

Final approved Minutes of Meeting November 19, 2014

Location: Kickemuit Village, 20 Libby Lane, Warren

In attendance: Henry Duquette, Judy Fardig, Rick Whitesell, Alex LaForce, Dory Wagner, Bob Butler, Dave Bell, Jonathan Rascoe, Roger Guillemette, Charlotte Taylor, Michael Laferriere, Alan Clarke, Sally Small, and Evelyn Wheeler (via SKYPE)

Excused absences: Pegee Malcolm, Edna Kent, and Kirsten Hammerstrom

Meeting called to order at 7:11 pm by Co-Chair Henry Duquette

- Introduction of Draft Meeting Minutes from September 17, 2014

Henry noted that the minutes should clarify one of the visitors to the Met School meeting as Bruce Frail along with Pegee, Evelyn and Henry. On a motion made by Judy, seconded by Bob, the commission voted unanimously to approve the draft minutes with the revision.

- State Farm Annex Cemetery

Charlotte reported that she still hasn't heard from the Department of Administration (DOA). After finding the headstones in the drainage ditch she contacted DOA and the City of Cranston.

- Met School

Dory spoke with Santa Espinosa of the Met School to arrange for a group of students to clean a cemetery in Exeter. A busload of students arrived and raked the cemetery. Henry suggested that a weather protocol be established with the school for future cleanups. Sally asked about the possibility of establishing community groups to serve as mentors during cleanups.

The next scheduled student cleanups are: Pawtucket #007 (Riverside), North Kingstown #012 on Dec. 3, and Tiverton # 001 on Dec. 10.

- RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery

Jonathan announced that on December 13 at 12pm Wreaths Across America Day will be observed.

- Rhode Island Historical Library (via email) announced it will re-open in December.

- Handbook Update

Rick and Evelyn are working on updating the existing handbooks. The updates should include address updates, enabling legislation, moving the RI General Laws to the back and addition of the commission's PO Box for reporting found cemeteries. There was a discussion on whether the changes were ready to go to a vote but it was determined that it should wait for further review.

- Rhode Island Historic Cemeteries Website

Michael reported that he updated the database about a month ago and has another coming soon.

At Charlotte's (RIHPHC) request, Michael agreed to remove the link to the state website on the Facebook page, which now has 550 "Likes".

- Redundant Stones

Discussion about what do when a headstone is replaced but the original wasn't destroyed and turns up elsewhere. Jonathan suggested taking any duplicate veteran's stones to the RI Veterans Cemetery to be crushed to avoid future confusion.

- Historic Cemetery Sign Update

Peggy (via Henry) reports that she was informed by Mike Hebert of DOT that they are working on the latest sign order which should be ready in January. Some commissioners reported that signs from a previous order are delaminating. DOT will be informed.

- Geocaching Presentation by Colin Parkhurst of the Warwick Historical Cemetery Commission

Colin read a prepared written statement (see attachment) concerning the established guidelines within the geocaching community for the responsible use of historical cemeteries in the rapidly growing activity of geocaching.

The commission was in agreement with the stated guidelines and reiterated that when planning a geocaching event involving a historic cemetery that permission of the property owner be obtained. The commission suggested that a commission member be contacted prior to planning the event to make sure there are no additional issues.

Member Comments/Updates were reported to Peggy via email.

The next meeting will be April 15, 2015, possibly at the Bristol Soldiers Home (RI Veterans Home) in Bristol. To be confirmed by Jonathan.

Judy made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Alan. Meeting adjourned at 8:54pm.

Respectfully Submitted by Maureen Buffi, Secretary

Ms. Peggy Malcolm  
Mr. Henry Duquette  
Rhode Island Historical  
Cemeteries Advisory Commission  
Kickemuit Village Center, Warren

19 November 2014

Dear Commissioners –

I am writing in regards to a topic that has had an indirect influence on the condition of cemeteries not only in the state of Rhode Island, but across the country. The activity known as geocaching involves the use of satellite GPS to locate hidden containers in typically interesting, historically significant, or scenic locations. With increased access to GPS receivers (or smartphones, which have similar capabilities), this activity is growing greatly. Due to the historical value and unique beauty that many New England cemeteries have to offer, it was only expected that there would be an overlap of interest between these communities. This has led to generally positive consequences, but there are still some issues that must be addressed so that there is no negative impact on these fragile sites.

As I am a member of the Warwick Cemetery Commission as well as of the geocaching community, I have strived to use my involvement with both groups in order to promote the condition of our state's cemeteries. A common mantra in geocaching is "CITO," or "Cache In, Trash Out." This extends into group events, in which a selected area is cleaned out entirely. In the past year, I have hosted two of these events in Warwick, with tentative plans to host more in the coming years. Each of these events had a respectable turnout and there was a vast improvement in the state of each lot, including clearing of ground growth and stone repairs.

The primary guidelines in regards to placing a geocache to be found are that it is placed with knowledge and permission of the landowner and that it will not damage sensitive areas. Traditionally, this meant that cemeteries were typically off limits. However, in recent years, there has been a gradual acceptance of geocaching within cemeteries so long as any containers still adhered to the previously stated guidelines. The reviewer in charge of all geocaches in Rhode Island, Mr. Bradford Webb, has been reasonable in the assessment of these geocaches. The rules that are generally accepted are that 1) no container will be placed in any cemetery wall, or placed so that it may lead to the damage or unintended destruction of the wall; and 2) no container will be placed in the immediate vicinity of monuments or gravestones, or placed in a location that may lead to any damage or unintended destruction of any stones. Permission still must be generally granted prior to placement of any geocache, as per existing guidelines.

As it stands now, the geocaching community in Rhode Island is working together to ensure that placed geocaches meet these standards and Mr. Webb has shown that any disregard to or violation of the current standards will result in the immediate removal of the geocaching container.

I ask the commission for any suggestion for amendment to these standards, or a formal statement in regards to geocaching in the vicinity of cemeteries so that the geocaching community can act appropriately and with the approval of the commission.

Thank you,

Cofin Parkhurst  
Warwick Historical Cemetery Commission  
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