



City of Portsmouth Committee For Cemeteries

North Cemetery Phase 1 Improvement Project

April 18, 2022 City Council Meeting

Presented by Chris Benecick



Portsmouth Cemetery Committee
Mission Statement (Oct. 2021):

*“To restore, preserve, and
safeguard Portsmouth's
historic cemeteries and their
history for future
generations.”*





Cemetery Preservation – Remembering Lives Once Lived

*“Blooming youth as you pass by,
As you are now, so once was I,
As I am now, so you must be,
Prepare for death and follow me...”*

Job Tabor (1807-1833), Beck-Tabor Family Cemetery

*Epitaph that became popular in American mortuary culture in the 1800-1850 period and found on gravestones in Portsmouth and throughout New England.

North Cemetery – Why Is It Important?



- Established in 1753, it is the largest 18 Century coastal burying ground north of Newburyport, MA, covering approximately 1.5 acres and containing over 400 graves.
- The North Cemetery landscape exhibits characteristics typical of 18th and early 19th Century **Colonial burial**. Single graves dominate, marked with portal shaped tablets made from brownstone or slate and intricately carved by local or regional artisans. Gravestone carvings were used to memorialize the deceased, and to also symbolize to the living the hope, fears and unknowns associated with death. Unrelated individuals are buried next to each other, and plots were not presold.
- Union Cemetery borders North Cemetery to the north. It opened in 1847 and is an example of a **Victorian style** of burial of cemetery design, with graves organized into family plots in a park like setting. **(FUTURE PROJECT)**



North Cemetery – Why Is It Important?

- By the late 1840's, the cemetery was near capacity and burials shifted to the new Union Cemetery and South Cemetery burying grounds. With fewer new burials, the landscape began to fall into disrepair. The neglect of the North Cemetery was first noted in 1869 by an article in The Portsmouth Herald and continued into the early 20th Century as the surrounding area changed from a residential setting to industrial. The last burial took place here in 1926.
- North Cemetery was placed on the National Register of Historical Places in 1978. The Register noted that the cemetery was not only important for its inclusion of federal, state and prominent local leaders of the colonial era, but also for serving to remember those who helped give Portsmouth the seeds of the rich cultural diversity it represents today. Resting here are two Founding Fathers, patriots of the French and Indian, Revolutionary and Civil Wars, important physicians, the first Jewish resident, the first Roman Catholic parishioner, and early African American residents, both enslaved and free.
- As the North End of Portsmouth continues to redevelop, North Cemetery is a jewel that must be polished and protected to maintain its historic significance and tie its new residents and growing number of visitors to its important past.

John Langdon (A Founding Father of the United States)

- Born in Portsmouth in 1741 (now the Urban Forestry Center). He was a sea captain, ship owner and merchant before the Revolutionary War.
- Was a member of the 2nd Continental Congress in 1775, resigned a month before the Declaration of Independence was signed to oversee the construction of several warships including the “Raleigh”, “America” and “Ranger”. He also led militia units at Saratoga.
- Was President of NH, a signer of the U.S. Constitution, one of the first two US senators from NH, first president pro tempore of the Senate, and later Governor of NH.
- One of the most respected men in the country at the time, and a personal friend of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. He turned down James Madison’s request to be a candidate for Vice President in 1812 to remain in NH. Died in 1819.



William Whipple (A Founding Father of the United States) and Prince Whipple

- William Whipple was a sea captain, merchant and judge who was one of 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence at the 2nd Continental Congress.
- He also was a general at the Battle of Saratoga, accompanied by his enslaved servant Prince Whipple who served as a soldier and his personal bodyguard.
- In 1779, Prince and 19 other enslaved Portsmouth men petitioned the NH General Assembly for their freedom and abolition of slavery in the state; it was not acted upon, and NH did not abolish slavery until 1857.
- Prince was given his freedom in 1781 after his service in the Revolutionary War, and legally manumitted by Gen. Whipple in 1784. Later, he and his wife Dinah lived on the Whipple property on High St. and taught black children how to read and write.
- The Whipples, former owner and slave in life, now rest 50 ft apart in death in North Cemetery.



Abraham Issac

- An immigrant who migrated from Prussia in the early 1790's with his wife Rachel, he was the first Jewish resident of Portsmouth.
- A successful merchant, he was highly esteemed and respected by the Portsmouth community at his death in 1803. (this noted on his gravestone)
- Very unusual to find Jewish citizens buried next to Protestants in Colonial America.



Pomp and Candace Spring

- Pomp Spring was born into slavery in 1766 in Maine.
- After gaining his freedom, Pomp earned money from farming and bought a home in Portsmouth in 1791, married his wife Candace in 1793, and opened a bakery next to the North Church in 1794.
- The bakery enabled the Springs to accumulate enough income to live comfortably, and they were highly respected by both the white and black community in Portsmouth.
- Pomp became the President of Portsmouth's African Society, an organization that assisted others in the black community from feeding the poor to assisting with burial costs.
- The Springs died 4 months apart in 1807.



Robert Greenough

- Born in Portsmouth in 1839. Moved to Boston with his parents in the 1850's and worked as a paper hanger in Charlestown, MA.
- Enlisted in the 29th MA Infantry Regiment, Co. H at the start of the Civil War in late 1861, part of the famed "Irish Brigade".
- Killed at the Sunken Road at the Battle of Antietam, Sept. 17, 1862. It was the bloodiest single day in United States history, with 3650 soldiers dead on both sides of the battle.
- His body was returned to Portsmouth by train by his younger sister and he was interred in North Cemetery. She joined him just 4 years later at age 26, and now rests besides him.



Headstone Cleaning Project

- **SCOPE OF PROJECT:**

- The City of Portsmouth Cemetery Committee has organized an initial grave headstone cleaning project for the North Cemetery on Maplewood Avenue. Committee members and volunteers will be trained and supervised to clean headstones for future projects. Anticipating 15-20 volunteers through Committee outreach and city website.

- **PROJECT DATES AND TIMES:** **May 7, 2022 9:00AM to Noon**

RAIN DATE: May 14, 2022

- **SUPERVISION:** Project work will be supervised by Michael Griffin of the Cemetery Committee and John Lord of the NH Old Graveyard Association (NHOGA), both of whom are recognized as having the requisite experience and skills in this work.
- **COORDINATION:** The Department of Public Works will supply the materials needed for the project, along with providing a water tanker truck and reserving parking spots on site for volunteers

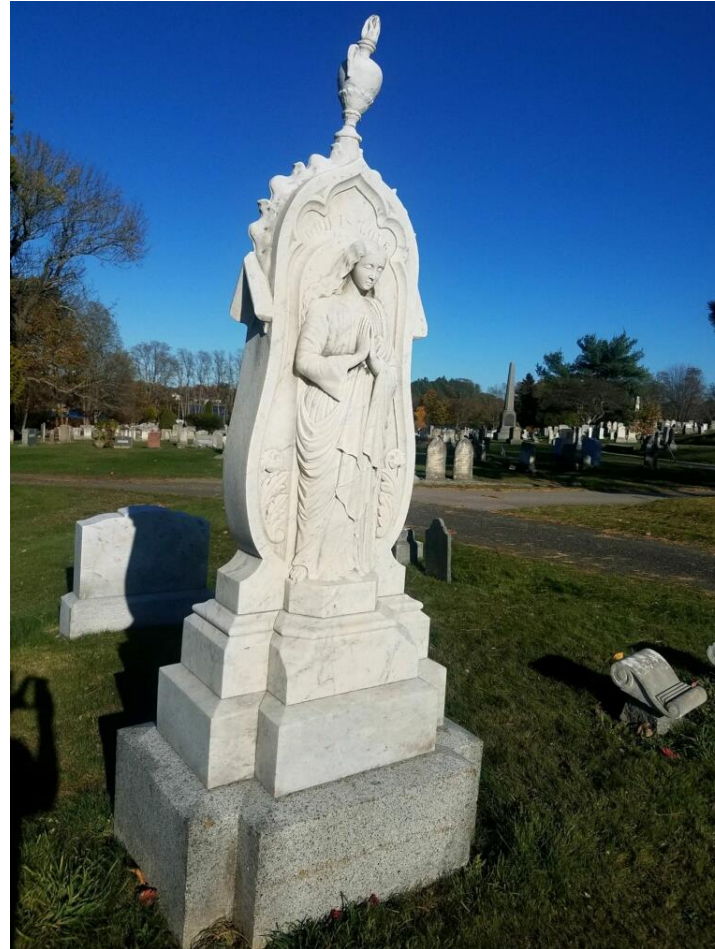
Gravestone Cleaning Process

- Applying D/2 Biological Solution which is effective for removing harmful staining from a variety of surfaces including natural stones such as marble, granite, limestone, sandstone, and slate. Removes stains from mold, algae, mildew, lichens and carbon-based air pollutants.
- D/2 Biological Solution is a biodegradable and contains no acids, salts, or bleach.
- D/2 is not a hazardous material and requires no special handling or protection. Safe to use around plantings.
- Volunteers will be using soft nylon or natural brushes to clean the headstones.

(Gravestone of Esther Mullinax, daughter of Prince and Dinah Whipple who died in 1868



Example of Headstone Cleaning with D/2 Biological Solution



Gravestone cleaned
in Harmony Grove
Cemetery by
Michael Griffith

The Historic
Cemetery
Committee
Thanks You for
Your Support!

Bibliography:

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- North and Union Cemeteries Edge Restoration Plan, Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture, LLC, December 2016
- National Register of Historic Places Nomination for North Cemetery, May 1977.
- Articles From The Portsmouth Herald:
5/24/1851, "Public burial grounds."
8/14/1869, "A ramble in our cemeteries."
6/5/1965, "Resting place of famous disgrace to city."
- *Antietam on the Web* ©1996 - 2022 [Brian Downey](#) & Contributors
- D/2 Biological Solutions, Inc.. PO Box 3746, Westport, MA
- New Hampshire Historical Society | 30 Park Street, Concord, NH 03301