

Who Owns Union Cemetery?

Union Cemetery is a family cemetery located in Wyckoff, Bergen County, New Jersey. It is accessed by a 350' lane (33' wide) from Franklin Avenue. The cemetery is a "notched" rectangle, being approximately 200' x 220'. (See map attached.) There is no owner of record and has not been at least since 1968. ("The Melancholy Cemetery Nobody Owns," *Ridgewood Sunday News*, July 14, 1968, p. 32)

Find A Grave lists 234 people buried in the cemetery. The earliest stone, which is not now visible, was dated 1764 and the most recent 1932. There are likely many graves without markers or whose markers have disappeared. The Wyckoff Historical Society is presently maintaining the cemetery and repairing and resetting broken stones. Most of the burials are Van Blarcoms and members of their extended families over several generations.

Ownership

I conclude from my research that the cemetery's ownership is divided. The eastern half of the cemetery is owned by the descendants of John Van Blarcom (1751-1829) John had eight children who had children, so the number of living descendants could be in the hundreds, if not thousands. There has never been a deed for this part of the cemetery as a separate property. (For more, see Eastern part of the Cemetery below.) The western part of the cemetery is owned by Waldwick United Methodist Church and the heirs of the Ackerson, Everson, Mallinson, Ackerman, and Van Blarcom families. (For more, see Western part of the Cemetery below.) The other conclusion from my research is that the present boundaries of the cemetery are generally consistent with the boundaries established in 1870 and 1926. There is no evidence of Union Cemetery Association (or other various names) owning any property at the Union Cemetery.

Union Cemetery Property

John Van Blarcom (1751-1829), of Franklin Township, purchased Romopock lot 27 from James Parker of on May 1, 1793. This 142 acres and was recorded on 30 Jun 1870 in Bergen County Deeds Book T7, page 399 (T7-399)¹. John's will was probated in 1829 and he left 52 acres of the old homestead to his son James. (No deed has been found.) James Van Blarcom (1779-1849) and his wife Sarah Bertholf had two children, Stephen J. Van Blarcom and Rebecca Van Blarcom (wife of Abraham Hammond). When James died in 1849, his property (now over 100 acres) descended to his children Stephen and Rebecca. They each received land that included part of the present cemetery. Their property boundaries went through the center of the present cemetery. (See map Union Cemetery: Early Deeds)

Eastern Section of the Union Cemetery

¹ All deeds are recorded in Bergen County at the Clerk's Office. They will be abbreviated by Book "number" and Page. For example, T7-399.

Rebecca Van Blarcom Hammond (1800-1866,wife of Abraham) inherited the eastern half of her father's property on 28 Aug 1849 (T7-416). The burial ground was excepted from this property "as it was given by John Van Blarcom to his children and grandchildren", but the bounds are not delineated. John Van Blarcom's will written 14 Apr 1829 mentions the road now known as Van Blarcom's lane, but does not mention the cemetery. (The will can be found in New Jersey State Archives estate 4231B or Bergen County Wills Liber C p. 344-347) No record of the gift of the cemetery has been found.

When Abraham Hammond died the children of Abraham and Rebecca inherited their property and all of the lot Rebecca inherited from her father was transferred to son, Stephen Hammond, on April 20, 1876. (T9-246). The burial ground was excepted, but the bounds were not defined.

When Steven Hammond died in 1890 his property descended to his three sons (Bergen County wills, volume T, page 83) and the part of the property north of Franklin Avenue was transferred to Richard Hammond with a description that was vague and did not include the exception for the cemetery but referenced the property of Steven. (N13-322)

John B. Hammond probably received Richard V. Hammond's property by inheritance. (No deed found; will not consulted.) In 1926 John B. Hammond sold it out of the family in two deeds. (1436-273 and 1448-551). In these deeds the boundary of the eastern half of the cemetery is defined, virtually identical to the boundaries on Wyckoff tax map today.

Western Section of the Union Cemetery

The western part of the cemetery belonged to Stephen Van Blarcom (1802-1876). It was not a cemetery when he inherited the land in 1849 (T7-412), but he sold plots for \$25 each in this section adjacent to the old burying ground. (Except the Methodists got their plot for \$1.) Three deeds have been identified within the western section:

- Stephen Van Blarcom to Jacob Ackerson and John I. Ackerson, September 3, 1863 (B7-82) (Sophia Catherine Everson is mentioned in the body of the deed. She is the mother of Pvt. Benjamin Everson, buried in Union Cemetery in 1863. Marker is not visible.)
- Stephen Van Blarcom to Aaron C. Ackerman and Henry and Joseph Mallinson, February 18, 1864, (V5-526)
- Stephen Van Blarcom to the Trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church of New Prospect, April 11, 1865 (C6-7).
- There may be other sales, as Stephen would have continued to own any unsold land after 1870. However, there is no evidence of burials in the western section outside of the three plots named above.

If these owners never sold the plots then these properties would belong to descendants of the original owners and to the Waldwick United Methodist Church (successor to the Methodist Episcopal Church of New Prospect).

Stephen sold his property (excluding the cemetery) to Elizabeth G. Noble (wife of Charles E.) and Frances J. Platt (wife of Rufus D. Platt) on 1 Jul 1870 (U7-268). This deed defined the boundaries, generally matching the boundaries on Wyckoff tax map today. (See map Union Cemetery: Deeds Defining Cemetery Boundaries; also see notes regarding boundaries below.)

Layout of Union Cemetery

The cemetery divides into several sections along the lines of the property history. The oldest part is near the lane in the eastern section. The family cemetery appears to have grown out and down the hill (east) from there. Since this burial ground reflects many generations, the markers could have multiple surnames, which might include Terwilliger, Hammond, Smith, Coe, Hopper, Blauvelt, Demarest, Bell, etc. (See suggestions for further research, below.) The western part of the cemetery is divided by families. The 1863 plot (Ackerson/Everson) contains a well-marked Kinsey family plot and a family marker with the name Ackerson and no other associated stones. The 1864 plot is divided in turn into Ackerman (southern half) and Mallinson (northern half) plots. The Methodist Church plot in the far northwest corner deserves investigation to see which families used the plot. Names include Hannon, Strong, and Kough. South of the plots that Stephen sold was land that the lot owners (1863 and 1864 deeds) could use to tie horses. There is no evidence of grave markers in this section. (See map Union Cemetery: Sections) It is also possible that the southern part of the family plot, set off by a low stone wall, was the place to tie up horses for that cemetery.

Lane to Union Cemetery

The lane leading to the cemetery is not a right-of-way but is part of the cemetery plot. The eastern boundary of the lane is first mentioned in Rebecca's deed T7-416. The fifth call (or line of the plot) is along fence on east side of road to the burial ground. Stephen's deed T7-412 references the same fence in call 10, the line being, "along the fence to the burial ground." Excepted thereout was "a road of one rod [16.5'] wide from aforesaid public road to the burial ground to the heirs of John Van Blarcom decd." (The cemetery itself is not excepted. The western half did not yet exist.) When Stephen created the western section of the cemetery, he created a road next to the one to the family burying ground, also of 1 rod wide. The western boundary of the road is defined by the 1870 deed from Van Blarcom to Noble U7-268. Today's lane combines both roads and is 2 rods or 33' wide.

NOTES

School

In 1859 Abraham Hammond sold Wyckoff a lot of land next to the road to the burial ground to be used for a school. (L5-243) On the 1861 map the schoolhouse is shown near the Waldwick-Wyckoff border (either a different schoolhouse or in error). The 1876 map shows the school at the location near the burial ground. The deed included the condition that if the property ceased to be used as a school, it was to revert to Abraham or his heirs. By 1914 the school property was abandoned. It was released by the Board of Education to John B. Hammond, Abraham's great grandson, by deed 876-200.

Boundaries

The boundaries of the cemetery are almost the same on the tax map today as written in the first deeds (1870 and 1926). The lane leading to the cemetery is shorter by about 40 feet, probably due to realignment of Franklin Avenue. The discrepancies on the western boundary (about 10' on the long western edge) may be due to further refinement of boundaries or may be due to ceding of land to lots north and west of the cemetery. There is no visual evidence that would indicate that the cemetery has been "trimmed." It would be a good idea to ensure that the fence as presently installed is on the boundaries as defined in the tax map and/or the deeds.

Church

I found no evidence that a church or chapel stood near the cemetery. The school lot was not earlier owned by the church. The Methodist history by William E. Bates published in the "Souvenir Program for the 130th Celebration of the Waldwick Methodist Episcopal Church" does not refer to such a building. It does indicate that many members and officials of the early days are buried in Union Cemetery. The Assembly of God Church, which now owns the land next to the cemetery, bought the property in 1984 from a private owner (deed 6843-917).

Ramopock Lot

The location of the lot was determined from Claire Tholl's map of Romopock tract and correlation with later Van Blarcom deeds that include the cemetery.

Ground Truthing the Western Section

A visit to the cemetery affirms the interpretation of the cemetery "sections." Burials accord with the Mallinson Ackerman section. The Methodist section has an assortment of names as one would expect in a section for a church rather than a family. Further investigation is needed of church affiliation of those in this section is needed. The Ackerson/Everson has one Ackerson marker, although it is a family marker, and not an individual monument. Investigation of the Roswell-Kinsey family plot in the Ackerson/Everson section is needed. The "Big Rock" used as a point of reference in deed V5-526 exists and correlates with the plot placement. There is even at least one "heap of stones" that still exists at the southwest corner of the Akerson/Everson plot that is referenced in deed B7-82. The area to tie up horses has no visible grave markers.

Further research:

- Waldwick UMC records were not consulted. Deeds for the New Prospect Methodist Episcopal Church were consulted and found to all be in present Waldwick, except the cemetery plot named above.
- David Van Blarcom in his paper, "How this land became Union Cemetery," mentions a deed of March 1, 1797, of 8 acres from John J. Van Blarcom and Isaac Van Blarcom to Paramus Methodist Episcopal Church. I have been unable to locate this deed. There is an 8-acre woodlot associated with this Van Blarcom family, but it does not include the Union Cemetery land.
- Analyze burials in Union Cemetery by date of death and by relationship to the Van Blarcom family and/or the Waldwick UMC and the other families who purchased lots. Particularly identify the relationships of the people buried in the "family" cemetery to verify that assumption.
- Pursue documentation of John Van Blarcom's gift of the cemetery to his children and grandchildren. His probate files should be examined.
- Although it is unlikely that the three western plots were resold, a thorough examination would review deeds and inheritance to determine present ownership. No sale by the Methodist Church was found.
- Examine probate files to further document transfer of land in the Van Blarcom and Hammond families.
- Investigation of Methodist and Kinsey burials, as mentioned in Notes: Ground Truthing the Western Section.
- Investigate origin of name, Union Cemetery, and the nature of the Union Cemetery Association.

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April 6, 2019

UNION CEMETERY: Early Deeds



John Van Blarcom (1751-1859) purchased lot 27 in the Romopock Tract from James Park, 1 May 1793 (recorded in Bergen County Deeds T7-399). **Yellow** is a rough outline of this lot. Van Blarcom also owned additional land.

In 1849 the property that includes the cemetery was divided between two grandchildren of John: Stephen Van Blarcom (1802-1876) **(purple)** and Rebecca Van Blarcom Hammond (about 1800-1866). **(blue)**

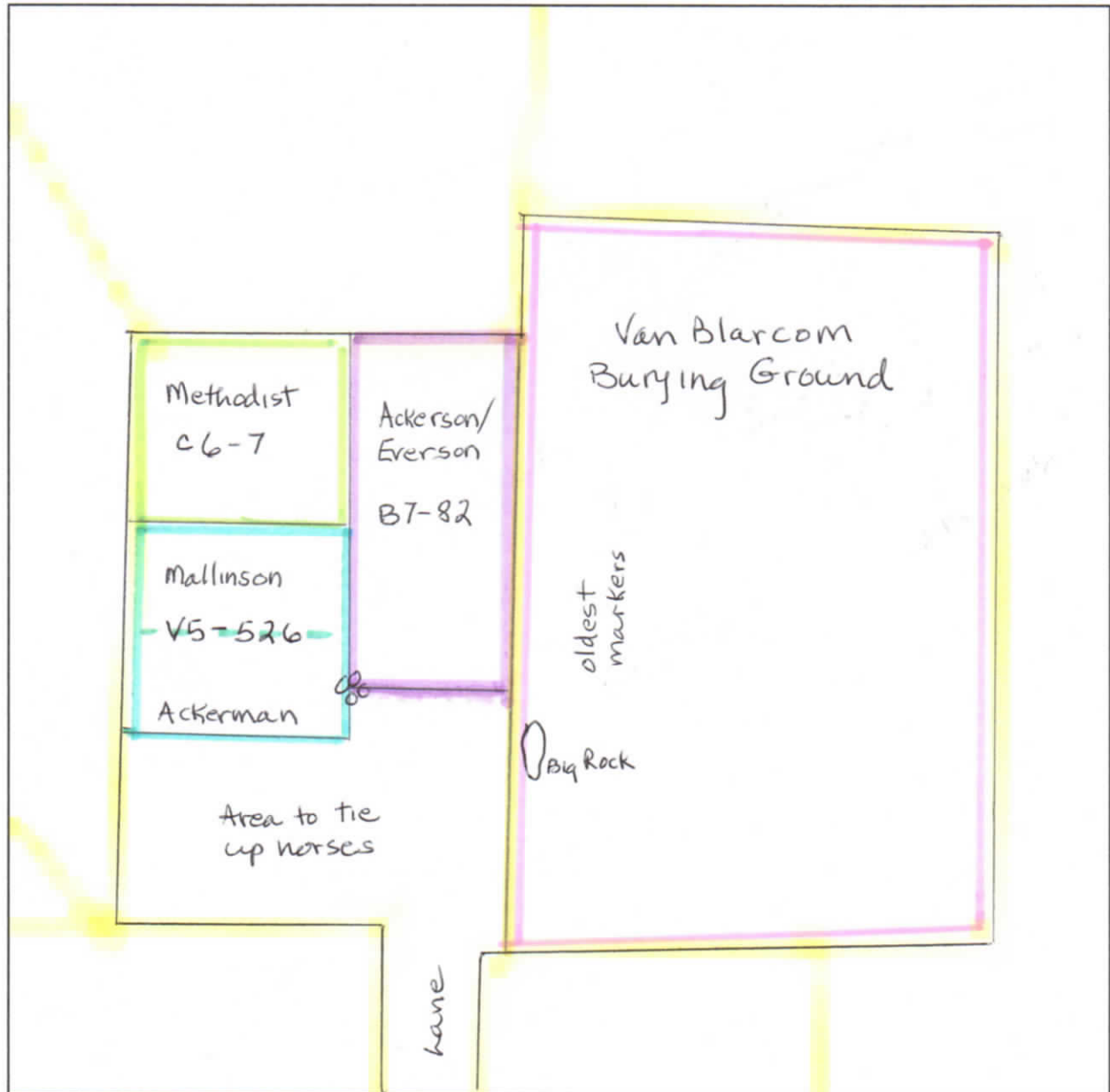
UNION CEMETERY: Deeds Defining Cemetery Boundaries



Stephen Van Blarcom (1802-1876) established the western boundary of the cemetery when he sold his property in 1870. (purple)

John B. Hammond (great grandson of Rebecca Van Blarcom Hammond) established the eastern boundary of the cemetery when he sold property in 1926. (blue)

UNION CEMETERY: Sections



Eastern Section: Van Blarcom Burying Ground

Western Sections:

Ackerson/ Everson

Methodist

Mallinson

Ackerman

oo = heap of stones