



Stonington
Cemetery

P O Box 345
Stonington CT 06378



THE GRAVE MARKER of William W. Hyde dates to 1856, a time of significant transition in the United States, both socially and economically. New England families like the Hydes were often rooted in early colonial history, and by the mid-19th century, many were experiencing the effects of industrialization, shifts in religious movements, and the lead-up to the Civil War (which began just five years after William's death).

Given the gravestone's ornate nature, the family likely had some standing in the community. Wealthier families of the time could afford more elaborate memorials, and cemeteries were seen as places to showcase a family's legacy.

The grave marker of William W. Hyde is not only a poignant reminder of a young life lost, but also a potential gateway into the broader history of the Hyde family in New England.



Save the Date

WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA will be held on December 14, 2024 at noon. Sponsor a wreath by scanning the attached QR code here!

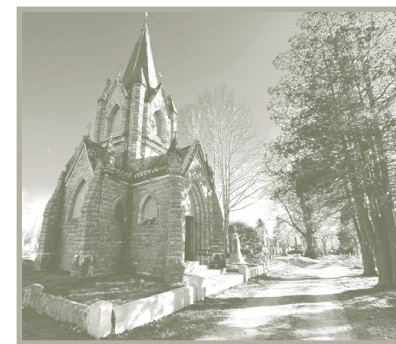


Stonington Cemetery Association



Volume 9 • Fall 2024

T O M B S T O N E CHRONICLES



NESTLED NEAR THE FRONT of our grounds, the Billings Mausoleum stands as a testament to the area's rich history and architectural heritage.

Constructed in the late 19th century, this ornate structure

has become a landmark of our cemetery, attracting those who appreciate its unique design and historical significance. However, recent discussions surrounding its preservation have raised concerns about the future of this iconic mausoleum.

The Billings Mausoleum was built in 1894 by the prominent Billings family, known for their contributions to the local economy and society. Its Gothic Revival architecture features intricate stone carvings and stained glass, reflecting the artistic sensibilities of its time. The mausoleum serves as the final resting place for Coddington Billings, Jr. and his parents, and stands as a symbol of the family's legacy in the community. Despite its historical value, the Billings Mausoleum is facing significant challenges. Age and environmental factors have taken their toll, leading to deterioration that threatens its structural integrity and safety. Cracks in the stonework, weathering of the façade, and damage to the stained glass are all indicators of the mausoleum's declining condition. Further, it was legally surrendered to the Stonington Cemetery Association in 1991.

In light of these issues, we are grappling with a difficult decision: should the mausoleum be disassembled to prevent further damage and safety concerns, or should efforts be made to restore and preserve this historic landmark? Recently, JR Lamb Studios, who created the original stained glass, volunteered to disassemble the glass dome and relocate it for safekeeping.

We believe that the mausoleum is an essential part of Stonington's heritage and has the potential to be restored to its former glory. We understand the need for maintaining historical sites for future generations and the cultural identity of the community. However, there are serious concerns about the financial and

logistical challenges associated with restoration. Based on a 2020 Engineering Study performed by GNCB structural engineers, the cost of preservation of this structure (excluding stained glass or gutter replacement) is estimated to be about \$1,100,000. As the cemetery relies on plot sales, burials and the generosity of our community to sustain itself financially each year, there are worries about whether adequate funds can be secured to undertake this preservation work.

As the community deliberates its options, several questions remain: How can we honor the history of the Billings Mausoleum while addressing the urgent need for preservation? What role can the community play in advocating for its future?

To facilitate a productive dialogue, we urge preservationists and subject matter experts to share knowledge, guidance and expertise on how to move forward. It is essential that we gather input from the community, ensuring that all voices are heard in this process. In parallel, our Association is investigating ways to explore feasibility of fundraising through a 501(c)3 entity. We hope that in doing so, we can maximize grant and/or foundation support.

The Billings Mausoleum is more than just a burial site; it is a piece of Stonington's history that embodies the stories of those who came before us. As we stand at this crossroads, the decision about its future will not only impact the mausoleum itself but also reflect our community's history, heritage, and preservation.

WEST GROUNDS UPDATE

BEHIND THE SCENES there has been significant progress made on the development of the West Grounds, located at 352 North Main Street. We are currently partnering with Cherenzia & Associates to assemble all required surveys, studies and documentation to supplement a Special Use Permit later this year. Once assembled, this will be presented before the public for approval by the Planning and Zoning Commission, and when approved, we will begin construction in earnest.

MANY THANKS to all who supported the Stonington Cemetery Association during the past fiscal year – July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. Contributions received after June 30, 2024 will be acknowledged in the Fall 2025 newsletter. If we have inadvertently missed you, please forgive us and send a correction. Gifts of \$250-\$499 are noted with an *, gifts of \$500-\$999 are noted with **, and gifts of \$1000 or more are noted with ***. We are grateful to all our donors who regularly support our organization with any amount. All gifts make an impact in helping us to achieve our goal.

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Website: www.stoningtoncemetery.org

Email: thestoningtoncemetery@gmail.com

LANDSCAPING AND MOWING continue to be the Association’s largest expense while also generating the most feedback from the community. Each year, we budget a minimum of \$50,000 towards landscaping and grounds maintenance including leaf removal and any necessary tree work. A large portion of this line item includes mowing and care of over 18 acres of grass, which is kept to a respectable length while also being good stewards of our grounds and the environment. Many areas, including the ancient burial ground in the front of our cemetery, require special care around fragile stones among uneven conditions. These areas are very time consuming and often get string-trimmed by hand. This was the first year that we partnered with Eric Beverly, Evan Spera and their team at Cedar Ridge Landscape, LLC to maintain our grounds and perform weekly mowing services. At least two men and equipment are on site for 8 hours per week from May through September, focusing on high visibility areas weekly with the remainder of our grounds being mowed on a cyclical basis. We are thankful for the Cedar Ridge team’s efforts this year as they kept the Cemetery looking great during a very wet growing season!



Stonington Cemetery

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THE STONINGTON CEMETERY ASSOCIATION continues to navigate a period of growth as longtime board members transition off the board and a new set of priorities emerge. Our mission to provide a respectful and aesthetically pleasing final resting place that is open to all remains steadfast, we continue to adapt to changing burial practices and tackle many years of deferred maintenance on our structures and grounds.

Our organization is fortunate to be able to build upon the stability of both fiscal and business practices that have been secured over the last decade and begin to focus on expanding, considering new opportunities, and looking to the future. This year, we welcomed three new board members: Frances Ashley, Steven Muller and Gary Van Zante and are excited for the contributions that they will bring to our organization.

As you visit the Cemetery this fall, we kindly ask that you please leave your pets at home as this space is meant for reflection and remembrance. Thank you for your understanding.

Respectfully,


Kyle Berg, *President*

Did you know – the Stonington Cemetery Association comprises 22.7 acres of land at 345 North Main Street and 3.6 acres at 352 North Main Street? 18 of these acres are mowed land. The Stonington Cemetery is also home to 3 Mausoleums, 1 Receiving Tomb, 1 Victorian Shed and 1 Hearse House.

In the last fiscal year, our association consisted of 11 Board members and 7 Advisors. We received 2 Grants, completed 9 Full Burials, 18 Cremation Burials and 14 Plot sales. We were assisted by 4 Contractors, placed over 150 wreaths on veteran’s graves to sponsor Wreaths Across America and relied on dozens of volunteers and donors who helped make it happen!



The Stonington Garden Club graciously donated a trailer of woodchips to line a path in the East woods. We are thankful for partnering with other local organizations!

In August, about a dozen members of the community attended a stone cleaning workshop on the Stonington Cemetery grounds where Bob Suppich highlighted methods for cleaning both marble and granite markers.

