



November 2021

The Shipleys School and Legacy Marker Program at Lower Merion Baptist Church

Burial grounds are not often viewed as ideal educational settings, but with assistance from Eugene Hough of the Legacy Marker Program, the Shipleys School has turned a local historic cemetery into a classroom all its own. In the spring of 2021, and in the midst of a global pandemic, Shipleys piloted a 3-week long community service project for high school seniors called *History and Horticulture*. The program, which collaborated with Lower Merion Baptist Church, utilized the grounds of its historic cemetery as a site for hands-on horticulture and history lessons. Though cemeteries were some of the nation's first public green spaces, after two centuries of shifting cultural and societal norms, very few people now consider them locations for gardening, or even strolling. Few students had ever set foot in a cemetery, and none were aware of the history of this particular site.

Lower Merion Baptist Church, founded in 1808, was the first church established in the area of what is now Bryn Mawr, PA. The land was donated by Charles Thomson (Secretary of the Continental Congress) and a cemetery was started on the land in 1809. Church documents show that sixteen descendants of William Penn, thirty-five soldiers of the Revolutionary War, twenty-four soldiers of the War of 1812, and fifty-one Civil War veterans are buried in the cemetery. There are also six cradle graves on site, which were common during the Victorian era as contained garden beds, often planted with flowers on family gravesites. At the beginning of the project, many of the headstones were in desperate need of restoration, including four of the six cradle graves.

Beginning in May 2021, eight Shipleys students took on the task of pruning shrubs, excavating sinking headstones, and restoring and replanting the cradle graves for their three week Senior Service Project. With permission from the Cemetery Board and guidance from the Legacy Marker Program, the students rejuvenated the final resting places of numerous individuals. Through this process, they learned important lessons about horticulture, reflected on the meaning of life and death, and gained awareness about the rich history of our local region.

Given the breadth of Eugene's knowledge and expertise, the curricular benefits of educational programming with Legacy Marker Program are limitless. The *History and Horticulture* project at LMBC provided opportunities for students to:

- learn from and work alongside members of the local community
- experience the history of their community
- collaboratively care for a historical site
- design and plant perennial gardens

- participate in the beautification of a public space
- engage in community service.

For these reasons, and many more, I am looking forward to continuing to grow and expand our collaboration with Legacy Marker Program. Eugene Hough is a joy to work alongside, and it is my privilege to recommend him, most highly, to you.

Sarah A. Sterling, MSS, LSW
 Coordinator of Educational Horticulture
 The Shipley School
 814 Yarrow St.
 Bryn Mawr, PA 19010
 610-525-4300 ex.4142
ssterling@shipleyschool.org



Two cradle graves prior to restoration



Two raised and newly planted cradle graves