

NANTUCKET CEMETERY COMMISSION
Posted Meeting of March 13, 2019, at 3:00 pm
Department of Public Works Office, 188 Madaket Road

FINAL AND APPROVED MINUTES

Attendance: Commissioners Frances Karttunen, Scott McIver, Allen Reinhard (Chair), Lee Saperstein, and Barbara White.

1. Call to Order.

Chair Allen Reinhard called the meeting to order at 3:03 pm. There was a quorum at all times.

2. Public Comment

There was none.

3. Approval of Minutes from February 13, 2019.

Scott McIver moved and Barbara White seconded approval of the minutes from the meeting of February 13, 2019. Frances Karttunen suggested a modest editorial change to Item 9. Signage at Quaise Asylum Burial Ground, that was accepted; thence approval was unanimous.

4. Approval of New Lot Sales.

Allen Reinhard said that we had an application from Jeffrey Lee for inurnment rights in Polpis Cemetery, Lot F-18, that we needed to approve. Frances Karttunen moved approval, Barbara White seconded it, and the motion was approved unanimously.

5. Access to Historic Coloured Cemetery, Latest Update.

Allen Reinhard reported that he had met again with Jason Graziadei of the Nantucket Cottage Hospital just last week. Jason Graziadei remains aware of our concern for fulfillment of the commitment to create an entrance to the Historic Coloured Cemetery from the hospital grounds and promises a solution soon. The hospital engineers have designated an ambulance waiting space along the cemetery fence and said that it could be jointly designated as parking for the cemetery. They will design a walkway from these spaces over the concrete vault to level ground where an entrance can be created. Commissioners raised a concern that the designation be stern enough to keep people from abusing the privilege. Lee Saperstein suggested that when the entrance is created, we should renew the fence around the cemetery as planned and arrange for some publicity.

6. Perpetual Care Definition, Declaration of Newtown Boundary Update.

Allen Reinhard reported that he has once again spoken with Erika Mooney, Operations Administrator, about the Commission's sense of urgency for the Select Board's approval of the

definition of perpetual care and the definitive statement of Newtown Cemetery boundaries. In the latter case, this is needed so that we may respond to requests for full-body interments in a public cemetery. She said that they will go in an upcoming Select Board agenda. [Action: Allen Reinhard to continue steps needed for Select Board approval of the motions.]

7. Polpis Land Swap Update.

Allen Reinhard reported that he and Rob McNeil, Cemetery Administrator, had transmitted to the owners of 268 Polpis Road the proposal discussed at the Commission's previous meeting for the land swap. It has gone to the owners' attorney who committed to sharing it with his clients. Allen Reinhard indicated that it would be nice to have the swap completed before the summer.

In a separate issue for Polpis Cemetery, Lee Saperstein reported that he had examined the Conservation Commission application for rebuilding a game court and associated structures at 262 Polpis Road and found that the changes are both away and out of sight from the cemetery and that we should have no concerns with the application.

8. Historic Cemetery Sign at Quaise Burial Ground.

Following on from last month's discussion of signage at the Quaise Burial Ground, Allen Reinhard said that he will speak with the Interim Director of the Nantucket Conservation Foundation, the organization that controls the land of the burial ground, about gaining permission for signage. This would include a modest sign on the Polpis Road indicating the presence of an "Historic Cemetery" and a brief marker for "Cemetery" at the parking area. In addition, there is a sentiment to have a monument with information about the people buried there, . Frances Karttunen said that she prefers a stone monument to either a painted sign or a bronze plaque. She noted that it must be of a size to contain 12 names. Commissioners agreed with her and suggested that we create a design from which a cost estimate can be drafted. She will create draft text for the monument and send to Commissioners for their review and potential approval at the next meeting. Scott McIver said that he would design an appropriate granite monument to accommodate that text. [Actions: Allen Reinhard to meet with Nantucket Conservation Foundation leadership. Frances Karttunen and Scott McIver to draft text and design for a monument.]

9. Commissioners Comments: Long-range Goals for Nantucket Cemeteries.

Lee Saperstein reminded Commissioners that he had drafted a brochure that describes the public cemeteries on Nantucket and that is intended for inclusion on the Commission's web site (attached). He felt that, while it can be improved with photographs and additional text, the initial draft should be released as soon as possible. Commissioners were favorable to the idea and asked that it be reviewed formally in a future agenda.

Multiple commissioners clamored for putting all of Nantucket's burial information into a single, searchable database. Such a program would consolidate the Lewis Account ledgers found on the NHA web site along with their list of monuments while creating space for listing recent burials and applications. Lee Saperstein said that we should consider hiring someone to work on this

full-time. Allen Reinhard reminded the group that Rob McNeil, Cemetery Administrator, has said that we should shop for a cemetery software package that will consolidate all of our various administrative accounts into one package.

Barbara White reminded the Commissioners that we had proposed a Ground Penetrating Radar, GPR, survey on those portions of Newtown Cemetery that will be newly exposed after vegetation is removed. We should also be surveying portions of New and Old North. The bare patches in Old North are supposed to have burials but they have lost their grave markers. It will be of great historical interest if we can identify burial locations in Founders Burial Ground.

Lee Saperstein reminded the group that we have been considering a web site for those Nantucketers who had been lost or buried at sea. The idea had been shared with James Russell, Executive Director of the NHA, who was enthusiastic about the idea. We might consider a three-way partnership with the NHA and the Shipwreck and Life-Saving Museum, Executive Director Pauline Proch.

Scott McIver asked for a review and approval of a non-standard design for a monument for the Rouillard family. He said that they wanted to have two inurnments in one 4-ft by 6-ft plot, which is consistent with the regulations, but they wanted a 12-in by 24-in monument to accommodate the two names. Current regulations allow only a 12-in by 18-in flush monument but do permit the Commission to approve waivers. The Commission considered his request to be a motion for a waiver and Barbara White seconded it; approval was unanimous. Lee Saperstein pointed out that we have a form for approval of monuments. Scott McIver will complete one and give it to the Cemetery Administrator for the record. For the future, the Commission should review the regulations on monument sizes and consider alternative sizes for multiple burials in one plot. The regulations are on the web site and the forms, now available at the DPW, should go on the site also.

9. Adjourn.

Adjournment was approved by acclamation at 4:17 pm.

Next regular meeting: Wednesday, April 3, 2019, at 3:00 pm in the conference area of the DPW Office, 188 Madaket Road.

Respectfully submitted: _____; Date: _____

Lee W. Saperstein, Secretary

PUBLIC CEMETERIES ON NANTUCKET

In General. Nantucket cemeteries are a trip into the Island's origins. The first recorded burial in a cemetery was in 1688 at the Founders Burial Ground. Always peaceful, the cemeteries have never been conveyed or deeded and, thus, are parts of the "common and undivided lands of Nantucket." The following listing gives a short history of each cemetery, its location, and its status as an active cemetery. As a hint, only two can be considered active. Additional information can be found on the Nantucket Historical Association's Research web site: <https://nha.org/research/research-tools/nantucket-cemeteries/>; where the NHA name differs from the official name, it is placed in parentheses. Another excellent resource is Dr. Frances Karttunen's book, "Nantucket Places & People, Underground," available in Nantucket book shops and the NHA Whaling Museum shop. Ancestors can be found in the databases but the search is not digital. If one knows the cemetery, the NHA cemetery site can be used to locate a grave or burial plot; sketch maps are available on this site to locate, roughly, a grave. If one knows the approximate date of death but not the burial location, one goes to the Lewis Funeral Home Records found in the NHA Research Library Manuscript collection and searches, in the index, ledger by ledger, for the ancestor. Of course, www.findagrave.com can also be used if the local resources do not work. Each cemetery is marked with an inscribed stone at its entrance.

For information about purchasing burial rights, please contact the Cemetery Administrator at the Department of Public Works or the Chair of the Cemetery Commission.

There are five private cemeteries on Nantucket and to obtain information about them, one uses the Prospect Hill web site: <https://www.prospecthillcemetery.com/>.

Founders Burial Ground, 202 Cliff Road. Enter at road-side sign for "Historic Cemetery;" the way to the cemetery can be traversed by vehicle but walking may be preferable. This cemetery is historic and has been closed to new burials for over a century.

The original Nantucket settlement was called Sherburne and was comprised of small farms that surrounded Maxcy's Pond. The settlers built a small meetinghouse on a hilltop and their burial ground surrounded it. As written above the first known interment was in 1688. A more substantial chapel was built in the early 18th century, some say 1711 but sometime in the 1720s may be more realistic, and eventually it was moved into Nantucket Town to become the Old Vestry of the Old North Church on Center Street. The one remaining headstone in their burial ground was given to the NHA in the late 19th century for safe keeping but there are modern monuments to ten early settlers and their wives. The cemetery is maintained by the Town and is well worth a visit.

Historic Coloured Cemetery. 7 Vesper Lane. Enter on North Mill Street at sign for "Historic Cemetery." Walkers may also enter from the Nantucket Island Land Bank property at 9 Vesper Lane and from the new hospital grounds behind the helipad. This cemetery is closed to new lot purchases although families with lot holdings may bury their kin there.

Although Nantucket was ahead of its time in recognizing the rights of people of color, African, Wampanoag, Cape Verdean, and others, it was not until the very end of the 18th century that a

burial place was recognized for them. In 1805, the Proprietors set off one acre of land to be designated as a burial ground. Historic maps reflect the use of contemporary names for this cemetery over the years of its existence. Lately, the Nantucket African-American and Cape Verdean community came together to accept the current name, emphasizing the old English spelling of Coloured to reflect its history.

Miacomet Indian (Native American) Burial Ground. Surfside Road, opposite Hatikvah Way and adjacent to the Sachem's Path development. The entrance from Surfside Road is behind a drinking fountain along the bicycle path. Safer is to enter from the back of the cemetery off Miacomet Road and Benjamin Drive. This cemetery is an historic archaeological site and has never been open to new burials.

This historic ground was re-discovered in 1987 during excavation for a housing development. It was realized quickly that this was the site of Christian burial of the victims of a horrendous epidemic, "the Indian Sickness," that killed 222 Wampanoag tribespeople in a matter of months. It is known from other archaeological excavations that the traditional native burial was usually near to their dwelling sites. The Miacomet ground was found to have its dead in coffins and arranged geometrically, according to Christian custom.

New North Cemetery. 27 New Lane between Franklin and Grove Streets. While closed to new lot sales, burials may occur in family plots that have available space.

As Old North cemetery became full, burials began across the road sometime in the second quarter of the 19th century. By 1858, maps showed a burial ground at the present site of New North Cemetery. The demolition of the Round-Top Mill in 1873 led to the conveyance of the land on which it stood in 1884 to the cemetery. Many prominent Nantucketers were buried here, including Owen Chase and those of his wives who predeceased him.

Newtown Cemetery. 40, 42, 44, and 46 Sparks Avenue. Between Nantucket school properties to the southwest and the Sea Grille Restaurant, across Sparks, to the northeast. This cemetery will soon be open to interments, both full-body and cremation remains.

Newtown was laid out by the Proprietors in 1726 and was described as being part of "West Monomoy." The cemetery became a burial ground sometime in the mid-18th century with the oldest known headstone dated as 1766. It lay just outside the livestock fence that separated the Town from the grazing Commons. This line is, today, Sparks Avenue. Early maps show the cemetery and by the time of the 1913 Assessor's Map, the boundaries seen today were delineated.

Old North Cemetery. 26 New Lane. Old North Cemetery is closed to interments.

Although further from the Town center, Old North Cemetery is much older than its neighbor across New Lane. It began as a family burial ground adjacent to land owned by the Gardner family, hence its original name of "the Gardners' Burial Ground." According to family lore, the first burial was in 1709 although the oldest identified headstone is from 1746. The families interred in Old North were mainly from the Congregational congregation and they, unlike the

Quakers, accepted grave markers. Although reserved originally for members of the Gardner family and their in laws, eventually the cemetery was opened to all Nantucketers. The empty zone in the middle of the cemetery reflects the ravages of weather on wooden and slate markers, not land devoid of burials. Burials occurred in Old North sporadically through the twentieth century. The cemetery is now closed.

Polpis Cemetery (Old Polpis Cemetery). 264 Polpis Road. On the north side of Polpis Road; look for a small parking lot against the cemetery's fence. This cemetery is open for burial of cremation remains only.

Polpis, a variant of the earlier Poatpes or Podpis, has been a farming place and settlement since the 17th century. Occupied by members of the Swain family and others, the first burial may have been as early as 1682 but the only old stone that has been found had the date of 1784. After several fires of nearby farms and barns and the conversion of the old Polpis School to a summer home, which still sits next to the Polpis Cemetery, the cemetery fell into neglectful disrepair. When it was re-opened in 1960, only two weathered stones were found, including the one mentioned above. For a short while, upright headstones were accepted but today the cemetery is laid out for cremation remains and only flush monuments are allowed.

Quaker Cemetery, once known as the Friends Burial Ground. 1 Quaker Road. At the intersection of Quaker Road and the Madaket Road. This cemetery is closed to new burials.

The earliest records of a Quaker meetinghouse and burial ground refer to a place somewhere along the present Madaket Road at about its intersection with Wannacommet Road. Their exact location has been lost. In 1731, a new meetinghouse was built at the corner of roads now called Quaker and Madaket and the first burial was in 1732. Over time, more than 5000 burials occurred in this ground. Quakers eschewed personal adornment and they particularly forbade adornments of graves, which explain why most of this cemetery has no monuments. In the 19th century, Quakerism was rent by schismatic disputes. The three "heretical" groups, the Gurneyites, the Hicksites, and the Wilburites created such disarray that Quakerism on Nantucket was dealt a mortal blow. The first two did allow modest monuments to the dead and, thus, a small portion of the Quaker Cemetery has the remains of Gurneyites and Hicksites that are marked with simple marble headstones.

Quaise Asylum Burial Ground. 205 Polpis Road. A plot of land owned by the Nantucket Conservation Foundation includes the Quaise Asylum Burial Ground, which, however, is maintained by the Town. Leave the Polpis Road on Altar Rock Road and park at the second small lot on the east (left) and walk about 100 yards to the east. The cemetery is marked by an inscribed stone and its corners are marked by fencing.

Nantucket had long struggled with ways to provide for its poor. By the 1820s the Town decided to move its "workhouse" facility to a farm in Quaise where the inhabitants could help raise their own food. Near to the Asylum was its own burial ground. The main building lasted until it was destroyed by fire in 1844; ten of the 59 inhabitants died in the fire and were buried in this cemetery. This building was rebuilt but its awkward distance from town led to its physical removal within a decade to a point on the Great Harbor on Orange Street where it was renamed

in 1905 to Our Island Home and, subsequently, Landmark House. The Asylum and its burial ground were not originally in the middle of a field; the Polpis Road ran just to the south of the cemetery until it was relocated in 1884 to its current layout. The ten who died in the fire have no monument:

Sophia Beebe, 57;
Lydia Bowen, 33;
Jonathan Cathcart, 79;
Abiel Davis, 87;
Wealthy Davis, 53;
William Holmes, 41;
Thomas Hull, 67;
William Hutchinson (no age given)
Paul Jenkins, 66;
Phebe Jones, 80.

Of the seventeen burials said to have taken place at the Quaise Asylum Burial Ground between 1823 and 1854, only two others beside those of the fire victims can be identified with certainty.:

“Uncle” Benjamin Davis, who died on April 14, 1841, is recorded in the Asylum notes as “The first buried here,”

Eliza Morrison, who died on September 5, 1841, was also “buried on the Farm.”

For the Cemetery Commission:

Frances Karttunen
Scott McIver
Allen Reinhard, Chair
Lee Saperstein, Secretary
Barbara White

16 February 2019