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MEDIA ALERT

BUILDING A CITY OF THE DEAD: THE CREATION AND EXPANSION OF PHILADELPHIA'S LAUREL HILL CEMETERY

AN EXHIBITION PRESENTED BY THE LIBRARY COMPANY and FRIENDS OF LAUREL HILL CEMETERY

WHAT: Laurel Hill Cemetery is among the most celebrated – and most densely populated – swaths of greater Philadelphia. Beneath seventy-eight acres of lawn, trees and monuments lie some 70,000 bodies – a sprawling and silent subdivision that took shape over nearly two centuries.

When Laurel Hill opened in 1836, it was Philadelphia's first "rural cemetery." This was a new kind of institution that grew out of competing impulses: attached socially and economically to the city, it stood physically and symbolically in the countryside. That paradox underlies the exhibition. Garden, graveyard, and civic amenity – a place of mourning and recreation – Laurel Hill was both public and private, rural and urban, a scene of development and a possible antidote to it.

This collaborative exhibition celebrates the 175th anniversary of the founding of Laurel Hill Cemetery, and can be viewed at The Library Company of Philadelphia through April 2011. The Cemetery, which is located at 3822 Ridge Avenue, is open daily for visitation, tours and recreational use.

WHEN: The exhibition will run from November 15, 2010 – April 29, 2011 / Free and Open to the Public
Gallery hours are Monday through Friday, 9:00am – 4:45pm

WHERE: The Library Company of Philadelphia / 1314 Locust Street / Philadelphia, PA 19107

WHO: The Library Company is America's first successful lending library and oldest cultural institution. It was founded in 1731 by Benjamin Franklin as a subscription library supported by its shareholders, as it remains to this day. Prominent Philadelphia editor John Jay Smith served as the Librarian of the Company for twenty-two years. During his tenure, Smith became the primary founder of Laurel Hill Cemetery, initiating the enduring connection between the two institutions. Today, most of the activity that takes place at the Cemetery is spearheaded by the Friends of Laurel Hill, a nonprofit group formed in 1978 to preserve the historic legacy of the site through public outreach, educational programming, restoration, and fundraising.

Aaron Wunsch serves as Guest Curator of the exhibition. The author of Laurel Hill's Historic American Buildings Survey, through which the Cemetery gained National Historic Landmark status, Wunsch is currently a Lecturer in the Historic Preservation Program at The University of Pennsylvania's School of Design. He received his Ph.D. in Architectural History from the University of California at Berkeley.

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