

Dead in Good Company: A Celebration of Mount Auburn Cemetery

Edited by John Harrison, and Kim Nagy. 2015. Ziggy Owl Press, Medford, MA, USA. 320 pages, 23.95 USD, Paper, 9.95 USD, E-book.

Dead in Good Company is a fascinating account of America's first landscaped graveyard, Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was created in 1831 with the intent of being more than just a burial ground, with a beautifully designed setting that inspires all who visit, comforts the bereaved, and commemorates the dead in an area of exceptional beauty (p. xviii). Today, over 200,000 people visit and about 5,000 burials take place annually on the 175 acres of 'Sweet Auburn'. It is also an exceptional area for wildlife observation, especially birds, as it is a sea of green in an otherwise urban environment. Thousands of wildlife watchers visit in spring and fall to see migratory birds (most notably the many species of warblers), while a sizable number of people remain year-round to seek out certain birds such as Red-tailed Hawks and Great Horned Owls, among many others.

The book description does a great job of summarizing the text as well as giving insight into the collection of diverse contributors, by noting "*Dead in Good Company* is a compelling collection of essays, poems and wildlife photographs of Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Sweet Auburn, as it is affectionately known, is America's first garden cemetery. An amazing group of authors have come together to celebrate this unique resource. . .". In total, I counted 60 chapters with 56 people contributing to this unique resource (the bios of the authors alone took up the last 18 pages of the book!), which is printed on beautiful glossy paper. I also tallied 202 colour photographs within this 320-page manuscript, mostly by editor and contributor John Harrison. I was very impressed with many of the images, and that they were often shown within a chapter and directly related to a given story, especially the images of birds and historical markers (like specific gravestones). John's skill at identifying and photographing birds is impressive, including Cape May Warblers, Cedar Waxwings, Brown Creepers, Scarlet Tanagers, Indigo Buntings, and Yellow-rumped Warblers, among dozens of other species found within the covers of the tome. My favorite images, considering that I am biased to mammals, were of the Eastern Coyotes (or Coywolves), including stunning images of 'Big Caesar' and

his pack, as well as other locally "famous" individuals who are personalized as identifiable members of the Mount Auburn wildlife community (p. 119) – including Red Foxes, Wild Turkeys, Red-tailed Hawks, Great Horned Owls, Great Blue Herons, many species of songbirds, and even Spotted Salamanders. These critters are fortunate to live within the sanctuary of this cemetery. And the biologist in me marvels at how many animals can be seen on just over a quarter of a square mile, about the size of a summer-time rendezvous site for a family of Eastern Coyotes.

The book is inspiring in that so many people contributed to the manuscript, ranging from naturalistic accounts to historical pieces that include some of the famous and prominent people who are buried there. The lives of so many who made an impact on our nation are detailed on the headstones, monuments, and plaques (p. 210): inventors, scientists, inspiring preachers, Civil War and other military generals, Harvard College presidents, Supreme Court justices and other outstanding jurists, governors, congressmen, senators, artists, writers, musicians, and even great baseball players. Being in this company, along with the natural beauty of this historic place, gives visitors to Mount Auburn Cemetery a genuine sense of past achievement and accomplishment (p. 210). While there are thousands of stories to be told within the confines of this special area, the reader gets to experience and be inspired by five dozen of these short stories, including many wonderfully illustrated photo-essays. *Dead in Good Company* is also important to the field of ecology as it clearly illustrates the importance of cemeteries like Mount Auburn as green spaces and wildlife habitats, especially in urban areas. It would be a great reference to quote when discussing the concept of urban green spaces or the history of landscaped cemeteries.

I marveled at how the editors, John Harrison and Kim Nagy, were able to assemble such a large, diverse, and well-respected group of contributors. John Harrison deserves special mention as many people in their reflections (in each of their contributing chapters) credited John with introducing them to this special area. Most notable for me were the many bird watchers who con-

gregate to and write about Sweet Auburn. May is frequently discussed as the time to visit, as spring and bird migration is in full swing. A cloudy or stormy day is frequently mentioned, as many birds, most notably warblers, are grounded due to the weather affecting their migration navigation (termed a 'fallout', see p. 110), so they flock to Mount Auburn both for the resources it provides and also because it is a haven in a sea of concrete. Migrants arriving over these urban areas will concentrate at Mount Auburn in much greater numbers and variety than in a similar sized area in outer suburban and rural towns (p. 139).

I highly recommend *Dead in Good Company* to all readers, especially folks interested in Boston, history, cemeteries, and nature. It is a local gem in that area of the world. It is beautifully written with barely any grammatical errors throughout its 300+ pages. For some

reason, the website listed in the book (www.DeadInGoodCompany.com) was not set up or working at the time of review, but interested readers can find the book on Amazon.com or via Facebook. My only critique would be for the editors to add a map(s) to the front or end of the book so interested readers can find all of the place names (like the 'Dell'), the many roads and graves, natural features such as the "tree" used by the red-tails, and other areas, such as ponds, that are often mentioned by the numerous authors. Other than that, the text is easy to read, well organized and will serve as a superb 6 × 9-inch coffee table book, given the spectacular pictures that can be found within its covers.

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