

Frederick Douglass Memorial Park

3201 Amboy Road, Staten Island
Tax Map Block 4475, Lot 300

Built: 1935

Landscape Architect: James Wallace Higgins

Proposed Action: Calendar March 19, 2024



Frederick Douglass Memorial Park along Amboy Road in the Oakwood Heights neighborhood of Staten Island is a historically significant cemetery created to offer a fitting and dignified place for African Americans to bury their loved ones in a park-like landscaped setting, free from discrimination. Designed by James Wallace Higgins and opened in 1935, the 14.88-acre memorial park has served New York City's Black community for almost a century.

The memorial park was founded in 1933 by Rodney Dade, a Harlem funeral director, who saw the need to provide appropriate burial sites for African Americans at a time when it was often difficult to do so due to discrimination and segregation. He partnered with Benjamin Diamond, a successful businessman, and Frederick A. Bunn, an attorney whose practice included many cemeteries. They then commissioned J. Wallace Higgins, a New Jersey civil engineer and landscape architect, to design the memorial park.

The design followed 20th-century memorial park models with an emphasis on the landscaping and the beauty of nature. The park's picturesque curving pathways and flat monuments highlight this modern landscape approach along with the latest engineering features such as watering and drainage systems. The design always included a place for a memorial to Frederick Douglass, the renowned 19th-century abolitionist, writer, orator, and activist, whose work has inspired generations of African Americans.

The Frederick Douglass Memorial Park opened with its first burials June 10, 1935. Since then, hundreds of people have been buried there, including some notable celebrities. Prominent African Americans include the jazz and blues singer Mamie Smith (1883-1946); Tommy Ladnier (1900-1939), an accomplished jazz trumpeter; and Sol White (1868-1955), a professional baseball player who wrote the *History of Colored Base Ball* in 1907.

The impressive monument to its namesake, Frederick Douglass, was dedicated in 1961. English-born sculptor Angus McDougall (1906-1978) created the low-relief sculpture on the monument that was fabricated by Wegenaar Monuments on Amboy Road. The cemetery office building along the north edge of the property is associated with local Staten Island architect James Whitford, (1871-1947) and was enlarged in 1961. The front entrance gates were replaced in 2018. Today the memorial park is well maintained with perpetual care in place. Still an active cemetery, it exhibits integrity of design and materials with its original acreage, pathways, and now-mature landscaping.

The Frederick Douglass Memorial Park on Staten Island is a historically and culturally significant cemetery established for the specific needs of New York City's African American community. As such, it occupies a special place as part of the City's social and cultural history.



Graphic Source: MapPLUTO, Edition 22v1, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, Date: 03.01.2024