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Mt. Zion Cemetery Ready for Its Own Resurrection

By **Robert Devaney** APRIL 13, 2017



A bright, beautiful Saturday brought out volunteers for a major spring cleaning at the closed but not forsaken Mt. Zion Cemetery-the Female Union Band Society Cemetery on April 8. Most of the elbow came from Georgetown Visitation Prep's Father-Daughter Club.

Also joining in were Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner Monica Roaché and Visitation Prep Head of School Dan Kerns, as well as ANC chair Joe Gibbons; Neville Waters, president of Mt. Zion-Female Union Band Society Foundation; architect and

resident Outerbridge Horsey; and Thornell Page and Vernon Ricks from Mt. Zion United Methodist Church.

The group of 50 or more worked from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. clearing brush, sawing tree branches, picking up trash, whacking weeds and hauling it all to the trash truck, which moved about five loads from the site.

“Mt. Zion is the oldest African American church in Washington, D.C.,” Roaché said. “This year, it celebrated its 200th anniversary. The cemetery is a reminder of the African American community that once lived in Georgetown. It is also suspected that the cemetery was part of the Underground Railroad. Mt. Zion Cemetery has historical significance and needs ongoing tender loving care to maintain this beautiful property. This effort is not a one-time event.”

Mt. Zion’s Pastor Johnsie Cogman was so overjoyed at Saturday’s results that she will make a personal dream come true Easter Sunday: “Because of the beautification of the cemetery, Mt. Zion will be having an Easter Sunrise Service in the cemetery at 6:45 a.m., April 16. Everyone is invited.”

“While we may see only 200 to 300 headstones and fragments of stones here today, our research [primarily the research of volunteer historian and professional genealogist Lynda Carter] has suggested that there are upwards of 8,000 to 10,000 persons buried on this three-and-a-half acre plot,” said Carrie Hull, consulting project coordinator for the Mount Zion-Female Union Band Society Memorial Park Foundation.

“This plot is actually two distinct cemeteries: one, the Mt. Zion Cemetery, which is also known as the old Methodist burying ground around the turn of the 19th century, and the second, the Female Union Band Society Cemetery, started in the 1840s.

“Each of the cemeteries are full of the founders of community leaders of Georgetown. We are trying to tell each and every one of their stories. Ultimately, the plot will function as an interpretive memorial park for both cemeteries, a space for reflection and education on the sacred ground.”