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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VISITORS DISCOVER THE HISTORY AND MYSTERIES OF MAPLE GROVE CEMETERY

Stories from the Grave

Briarwood, New York – September 21, 2013 – As he led members and friends of the Briarwood Action Network along the tranquil paths of the beautiful, non-sectarian Maple Grove Cemetery, noted historian and keeper of the flame, Carl Ballenas, recounted fascinating stories about the 65-acre site and those who are interred there. “The Friends of Maple Grove want to celebrate the life stories of those who are buried here,” Mr. Ballenas explained. The cemetery was created in 1875 when several Brooklyn businessmen, including William Cogswell, formed the Maple Grove Association and purchased the land.

Those buried in the cemetery range from former slaves to renowned artists and founding families of Queens. Grave sites for familiar names as Rikers, Van Siclen, Sutphin, and so on can be found on the grounds. In addition, African Americans prominent in the success of the underground railroad that provided a means for runaway slaves to travel north and gain their freedom are also buried in Maple Grove.

A celebrated artist who is buried in Maple Grove Cemetery is pianist Rosina Lhévinne. After emigrating to the United States, she and her husband joined the faculty of the Institute of Musical Art which later became The Juilliard School. Among her notable students were Van Cliburn, winner of the first quadrennial International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow in 1958, James Levine, Music Director of the Metropolitan Opera, and John Williams, composer and conductor of the Boston Pops Orchestra.

Another celebrity, actress/interior designer Elsie de Wolfe, known as Lady Mendl, is also interred in the cemetery. Lady Mendl scandalized French diplomatic society when she attended a formal dress ball and made her entrance turning handsprings. Cole Porter celebrated her acrobatic prowess in his song “Anything Goes” with the lyrics:

"When you hear that Lady Mendl, standing up
Now turns a handspring landing up-
On her toes
Anything goes!"

—more—

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As the most informative tour ended, Mr. Ballenas underscored the importance of sharing the life stories of those who have predeceased us. "They're never gone unless they're forgotten," he stated, and he encouraged us to share the stories of our friends and relatives who are buried there with The Friends of Maple Grove Cemetery.

[Click here](#) to see photos of the event on the Briarwood Action Network facebook page.

The Briarwood Action Network (BAN) is a neighborhood civic group dedicated to improving the quality of life in Briarwood, Queens.

For additional information, or to schedule an interview with Larry Sherman, Director of Communications of the Briarwood Action Network, e-mail Larry Sherman at ls Sherman.ban@gmail.com.

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