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Historic cemetery is in sad condition; [FINAL Edition]GREGORY KANE. *The Sun*. Baltimore, Md.: Apr 16, 1997. pg. 1.B

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Guess again. Mount Auburn is a wreck. The overturned headstone is as frequent as the upright one. Blades of grass shoot upward and sideways, choking the headstones and leaving you with the impression you're in something of a swamp, not a cemetery. Some graves had fresh tire tracks from cemetery dirt movers over them. Several graves clearly had human bones sticking from them. One looked like a leg bone, with a piece of the dead person's garment still on it. One part of Mount Auburn is virtually another cemetery - for headstones.

It is such conditions that caused [Carolyn T. Jacobi] - a campaigner against illegal and unethical practices by morticians and cemetery owners and the founder of a movement called Eternal Justice - to call Friday's news conference in front of the cemetery. Jacobi also had harsh words for Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke, whose proposal for new management of Mount Auburn she labeled a "Band-Aid approach."

"But you can't get diseases from old bones," he said. Dr. Bruce Haskins, pastor of Sharp Street United Memorial Methodist Church, which owns Mount Auburn, said he has asked for the resignation of the cemetery's board of directors and will replace it with a new one. The church has started a small endowment for perpetual care of the cemetery. Mount Auburn was designated a Baltimore historic landmark in the 1980s, Haskins said, and 6th District City Councilman Melvin Stukes has been trying to raise federal money to help refurbish it.

Full Text (807 words)*(Copyright 1997 @ The Baltimore Sun Company)*

JOE GANS' grave is about the fifth on the left as you enter Mount Auburn Cemetery, the huge headstone that reads simply "Gans" a fitting tribute to a Baltimorean with a truly huge legacy.

Gans shucked oysters along Baltimore's docks in the later years of the 19th century. After hooking up with a restaurant owner named Al Hereford, Gans took to boxing, becoming the first black American - and probably the first Baltimorean - to win a world boxing championship.

Mount Auburn is also the final resting place of Lillie Carroll Jackson, civil rights activist, the first black woman to practice law in Maryland and the matriarch of the Mitchell family that includes two city councilmen, two state legislators and at least one talk-show host.

"There is so much history in this place," observed Carolyn T. Jacobi as she stood outside the entrance Friday. Katy Williams, Maryland's first black woman mortician, also is buried in Mount Auburn.

"There are slaves galore buried down there," Jacobi said, motioning toward the end of the cemetery that runs along Hollins Ferry Road. With such history, you might guess that Mount Auburn is a gorgeous, well-manicured place with neatly trimmed grass and headstones upright and in place.

Guess again. Mount Auburn is a wreck. The overturned headstone is as frequent as the upright one. Blades of grass shoot upward and sideways, choking the headstones and leaving you with the impression you're in something of a swamp, not a cemetery. Some graves had fresh tire tracks from cemetery dirt movers over them. Several graves clearly had human bones sticking from them. One looked like a leg bone, with a piece of the dead person's garment still on it. One part of Mount Auburn is virtually another cemetery - for headstones.

It is such conditions that caused Jacobi - a campaigner against illegal and unethical practices by morticians and cemetery owners and the founder of a movement called Eternal Justice - to call Friday's news conference in front of the cemetery. Jacobi also had harsh words for Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke, whose proposal for new management of Mount Auburn she labeled a "Band-Aid approach."

"This is beyond the weed and grass stage," Jacobi intoned. Bones lying openly in graves are "criminal violations," she said, adding that a historic cemetery such as Mount Auburn cries out for better treatment.

But Clinton R. Coleman, the mayor's press secretary, says that new management is the only way to prevent Mount Auburn from becoming more of a wreck than it is.

"If you maintain it as a historical site, what's to keep it from further deterioration?" Coleman asked. "What the mayor believes we need is someone to come in and take care of this property the way it needs to be taken care of. We argue that it's already a historical site and needs to be treated as such."

Dr. Bernetha George, who also was at the news conference, challenged city health commissioner Dr. Peter Beilenson's claim that the cemetery did not pose a health threat.

"To make a statement that it's not a health threat is not medically sound," George said.

But Beilenson said he checked with the head of infectious diseases at Johns Hopkins Hospital, who agrees that the cemetery poses no health threat. Cemetery workers are bulldozing old graves and unearthing bones, which Beilenson deplored as reprehensible.

"But you can't get diseases from old bones," he said. Dr. Bruce Haskins, pastor of Sharp Street United Memorial Methodist Church, which owns Mount Auburn, said he has asked for the resignation of the cemetery's board of directors and will replace it with a new one. The church has started a small endowment for perpetual care of the cemetery. Mount Auburn was designated a Baltimore historic landmark in the 1980s, Haskins said, and 6th District City Councilman Melvin Stukes has been trying to raise federal money to help refurbish it.

"It becomes a matter of all our stewardship to care for Mount Auburn," Haskins told a meeting yesterday of Clergy United to Renew East Baltimore (CURE). CURE members pledged their support for Haskins.

"We're trying to encourage folks - especially service organizations - to come out and adopt the cemetery and clean it up once a month," Haskins said, adding that his long-range goal is to find some individual or organization that will assume management of the cemetery.

"The condition of Mount Auburn is not news," Haskins said. "It's easy for somebody to say, 'Look at the mess.' But what are you doing about it?"

What every Baltimorean should do about it is find ways to make Mount Auburn Cemetery the historic tourist attraction it should be, as we have done with Edgar Allan Poe's grave and Babe Ruth's birthplace.

All are a part of the history that makes Baltimore unique among American cities.

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Woman monitoring cemetery discovers bones, casket protruding from earth; Worker acknowledges site is unkempt, denies graves are recycled; [FINAL Edition]

Cheryl L. Tan. *The Sun*. Baltimore, Md.: Mar 26, 1997. pg. 3.C

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Abstract (Document Summary)

These objects, [Carolyn T. Jacobi] said, made her suspicious that Mount Auburn management could be digging up old graves and reselling the plots, and she is lobbying city officials to investigate her charges.

Based on the information Jacobi has provided, it is hard to determine whether Mount Auburn cemetery officials are recycling graves, said Sarah Rex, president of the Maryland Free State Cemetery and Funeral Association.

PHOTO 1 PHOTO 2; Caption: "In bad shape": The 33-acre Mount Auburn Cemetery, founded in 1872 and managed by Sharp Street Memorial United Methodist Church, is known among historians as "City of the Dead for Colored People." Investigates: Carolyn T. Jacobi, an advocate for cemetery regulation, has monitored Mount Auburn Cemetery for two years.; Credit: CHIAKI KAWAJIRI : SUN STAFF PHOTOS CHIAKI KAWAJIRI : SUN STAFF PHOTOS

Full Text (629 words)

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The scene was right out of a B-grade horror movie: an old cemetery choked with overgrown weeds and dead shrubs, mounds of recently dug-up earth with a human bone sticking out and a rusted casket protruding. But this wasn't the big screen.

The human bone and protruding casket were on the startling list of objects Carolyn T. Jacobi, a cemetery regulations advocate and self-appointed watchdog, found while walking around Mount Auburn Cemetery in Westport yesterday.

Jacobi, who has been monitoring Mount Auburn for two years, also found a mud-encased cloth that she believes is a shroud. She said Monday she found another mound of earth with human leg bones sticking out.

These objects, Jacobi said, made her suspicious that Mount Auburn management could be digging up old graves and reselling the plots, and she is lobbying city officials to investigate her charges.

"There is no other reason this casket would be mangled and sitting up like that," Jacobi said. "You think: Whose mother, whose father, whose sister, whose brother, whose children were in that casket?"

"Would you want to bury your loved one here if you didn't know what was going to happen to them in five or 10 years?"

Virginia Clark, manager of the cemetery's office of records, denied Jacobi's allegations.

"She's lying," she said. "The grass needs cutting and some graves need filling in, but we don't recycle no graves. We know the cemetery is in bad shape. We're doing the best we can with what we have."

Based on the information Jacobi has provided, it is hard to determine whether Mount Auburn cemetery officials are recycling graves, said Sarah Rex, president of the Maryland Free State Cemetery and Funeral Association.

"Ms. Jacobi has some legitimate concerns about the quality of the cemetery, but to really prove the recycling of the graves, you'd need a court order to examine the records and do disinterments," said Rex.

The 33-acre cemetery, founded in 1872 and managed by Sharp Street Memorial United Methodist Church, is known among historians as "City of the Dead for Colored People." Many prominent African-Americans are buried there, including Joseph Gans, the first black lightweight boxing champion of the world. The cemetery, however, also has been known for its unkempt grounds. Two years ago, the cemetery management was forced to round up 200 volunteers to clean up the place under orders from the Baltimore Department of Housing and Community Development.

Jacobi said her recent findings require more than just another "superficial cleanup."

"I'm going to fight," she said. "The church cemetery needs to be regulated, and there needs to be a penalty or fine."

Reginald Scriber, a Department of Housing and Community Development executive director, said he will be looking into the issue. He said his department has been monitoring Mount Auburn management since the last big cleanup in 1995 and will be helping it with one scheduled for May 3.

"It's something we don't take lightly," he said. Clinton R. Coleman, a spokesman for Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke, said the cemetery cleanup will be a priority during a daylong volunteer effort involving several projects May 3 in commemoration of Baltimore's bicentennial. But Schmoke also would insist that the church "is going to have to turn it over to private management so that it doesn't deteriorate to its present condition again in the future," Coleman said.

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[Illustration]

PHOTO 1 PHOTO 2; Caption: "In bad shape": The 33-acre Mount Auburn Cemetery, founded in 1872 and managed by Sharp Street Memorial United Methodist Church, is known among historians as "City of the Dead for Colored People." Investigates: Carolyn T. Jacobi, an advocate for cemetery regulation, has monitored Mount Auburn Cemetery for two years.; Credit: CHIAKI KAWAJIRI : SUN STAFF PHOTOS CHIAKI KAWAJIRI : SUN STAFF PHOTOS

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