



CEMETERY COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

January 4, 2024 at 4:00PM

Meeting held in person at City Hall in Conference A
1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth, NH

Members Present: Co-Chair Susan Sterry, Co-Chair Dee Dee Forte, Eva Boice, Celeste Brooks, Michael Griffin, Duncan MacCallum and Peter Splaine

Members via Zoom: Sue Polidura

Staff Present: Suzanne M. Woodland, Deputy City Manager / Regulatory Counsel (DCM/RC)

1. Call to order at 4:01PM and roll call of the members as noted above.
2. Minutes: **Motion:** Griffin moved to accept the minutes of November 2, 2023 meeting. Seconded by Boice. **All in favor.**
3. Wreaths Across New Hampshire: As an FYI, Wreaths Across America reached out to the States and asked for assistance in placing wreaths on veteran's graves as they were receiving so many requests. New Hampshire has its own program now and Sterry, Griffin and Polidura participated in the event which was organized by the Elks Lodge with the help of over 40 volunteers, 44 wreaths were placed on veteran's headstones at all the cemeteries. The feedback was very positive. Griffin added that he provided the presenters of the wreaths at the South Cemetery with a brief history of individuals before the wreaths were placed, along with observing a moment of silence. This personally acknowledged the individual person, and which added another element of honor and thanks for their service. This also increased awareness of the Cemetery Committee and Portsmouth's historic cemeteries. This event was also nicely covered in the City's social media. Polidura arranged to have a photo of the wreath laying put in the newspaper.
4. Report on Ground Penetrating Radar at North Cemetery: Two professors from UNH performed a ground penetrating investigation on December 18, 2023. They are conducting research on "yellow fever" which is believed to come to Portsmouth from people on ships. Sterry learned that at the time, doctor's records indicate that 65 people died from yellow fever or dysentery in the South End. There is another list of about 45 – 50 people who all died around the same time from dysentery. There are two spots in North Cemetery that are believed to be mass graves and the ground penetrating will hopefully provide information if this is so. The report will be ready in six to eight weeks and the Committee will receive a copy of the report. Sterry mentioned to the professors that there was concern regarding the water table at the

Point of Graves Cemetery area. They had information about another professor (of Geology) who has equipment which will conduct a topical measurement of the area which will show a diagram of the area. A brief discussion of the 1798 and 1863 epidemics and research regarding these incidents.

5. Old /New Business:

- a. DCM/RC will connect Brooks and Monte Bohanan, Director of Communications & Community Engagement. Brooks is interested in researching how to post items on Atlas Obscura and identifying headstones to post. Polidura has a list of interesting people who are buried in the cemeteries, which will be helpful.
- b. Dinah Chase Whipple: The UNH professors noted in #4 looked at the area where Prince Whipple is buried and they definitely felt that the earth had been disturbed in the area where it is believed Dinah is buried, to the right of Prince Whipple's grave. Forte and Boice were in contact with the descendants of Prince and Dinah Chase Whipple and they asked that Valerie Cunningham of the NH Black Heritage Trail be their key contact. Boice contacted Valerie who provided information of one of the descendants, Laural Yantze and Valerie asked that Boice be the point due to her time constraints. Boice stated that she read about Dinah Chase Whipple's connection to the Congregational Church in Hampton, NH. One of the things that was written was that her daughter had made provisions to have Dinah buried next to her husband. Sterry stated that she found a brief in the North Church records at the Athenaeum indicating that the North Church gave money for her burial, but that does not provide any further proof that Dinah is buried next to her husband. At the time of the reinternment, Pastor Jen Mazur said that there was a lot of information online. Susan will share the Pastor Mazur's information with Forte and Boice. Susan stated that Dinah should be remembered mostly for her Black School. Boice reminded the Committee that the descendants stated that they would fundraise, and the Committee would decide how to market the campaign for a headstone or other stone for her grave. DCM/RC stated if the Committee decides on some appropriate projects, it would be very easy to approach local organizations and the community about this project.
- c. In December, Sterry stated that a homeowner who lives adjacent to the Point of Graves Cemetery dug up their driveway and went down more than 2 feet down. Per NH RSA, this is not allowed for 25 feet of a cemetery. Sterry went to speak with the homeowner and contractor, who indicated that they were not aware that they should not have done that. Sterry also spoke with Peter Britz and Izak Gilbo in the Planning Department. They stated that was not anything in the City Ordinances that would have prevented this. The Planning Department offered to have an intern geo-locate all 38 cemeteries in Portsmouth with Sterry and then note these on a map, along with bringing

attention to City ordinances regarding digging in certain areas, such as their driveways.

- d. Hall Cemetery: The cemetery has been cleaned and the neighbors are very pleased. Sterry would like to reach out to a few organizations, i.e., the Shipyard and the Rotary to ask if they would be interested in conducting a day project in the cemetery to do weed wracking, filling in holes, ... The City is on board with maintaining the cemetery by weed wracking. Sterry asked DCM/RC if she could send a letter to the State regarding the approval to start up-righting the headstones. DCM/RC will speak with Monte Bohanan about adding the Hall Cemetery clean-up to the City's social media.
 - e. The plaque for the internment has arrived and Sterry will be in contact with Corin at the DPW, so he can decide where the best place to place it. DCM/RC will also ask Monte to include social media on the interment and the installation of the plaque.
 - f. The J. Verne Wood Funeral Home donated 3 bronze markers – “Unknown Revolutionary Veteran 1700 – 1810” which can be found in the cemeteries. A thank you note was sent to them.
 - g. Andy Croteau – started restoring the two (2) small doors by the Cotton Cemetery (on South Street). This project should be completed by the Spring.
 - h. New Member: Steve Buzzell, lives in Portsmouth NH, who has volunteered cleaning headstones at Cotton Cemetery during the summer and is interested in the up righting the headstones project.
 - i. The Committee discussed giving a 10-minute presentation to the City Council in February to provide them with the Committee's achievements, i.e., putting up signs, cleaning headstones, to include before and after pictures, and interments, which would solidify the mission and dedication of the Committee.
 - j. The Committee expressed thanks to the Department of Public Works for all their help. The Committee stated that it could not do what they do without them.
 - k. The Committee will continue to meet on the first Thursdays of the month (except in July when it will be the second Thursday, July 11, 2024 due to the Fourth of July holiday).
6. Public Comment: None
7. Next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, February 1, 2024 at 4:00PM.

8. Adjournment: **Motion:** Griffin moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Brooks. **All in favor.** Adjourned at 4:50PM.

Minutes prepared by:
Barbara Zulkiewicz

Minutes Approved: February 1, 2024