

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Midland Cemetery

Other names/site number: Colored Cemetery, Negro Cemetery, Highland Cemetery

Name of related multiple property listing: African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644-1970

2. Location

Street & number: 206 Kelker Street

City or town: Swatara Township

State: PA

County: Dauphin

Not For Publication:

Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following

level(s) of significance: ___national ___statewide Xlocal

Applicable National Register Criteria: XA ___B ___C ___D

	3/10/23
<hr/> <p>Signature of certifying official/Title: Date</p>	
<hr/> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	
<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<hr/> <p>Signature of commenting official: Date</p>	
<hr/> <p>Title : State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> 1 </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> 1 </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> 3 </u>	objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 4 </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY/cemetery

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY/cemetery

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

N/A

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: N/A

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Midland Cemetery is located along Kelker and Cole streets in Swatara Township, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, approximately 0.5 miles from downtown Steelton. The surrounding neighborhood is a rural, residential neighborhood consistent with the area's historic character. 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 is just under 4 acres. Aside from the Kelker Street intrusion through the western portion of the cemetery, the boundary remains consistent with the 1935 deed of sale transferring the land to the Midland Cemetery Association.

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Midland Cemetery Sketch Map



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Narrative Description

The Midland Cemetery is located along Kelker Street and Cole Street in Swatara Township, Dauphin County, approximately .5 miles from downtown Steelton.

Setting

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

The southeast border of the cemetery runs along Cole Street, a parallel narrow lane that serves as the back alley for Dunkle Street. 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.

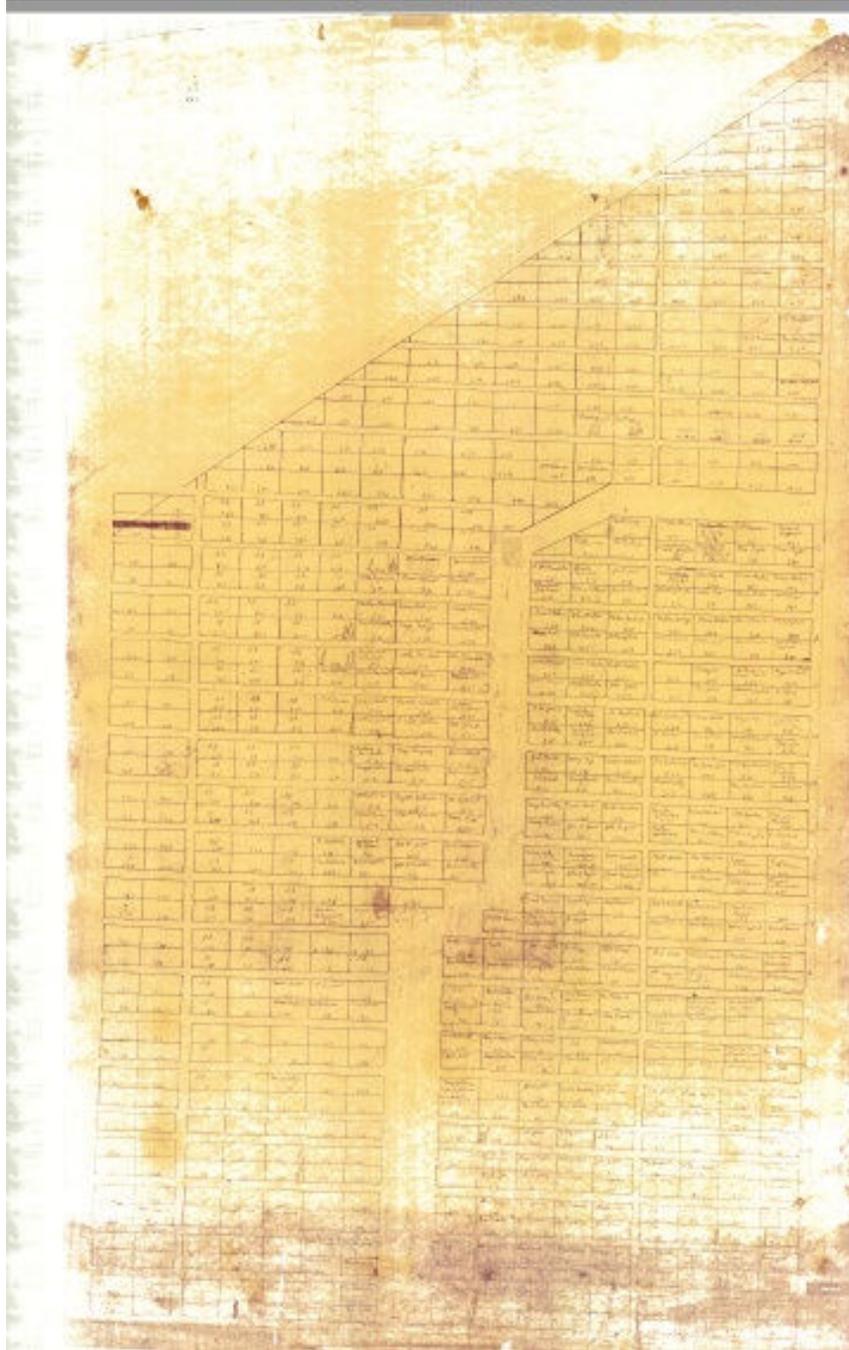
Cemetery Plan

A map of cemetery plots from circa 1924 shows that the cemetery did have a carefully planned layout, and that the cemetery retains a high degree of integrity in terms of maintaining its original design.

As in 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 continues 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.

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1924 Plan of the Midland Cemetery, in possession of Friends of Midland.

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. Burial plots are laid out in parallel rows on either side of the central lane and grouped into sections that span the entire width of the cemetery. Each section generally consists of

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groupings of four, eight, or ten adjoining lots—although the exact number varies depending on the landscape and the cemetery’s boundaries. Section 18 includes all lots northeast of the lane’s Cole Street entrance. The original layout shows 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.

Cemetery 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.¹ 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.²

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. The National Register boundary for the Cemetery includes both lots.

The small triangular section of the cemetery across Kelker Street is known as “Ancestor’s Grove.” The site has no extant markers, but the Friends of Midland Cemetery have erected an interpretative sign and split-rail fence on the site explaining that it is part of the cemetery and describing how it was separated from the rest of the grounds by the rerouting of Kelker Street. The driveway for the residence at 209 Kelker Street also extends onto the cemetery’s property and the owners were required to obtain a “right of way” to gain access to their property.

Approximately three-quarters of the cemetery sits on a gently-sloping hilltop, but the west 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.

¹ Agnes W. Dunkle et al to Ruth E. Alleman, September 11, 1930, Deed Book 23 R, page 219, Dauphin County Recorder of Deeds.

² Ruth E. Alleman to Midland Cemetery Association, March 30, 1935, Deed Book 23 R, page 222, Dauphin Country Recorder of Deeds.

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Cemetery Grave Markers

The cemetery's tombstones date between 1869 and 1982. 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 possess relatively few words and modest designs. The cemetery has a mix of flat lawn-style monuments, free-standing tablets, and upright die-on-base, die-in-base, or pedestal-style monuments. The lawn-style granite markers frequently have names and dates forged onto bronze plaques.

The cemetery also has several different types of vernacular markers, including those made of concrete with hand-carved inscriptions, solid blocks of native limestone without inscriptions, and one flat, upright concrete slab covered with gray paint and faded black-painted lettering. Historically, the cemetery would have wooden-boards markers painted white with black hand-painted lettering. The Friends of Midland Cemetery unearthed two such markers at the cemetery that were largely intact. The simple, efficient, and economical markers reflected the people of modest means who constituted Steelton's African American community. The grave markers of the Midland Cemetery are consistent with the MPDF, which notes "the grave markers in independent cemeteries were typically modest in design... They are typical of their time and place and the variety, quality, and design of the grave markers is reflective of locally-available materials and the class and wealth of the deceased."³

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.⁴ The most recent tombstone is for Della Wise who passed away in 1982. It is located just southwest of the lane near its Cole Street outlet.

³ Splain, *African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644-c. 1970*, 61.

⁴ For example, the Locust Grove Cemetery in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania is an African American cemetery that similarly dates to the late eighteenth century, but the oldest extant tombstone in the cemetery is for William Wilson who died in 1868. See the Locust Grove Cemetery National Register Nomination, PA-SHARE, <https://share.phmc.pa.gov>, listed December 2021.

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Photo #1: View of Midland Cemetery Grave Markers

Overall, the markers at the Midland Cemetery reflect an excellent diversity of form, and good integrity. Their scale and styles are consistent with the feel and appearance of a rural Independent Legacy African American cemetery in Pennsylvania. The Friends of Midland continues to raise funds and work to appropriately repair and conserve all the cemetery's original monuments.

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Photo #2: Painted wooden grave markers for George W. Roebuck and Jennie V. Roebuck recovered from the grounds of the Midland Cemetery. Friends of Midland.

Military Markers

The cemetery also has the graves of a significant number of military veterans from the nineteenth and twentieth century, and a variety of government-issued markers, including sunken-shield federal Civil War tombstones and lawn-style monuments. Privately purchased monuments for veterans often include information about their military service.

There are also several Civil War veterans graves adorned with similar marble, die-on-base markers, such as the grave of William Jackson, William Woodburn, and Israel Palmer. The similar design of those tombstones suggests that they may have had a common origin, and perhaps were installed by Dauphin County as part of a state program passed in 1885 to ensure that all Civil War graves were marked with appropriate monuments.⁵

⁵ The Pennsylvania Legislature passed Act 20 in 1885 that provided money to Pennsylvania counties to provide a free burial and headstone to "any honorably discharged soldier, sailor, or marine who served in the army or navy of the United States during

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Additional Landscape Features

A few family plots are marked by concrete coping. One family plot with the grave for Bessie Hawkins is marked with bricks. Another family plot is marked with the posts for chain barrier (although the chain is gone) and another is marked with a small white picket fence.



Photo #3: Bessie Hawkins hand lettered concrete grave marker with brick coping.

A unique feature of the Midland Cemetery is that a number of the graves were equipped with concrete “frames” on the gravesite with an attached metal disk indicating the plot number. These appear to have been provided to accommodate either a lawn-style rectangular stone marker or a painted wooden marker, and are still visible on many of the lots.

the late rebellion, or any proceeding war and died in their county, leaving insufficient means to defray necessary burial expenses.” The law was subsequently amended to provide free burials and grave markers to any veterans regardless of economic need. See Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Passed at the Session of 1885 (Harrisburg, PA: Edwin E Meyers, State Printer, 1885), 17.

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Photo #4: Concrete grave marker frame with metallic plot medallion number for plot #281.

The cemetery includes one other unusual, original feature. In section 18, just northeast of the Cole Street entrance is a plot of markers commemorating white men and women from Central Pennsylvania. The markers are oriented differently than other markers in the cemetery (they all face southeast), and are markers for several individuals who are buried in marked graves in other cemeteries in Central Pennsylvania. Included in the section are gravestones for Harvey L. Mell, David Cassell; John and Elizabeth McElwee and their son David; and Mandanna L.E. Hershey.

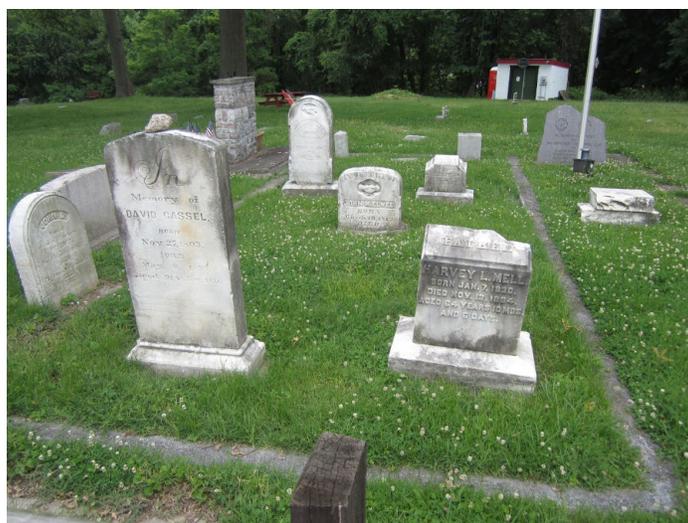


Photo #5: Section with duplicate grave markers for white men and women

To date, no information has been found explaining why these markers were erected in the cemetery or the precise relation of these individuals to the Midland Cemetery.

In addition to the original monuments, there are a few recent elements introduced to help provide interpretation of the cemetery. These elements reflect the ongoing importance of the cemetery as a site of

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memory and commemoration actively used by local African Americans and supported by the surrounding community, though they are non-contributing due to their placement date.

There is a large granite monument at the cemetery donated by the Borough of Steelton and the Harrisburg East Rotary Club in 2005 as part of a flagpole area “To Honor Those Interred in the Midland Cemetery,” and a plaque from the Swatara Township Supervisors erected in 1999 designating the Midland Cemetery as a local historic site.

The friends of Midland erected an interpretative panel marking the Andrew Theodore Askin Memorial Garden designated in honor of Askins who was a mess attendant third class who was lost at sea on the collier, the U.S.S. *Cyclops*, which mysteriously disappeared in the Caribbean while transporting manganese from Brazil on June 14, 1918. A federally-issued lawn-style memorial marker was placed at the Midland Cemetery in his memory.

The Friends of Midland also erected a black granite monument for Negro League baseball player Herbert “Rap” Dixon with his likeness and career statistic. Dixon’s grave is at the Midland Cemetery, and among his other achievements he was the first African American to hit a home run in Yankee Stadium in 1930.



Photo #6: Monument erected to honor Negro League all-star Herbert “Rap” Dixon

There is a non-contributing cinder-block storage shed on the cemetery grounds used to house the cemetery’s lawn mower and tools. An iron and wood park bench and a concrete bench have been installed on the cemetery grounds, as have a picnic table and several Adirondack chairs painted in green and red.

Today, the cemetery is surrounded on the sides with a split-rail fence installed by the Friends of Midland. A large oval, painted sign is mounted on wooden posts near the intersection of Cole and Kelker Streets reading, “Historic Midland Cemetery.”

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Description	Contributing/Non Contributing	Resource Type
Cemetery	Contributing	Site
Borough of Steelton/Harrisburg East Rotary Club Monument	Non contributing	Object
Askin Memorial Garden Interpretive Panel	Non contributing	Object
Herbert "Rap" Dixon Monument	Non contributing	Object
Storage Shed	Non contributing	Structure

Midland Cemetery's Integrity

Although the cemetery had been untended from the 1950s to 1993, it is now well maintained. Much overgrown brush and vegetation has been eliminated since 1993, and numerous volunteer trees have been removed. Only one area of the cemetery--the northwest edge along Kelker Street--has some residual vegetation. Most of the grounds are open and covered with well-maintained grass and plantings much as they would have appeared during the period of significance. Overall, the cemetery is in good condition and is lovingly maintained by the Friends of Midland.

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 a century and a half, perhaps longer.

The Midland Cemetery has integrity of design. It maintains the layout documented in the cemeteries 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 over its history. 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 provide visceral reminders of the experiences of slavery and racial discrimination that are integral to the history of Midland Cemetery.

The Midland Cemetery exhibits the characteristics of integrity consistent with the property subtype, Independent Legacy Cemetery, as defined by the MPDF.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Ethnic Heritage: Black

Social History

Period of Significance

c.1869-1972

Significant Dates

1935

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Midland Cemetery (also known historically as the “colored cemetery,” the “negro cemetery,” and the “Highland Cemetery”) in Swatara Township, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, is locally significant under Criteria A for Ethnic Heritage: Black for its association with the African- American community, and in the area of Social History for the Midland Cemetery’s role as a site of memory and commemoration in Steelton/Swatara Township’s African American community. The Midland Cemetery meets the registration requirements for the subtype “Independent Legacy African American Cemetery”, as described in the *African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644 to c.1970* Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF). The period of significance, 1869-1972, spans from the date of the earliest extant dated tombstone (1869) to the date when the cemetery began to fall into disuse. The last burial occurred in 1982. The cemetery satisfies Criteria Consideration D, as a cemetery that derives its significance from historic events and associations.

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Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Midland Cemetery is located in today's Swatara Township. The land that would become Midland Cemetery occupied the northeast corner of a 309-acre parcel warranted to James Galbreath in 1745, and then sold in 1747 to English-born Anglican minister Richard Peters who served the Penn family proprietors in multiple official roles until his death in 1776.⁶

The area was part of Lancaster County, and was then included in the portion of land separated from Lancaster County to become Dauphin County in 1785. Swatara Township as a municipality was created by a court order that divided Lower Paxton Township into two equal parts in 1799.

The overall original 309-acre parcel in Swatara Township was well-situated for both commerce and agriculture. It located just five miles from Harrisburg and fronted the Susquehanna River. Additionally, the plot contained a highly desirable resource: a very large spring pond (now the site of the Steelton Water Tanks near the intersection of Kelker Street and Dewey Street). Subsequent deeds for the parcel indicate that this pond was a highly sought-after feature. Additionally, the pond fed what is, per its depiction on historic maps, the largest run in the vicinity of Steelton prior to its conversion into a reservoir. The run flowed down what is now Kelker Street (the road was formalized after the reservoir dried the path in the late nineteenth century), was joined by the run that separates Midland from the adjacent property to the north, and then flowed in a southwestwardly direction along a still-visible tree line into the Susquehanna River.⁷

Like much of the surrounding area, the land was used primarily for agriculture. Although it is unclear precisely how the land was used in the eighteenth century, an 1821 deed transferring the land from John Roop to Jacob Keever indicates that the farmstead adjacent to the cemetery's current location contained a barn, chicken house, and stable.⁸ A single story stone building on the lot may also have served as a mill.

The particular site for the cemetery was likely selected because of its remote location on the parcel, and physical conditions which made this portion of the land unsuitable for other commercial or agricultural purposes. The site designated 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, old vehicle, and broken appliances.⁹ 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 *African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644-c.1970 MPDF* for segregated cemeteries, which notes that "African American burials were made in an area considered the least desirable because of soil conditions, accessibility, viewsheds, or proximity to water."¹⁰

⁶ Deed James and Elizabeth Galbreath to Richard Peters, January 10, 1745, recorded May 16, 1748, Lancaster County Recorder of Deeds, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

⁷ For an example of the specific mention of the spring and rights to its water, see the deed Catherine Livingston to Abraham Livingston, June 5, 1845, recorded June 25, 1845, Dauphin County Recorder of Deeds.

⁸ Deed John Roop and wife to Jacob Keever, June 20, 1821, Pennsylvania, Deed Book 1X: 209-10, Recorder of Deeds Office, Harrisburg.

⁹ "Extinguish Dump Fire," *Harrisburg Evening News*, July 9, 1938.

¹⁰ Splain, *African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644-c.1970*, 41.

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The cemetery is a significant local site of African American history and culture dating to at least the mid-nineteenth century. The exact date when burials first took place on that site is not known. While local tradition suggests that the cemetery's origin dates back to its use in the eighteenth century as a slave burial ground, documentation has yet to be uncovered to establish the cemetery's exact date of origin. There were slaves in Swatara Township in the 1790s and a free black community had emerged in the region by the early nineteenth century, but no documentation has yet been located to pinpoint where deceased people of color were buried at that time.

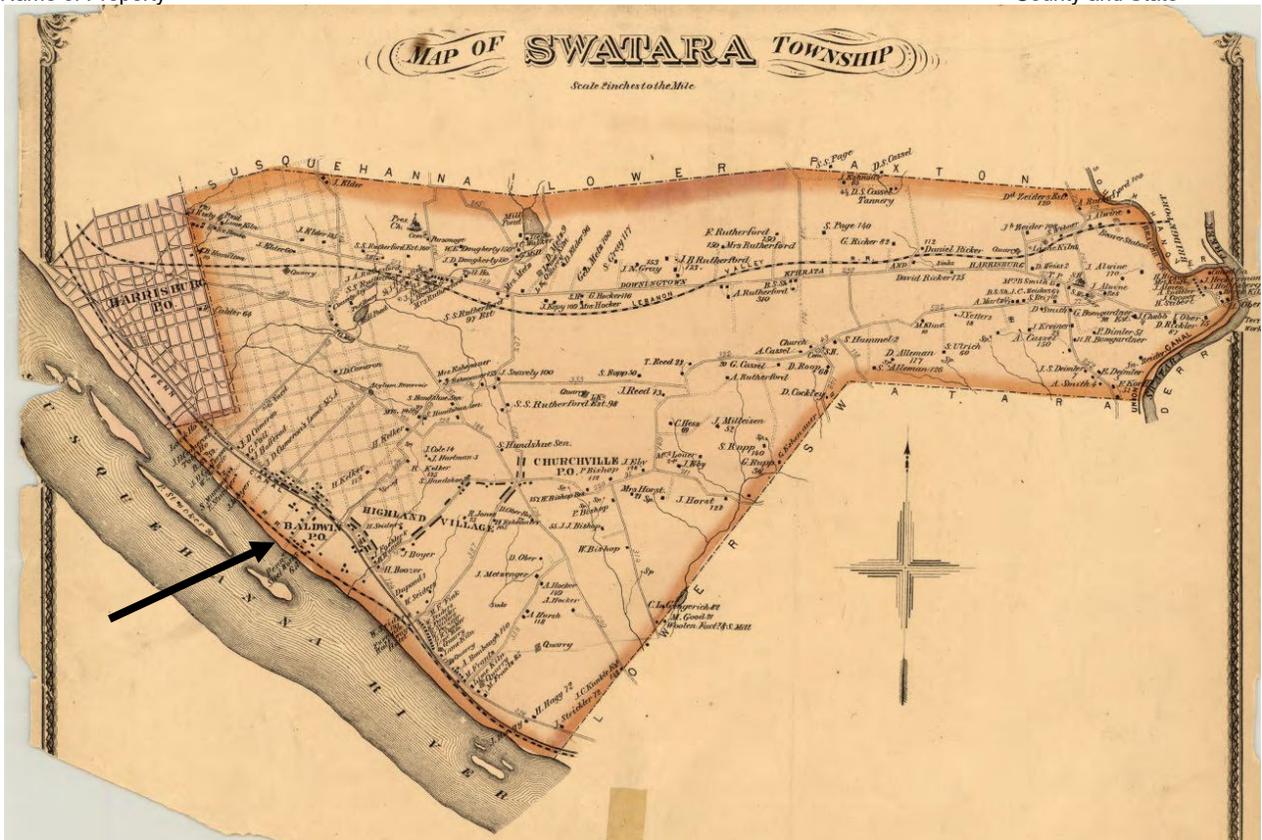
By the 1860s, a recognizable cemetery for African American burials had been established at the Midland Cemetery site. The oldest extant grave marker can be found on the edge of the cemetery facing Kelker Street, the tombstone for Elizabeth Fields who died in 1869. The first mention of the cemetery is a newspaper article from 1877 that noted the existence of a "colored cemetery" along a line dividing Swatara Township into two voting precincts. The article noted that the new precinct boundary would run "in a straight line crossing or near to the property of Hartman, Dunkle and Mayold, and through the east side of cemetery (colored) to a point in middle of Churchville and Highland Road near Highland School House."¹¹ There is no written description of the cemetery's boundaries.

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.

¹¹ "Sheriff's Proclamation," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, October 22, 1877.

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Above: Map of Swatara Township in 1875. Arrow points to Baldwin, P.O. Below: Detail of map indicating the approximate location of the Midland Cemetery [not labeled on the map].¹²



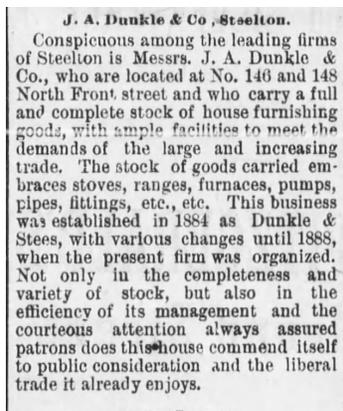
¹² *Atlas of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, 1875*, Compiled, Drawn and Published from Personal Examinations and Surveys, by Everts & Stewart, Philadelphia. Pennsylvania State Archives, <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/mg/di/m011/Map0795Interface.html>.

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Workers came 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.¹³ 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.

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.¹⁴



Advertisement for the Dunkle Store in the *Harrisburg Independent*, December 11, 1889.

Among his considerable land acquisitions, Dunkle purchased two substantial parcels of land from Elizabeth Livingston in 1872 and 1873. Though the deeds made no mention of any burial grounds on the land, the transaction made Dunkle the owner of the Midland Cemetery.¹⁵

Dunkle obviously understood the need for the new community of Steelton to have adequate burial facilities for its growing population, as well as the potential profits to be realized by selling cemetery lots. In 1876, he donated the land for the new Baldwin Cemetery in Steelton and took steps to ensure its

¹³ "United States Census, 1870." Database with images. *FamilySearch*. <http://FamilySearch.org> : 18 July 2022. Citing NARA microfilm publication M593. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.

¹⁴ Luther Reily Kelker, *History of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania*, volume 3, (New York and Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1907), 289-290.

¹⁵ Deed Elizabeth Livingston to Josiah A. Dunkle, December 6, 1872, Deed Book 4S, pps. 754-757; Deed Elizabeth Livingston to Josiah A. Dunkle, January 15, 1873, Deed Book 4S, 758-761.

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perpetual care. He created a trust and made himself a trustee of the cemetery, and specified that twenty percent of all funds raised by the sale of plots minus routine maintenance costs “shall be set apart as a fund the interest of which is to be used for the purpose of keeping the cemetery in repairs forever.”¹⁶ He also allocated additional land to the cemetery in 1889 to allow for its future growth, and made provisions for still more land in his will.

The instrument creating the new Baldwin Cemetery also codified that Steelton’s burial grounds would be racially segregated. Just as the population of Steelton boomed and African Americans came in large numbers to the area, Dunkle established the Baldwin Cemetery “as a cemetery and place of internment for white persons.”¹⁷ Physically, the location of the Baldwin Cemetery closely paralleled the placement of the Midland Cemetery. It was almost precisely a half mile northeast of downtown Steelton like the Midland Cemetery, and one mile northwest of the Midland Cemetery. Dunkle had intentionally created a parallel, racially segregated system of cemeteries in Steelton by barring African Americans from his new, well-funded public, white cemetery.

When Josiah Dunkle died on February 6, 1897, his will of April 20, 1896, mentioned the Midland and Baldwin cemeteries as real estate that should not be sold as part of the general liquidation of his estate. He left his sons Samuel and Amos the Baldwin Cemetery “with power to sell the lots.” He also empowered the executor of his estate to contribute up to five additional acres of land to the Baldwin Cemetery if “it should become necessary to make a further dedication of land to the cemetery.”¹⁸ Other than preventing its public sale, Dunkle made no other provisions for the care or support of the Midland Cemetery.

The Midland cemetery would remain in the possession of the Dunkle family for the next twenty-eight years. However, during that time the Midland Cemetery was being operated independently by members of the African American community operating as the unincorporated Midland Cemetery Association. No records have been located to know who belonged to that organization or other aspects of its operations. The only mention of the organization prior to its incorporation in 1935 was a small article published in the *Harrisburg Telegraph* in 1913 entitled, “Cemetery is Full.” That same article noted that the original land had been filled and the Midland Cemetery Association had purchased “several acres of ground adjoining the cemetery from the Dunkle estate.”¹⁹

The Midland Cemetery Association would finally take legal possession of the cemetery in 1935. The organization was incorporated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on January 17, 1935, and then on March 30, 1935, Josiah Dunkle’s granddaughter Ruth Alleman sold the cemetery to the Midland Cemetery Association for the token sum of one dollar.²⁰ The Midland Cemetery association would continue to operate the cemetery, care for its grounds, and honor those buried there for the next four decades.

¹⁶ Josiah Dunkle and Wife to Josiah Dunkle Trustee Baldwin Cemetery, July 22, 1876, Dauphin County Recorder of Deeds, Deed Book G5, 129-131; Josiah Dunkle and Wife to Josiah Dunkle Trustee Baldwin Cemetery, October 21, 1889, Dauphin County Recorder of Deeds, 264-267.

¹⁷ Josiah Dunkle and Wife to Josiah Dunkle Trustee Baldwin Cemetery, July 22, 1876, Dauphin County Recorder of Deeds, Deed Book G5, 129-131; Josiah Dunkle and Wife to Josiah Dunkle Trustee Baldwin Cemetery, October 21, 1889, Dauphin County Recorder of Deeds, 264-267.

¹⁸ “J.A. Dunkle’s Will,” *Harrisburg Telegraph*, February 16, 1897.

¹⁹ “Cemetery Full,” *Harrisburg Telegraph*, May 29, 1913.

²⁰ Ruth E. Alleman to Midland Cemetery Association, March 30, 1935, Deed Book 23 R, page 222, Dauphin Country Recorder of Deeds.

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In addition to the cemetery's vital importance as a communal institution and as an artifact of segregation, it is significant as the only place in the Steelton area where one can learn about the community's rich African American history. As the MPDF notes, "In many respects, African American cemeteries are the only places to tell the stories of individuals and families. Individual graves, or collections of graves, in the cemetery often reflect broad themes in local, state, and national history. For example, a cemetery can hold graves of enslaved Africans and African Americans that tell the story of Pennsylvania before abolition and the Civil War or contain plots for families or entire communities that moved from the South to Pennsylvania during the Great Migration looking for work and opportunity."²¹ This is assuredly the case for the Midland Cemetery.

The Midland Cemetery provides a powerful connection to the history of enslaved individuals who lived in the local community. There are several markers in the cemetery that mark the burial locations of individuals who were enslaved in Swatara Township or who were enslaved elsewhere and relocated to Steelton. At the Midland Cemetery, it is possible to recall the lives and experiences of individuals who illustrate the history of slavery in Dauphin County, as well as the role that the Steelton and Swatara Township area played in providing employment and opportunity for at least fourteen former slaves who forged new lives of freedom and now lay within the cemetery's grounds.

For example, Mary Ann Gale Taylor Dixon born on August 26, 1824, was one of fifteen children of Hannah Louise and George Gale who were enslaved near New Market, Virginia. Her mother and fourteen of her siblings were sold away when she was a child. Just before departing - never to be seen again - her mother gave her one final gift: a green silk shawl that she cherished for the rest of her life.²² When she was around twenty years old, she married an enslaved man named Gilbert Taylor. Mary Ann and Gilbert Taylor had six children when the Riddle family decided to sell them all and move to Ohio. They were all sold to a professional slave trader named Showwalter who bought the entire family for \$2200 cash with the intent of taking them to resell in the South along with 300 other slaves. However, a cholera outbreak killed many of the slaves he purchased, and to avoid further losses he quickly sold Mary Ann Taylor and two of her daughters to William Seibert of New Market, Virginia, and her husband and other children to two different families in the New Market area. The Taylor family members could see each other once or twice a month, and Mary Ann and Gilbert Taylor had eight more children together. Sadly, six died in infancy.

By day Mary Ann Gale Taylor worked as a field hand alongside the other male slaves, but then in the evening was required to cook and perform domestic labor for the Seibert family. After an incident where Sally Seibert flew into a rage and beat her with a hickory stick and then Taylor wrenched the stick from her and struck her twice across the back, the Seibert's hired her out to work at the tavern owned by Noah Higgs of New Market. During the Civil War, her husband and brother were able to escape north during Philip Sheridan's raid into the Shenandoah Valley in 1864. She lost contact with her husband who moved west and settled in Columbus, Ohio.

Five years after the end of the war, unable to locate her husband with her children scattered during the conflict, Mary Ann Gale Taylor moved north to Marysville, Pennsylvania in 1870 to start a new life on a farm with her brother Hiram Gale—a property she would inherit when he died.²³ She then married for a second time to James Dixon and became a pillar of the Steelton African American community. She had

²¹ Splain, *African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644-c.1970*, 23.

²²"Mrs. Mary Ann Taylor-Dixon, the Aged Mother of Julius F. Taylor, Celebrated Her 91st Birthday, Saturday, August 26, 1916," *The Broad Ax*. September 9, 1916.

²³ IBID

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belonged to the Baptist Church since 1846, and around 1890 became active in Steelton's First Baptist Church. She also was a member of the Galilean Fisherman Lodge no. 78, an African American mutual aid and benevolent society that helped members to pay for healthcare and funeral expenses. She passed at the age of 93 on April 25, 1917. Her funeral was held the following Sunday at 2:30 pm at Steelton's First Baptist Church. Indicative of the honored place she held in the community, the church was "filled to overflowing with people who knew... [her] best in this life."²⁴ Funeral arrangements were handled by Walter G. Hooper, "the leading Afro-American funeral director of the Harrisburg," who secured her remains in a "black broadcloth casket with heavy silver trimmings." Her son, newspaper editor Julius Taylor, noted that the "floral tributes were numerous and beautiful," and that the guests included, "many white citizens, including men, women, and children." The Galilean Fishermen Lodge members conducted her final rites both at the church and graveside at the Midland Cemetery.²⁵

Another 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."²⁶ 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")²⁷ 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 94.²⁸

The cemetery is also significant as a place to honor the history and memory of the community's African American veterans. As the MPDF notes: "Some cemeteries in Pennsylvania can also contain graves of

²⁴ Julius Taylor, The Death and Funeral of Mrs. Mary Ann Gale Taylor Dixon at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the Aged Mother of the Editor of this Paper," *The Broad Ax*, May 5, 1917.

²⁵ Her son Julius Taylor wrote two extensive pieces telling his mother's story: Julius Taylor, "Mrs. Mary Ann Taylor Dixon, the Aged Mother of Julius F. Taylor, Celebrated Her 91st Birthday, Saturday, August 26, 1916," *The Broad Ax*, September 9, 1916; Julius Taylor, The Death and Funeral of Mrs. Mary Ann Gale Taylor Dixon at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the Aged Mother of the Editor of this Paper," *The Broad Ax*, May 5, 1917.

²⁶ "Aged Colored Leader Dies," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, March 20, 1916; Robert M. Fields, 1880 Manuscript Census for Steelton, Pennsylvania, accessed via Family Search.

²⁷ Alex Harris Death Certificate, July 25, 1920.

²⁸ "Former Slave Buried," *The Evening News*, July 28, 1920.

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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.”²⁹ 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 has documented 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 1920.³⁰ 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.³¹ 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.”³² 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.”³³

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, 1918.³⁴ 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.³⁵

²⁹ Splain, *African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644-c.1970*, 48.

³⁰ “Civil War Veteran Dies,” *The Evening News*, March 8, 1920.

³¹ Barbara Barksdale, “Samuel E. Coles Sr.” unpublished research, 2022.

³² “Died at the Soldiers’ Home,” *Harrisburg Telegraph*, January 24, 1899.

³³ “Died at the Soldiers’ Home,” *Harrisburg Telegraph*, January 24, 1899.

³⁴ Friends of Midland, “Friends of Midland Annual Memorial Service,” unpublished pamphlet, May 27, 2017.

³⁵ The General Assembly of Pennsylvania, “Senate Resolution, No. 99”, May 1, 2019.

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Another example is George Monroe who was born in 1884. Monroe served during World War I as a Private 1st Class, 304th Engineers, Co C. According to a news report, "George Monroe, colored, and John E. Wilson, of Steelton" were drafted into the war in April of 1918.³⁶ He was also a "member of the Andrew Askin Post, the Steelton American Legion, and was a trustee of Cyrene Lodge, B.P.O.E."³⁷ Monroe passed away in 1940 and was laid to rest in the Midland Cemetery.

As the communal African American burial ground for the entire community of Steelton and Swatara Township, Midland Cemetery is also significant as a place to understand the diverse array of civic organization and leaders that contributed to the vibrant African American community of the Steelton area. African American plots within segregated cemeteries will typically contain graves for many members of the local African American community. Within a large, segregated cemetery, there may be more than one area with plots reserved for African Americans based on their church or religious affiliation, membership in a fraternal or benevolent organization, or military service. African American communities that did not have an African American church or a church with a graveyard would have buried their dead in this type of cemetery if they did not have access to or interest in an African American cemetery."³⁸

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 died in 1907, was labeled "one of Steelton's most respected colored men."³⁹ 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."⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

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."⁴² 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 of

³⁶ "Four More Enlistments," *The Evening News*, April 20, 1918.

³⁷ "George Monroe," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, July 11, 1940.

³⁸ Splain, *African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644-c.1970*, 68.

³⁹ "Died Yesterday Morning," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, January 14, 1907.

⁴⁰ "Died Yesterday Morning," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, January 14, 1907.

⁴¹ "Post Pays Last Tribute to Former Leader," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, May 29th, 1941

⁴² "Mrs. George Pearson," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, November 23, 1942

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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.”⁴³

Notably, Blackwell and the *Steelton Press* were outspoken in advocating for racial justice. For example, in 1894 when accused double-murder 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 murders of Richard Puryear.”⁴⁴ 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 path breaker, 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.

The Midland Cemetery grounds provide a fitting and appropriate space to reflect on the full array of cultural, social, educational, and religious institutions that flourished as part of the locale’s African American community, just as the MPDF notes, “beyond their physical and obvious role in a community, Black Church congregations and cemeteries often serve as the de facto historical societies for the African American community.”

Regarding churches, one scholar summarizes this role accurately: “Since many of the historical events that affected each black community and its members were debated or took shape around the church, these buildings... often constitute important artifacts and physical monuments symbolic of the history of individual black neighborhoods.” For most ethnic and cultural groups, cemeteries are places of identity, commemoration, remembrance, and, for some African American communities, empowerment.”⁴⁵

On the grounds of Midland Cemetery, visitors can learn about the important institutions that bonded and supported the local African American community. This includes the array of African American churches in the area that shared the Midland Cemetery as a common sacred space. The Monumental A.M.E. Church founded in 1871 was the first congregation formed specifically for African American worshippers who had no other place of worship in the company town of Steelton. The cornerstone of the church’s first building was laid in 1874, and in addition to serving as a house of worship and community meeting place, the church’s basement also served as the elementary school for local African American children until 1890. In 1905, the congregation bought land for a new building at the corner of Second and Adams Street. Until the 1940s, the Midland Cemetery served as the burial ground for the deceased members of the congregation.

⁴³ “*Steelton’s New Paper*,” *Harrisburg Telegraph*, July 3, 1890; Bodnar, John E. “Peter C. Blackwell and the Negro Community of Steelton, 1880-1920.” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* vol. 97, no. 2 (1973): 199–209.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20090732>

⁴⁴ “Protest and Appeal,” *Harrisburg Telegraph*, March 21, 1894

⁴⁵ Splain, *African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644-c.1970*, 48.

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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 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.⁴⁶ 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 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 the basement of the Steelton's Monumental AME Church."⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ 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 Andrews 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."⁵⁰ 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

⁴⁶ "Stereopticon Exhibition," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, December 29, 1883.

⁴⁷ "The Hygienic School of Pennsylvania Opens." African American Registry, August 24, 2021. <https://aaregistry.org/story/the-hygienic-school-opens/>.

⁴⁸ "The Hygienic School of Pennsylvania Opens."

⁴⁹ "The Hygienic School of Pennsylvania Opens."

⁵⁰ "Name American Legion Post in Honor of Andrew Askin," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, October 7, 1919.

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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 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 honors its heroes and celebrates 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 that marched to honor the veterans' graves at the "colored cemetery."⁵¹

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.

Other commemorative events have also occurred at the cemetery to honor other community heroes. For example, the Friends of Midland held an event to honor baseball player Herbert "Rap" Dixon held in 2007. Herbert "Rap" Dixon was considered "one of the greatest outfielders ever to play baseball."⁵² He played for the Harrisburg Giants for the Eastern Colored League during the years 1924-1927. He played along with individuals such as "Fats" Jenkins and Oscar Charleston, and had a .315 batting average with 16 homeruns, 27 steals, and 125 run.⁵³ He toured Japan from 1927 to 1928, and made the All-Star team chosen by the Hall of Famer Raleigh "Biz" Mackey. During 1929, Dixon secured a record of 14 consecutive hits against the Homestead Grays.⁵⁴ He died in Detroit, Michigan, and was buried in the Midland Cemetery in 1944. In addition to honoring his life, the Friends of Midland installed a marker with his image and an overview of his career at his Midland Cemetery gravesite.

By the early 1950s, the cemetery grounds were no longer maintained and fewer and fewer burials took place. Volunteer trees and brush had already started to grow on cemetery grounds. The cemetery struggled financially in part because it was running out of lots to sell, but also because the federal court decision *Terry v. Elmwood Cemetery* (1969) ended racial segregation of cemeteries by declaring that it was unconstitutional for cemetery owners to deny individuals from buying cemetery plots on account of

⁵¹ "Steelton," *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, May 30, 1889

⁵² Friends of Midland. Rap Dixon Memorial Event program. Steelton, PA: Friends of Midland, 2007.

⁵³ Rap Dixon Memorial Event program.

⁵⁴ Rap Dixon Memorial Event program.

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race. The opening of the William Howard Day Cemetery in 1940 in Steelton provided African Americans who wished to be buried in a predominantly African American cemetery a more modern option

Additionally, the century-long decline of the steel industry in Steelton led to an overall decline in the areas population and affluence. In the four decades between 1950 and 1990, the city lost 54% of its population dropping from 12,547 to 5,858. Many members of the older generation passed away while many young people left the area to find employment—sometimes losing connection with the cemetery where their family and ancestors had been laid to rest.

Sometime in the late 1960s or 1970s, the Midland Cemetery Association ceased operation, and no one was left to oversee the cemetery. Without regular maintenance or landscaping, nature and the elements overtook the cemetery. Volunteer trees, brush, and weeds choked the cemetery making it challenging to enter the grounds. Weathering and erosion toppled markers, wore away at monuments, and made their inscriptions unreadable. The cemetery's history and markers literally disappeared from both the community's consciousness and the landscape.

In 1993, Barbara Barksdale and her son ventured into the overgrown cemetery. Barksdale recollected from her childhood that her family would visit the cemetery every Decoration Day. She never ventured onto the cemetery grounds with her parents because of her allergies as a child, but as an adult she had the desire to care for her grandfather's burial site. She set off into the overgrown cemetery, and after discovering the history and toppled markers among the roots and brush, she dedicated herself to restoring the cemetery.

Barksdale founded the non-profit organization, the Friends of Midland, and has continued for thirty years restoring the cemetery and sharing the African American history reflected through its grounds and the lives of the men and women buried there. They have also continued the annual commemoration of Decoration/Memorial Day. The Friends of Midland have catalyzed support from across the community, and Barbara Barksdale has used her experience to help other cemetery stewards across Pennsylvania with their own restoration efforts. In 2013, she helped to found a statewide organization, Pennsylvania Hallowed Grounds, dedicated to preserving and sharing the story of African American cemeteries in Pennsylvania.

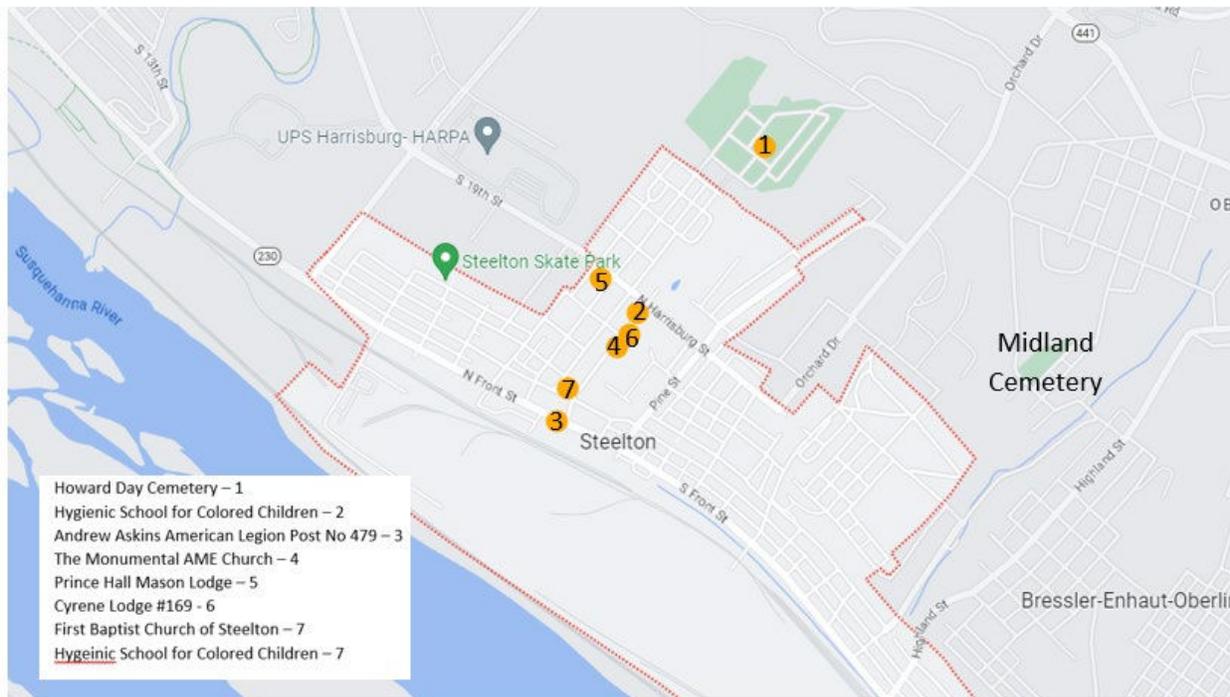
Today the Friends of Midland continues the work of maintaining and telling the history of the Midland Cemetery and the remarkable individuals at rest on its historic grounds. After more than two centuries, the cemetery stands as a representation of resilience and a monument to the lives of the individuals who contributed so much to the Swatara Township and Steelton communities, and to the nation. It is truly a powerful and remarkable site that offers a unique and significant connection to Steelton-Swatara Township's African American history.

Context of the Steelton African American Community

The Midland Cemetery was part of a larger, vibrant African American community that included several organizations and institutions that served the African American community in the Steelton area. Many were concentrated in the area of Adams Street (now Frank Brown Boulevard) that was the center of African American life in Steelton. In addition to the Midland Cemetery, some of the major sites serving the African American community included:

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Howard Day Cemetery: This African American cemetery was established in 1940 to provide additional burial space in the Steelton area for African Americans as the Midland Cemetery began to reach capacity. It is named in honor of Harrisburg African American abolitionist, orator and educator, William Howard Day, the first African American elected to the Harrisburg school board. The lawn-style cemetery that also contains mausoleums and has excellent historical integrity. It is located adjacent to the Baldwin Cemetery at 801 Lincoln Street in Steelton.

Hygienic School for Colored Children: This African American school in Steelton opened in 1880 and served children through the eighth grade. It was torn down in 1974. A local memorial was dedicated at the site on October 17, 2020.

Andrew Askins American Legion Post No. 479: Steelton's segregated American Legion posts opened a headquarters at 204 North Front Street, Steelton on August 8, 1944. The Legion Post building has been demolished.

The Monumental A.M.E. Church: This Steelton African American congregation began in 1871 and constructed a new church building in 1905 at the corner of 2nd Street and Adams Street (now Frank S. Brown Boulevard). The building is standing, but the congregation has ceased to worship there due to HVAC and plumbing issues with the building. The building is intact, and the exterior facades exhibit good integrity.

Prince Hall Mason Lodge: This fraternal lodge meeting space is still home to the Prince Hall Masons and is also frequently used by other community organizations (the Monumental A.M.E. Church was meeting there in 2021-2022). The building is extant at 410 North Harrisburg Street. The building has undergone considerable alterations, including the additional of a central front

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doorway, and most of the buildings original window openings and its double door openings have been bricked over.

Cyrene Lodge #169 & Cyrenus Temple #75 Improved, Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks of the World (IBPOE of W), Steelton, PA: 142 Adams Street (Frank Brown Boulevard). This plain, two-story, rectangular brick building houses the male and female chapters of the Black Elks in Steelton.

First Baptist Church of Steelton: The congregation of the First Baptist Church of Steelton has moved to a newer building at 1850 South 19th Street, Steelton, but its original red brick building stands at 158 Adams Street (Frank Brown Boulevard). Despite a few alterations (a glass front door, a handicap ramp), the front of the church exhibits integrity of material, feel and design, including Gothic elements and original stained-glass windows.

Discussion of Significance

The Midland Cemetery is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage and Social History within the context of the MDPF as an example of the African American Cemetery property type and Independent Cemetery subtype.

According to the MPDF, an independent cemetery is “one created and used solely by and for the burial of free Africans and African Americans in Pennsylvania sometime between c. 1795 and c. 1973 and survives as an enduring example of African American agency. Independent cemeteries exist as evidence of racial segregation and African American agency in Pennsylvania.”⁵⁵

The Midland Cemetery reflects the first and most enduring communal institution established by and for the Steelton African American community, and a site that facilitates the tell of the community’s history—both the story of enslavement and discrimination, but also the stories of the intersection of Pennsylvania’s industrialization and the Great Migration. The site illustrates in a clear and powerful way how the men and women who came to the area—many of whom were former slaves-- built a thriving Black community and important organizations and institutions to support the area’s African American residents. The cemetery holds enduring significance to the local African American community as a location to honor the community’s ancestors and African American military veterans. Local School groups regularly visit the site to learn about the community’s African American history. For over one hundred years, members of the African American community have organized an annual Decoration/Memorial Day event to honor the community’s African American veterans, and generations of local African Americans have driven efforts to preserve, protect, and share the history of the cemetery and those laid to rest there.

The MDPF states that in order to be eligible for the National Register, under Criterion A, churches and cemeteries should have a “substantial historical connection to the African American community it served.”⁵⁶ This connection should not be solely related to the practice of a particular religion. The property must “be directly associated with significant historical events, patterns of events, or themes that affected the African American community it served, and the property must retain sufficient physical character to be able to convey the importance it held within that specific period.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Splain, *African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644-c.1970*, 7.

⁵⁶ Splain, *African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644-c.1970*, 52.

⁵⁷ Splain, *African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c. 1644-c.1970*, 52.

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The Midland Cemetery meets this standard and the NPS criteria considerations for cemeteries by serving as a major communal institution for the Steelton/Swatara Township area's African American community for over one hundred years, one used by all African Americans as a burial ground and site of memory and commemoration regardless of church affiliation.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

- Bodner, John. "Peter C. Blackwell and the Negro Community of Steelton," 1880-1920, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol.97, no.2 (April 1973), 199-209.
- Burg, Steven et al., "Locust Grove Cemetery," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. December 21, 2021.
- Friends of Midland, <http://midlandcemetery.com/>.
- Kelker, Luther Reily. *History of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania*. New York and Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1907.
- Krüger-Kahloula, Angelika. "On the Wrong Side of the Fence: Racial Segregation in American Cemeteries," in *History and Memory in African American Culture*, eds. Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. Pages 130-149.
- Splain, Shelby. "African American Churches and Cemeteries in Pennsylvania, c.1644 to c.1970." National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, April 24, 2020.
- Steelton Borough, "The Historic Midland Cemetery," <http://www.steeltonpa.com/for-residents/historic-midland-cemetery/>.
- Trotter, Joe William, Jr. (editor). *African Americans in Pennsylvania: Shifting Historical Perspectives*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977.
- Zeller, Becky, "Mount Tabor AME Zion Church and Cemetery," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form," January 13, 2021.
- Historic newspapers accessed through Newspapers.com
- Files of the Friends of Midland, in possession of President Barbara Barksdale.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): #2022RE00818

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 3.75 acres

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: **40.237609**

Longitude: **-76.826126**

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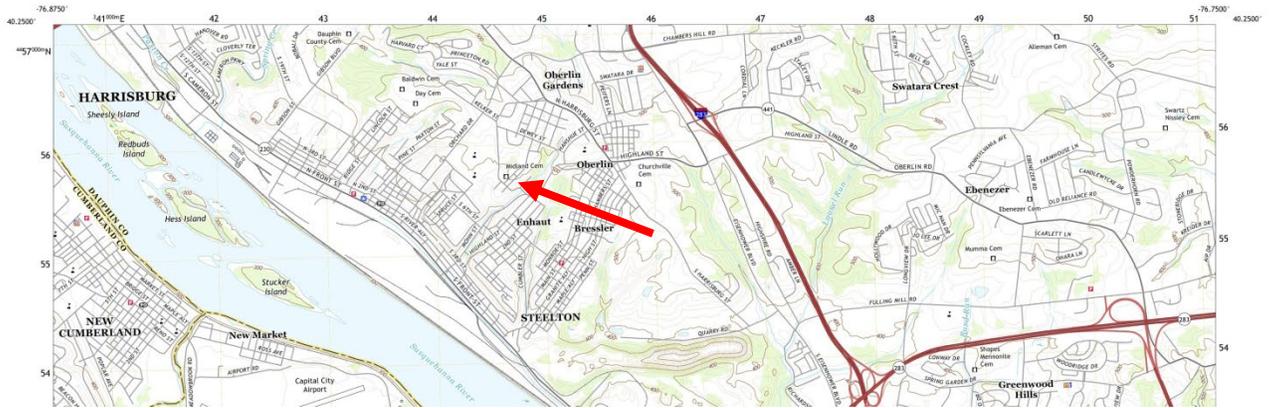
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



STEELTON QUADRANGLE
PENNSYLVANIA
7.5-MINUTE SERIES



Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Boundary is consistent with the boundaries for Dauphin County Tax Parcel 63-047-012, and the 1935 deed of sale between Ruth E. Alleman and the Midland Cemetery Association, March 30, 1935, Deed Book 23 R, page 222, Dauphin Country Recorder of Deeds.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This is the land historically associated with and as Midland Cemetery, and represents the entirety of the land purchased by the Midland Cemetery Association in 1935.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Steven Burg, Barbara Barksdale, Jeanie Glaser, and Sarah Hoffeditz; with prior research by Kristian Carter, Kathryn Kondrick, Amanda Partner, and Meghan Turtle
organization: Shippensburg University Dept. of History, Friends of Midland, Pennsylvania Hallowed Grounds
street & number: Shippensburg Univ. Dept. of History, 1871 Old Main Drive
city or town: Shippensburg state: PA zip code: 17257
e-mail sburg@ship.edu ; mscmtyldy@aol.com
telephone: 717-860-7621
date: February 2023

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Photo Log

Name of Property: Midland Cemetery

City or Vicinity: Swatara Township

County: Dauphin

State: Pennsylvania

Photographer: Steven Burg

Date Photographed: June 14, 2021

- 1: Facing east, view of Midland Cemetery grave markers.
- 2: Painted wooden grave markers
- 3: Facing northeast, detail of Bessie Hawkins gravesite.
- 4: Facing northeast, detail of concrete frame and metal plot marker.
- 5: Facing northwest, "White Section" of Midland Cemetery
- 6: Facing northeast, Rap Dixon memorial.
- 7: Facing northeast, Elizabeth Fields and George Fields grave markers.
- 8: Facing northeast, Midland Cemetery sign, Elizabeth and George Fields markers
- 9: Facing southeast along Kelker Street
- 10: Facing east from Kelker Street towards Cole Street
- 11: Facing northeast, trees mark the left side of the original central lane
- 12: Facing east from Kelker Street
- 13: Facing North from Kelker Street entrance. Note the level ground to the right of the lane, and how the land slope downhill to the left of the lane and trees.
- 14: Facing northwest from the cemetery's Kelker Street entrance.
- 15: Facing northwest, corner of cemetery separated by Kelker Street intrusion.

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16: Facing west, Ancestor's Grove section of cemetery

17: Signage at Ancestor's Grove explaining how the rerouting of Kelker Street separated it from the main portion of the Midland Cemetery.

18: Facing east: section of cemetery across the street from Ancestor's Grove. Trees have been removed and area is being reclaimed from overgrowth. Flag indicates grave marker.

19: Facing northeast from Kelker Street from bottom of hill.

20: Facing east, looking up the side of the hill.

21: Facing west from the top of hill near center of cemetery.

22: Facing northwest, grave markers along the north tree line.

23: Facing west from center of cemetery.

24: Facing Southeast

25: Facing South

26: Facing northeast

27: Facing northeast

28: Facing northeast, along the lane where it turns to Cole Street

29: Facing east. Stumps of felled trees painted green, yellow, and red

30: Facing northwest

31: Facing northeast

32: Facing southwest

33: Facing northwest, second from the left is the marker of Della M. Wise, the last dates tombstone in the cemetery. She died in 1982.

34: Facing north along Cole Street

35: Facing northwest, Andrew Askin Memorial Garden

36: Facing southwest from rear of cemetery from Cole Street.

37: Facing southwest along Cole Street

38: Facing northwest, maintenance shed

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Midland Cemetery Photo Map Key



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Photo #7: Facing northeast from Kelker Street, Elizabeth and George Fields markers



Photo #8: Facing northeast from Kelker Street

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Photo #9: Facing southeast along Kelker Street



Photo #10: Facing east from Kelker Street towards Cole Street

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Photo #11: Facing northeast, trees mark the left side of the original central lane.



Photo #12: Facing east from Kelker Street

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Photo #13: Facing North from Kelker Street entrance. Note the level ground to the right of the lane, and how the land slope downhill to the left of the lane and trees.



Photo #14: Facing northwest from the cemetery's Kelker Street entrance.

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Photo #15: Facing northwest, corner of cemetery separated by Kelker Street intrusion.



Photo #16: Facing west, Ancestor's Grove section of cemetery

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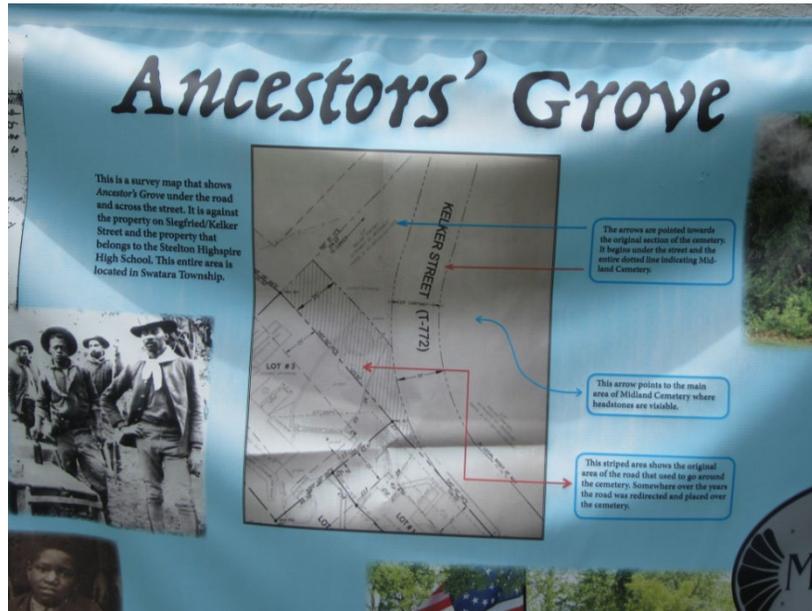


Photo #17: Signage at Ancestor's Grove explaining how the rerouting of Kelker Street separated it from the main portion of the Midland Cemetery.



Photo #18: Facing east: section of cemetery across the street from Ancestor's Grove. Trees have been removed and area is being reclaimed from overgrowth. Flag indicates grave marker.

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Photo #19: Facing northeast from Kelker Street from bottom of hill.



Photo #20: Facing east, looking up the side of the hill.

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Photo #21: Facing west from the top of hill near center of cemetery.



Photo #22: Facing northwest, grave markers along the north tree line.

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Photo #23: Facing west from center of cemetery.



Photo #24 : Facing Southeast

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Photo #25: Facing South

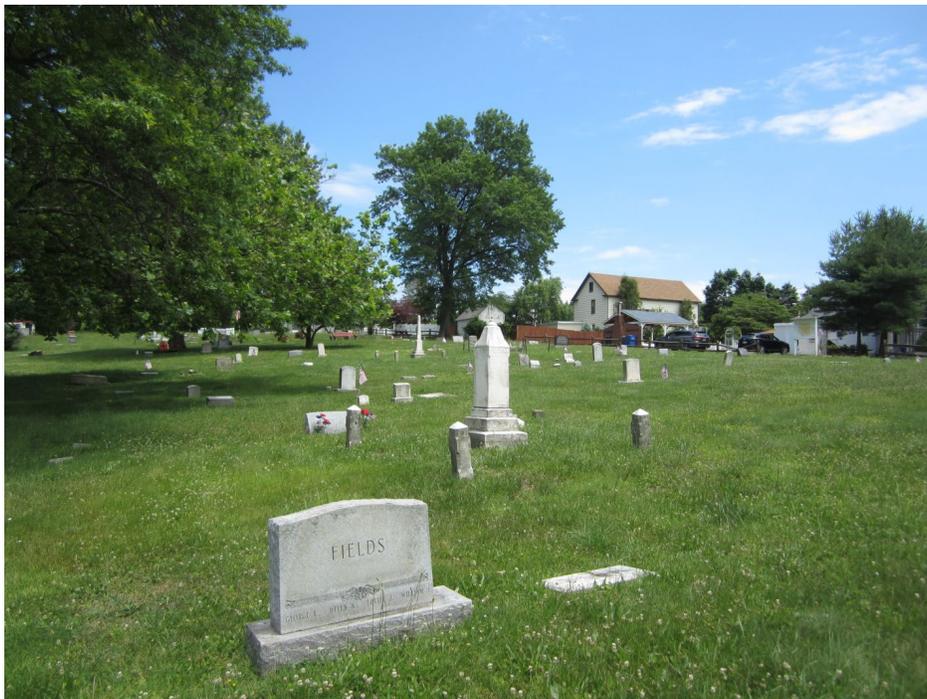


Photo #26: Facing northeast

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Photo #27: Facing northeast



Photo #28: Facing northeast, along the lane where it turns to Cole Street

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Photo #29: Facing east. Stumps of felled trees painted green, yellow, and red.



Photo #30: Facing northwest

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Photo #31: Facing northeast



Photo #32: Facing southwest

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Photo #33: Facing northwest, second from the left is the marker of Della M. Wise, the last dated tombstone in the cemetery. She died in 1982.



Photo #34: Facing north along Cole Street

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Photo #35: Facing northwest, Andrew Askin Memorial Garden

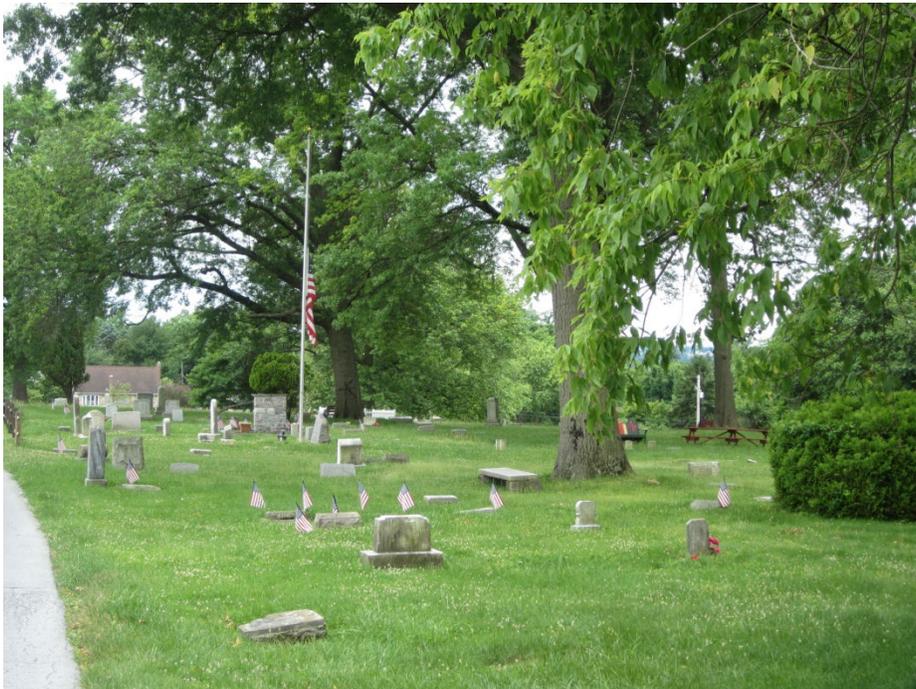


Photo #36: Facing southwest from rear of cemetery from Cole Street.

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Photo #37: Facing southwest along Cole Street



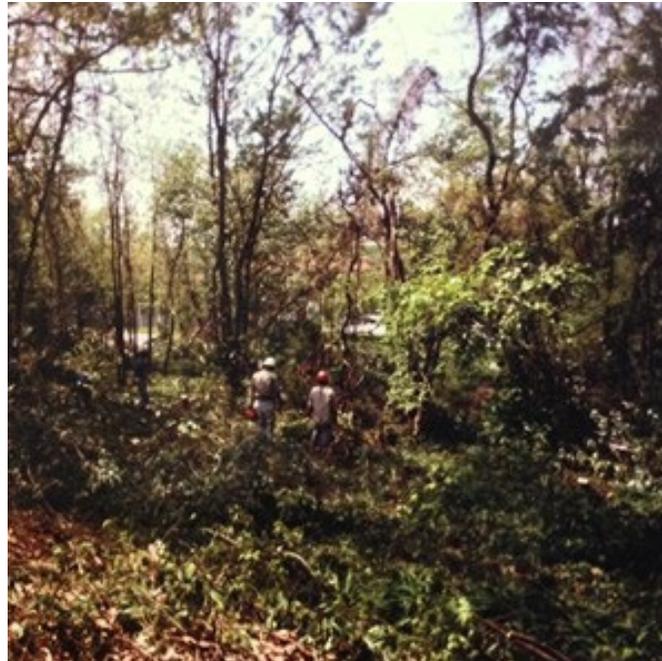
Photo #38: Facing northwest, maintenance shed

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The wooded area in the rear is Midland Cemetery, 1990. Friends of Midland.



Midland Cemetery in the early 1990s. Friends of Midland.

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Clearing brush at Midland Cemetery, c. 1993. Friends of Midland.



Barbara Barksdale and professor and students from Dickinson College, c. 2000.
Friends of Midland.

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Barbara Barksdale, Volunteer Day at Midland Cemetery, August 2021. Friends of Midland

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.