



Samuel Humphreys' box tomb serves as an altar for Easter Sunrise Service (R33/S41), the wife of William Thornton whose diaries are crucial in understanding early Washington (learn more about her on page 8). This type of burial marker has continued to evolve, and a more modern interpretation can be seen with the Schroder stone's hipped granite roof and concrete base (R100/S221).

Regular monitoring and maintenance of these tombs are crucial in order to maintain their integrity. Constant threats presented by gravity, climate, vegetation, and the natural properties of the stone and iron render these constructions fairly delicate after 200 years. Cracking stone, the effect of the oxidation of the iron pins at the top of the corner posts, can be witnessed on William Prout's box tomb, along with the delamination of the sandstone base. According to Lynette Strangstad, author of *A Graveyard Preservation Primer*, without monitoring of their structural integrity, box tombs face the risk of needing to be completely recreated when they fail. With support from the K-9 Community, Congressional Cemetery will be able to conserve many of these valuable cultural resources for generations to come. ~

From the Ground Up

Talented Toads

BY VICTORIA MARKOVITZ

When cemetery staff spotted an amphibian scaling a tree on the grounds, we couldn't wait to find out what kind of tree frog had made Congressional its home. Barry Hayman, our grounds conservation manager, shot a video of the acrobatic animal, and we rushed the film to a local expert.

The illustrious tree frog turned out to be an Eastern American toad (*Anaxyrus americanus americanus*). But, although it belongs to a common species, our toad – like many of our famous “residents” – has extraordinary talents.

“I’ve never seen one try to climb a tree,” said Andrew Landsman, a biological technician who serves as a county coordinator for the Maryland Amphibian and Reptile Atlas, which keeps track of Maryland amphibian populations. “I was surprised at how well it was doing that.”

True to its name, the Eastern American toad can be found throughout most of the eastern United States. All the toads need to settle down is a place with a body of water in the spring and early summer, so the females can lay their long strips of eggs.

And even non-climbing toads stand out in surprising ways. Toads feed on large amounts of agricultural pests, and this helps farms – and our cemetery garden – flourish. The humble toad has also contributed to scientific research. Most amphibians are considered bio-indicators, which means they often serve as a “canary in a coal mine,” Landsman says. When amphibian populations suffer, there's a good chance that other animals will be affected, as well. Scientists have studied toads, which are susceptible to chemicals and pesticides, to examine the toxicity of fragile environments, such as wetlands.

And, despite popular beliefs, the critters will not give humans warts. However, the toads may emit unpleasant secretions while being handled – which would leave a foul taste in a predator's mouth. So, it may be best to admire them from afar. While the Eastern American toad is more ordinary than a tree frog, we're proud such a dexterous member of the species has chosen to stay at Congressional.

To see a video of our tree climbing toad, visit our Facebook page. ~



Our exceptionally talented tree climbing Eastern American Toad