

CHESTER TIMES – April 12, 1902

OLD CHURCHYARD MAY BECOME PARK – The Offer of St. Paul's Vestry is Made to City – For a John Morton Park

The offer of the Vestry of St. Paul's Protestant Episcopal church to deed to the city the old graveyard on the Southside of Third Street, between Market and Welsh, which was dedicated upon some time ago, was renewed yesterday by a committee representing the officials of the church. Mayor Houston said in response to the offer that he would look into the matter; his impressions were that it was a favorable offer for the city, and if, upon investigation, he was assured of this, he would recommend to Councils the acceptance of the church's offer.

The matter was suggested to Mayor Jefferis, some months ago, but at that time no formal offer was made. Dr. Jefferis was strongly favorable to the city's taking the ground and believed that it could be well utilized by turning it into a small park. The only condition imposed by the church are that the bodies interred in the ancient God's acre shall be removed by the city to a suitable place in the Rural Cemetery. In this plot are the graves of John Morton, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and Paul Jackson, the first graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, who was chief burgess of Chester, was one of the acknowledged colonial poets and died and was laid away in the old burying ground in 1767.

There have been no burials in the plot on the South side of the street since shortly after the Civil War, but according to the records about four hundred interments were made in the ground. The first interment of which there is record was that of an ancestor of D.M. Johnson, Esq., of this city, who directed in his will 1685 that he buried in that yard. In this plot stood the first St. Paul's Church, which was built in 1702 and stood until removed in 1850 when the second church, still standing on the opposite side of the street was built.

The suggestion has been made that the city take the plot, remove the bones of the dead of other generations, excepting those of John Morton and Paul Jackson, and call the plot John Morton Park. It is in a portion of the city where a public park is sadly needed and the clearing out of the old burying ground and its improvement would be a long step toward wiping out the disgraceful nest of dilapidated shacks which constitutes the worst slum district in Chester.

This could be followed up by the condemnation by the city, as unsafe and unfit for human habitation of a large number of the ramshackle houses in the Bethel Court district, and in a few years what is now a miserable group of rookeries would be replaced by substantial homes. The tide of industry and improvement toward that section of the city makes the offer of the Vestry of St. Paul's a fortunate one at the present time, and the city should not hesitate to accept it.

Not counting the historical value of the old plot and its advantageous location for a park, as well as the benefit to be gained by removing the graveyard from a thickly built up portion of the town, the actual value of the ground for any purpose is many times what it would cost the city to put the tract in order for park use, and the offer of the church is a good one in every particular.