

# **FRIENDS of MIDLAND**



## **ANNUAL MEMORIAL SERVICE**

Saturday, May 27, 2023

1:00 PM



Celebrating the lives of the Veterans and their Families

**HISTORY begins with MIDLAND CEMETERY**

May 27, 2023

Dear Friends of Midland,

**We did it! YES, the Friends of Midland members, supporters, churches, contributors, Scouts, volunteers and just those who wanted to lend a helping hand all played a part in the achievement. Without the support of everyone since our conception, we could not achieve the restoration of Midland.**

**As of April 27, 2023 we were officially placed on the National Register of Historic Places, which is the official list of the Nation's historic places found worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources.**

**This will help with preserving it and letting the world know that Midland welcomes their visit, however, this will not stop destruction. We still need the support of the community to take care of it.**

**We decided not to do ads this year because we needed the space to give you a better view of what it took to get on the register. This is only a sample, because the actual information was 62 pages long, with lots of reading. The information came from years of research, documentation, organization and preservation.**

**Key participants were Dr. Steven Burg (Shippensburg Univ), Jeanie Glaser (FOM).**

**The picture on the front cover showing the National Register information is only a sample. We plan on having the wording such as "Midland Cemetery has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places". We must raise the money to purchase the plaque. If you wish to donate for the plaque, please send your check to Friends of Midland or PayPal with the note that you wish for it to be applied to this purpose. Go to our website [Midlandcemetery.com](http://Midlandcemetery.com) for directions.**

**With warm regards,  
The Friends of Midland Board**

**Barbara Barksdale, president of Friends of Midland  
Sharon Harris, vice president, Jeanie Glaser, Tech Advisor, Robert Williams, Jr.,  
William Carelock, Dorothy King, PhD., Lonnie Dodd, Joeline Beasley-Erby, Elizabeth  
Jefferies, Jermaine Shelton**

**Friends of Midland**  
**Annual Memorial Service**  
**Saturday, May 27, 2023 1:00 PM**

Master of Ceremony:	Robert Williams, Jr.
Placing of Colors:	American Legion Post 733, Post 420 and 3 <sup>rd</sup> United States Colored Troops re-enactors
Pledge of Allegiance:	Attendees
National Anthem:	Attendees
Opening Prayer:	Pastor Josh Robertson
Musical Selection:	Spiritual Messengers
<b>Keynote Speaker:</b>	Lieutenant Colonel Robertrel Sachi, U.S. Army
Remarks:	Benjamin Martin, S. Central PA Reg. Mger. Office of U.S. Senator Bob Casey
Remarks:	State Representative David Madsen
Dauphin County Proclamation	
Musical selection:	Spiritual Messengers
Remarks:	Swatara Twp. Comm. Shaela Ellis
Remarks:	Steelton Mayor Ciera Dent
Reading of Veteran's Obits :	Hershey Corp with Starvonski Gibbs
Back in time:	Fred Clark, Clark Resources, Inc.
Musical Selection:	Spiritual Messengers
Closing Remarks:	Barbara Barksdale, Pres. Friends of Midland
Salute of Volley/Taps:	3 <sup>rd</sup> United States Colored Troops re-enactors
Closing Prayer:	Pastor Josh Robertson
	Spiritual Messengers will continue musical selections



### **Lieutenant Colonel Robertrel Sachi**

is a student at the United States Army War College. He received his commission as an Engineer Officer from the United States Military Academy in 2002. He is a graduate of the Engineer Officer Basic and Advanced Courses, Command and General Staff College, and the United States Army Telecommunications Systems Engineer Course. Prior to his arrival at Carlisle Barracks, he was assigned to ARCYBER, where he served as the Director of the Regional Cyber Center - Korea in Camp Walker, South Korea. Previous non-command assignments include service as an Engineer Platoon Leader, Engineer Company XO, Engineer Battalion Assistant S3, Infantry Battalion S4, 3ID G6 Network Engineer, Offensive Cyber Operation OIC at JFHQ-Cyber, and Senior Test Officer with the Air and Missile Defense Test Directorate. His command assignments include: 18 months as Commander, C Company, 2/1 BSTB, 2nd Infantry Division, Fort Riley, KS where he deployed to Iraq in Support of Operation Iraqi Freedom; 24 months as Director, Regional Cyber Center – Korea. Lieutenant Colonel Sachi holds a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science from the United States Military Academy.

His awards and decorations include the Bronze Star Medal with 2 OLC, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal with 3 OLC, the Army Commendation Medal with 1 OLC, and the OIF and OEF Campaign Medal management, and the Royal Saudi Naval Forces. This included a month-long trip to train Saudi Navy personnel.

# UNITED STATES COLORED TROOPS SPONSORS

**William Howard Day Cemetery Inc. / Matthew Seyler  
American Legion Post 733**

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**In memory of Jacob Franklin & Fabian Franklin  
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Starvonsky Gibbs**

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Eugene Allen  
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John C Clark Sr, Steelton American Legion, Post 420**



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**Join us and help with the continued restoration of Historic Midland Cemetery**





**“One Soul at a Time”**

**Steve Wetzel has donated this beautiful piece to the Friends of Midland as a fund raiser. This picture is titled “One Soul At A Time”, showing the tall grave monument of the Blakely family, located in the front of the cemetery with graves of others in the background. Also note the beautiful sycamore tree, which is near the Blakely monument at the walkway. As you study the painting, take notice to the figures in the background, including a soldier. Please support the Friends of Midland by giving a donation of \$50.00 or more for one of these 9”x 14” prints.**

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**In other news. The Friends of Midland was asked by the Swatara Township Police Department to name the new police dog that will be soon arriving in Swatara Township. He will have his partner assigned and a new police car to go along with him. Our newest canine officer’s name will be “SOUL”.**

**What an honor to be a part of this. Can’t wait for him to arrive.**

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The first tree cut and board members.



## **This is a sample of the information that was submitted to the National Registry :**

The Midland Cemetery is an Independent Legacy African American Cemetery (as defined by the MPDF, African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c.1644-1970) located along Kelker Street and Cole Street in Swatara Township, Dauphin County, approximately .5 miles from downtown Steelton. Local tradition suggests that the site existed from the late eighteenth century as a burial ground for both slaves and free black residents of the area, and then expanded to serve the growing African American population drawn to the area by industrial jobs in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The earliest extant, dated tombstone in the cemetery dates to 1869. Today, the cemetery consists of two non-contiguous plots—the larger, main portion of the cemetery measuring approximately 3.5 acres in size, and a smaller .25-acre section separated from the main lot when Kelker Street was realigned through the cemetery grounds in the late 1930s. Aside from the Kelker Street intrusion, the cemetery boundaries remain consistent with the 1935 deed of sale transferring the land to the Midland Cemetery Association. The site is a single contributing resource. The gravestones, flagpole, commemorative markers and signage, split-rail fence, and maintenance sheds are uncounted landscape features. The surrounding neighborhood is a rural, residential neighborhood consistent with the area's historic character. The Midland Cemetery is a historic African American cemetery that reflects integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association consistent with the property subtype, Independent Legacy Cemetery, as defined by the MPDF African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644-c. 1970.

### **Narrative Description**

The Midland Cemetery is an Independent Legacy African American Cemetery (as defined by the MPDF, African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c.1644-1970) located along Kelker Street and Cole Street in Swatara Township, Dauphin County, approximately .5 miles from downtown Steelton.

### **Setting**

The cemetery is on its original site that was likely selected because of its remote location and physical conditions that made it unsuitable for other commercial or agricultural purposes. The site used for African American burials was in an area prone to flooding, and on a steeply-sloped gulch that would have been difficult to farm. The lot adjacent to the cemetery directly to the north was used in the past as a garbage dump, and today the area continues to be cluttered with refuse, a vehicle, and broken appliances. The fact that the cemetery was located on less valuable land and in close proximity to a dump is consistent with the conditions described in the MPDF African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644-c.1970 for



segregated cemeteries: “African American burials were made in an area considered the least desirable because of soil conditions, accessibility, viewsheds, or proximity to water.” (p.41).

In addition to the garbage dump to the north, the area northeast of the cemetery along Cole Street is a residential lot and a horse farm. The rest of the surrounding neighborhood to the south and west is a low-density rural residential neighborhood with modest one-story and two single-family homes, outbuildings, and a multiuse commercial-industrial building.

The southeast border of the cemetery runs along Cole Street, a narrow lane that serves as the back alley for Dunkle Street which runs parallel to Cole Street. There are no buildings on the northwest side of Cole Street where the cemetery is located, but the southeast side is dominated by outbuildings, carports, fenced backyards, parked cars, and garages serving the single-family homes that have their main entrances and front yards on Dunkle Street.

The block of Kelker Street across from the cemetery and southeast of Siegfried Street is occupied by two small bungalows, one of which is frame and the other has a stone exterior. The block northeast of Siegfried Street is marked by two larger buildings. One is a brick and frame multi-unit residential building with several additions. The other lot is zoned commercial-industrial, and has a large, multi-bay shop with additions on both ends that has been used by a catering business. In front of the building there is a large paved parking lot, a carport, a shed, a fenced area for a dumpster and trash receptacles.

### **The 1924 Cemetery Plan**

According to the 1924 plan, a lane runs through the middle of the cemetery starting on Kelker Street and continuing northeast through the cemetery grounds. After approximately 230 feet, it makes a slight curve and then continued straight in a northeasterly direction for another 170 feet until it makes a ninety-degree curve to an opening onto Cole Street. The end of the Cole Street section of the lane is today partially covered with crushed gravel; the remainder of the lane is covered with grass. The Kelker Street entrance is approximately across the street from Siegfried Street, and the Cole Street entrance is across from Mann Street. The lane is not precisely centered, but rather runs along the edge of the crest of the hill and marks a separation between the flat land to the southeast and east and the steep sloped area to the southwest. Most of the eight, massive oak trees flank the historic lane.

The 1924 plan shows that burial plots were laid out in parallel rows on either side of the central lane and grouped into sections that spanned the entire width of the cemetery. Each section generally consisted of groupings of four, eight, or ten adjoining lots—although the exact number varied depending on the landscape and the cemetery’s boundaries. Section 18 included all lots northeast of the lane’s Cole Street entrance. In total, the map of 1924 listed eighteen sections with 806 individual lots.

Examination of the numbering of the lots suggests that the oldest sections (lowest numbers) were found in five-lot ranks along both sides of the central lane—numbered from 1-128. One additional plot was then added to the southeast end of the original lots (129-150), and then additional lots were added to the northeast end of the cemetery (151-168). Lots 169-191 then continued on the northeast of the original grounds. Lots numbering from 300s through 800s then can be found extending the cemetery to the southeast, northeast, northwest, and west of the original section. Aside from the numbering system, it is not known the exact timing when these additional lots were added onto the original cemetery grounds.

Today, the cemetery continues to reflect the 1924 plan, although unmarked graves and unused lots—especially those in the steeply sloped section of the cemetery—make the design’s precise regularity less apparent to the casual visitor.

### The 1935 Deed of Sale, Kelker Street Intrusion, and Contemporary Boundaries

The first legal description of the cemetery is found in a 1930 deed transferring the land from Agnes Dunkle et al to Ruth Alleman. On January 17, 1935 the Midland Cemetery Association was incorporated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and on March 30, 1935 Ruth Alleman sold the cemetery lands with the same boundaries as the 1930 deed to the Midland Cemetery Association for one dollar.

The current day Midland Cemetery’s boundaries conform to the original boundaries of the March 1935 deed with one notable exception. The cemetery now consists of two non-contiguous lots due to a rerouting of Kelker Street in the 1930s that replaced a right-angle intersection along the perimeter of the Midland Cemetery with a curved connector that cut through the cemetery grounds. The roadway paved over a portion of the cemetery and left a segment separated from the main lot. It is believed that there are burials beneath the curved portion of Kelker Street that ran through the cemetery.



Approximately three-quarters of the cemetery sits on a gently-sloping hilltop, but east quarter of the cemetery is a sloped gully that drops 15 feet of elevation in a span of 150 feet, including some relatively steeply-pitched areas near the cemetery’s center lane. The bottom of the hill (the Ancestors Grove area) historically had been marshy and prone to flooding from a spring-fed creek. The northeast section of the cemetery is wooded and has extensive brush and

undergrowth. The Friends of Midland Cemetery continue to remove trees and brush to uncover grave markers in that portion of the cemetery.

The cemetery's tombstones date between 1869 and 1982. The oldest is the tombstone of Elizabeth Fields dating from 1869 which is located near the southwest corner of the cemetery grounds near the intersection of Kelker and Cole Streets (the 1924 cemetery plan indicates that her husband, George Fields, purchased lots no.10 and no. 20 along Kelker Street). The cemetery has many unmarked graves, as well as graves that may have been marked in the past by wooden or ephemeral markers that are now lost. This is a common feature of African American burial grounds.

The most recent tombstone is that of Della Wise who passed away in 1982. It is located just southwest of the lane near its Cole Street outlet. The oldest tombstones tend to be in the center of the cemetery in the area closest to the original center lane. The later tombstones are in the area of the Cole Street cemetery entrance, and then the tombstones in section 18 northeast of the lane tend to be from the 1930s and 1940s.

On the sloping north side of the cemetery, there are fewer extant grave markers and they tend to be from the 1890s and early twentieth century. At the northwest corner of the cemetery along Kelker Street are tombstones dated from 1949 and 1951.

The cemetery's grave markers reflect a diversity of styles and materials capturing the changing methods used over the cemetery's long history to mark graves. Most tended to stand relatively low in height (flat or 24-36 inches tall), to be made of marble or granite, and to possess relatively few words and modest designs. The simple, efficient, and economical markers reflected the people of modest means who constituted Steelton's African American community.

### **The cemetery reflects the seven aspects of integrity:**

The Midland Cemetery has integrity of location. The current cemetery stands on the site used for African American burials for over two centuries.

The Midland Cemetery has integrity of design. It maintains the layout documented in the cemetery's 1924 burial plot map.

The Midland Cemetery has integrity of setting. It continues to occupy a rural, low-density residential neighborhood with significant amount of woodlands to the north and west, and a horse farm to the east.

The Midland Cemetery has integrity of materials and workmanship. There has been virtually no change to the cemetery grounds aside from landscaping and tree removal, and graves continue

to be marked by a variety of historical grave markings, including federally-issued veteran markers, commercial produced gravestones, and vernacular grave markings.

The Midland Cemetery has integrity of feeling and association. All of the well-preserved elements of the cemetery—the setting, scale, material culture, and spatial arrangements—together convey to a visitor that they are stepping into a unique historical landscape reflecting the pride and dignity of the area’s African American community displayed over two centuries. The modern interpretative elements signal that the cemetery continues to have a powerful connection and significance for the contemporary African American community. At the same time, the site’s remote and undesirable location, and even the intrusion of Kelker Street onto the cemetery grounds provides visceral reminders of the experiences of slavery and racial discrimination that are integral to the history of Midland Cemetery.

### **More History:**

The cemetery existed on land owned by the white Livingston family, but nothing is known about the African Americans who likely cared for the cemetery at that time or their relationship with the site’s property owners. Yet in the years after the Civil War, the cemetery would become even more important as the community’s African American community grew and racial segregation in death became more clearly established in the area.

In 1866, the Pennsylvania Steel Company decided to open its first mill dedicated exclusively to the production of steel. It was also the first plant to produce steel railroad rails. For what would become a large industrial complex and company town, the company selected a riverfront site along the Susquehanna River in Swatara Township just south of Harrisburg.



The tiny Swatara Township village of Baldwin grew rapidly to accommodate the new mill, its employees, and the array of businesses and services they required. Baldwin was renamed “Steel Works” in 1871, and then became “Steelton” in August 1879.

Workers flocked to the town seeking employment, including African Americans seeking work with Pennsylvania Steel or other related industries. As a result, the African population more than tripled; the 1870 United States census enumerated 171 Black or Mulatto individuals in the area, the majority of whom had birthplaces in Maryland or Virginia. These new African American residents would establish a host of new institutions, businesses, and civic organizations that would be the foundation of a vibrant African American community in the new city. The Midland Cemetery continued as the sole burial ground serving all African Americans in the area.

The cemetery is significant as a surviving institution reflecting the history of racial segregation in the Steelton community. Steelton’s system of racially segregated burial grounds was reinforced by the local businessman and real estate developer Josiah Dunkle.

Josiah Dunkle was a Dauphin-county born carpenter who became one of the most important real estate developers in the region. He and his partners purchased substantial tracts of land in the area and transformed those farms and fields surrounding Baldwin into the commercial and residential neighborhoods of Steelton. He developed large portions of Steelton, Highland (now Enhaut), Benton, Oberlin, and Eastmere. In addition to his real estate interests, he traded in coal and lumber, operated a retail store on North Front Street in Steelton that sold household furnishing and appliances, and served on the board of several corporations including the Harrisburg Boiler and Manufacturing Company and the Steelton Light, Heat and Power Company. He also served as the first president of the Citizens Passenger Railway Company connecting Steelton to Harrisburg.

### **History speaks:**

An example of a former slave who built a new life of freedom in Swatara Township was Robert M. Fields. He was born in Shenandoah, Virginia around 1834 to George and Hannah Fields. For the first thirty years, he was enslaved by several Virginia families. He left the South after the Civil War and settled in Steelton, Pennsylvania. The first record of Robert Fields in Steelton was his enumeration in the 1880 United States census which listed him as a forty-six-year-old laborer living with his 49-year-old wife Mary Jane Fields and their fifteen-year-old daughter named Amanda. Fields was able to establish a life for himself in Steelton. According to his obituary, he was a member of “the Paxton Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons, and the Galilean Fishermen.” Fields was also a founding member of Steelton’s Monumental A.M.E. Church and he participated in the church’s groundbreaking ceremony at Second and Adams Streets in 1904.

He was considered a leader of several of Steelton's African American organizations prior to his death. He appeared in the 1910 census as a seventy-six-year-old widower living with his daughter. Robert Fields passed away at home at 104 Adams Street six years later in 1916 at the age of eighty-two years old. Burial at the Midland Cemetery followed a funeral service officiated by Rev. Mr. King at the Monumental A.M.E. Church.

A final example, Alex Harris was born in North Carolina around 1826 and served as a slave for a man named Major Harris. After being freed Alex took the last name of Harris after his favorite owner (on his death certificate it is listed as his "slave name.") He moved north to Steelton in the 1880s, and like many other African American arriving in Steelton after the Civil War, he found work with the steel industry. From 1887-1890 he lived on Shanty Row and then on Canal Street, married, and worked as a laborer for the Pennsylvania Steel Company. He eventually retired and continued to live in the Steelton area, and as he grew elderly, he suffered from blindness as well as "senile debility and arteriosclerosis." He died at home in July 1920 at the age of 94.

The cemetery is also significant as a place to honor the history and memory of the community's African American veterans. As the MPDF African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644 to c.1970 notes: "Some cemeteries in Pennsylvania can also contain graves of one, or many, African Americans who served in the United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T) or as Buffalo Soldiers; in these instances, these servicemen are remembered for their contributions only by their gravestones."



The Midland Cemetery also is a site to honor those who have fought during the era of the Civil War and up to the Korean War. The cemetery documents at least ninety-three individuals buried at the cemetery who served in the United States armed services.

When the federal government began to form the United States Colored Troops regiments in May 1863, Swatara Township men enlisted to join their ranks. Five out of sixteen Swatara men who enlisted joined the ranks of the 127th United States Colored Troops that was formed at Fort William Penn in Philadelphia.

For example, Samuel Cole born in Falls Church, Virginia, in the year 1843, was a prominent member of the Steelton community. Cole served as a Private with the 127th Regiment, Co. D, United States Colored Troops. The 127th Regiment saw a total of 10 different battles and services prior to their mustering in 1865, including the sieges of Richmond and Petersburg, and Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse. After the war, Cole served as a member of the "colored post" of the Harrisburg Grand Army of the Republic. He was employed in the Pennsylvania Steel

Company for several years before becoming a janitor at the Fothergill School Building from 1908 until his death in 1920. He was also appointed to be jury foreman for the Dauphin County Courthouse. Cole helped establish a school for African American children in Swatara Township, The Hygienic School for Colored Children. Cole passed away in the year 1920 at the age of seventy-five years old.

Veterans who served with other USCT regiments are also buried at the Midland Cemetery. Another example is Jeremiah Jackson born in Virginia circa 1825. Jackson was a member of the 23rd Regiment, Co. D, United States Colored Troops. His company was one of the first Union Army units "to enter Richmond after it surrendered." Jackson was "a highly respected citizen"

of the Steelton community who left Steelton for the Soldiers' Home in Erie in 1898 due to failing health. After six months, Jackson passed away at the age of sixty-four years old at the Soldiers'

Home on January 19, 1899. His body returned to Steelton for a Sunday funeral at the Monumental A.M.E. Church and burial at the Midland Cemetery. According to his obituary, "Many went to view the remains."

The cemetery also honors the community's World War One veterans. Andrew Theodore Askin, a native of Baltimore, Maryland, lived with his mother in Steelton until he enlisted into the navy at Atlantic City, New Jersey. His rank was Mess Attendant 3rd Class. He died at the age of 22 years old when his ship, the collier USS Cyclops was lost at sea on March 4, 1918. Franklin D. Roosevelt declared the Cyclops to be officially lost at sea and all members deceased on June 14,

1918. He was honored by the African American veterans of Steelton when they named their segregated American Legion post the Andrew Askin Legion Post No. 479. In the cemetery, there is a cenotaph marker for Askin surrounded by a small garden. In 2019, the General Assembly of Pennsylvania dedicated March 4, 2019 as “Andrew Askin Day” in his honor.

The Midland Cemetery contains the graves of numerous individuals who were leaders of the local African American community. There are many individuals who were a part of several organizations relating to the cemeteries, churches, and fraternal lodges and civic organizations that flourished as part of the thriving African American community of the Steelton-Swatara Township area.

For example, Bernard Blakey who died in 1907, was labeled “one of Steelton’s most respected colored men.” Originally from Virginia, he moved to Steelton around 1882. He was one of the founders of the First Baptist Church and was described in his obituary as “a devout Christian.” He worked as a janitor of the general office in the Pennsylvania Steel Company for years. He is at rest in the Midland Cemetery.

Another example is Charles Hogans. He died in the year 1941. Hogans was the first commander of the Andrew Askin Post No. 479, Steelton American Legion. For his funeral twenty “Negro soldiers” took part in the ceremony in his honor at the Midland Cemetery.

Another example is Mrs. George “Janie” Pearson, who passed in 1942. Mrs. Pearson was an active member of the Steelton African American community. As her obituary noted, she was a member of “Monumental A.M.E. Church, the president of the Auxiliary to Andrew Askin Post, No. 479, American Legion, and she was a member of the Cyrene Temple of Elks.” When she passed, she was buried at the Midland Cemetery.

A final example is Peter S. Blackwell, who died in the year 1936. Blackwell was a prominent resident and Republican leader of Steelton. He was the first African American councilman for 14 years and was a precinct committeeman in the Borough of Steelton. Blackwell belonged to the Paxton Lodge, No.16, of the Masons, as well as the Swatara Lodge, No. 19 of the Odd Fellows. He was also a publisher of the former Steelton Press, a local African American newspaper. The Steelton Press first began in the year 1890, with its first mention being in the Harrisburg Telegraph. “The Steelton Press is a new candidate for public favor in the world of newspaper readers.” Notably, Blackwell and the Steelton Press were outspoken in advocating for racial justice. For example, in 1894 when accused double-murderer Richard Puryear was lynched by a mob in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania before he could be put on trial, Blackwell publicly called out the authorities noting, “we condemn the sheriff of Monroe County for his carelessness, which facilitated the escape of the prisoner.” He then demanded that “every member of the mob should be prosecuted,” and declared that “the constable and the sheriff are accessories to the crime so long as they withhold the names of the murderers of Richard Puryear.” Blackwell was also a strong local advocate for public education for African American children. He was laid to



rest in the Midland Cemetery, and it is a fitting place to honor both his legacy as a political pathbreaker, a civil rights leader, and an outspoken champion of equality and justice.

The graves of these individuals at Midland Cemetery provide an opportunity to survey and reflect upon the individuals who were part of the region's active and tenacious African American community. They contributed to the region's African American social, cultural, political, and religious institutions, and also served the nation through their honorable military service. The Midland Cemetery provides the only location in the community to recognize the accomplishment of these individuals and to honor their labors and sacrifices that benefitted both the area's African Americans as well as Swatara Township, Steelton, and the greater Harrisburg area.

### **Churches:**

The First Baptist Church of Steelton was also founded during the Great Migration in 1881 in part to serve the influx of African Americans from the South coming to Steelton for industrial jobs who were Baptists. Likewise, the Mt. Zion Baptist Missionary Church was started by the ex-slave Rev. J.J. Jones from Hot Spring, Arkansas who came to the community in 1883. He promoted the education of missionary work to the African American residents of Steelton. These churches also used Midland Cemetery as their shared, communal burial ground until the mid-twentieth century when Steelton's William Howard Day Cemetery for African Americans began operation.

In addition to its churches, Steelton also had its own African American school, the Hygienic School for Colored Children. Located on "Hygienic Hill" on Bailey Street between Adams and Ridge Streets, the Hygienic School was promoted by Steelton editor Peter Blackwell as a way to provide African American teachers with employment and African American children with a quality education. It began operation in 1880 "as a night school in basement of the Steelton's Monumental AME Church."

The school outgrew that space, and the Steelton African American community organized a protest in 1890 when the school board attempted to locate the school in a dilapidated building.

Blackwell, along with Joseph Hill and Samuel Cole, organized the American Protective Association demanding that the school board either construct a new building or provide rooms in the white high school. In response, the school board provided space for the children in the Hygienic School building.



Students would attend school at the Hygienic School through the eighth grade, and then go on to attend the Steelton High School for their last four years. When it was discovered that African American students could not join the high school's all-white alumni association, the community founded their own alumni association, the "Douglass Association" named after Frederick Douglass. The segregated Hygienic School continued operating into the 1960s when Steelton's schools were integrated, and then was torn down in 1974.

The Hygienic School served as the starting point for the annual African American Decoration Day ceremony that processed to the Midland Cemetery, and the children from the school regularly participated as a body in that annual commemoration that culminated in having them decorate the graves of the deceased veterans at the Midland Cemetery.

African American veterans also created their own organizations when barred from joining local all-white veterans' groups. Most notably, African American veterans created the Andrew Askin American Legion Post. The first report about the Andrew Askin Post is in the Harrisburg Telegraph of 1919 that noted, "The Steelton Post, American Legion, composed of colored veterans, will be known as the Andrew Askin Post, in honor of a Steelton lad who died in the service." The post held a gathering space for local African American veterans, as well as a social center and hall for their weekly dances. The Andrew Askin Post played an active role in planning and honoring the community's African American veterans each year at a separate Decoration Day/Memorial Day observance at the Midland Cemetery.

Additionally, Steelton had a wide array of fraternal organizations and lodges specifically for the area's African American residents. These included the Prince Hall Paxton Lodge of the Free and

Accepted Mason, no. 16, the Grand United Order of the Odd Fellows Swatara Lodge No. 1901 that met at Odd Fellows Hall on Adams Street, the Order of the Eastern Star, the Cyrene Temple of Elks Lodge no. 169, and the Galilean Fisherman Lodge no. 78. All of these organizations have members buried in the Midland Cemetery. The importance of these affiliations is further indicated by the fact that some individuals placed symbols on their grave markers denoting their affiliations. The members of these organizations often honored the death of their members with special ceremonies, processions, resolutions, and rituals—many of which occurred graveside at the Midland Cemetery.

The Midland Cemetery is significant as the local African American community's site of memory, remembrance, and reflection to honor its heroes and celebrate their service and accomplishments. A major time for memory and remembrance is the spring holiday to honor the memory of the veterans of the United States armed services. Commemorations begin in the late nineteenth century with observance of Decoration Day at the "colored cemetery" when processions of African Americans would gather at the cemetery to lay flowers on the graves of veterans of the United States Colored Troops.

The earliest documented observation of Decoration Day at the Midland Cemetery was in May 1889 when a band and parade formed and marched to honor the veterans' graves at the "colored cemetery." Typically, the Decoration Day events were organized by a committee of African Americans and veterans of Steelton. The procession would consist of military bands, wagons, or other vehicles that were decorated by several individuals, and speakers were typically reverends or influential people of the community. The children of the Hygienic School for Colored Children would parade along carrying flowers for the graves. The route that was taken was coming out of Adams Street into Front, turning to Chestnut, then Second, to Mohn, and finally into the cemetery. The graves were then decorated with flowers. On at least one occasion, the band played music while the graves were decorated. The parade and ceremonies continued after World War Two, stopped in the 1970s, but then resumed when the Friends of Midland emerged in the 1990s.

Keep in mind that this is only a small portion of what was submitted of the 62 pages. The information was organized by Steven Burg, Barbara Barksdale, Jeanie Glaser, and Sarah Hoffeditz; with prior research by Kristian Carter, Kathryn Kondrick, Amanda Partner, and Meghan Turtle. This could not have happened without the support of many board members since the conception of Friends of Midland, its volunteers and many organizations. We thank all of them and the Swatara Township and Steelton communities involved to get the historic Midland Cemetery on the National Register of Historic Places.

A special thanks to the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission in partnership with the National Park Service for recognizing the contributions of those interred at Midland to be significant in American History.

**Not the END!**

We have come a long way. We started with the cutting down many trees.

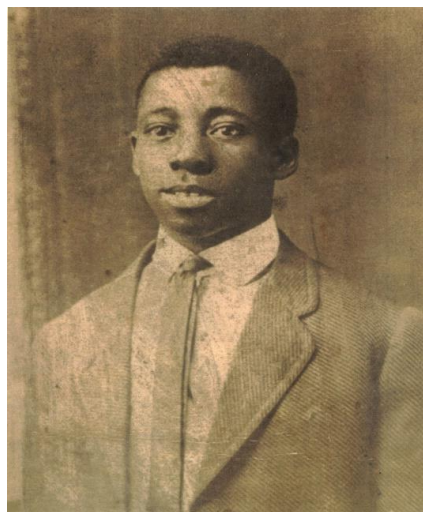


Team Rubicon at Ancestors' Grove



This is an ongoing process. The worst of the trees were removed in the early years of Friends of Midland. We had to remove hundreds of stumps and with the help of Swatara Township removing the stumps. We are still locating graves and names, but we are thrilled that every day we get closer to finding more ancestors..."ONE SOUL AT A TIME"

We received the certificate in the mail May 17th, 2023. What a way to finish this program...to add it to the cover. Please visit Midland, relax and enjoy the beautiful environment. Bring your family, a book and just sit to reflect.



***This program booklet is dedicated to my grandfather David Murray (1895-1934). He is the reason why I started to clean the cemetery. I just wanted to clean his grave!***

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania



Pennsylvania  
Historical & Museum  
Commission

## Midland Cemetery

Swatara Township, Dauphin County

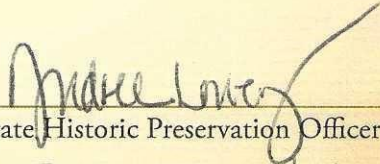
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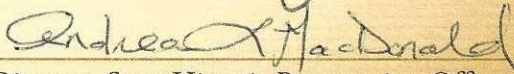
## National Register of Historic Places

Under provisions of the National Historic  
Preservation Act of 1966

The National Register of Historic Places is our Nation's official list of properties significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture. These places contribute to our understanding of the historical and cultural foundations of the United States. The National Register is administered in Pennsylvania by the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission in partnership with the National Park Service.



  
State Historic Preservation Officer

  
Director, State Historic Preservation Office

April 27, 2023

Date Entered