

Rhode Island Advisory Commission on Historical Cemeteries

Minutes for Meeting on September 24, 2022 at 2:00 p.m.

Location: Burrillville Historical & Preservation Society, 16 Laurel Hill Avenue, Pascoag, RI

Present: Pegee Malcolm, Betty Mencucci, Christine MacWilliams, Debbie Suggs, Lew Keen, Jeff Burns, Charlotte Taylor, David Guiot, Caroline Wells

Absent (excused) Larry Hunter, Maureen Buffi, Edna Kent, Judy Fardig, Rich Ring, Marjory O'Toole, Jim Bessell, Bob Butler

Also in Attendance: Denise Mitchell (Burrillville Historical & Preservation Society), Carlo Mencucci

The meeting was called to order at 2:03 p.m.

1. Betty presented the Bridgeton School and cemetery work in Pascoag, Glocester (#73), Addieville, Harrisville, and Naperville. There is a problem with people using Portland cement to repair stones. Everyone should use lime mortar. Deb asked if stones should be left in the ground. Betty said that they should be brought up as long as it is not crumbly and you intend to do a good repair job. Otherwise, leave it there.
2. Pegee said that 18 commission members including the 4 agencies (Charlotte, Preservation Commission, League of Cities and Towns, and Vets) were re-appointed last week. Some are staggered. RI General Law says that the RIAHC will have two people from each county and appointments are staggered. Charlotte said that she can collect the paper copies for reappointment or we can mail them. Notaries can be found in city/town halls and banks.
3. Caroline discussed the database and asked how it is updated. Most people looking for ancestors are going to FindaGrave, but that does not note the condition. A discussion ensued on how to get updates to John Sterling and more broadly on the mission of the Commission and who owns the information. Updates to the database can be sent to the following email addresses:
 - a. johneyersterlig@yahoo.com
 - b. Jnathanson123@verizon.com

Christine mentioned that she is taking overview photos of cemeteries. Jeff mentioned that Google Maps has different cemetery locations from the real location. These are on a GIS layer and that should be reviewed as well. Michael synched them up recently. John will correct the mistakes. A discussion ensued on how data/photos are made public and the need for a succession plan for data in the future.

4. Debbie asked about signs. She has signs and poles and asked what the procedure was. Jeff said that he will order a bunch that he knows he will install in the next year. He puts the word out that they need to be installed. We are allowed to order signs once a year – usually in February.

Pegee takes the requests and sends them to the RI DOT archaeology department. They verify the requests and send them to their sign shop to make them. Jeff suggests that you note where the sign is missing. The person who orders the signs will be the person who installs them or has someone else install them. The group discussed pole sizes which are both smaller (3.5') and longer (6'). The little one goes into the ground and the 6-foot pole goes on top. Not every sign needs a post. Deb asked what happens to old signs. Pegee says that we write on it "replaced by Cemetery Commission" and take it to Allen Avenue. If someone (i.e. a property owner) requests a sign, you have to ensure that they will install it.

5. Lew discussed the creation of a FAQ on gravesites and passed around a draft. Pegee and Lew worked with Rep. Lauren Carson last year on some legislation updates and they learned much in that process. They are trying to provide that information to the public, such as how to get a burial plot in a historic cemetery (you need local approvals). Charlotte added that it should address grant funding to preserve cemeteries, which is a common question. Lew asked everyone to review the draft and send edits for information that you would like to see on the FAQ. Other questions include "who owns the cemetery?" Charlotte said the state has delegated ownership to the town within town property records. Pegee stated that when the Commission was founded we go to the clerk and they assign a number. Should contact information be on the FAQ? Individuals may or may not research.

Lew also mentioned that some congressional members have expressed interest in historic cemeteries. We should think that the RI Cemetery Association should also be involved.

A discussion ensued about the obligations of Commission members. Pegee says that under the state ordinance that created the Commission, we are to study the location and condition of cemeteries, inventory them, and make recommendations to the Town. Sometimes cleaning graves is part of inventory and location. Pegee says that she gets calls from people who need community volunteer hours and they can help clean cemeteries. She also mentioned that Middletown Cemetery #31 needs help if anyone has time.

Christine DeMarco (a woman adjacent to Oakland Cemetery) has a proposal for the Cemetery that she is pursuing. Pegee says that she wants to create a "Friends of" Oakland Cemetery – a non-profit that will organize clean-ups. The Commission discussed the ownership of the cemetery.

Pegee mentioned that there was a big accident in a cemetery in Woonsocket where the gates were damaged (but not the graves).

David asked where we can buy D2 in volume. Pegee said she will ask. The deal is that we would buy 4 and pay for 3. She asked if anyone was interested. The location is in Westport for pick up.

Charlotte asked if anyone wants pictures of Cemetery #37 in Richmond.

Pegee mentioned that there is a person who can work in Newport and Westerly to donate time.

Charlotte mentioned that she was contacted by an EcoRI report to talk about the impacts of climate change.

Pegee mentioned that the November meeting should be on the East Bay or Newport.

Based on a motion by Caroline Wells, and seconded by Deb Suggs, the meeting adjourned at 4:00.

Respectfully submitted by Caroline Wells.