



# A Gateway Into History

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Mike Van Yahres

## A Third-generation Arborist Tends Hollywood's Trees

For Mike Van Yahres, there's nothing quite like seeing the world from the top of old shade trees—like those found at Hollywood Cemetery.

"They're so big, and the views from them are spectacular. The branches are so big they're like walkways," he says. Some of Hollywood's trees are over 200 years old.

As Hollywood's arborist, he oversees the needs of the trees in the 135-acre cemetery. He pays special attention to the cemetery's monarch trees, which he described as "good, respectable species, over 36 inches in diameter, with a projected lifespan of 30 years or more." His favorites include a tulip poplar that is the largest tree in Hollywood, a 140' bald cypress in Long Bottom, and a black gum in the center of the cemetery that is "a real showstopper in fall." The tree, which resembles a bonsai, turns a brilliant orange and red at that time of year.

His firm, Van Yahres Tree Company, first began working with Hollywood in 1990. Perhaps the firm's biggest challenge to date was the damage produced by Hurricane Isabel in September 2003.

"We had lost over 100 mature trees. It looked like a war zone. There were trees down everywhere," says David Gilliam, general manager for Hollywood Cemetery. The storm hit on a Thursday, and he contacted Mike right away. The first order of business was to provide access to an open grave. "We had a funeral scheduled for the Monday after the hurricane hit. A huge oak had fallen on the open grave." By Friday at noon, a Van Yahres crew was already clearing a path to the gravesite. The funeral proceeded as scheduled. "This splendid reaction has been a hallmark of service by Van Yahres."



*A bucket truck can reach as high as 65 feet.*

Mike's grandfather, George, started the Van Yahres Tree Company in upstate New York in 1919. Much of his work involved traveling up and down the East Coast, preserving ancient trees on the estates of families like the Duponts, the Firestones, and the Rockefellers. An innovative arborist who held several patents, he was also very successful. "During the '30s, he had 75 trucks working all over the East Coast," says Mike.

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## Mike Van Yahres (continued from page 1)

In 1923, George was one of the arborists hired to help save the trees of Monticello—a client of the Van Yahres Company that remains to this day. George liked the area, and relocated the business to Charlottesville in 1949.

George's son, Mitch—Mike's father—also joined the firm. He was the first Van Yahres engaged by Hollywood Cemetery, and made an assessment of the cemetery's approximately 2000 trees in 1994. In addition to his tree work, Mitch served as the Mayor of Charlottesville, and was instrumental in the development of the Downtown Mall. He also served in the General Assembly from 1981-2005. To get away from the pressures of the day, he would go out into the field and grind stumps. "That was the only time he was unreachable," says Mike.

Growing up, Mike was told not to climb trees. "My father would not allow me to work in the field," he says. Unable to resist his youthful urge, he found a sympathetic conspirator.



*A grapple log loader (made in Austria) is used to lift and load logs into a truck.*

"The superintendent would sneak me out there on Saturdays." He fondly recalls one summer when, as a college student, he worked his way across the country as a tree climber.

Mike, who holds a Master's degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Virginia, began working for the family business 30 years ago. (In addition to the tree company, Mike and his wife, Peggy, also own a landscape architecture firm, Van Yahres Studio, which merged with Richmond-based BCWH Architects in February 2013. The studio has provided valuable assistance to Hollywood with its master plan and other projects.)

Although he no longer climbs trees, Mike enjoys working with his company's clients, who he describes as "individuals

and institutions interested in the very highest caliber of work." His institutional clients include Emory & Henry College, Martha Jefferson Hospital, University of Richmond and Saint Catherine's School.

Van Yahres Tree Company is a member of the prestigious Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), and all of its key employees are certified by the International Society of Arboriculture. The crews at Hollywood engage in tree pruning and removal, environmentally-friendly pest control and management, and nutrient enrichment of the soil. The latter includes injecting humus into the ground to stimulate an environment similar to that of forest floors. The company also provides lightning protection for monarch trees.

His crews also provide expertise in recognizing when trees need to be removed, either for poor health or to protect monuments and other structures, and where new trees should be planted.

"Any recommendation for a new tree involves a very thoughtful process," says David Gilliam. "When you plan and plant a new tree in Hollywood you need to be thinking 100 years down the road."

Mike derives a special pleasure from his work at Hollywood Cemetery. "What's rewarding is that it's probably the finest collection of trees in one concentrated area that you're liable to find in this part of the world," says Mike. "It is a wonderful example of a mature, native forest in a maintained landscape." *Photographs courtesy of Van Yahres Tree Company.*



*A tree has been cut down section by section. The pink strap has been connected to a crane (off the photo) which will lift the massive trunk section into a truck.*



March 21, 2015

## *Volunteers Give TLC to Hollywood Roses on Work Day*

“I love old roses,” said Suzanne Miladin, a member of the Salisbury Garden Club. “I get my rose fix coming here.”

Miladin was one of the 29 volunteers who gathered at Palmer Chapel on the morning of March 21, ready to take part in Hollywood’s Third Annual Rose Work Day. The helpers—many wearing sunhats and gloves, and armed with clippers and loppers—were eager to get the cemetery’s roses ready for spring.



*2015 Rose Day volunteers gather in front of Palmer Chapel.*

“Thank you for giving us your Saturday morning,” said event organizer, Connie Hilker, to the group. Hilker, the owner of Hartwood Roses near Fredericksburg, has overseen the work day since it began in 2013. As part of her task, she has carefully mapped and kept detailed notes on all of the 140 roses at Hollywood Cemetery. About 110 were targeted for this year’s work day, including many antique varieties.



*Members of the Richmond Rose Society gather before work begins.*

After giving instructions to the volunteers, she divided them into teams. Each team received a red binder that held a map along with detailed information and pruning tips for each assigned rose.

Some volunteers were first-timers, like Riley Hawkins, who arrived with his grandparents, Pam and Ju-Ju Hawkins. Others such as Alesa Hemenway and Caroline Tisdale—friends since their years at Virginia Tech—have worked each year at the event.

Hemenway recalled the first year of the project, when “some of the roses were six feet tall and so overgrown you couldn’t walk between the graves.” Thanks to the work the volunteers accomplished that day, she found the next year’s work much easier.

Newcomers worked side by side with experienced gardeners, like Al Minutolo and Lynn Pappas, who showed them the ropes. Hilker provided the groups with an alcohol spray to clean their clippers between roses, to avoid spreading disease. Orange flags marked the locations of the roses, making them easy for the volunteers to find.

At noon, the group gathered for a Sally Bell lunch provided by Friends of Hollywood Cemetery, before heading back to work. Many of the volunteers planned to return in the spring to visit the roses and “see the fruits of our labor,” as Hemenway put it.

“Last spring and summer, the roses were beautiful as a result of the attention that they had received during the first two annual volunteer days,” said Hilker. To the helpers that gathered this March, she said, “I thank you, and Hollywood thanks you.”



*Accomplished rosarian Al Minutolo mentors new Rose Day volunteers--Barbara and Joe Brancoli.*

Rose Work Day is held each year on the third Saturday in March. “We welcome anyone who has an appreciation for the roses at Hollywood to join us. “No experience is necessary,” says Hilker.

*A map of notable trees and roses is available to visitors in the Hollywood Cemetery office.*

### **Hollywood Rose Day Volunteers March 21, 2015**

Tracy Anderson	Riley Hawkins	Catharine Moser
Julie Ashman	Alesa Hemenway	Sharon Pajka
Barbara Brancoli	Connie Hilker	Lynn Pappas
Joseph Brancoli	Denny King	Carolyn Pegram
Lisa Caperton	Jenny King	Debbie Priebe
Pat Cash	Grace LeRose	Dean Siwec
Martha Davidson	Candy Lindenzweig	Caroline Tisdale
Laura Deck	Kathy Maitland	Nanette Whitt
Julius Hawkins	Suzanne Miladin	Richard Whitt
Pam Hawkins	Al Minutolo	



## *The Mysterious Life and Death of Tokukichiro Abe*

A monument engraved in old Japanese script has long intrigued visitors to Hollywood Cemetery. The large granite stone, located in the Lawn section near the Davis Family Circle, tells the story of Tokukichiro Abe, a commissioner of the Japanese tobacco industry who died of typhoid fever and was buried in Richmond in 1907.



*A photograph of Mr. T. Abe said to be taken in March 1906 prior to his departure to the United States.*

“He was from the upper levels of Japanese society, and the Emperor of Japan was among those who attended his departure” to the U.S., according to R. Scott Wallinger in a 1999 report on Abe’s death. Over the years, various parties have sought to learn more about Abe – a man so well regarded in his home land that numerous Japanese visitors have journeyed to Richmond to pay their respects.

He was born March 25, 1866 in Koyoshi, in the Akita Prefecture of northern Japan, an area known for its rice fields and sake. An intelligent young man, he enrolled in Agricultural College of Tokyo University in 1888. According to a journal about Abe

published in 1991 by the Tobacco Academic Studies Center, Tokukichiro was actually born with the surname “Niinomata.” In 1891, at age 25, he was adopted by the high-ranking Abe (pron. Ah-bay) family. Prominent Japanese families may adopt a promising young man from the community when they lack a male heir, says translator Tadao Uchisawa. “It’s not unusual.”

After graduating from college in 1892, Abe worked in an agricultural testing center in the Nagano Prefecture. He married a high school teacher, Masako “Masa” Ito, who was also an English translator. The couple had two sons and four daughters. Coming from a well-regarded family, and with his talent and intelligence, Abe soon rose to an esteemed position.

### **Appointed Tobacco Commissioner**

Abe was appointed in 1897 as the commissioner and official expert of the Imperial Tobacco Monopoly Bureau of Japan, part of the Ministry of Finance. According to the website of the Tobacco and Salt Museum in Tokyo, cigarettes were introduced to Japan in the latter part of the 19th century and “the indigenous tobacco industry flourished as never before.” The Meiji government “was quick to realize the value of tobacco as a potential source of revenue. In 1904, all stages of processing and sale were brought under government control as a national monopoly, which remained in effect until 1985.”

In March 1906, the Japanese government charged Abe with the task of researching the tobacco industries in western countries and purchasing tobacco to import and export. A photograph of Abe from this time, which appears in the TASC journal, shows a slim, distinguished balding man with a moustache. He is elegantly dressed in a black tuxedo with tails. A top hat lies on a table nearby. The photograph was said to be taken during his audience with Emperor Meiji, before his departure by ship to the U.S. *(See photograph on left.)*

Abe settled in the thriving tobacco hub of Richmond, living on East Broad Street in the well-heeled Church Hill community. “In Richmond, he achieved a high level of esteem among the leaders of the tobacco industry,” writes Wallinger.



*Family portrait (July 1899). Abe is age 34; his son, Tatsui, age 8, center front row.*

Abe then traveled to France, and likely made visits to England and Germany. On the voyage back from France to the U.S., his health took a turn for the worse. “Some people said he got ill on board,” says Uchisawa.

In December 1906, Abe was hospitalized at Virginia Hospital

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*Abe's funeral cortege at Hollywood Cemetery.*

(later a part of the Medical College of Virginia) for typhoid fever. While in the hospital, he was visited by friends. A physician, Dr. K. Ikeda, arrived from Tokyo to help at his bedside. Despite the efforts, Abe passed away three weeks later on Monday, January 14, 1907, at 1:30 p.m. in the afternoon. He was just 41.

### **Tribute of Respect**

On January 15, members of the Tobacco Trade in Richmond met and adopted a resolution in Abe's honor. The group noted that "we deeply regret the sudden departure from this life of Dr. T. Abe, who has been called away from our midst in the flower of his manhood...Although in a foreign land he had quickly made many friends amongst us who are shocked at the sudden loss which has befallen us."



*Formally attired mourners pose in front of Abe's hearse.*

According to an article in the *Richmond News Leader*, Abe's body was embalmed on January 16. The article noted that Dr. Ikeda, "said today that he would do nothing with the body until a cable was received from Tokio [Tokyo]. It is believed that the remains of Abe will be shipped to Japan for interment."

Yet, because Abe had contracted a contagious disease, his body could not be returned home. A service was held in the chapel of Hollywood Cemetery on January 17 at 11 a.m., led by the Rev. J.Y. Downman of All Saints Church with music provided by some of the members of St. Paul's Episcopal Church choir. Pallbearers (E.K. Vietor, John L. Wingo, James N. Boyd, J.I. Miller, C.D. Larus, Rutherford Rose, Henry Carrington, and W.W. Morton) included leaders prominent in Richmond's tobacco industry. Abe was buried in the Lawn section, near the Davis family circle.

Interestingly, Abe's hair was shipped to his family that February and buried in his hometown. "Confucious says that

your body, skin and hair belong to your parents," says Meng. "If his family couldn't have the actual body, then they could have the second best thing." Abe received both Christian and Buddhist funeral services in his homeland.

### **Visit by Son and Grandson**

Numerous individuals from Japan have visited his grave in Hollywood over the years, including his oldest son, Tatsui, and his grandson in 1973. Dr. Tatsui Abe wrote of the visit in a poem called "Richmond," collected in the TASC journal, and translated by Uchisawa. "I meet my father's tomb here in the huge cemetery, like a park," he begins. He says the pair brought flowers and "Japanese sake, which he loved, and poured it on his tomb." Once wet, his father's name on the stone "becomes more pronounced." He notes that "the flowers that put the shadows on his tomb is the dogwood" and that "behind the tomb, the sun is faced to Japan." He observes that his son only knows Tokukichiro by a photo. Their visit draws to a close, though "it's hard to leave here from my father's tomb while the smell of sake remains." Standing by the grave, he says that the stone still looks new after more than 60 years, and appreciates the efforts of those who preserved the tomb of "the stranger, not related to anybody else."

*The author is grateful to R. Scott Wallinger's 1999 "Report on Inquiries related to the Death and Interment of Dr. Tokukichiro Abe," along with its addendum, conducted on behalf of executives in the Japanese tobacco industry and archived at the Virginia Historical Society; and to Maggie L. Walker Governor's School instructors Sharon Meng and Tadao Uchisawa for their translations of the monument and the TASC journal.*

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*Tokukichiro Abe's monument  
at Hollywood Cemetery.*

## Abe's monument:

Tony Grappone, owner of A.P. Grappone & Son says the headstone's extensive Japanese inscription was carved by his great-grandfather, Alfonso. "He was very proud of it," he says.

The 5'1" granite stone has writing on both sides, including a rendering of Abe's name in Japanese and some brief biographical details in English (including listing January 15, 1907, the date of his death in the time zone in Japan). The rest of the headstone "is written in Kanji, which uses the same characters as classical Chinese so there is a lack of punctuation," says translator Sharon Meng. "It's a formal way to write." According to Meng, the letters – read from right to left and top to bottom – on the south side of his monument translate to the following:

*"Mr. Tokukichiro Abe was born in Akita Prefecture, Yuli county, Koyoshi Village. In the year 1892 [Abe] graduated from Imperial Agriculture University. In the year 1897, he was appointed to the Ministry of the Finance. In March 1906, he was appointed to both the France and the U.S. He became ill at this place and unfortunately passed away. His character was that he was indifferent to fame or gain, he was lawful and patriotic, and honored his duty. A man of such quality is hard to find. At middle age he died before his time. **What a shame.** Those who knew him in the U.S. got together to build this memorial to pass on his virtues forever."*

Meng says the writing includes the phrase "yao zhe" (or "yoosetsu" in Japanese), a term used when children die. "It's a way of saying he did not reach his potential. He died before his time." She also noted that use of the phrase "zhen ke xi" – **"what a shame,"** in Chinese.



# Overlooks Will Enhance Prime Viewing Locations

With its dramatic elevation overlooking the James River, it's no surprise that Hollywood is often recognized for having some of the "best views" in the city of Richmond.

"Our new overlook plan will enhance these viewing areas and create better access to them," says Kelly Jones Wilbanks, executive director of Friends of Hollywood Cemetery. "They will provide ideal locations for families to gather before or after funerals, and for visitors who simply wish a moment of tranquility."

Designed by the Van Yahres Studio of BCWH Architects, the plan includes renovating three overlooks, located in the Palmer Chapel area, the Davis Circle area, and an area between these two sites. When combined, the areas will offer over 1000 feet of river viewing access. Each overlook will cost about \$100,000 to complete. The funds will provide "restoration, conservation and beautification of the areas, with an emphasis on connecting the landscaping to the magnificent views of the James," says Wilbanks.

The overlook plans include new landscaping, sidewalks, and ample seating areas for visitors. Native plantings will address erosion, runoff, drainage and storm water management. "Being located on the James, environmental stewardship is

very important to us," she says.

An additional \$200,000 will fund bollard and chains to define the areas and connect them visually.

The first overlook (beside the Palmer Chapel) has already received funding of \$25,000 from the **Dominion Foundation** and was selected by the **James River Garden Club** as its Centennial Signature Project which was accompanied by a grant of \$50,000.

"We are so grateful to these organizations for supporting this worthwhile project," says Wilbanks. "When completed, we think the overlooks will provide ideal settings for pause and reflection."



*Current view of the James River from the vicinity of the Palmer Chapel.*



*Rendering of the first proposed overlook east of the Palmer Chapel. Construction to begin in the summer of 2015.*



# Hollywood Cemetery's New Virtual Tour Platform

Hollywood Cemetery holds a wealth of stories in its rolling hills. The fascinating tales of U.S. presidents, Virginia governors, Supreme Court Justices, Confederate generals, soldiers, and thousands of other residents are all intermingled in the beauty of Hollywood.

But how does one discover all of those stories?

Hollywood Cemetery has teamed up with NimblePitch and Addison Clark, both of Richmond, to create an interactive storytelling platform that visitors both near and far can use to discover the stories that make Hollywood Cemetery so unique.

At its core, the platform revolves around an interactive map of the cemetery that can be viewed on either a desktop or mobile device. By clicking or tapping on different spots on the map, visitors can find the exact burial place of a famous Hollywood resident, as well as short biographies, links, and videos about that particular person.

One of the greatest aspects about this program is that it can be used anywhere. Someone in another state or country — who may never have the opportunity to visit Hollywood Cemetery in person — can experience the stories of Hollywood straight from their computer screens. Just as easily, a person visiting the cemetery in person can use the program as a reference guide while they're exploring the grounds.

Users have the option of taking a self-guided tour which will lead them to some of the most popular sites in the cemetery, including Presidents Circle, the Pyramid, and the Iron Dog. Bookmarking capabilities allow users to customize a self-guided tour in order to visit sites in the

cemetery that interest them the most. Finally, users have the ability to turn different categories (such as presidents, governors, and Confederate soldiers) on or off in order to further customize the sites they want to visit.

This huge digitization endeavor by Hollywood Cemetery is one of the first of its kind in the cemetery industry. As a National Historic Place, Hollywood believes it is important to make its rich history available to the public in an easy-to-use, accessible platform. With technology advancements and the prevalence of mobile technology, it has become easier for historic landmarks like Hollywood to do so. Other organizations who have undertaken similar projects include the U.S. Capitol, Ukrop's Monument Avenue 10K, and many colleges and universities.



*The homepage of the virtual tour provides several options for the user.*



*The first screen of the virtual tour is a hand drawn map of the cemetery.*



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*Van Yahres' employees demonstrate climbing skills required for many above ground pruning and thinning tasks. (See article on page 1.)*