



Stonington
Cemetery

STONINGTON CEMETERY ASSOCIATION ANNUAL REPORT

October 2017

The past year has seen a consolidation of past gains for the Stonington Cemetery Association (SCA). We continue to stress that the organization is a hands-on organization with a very part-time staff of contractors including Mike Nolan who is responsible for burial sales and services, Tim Keena, who with his family and employees, loyally maintains the grounds, Marilyn Buck who keeps our books, and Steve Ahern who excavate gravesites and plows in the winter.

The Board supervises the vendors and fills in where necessary to manage projects, provide additional landscaping support, maintain the website, perform development functions, and plan for the future. Board members and Advisory Board members have worked hard to ensure that your contributions make a difference.

The board is at present:

Lynn Callahan . President
Philip Darrell . Vice President
Jacqueline Spiers . Treasurer
Trad Dart . Secretary
Ann Freeman
Michael Devine
Shane Devine
Tim Hogen
Steve Slosberg
Don Steinhoff
Thomas Taylor

Advisory Board: Mary Thacher, George Avery, Fred Burdick, Alison Darrell, Bob Suppicich.

Our community is everyone who has friends, relatives, and loved ones buried in Stonington Cemetery, residents of Stonington, those who have an interest in its history,

all who pass by and are refreshed by the landscape, and those who have contributed to its maintenance and preservation.

One of the most significant and enduring developments for the SCA this year has been a recognition of the importance of the cemetery grounds with a listing on the National Register of Historic Places. As part of a large post-Storm Sandy grant program, the National Parks Service hired R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates to prepare a nomination proposal for Stonington Cemetery for a listing on the National Register. The document was presented to the State Office of Historic Preservation in June and their review board approved the nomination. We expect to see the listing before the end of this year.

Stonington Cemetery is being recognized as notable for its “association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history” and with the lives of persons significant in our past”. The “property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction”. In quotes are the qualifying factors established as guidelines by the National Parks Service.

Our place on the National Register recognizes the importance of our grounds as an historic location that has played a role significant in local and national history. Stonington Cemetery is the oldest incorporated cemetery in New London County and is unusual because it contains burials prior to incorporation and represents examples of several recognized cemetery types. The nomination proposal is available on our website and at http://www.cultureandtourism.org/cct/lib/cct/Stonington_Cemetery_NR_Sept2017.pdf.

We are proud to be recognized and to take our place beside other important locations in New London County, in Connecticut, and in the United States.

What follows is a summary of our work during 2017, some explanation of our current situation, and some ideas about future plans. We welcome your input.

Financial

The completion of our loan obligation for the purchase of the West Grounds, coupled with a willingness of our community to support the mission of the Stonington Cemetery Association through our appeals, plus the continued contribution of time from Board members and volunteers has meant that we are able to share with you an improved picture of our financial well being.

The Board of Directors is happy to present a budget that, for the first time in many years, includes money for cemetery improvement but does not rely on withdrawals from the Association’s endowment fund to balance the budget. At the end of Fiscal Year 2016, we were able to add \$5,000 to our asset account. In September, we received a bequest of \$7,200 from Marianne Ryon Felmet who died in February of this year. The entire amount of her bequest has been added to our fund.

Cemetery expenses have remained constant during the past several years. We do anticipate significant expenditures for the expansion of burial areas in both the old cemetery grounds and in the West Grounds in the coming 18 months. This expansion will be discussed more fully in another section of this report.

At the end of last year, the balance in the checking account was \$15,995. The savings account had a balance of \$4,468. The Mystic Management Asset account stood at \$232,084. This number is in comparison to \$202,965 at the end of FY 2015. Note that the FY 2016 figure of \$232,084 does not include the \$7,200 bequest that we received during the current (FY 2017) accounting period. Details of our fund's investments are available upon request.

The annual financial statement will be available later this month. It is being prepared by Michael Poe. The 2016-2017 budget is included at the conclusion of this report.

Development

During FY 2016, \$26,046 was raised as a result of our two appeals. We are grateful to our community for this support. Donations represent one third of our annual budget. Lot sales and burial services provide the rest. During the past year, the SCA received two grants - a \$2,500 grant from the Town of Stonington for the repair of the shed buildings and a \$500 grant from the Mystic Rotary to furnish the inside of the Victorian shed as a simple office space. A grant proposal for money to purchase new street signs to replacing missing signs has been submitted to the Charles B. Allyn Foundation.

We have set an annual giving goal of \$30,000 this year. This number represents a small increase over the amount raised in FY 2016 and is modest in comparison to the benefits this acreage provides.

We have made progress with the list of small and grand needs presented in last year's annual report. We hope this status report will be encouraging to our community.

- A rainy day fund to cover unanticipated maintenance expenses. *There are sufficient funds in the budget to support reasonable expenses.*
- A plan of development and the capital campaign required to prepare the West Grounds for burials. *Revised plans for developing the West Grounds will cost less to implement than the 2004 plan and it's possible that we will be able to fund this expansion through the annual appeal.*
- Funding to re-build our endowment. *During the last six months we have added \$12,200 to our endowment.*

- Purchase of a cemetery mapping and record keeping software system to efficiently and accurately manage recent purchases and burials as well as to provide a platform for historic burial information that interested parties can access to research their family histories. *We have put this investment on hold. Work by Joanna Case and Judy Hicks has greatly assisted with grave recording and finding. Our need for a better system for storing cemetery plot sales and burial locations hasn't been eliminated. We have made a decision to delay the purchase of dedicated cemetery software.*
- Planning and fund raising to preserve important cemetery buildings & monuments: the Billings Mausoleum, the Phelps Mausoleum, the Atwood Colonnade, the Receiving Chapel, the CP Williams monument. *This need remains unfilled and becomes more urgent yearly.*
- Upkeep for all stones and monuments and the fence. *With continued contributions from the community, this upkeep can be part of our annual budget.*
- Repair & renovation of the green shed/hearse house. *This work on these structures will begin this month and continue next spring.*
- Various smaller projects including – signage for the West Grounds, new “street” signs, rubbish cans, professional attention to trees & shrubs including maintenance & new plantings. *There is an ongoing need for professional landscape planning and the implementation of that plan for both the old cemetery and the West Grounds.*

This organization was realized through the generosity of interested community members with a vision for a public cemetery open to all serving both as a non-sectarian burial place and as an artistic landscape. We remind you that the same spirit is needed today if we are to continue to honor the gift of the original founders to this community.

Grounds

Maintenance constitutes a significant portion of our annual operating costs. Regular upkeep is required to keep the Stonington Cemetery a safe, beautiful, and peaceful place for the families and loved ones we serve. While volunteers can and do play an important role in care for the grounds, we must and do rely on professional landscaping services to provide regular upkeep for our historic cemetery.

Tim Keena's firm continues to mow, trim, and remove dead trees and fallen limbs. His team is generous with their time and attention. Centuries old family plots and uneven spacing of stones means additional time and care are required for mowing and trimming. Last spring, his firm repaired several uneven areas in the roadways. Many dead or dying trees were removed. Constant attention to our aging tree population is necessary to prevent damage to headstones.

Plans are underway to open two new sections of the old cemetery grounds for burials. We have hired Cherenzia of Westerly, RI and James Cowen of North Stonington to assist us with the necessary survey maps, grading plans, and wetland studies. We are seeking permission to offer burial plots in the southeast corner of the grounds and in the open space behind the sheds. In addition, we are revisiting the 2004 plans for developing the West Grounds.

In both the old cemetery and the West Grounds, most of the space that is free and/or suitable for burials is located within 100' of wetlands and thus in an upland review area where plans for use must be approved by the Wetlands Commission. Our revised plans for the West Grounds reflect this Board's inclination to preserve the open and natural appearance of the field. We will prepare a smaller portion of the acreage for plot sales and submit a plan that won't require grading or filling. Access to the water will, of course, be preserved.

Community members with an interest in this planning process are encouraged to contact the Board of Directors.

We expect to begin work during October on the planned restoration of the shed buildings. The buildings will be re-roofed this fall. Work on the exterior will continue next spring with repairs to the trim and staining. Outmoded and broken property was removed from the sheds during a May work session. A grant from the Town of Stonington will offset the expense of exterior repairs. A small grant from Mystic Rotary is earmarked for the interior.

In September, our West Grounds neighbors in consultation with the SCA Board planted 10 field cedars on cemetery property near the bordering stone wall to create a natural screen between our properties. The planting was designed by the landscape firm Reed Hilderbrand. All parties signed a memo of understanding.

The Board has scheduled a work morning at the cemetery on Saturday, 14 October, at 9 AM. We will be removing spent cemetery baskets, clearing downed limbs and branches and pruning.

Note: It will help the appearance of our grounds if spent cemetery baskets are removed to the rear southeast corner of the grounds and placed near the dumpster. Please don't use trash receptacles for spent arrangements and baskets.

Website & Communications

The website continues to be a tool for easy contact and regular monitoring of the phone answering machine. A link to PayPal makes online secure donations and payment for burial services possible. The Gmail account has contributed to better service and

improved customer relations and has made it possible to send out email blasts. The number of FaceBook members is growing.

Constitution & By-Law Review

At a Special Meeting of the SCA, December 2015, a committee was formed to review and make any necessary revisions to the organizations by-laws. The result of the committee's work has been to vote on a revised constitution. By-law revision is ongoing.

Outstanding Volunteer 2017 Honor

The importance of volunteer contributions has been noted often in this report. Last year the SCA Board of Trustees decided to formally recognize at the annual meeting and in our newsletter individuals who have undertaken projects that go beyond the regular work at hand and who have demonstrated initiative and leadership through his or her efforts and who have made dramatic changes in the organization and in the way the community and the organization views itself.

This year the Stonington Cemetery Association would like to recognize and honor the efforts of JOANNA CASE and JUDY HICKS for their remarkable work surveying the grave stones in our cemetery.

Joanna and Judy approached the Board early in the winter of 2016 to discuss a project to record and photograph headstones. We were excited and delighted to learn that volunteers might consider this serious undertaking on behalf of the Stonington Cemetery Association.

Their work began in the spring of 2016. They visited the grounds on a weekly basis, weather allowing, and worked for several hours each visit. Joanna photographed stones and read the epitaphs. Judy acted as scribe. Periodically the recordings – reviewed and corrected – were sent to a third volunteer living in Florida – Sandra Seldon. Sandra entered the raw data into an Excel spreadsheet with an accompanying guide to the photos. The team predicted that it would take three summers to complete the project, but their fieldwork was completed in only two summers. The project is being wrapped up now with almost 4,500 burials recorded.

Joanna and Judy have surveyed all the gravestones on the cemetery grounds. They have recorded the epitaph on each stone or monument, photographed every stone, and compiled a digital record. The results have been shared with us and have been posted on GraveFinder and made available to the public.

Both Joanna and Judy have intense and generous interest in history and genealogy. Judy is a past president of the Mystic River Historical Society and was owner of the Village Bookstore in Olde Mystic Village where she offered many books on local history. She worked for a time as Assistant Librarian at Mystic & Noank. This is where the friendship began. Joanna was director of the Mystic & Noank Library for 35 years. After retirement

she wanted to keep her research skills honed. Her interest in history and genealogy led to work as a volunteer for GraveFinder photographing tombstones for folks researching their family history.

About seven years ago, after Joanna had been researching remote graveyards unaccompanied, Judy decided it would be more sensible to work as a pair and thus was born the team that has led to tens of thousands of monument recordings. Joanna and Judy form a remarkable research duo that has surveyed 11 local small family cemeteries as well as Elmgrove Cemetery in Mystic – a 14,000 grave project that took them three years to complete. At the conclusion of a project, all data is released to the cemetery administrators (or in the case of an orphan cemetery to the Town Hall), historical society, and/or library. The information is also released to the GraveFinder website. Next on their project list is St. Patrick's cemetery on River Road in Old Mystic. Then Noank?

The hundreds of hours of work that Joanna and Judy and Sandra have spent in the field and at their desks is an invaluable service and as a result of their efforts, our cemetery has already been able to assist with grave location has received donations for the service. Their project is a modern day version of Charles Hales' WPA survey of CT gravestones that was completed in the early 1930's. Hales' records remain a valuable tool for historians and genealogists. Joanna and Judy have applied the same rigor to their work as Hale and his associates, but Joanna and Judy's survey provides a searchable database and photos that are available via the internet. Their record is the first comprehensive survey of Stonington Cemetery since the 1930's and the first shareable database of all existing headstones in the 263 year history of our cemetery.

This Board, our membership, and all those with loved ones buried in our cemetery or who are searching for family members can be grateful in the present and in the future for Joanna's and Judy's generous gift – for their time, for their dedication, for the meticulousness of their recordings and research, and for their vision.

The Board would also like to note several other important volunteers.

BOB SUPPICICH has continued to work on an almost daily basis since spring picking up where he left off late fall last year cleaning first the remaining marble stones and then, using a different technique, granite markers. In addition to this incredible undertaking of monument cleaning, Bob has repaired stones, assisted R. Christopher Goodwin researchers when they were on site to prepare the nomination proposal, and welcomed visitors. Acting on behalf of the Board he has been a guide and a conduit to the Board. We are grateful to Bob for the considerable role he has played in helping the SCA become the organization that it is today.

STONINGTON GARDEN CLUB: We would also like to express appreciation to the Stonington Garden Club for the plantings they have installed along the wall of the old cemetery grounds. For two fall seasons - 2015 and 2016 – the club dug in thousands of spring blooming bulbs. The result was an incredible display this last spring. The plants will of course multiply over the years.

This fall a group of volunteers led by Tipping Rock Road resident, Michelle Kutz, will dig in more bulbs on the west side of North Main Street along the stone wall of the West Grounds. We are very appreciative of this work on behalf of the SCA and for the enjoyment of all our friends and neighbors.

ANNE BOURNE is a new volunteer who has offered to assist with data organization. She will help consolidate our burial and plot sale information into a single searchable database. When we are eventually able to purchase a cloud based cemetery management system, the work of volunteers like Joanna, Judy, and Anne will greatly assist with the data merge and enable us to have a working system more quickly. In the meantime, a good excel database serves as a bridge.

A new volunteer project put into place this fall will record and mark the graves of all veterans buried in the cemetery. The effort is being organized in connection with Stonington High School teacher Ann-Marie Houle. Volunteers include Sage Williams who will help co-ordinate with the high school and Don Maranell representing American Legion Post 58. We are excited about an activity that will involve young people.

We welcome the participation of individuals wanting to help us. We have a need for all sorts of assistance – from work on the grounds to research to data management. Please don't hesitate to volunteer your service. You may be able to fill a need we haven't recognized or articulated.

Respectfully,
Lynn Callahan