



Quabbin Park Cemetery

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In addition to the families who were displaced by the Quabbin Reservoir project, more than 7500 graves needed to be relocated as well. There were 34 cemeteries in the 81,000 acres bought for the project, 13 of which were slated to be flooded. The Metropolitan District Water Supply Commission (MDWSC) purchased 82 acres of farmland outside the watershed on which to set a new cemetery into which to move the disrupted remains. It took several years to clear and prepare the land for what was to become the Quabbin Park Cemetery. During this time, the MDWSC conducted a thorough inventory of the existing cemeteries, carefully recording inscriptions, family groups, and locations of the gravestones. The only copy of most of this information is located DCR Quabbin Administration Building in Belchertown.

In 1932, the first graves were moved to the newly created cemetery. Many people, bitter about the loss of their land and now their family burial sites, refused the spaces provided for them in the new cemetery and chose to move their loved ones elsewhere. Hearse moved each box individually, either to Quabbin Park Cemetery or a location of the family's choice. In most cases, headstones were moved and reset as well, but an underwater survey of the reservoir bottom conducted by the University of Massachusetts in conjunction with the State Police Underwater Recovery Unit West Team and Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) Rangers discovered fragments of broken headstones abandoned under the water. Watch the 2001 PBS special, *Under Quabbin*, to see more about this survey. <http://video.wgby.org/video/2365046325/> In addition to individual headstones, memorials and markers from Dana, Prescott, Enfield and Greenwich were moved and have become the centerpiece of the Memorial Day remembrances held annually on the Sunday before Memorial Day. This year's observance marks the 80th anniversary of the final Memorial Day ceremonies in the four Swift River towns. Brass plaques on the two stone entrance columns, built using foundation stones from all the churches in the valley, list all the cemeteries moved.

Despite the apparent care and the respect with which initial moves took place and the guarantee of perpetual care though the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), less attention has been paid to maintenance over the years, resulting in headstones and markers being damaged

or broken or covered with lichen and mosses. In 2012, DCR made some headway in addressing this problem by hiring a consultant to provide training in repair and restoration of gravestones with a goal of creating an overall Cemetery Management Plan. Not much progress seems to have been made toward creating and implementing this plan. The result is that stones are deteriorating to the point where they are unreadable, broken or sunken into the soil.

The Friends of Quabbin, Inc., a nonprofit volunteer organization established in 1984 to increase public awareness and appreciation of the Quabbin Reservoir, has been actively working over the past year to coordinate with DCR to develop a plan to inventory and preserve the stones in the cemetery. FOQ President, Gene Theroux, a Towne descendant through Joseph's line, has personal understanding of the losses which have occurred and will continue to occur without active interventions. His fourth great-grandparents, John and Mary (Brown) Torrance, were buried at the Enfield Church Cemetery and then reinterred in Quabbin Park Cemetery. The headstone was later broken into four pieces during a winter storm. The damage was documented in an MDC photograph on April 14, 1947, after which the headstone was discarded by maintenance workers. Mr. Theroux has spent a great deal of time in the cemetery uncovering and documenting other evidence of the lack of the perpetual care which was promised.

As a result, the Friends of Quabbin, Inc. have been pursuing an active collaboration with DCR to rectify this situation before any more time is lost and more stones are irretrievably damaged. You can read about their progress in the last four issues of their newsletter, The Friends of Quabbin at <http://www.foquabbin.org/> (Summer 2017, Fall 2017, Winter 2017, Spring 2018.) Their initial activities were listed in the Winter 2017 issue:

1. They sought expert help to learn about cemetery restoration. Details about this training may be found on their website.
2. They initiated training to volunteers in cleaning and restoration.
3. They developed a preliminary database of cemetery information, which has evolved into a detailed inventory which is being integrated into Find-A-Grave.

Progress coordinating with the Quabbin and Ware River Watersheds, has been delayed since they had only an interim director for 13 months during 2017. At the end of January 2018, a new director, Dan Clark, was appointed to the position and met with the Friends of Quabbin Board of Directors in February. At that meeting, Mr. Theroux made a presentation on the Quabbin Park Cemetery Inventory and Preservation Initiative. He used TFA's upcoming reunion and our interest in the preservation of the cemetery to help bolster his argument. Many of the photographs he used in this and subsequent presentations were of Towne family stones. He has provided us with copies of all the material used in his presentation, as well as other relevant materials. This material will be available in the hospitality room during our reunion. Mr. Clark has now stated that the first priority should be the creation of a Standard Operating Procedure Manual which, once completed sometime this spring, will provide guidelines of ways in which Friends of Quabbin can help with long-term maintenance of the cemetery.

Mr. Theroux will be joining us at the Quabbin Park Cemetery to give us a tour and show us where Towne descendants are located. I am sure that by that time he will have a great deal of

new information on the inventory and restoration project to share with us. We could not ask for a more enthusiastic and knowledgeable guide.

Sources:

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/quabbin-park-cemetery>

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/watersupply/watershed/quabbincemeteryrepairs.pdf>

Under Quabbin <http://video.wgby.org/video/2365046325/>

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http://www.foquabbin.org/voices_vol30_num3.pdf

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http://www.foquabbin.org/voices_vol31_num1.pdf

<https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/91487/quabbin-park-cemetery>

email communications with attached documents from Gene Theroux to Elizabeth Hanahan, February- April, 2018