Salem Cemetery

Prominent local families formed the nondenominational Salem Cemetery Company in 1857, the year following the end of Salem’s Moravian theocracy when members of the faith gained a new level of autonomy. In April of that year, the company purchased just over eight acres from the Moravian Church for $50. The cemetery was designed by the Moravian merchant Elias Alexander Vogler, who was also an artist, architect, surveyor, and later mayor of Salem. Salem Cemetery is a picturesque, nineteenth-century idyll with upright grave markers and mausoleums organized in family groups. It stands in stark contrast to the orderly, egalitarian, and comparatively humble God’s Acre next door where burials are arranged by choir according to age, gender, and marital status, and all graves are marked with flat, simple stones.

The Rural Cemetery movement began in the United States in 1831 when Mount Auburn Cemetery opened in Boston. Drawing inspiration from English landscape traditions and Romanticism, cemeteries of the movement were designed to provide quiet, beauty, solitude, and sanctuary from the busy city. Designs were naturalistic rather than formal. Specimen trees, shrubs and flowers, and ornate fencing or hedges that set burial grounds apart were key components. Curving roads traversing naturally rolling topography were desirable when possible. Salem Cemetery is an exemplar of this movement and remains a popular place for passive recreation today. The cemetery was expanded by approximately three acres in 1906 at a cost of $3,500 and by another four acres in 1922 for $11,730. Most of the cemetery is given over to family burial plots, which owners may embellish with fencing, plantings, and other funerary sculpture. Obelisks, monuments, tombs, and mausoleums display the wide variety of popular design styles from the preceding 160 years, including Italianate and Rustic along with the ever popular Revival styles modeled on Classical, Greek, and Gothic precedents. A walled section on the western side of the cemetery is designated for single burials. The Forsyth County Confederate Veterans Association purchased a plot in 1890 for the burial of 36 Civil War veterans; other Civil War veterans are buried throughout the cemetery. Veterans from both world wars, Vietnam, the Spanish-American War, and Desert Storm have also been buried at Salem Cemetery.

Today, the cemetery contains over 10,000 burials. Although it is not full, all burial plots have been sold. Because of the
topography and lack of space, members of the full-time staff dig graves by hand using picks, shovels, and wheelbarrows. It takes 5-6 hours to dig a single grave. Staff also maintain the trees and plantings, roadways, and funerary art.

The cemetery is the final resting place for many of Winston-Salem’s elite families. Most well-known of these are Richard Joshua Reynolds and Katharine Smith Reynolds Johnston and their children Z. Smith Reynolds and Mary Reynolds Babcock. A procession of more than 100 cars drove from R. J. Reynolds’ funeral service at Reynolda to Salem Cemetery, passing thousands of onlookers along West Fourth Street. Most local businesses were closed during the funeral and every R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. plant in the country shut for the entire day, “everyone being glad to pay a last tribute of respect to the man who was so materially responsible for the industrial expansion of the city,” as reported in the Winston-Salem Journal. The family burial ground is marked by a Doric colonnade inscribed

IN·MEMORIAM
1850-RICHARD JOSHA·REYNOLDS·1918
ORIGINAL·IN·THOUGHT·NATURAL·IN·ACT·JUSTICE
TO·ALL·MEN·HIS·GUIDE·ENERGY·IN·BOUNDLESS
MEASURE·MADE·VP·THIS·WORKMAN·OF·THE·WORLD

Brothers Pleasant Henderson Hanes and John Wesley Hanes, who founded P. H. Hanes Knitting Co. and Hanes Hosiery Mills respectively, are also buried in Salem Cemetery. It is the final resting place for Richard Thurmond Chatham, who ran the world’s largest blanket manufacturer, Chatham Manufacturing, before being elected to the US House of Representatives in 1948. The grave marker of furniture-company founder and Baptist philanthropist Benjamin F. Huntley Sr. is inscribed “EVERY DUTY WELL DONE ALIKE TO HIS FAMILY, TO HIS CHURCH, TO HIS BUSINESS AND TO HIS COMMUNITY—HE RESTS IN PEACE.” Fittingly, the cemetery’s designer E. A. Vogler is buried in a vault at the cemetery with his wife, children, and grandchildren.

This information is also available at the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission web site: www.ForsythCountyHRC.org