

Dedication of Headstones

On behalf of the Belmont Mansion Association, I would like to thank the Nashville City Cemetery Association for placing these headstones. I would also like to thank them for all of the work they do to preserve and restore this important place and educate people about it.

We are here today to dedicate the headstones of London and Salley, two formerly-enslaved residents of Nashville. If it were not for burial records, we would not know of their existence or their names. As of now, no other records of their lives have been found.

London was buried here on February 16, 1850. He lived at Adelia and Joseph Acklen's town house on Cherry Street in downtown Nashville. His age at the time of this death and his cause of death are unrecorded. We do know that it cost \$2.00 to bury him, thanks to burial records.

While this is all we know about London specifically, we know a little more about the enslaved community in which he lived. From the 1850 census taken on Sept 7th of that year, there were 28 enslaved people living at the Cherry Street house; ranging in ages of 80 to six months. There were ten males and ten females over the age of 15, with nine children under the age of 12.

When Sally [sic] died twelve years later, she was living at the Acklen country house, Belmont. She died of pneumonia at the age of 23 and was buried on March 21, 1862. From the 1860 census we know that she lived, worked, and died in a community of 32 enslaved people. This was a community of ten adult males, ten adult females, and 12 children under the age of 15. It is likely that one or more of those twelve children was hers.

I remember the day I discovered these burial records. Salley's entry stood out. March 21st 1862 was just a month after the occupation of Nashville by Union Troops. Those were turbulent days for everyone in Nashville. Salley almost lived to taste freedom in this life. She did taste freedom in the larger life. Could she even have hoped by the time of her death for freedom for her child or children? Who did her children grow up to be?

May these headstones bear witness to their lives and the hundreds of others buried here, who, like them, who were born in slavery and knew freedom on this earth, or only knew freedom after crossing the River Jordan.