

# RICHMOND REGISTER

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## Ground radar helps find unmarked burial sites at Richmond Cemetery

By Bill Robinson  
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Since Jane Todd Breck, an aunt of First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, was interred in 1856, approximately 18,773 burials have taken place at the Richmond Cemetery.

After 161 years, however, headstones can disappear and grave locations can be forgotten.

That is why the Richmond Cemetery has commissioned a survey, using 21st century technology, to map its 78 acres.

"The cemetery's charter requires it to be mapped every five years," said Thomas J. Smith III, who chairs the cemetery's board. "However, it was last mapped in 1959."

Although the cemetery has some open areas, officials cannot be certain there are not graves there, he said.

"After 50 years, memories fade and things can get misplaced," Smith said, "and we want to be certain where all of the graves are."

When the last cemetery map was prepared, surveyors did not have the advantages of modern technology, such as ground-penetrating radar. GPR can create images of what is underground without disturbing the surface or what is below, according to Robert Perry of New Hampshire-based Topographix LLC.

Perry began surveying the cemetery on Tuesday, but was interrupted by heavy rain. He was back at work Wednesday, when he took panoramic videos and starting GPR mapping.

"When the survey is complete, I will give the cemetery board a digital map showing every burial location," Perry said. "You'll be able to select a point on the map, and a panoramic video taken there will give a 360-degree view from that point."

The GPR is so effective, it can show stacked burials on the same grave site, he said. While metal or concrete vaults are easily imaged, the GPR that Perry uses can even detect an underground air pocket left by a casket or remains that have decomposed years ago, he said.

"I set the GPR to read up to a depth of 10 feet," he said.

Over time, landscapes can change, even if they are not deliberately altered, Perry said.

"The ground may shift, trees can grow or be cut down and roads may be created or abandoned," he said.

Perry said he has done cemetery survey work all over the United States. After completing his work in Richmond, he will head to Savannah, Ga., where he will continue a project for the Diocese of Savannah.

The diocese is attempting to sort out some mass graves that were created in the first half of the 19th century when yellow fever epidemics claimed hundreds of lives in very short periods.

The ice storm in late January felled numerous tree limbs in the Richmond Cemetery, toppling over several grave markers. No trace of the damage was visible this week, however.

The cemetery board is working to expand and improve the appearance of the historic burial ground, Smith said.

"We've had a study done of how best to preserve our most historic monuments," he said. "Preservation is expensive, and we will need to raise funds for that."

Later this month, the cemetery will open a new, 250-grave section that will be governed by restrictions designed to ensure a pleasing appearance is permanently maintained, Smith said.

In addition to Mrs. Breck, an aunt of President Abraham Lincoln's wife, the Richmond Cemetery is the final resting place for the remains of numerous historical figures.

Among them are:

â€¢ Capt. James Estill, who was killed by American Indians in the Battle of Little Mountain, near present day Mt. Sterling. Estill County was named for him.

â€¢ Cassius M. Clay, famed emancipationist, hero of the Mexican War and ambassador to Russia.

â€¢ Medal of Honor winner Thomas W. Stivers.

â€¢ James B. McCreary, two-time Kentucky governor, congressman and U.S. Senator.

â€¢ Keen Johnson, former Richmond Register editor and Kentucky governor.

â€¢ Baseball Hall of Famer Earle Combs.

Confederate soldiers killed in the 1862 Battle of Richmond are interred there in a mass grave. The Union soldiers originally buried there were moved to Camp Nelson National Cemetery in Jessamine County in 1868.



Robert Perry, owner of New Hampshire-based Topographix, uses ground-penetrating radar Wednesday to look for unmarked burials in the Richmond Cemetery. The cemetery commissioned the survey to map its 78 acres. **Nancy Taggart**