



# T O M B S T O N E C H R O N I C L E S



The West Grounds from North Main Street. This area was part of the same farm as original cemetery land.

WE ARE HAPPY TO REPORT that early this summer, the Stonington Cemetery Association signed a contract with the nationally recognized and award-winning firm of Reed-Hilderbrand to work with us on a cemetery landscape design for the West Grounds. Reed-Hilderbrand is responsible for a number of important projects including contributions to the design of the Meadow extension project at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, MA — the earliest public cemetery in the United States and an inspiration for our own.

A 2004 plan for the West Grounds was a traditional cemetery design that called for extensive and expensive changes to the topography, including the addition of retaining walls and fill to create a flat and open burial area. Reed-Hilderbrand’s 2020 vision places importance on honoring the character of the historic farm field with a plan that will open this area for burial, contemplation, and memory, with a designed yet natural landscape. Our goal is to create a new cemetery landscape to complement the founders’ original ideas.

We expect to have plans ready to share with the public this winter and will be scheduling virtual meetings to explain the project and gather input. The design process has been—and will continue to be—a collaborative one. The Board looks forward to bringing our community into the discussion.



GNCB surveys the Billings Mausoleum with a lift to better view the roof and steeple.

EARLY THIS SUMMER, we received full funding from the State Office of Historic Preservation (SHPO) for a \$9,800 engineering survey of the Billings Mausoleum. This late 19th century J. & R. Lamb designed tomb is the grandest and most recognizable structure on our grounds. Unfortunately, after it was constructed in 1889 to house the remains of Coddington Billings Jr. and his parents, there was little interest in and apparently no endowment to fund its maintenance. By 2018, the

structure’s level of disrepair was such that masonry firms were unwilling to attempt restoration without the guidance of engineers.

We awarded a contract to the respected firm of GNCB Engineering of Old Saybrook, CT. GNCB conducted a site visit in August, during which the mausoleum was thoroughly inspected inside and out. We now have a report that includes an assessment of the structure’s condition and provides cost estimates and a time-line for proceeding with repair and/or restoration of this iconic building.

We have taken the first step toward gaining a clear understanding of the structure’s condition. The next step will be to decide the future of this family mausoleum constructed during the early years of the cemetery and now the property and responsibility of the Stonington Cemetery Association.



Gene Anderson at work on the oldest building on the grounds, which may have once housed a hearse. This ongoing restoration work is made possible through your support.



This summer, sloping land behind the sheds was leveled with excess fill furnished by the Town of Stonington with a donation arranged by Tim Keena and First Selectman Danielle Chesebrough.



This granite bench was donated by Lee Cashman in memory of his wife, Karen, who died in January and rests nearby. It is meant to be a shared spot for contemplation and memory.

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK everyone who gave to the Stonington Cemetery Association during the past fiscal year – 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020. Contributions received since 1 July will be honored in our Fall 2021 newsletter. If we have inadvertently missed you, please forgive us and send us a correction. Gifts of \$500 and over are noted with an \*. Gifts of \$1,000 and over are noted with a \*\*.

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Bob and the smallest obelisk in the cemetery. It marks the grave of Louisa Ross who died at the age of 15 days.

BOB SUPPICICH has cleaned hundreds of grave markers during the past four years. A feature of the oldest part of the cemetery is the obelisk. This was one of the popular styles of the Victorian era, when a love for classical designs influenced architecture, fashion, and furniture, as well as funeral monuments. The obelisk pointed toward heaven, symbolized permanence, and drew upon Egyptian references to the dead. These monuments reflected modern ideas about the afterlife. There are 55 obelisks in our cemetery, a testimony to local prosperity during the first 60 years of the 19th century. The number of beautifully cleaned obelisks is a testimony to the hard work and dedication of an incomparable community member.



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Cemetery

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Dear friends,

The Stonington Cemetery Association has enjoyed a productive year. We have seen a growth in revenue and embarked upon or completed a number of important projects.

Your belief in and your support of us has provided the means and the confidence required to undertake restoration and expansion work that were only a dream five years ago. Earlier small steps improved the appearance of our grounds and made the cemetery a more welcoming place. Recently, the Board's planning and execution of projects to increase the number of plots available for sale has produced additional revenue that has allowed us to fund restoration work and plan for further expansion.

Our budget for FY 2020 is \$154,000. It's an ambitious number based on income projected from grant revenue, cemetery services income, and donations. We look to our donors to provide at least \$30,000 of this. Much of our income comes from sales and as such can be unpredictable. Donations have been a stable source of income for several years and have allowed us to plan.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank you for your continued support. We are grateful for every gift. Look what we have accomplished together! In addition to your donations, we always welcome your ideas and dreams for our future.

Warm regards,

Lynn Callahan, *President*



Bob Kenyon, of Kenyon Cemetery Services, has assumed additional responsibilities helping us co-ordinate burial services. This summer, his son R.J. served as a part-time assistant.



This slice of land next to the work sheds and adjacent to a burial area was, until last year, a parking lot. Last fall the area was seeded, and this spring a large donated witch hazel tree was planted.



During the summer, several people assembled and climbed scaffolding to assist Bob Suppicich with his mission to clean all the monuments in our cemetery. Here, it's Tim Keena's turn.



Stonington  
Cemetery

P O Box 345  
Stonington CT 06378



Whistler's grave today. It is marked by an obelisk, but the chain enclosing it has been removed.



James Abbott McNeill Whistler's pen and ink sketch now in the Library of Congress. He and his mother are buried in England.

TWO WELL-WORN PATHS in a quiet corner of the oldest part of the cemetery lead to the grave of George Washington Whistler (1800-1849) whose international renown made this an often visited location at the end of the 19th century. Whistler was both a civil and mechanical engineer. He laid out railroad routes and was responsible for important improvements to the safety and efficiency of locomotives at a time when railroad transportation bonded this young country's cities and towns.

Projects in New England brought Whistler and his second wife, Anna McNeill Whistler, to Stonington in 1837 where they took a house on Harmony Street near Anna's sister, Catherine Palmer, who was married to a prominent physician and living on Main Street. The Whistlers lived here for several years before moving to Springfield, MA.

During the 1830's, G.W. designed the tracks for a new line that would deliver travelers from Stonington to Providence by rail. Passengers arrived from New York via steamboat on the west side of Stonington and spent the night in one of the hotels here. In the morning, they boarded a train that proceeded through the center of the Borough and then traveled northward safely to Providence avoiding the perilous seas off the Rhode Island coast. The rail line brought 40 years of prosperity to Stonington. During this decade, Whistler executed similar rail projects in the eastern U.S. and continued to make improvements to locomotives.

In 1842, the Whistlers moved to St. Petersburg, Russia, where G.W. had been hired by Tsar Nicholas I to work on Russia's first major rail line. It was a comfortable life for the family of the famous engineer until Whistler died suddenly from cholera in 1849. The family returned to the U.S. with his body for burial in Stonington — the place with deepest routes for Anna and where several of his children already lay. Although none of the family remained in Stonington and the son James A. M. Whistler's reputation later eclipsed that of his father, the family plot with its modest obelisk deserves a visit.