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TOP STORY

A Decade in the Making: Lost granite globe returns to Stonington Cemetery entrance

By Jason Vallee Sun staff writer
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Dylan Breault, 20, top, of Pawcatuck, an employee at Buzzi Monuments in Stonington, works with Richard Brooks, not in picture, of Pawcatuck, owner of Buzzi Monuments, as they replace a \$4000.00 pink granite ornamental ball, located at the entrance of the Stonington Cemetery, on Wednesday, Dec. 1, 2021 in Stonington. The 150-year-old ornament was stolen 10-years ago, when the gate was hit by a truck. Rob Simmons, lower right, supports the ladder for Breault. Tim Martin, The Westerly Sun

STONINGTON -- For 150 years, a stone globe adorned the incorporators' pillar at the entrance to the historic Stonington Cemetery, one of two symbolic pieces at each side of the gate carved from Westerly granite.

The globe atop the right pillar was jarred loose a decade ago when the pillar was struck by a turning truck, sending the stone ball rolling across North Main Street. Within days, it was gone without a trace and the cemetery was left with a missing piece of its history.

"We had done what the insurance company told us to do, leaving it by the side of the road to wait until someone could come out to take pictures. People said, 'Are you crazy to just leave it there?' We had no choice," said Rob Simmons, a former first selectman in Stonington.

"By the time the insurance company came a few days later, sure enough it had up and rolled away as we were concerned it might," he recalled.

Caught by surprise by the sequence of events and left without enough money, even after insurance, to cover an immediate replacement, the pillar was left without its decorative crown for the past 10 years. That all changed on Wednesday as members of the Stonington Cemetery Association Board of Directors celebrated while watching Richard Brooks, owner of Buzzi Memorials, and apprentice stone worker Dylan Breault reattach a replacement globe, making the gate whole once again.

The installation of a new globe marks a symbolic point in the cemetery's restoration process, a \$30,000 project that began five years ago and has included volunteer contributions, including every marble stone receiving a cleaning courtesy of Bob Suppich, board members said, as well as renovations and restorative construction to two work sheds on the property.

Fundraising and work on the project are both ongoing, Cemetery Association President Lynn Callahan said, and the board will soon have an even bigger task in raising capital to invest in a \$1 million overhaul of the historic Billings Mausoleum.

For now, Callahan said it is worth recognizing how far the all-volunteer effort has come, especially considering the challenges created by the pandemic. Callahan credited several board members and volunteers, and said that Vice President Ann Freeman played an instrumental role in helping things come together.

“There were a lot of people who came forward to help out, but Ann was so important in bringing everything together and making this a reality,” Callahan said.

The historic cemetery has a long history in the community, beginning with the interment of Thomas Chesebrough before serving as a burial plot for the Chesebrough family over the next 100 years. In the 19th century, the land was incorporated into a larger public cemetery that is still active, and today the cemetery spans 22 acres and holds the remains of Stonington residents from all walks of life.

Among the many notable names buried in the cemetery are various founders, including Williams, Billings, Palmer, Chesebrough and Denison, as well as more widely known individuals from the 19th century including Nathaniel Palmer and George Washington Whistler.

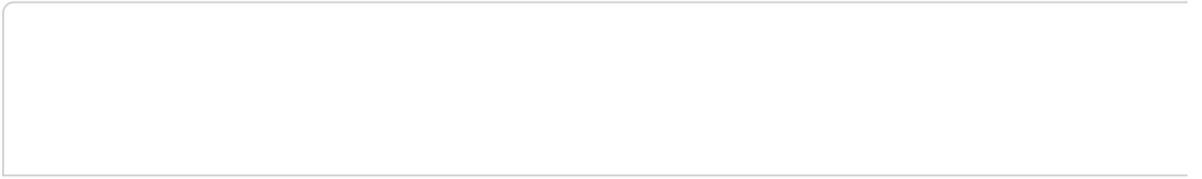
The stone globe that was attached to the pillar on Wednesday may be brand new, but it blends into the gate’s original artwork thanks to delicate handcrafting that recreated the line-pointing of the original work. The globe was crafted from a slab of red granite that was hand-selected from a quarry in Westerly, Brooks said.

“This type of work had to be done by hand because that is the only way to reproduce it. It’s a rare style, especially these days, and Dylan really picked it up and did a fantastic job replicating it from there,” he said.

Breault said it was challenging, but rewarding, to be able to learn and practice the new technique.

The project cost just over \$4,000, which was raised by the Stonington Cemetery Association, Callahan said. She said restoration efforts are only getting started.

“This is a good step, and I think it is a symbolic show that we are continuing to press forward,” she said. “There’s a lot of history here. We want to make sure that the whole cemetery is taken care of.”



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