



PROJECT PROFILE

Mount Moriah Cemetery Gatehouse

Temporary Structural Stabilization | Philadelphia, PA



CLIENT

Mount Moriah Cemetery Preservation Corporation

BACKGROUND

Designed by architect Stephen Decatur Button, this ornate sandstone-clad gatehouse was constructed in 1855 for Mount Moriah Cemetery, a historic Philadelphia burial ground based on the “rural ideal” movement.

During the late twentieth century, ownership of the cemetery became unresolved and maintenance of its historic structures was neglected. The Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia named the gatehouse one of its “Places to Save” in 2014 and facilitated efforts to designate the cemetery and gatehouse as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Deteriorated by weather exposure and damaged by vandals, the gatehouse was at risk of collapsing before it could be restored by the Mount Moriah Cemetery Preservation Corporation, the nonprofit entity that took over management of the cemetery in 2014. WJE provided pro bono structural engineering services to design temporary stabilization measures that will limit further loss of historic fabric until funds can be raised for a more extensive restoration.



SOLUTION

WJE communicated with Philadelphia’s building department, which had issued a violation because of the structure’s deteriorated condition, to mitigate the possibility of a demolition order. WJE designed temporary stabilization measures utilizing readily available lumber sizes and connectors, which were assembled by a local contractor at cost. Because of the proximity of grave sites to the perimeter of the structure, precast concrete traffic barriers were used as reaction blocks in lieu of foundations below grade. This not only minimized ground disturbance and eliminated the need for archaeological exploration but also reduced cost and resulted in a fully reversible intervention. The completed stabilization measures attracted press coverage that should help the Mount Moriah Cemetery Preservation Corporation raise funds for a more extensive restoration of this landmark structure that anchors one corner of the historic cemetery site.

Historic photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS PA,51-PHILA,489A--2

