ANNUAL RECEPTION
SUNDAY, MAY 7, 2006
2–4 PM
Featuring 19th-Century Portrait Images, Refreshments & Distant Cousins

Owners’ Meeting at 3pm
Look for handsome iron gates at 41½ Second Avenue adjacent to Provenzano Lanza
Two blocks North of Houston Street in the East Village
RSVP: Caroline S. DuBois (212) 206-1106

The first privately owned, nonsectarian cemetery in New York City, established in 1831.

The half-acre Cemetery lies hidden in the interior of an East Village block; its underground vaults are concealed beneath an open lawn and enclosed within a 12-foot masonry wall and wrought-iron gates.

The Cemetery’s 156 vaults have accommodated over 2000 burials in an arrangement designed, during an era of frequent epidemics, to safeguard public health from the little-understood ravages of infectious disease.

The vaults form a grid of 26 rows of six vaults each beneath the lawn, and the wall bears numbered tablets naming the original family vault owners.

Today, each vault belongs to the heirs of its 19th Century owner and all current owners have the right to burial here.
A NEW EXHIBIT, “SEEING EYE TO EYE,” is a collection of small images portraying early Cemetery owners and their families. It was prepared for Open House New York last fall, but never saw the light of day because of torrential rains. Weather willing, it will be on display for the Annual Reception and Owners’ Meeting on May 7.

More than 90 images were provided by descendants, by museums, and by historical societies. Although they vary greatly in size, style, condition, and quality, all give an intimate look at the people whose names and accomplishments are so familiar. Included are formal busts in oil on canvas or boards, many by New York’s leading artists, such as Asher B. Durand, Henry Inman, Rembrandt Peale, and the team of Waldo & Jewett. Others are steel engravings, silhouettes, or miniature watercolors on ivory. Each leaves the indelible impression of a person very much alive, not planning on using the family’s marble vault anytime soon.

Thanks to several new Web sites, many funded by the Henry Luce Foundation, it is now much easier to locate works owned by even the smallest institutions. Many of them encourage dissemination of their works for educational and noncommercial purposes. Paintings over private mantelpieces, though, remain elusive. Please consider letting your own family portraits enjoy a wider audience.

— ANNE W. BROWN
Till Death Do Us Part?

Couple Exchanges Wedding Vows in Historic Cemetery

On Sunday, July 3, 2005, two hundred family members and friends gathered at the New York Marble Cemetery for a rite of passage—but this ceremony was not what you would expect to see at a final resting place.

In a solemn service at this peaceful landmark, Adrianna Dufay and Mac Premo were married in the oldest non-sectarian cemetery in New York City. For the first time ever, Trustees of this beautiful “secret garden” collaborated with a local couple to host their wedding and bring new life to the once virtually inaccessible site.

Mac and Adrianna met in 1996, when they shared an apartment in the East Village just two blocks away from the Cemetery. Now, almost ten years later, they returned to their old neighborhood to get married.

In all the years they lived in the East Village, neither Mac (wood sculptor) nor Adrianna (Internet editor) had ever been inside the mysterious Marble Cemetery. “We had looked through the front gate before, but it was always locked,” Mac said.

In 2004, while taking a Sunday stroll with both of their fathers, who were in town to meet for the first time and celebrate the couple’s engagement, they walked past the Cemetery and found the gates wide open for Open House New York. They entered and found a sunny, quiet half-acre green space insulated from the hustle and bustle of the Lower East Side.

“Adrianna said, “The space is beautiful,” Adrianna said. “We had been looking for wedding locations, but nothing seemed right. When I saw the Marble Cemetery, I thought, ‘This would be a great place to get married.’ A strange use for a cemetery. But it turned out my fiancé and our fathers—we were all thinking the same thing.”

During their visit, one of the Trustees described plans to restore the Cemetery grounds to their original condition. The Trustees hope to raise funds to repair the Cemetery’s 175-year-old Greek-Revival walls, which are collapsing from traffic vibrations, acid rain, and gravity.

By making the grounds available for weddings, fund-raisers, corporate events, and other festivities, the Trustees hope to preserve the New York City Landmark and make it more accessible to the community.

Adrianna and Mac are proud to support the historic site with their wedding. “Weddings can be very expensive. It’s nice to know that we’re actually doing something useful for the community,” Mac said. “We’re helping preserve a beautiful, historic landmark as well as providing a unique setting for our ceremony. Also, we’re the first people to get married here. How often in New York can you do something that unusual?”

After the ceremony, their guests threw grass seed instead of rice, and toasted the newlyweds with champagne. Then (in a reversal of the usual somber funeral procession), the couple led their guests on a joyous wedding parade along Second Avenue to the subway and continued their party at the Brooklyn Brewery in Williamsburg.

“A great place to get married.”

After so many years of neglect, the Cemetery is building a new tradition of happiness and stewardship, while maintaining its historic character.
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