



Stonington
Cemetery

2025

Stonington Cemetery Association

Annual Report

September 27, 2025

The Stonington Cemetery Association (SCA) closed out fiscal year 2025 with a period marked by both expansion and resiliency. With the dedication of our Board and the support of our community partners, the Association achieved significant milestones. Highlights included the establishment of the Stonington Cemetery Foundation to secure major gifts from private donors, a record-setting year for contributions to our endowment, the highest annual plot sales in our history, and progress toward expanding our physical grounds through working towards a Special Use Permit submission to the Town of Stonington for the West Grounds.

At the same time, we remained steadfast in navigating the challenges that face nonprofits: an uncertain national climate, rising expenses, and deferred maintenance. Thanks to the commitment of our Board and the generosity of our donors, SCA continues to adapt, evolve, and thrive.

We are deeply grateful not only for the commitment of our volunteer Board of Directors but also for the trusted professionals who support our daily operations. These include Christie Voss, who oversees customer service, plot sales, and burials; Craig Czaja, our burial services contractor; Eric Beverly and Evan Spera of Cedar Ridge Landscape, LLC, who manage landscaping and tree care; Elliott Shaw of Greenwheel, LLC, who assists with gardening; and Marilyn Buck, who maintains our financial records.

The Board actively supervises these partners and steps in wherever needed to manage projects, oversee development, maintain our website, and ensure careful stewardship of your contributions. Together, we are building a stronger, more sustainable future for the cemetery while honoring our responsibility to the past.

Board members in FY 2025 include:

Kyle Berg, President

Rachel Adam Rogers, Vice President

Frances Ashley

Philip Darrell

Hardin Gray

Daniel Hasson

Frederick Souza, Treasurer

Stewart Joseph, Secretary

Jamie Lewis

Steven Muller

John Olmstead

Gary Van Zante

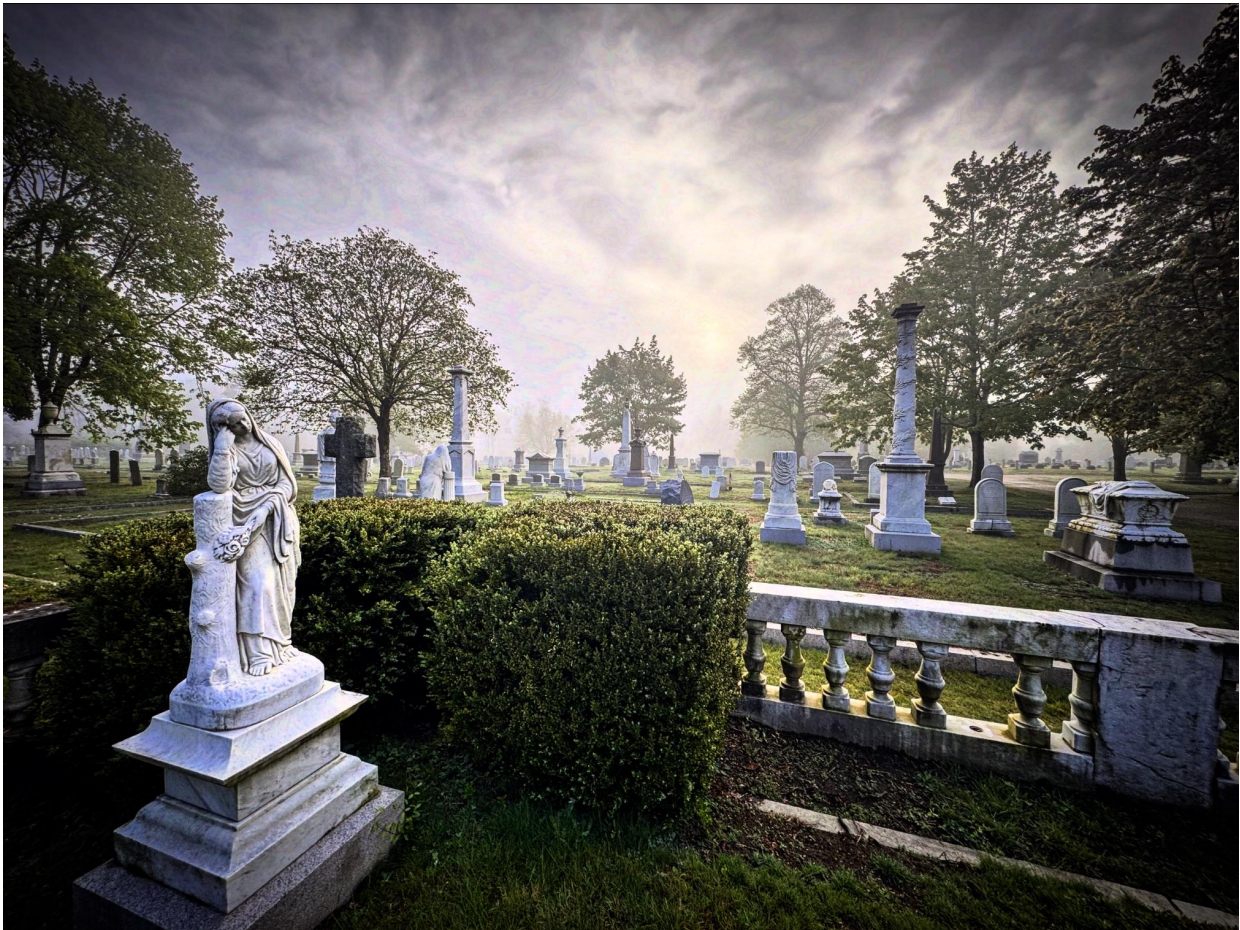
The following is a summary of our work in FY 2025 (July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025), an explanation of our current activities, and ideas about future plans. We welcome your input and feedback.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

SCA Letter	...	[2]
Financial	...	[4]
Development	...	[6]
Burials & Plot Sales	...	[7]
Buildings & Grounds	...	[8]
Monuments, Gravestones & Mausoleums	...	[9]
Recordkeeping & Mapping	...	[10]
Public Relations & Social Media	...	[11]

Programming	...	[11]
Checklist of Projects	...	[12]
West Grounds Development	...	[13]



Financial

The Board of Directors is pleased to present a balanced budget once again.

We ended FY2025 with a surplus of \$67,317 and plan to utilize this surplus to continue supporting maintenance of the grounds and new projects such as the development of the West Grounds. This surplus is the result of careful attention to budgeted expenditures and income to keep within the limitations of the approved budget of \$131,049. It must be noted that the budget had allowed for \$35,000 for developing the West Grounds, but only \$13,488 of that was spent as progress has been slowed by design iterations and the permitting process. Additionally, \$8,600 was put aside for Restoration Projects and

Preparation of New Burial Areas, and several stones have been repaired and re-righted, and a new burial area created.

At the end of FY2025 (June 30, 2025), our cash balance was \$45,444, and our endowment balance was \$559,961, an increase of \$108,347 over last year. In large part, this increase is the result of significant plot sales during the year and increased donations from the public. There have been no withdrawals from this fund over the past several years. However, once the West Grounds project begins in earnest, it is expected that resources from the fund will need to be used. Similarly, the Billings Mausoleum continues to be a topic of discussion, but repair and/or demolition estimates over the years indicate anywhere from \$1-\$3 million to address the issues that make the building unsafe in its present state, a situation that will need attention in the very near future.

Our Endowment Fund is managed by Mystic Asset Management with supervision by the Board of Directors. Details of our fund's investments are available upon request. Note that we have been carefully moving money into treasury funds that were previously held in our interest-free checking account. The change has allowed our money to generate some income while remaining liquid for when it may be needed.

The 2025-2026 budget of \$194,267 is higher than that of 2024-25 but is realistic. A surplus of \$67,317 was carried forward during the budget development process, and we expect to use approximately \$27,067 of this surplus to support the development of a new burial area dedicated to cremation burials. In turn, this will allow for additional revenues from plot sales and burials and help the restoration and repair of some of our historic monuments.

On the expense side, we estimate our costs for general landscaping will be about \$65,000, and \$28,500 for grave excavation and plot sales. Although burials represent income, we must pay our contractors for their services. An important percentage of our income comes from these unpredictable burial fees and plot sales. Last year, the income from these was \$10,500 below what was expected and budgeted, while this year it was \$71,200 higher than what we budgeted. It is important to note that the Cemetery has many plots available for sale in locations throughout the cemetery, and that there is true savings in purchasing these sooner rather than later.

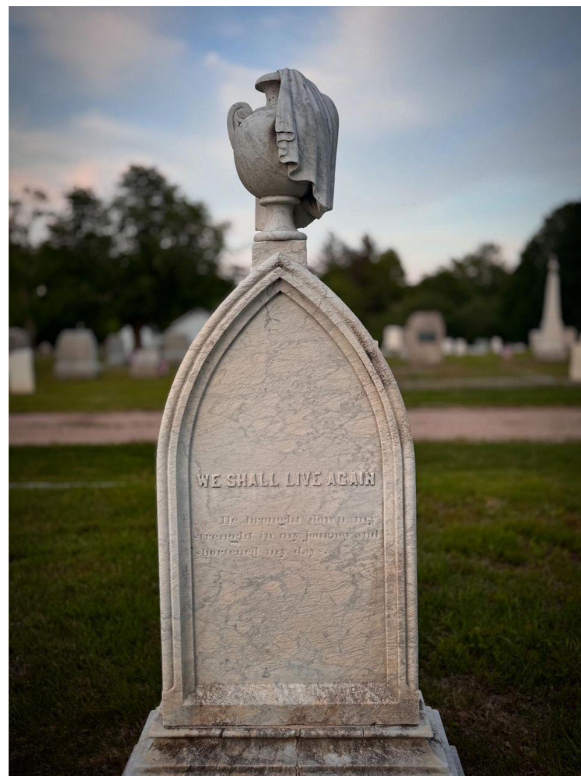
All budget income accounts were held constant. Expenses (i.e., insurance premiums, bookkeeping fees, utilities, and general expenses) were adjusted up slightly to account for actual costs incurred.

We have budgeted \$27,067 for capital projects and the preparation of new burial areas, and \$45,000 to support the development of the West Grounds. However, it must again be noted that this number is expected to demand tapping into the endowment fund, and we don't have detailed cost estimates for the West Grounds or the Billings Mausoleum.

There is a new feature in our financial picture that had been suggested for many years but came to fruition this year. On January 30, 2025, the Stonington Cemetery Association Foundation, Inc. was created as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. This is somewhat different than the Stonington Cemetery Association, which has been classified as a 501(c)(13) cemetery association. While both entities are non-profits, there have been issues over the years with being able to apply for and receive grants and donations because of the 501(c)(13) IRS classification. The Foundation is now the fund-raising entity of the Cemetery, and this has proven to be helpful, with approximately \$7000 of this Spring's donations coming from financial

corporations that would not previously donate to us. Additionally, it is hoped that the creation of the Foundation will enable donors to more easily create charitable bequests in their estate planning.

The FY 2025-2026 budgets are attached at the end of this report.



Development

Important funds are derived each year from grants, and we are very thankful to the Town of Stonington for its continued support in this area. They have helped with both general expenses and the Wreaths Across America project, enabling every veteran's grave to be decorated for the winter holidays. We will seek additional grant funding as the West Grounds project comes to fruition. Some costs associated with the Billings Mausoleum may also involve grant funding.

We credit a large part of our success and ability to support new projects to the generosity of our community. This year, our appeals enabled us to exceed the \$40,000 budget, and we appreciate the continued support from our many benefactors. The newly created 501(c)(3) allows benefactors more flexibility in their donation options and will also enable us to apply for different grant funding.

The Stonington Cemetery Association was created through the generosity of community members with the vision of a non-sectarian burial place and a public landscape. Situated in the most visible of locations along Route 1, that idealism has come to fruition. With the help of the families who have

members interred here and the larger Stonington community, we hope to maintain that spirit from our founders.

We look forward to working with everyone who has a stake in the continued success of Stonington Cemetery and to maintaining and expanding our service to the community.

Burials & Plot Sales

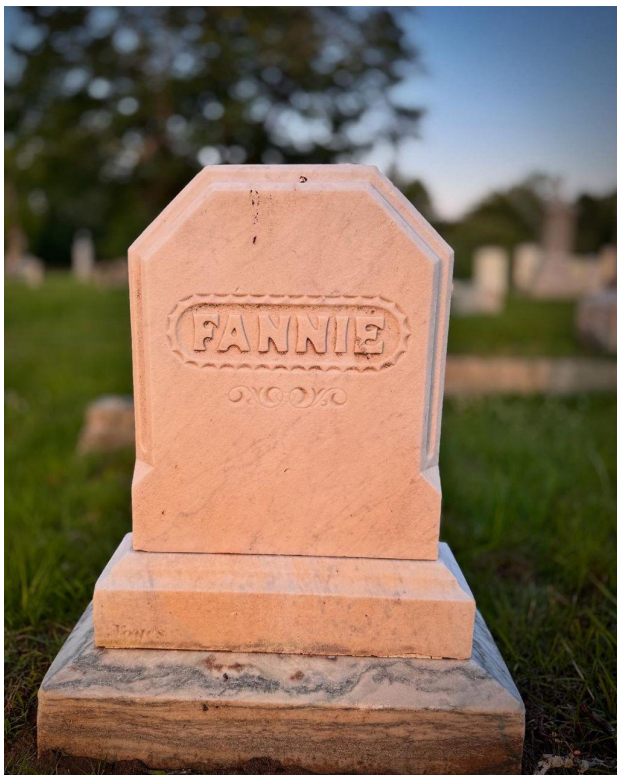
Christie Voss continues to play an essential role in the day-to-day operations of the cemetery. She provides attentive customer service for all inquiries, files the required Sexton reports with the Town of Stonington, and facilitates burial arrangements with families and funeral homes. Christie also coordinates the showing and sale of burial plots, maintains our cemetery services software for all new burials and sales, and serves as the point of contact between our cemetery services contractor and area monument companies. In years past, these responsibilities were handled on a volunteer basis by Board leadership, making her consistent effort and professionalism all the more valuable. The Association is deeply appreciative of her work in supporting our mission and serving our community.

In FY 2025, the cemetery recorded 20 burials—nine full burials and eleven cremation burials. We also achieved a new record with 47 plot sales, exceeding budgeted expectations by more than four times. This remarkable increase was largely due to the opening of a new section within the Eaton area, established at the request of a family.

We also introduced Oak Grove, a newly developed section within the York grounds. Nestled in a quiet, wooded area, Oak Grove offers a serene and private setting for families seeking a natural resting place. The section includes 84 cremation-only plots, carefully designed to complement the landscape's natural character while accommodating the site's rocky terrain.

As public interest in burial practices evolves, we continue to receive inquiries regarding “green burials.” While the term has no universal definition, we interpret it as burials without embalming, caskets, or vaults/liners. Under Connecticut General Statute § 19a-315d, these practices are permitted in our historic cemetery. By offering this option, we are among the few cemeteries in the region able to meet this growing demand. Please note, however, that green burials will not be available in the West Grounds.

In FY 2025, we carried out two green burials (included in the total above), and we anticipate interest in this option will continue to grow in the years ahead.



Buildings and Grounds

In FY 2025, the Buildings and Grounds Committee continued its steady focus on maintaining and enhancing our cemetery's landscape.

Cedar Ridge completed its second year of mowing services, concentrating on high-visibility areas on a weekly basis and rotating through remaining sections as needed, with additional labor provided during peak growing months. Based on feedback from the prior year, we scheduled a full-property mowing prior to Memorial Day, ensuring the cemetery looked its best for the many visitors during that time. Routine brush clearing also took place, particularly along the exterior walls surrounding the West Grounds and the front wall of the existing cemetery. This work received positive feedback, and we intend to maintain this approach going forward.

In November 2024, board volunteers identified, tagged, and removed seven dump trucks' worth of overgrown plantings, primarily Alberta spruces, from individual plots in the Shaw and Pomeroy sections. This effort significantly improved the appearance of areas that had been neglected for some time.

Cedar Ridge also addressed hazardous trees including the removal of a severely decayed tree on Hyde Avenue and a large tree on Phelps Avenue, both in April 2025. Additional tree work has been scheduled for the coming fiscal year as more compromised trees and overhanging branches have been identified.

Two years ago, extensive tree clearing by the Connecticut Department of Transportation impacted the cemetery grounds. In response, a neighbor generously contributed \$10,000 in June 2025, specifically designated for tree care and replacement. This donation aligns with the longstanding goal of the Grounds and Long-Range Planning Committee to create a succession planting plan that preserves the cemetery’s “landscape” experience. A comprehensive planting plan is currently underway, with plantings anticipated in Fall 2025.

As the West Grounds opens, the Board will need to increase the budget for landscaping and mowing, while also considering roadway improvements along Hyde Avenue (addressed later in this report). Grounds care—especially mowing and leaf removal—remains our most significant expense, and we are grateful to both contractors and volunteers who support these ongoing efforts.

Unfortunately, FY 2025 also brought an increase in unwanted activity on cemetery grounds, including dog walkers and overnight visitors. In a few cases, graves were found disturbed with suspicious items left behind. While no permanent vandalism was discovered, we notified local police to increase patrols and installed three trail cameras to monitor activity and help guide corrective measures.

Monuments, Gravestones & Mausoleums

Our organization continues to require applications for all new monuments to ensure proper review prior to installation. Craig Czaja remains responsible for installing monument foundations, helping guarantee that each monument is stable and secure. In FY 2025, the Association reviewed and installed 28 monument applications.

In addition to new installations, we also worked to repair and straighten damaged or threatened stones, preserving both safety and the dignity of the grounds.

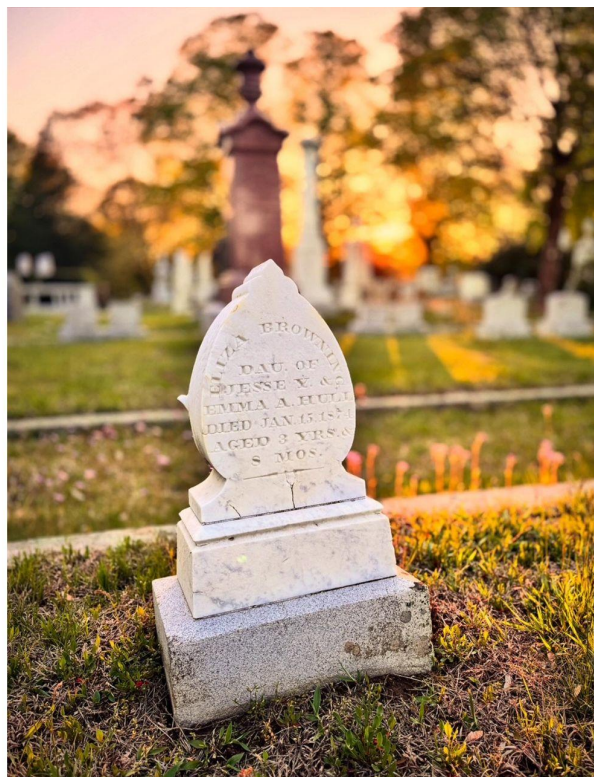
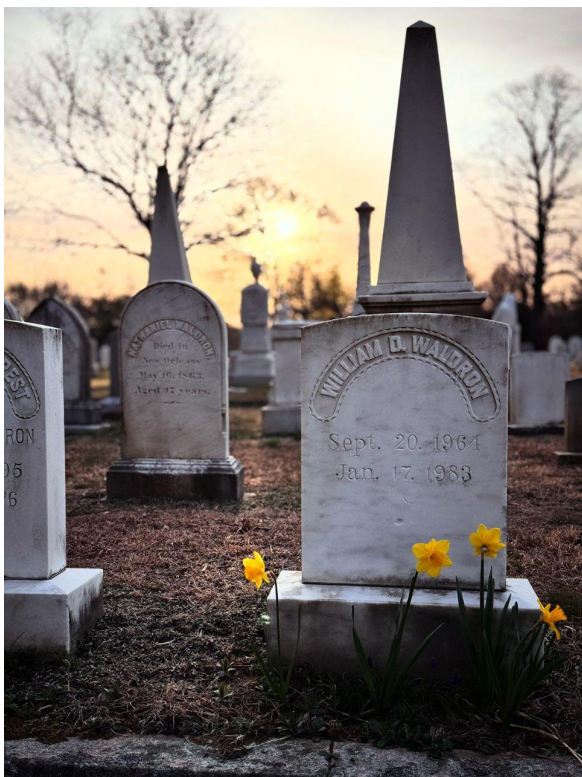
With the transition of longtime volunteer Bob Suppicich from active service, the cemetery hosted a stone-cleaning demonstration where Bob shared techniques for caring for marble and granite markers. We are grateful to Board member Daniel Hasson for stepping in to continue supporting monument cleaning efforts.

Mausoleums remain a significant challenge due to the high cost of ongoing maintenance. In particular, the Billings Mausoleum has suffered decades of water intrusion and neglect, leaving its structural integrity compromised. For safety, the surrounding area has been cordoned off and a warning sign posted.

In 2024, J.R. Lamb Studios—the original creator of the mausoleum’s stained-glass dome generously volunteered to relocate the dome to storage for safekeeping. A working committee was also established to explore options for the mausoleum’s future.

Our Fall 2024 newsletter featured a cover story inviting community feedback on the issue. We received only two responses, both favoring a respectful demolition of the structure with an appropriate site memorial. In the coming fiscal year, the Board will continue to evaluate next steps, whether that involves

stabilization or a phased, planned demolition, and will work to identify a sustainable funding source for the chosen path.



Recordkeeping & Mapping

During the past year, we continued to build upon the data that we transferred to Cemsites, a cloud-based cemetery software system that was purchased in 2021. We have carried on with the upload of other records including death certificates, obituaries, plot owner information, veteran status, photos, etc. As with any bulk data transfer, records need to be corrected and/or clarified.

Francine Sullivan, hired through the Charles B. Allyn Foundation grant, has been assisting with data collection and uploading. Ann Freeman and Lynn Callahan, along with Rex Henderson, have been verifying plot ownership and burial locations and have worked to audit records, ensuring that all grave assignments, maps, schematics and archives are represented accurately in our digital records. Additionally, dozens of monuments have been uploaded to Find-A-Grave.

As can be expected, this has been a tedious process that once completed, will be an invaluable resource both for our own cemetery's purposes and as a resource to the community members who reach out for assistance in finding graves or learning about a specific burial from the past.

As new burial areas are created and maps for older areas become more organized, we will hone our Ramaker map to accurately reflect all areas. We plan to execute this initiative once the remaining areas are mapped and reconciled – a goal for the upcoming fiscal year.

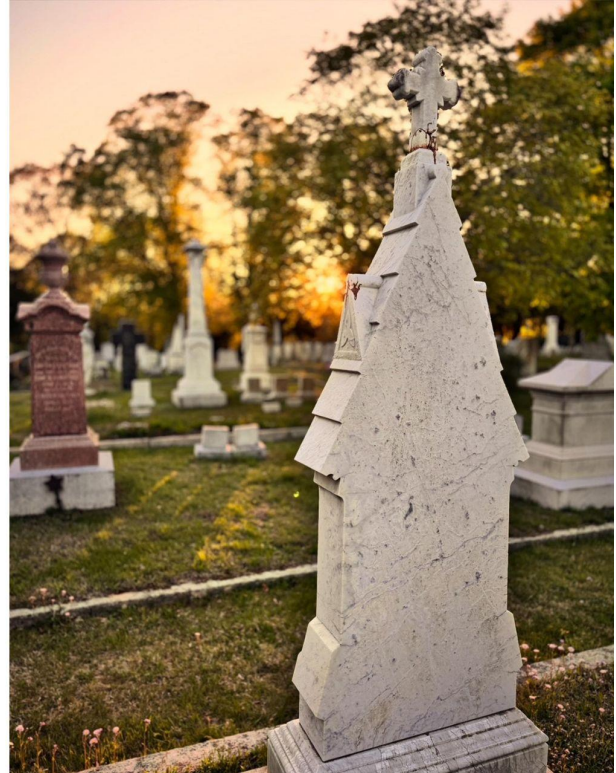
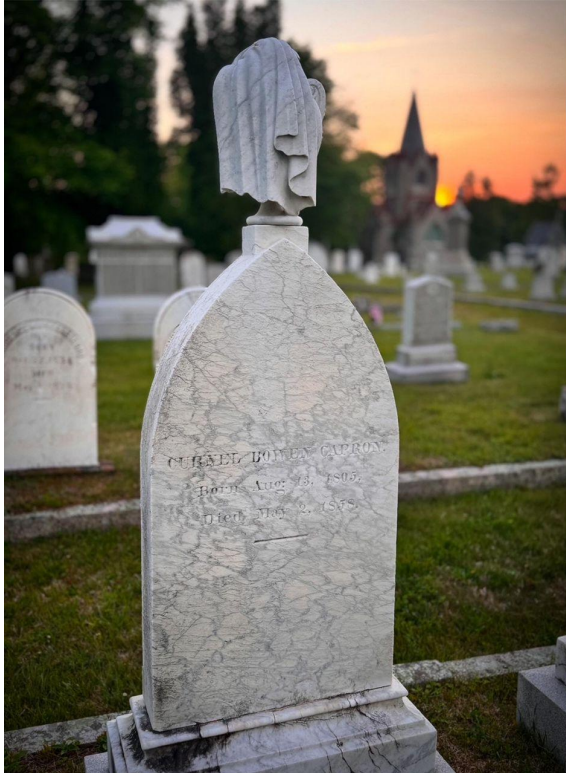
Public Relations & Social Media

The Stonington Cemetery Association continues to maintain a website which is useful for those seeking contact information or for assistance with plot location. We also utilize a shared email account and cloud-based drive for online file storage which has contributed to consistent customer service to allow for improved communications (including sales and burial arrangements). The Board also continues to reach out to our donor base via mailings twice annually; once by distributing the annual Tombstone Chronicles newsletter, the 10th edition being mailed this fall, and a second by a call for donations via a Springtime update letter. Instagram is our most active platform, which currently has over 1,500 followers, and increase of about 300 from the year prior. Board member Daniel Hasson regularly posts images of our monuments and grounds, highlighting our cemetery's rich history while honoring individuals and their unique monuments.

The Town of Stonington established a Cemetery Commission in June of 2024 of which SCA advisory committee member, Rob Simmons, currently serves on the commission as an alternate member. We look forward to collaborating with this new Cemetery Commission, and have sought their advice regarding the Billings Mausoleum. The Commission is ready to support us once we've identified a solid path forward.

Programming

As we move forward, a goal for our organization is to provide more programming and community outreach. As such, we were proud to host the 2nd annual Wreaths Across America event, which sponsors wreaths on veteran's graves during the holiday season. Organized by Board member Daniel Hasson, the SCA hosted over 100 members of our community at an event held on December 14, 2023. Dignitaries, Thames River Composite Squadron, reporters and members of the community gathered at the Grand Army of the Republic monument and honored every veteran in our cemetery by sponsoring a surplus of wreaths which carry forward to this year. We plan to continue this event annually. This year's Wreath Across America Event is scheduled for December 13, 2025. For the second year, we have secured funding from the Town of Stonington to sponsor this event. During the next fiscal year, we hope to resume providing cemetery tours, led by volunteers of our Board.



Checklist of Projects

We continue to include a checklist of projects and needs that the Board manages based on priority. This serves as a visible list for of the community (and the Board) to keep track of what we've accomplished and a checklist for what remains to be accomplished.

- West Grounds development has moved into the forefront of project priorities for FY 2025. Additional information is detailed below.
- The Billings Mausoleum is in severe disrepair due to water intrusion and a strategic plan is necessary in order to determine what steps are necessary to stabilize and salvage this historic structure, or if there is no other option but a demolition. Grant funding and a capital campaign will likely be required to proceed as a seven-figure cost estimate resulted from an engineering survey in 2020.
- A complete overhaul and refresh of our website and marketing strategy.
- An update to our cemetery-wide Ramaker map, including all newly created burial areas and updated sections.
- A tree planting plan to be developed and implemented using earmarked donor funding.
- A long-term plan on succession and board leadership, including the need for additional paid support, if necessary.
- A comprehensive review of regulations, bylaws and customer forms will ensure our current practices are uniform and up to date.

- Stone repair and righting is ongoing. Our Burial Services contractor, Craig Czaja, has been helpful with resetting stones as needed. The Monuments and Gravestones committee will continue work to catalog needs and determine priorities and solutions for repair.
- The Palmer Mausoleum is maintained by the Palmer Society. Repointing was completed in FY 25. We hope to see window and door replacement in FY 26.
- The Phelps Mausoleum has begun to experience water intrusion. Repointing is necessary to ensure no additional damage will occur.
- Record rainfall has led to roadways and asphalt being washed out and unstable in some areas. Reclaimed asphalt has been laid in previous years to reinforce roadways in the majority of our cemetery. We will continue this effort in order to complete a stable and asphalted roadway along the cemetery's entire perimeter.
- A Strategic Plan will outline steps necessary to support the long-term success of the SCA. This project will be a priority for the Long-Range Planning Committee once the West Grounds is open.

West Grounds Development

The Stonington Cemetery Association purchased the West Grounds property, located at 352 North Main Street in 2001. After many years of planning, the SCA is actively working to bring this expansion project to fruition. Reed Hilderbrand Landscape Architects completed a conceptual plan for these grounds in 2021. In 2023, a dozen eastern red cedar trees were planted along the north wall as a screening against Route 1.

Legal consultation and civil engineering work with Cherenzia and Associates commenced in FY 25 to secure remaining documentation and reports necessary to apply for a Special Use Permit for Town of Stonington Planning and Zoning review and approval. We hope to apply for this permit by the end of 2025. Upon approval, we hope to seek bids and develop a cost estimate and begin construction once adequate funds are secured. First steps will include creating a new entrance, curb cut, installing a roadway for vehicular access and rebuilding the existing stone wall on the west side of the lot. Site work and plantings will follow.

In summary, FY 2025 proved to be a busy year for our cemetery. As we move forward and look to the future, strategic planning, exploration of grant funding and continued fundraising will be in the forefront of our endeavors as we continue to expand. We embrace the participation of individuals wanting to assist us – this can range from work on the grounds to research or recommending potential grant opportunities. Please don't hesitate to volunteer your service. You may be able to fill a need we have not yet recognized.

Respectfully submitted,
Kyle Berg, President