

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED **MAR 3 1977**
DATE ENTERED **OCT 5 1977**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Swan Point Cemetery

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

585 Blackstone Boulevard

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Providence

VICINITY OF

#1-Rep. Fernand J. St. Germain

STATE

Rhode Island

CODE

44

COUNTY

Providence

CODE

007

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: cemetery

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

The Proprietors of "Swan Point Cemetery"

STREET & NUMBER

585 Blackstone Blve.

CITY, TOWN

Providence

VICINITY OF

STATE

Rhode Island

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Providence City Hall

STREET & NUMBER

25 Dorrance Street

CITY, TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Providence Broadbrush: Blackstone

DATE

July 1976

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Swan Point Cemetery, located in the northeast corner of Providence, is bounded on the west by Blackstone Boulevard, on the south by Butler Hospital, on the east by the Seekonk River, and on the north by the City of Pawtucket and Riverside Cemetery. (A nomination for Blackstone Boulevard is currently being prepared, and Butler Hospital is already listed on the National Register.) Swan Point was conceived and developed as a rural cemetery, but urban growth has created a twentieth-century upper-middle class residential neighborhood out of the former surrounding farms. This change in the cemetery's environs has not seriously affected the visual quality of the cemetery, for it is enclosed by large stone walls and areas of undeveloped, densely wooded land.

The cemetery, which today includes approximately 210 acres and 36,000 graves, is composed of two distinct parts. The land acquired between 1846, when the cemetery was founded, and 1870 lies to the east of The Old Road -- formerly the Neck Road, the main public highway from Providence to Pawtucket, now owned by Swan Point Cemetery. The area to the west, acquired between 1870 and 1900 and developed only in this century, once extended as far as Hope Street, but now extends only as far as Blackstone Boulevard. The latter was built at the behest of the Proprietors of Swan Point between 1892 and 1894. There is a topographical as well as developmental separation between the eastern and western halves of the cemetery. The eastern section rises sharply from the Seekonk River in a series of steep hills and ravines. This section is particularly hilly, to the south, and becomes more gently rolling to the north. By contrast, the western half of the cemetery is quite flat. The only body of water on the grounds is Rock Pond, located just to the east of the center of the cemetery.

The main entrance to Swan Point is on Blackstone Boulevard where the massive walls -- constructed entirely of boulders removed from the grounds during the course of road construction, landscaping, and grave digging -- part to allow two gates for automobiles, as well as pathways on either side. A massive boulder bearing the words "SWAN POINT CEMETERY" in bronze letters rises from a naturalistic planting pocket between the two gates. Smaller stones on the outer sides of the gates bear the dates 1847 and 1900, commemorating the founding and expansion of the cemetery. Holly Avenue, the major east-west axis, runs due east from the entrance to The Old Road.

The east part of the cemetery, designed primarily by the Providence surveying firm Atwater and Schubarth between 1847 and 1863, consists of meandering roads designed to employ the beautiful natural topography

(See continuation sheet #1)

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to its best advantage: some roads follow the contours of the valleys and ridges, while others cross the natural and man-made hills to provide scenic vistas. These roads are generally irregularly placed, wide loops.

The major exception to the generally random design in this section is the First Unitarian Society Grounds. This area, acquired by that Society in 1848, contains the remains formerly interred in Providence's West Burial Grounds - which was steadily deactivated between the 1840's and 1890's - as well as new graves. Set in a sloping vale, the area is circumscribed by an elliptical road, and concentric elliptical paths and axial roads give access to the interior of the grounds; this pattern breaks down into a somewhat more random pattern in the north and south quadrants.

The roads in the western section, developed only in this century, are more regular. The land is much flatter than that east of The Old Road, and topographical considerations have thus played little part in the development of the design. While the new roads are gently curving, their arrangement is based on a grid system; they do not wander so quixotically as those in the eastern section.

Landscaping throughout the cemetery is designed naturalistically. The dense growth of trees and underbrush, natural to the hills and ravines along the Seekonk River, has been augmented by careful planting. Numerous examples of indigenous flora -- including elms, maples, rhododendron, and laurel -- have been planted throughout the cemetery over the years, and now emulate the random growth of wooded areas. Flowering shrubs are plentiful, and spring and fall flower shows emphasize the abundantly planted tulips and chrysanthemums.

The earliest markers in the cemetery are those transferred from the West Burial Ground to the First Unitarian Society Grounds. These small headstones are primarily slate or marble. Few monuments or tombs exist in this area, and the newer headstones here are generally similar in scale and character to those moved from the West Burial Ground.

Undoubtedly the most impressive monument moved from the West Burial Ground is the Dyer family crypt, which stands just east of the First Unitarian Society Grounds. The brownstone Egyptian Revival tomb, designed by Richard Warren in the late 1830's, is now built into the

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eastern slope of a hill overlooking the Seekonk River. Its facade features a central entrance flanked by sturdy columns with acanthus capitals.

At least two monuments designed by the prominent mid-nineteenth century architect Thomas A. Tefft stand in the southeast part of the grounds. Small, simple Italianate sarcophagi mark the graves of Edward B. Bohuszewicz and of Tefft himself.

The late nineteenth-century markers reflect the opulent taste of the many well-to-do families buried in the cemetery. Generally larger and more lavish than early and mid-nineteenth century markers, these monuments, obelisks, ledger stones, and sarcophagi are often of granite or marble, though other stones were occasionally used. The elaborateness of these markers reaches its fullest development with the inclusion of life-size statuary -- portraits, angels, and occasionally gisants -- and a more explicit death iconography, e.g., broken or unraised columns and broken pitchers to symbolize early death. Detailing also becomes more elaborate, and many markers from this period are decorated with deep carving, heavy rustication, or swag ornamentation.

The Sprague lot, just to the south of the center of the cemetery contains two excellent examples of later nineteenth-century funerary art. In the center of the circular lot separated from lots adjacent by a low granite retaining wall, is a substantial granite monument, dating from the late 1860's and designed by the noted Providence architect James Bucklin. Bucklin used as a model the Lysicrates monument in Athens, a motif he had used before in the lantern he designed for Beneficent Congregational Church in the 1830's. The sarcophagus of two of the Sprague children is adorned with a marble gisant sculpture carved by Charles Hemenway in the late 1860's.

The southern end of the eastern section contains a number of extremely handsome late nineteenth-century monuments. The Lockwood lot has two similar sarcophagi with elaborate, deeply carved swag ornamentation. The Grosvenor lot contains a tall but broken Ionic column covered with carved vines. Adjacent to the Grosvenor lot is the brownstone Joseph Brown pyramid which, like so many nineteenth-century monuments, makes reference to historic burial practices.

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Since the turn of this century, a general preference for smaller, simpler markers has returned. Most of the twentieth-century markers are slabs of granite which generally serve only to mark the graves rather than to commemorate individuals or families.

The definition of the boundaries of family plots by fences or planting has been discouraged since the middle years of the nineteenth century, and the practice has never flourished. Boundaries are indicated by markers flush with the ground, and consequently the visual continuity of the landscape has been maintained.

Several service structures spanning the history of the cemetery still stand. The oldest of these is the receiving tomb on Cedar Avenue. Designed by Thomas A. Tefft in 1847, the brownstone Romanesque structure is built into a hillside. The corbelled gable projects from the mound of earth, and is flanked by two heavy corner pilasters; an arched entrance protected by a wrought-iron gate is centered in the facade.

The present office was built near the entrance to the cemetery by the distinguished Providence architectural firm Stone, Carpenter and Willson in 1905. The one-story Gothic Revival structure is faced with Weymouth seamface granite and Indiana limestone. A chapel, designed by John Hutchins Cady, was added to the north of the building in 1932; this was followed by an enlarged chapel and crematorium wing in 1947. Both additions continue the formal treatment of the original structure. In the 1960's, two columbaria and a mausoleum were added to the east of the office building; these employ the sheathing used in the earlier buildings but do not imitate their style.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

As an early exemplar of the rural cemetery movement and because of the high quality of its landscape design and monuments, Swan Point is of great importance to the history of social attitudes, landscape architecture, and sculpture.

The rural cemetery movement of the middle third of the nineteenth century, of which Swan Point is an early and excellent example, arose largely as a result of an era of reconciliation with nature which also included the American school of landscape painting and the Transcendentalist movement. The joining of the awe of nature, exemplified by the Transcendentalists, and a wish for landscape improvement, so well expressed by the work of Andrew Jackson Downing, gave rise to an artistic reform that was conceived to improve the moral character of American life.¹ The first example of the rural cemetery, Mt. Auburn, was begun in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1831, and soon after a number of other examples, including Swan Point in 1846 were developed in rustic, rural settings.

The shift in social attitudes toward a greater concern with the dead and their final resting place, as well as the Transcendentalist notion of communion with the Almighty through nature, were closely associated with the rural cemetery movement in general, and especially with the creation of Swan Point. Its founder, Thomas C. Hartshorn, a prominent Providence educator and intellectual, called attention as early as 1840 to the "'desolate condition of our burying grounds' and to the need of procuring a new spot for burial purposes which should have 'beauty of situation, amplitude of space, and capacity for improvement.'"² In 1846, Mr. Hartshorn was able to purchase fifty-nine and one half acres of land -- approximately the southeast quarter of the present cemetery -- on the Seekonk River. He then induced a group of his friends to form a cemetery association. The General Assembly granted the group a charter as a perpetual-care cemetery, and the grounds were consecrated the following July in an inter-denominational Protestant service. As a contemporary account of the dedication of the cemetery shows, response to the new cemetery was highly favorable:

(See continuation sheet #4)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Atwater and Schubarth. (Plan for Swan Point Cemetery). Providence. 1846.
 Deposited at Rhode Island Historical Society Library.
 Cady, John Hutchins. Swan Point Cemetery: A Centennial History.
 Providence: Ackerman-Standard Company. 1947.

(See continuation sheet #9)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 210

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,9	3025,1,0	4,6	3,6	6,2,0	B	1,9	30,2	7,0,0	4,6	3,5	3,3,0	
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			
C	1,9	30,1	8,2,0	4,6	3,5	3,0,0	D	1,9	30,1	5,0,0	4,6	3,6	3,6,0
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See first paragraph of Description, Section 7

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Wm. McKenzie Woodward

ORGANIZATION

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

DATE

Jan. 1977

STREET & NUMBER

150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

401-277-2678

CITY OR TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

Wm. McKenzie Woodward

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

February 23, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: *Charles E. Cunningham*
 CLERK OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

12/15/77

DATE

9-21-77

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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We remember when we heard that we were to have a pleasant new rural cemetery, we inwardly thanked God that such a spot as Swan Point had been chosen. Besides the beauty of the place, there was something suitable in the name which it had always borne. As well as of purity, the spotless bird was an emblem of peace and repose. And then we remembered how often we had thought with dread of those old lonely places with but little shade in summer, and bleak and exposed in winter, the North and West Burial Grounds. ...we felt that to be laid in one of those mournful places, our last sleep would not be the serene rest which we had loved to imagine it would be, with flowers and trees above and attractive groves around, for the living to visit...³

The growing importance of the cemetery for the living as a place to visit and as a place for reflection was emphasized by nineteenth-century moralists and philosophers; the cemetery came to be viewed as an open-air religious site where, though aided by man's guidance, the hand of God as seen through nature would dominate. From its inception, Swan Point was viewed as such a place:

Here are no altars such as heathen worshippers raised, but a genuine sacrifice is still offered. No golden or silver censer is swung, but tossed by the passing wind from many a verdant bough, precious incense rises. From the pure chalices of innumerable flowers, unsullied by false human lips, bees and insects with song shall partake mystic communion.⁴

From its inception, Swan Point has been a popular site for drives and walks. Its park-like qualities have been emphasized in Providence guidebooks since the middle of the nineteenth century. Quiet afternoons spent on the grounds continue to be a popular pastime, now further encouraged by the cemetery's semi-annual flower shows.

Once the land was purchased, the development of the cemetery was placed in the capable hands of Messrs. Atwater and Schubarth, who followed the precepts of picturesque, natural planning for such sites established by A. J. Downing. The firm designed the still extant

(See continuation sheet #5)

dead, and contained numerous examples of historically and archaeologically allusive monuments. The sculptural monuments that adorn

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scheme for the southeast section, while the First Unitarian Society Grounds were designed by Schubarth and Haines. Niles Bierragaard Schubarth continued to function as a designer for Swan Point as late as 1863. Thus, the elaborate design for the southeast quarter, as well as the general scheme for the less compact northeast quarter, provide excellent examples of Schubarth's designing talent.

In accordance with contemporary aesthetic theory concerning rural cemeteries, the hand of nature rather than human artifice was emphasized. The roadways and lots were arranged to take advantage of the scenic qualities of the land. When more drastic work was required to prepare ground for burials or roadways, an effort was made to emulate natural topography rather than to create an artificial landscape. For example, the numerous boulders removed from the earth over years are used in the large wall that surrounds the grounds. Further, the planting was to appear natural: as early as 1852, the Board of Directors acted to provide the most appropriate indigenous trees for planting in the cemetery. In spite of the intervention of man, nature was to appear as the great architect.⁵

Since the 1870's decisions concerning design at Swan Point have rested with the superintendent, aided by the Board of Directors. A number of prominent Providence architects have been extremely active in the direction of Swan Point, including Thomas A. Tefft, James Bucklin, Alfred Stone, and John Hutchins Cady. Nationally prominent design firms have been consulted from time to time: H. W. S. Cleveland of Chicago was called in by the Board to design the adjacent Blackstone Boulevard; Olmsted and Olmsted of Brookline drew up a scheme for the development of the western section of the grounds, which has been executed (with some minor modifications) since 1911.

Because of the high quality of its landscape design, Swan Point was chosen as the site for the annual meeting of the American Cemetery Superintendents Association in August of 1907. The grounds were highly regarded by the members of that group, and by 1910 Swan Point came to be mentioned in articles on landscape architecture as a nationally prominent example of cemetery planning.

Although the hand of nature was the immediate concern in the layout of the rural cemetery, the movement helped to further other nineteenth-century artistic vogues. Cemetery brochures of the period emphasized the time-honored universal trait of proper respect for the dead, and contained numerous examples of historically and archaeologically allusive monuments. The sculptural monuments that adorn

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the nineteenth-century graves in Swan Point are excellent examples of the interest in perpetuating burial customs of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome; the Middle Ages; and the Italian Renaissance. Particularly notable examples of these antiquarian monuments are the Egyptian Temple built for the Dyer Family; the Egyptoid Brown pyramid; the Lockwood sarcophagi, recalling Imperial Roman types; the Sprague gisant memorial, recalling medieval French and English sepulchral forms; and Thomas Tefft's Italianate tombs for himself and Edward B. Bohuszewicz. The high quality of workmanship of these monuments further enhances their significance as examples of nineteenth-century funeral sculpture.

In the century and a quarter since Swan Point was founded the taste for the rural cemetery has remained, though the designs used to implement this goal have changed. Swan Point continues to develop today, and while the passionate love of nature that gave rise to the highly picturesque designs of the mid-nineteenth century has subsided, contemporary growth -- as well as the maintenance of older sections -- remains consistent with the goals of the founders to provide a handsome park for the burial of the dead.

FOOTNOTES

¹Neil Harris, The Artist in American Society (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), p. 200.

²John Hutchins Cady, Swan Point Cemetery: A Centennial History (Providence, 1947), p. 11.

³"Swan Point," Providence Daily Journal, 14 September 1847, p. 2.

⁴ibid.

⁵Harris, p. 202.

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Swan Point Cemetery Site Plan

1. The Old Road
2. Ravines
3. Rock Pond
4. First Unitarian Society Grounds
5. Dyer Family Egyptian Revival Tomb
6. Thomas A. Tefft Tomb
7. Edward B. Bohuszewicz Tomb
8. George Rathbone Dyer Monument
9. Sprague Family Group
10. Grosvenor Family Plot
11. Joseph Brown Pyramid
12. Original Receiving Tomb
13. Offices
14. Service Buildings

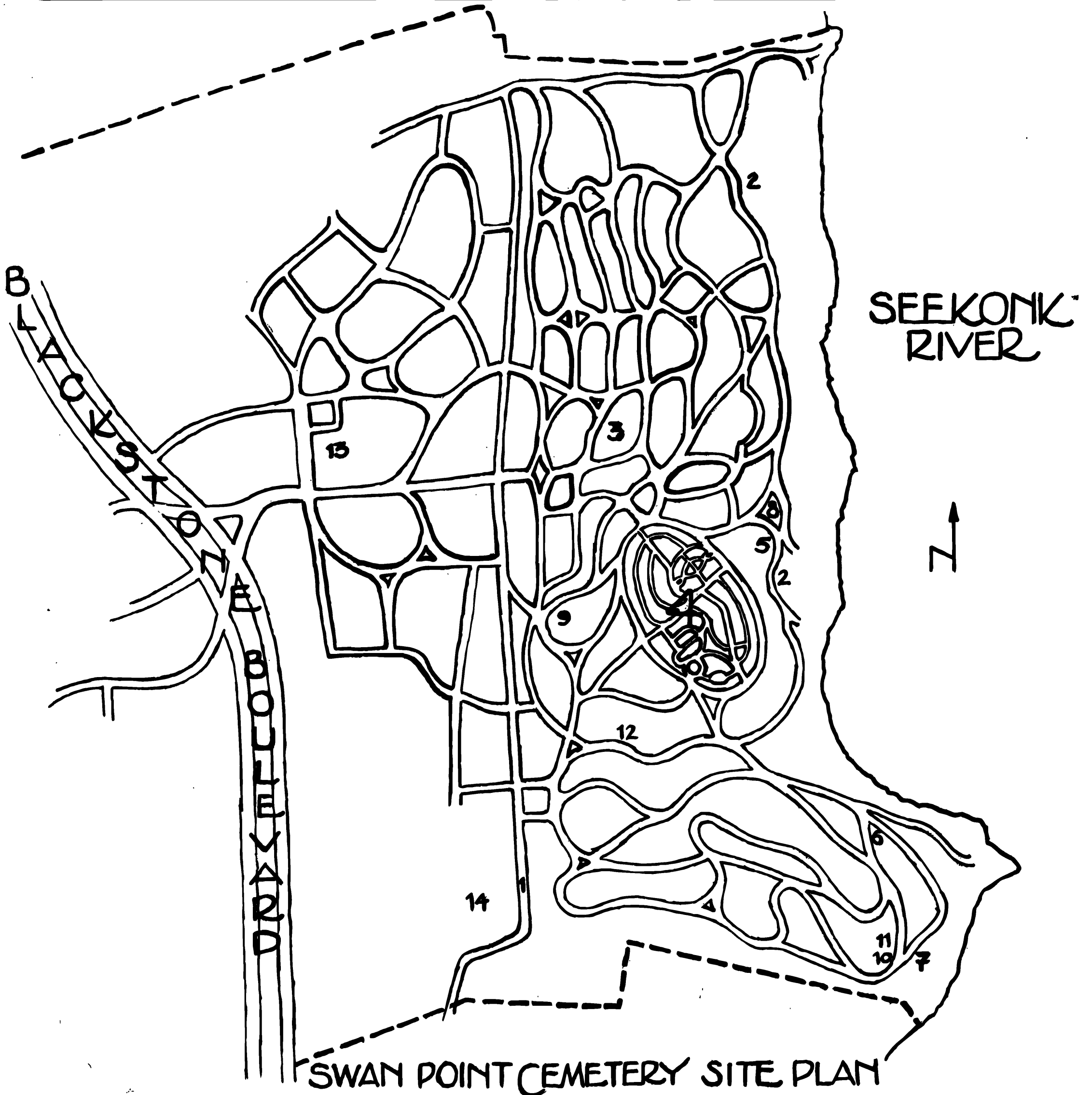
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SWAN POINT CEMETERY SITE PLAN

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- Olmsted Brothers. (Proposed Plan for the Western Section of Swan Point Cemetery). Brookline. 5th August 1913. Deposited at Swan Point Cemetery.
- Order of Services at the Consecration of the Swan Point Cemetery.
29th June 1847. Deposited at Rhode Island Historical Society Library.
- Providence Daily Journal. Account of the Consecration of Swan Point Cemetery. 14th September 1847.
- Providence Journal. Alfred Stone's speech to the American Cemetery Superintendents Association at Swan Point Cemetery. 22nd August 1907.
- Schubarth and Haines. (Plan for Beneficent Congregational Society Burial Ground at Swan Point Cemetery). Providence 1850.
- Stone, Edwin. Memorial of the Dead: Being Notices of Monuments in Swan Point Cemetery. Providence: Providence Press Company, 1870.
- Swan Point Cemetery. Annual Report. Providence. 1869.
- Swan Point Cemetery. Directors Record. 21st June 1858-8th March 1883. Deposited at Swan Point Cemetery.
- Swan Point Cemetery. Records. 1846-1858. Deposited at Swan Point Cemetery.