery Park, key stakeholders were identified and contacted to see if they would be interested in speaking about their personal connections and experiences with GAR Cemetery Park. Ten stakeholders responded to this inquiry and agreed to share their experiences. Their perspectives were then used to develop the interpretive scope of the guide.

In these interviews, the most frequent reoccurring question people found important was; "Why and how did these soldiers end up in Seattle?" This shaped the interpretive focus of the guide's historical content, and resulted in a focus on veterans in Seattle, rather than extensive details about battles of the American Civil War. **The guide seeks to situate GAR Cemetery Park's history firmly in Seattle, with emphasis on the multitude of factors that brought survivors of the Civil War to Washington and what their lives were like there.** Locality also became key to framing the importance of historic preservation and community organization, tying together the site's history and the community that cares for it.

From here, the research, writing, and design process began, keeping in mind user experience on a smartphone. **The guide's cemetery walk was curated based on defining features of the cemetery, which were interpreted as museum artifacts. Each stop on the walk focused on a physical aspect of the cemetery visible to the visitor, the history tied to that aspect, and the additional context needed to make sense of the cemetery's history.** The visitor then is given the choice to decide if they would like to explore nearby tombstones and hear the stories of the people they belong to, or if they would like to continue to the next stop. This is designed to give the visitor agency, which is necessary to foster engagement. Once the visitor has completed the walk, or if they choose not to do it, they have a multitude of options to learn about whatever interests them and spend as much time with the guide as they wish. Interpretive content from the guide was slimmed down and made brief to create consistent signage for the entry kiosk.

05. FINAL PRODUCT

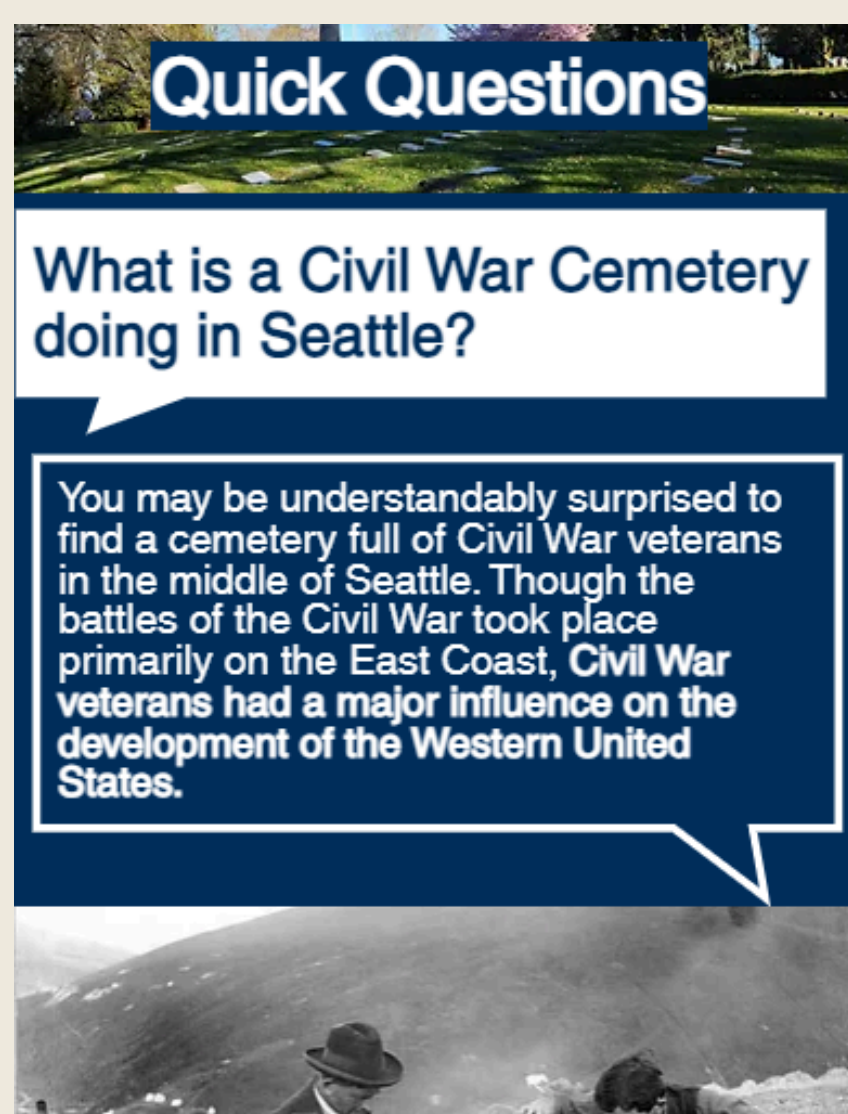
To continue on this guided walk, please make your way to the monument. If you are facing away from the bench in the corner, the obelisk should be right in front of you.



When you are at the monument, press the button below to continue.



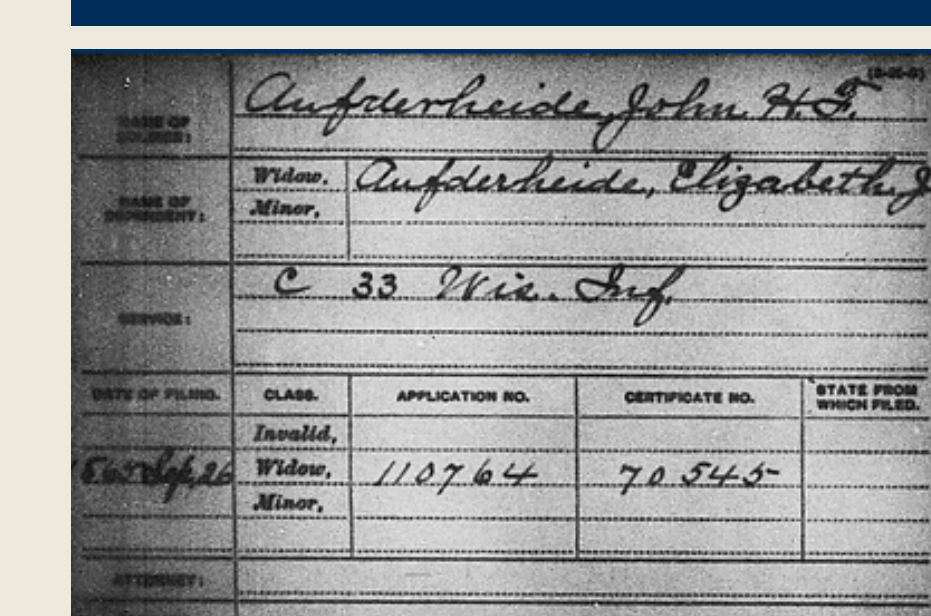
For the neighbors of G.A.R. Cemetery Park, this place is more than just a historic cemetery and park, it is the site of cherished community gatherings and neighborhood memories.



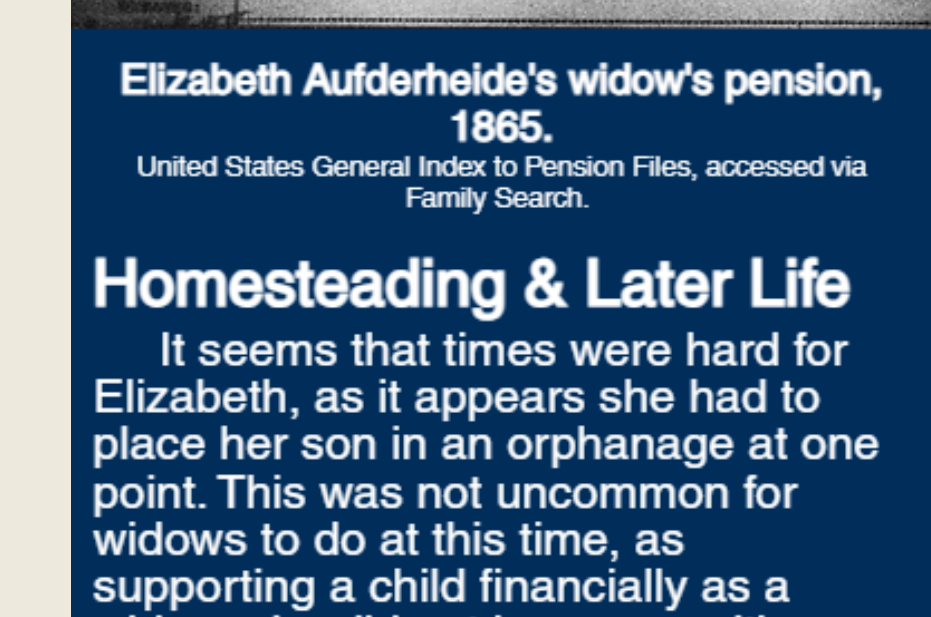
Quick Questions

What is a Civil War Cemetery doing in Seattle?

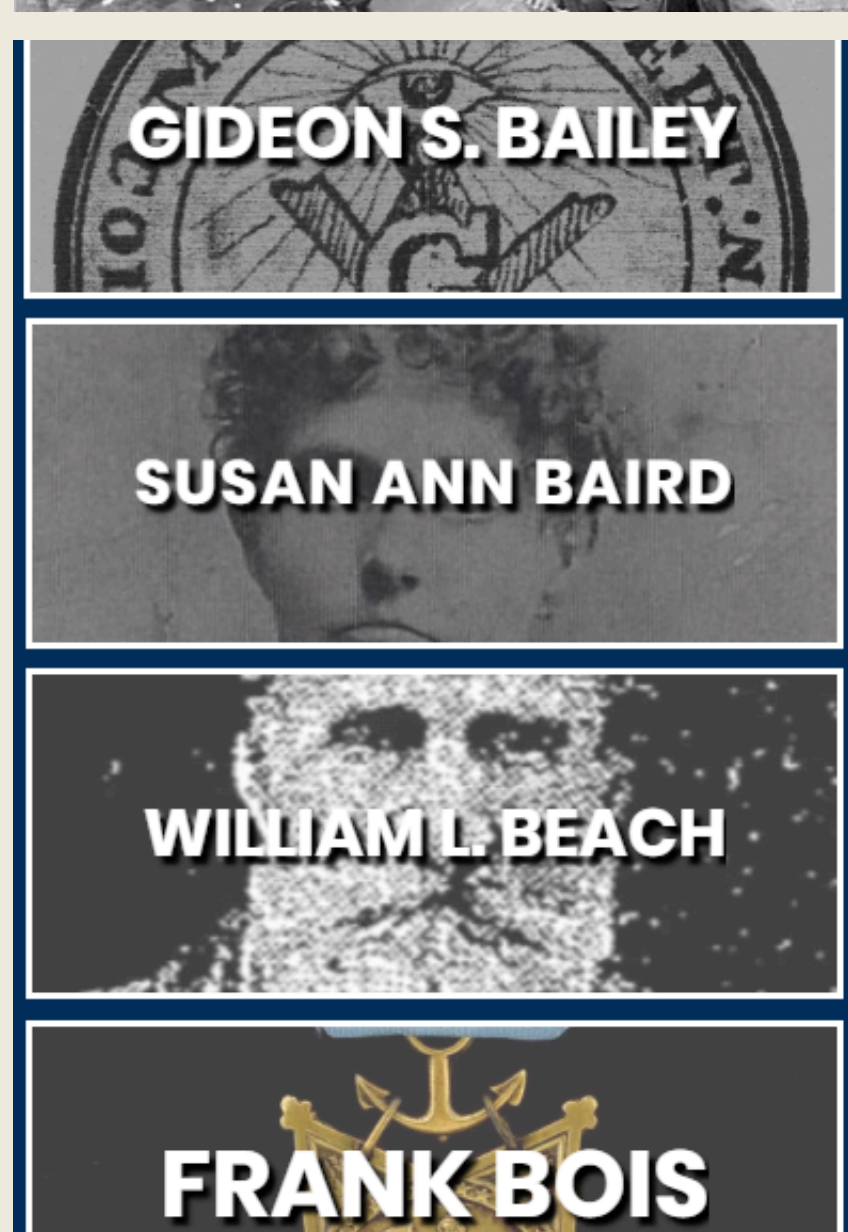
You may be understandably surprised to find a cemetery full of Civil War veterans in the middle of Seattle. Though the battles of the Civil War took place primarily on the East Coast, Civil War veterans had a major influence on the development of the Western United States.



Distinct Features & Symbols
The design of this monument is unique when compared to Civil War monuments throughout the country for several reasons. Firstly, it is quite minimalist compared to war memorials of the early 1900s, many of which feature ornate carving and sculpture work. In short, the simplicity of this monument makes it stand out among its intricate contemporary counterparts found elsewhere in the country.



Elizabeth Auferheide's widow's pension, 1865.
United States General Index to Pension Files, accessed via FamilySearch.
Homesteading & Later Life
It seems that times were hard for Elizabeth, as it appears she had to place her son in an orphanage at one point. This was not uncommon for widows to do at this time, as supporting a child financially as a



The complete guide can be seen at the following link: <https://garcemeteryparksea.wixsite.com/guide>.

06. RECOMENDATIONS

This guide would benefit greatly from further research into the lives of the women buried at GAR Cemetery Park, as many of them have so little information available about them they were unable to be included in this project. A guide with a focus on the women's history of this site would be incredibly valuable.

This style of interpretation should be modeled and applied at other historic cemeteries, with specifications and improvements made to suit a site's needs.

07. SPECIAL THANKS

This project would not have been possible without my thesis chair, Dr. Lane Eagles, and the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Manish Chalana and Tom Easthope, thank you all for your feedback and time in supervising this project I am also grateful to all friends and neighbors of GAR Cemetery Park who were so kind and helpful as I created this guide, I would not have been able to create this without you.

08. REFERENCES

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