Ivy Hill Cemetery
Historical Preservation Society

ivyhillcemetery.net or IHCHPS.org
2823 King St, Alexandria, VA 22302

Spring 2026
703-549-7413

Hugh Charles Smith: A Leader in Alexandria's Early Industry

By Catherine Weinraub

Founded in 1854, Ivy Hill Cemetery has been part of the Alexandria community for 170 years. Today, its landscape and historic monuments reflect generations of local history—but its beginnings were rooted in a very practical need. As Alexandria grew in the early nineteenth century, space for burials within the city became harder and harder to find.

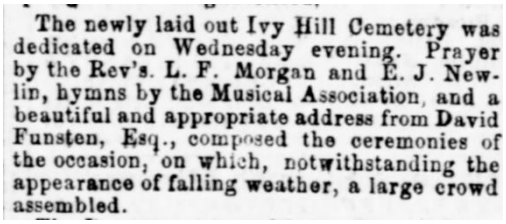
As early as 1809, new cemeteries were largely prohibited within city limits, due in part to concerns about overcrowding and the spread of disease. In response, many religious and civic organizations established burial grounds along Wilkes Street, creating what we now know as the Wilkes Street Cemetery Complex. Even so, it was clear that more space would be needed, and attention soon turned to land just outside the city.

About a mile northwest of town, on a hillside overlooking Timber Branch, one such property offered a solution. The story of that land is closely tied to Hugh C. Smith, an accomplished Alexandria businessman who owned a pottery manufactory, operated foundries, and invested in real estate. When Smith passed away on August 18, 1854, his estate sold roughly 22 acres to a group of thirty local stockholders for $2,000. The purpose was clearly stated: the land was "to be used for the public cemetery and no other use or purpose."

A second deed, recorded in 1855, posed how the cemetery should take shape. It called for the land to be "suitably laid out in burial lots, roads & alleys, well & securely enclosed," and to include a keeper's house and chapel, and a receiving vault. The project was funded through stock subscriptions—$25 a share—with each investor entitled to a burial lot, though no one could hold more than four. The sale of additional lots would help fund improvements and maintain the grounds.

Life—and death—looked very different in the mid-nineteenth century. Funeral homes did not yet exist, and families were responsible for preparing their loved ones for burial. The receiving vault mentioned in the deed played an important role, providing a temporary resting place when burial had to be delayed—often in the winter when the ground was frozen solid or during wet spring months when digging a grave was difficult.

Ivy Hill Cemetery was formally dedicated on June 18, 1856, with prayers and hymns marking the occasion. A horse-drawn omnibus even ran from the corner of King and Washington Streets every fifteen minutes to bring visitors out to the new cemetery. Just a few months later, on November 17, 1856, a monument near the entrance was dedicated to seven Alexandria firefighters who had lost their lives the year before. Over time, many members of the Alexandria Fire Department have been laid to rest at Ivy Hill, strengthening the cemetery's long connection to the city's civic life.



The newly laid out Ivy Hill Cemetery was dedicated on Wednesday evening. Prayer by the Rev's. L. F. Morgan and E. J. Newlin, hymns by the Musical Association, and a beautiful and appropriate address from David Funsten, Esq., composed the ceremonies of the occasion, on which, notwithstanding the appearance of falling weather, a large crowd assembled.

From the beginning, the founders envisioned Ivy Hill as more than just a burial ground. It was meant to be a carefully maintained, lasting place of remembrance for the community. Provisions in the original deed ensured that money from the sale of burial lots would be reinvested into the care and improvement of the cemetery. More than a century and a half later, Ivy Hill continues to fulfill that vision—preserving Alexandria's history while offering a place for reflection and remembrance today.

Flora and Fauna at Ivy Hill



Spring is a beautiful time to walk through Ivy Hill. Azaleas have already peaked, but the wildflowers are just starting to bloom. We have numerous species unique to this area. See how many you can find on your next stroll!

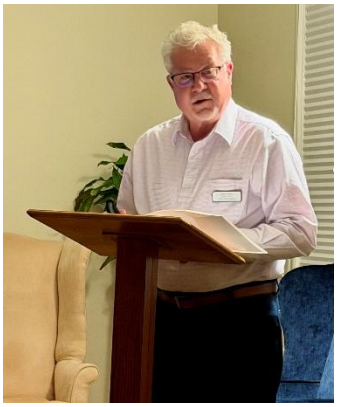




We are so grateful for our amazing community volunteers! While spending several days clearing leaves and brush along our fence lines, Chappy Klick discovered this sweet bunny nest. If you come across wildlife at Ivy Hill, please admire it from a distance and leave it undisturbed. This space is their home too.

Thank you to the Beverley Hills Garden Club for their continuous efforts to keep the Circle of Honor looking its best! We so appreciate their expertise and careful maintenance of the plants around this special memorial.

Recent Events at the Cemetery



Our first 2026 lecture featured David Heiby, who presented on the lost burial and final resting place of Philip Richard Fendall. David offered fascinating insight into the history, mystery, and legacy surrounding one of Alexandria's notable early residents.



Our first wine tasting event was a wonderful success! Carol Kaufmann enthusiastically shared her extensive wine knowledge with guests as they enjoyed sampling a selection of Virginia wines, creating an engaging and memorable evening for all who attended.



Tombstone transcription efforts continue to make strong progress. Recently, members of the Emory Cares Program volunteered their time to help document historic tombstones before inscriptions fade, supporting our ongoing preservation efforts for future generations. Emory Cares is a year-round volunteer initiative of Emory University that unites alumni, students, faculty and staff in service to communities around the world. Through hands-on projects globally, Emory Cares brings to life the university's mission to serve humanity.

Upcoming Events at the Cemetery

To celebrate our 170 year milestone, we are continuing to host a variety of events. Mark your calendar!

From Alexandria's Shadows: P.O. Box 1142 and Operation Paperclip
Tuesday, July 21 7:00 PM
Event Registration on our website – Limited Seating

During the Second World War, the United States Army's Military Intelligence Service operated a top-secret intelligence facility known only as P.O. Box 1142, which was established less than ten miles from Ivy Hill Cemetery, on land now known as Fort Hunt Park. Three highly classified operations were conducted at P.O. Box 1142, including the creation of the 'Red Book' and the interrogation of more than 3,000 German prisoners of war.
After the war, the site became connected to Operation Paperclip, the covert program that brought German scientists—including rocket pioneer Wernher von Braun, buried at Ivy Hill Cemetery—to the United States. This lecture will explore Alexandria's hidden role in World War II intelligence and its lasting impact on the Cold War and the Space Race.

Jenny Waters is the Museum Manager at the Lee-Fendall House Museum & Garden in Alexandria. She created the museum's World War II Walking Tour of Alexandria and has become an avid researcher of the history of P.O. Box 1142, presenting lectures on the topic to public and academic audiences. In addition to her work on military intelligence history, she interprets the women's history of the Lee-Fendall House and oversees the museum's annual fundraiser, Wine & Art Night.
Jenny holds a degree from Bucknell University, and most recently completed the highly-regarded Graduate Certificate in Collections Management and Care from George Washington University's Corcoran School of the Arts & Design in 2024.

Fall Events at Ivy Hill

Please check our webpage for more information and registration
www.ivyhillcemetery.net/events

Veils of Sorrow – 19th Century Mourning Practices
Tuesday, September 15th - 7:00 PM

Picnic Among the Stones – 19th Century Picnic and 170th Anniversary Celebration
Saturday, September 26th - 2:00-4:00 PM

Forever on Duty: AFD Wreath Laying Ceremony Honoring Fallen Firefighters
Friday, October 9 – 11:00 AM

Veterans Flag Placing
Sunday, November 1, 1:00 PM

Ashes, Sacrifice and Remembrance: The History of the Firefighters' Memorial
Saturday, November 14 – 1:00 PM

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