

# Hollywood Cemetery: A local haunt on the hill



There is no need to go far to get in Halloween mode! If you want some spookiness for your kids without any scary prices, stay local and head to the legendary Hollywood Cemetery. You can easily sneak in some history while you're there, too! In fact, it is impossible to avoid it in this breathtaking National Historic Landmark.

Located in up-and-coming Oregon Hill, this gorgeous destination offers 135 acres to explore in a rural garden setting. Although quite hilly, it is stroller-friendly with quaint paved streets for cars. Even better, there is no admission fee, and nothing is breakable.

Named for its many holly trees, the cemetery is situated on a majestic spot overlooking the James River Rapids. The sprawling grounds are filled with Gothic architecture, giving it an eerie feel. There are 52,000 monuments and statues spread throughout the cemetery, making it a fascinating place for people of all ages. Meandering down the winding pathways is like visiting an outdoor art museum. There are stained glass mausoleums, crypts, homages to the dead, and stately old trees. Just looking at the dates on the tombstones is fascinating.

If you believe in "haunted" places, Hollywood surely is one. The cemetery remains fully operational

today, but spirits have roamed these hallowed grounds since 1849. More than 80,000 people are buried there, including many notable Americans. Due to its fascinating history, it remains one of Richmond's top tourist attractions. It is well worth a place on your bucket list. (Pun intended.)

Hollywood is the burial site of two U.S. Presidents in a special area called "Presidents' Circle" with phenomenal river views. For thrill seekers, President James Monroe's tomb is particularly eerie. It consists of a huge black wrought-iron cage placed over a simple sarcophagus. Once you see it, you'll understand its nickname of "The Birdcage." Behind it lies President John Tyler with a large obelisk marking his grave.

The Confederate President, Jefferson Davis, is also buried nearby beneath a life-sized statue with no mention of his presidency. The list goes on - there are two Supreme Court justices, six Virginia governors, and 22 Confederate Generals, including J.E.B. Stuart. If you've never been there, it's a "Who's Who" of noteworthy Virginians, including Louis Ginter.

The 90-foot granite pyramid in the Confederate Section is an amazing sight to behold. It was built to honor the 18,000 enlisted Confederate soldiers buried there, many unknown from Gettysburg. Local inmates made it out of stones pulled

from the James River using no mortar. Some visitors claim to have heard soft moans coming from the pyramid at dawn and dusk. It is said the unidentified soldiers were trying to make their presence known. Others have reported feeling cold spots around one corner of the pyramid.

Not far from the pyramid is a cast iron dog apparently keeping watch over the grave of a three-year-old girl. Amidst many versions, historians agree that Rees's father moved the dog to the plot to preserve it. During the Civil War, the Confederates were confiscating cast iron. In the paranormal realm, people profess to have heard the dog growl when someone got close. Others believe they have seen the little girl playing with the dog at night.

Have you ever heard of the Richmond Vampire? Well, you have now! Back in 1925, the C & O Railroad's Church Hill Tunnel collapsed, burying several workers alive. As the legend goes, a bloody creature with jagged teeth and hanging skin emerged from the rubble and began racing toward the James River. Some men chased the creature into Hollywood Cemetery where it allegedly disappeared.

The facts are that a railroad fireman named Benjamin F. Mosby was loading coal into the train's steam tank without a shirt. The cave-in

caused the boiler to burst, badly scalding him and breaking several teeth. Witnesses saw him emerge in shock with layers of skin hanging off him. He later died at Grace Hospital.

While in the area, you can get a milkshake to die for at the Dairy Bar, around since 1946. How appropriate after visiting a cemetery! Another Richmond landmark, Mama Zu, is around the corner with top-notch Italian food. Plus there's always a potential detour to Carytown for Bev's Homemade Ice Cream or Carytown Cupcakes. **RPM**

## WANT TO GO?

### Hollywood Cemetery

412 South Cherry Street  
Richmond 23220  
www.hollywoodcemetery.org  
(804) 648-8501

**Admission:** Free  
**Parking:** Free  
**Pets:** Welcome  
**Water fountains:** None  
**Restroom:** In the office basement

**Walking:** At the main entrance office, get a map of the cemetery or snap a picture of it with your phone. It costs \$1 and is the most efficient way to find the famous burial sites.

**Walking tour:** Contact the Valentine Richmond History Center at (804) 649-0711, ext. 334.

**Driving:** Keep the blue painted line to your right. It will take you by all the famous graves.

If you get lost, just head downhill. You will end up back on Westvale Avenue leading to the main gate.

**Cemetery Hours:**  
8 a.m.-5 p.m. daily  
Closes at 6 p.m. during Daylight Savings Time.

**Office Hours:** Monday-Friday  
from 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Make sure to leave by closing time because the gates will close overnight. No one wants that much spookiness!