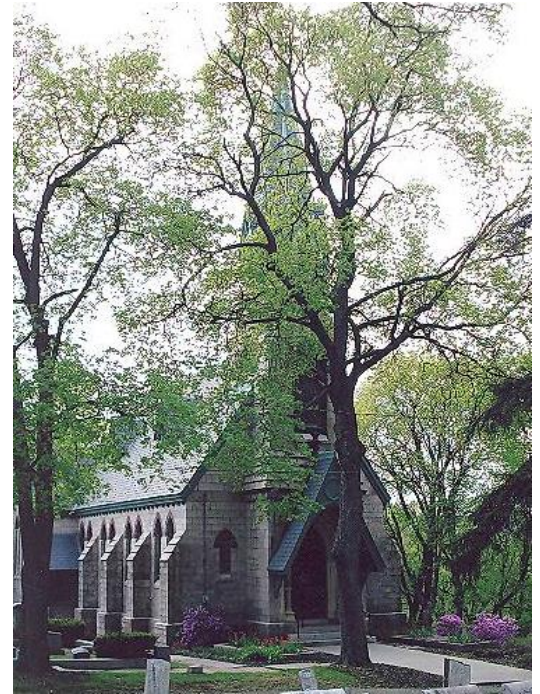


## Springtime At My Garden Cemetery

The long dormant sleep of winter is coming to a close. Gradually the temperature warms up, the day light hours grow longer, and the tall piles of plowed snow have begun to melt. The snowflakes are replaced by rain drops, cold and icy at first, but then getting warmer as the days go by. The mountain fed springs that run through my grounds spill into the pond, filling it up. Like early spring sentries, a long V-shaped line of geese flying north can be heard overhead as their honks herald the arrival of spring. Spring, oh, glorious spring! Nature all around me is waking up from winter's slumber. The grass, bent over from the weight of the snow is lifting towards the sky. The buds have formed on the trees, and within a short period of time, the radiant patchwork of spring colors will appear. White and pink dogwoods dot the landscape, violets appear throughout the grounds, and the magnolia bush at the entrance gate erupts into pink petal flowers with white centers. The timid, tiny balls of leaves on the many varieties of deciduous trees unfurl, opening wide their leaves to soak up the rain and the sun. Soon the purple azalea bushes aside of the chapel entrance and the red tulips at the columbarium will burst into blossom.



My grounds keepers, Bob and Tom, have returned to work from a two month layoff. They are assisted by Randy, Trinity Church's sexton. There is much work to be done. The grounds are littered with branch debris from the heavy snow and ice of winter. The grounds are also littered with trash and windblown paper from the Market St. traffic and from the school children who hasten across my property. There may be leaves left from the fall that need to be cleaned up. All of my grass cutting equipment must be serviced, with batteries charged, oil changes and new filters, and possibly new tires on the riding lawn tractors. Chain saws, leaf blowers, and grass cutters are inspected and serviced with new wire ordered for the grass cutters. The property clean up is often slowed down by the heavy and frequent rains of March and April.

A very special day for me is in April. It is Arbor Day, which is celebrated the last Friday in April. Arbor Day reminds the public of the importance of trees to the environment and our duty to inspect and protect them, and to replace them when they are rotted or diseased. Trees are used commercially for timbering in home construction, paper mills, etc., for food consumption from fruit and nut harvesting of apples, oranges, etc., and



by landscapers to enhance the ascetic value to homes. My acres of trees and shrubs are not for commercial purposes, but rather for social pleasure and enjoyment. They clean the air and provide oxygen and cool shade for visitors and shelters for the small animals and the birds, a tranquil setting for walkers and joggers and for mourners visiting the gravesites of their loved ones, and a panoramic palate of colors and artistry throughout the year.

And my red maple trees are the pride of the county. My property may have the highest concentration of red maples per acre than any other area in the entire state.

Look closely at my trees and see how their varying shades of spring greenery differentiate each one from the other. And, of course, my many red maple trees are astonishing to behold.

Thanks to my committee members like Frank Snyder, DCNR, and Joe Orłowsky, Shade Tree Commission, a tree replacement program was created in 1999 and implemented in 2000 to inspect my trees for disease and rot, identifying the ones that must be cut down, and replacing them with 10 newly planted trees each year. The trees are removed by an outside service and can be quite costly with an average cost to remove 3-5 trees at \$4,000. Part of this cost is offset



by asking the public to sponsor a tree for \$400. The sponsored tree can be done as a memorial or in thanksgiving for someone or something. Sponsors and the public are invited to attend the Arbor Day celebration which is a delightful and festive event. At the Arbor Day service, ecology high school students read poems and essays about trees. Also in attendance are representatives from Pottsville City Council, the Shade Tree Commission, and DCNR. Each sponsored tree is blessed by the rector of Trinity Episcopal Church. The sponsors are sent thank you cards, the memorial plaque, and a picture of the tree being blessed.

April's Arbor Day ushers in spring with visions of the richness, fragrance, the beauty of nature, and the rejuvenation of life. Spring replaces the images of cold winds, piles of snow, and short days of light with the promise of sunshine and warmth. While April is a month to truly enjoy and appreciate the natural side of my cemetery, the month of May reminds all of us of what my true purpose is as a cemetery. It is a resting place for our loved ones. On the Friday before Memorial Day, 3-4 bus loads of the Clark Elementary school children come to the cemetery. They are met and greeted by several representatives from the Joint War Veterans' Association. The school children are given new small American flags. They are asked to find and remove the old flag from each of the veterans' grave sites and to replace it with a new flag. The old flags are collected for the Veterans' Association to properly dispose of them. Prayers are read by someone from Trinity Episcopal Church, taps are played by one of the veterans, and then the veterans perform a 21 gun salute. The service, while evidencing the exuberance of the school children finding and replacing the flags, also holds the dignity and solemnity of remembering and paying tribute to our service men and women, and to all the people buried at Charles Baber Cemetery.

Following Memorial Day, when our Farmer's Almanac tells us it is safe to plant flowers without fear of frost, a friend of the cemetery, Kurt K., plants an assortment of flowers in the two large cast iron urns that sit inside the front gates. At one time these heavy urns sat atop the two Egyptian Revival style gatehouses. However, their weight load and damage to one urn caused concern of toppling and structural damage to the gatehouse roofs. And so they had to be lifted off the roofs and placed on the ground.

With the arrival of spring, and after the frequency of spring showers have subsided, the foot traffic of joggers and walkers, and school children increases. While the walkers and joggers may be passing through the property quickly, many do several loops around the grounds or walk the upper section and then the lower section before returning home. The school children linger a little longer with their friends or watch the squirrels, rabbits, and groundhogs skitter out of sight. A bird may be circling overhead in search of food to feed its young.

My property in winter tells a story of sedateness, dormancy, bareness with the stark white beauty of ice, cold, and swirling snow. Yet, there is an underlying anticipation and excitement of the spring season arriving. The spring season emerges with its own story. It is a story of energy, birth, growth, joy, increasing days of sunlight, blossoms, fragrances, and a kaleidoscope of colors. If you haven't visited me or walked my grounds, then I invite you to come and enjoy my natural beauty in the spring of my life.