

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ THE ★ ★ ★ GEORGETOWNER

Georgetown History Alive at Mt. Zion Cemetery on Juneteenth

BY [ROBERT DEVANEY](#) • JUNE 19, 2023



Mount Zion Cemetery-Female Union Band Society Cemetery, located at 27th Street NW and Mill Road NW, was very much alive on a most appropriate day, Juneteenth, June 19. Hundreds of people visited this quiet, humble and historic Black burial grounds — where thousands of African Americans were laid to rest — for a walking tour, full of history and personal stories.

[Juneteenth](#) is a recent federal holiday, signed into law in 2021 by President Joe Biden.

“On June 19, 1865, two and a half years after President Abraham Lincoln’s historic Emancipation Proclamation [Jan. 1, 1863], U.S. Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger issued General Order No. 3, which informed the people of Texas that all enslaved people were now free. This day has come to be known as Juneteenth, a combination of June and 19th. It is also called Freedom Day or Emancipation Day,” according to the National Archives which exhibited the Emancipation Proclamation and General Order No. 3 this week.

“It’s wonderful to see the diversity of visitors to the Mt. Zion-Female Union Band Cemeteries,” Neville Waters, president of Black Georgetown Foundation (formerly Mt Zion-Female Union Band Memorial Park Foundation) told The Georgetown. “The interest in learning about and recognizing the lives and contributions of the African American ancestors to the history of Georgetown is wonderful. We are delighted that the Juneteenth Holiday was a cause for inspiration and celebration.”

Lisa Fager, executive director of Black Georgetown Foundation, talked to visitors about D.C. Emancipation and the impact abolishment of slavery in the District had on the enslaved — “and how the freed Black citizenry of Georgetown and Washington quickly began to influence the political scene, legislation and the rule of law.”

There was a line down the hill to see the burial vault, which was reportedly part of the Underground Railroad.

The cemetery is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and designated a UNESCO Slave Route Project site of memory. It is bounded by residences to the south, by Dumbarton House to the west, by Oak Hill cemetery to the north and by Rock Creek Park to the east. The cemetery is actually two adjoining burial grounds: the Mount Zion Cemetery and Female Union Band Society Cemetery. Its official address is 2501 Mill Road NW.

“We have an unprecedented opportunity to rediscover two centuries of lost African American history in Georgetown and to develop a historic memorial park as a sacred space for quiet reflection, the respectful commemoration of the past and to educate,” the foundation states. “These cemeteries serve to preserve and create awareness of the heritage, contributions, and sacrifices these founders of Georgetown made during their lifetimes and provide insight to their families and the community in which they lived during a time of deep segregation.”

The Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia also issued a statement: “Today, on Juneteenth, we reflect upon the significance of this historic day and the enduring importance of Mount Zion Cemetery. Juneteenth

serves as a powerful reminder of the struggle for freedom and equality, and Mount Zion Cemetery holds the stories and legacies of those who fought for justice. It is crucial that we recognize and honor our history, acknowledging the challenges faced and the progress made. However we commemorate the strides we have taken, we must also recognize that our work is not yet finished. We must continue to strive for equity and justice, which includes ensuring that the necessary infrastructure is in place to protect and maintain one of the oldest remaining African American cemeteries in Georgetown and Washington, D.C. The DC Office of the Attorney General remains committed to this fight and continues to work with elected officials and District agencies to preserve this cemetery as a cherished symbol of African American heritage.”

For more information, visit BlackGeorgetown.com. **Photos by Bill Starrels**



Lisa Fager and Neville Waters of Black Georgetown Foundation.



Lisa Fager, executive director of Black Georgetown Foundation, talks to visitors about D.C. Emancipation and the impact abolishment of slavery in the District had on the enslaved.



The 27th Street entrance to Mount Zion Cemetery- South-Central Band Society Cemetery



Tawana Thomas, whose family members are buried at Mount Zion Cemetery, with Neville Waters, president of the Mt. Zion-Female Union Band Historic Memorial Park, Inc. (Black Georgetown Foundation).



*The most famous
and beloved
tombstone in the
cemetery is that of
7-year-old Nannie.
Photo by Robert
Devaney.*