

CRANSTON HISTORICAL CEMETERIES COMMISSION



ANNUAL REPORT
FOR 2023



"The commission shall cause to be created an inventory of historical cemeteries within the city; formulate and develop plans and programs to restore, rehabilitate and maintain historical cemeteries; recommend to the Mayor and the City Council such action as may be necessary to implement such plans and programs; and investigate sources of funds, including fundraising, grants and development of both corporate and individual sponsors, and all other legitimate and related activities."

Cranston City Charter, Article 2.55.060

COMMISSION'S

Mayor Hopkins and members of the Cranston City Council:

After a chaotic yet productive 2022, the Cranston Historical Cemeteries Commission in 2023 made great strides in expanding efforts in maintaining the city's more than 150 historical burial grounds. The commission has also increased its reach in the community, gained a new commissioner – appointed by the mayor – and recruited several dedicated volunteers.

The year began with the discovery of a previously lost cemetery, the Burlingame Lot (CR118), located within the John Curran Management Area in the western portion of the city.

Hikers in the management area came upon it and notified the commission. A group of volunteers and commission members visited the site in February and cleared it. Three carved headstones were found as well as other graves marked by uncarved stones. Though on the city's land records, the cemetery was completely hidden by thickets of thorny bushes and has been listed as an unknown cemetery. But with the hiker's discovery and the volunteers' work, it is now found and known as CR118, added to the state database in March 2023.

In April, two dozen volunteers descended on the Jeremiah Williams Lot (CR069) located on Beacon Circle in the eastern section of the city to pick up a little more than 90 yard waste bags of leaves and branches.

LETTER

May brought Rhode Island's annual "Cemetery Awareness Weeks." To commemorate this we held a stone cleaning and repair workshop at the Knightsville Meetinghouse Lot (CR020) on Colwell Street with commission advisor Colin Parkhurst. This event attracted a wide range of volunteers who were eager to learn the ins and outs of headstone preservation.

It was for this event that we also began using graphics and flyers to promote our events on social media and in the community, a method we hadn't tried before and which was certainly helpful. We also unearthed a stone of Nathaniel Warner, who was just over a year old when he passed away in 1833.

We also had a number of people volunteer to work on projects with us. In June 2023, an Eagle Scout candidate cleared the Jacob Clarke Lot (CR022) on Budlong Road by mowing the grass, cutting down brush, picking up leaves, and planting a flower garden along the back wall of the cemetery.

Three high school students from St. Mary Academy-Bay View got a glimpse of what cemetery preservation entails by participating in stone cleaning tutorials, clearing out yard waste and learning about the history of burial grounds. Further, we have had members of the Rhode Island Training School community assist in cleaning up the

State Farm Cemetery Annex (CR107), where students are learning about the history of the individuals buried and lost to time.

Perhaps the most positive development this year concerns the Oakland Cemetery, CR003, on Broad Street. For many years, the trash piles and untended areas have been a steady source of dismay. But in 2023, the Cranston Historical Cemeteries Commission is pleased to report, significant progress was made in maintaining it and new developments concerning its ownership status offer opportunities for long-term solutions.

For a long time, a drive past it revealed knee-high grass that obscured many of the headstones. But today, it is mowed regularly to where it resembles other cemeteries in the city.

The credit for this transformation goes to the Pentecostal Gateway Fellowship, led by Pastor Russell Farmer. After adopting Oakland last year, the fellowship has been able to recruit volunteers from its own ranks as well as dozens more from other groups for three-or-four-times a season cleanups. Grass is mowed, branches are removed and trash is collected. It is not unusual to see more than 150 yard waste bags lined up along Broad Street after one of these efforts.

The campaign there was assisted by the generosity of the Rhode Island Foundation, which provided a \$5,000 grant to help pay for yard waste bags, tools and a contractor to remove a large tree that had been blown down in the middle of the cemetery. We are happy to report that two sections of this massive cemetery have been adopted by

volunteers who will be tending them regularly and plans are for at least three cleanups in 2024.

The cemetery grounds are not the only place where progress has been made. We have also started a new data collection process to inventory the locations, conditions and other details of the headstones in the city's historical cemeteries. We hope to use the information to update the state cemetery database.

Two large sections of Oakland have been completely inventoried and we hope to update the database in 2024. We have also been using this method at other cemeteries across the city and have completely inventoried four other historical cemeteries.

Our social media presence has ramped up in 2023. We have been using Facebook as our primary method of outreach and in 2023 our following went from around 1,200 at the start of the year to around 3,000 by year's end. It helped us attract new volunteers, including 16 who agreed to adopt and tend specific cemeteries. We also expanded our Instagram efforts and have been able to tap the graphic design and marketing talents of some of our members to create more attention-getting flyers and posters. We plan on continuing these efforts in 2024.

Of course, little of our success would be possible without the help of the Public Works Department, which has repeatedly and graciously coordinated

yard waste bag pickup at all of our events. Bags – often more than a hundred – have been picked up within just a few days. They also donated a wonderful bench for visitors to sit peacefully at the Knightsville Meetinghouse Lot.

Looking ahead to 2024, we are planning on hosting more cleanup events, engaging volunteers in our work, and expanding our online and community presence through social media and graphic design. We are also hoping to increase our fundraising efforts throughout the year. In doing so, we hope to continue on our path of success and service to the community.

Respectfully submitted,

John Hill, chairman

Paul Tognetti, vice chairman

David Guiot, treasurer

Mary Mierka, secretary

Nicole Johnson-Morais, commissioner

Kellsie King, commissioner



BY THE NUMBERS

509

Burials inventoried
(9/23–12/23)

180+

Yard waste bags
filled

160+

Volunteers

30+

Headstones
cleaned

9

Monthly meetings

5

Cleanups held

3

Lots with new
signs

1

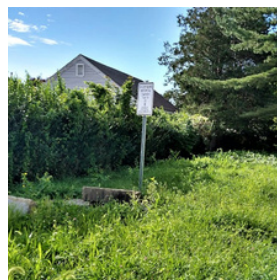
Discovered lot

CEMETERY SPOTLIGHT

KNIGHTSVILLE - On Saturday, May 6, 2023, CHCC participated in Rhode Island's annual "Cemetery Awareness Weeks," which spotlights the history and preservation of cemeteries across the state. Nearly 20 attendees were able to get hands-on experience during our stone cleaning and repair workshop held at the Knightsville Meetinghouse Lot (CR020), hosted by former chairman Colin Parkhurst. In his demonstration, Parkhurst was able to begin the process of resetting a few toppled headstones.

The commission's Nicole Johnson-Morais and Kellsie King also gave a demonstration on the basics of cleaning headstones using water and D2 Biological Solution. A group of participants then rolled up their sleeves

and were able to clean about a dozen stones. Chairman John Hill and treasurer David Guiot meanwhile poked around the lot in search of numerous headstones that have been lost to time. Using a 4-foot probe, the team managed to unearth three stones, two for children who were under five years old. Secretary Mary Mierka manned the information table to greet guests for the day. For a perfect spring day, the event was a smashing success.



JUNGLE OF WEEDS

In this September 2021 photo, CR020 is completely overgrown by weeds and thick brush, including poison ivy.

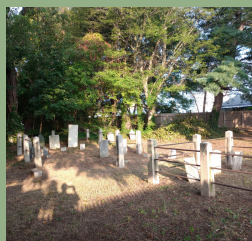


PHOTO GALLERY

ADOPTED CEMETERIES

#	Cemetery
3.10	Oakland Cemetery
3.20	Oakland Cemetery
19	Nicholas Sheldon Lot
21	Nehemiah Knight Lot
24	Nathan Thornton Lot
25	Uriah Eddy Lot
30	King-Randall Lot
31	Edward Edwards Lot
32	George Colvin Lot
34	Thomas Andrews Lot
36	Capt. Phillip Sheldon Lot
37	Dr. George Waterman Lot
42	William Knight
45	John Stone Lot

ADOPTED CEMETERIES

#	Cemetery
48	Jeremiah King Lot
68	Friends Burial Ground
69	Jeremiah Williams Lot
75	Nicholas Sheldon Lot
78	Westcott-Warner Lot
103	Alvan Warner Lot
106	Ephraim Carter Lot
108	Zuriel Potter Lot

As of January 2024

IN THE NEWS

Neglected Cranston cemetery is looking better, but volunteers say they need more help

Volunteers so far have cleaned up effort on Sept. 9, 2023



GRAVE RESPONSIBILITIES: Unearthing [Shwaite](#)

Updated 11:53 a.m. ET July 26, 2023

GRAVE RESPONSIBILITIES: Unearthing history

Lost Burlingame cemetery found and revived by volunteers



Respecting the dead by cleaning the grounds



Once lost, this rediscovered Cranston burial plot may hold Revolutionary War secrets

10 I-Team: More complaints over cemetery corner solution in sight?

by BRIAN CRANDALL, NBC 10 NEWS | Thu, September 7th 2023 at 7:05 PM

'These people have been buried and again:' Volunteers want to ensure and recognized.



Jack Perry

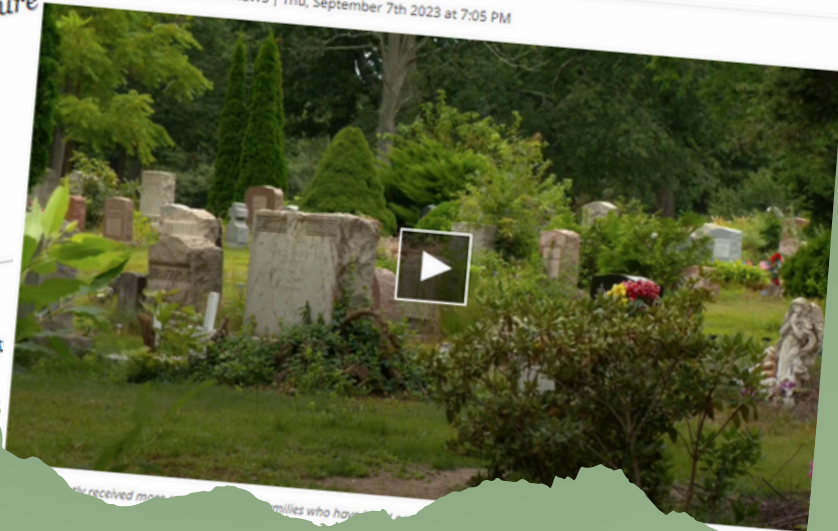
The Providence Journal

Published 5:03 a.m. ET Feb. 17, 2023



Key Points

- Andrew Grover found the history



2024 BY CHCC