

Town of Granville, Massachusetts
COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE
Funding Request Questionnaire- 2020

Proposed Project: Main Road (Center) Cemetery Monument Restoration

EXCERPTS FROM REQUEST - NOT COMPLETE REQUEST



“DEATH IS A DEBT TO NATURE DUE. I HAVE PAID IT AND SO MUST YOU”

(Headstone inscription of Lt. Samuel Bancroft, Granville's first settler, died July 1788 at age 77)

A Brief History of the Main Road Cemetery

Bedford's First Cemetery:

The earliest recorded reference to Bedford's "Old Burying Yard" was in 1753 but the inscription on 3 year-old Elizabeth Rose's headstone tells us she died in September, 1742 and was the first person buried in the cemetery. She was followed soon after by 5 year-old Sarah Pratt. In 1754 Bedford incorporated under a new name: Granville.

The Old Burying Yard was the only cemetery for at least 45 years. In 1787 a second cemetery, the West Granville Cemetery was established. At some point later the original old burial ground became known as Center Cemetery, commonly referred to today as Main Road Cemetery, located at 786 Main Road.

Main Road Cemetery's Headstones (and Footstones);

As was common in the early 1700's (and longer for the less affluent) Main Road's earliest graves are marked with un-carved fieldstones. Families knew who belonged to which stones but that family lore is long lost. Some stones may have had carved initials but they too are long gone.

Although the Main Road Cemetery has been inactive since 1970 it graciously hosted death for well over 200 years of mind-boggling political, scientific and social change. It presents a unique museum of the history of grave markers in America. The cemetery's most noteworthy physical historic feature is its 130+ footstones dating between 1751 and 1881 (in the words of MCC restoration expert Martin Johnson, "a phenomenal number"). Please see Attachment 6 for more information on Main Road's footstones.

Main Road Cemetery's People:

The Main Road Cemetery contains 331 known graves of the fine citizens of Granville (and Bedford), 102 being children under the age of 18. Granville's first settler and Revolutionary War officer, Lt. Samuel Bancroft is buried here. It is safe to say that most of Granville's first settlers also ended up here, many in anonymous graves marked only by a simple fieldstone.

The earliest recorded date of birth is James Barlow, 1688. The earliest date of death is James' wife, Mary Barlow, 1732. It is possible that Mary was moved from elsewhere to be interred with her husband in Main Road Cemetery when he died in 1758, thus while her death pre-dates Elizabeth Rose, her burial in Main Road Cemetery came later. The last burial was Adaline G. Wheeler Winchell in 1970.

The stories of the remarkable people and "old Granville names" buried in the Main Road Cemetery would be a Who's Who of Granville history and fill a very large book. These were strong, pioneering, hardworking, colorful, patriotic, highly intelligent, resourceful, moral people (with the occasional exceptions) whose community leaders had a vision of a society where modesty, reverence, work ethic, education, civility and "Yankee ingenuity" mattered.

Their Voices Speak To Us:

If the Main Road Cemetery reminds us of anything it is that when these people buried their parents, spouses, sons and daughters and wept their tears into this ground they were also entrusting successive generations to respect and care for this place. We live in times where people leave their home towns and in doing so lose touch with these values and duties. It becomes acceptable but it is sad and erodes the soul. Like so many in Granville we believe in the preservation of Granville's historic places. It is uplifting for everybody when a community remembers, honors, preserves and is proud of its people and history. This is part of what continues to make Granville such a special place.

The Footstones of Main Road Cemetery

Martin Johnson from Monument Conservation Collaborative (MCC), the company that has done the repairs for West Granville and Woodlands, made a special effort to inform us that our Main Road Cemetery is “very unique”, and, in fact, he used the word “phenomenal” in regards to the number of footstones that exist at our Main Road Cemetery. This cemetery has footstones that, over the centuries, have not been moved from their place or cast aside by some commercial landscaping company because they are just in the way.

A footstone is a stone that is placed at the foot of the buried body and defines the grave. It is usually about 1/8th the size of the headstone and typically carries the initials or name of the person. It is often is the same shape as the headstone, and sometimes has lovely carvings that match the headstone.

Mr. Johnson is telling us this as general information which has no bearing on services MCC would provide under their 2020 proposal. Any repairs to footstones would be well down the list of repairs needed at Main Road.

When he visited the cemetery to do an evaluation of the headstone repairs needed, he was surprised at how many footstones there were. Later, when he called, he thought there were probably at least 30 or 40. He said he was shocked at the large number of them and in fact was tripping over them on occasion.

Based on that information, I thought we should know more about our historic treasure. Late autumn was already here. Jack and I made two tours of the cemetery, taking pictures and recording GPS coordinates. I have identified and have photos of footstones which define the graves of 153 people resulting in about 130 physical footstones.

This means that of the 331 known graves in Main Road cemetery, about 50% of them have footstones. As with headstones, some footstones identify more than person. And there are more. There are 18 headstones so eroded that we can't identify the person...and there are at least that number of footstones that we can't identify. The dates for those that we can identify range from 1751 to 1881.

The following pages have photos of some of them. There are an astounding number of them in this cemetery and they are historically significant. Woodlands and Northeast cemeteries have none that I know of. I don't know about West Granville or Silver Street.



LEMEUL BANCROFT, 1801



INFANT SON GILLETT, 1783



SAMUEL BANCROFT, 1788 (our first settler)



ABIGAIL DEMING SEYMOUR, 1805



COMFORT, STATIRA AND ANNE BANCROFT, 1773, 1776, 1791



HANNAH COE, 17



JAMES PARSONS AND MATTHEW MARVIN
COOLEY, 1809, 1810

Granville "Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2004"

The 2004 "Open Space and Recreation Plan" identified five Granville cemeteries as important historical town resources and noted the need to preserve these cultural sites. The current status of each is:

1. Main Road (Inactive, Town-owned): Restoration work has not been done but this cemetery is the subject of this 2020 CPA Funding Request.
2. Northeast (Inactive, Town-owned): Restoration work has not been done but this cemetery is the subject of a separate 2020 CPA Funding Request.
3. Silver Street (Active, Owned by Private Association): The cemetery association does an excellent job of maintaining this active cemetery.
4. West Granville (Active, Owned by Private Association): Very successful restoration work has been done thanks to recent CPA funding. The association provides a very high level of attention to maintenance.
5. Woodlands (Active, Owned by Private Association): Very successful restoration work has been done thanks to recent CPA funding. The association provides a high level of attention to maintenance.

The world is rapidly losing places like Granville for many reasons, the primary being peoples' loss of connection to where they came from, what they valued as a community, and why it matters. When the people change so does the place, unless the character of a place is strong enough to inspire people to join in the preservation effort. Absent that everything is up for grabs including the cultural soul of the place.

The people make the place, but so does the place make the people. Granville understands this. People preserve what they value. The more they value the more they preserve, just as the opposite is equally true.

A major theme of the 2004 Plan was to make sure Granville stays Granville which means different things to different people but to the overwhelming majority it meant preserving a way of life (or at least a certain way of looking at life) and continuing to be surrounded by the places and things that represent Granville's history, traditions and values.

For example, the Town Green was often cited as a major part of what it feels like to live in Granville. People admire the Green and their day is cheered by the beautiful plantings, holiday decorations, events, and care given to this shared community space. Granville's natural beauty, the Old Meeting House, the Library, the historic houses, the farms, and many other places help define Granville as a unique, uplifting place that has been well-loved by many generations. Who doesn't feel good just reading that list? These images of home are treasured by every Granville resident wherever they go.

This Funding Request is intended to help Granville's historic cemeteries remain a lasting, proud, positive part of Granville's future. Approval of 2020 CPA Funding Requests for Main Road and Northeast would be in keeping with the preservation plans outlined in 2004.

Having all five historic Granville cemeteries in a good state of preservation will be a credit to Granville's appreciation of the town's rich history and an investment in preserving the town's unique character.