

The Evergreens Cemetery Quarterly Newsletter



Notable Resident

This article continues our series highlighting important people buried at The Evergreens Cemetery.

Thomas "Blind Tom" Wiggins (1849 – 1908)

Thomas "Blind Tom" Wiggins was an African-American musical prodigy on the piano. He had a long and mostly successful performing career throughout the United States, and composed many original pieces which were published. He was called the "human mockingbird" and could reproduce songs flawlessly after hearing them a single time. He is reported to have learned 7,000 pieces of music, including popular songs, hymns, waltzes and classical music. He is now regarded as an autistic savant, although during his lifetime autism was not yet recognized.

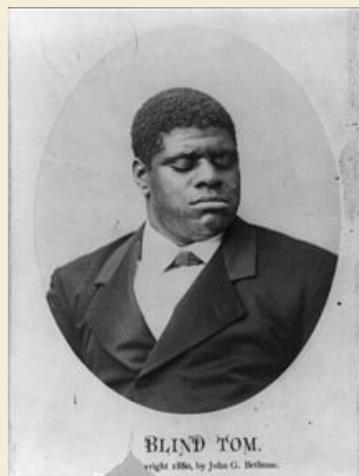
Wiggins was able to communicate mostly in grunts and gestures, although he could repeat a conversation of 10 minutes in length.

Wiggins, blind at birth, was born on a slave plantation in Georgia in 1849. He was sold in 1850 along with his enslaved parents to a lawyer, General James Neil Bethune. Wiggins became interested in the piano after hearing Bethune's daughters playing, and composed his first tune, *The Rain Storm*, at age five.

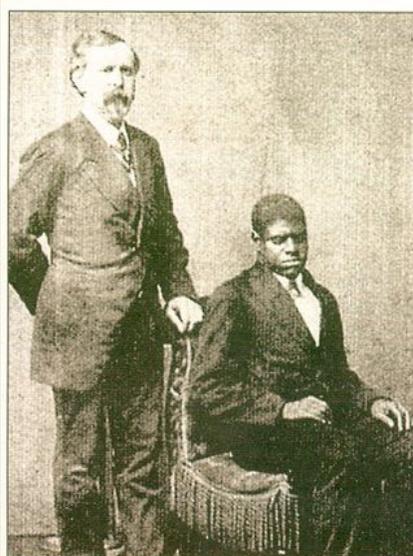
Bethune recognized his genius and hired him out at the age of eight to a promoter, and Wiggins became the mostly highly compensated pianist of the 19th century. He performed throughout the country and earned an estimated \$750,000 over the course of his lifetime, although he personally never received any of the money. Instead, his owner and promoters benefited from his musical genius.

In spite of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1865 Bethune and later his son controlled Wiggins through an indenture agreement until Bethune's daughter-in-law, Eliza Bethune Lerche, was appointed his guardian in 1884 after a legal battle in which the media dubbed Wiggins "the last American Slave". Lerche moved him to Hoboken, New Jersey. In the last years of his life his popularity waned, as musical tastes changed at the end of the century, although he continued to perform in vaudeville venues and concert halls.

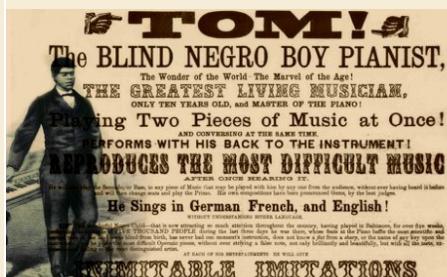
Wiggins died in 1908 and was buried at The Evergreens in an unmarked grave. There has been some debate about



"Blind Tom" Wiggins, 1880



General Bethune and Blind Tom



Advertisement for a performance by Wiggins

whether Wiggins and bury him near his birthplace in Georgia were carried out. A plaque and marker on Westmoreland Plantation in Midland, Georgia claim that to mark his final resting place. However, the records of The Evergreens show that his body was never moved and that Wiggins remains buried at The Evergreens.

John Davis, a pianist who rediscovered Blind Tom's music, arranged for a tombstone to be placed in 2002, and invited Wiggins' relatives to attend a grand piano performance at the cemetery. See [http://johndavis pianist .com/music-and-books/blind-tom/](http:// johndavis pianist .com/music-and-books/blind-tom/).

See also *The Ballad of Blind Tom: Slave Pianist* by Deirdre O'Connell (2009).



Grave of Wiggins

Upcoming Events at The Evergreens



Yoga classes

Sunday, June 3 and June 10, 2018
10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Join us for yoga classes on the beautiful grounds of the cemetery, led by Lila Lucy Nelson from All Yoga Studio.

Registration is appreciated but not required. \$5 suggested donation. Register [HERE](#).



Brewers' Row: The Beer Barons of Bushwick at The Evergreens Cemetery with Atlas Obscura Society New York

Saturday, June 16, 2018
3:00 to 5:30 p.m. (tours will start at 3:00 and 4:30 p.m)

Come explore the unique brewing history and culture of Brooklyn's German immigrant brewers at The Evergreens Cemetery, the final resting place of several notable beer barons. The walking tour will be led by James Henry, tour guide at The Evergreens. Following the tour we will gather for a beer tasting (with beverages provided by Brooklyn Brewery).

Advance tickets only. \$35. See here for further information and tickets: <https://www.atlasobscura.com/events/beerbarontour>.



Spring Starfest: Stargazing with the Amateur Astronomers Association of New York

Saturday, June 16, 2018
7:30 to 10:00 p.m.

We will welcome the public to observe and learn about the stars with members of the Amateur Astronomers Association of New York at their annual Spring Starfest.

Free and open to the public. Register [HERE](#).



Hidden History Stroll: Walking Tours of The Evergreens

Saturday, June 23 and July 21, 2018
11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Come with us as we explore the winding paths of historic The Evergreens Cemetery on a walking tour led by James Henry. We will visit the gravesites of notable residents -- who reflect the racial and religious diversity of New York City -- including artist, actors, musicians and entertainers as well as some controversial personalities. We will learn about Victorian funerary symbols and styles as well as secret societies and their mysterious memorials. The tour will also include a trip inside our normally 'off-limits' Receiving Vault as well as other surprises.

Registration is appreciated but not required. \$5 suggested donation. Register [HERE](#).



Meditation Class

Sunday, June 24, 2018
10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Join us for a meditation class on the beautiful grounds of the cemetery, led by Lila Lucy Nelson from All Yoga Studio.

Registration is appreciated but not required. \$5 suggested donation. Register [HERE](#).



Battle of Brooklyn and Beyond: The Evergreens Cemetery Military History Tour

**Sunday, August 19, 2018
11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.**

Come with us as we explore the winding paths of historic The Evergreens Cemetery on a military history walking tour led by James Henry. This event is part of Battle of Brooklyn week to commemorate the 242nd anniversary of the Battle of Brooklyn on August 27.

Registration is appreciated but not required. \$5 suggested donation. Register [HERE](#).

Recent Events at The Evergreens



Hidden History Stroll: Walking Tour of The Evergreens

On April 21 we held our first Hidden History Stroll. Tour guide James Henry led visitors to the graves of notable residents such as cartoonist Winsor McCay, tap legend Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and jazz great Lester Young, among many others. The tour's focus on musicians, actors and artists,

including many involved with vaudeville, reflects the economically and socially inclusive character of The Evergreens.

Commemoration of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

On March 23 we held a wreath-laying ceremony to commemorate the victims of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of March 25, 1911. We were proud to honor the victims of the fire who are buried here at The Evergreens. Speakers included The Evergreens President Julie Bose, artist Robin Berson, Evergreens Director of Programs Eva Bowerman, and Boris Santos from Council Member Antonio Reynoso's office. Among the attendees were Members of the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition. Bagpiper Mark O'Brien provided accompanying music.

"We were proud to honor the memory of the fire's victims at our commemoration ceremony" said Julie Bose. "The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire is an important historical event, and watershed moment in labor reform history, and we continue to honor the memory of those who died in this tragedy."



Art Workshop

Following the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire commemoration on March 23 attendees gathered to view the Triangle Fire Memorial Quilt by Robin Berson, which was on display for the month of March.



Later in the day Berson taught an art workshop to students from the El Puente Neighborhood Leadership Center, a local program for students age 13-21. Students viewed the memorial quilt and learned about the history of the fire and about Robin's inspiration for making the quilt and the concept of art as activism. Students then made paper 'quilt squares' based on contemporary issues of importance to them, such as gun violence.

Easter Eggstravaganza

On March 24 we welcomed families for an Easter egg hunt, visit from the Easter Bunny, magic show, petting zoo and

refreshments at a free community event.

We would like to thank Carbone Memorials Inc for helping sponsor this event.



Arbor Day Celebration

On April 28 we welcomed families for an Arbor Day celebration to learn about trees at the Evergreens, including a tree planting, flower planting, art activities, a tree identification walk, and a tree climbing demonstration by a professional arborist.



Walking Tour: Tree Stories

On April 29 noted arborist William Logan led *Tree Stories*, a walking tour exploring the wide variety of tree species at the Evergreens. Attendees learned how to identify different species, and heard about how they can be used for medicinal and food purposes.



The all-ages tour gave members of two Troops of Girl Scouts the opportunity to earn their tree badges. According to Troop leader Jessica D'Antonio "Cadette Troop 4744 and Junior Troop 4732 had the privilege to work with the arborist at The Evergreens to learn about trees native to our area and key traits to identify various species found in New York and abroad." The Girl Scouts especially enjoyed the interactive experience of gathering leaves, nuts and other tree parts in plastic bags to bring home to examine more closely.

Bird Walk



On May 20 we held a bird walk led by NYC Audubon's Corey Finger. The group spotted 39 species, including a Red-tailed Hawk (and its nest), Bald Eagle, Scarlet Tanager, and several types of Warblers. We look forward to holding a family-friendly bird walk in the fall.



Staff Spotlight with Henry Nunez, Superintendent

How long have you worked at the Evergreens?

I started working here on September 25, 2017.

Where did you work before this?

I worked at Raymour & Flanigan Furniture.

What does your position consist of?

As the Superintendent I am in charge of all outside operations which include interments, and general maintenance of the property. The interment process is the most important part of our business. We have a crew that is both professional and efficient. We strive to show empathy to our families and maintain the grounds to the highest standards. We are constantly improving the cemetery to meet the needs of our families.

What is the most rewarding part of working at the Evergreens?

I enjoy helping in the development of the personnel and witnessing their success with the transitions.

How do people react when you tell them you work in a cemetery?

They always ask if it's creepy, to which I respond "Not at all -- we have wonderful people who work here, we have a beautiful park-like setting, and we plan on making it even better."

Where do you live?

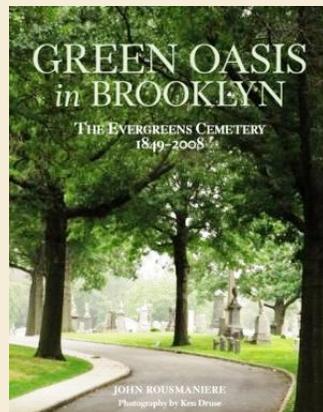
East Islip, Long Island.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I coach football and basketball, but enjoy all sports and spending time with my wife and three sons.



John Rousmaniere, author of Green Oasis in Brooklyn



Green Oasis in Brooklyn: The Evergreens Cemetery 1849 - 2008

by John Rousmaniere

Noted historian John Rousmaniere traces the history of the Evergreens Cemetery in this well-researched and lavishly illustrated book. Beginning with the land itself before the cemetery was founded in 1850, his engaging text shows how the forces that shaped the history of New York-population growth, immigration and growing wealth-also shaped the Evergreens. He also describes the beautiful monuments and fascinating characters that are buried there. Ken Druse's stunning color photographs demonstrate the beauty of the site and the monuments.

Evergreens Cemetery Historian John Rousmaniere, who leads many tours of The Evergreens, says that writing the story of The Evergreens, *Green Oasis in Brooklyn*, was one of the most challenging and rewarding of his many projects in a wide range of subject areas. He is a prolific author who has written 30 historical, technical, and instructional books on sailing, yachting history, New York history, business history, and clubs.

Green Oasis in Brooklyn is for purchase at the Evergreens office or on Amazon.

New Website:

www.theevergreenscemetery.org

We are pleased to announce the launch of our brand new website. Visit www.theevergreenscemetery.org to check out our redesign. We hope you enjoy the new look and easy-to-access information about our services and events. The website creation team consisted of Elba Luna (design) and Eva Bowerman (content) with assistance from Nicole Segarra and Kelly Ruffel.

Support Us

We are committed to maintaining our beautiful historic cemetery, and offering our green space to our community through a wide variety of programs. Your support helps make our this possible. It allows us to offer historical tours, tours of cemetery architecture and art, tree walks, stargazing, yoga, bird walks, Easter and Halloween events for local children, and other events. We are grateful for your support in helping us fulfill our mission.

Your tax-deductible donation may be made by credit card through PayPal or mailing a check to:

The Evergreens Preservation Foundation
1629 Bushwick Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11207

To make a donation through PayPal please click [HERE](#).



Magician The Great Ragidy Supreme entertained children at the Easter Eggstravaganza.

Making Arrangements

The Evergreens Cemetery provides a beautiful final resting place for loved ones, and we are pleased to discuss the variety of options available.

Contact:
Damaris Rodriguez
Family Service Counselor
718-455-5300
dr@theevergreenscemetery.org

Research

We welcome genealogical inquiries. Please contact the office at info@theevergreenscemetery.org or tel. 718-455-5300 for further information.

Cemetery Hours

Grounds are open seven days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Please contact the office about holiday closures.

The Evergreens Cemetery Board of Trustees

Jonathan M. Weld, Chairman

Julie Bose, President

Frederick A. Bland, Chairman, Buildings and Grounds Committee

William R. Cline, Jr.

Jennifer Eisenstadt, Buildings and Grounds Committee

John E. Osnato, Secretary/Treasurer and Investment Committee

T. Dennis Sullivan, Chairman, Investment Committee

Staff

Julie Bose, President

Eva Bowerman, Director of Programs

Carl Dill, General Foreman

Robert English, General Foreman

Patricia Gentilella, Bookkeeper

Elba Luna, Administrative Assistant

Henry J. Nunez, Superintendent

Karim Parchment, CFO

Damaris Rodriguez, Family Service Counselor

Nicole Segarra, Administrative Assistant

Veronica Willis, Executive Assistant

Newsletter edited by Eva Bowerman

Newsletter designed by Eva Bowerman and Elba Luna

The Evergreens Cemetery
1629 Bushwick Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11207
718-455-5300

info@theevergreenscemetery.org

Don't forget to like us on Facebook and follow us on Instagram!



[Visit our website](#)