

PRESERVATION GUIDELINES FOR MUNICIPALLY OWNED HISTORIC BURIAL GROUNDS AND CEMETERIES

THIRD EDITION





**These Guidelines are a publication of the
Massachusetts Department of Conservation
and Recreation (DCR), Executive Office of
Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA)**

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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Prepared by Walker-Kluesing Design Group
for the DCR Historic Cemeteries Preservation
Initiative.

Cover Illustration: Steel engraving of "The
Burial Hill" from *The Pilgrim Fathers* by William
H. Bartlett, London 1854 [*Boston Public Library/
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June 2002, Second Edition,
Expanded and Revised, 2009 Third Edition

First edition recipient of:

Honor Award for Landscape Planning,
American Society of Landscape Architects, 2000

Merit Award for Landscape Planning,
Boston Society of Landscape Architects, 2000

*Memorial entrance gate
Riverview Cemetery, Groveland*



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All of the contemporary photographs in this publication were provided by Walker-Kluesing Design Group, except as otherwise noted.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This plan builds upon the work of staff, agencies, organizations and notable individuals who assisted with the preparation of this document.

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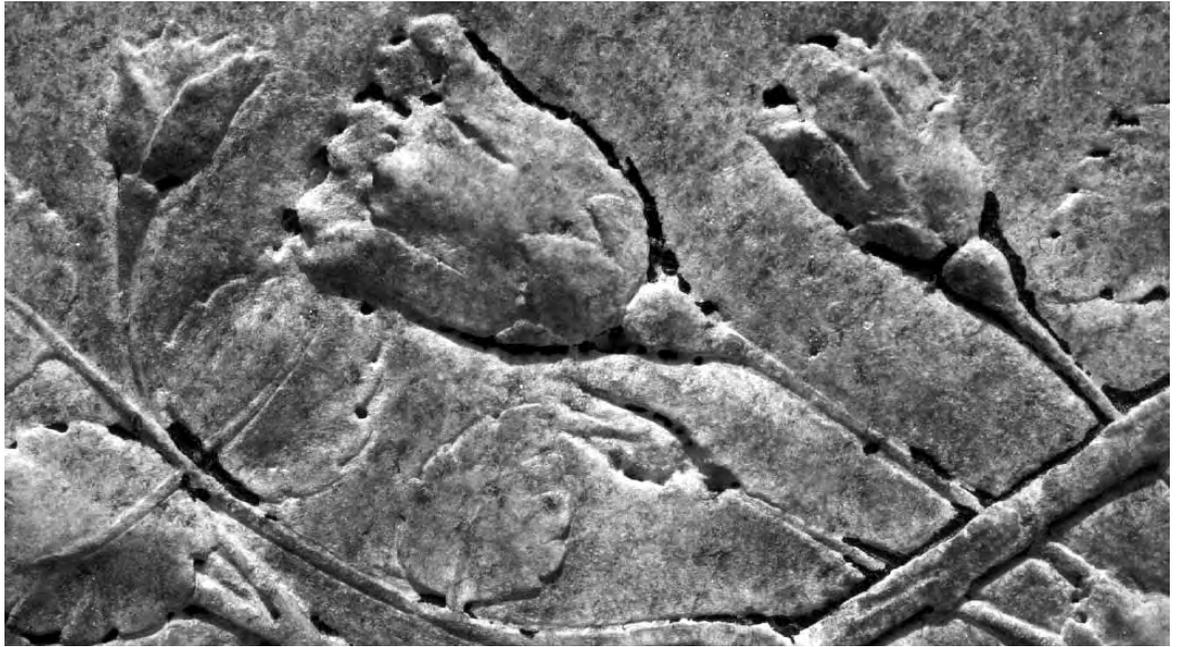
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*Stone carving detail,
Cambridge*



INTRODUCTION

SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORIC BURIAL GROUNDS AND CEMETERIES

The historic burial grounds and cemeteries of Massachusetts are vital elements of the Commonwealth's cultural heritage. They are often the oldest surviving remnants from the early years of a community and represent important social, historic, architectural and archeological artifacts. In addition to their historic value, many of these significant cultural landscapes must also meet contemporary needs.

Burial grounds and cemeteries are important public spaces with a vital link to the past. These sites tell a story of evolving burial and mourning practices, from the bleak Puritan graveyards to the richly ornamented rural cemeteries of the 19th century. When little else may remain intact from the beginnings of a city or town, the burial ground with its stone walls, mature trees and dirt paths can often evoke the early history of a community. As open space becomes more and more scarce and undeveloped land is increasingly used for other purposes, burial grounds and cemeteries remain places for solitude, contemplation and reflection.

These properties are considered not only public open space and areas of respite, but also outdoor museums. Unlike traditional museums, these sites present a permanent collection of rare three dimensional artifacts, some of which have remained in place more than 300 years. These historic artifacts are a finite and deteriorating resource that need preservation and protection from damage by weathering, vegetation and vandalism, as well as deferred and inappropriate maintenance practices.

The gravestones, monuments, memorials and tombs found within the cemetery landscape commemorate the lives of many generations of citizens, from founding members of a community and the state to Revolutionary and Civil War heroes to the newest immigrants. These important artifacts are a unique historic and genealogical record, sometimes representing the only source of the history of an entire town. Some of these stone carvings represent some of the earliest art and written history available in the United States. Many also reflect an important artistic legacy, displaying the work of a long tradition of skilled stone carvers and documenting the evolution of funereal iconography.

Each site needs to be dealt with in a coherent way that recognizes its historic importance, contemporary interpretive purpose and passive public use.

The cemetery as part of everyday life in early America



2 - Introduction

THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORIC CEMETERIES PRESERVATION INITIATIVE

The Historic Landscape Preservation Grant Program [HLPGP] is a state funded competitive grant program established in 1997 to support preservation and restoration of publicly owned landscapes listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In the course of its first three grant rounds, the HLPGP received numerous proposals addressing critical preservation and stabilization needs at historic municipally owned cemeteries and burial grounds. The majority of these proposals came from smaller, rural towns where burial grounds and cemeteries may represent the most significant and/or only historic landscape owned by the municipality. In response to this need, the Department of Environmental Management [DEM] set aside funds from the FY 1999 and FY 2000 Historic Landscape Preservation Grant Program to initiate a year long Historic Cemeteries Preservation Initiative. Because of the interest generated by the first year's efforts, the DEM expanded the program in FY 2001 to include additional properties across the state. This project has been managed by DEM's Office of Historic Resources in collaboration with the Massachusetts Historical Commission [MHC].

The Massachusetts Historic Cemeteries Preservation Initiative has begun to address the pressing needs of municipal cemeteries and burial grounds. It has taken important steps to document, evaluate and make preservation recommendations for 32 burial grounds and cemeteries in 29 communities across the state, as well as providing training, technical assistance and preservation guidelines that are applicable to other historic municipal burial grounds and cemeteries.

As a group, and sometimes individually, these sites illustrate important developments in the evolution of graveyard design ranging from domestic homestead graveyards, to churchyard burial grounds, to public graveyards, to rural cemeteries, to lawn park cemeteries. The range of landscape expression of these graveyard types also portrays evolving societal attitudes toward death and immortality.

Municipal burial grounds and cemeteries are often among the oldest and most significant graveyards in a community, frequently containing the graves of the earliest inhabitants. As public properties, historic cemeteries and burial grounds present many unique preservation challenges, including damaged and vandalized headstones, deterioration of older walks and enclosures, and aging and hazardous trees.

Inactive sites [closed to further burials] and active sites face different challenges. The majority of the sites examined are inactive. Because they are no longer in active use and not generating revenue, inactive cemeteries must compete with other municipal priorities for funding. Resources for basic maintenance are almost always scarce, while funds for capital repairs are virtually nonexistent. Municipal cemetery managers often lack the specialized technical skills to resolve structural and conservation problems and face difficult decisions regarding priority setting.

Once a burying ground or cemetery is closed it can quickly turn from a community asset into a liability. When a property like this stops generating an income and serving a recognized civic purpose, it only creates expenses, and often there is no one to maintain or watch over it. This leads to abandonment and further neglect.

Despite these pressing needs, few historic burial grounds or cemeteries have condition assessments, inventories, master plans or preservation maintenance plans to guide their management or care. While there is some excellent material prepared by advocacy organizations and municipalities, primarily related to headstones, there is very little easily accessible written information focusing on the overall care of this historic landscape type, and, in particular, balancing the needs of competing resources such as trees and burial markers.

Finally, even where adequate preservation planning has been done, few burial grounds and cemeteries have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or have been determined eligible for listing. This precludes them from receiving construction funds from programs such as DEM's Historic Landscape Preservation Grant Program, or MHC's Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund [MPPF].

PURPOSE AND GOALS OF THE PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

These guidelines offer a compendium of information directly related to the preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, reconstruction, management and care of the Commonwealth's municipally owned historic burial grounds and cemeteries.

Specific goals of the guidelines include:

- Restoration and rehabilitation of these historic resources in a contemporary context,
- Reinforcement of an overall image compatible with the historic assets of these properties,
- Improvement of accessibility, and
- Increasing passive recreation and educational opportunities.

The individual preservation master plans and implementation plans included in the Case Studies portion of this report can also serve as models for both long and short term planning and improvements at other historic burial grounds and cemeteries.



Obelisk detail, Chocksett Cemetery, Sterling

ORGANIZATION OF THE DOCUMENT

This document begins with general information on the historic background of burial ground and cemetery development in Massachusetts. This is followed by guidelines for preservation planning which include site documentation, condition assessment, evaluation of significance and integrity and priority setting.

General recommendations are provided next for historic burial ground and cemetery components, with a brief discussion of why certain recommendations are made and how to accomplish them. Recommendations related to issues of administrative management follow. These two sections contain references to individual case studies which serve as examples of the issues being discussed.

Case studies or site specific assessments and prioritized recommendations are included for each of the properties examined in this program. While the assessments should not be considered to be in depth, they are sufficient to offer basic guidance to each community. The site plans have been developed to a concept level. Locations of specific elements on most of the plans are approximate and based upon assessors maps with field observations. Few communities have detailed topographic surveys which are necessary to implement many types of improvements.

Organized by date of establishment, the sites include:

First Burial Ground, Woburn [1642]
Vine Lake Cemetery, Medfield [1651]*
East Parish Burial Ground, Newton [1660]
Spring Hill Cemetery, Marlborough [c1660]
Riverside Cemetery, Sunderland [1714]*
Prospect Hill Cemetery, Millis [c1714]*
Elm Street Cemetery, Braintree [1716]
Walnut Street Cemetery, Brookline [1717]
Center Cemetery, Brimfield [1720]*
Old Burying Grounds, Littleton [1721]
Old Burial Ground, East Bridgewater [c1724]
Old Parish Burying Ground, Rockport [c1732]
Corbin Cemetery, Dudley [c1735]*
Chocksett Cemetery, Sterling [1736]
Old Burial Ground, Sturbridge [c1740]
Old Cemetery, Spencer [1742]
Center Cemetery, Douglas [c1746]*
New Marlborough Cemetery,
New Marlborough [1755]*
Pope Cemetery, Peabody [1755]
High Street Cemetery, Danvers [1758]
Village Cemetery, Tisbury [c1770]
Center and Ringville Cemeteries, Worthington
[c1770]*
Oak Ridge Cemetery, Southbridge [1801]*
Roxanna C. Mye, Pocknett and William Jones
Burial Grounds, Mashpee [c1800s]
Riverside Cemetery, North Chelmsford [c1841]
Greenlawn Cemetery, Nahant [1858]*
Northampton State Hospital Burial Ground,
Northampton [1858]
Glenwood Cemetery, Maynard [1871]*
Glenwood Cemetery, Everett [1890]*

* *Indicates sites that remain active*

The appendices contain information on grave marker inventory and a selected bibliography for further reading.

Cemetery in a rural area

“While the old places of sepulture are usually unattractive save to the antiquary and those curious in old epitaphs, nothing is more characteristic of New England.”

Francis Drake, 1878



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON BURIAL GROUND AND CEMETERY DEVELOPMENT IN MASSACHUSETTS

The burial grounds and cemeteries of Massachusetts are one of the richest cultural and historic records of our past. In addition to providing specific genealogical information about our ancestors, they also tell a broader story about evolving attitudes towards death, burial and public landscapes. However, this significant cultural legacy is often a subtle and fragile message that is not well documented or understood.

The diversity in the character of the historic burying grounds and cemeteries across the Commonwealth reflects the unique and identifiable quality special to each community. There is a significant difference between the sterile plainness of the old graveyards and the beautiful grounds and flowers of the charming Victorian cemeteries that followed. Sketches and etchings of the early 1800s tend to show burying grounds in a much more barren condition than photographs from the 1850s through the turn of the century. These later photographs illustrate the Victorian influence with more decorative elements and heavier, more mature plantings.

Puritan Graveyards

The 17th century Puritan graveyards of Massachusetts were literally boneyards, simply a place of burial and often located on infertile or leftover land considered undesirable for other uses. They reflected the general austerity and difficulty of life during this period and were intentionally unwelcoming as Puritans wanted as little as possible to do with the place of the dead.

The earliest graveyards might house the graves of an extended family or a small community but typically had only a few graves, which often faced west towards the setting sun, but were otherwise laid out with little formal organization. The overall appearance was barren, with rough, uneven topography from frequent digging, poor grass cover, few trees or other plants and no attempt at embellishment. Pathways were few because space was at a premium. Because many of the early grave markers were not permanent, older graves were frequently disturbed by subsequent burials. Many graveyards began as pastures and continued as such after being developed as burying grounds, adding to the unkempt appearance. Few graveyards were carefully tended.

As towns grew beyond a few families, they began to establish municipal burial grounds. Some were located adjacent to meetinghouses or on commons, while others were situated in more isolated locations.

Small old burial ground



6 - Historic Background

Most of the sites examined in this program were opened as public burial sites, owned and operated by the municipal authorities of the time. A few began as family burial grounds [Mashpee, Peabody], others as church yard grounds [Douglas, Braintree].

Over time, burial markers became more permanent, with a growing tradition of slate carving by skilled artisans like Joseph Lamson, James Foster and Henry Christian Geyer. These early grave markers represent some of America's first public art. Markers during this period were usually portal shaped, with images of winged skulls and hourglasses. Inscriptions typically read "Here lies the body of ...," reflecting the Puritan rejection of bodily resurrection.

Unitarian Burial Grounds

Towards the end of the 18th century, ideas about death and burial began to change as Unitarianism replaced rigid Puritan beliefs. Attitudes towards death and the afterlife became more ambivalent, reflecting a cautious optimism that became evident in the burial grounds of New England. Burials no longer faced west but were oriented east towards the rising sun. Gravestones remained mostly slate but the iconography changed to reflect the new optimism. Winged cherubs and angels offered more positive images and were soon supplemented by urns, willows and other symbols of hope. Inscriptions took on a different tone as well. "Dedicated to the memory of ..." implied a permanent legacy, even though the body was departed.

Burial grounds, by this time much larger than they were a century earlier, began to reflect the general orderliness that was valued in New England during the Federal period. They were no longer fields with a few scattered graves but contained rows of headstones, and sometimes footstones. The landscape remained rough and unadorned although the burial ground might have been enclosed by a fieldstone wall or wooden fence, particularly if it was used as pasture. There would have been little if any ornamental planting.

An early 19th century New England writer wrote:

"the burying place continues to be the most neglected spot in all the region, distinguished from other fields only by its leaning stones and the meanness of its enclosures, without a tree or shrub to take from it the air of utter desolation."

The Rural Cemetery Movement

By the beginning of the 19th century, the population of Massachusetts had increased dramatically. The increased urbanization fouled the air and water of urban areas with a resultant rise in epidemics like Small Pox, Diphtheria, Scarlet Fever, Yellow Fever, Whooping Cough, Measles and Asiatic Cholera that caused high death rates.

In 1822 Boston's burial grounds were in such a deplorable state that Mayor Josiah Quincy proposed to ban interments within the city limits. Existing urban burial grounds were in a deplorable state because of vandalism, abandonment and shuffling of locations. The burial grounds were seriously overcrowded with no space available for burials. It was believed that burial grounds were contaminating the water supply and that gases emanating from graves threatened public health. The 1830s and 1840s witnessed the closure of many of the nation's urban burial grounds because of neglect, abandonment and desecration.

The overcrowding and unhealthy conditions of urban burial grounds and city churchyards led to the perceived need to remove burial grounds from urban centers. While Boston's problems were very dramatic, these issues were also reflected in other large cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth, prompting a new approach to the design of burial grounds called the rural cemetery movement. Improvements in transportation made it possible to establish cemeteries in areas remote from crowded living conditions. These locations provided assurance that the dead could be interred and their remains would not be disturbed. Prior to that the dead were exhumed to make room for others in the tight confines of urban burial grounds or churchyards.

The rural cemetery movement was influenced by two important precedents, New Haven's New Burying Ground and Pere Lachaise in Paris.



New Haven's New Burying Ground

New Haven's New Burying Ground, established in 1796, introduced the idea of a private non-sectarian burial ground free from church and municipal oversight. It was located far enough from the city so it would not be perceived as a public health risk and was laid out in a geometric grid with private family burial lots. It was an enclosed level field with pathways broad enough for carriages to pass and the area was planted with trees [Poplars and Willows]. The design of this burial ground influenced the form and style of burying grounds to follow. This influence can be seen in plans for the cemeteries in Sunderland and Brimfield, Massachusetts.

The 1804 design of the new rural cemetery, Pere Lachaise in Paris, drew international acclaim. It too was located outside the city but unlike earlier precedents, it was deliberately laid out to reflect an Arcadian ideal, a landscape for mourning. The design borrowed elements from the English romantic landscape style of the period with formal and informal design elements. It was a picturesque commemorative landscape with paths separated from carriageways. The cemetery was unified by a curving drive that led visitors past the classical monuments and offered a sequence of carefully constructed views.

By the 1830s the three major cities in the United States [Boston, New York and Philadelphia] had established large cemeteries on sites carefully chosen for accessibility and natural beauty.



Pere Lachaise Cemetery, Paris



From these two early precedents and the specific issues arising out of Boston's burial reform came Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, established by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society in 1831. Key principles of Mount Auburn were that it was located outside the city, it was a place of permanent burial in family lots and it was nondenominational. It was the first American cemetery intended to emulate the romantic character of estate design and was widely imitated in the years that followed.

Detail of Statue, Pere Lachaise Cemetery, Paris

Mount Auburn Cemetery and Pere Lachaise were created with a similar design intent and landscape aesthetic. But the two sites developed with very different results. Pere Lachaise became built up and congested with monuments and the French landscape expression of man's dominance over nature. It became a classic representation of mourning. At Mount Auburn, natural expression dominated and came to represent a calming sense of hope and expectation in the hereafter. It has retained the careful balance of art and nature intended by its founders.

The rural cemetery movement brought a new aesthetic to the design of other cemetery landscapes. Varied topography was desirable to create a landscape of complexity and visual interest. Broad vistas and picturesque landscapes were introduced to offer a view of the sublime in nature. Roads were circuitous and laid out to create a series of views as visitors moved through the landscape. Unlike earlier burial grounds, rural cemeteries were heavily planted. Some, like Mount Auburn, were even conceived of as arboretums. Enclosed vegetated spaces were provided for contemplation.

This new type of cemetery experience changed the public perception of burial grounds to such an extent that during the 1840s and 1850s tours of cemeteries became popular. For many these fashionable excursions combined pleasure with duty.

There was an important change in nomenclature as well. The older term "burial ground" was gradually replaced by the term "cemetery" which came from the Latin "to sleep." Even the names of the rural cemeteries [Greenlawn, Harmony Grove, Hope and Forest Hills] evoked their new ideals as places of consolation and inspiration.

Chronologic Development of Selected
"Rural" Cemeteries in Massachusetts

- 1831 Mount Auburn Cemetery,
Cambridge
- 1837 Rural Cemetery, New Bedford
- 1838 Rural Cemetery, Worcester
- 1839 Blue Hill Cemetery, Braintree
- 1840 Harmony Grove, Salem
- 1841 Garden Cemetery, Chelsea
Rural Cemetery, Lowell
Springfield Cemetery, Springfield
- 1842 Oak Hill, Newburyport
- 1848 Forest Hills, Jamaica Plain
Mount Feake, Waltham
- 1850 Evergreen Cemetery, Brighton
Pine Grove, Lynn
Rural Cemetery, Pittsfield
- 1851 Woodlawn Cemetery, Chelsea
[now Everett]
Wildwood, Winchester
- 1852 Mount Hope Cemetery, Mattapan
- 1853 Oak Grove, Fall River
- 1855 Newton Cemetery, Newton
Sleepy Hollow, Concord



Mount Auburn Cemetery, Forest Pond, 1845 engraving

Central to the concept of the rural cemetery was the idea of family lots where family members could be buried together in perpetuity. Absorbed in the world of the dead, Victorians lavished family plots with embellishment as an outward recognition of their sorrow. Lots were often edged with stone and/or defined by ornate iron fences or hedges. A large central family monument often supplanted individual grave markers. Families often took pleasure in maintaining their lots, which sometimes had furnishings for visitors.

Grave marker and memorial iconography and materials changed dramatically during the 19th century. Urns, willows and other symbols of solace gradually replaced earlier images. Upright slabs remained popular but there was growing use of three dimensional monuments. Classical symbols, particularly obelisks and columns, were popular early in the century. Iconography became less abstract and more sentimental, with figures like lambs and cherubs used for graves of children.

Monuments of the wealthy sometimes reflected aspects of a person's life or career. Affluent families constructed tombs or mausoleums, often into a hillside.

Many cemeteries also built receiving tombs to house the bodies of those who died during the winter months until the ground was soft enough to dig. Hearse houses also became popular during the 19th century, as many cities and towns were now so large that the deceased could no longer be carried from their houses to the cemetery.

Slate and sandstone markers were replaced with marble markers, granite obelisks and replicated statues. The whiteness of the marble markers was less somber than the earlier dark slate and more appropriate for positive feelings about the hereafter. While marble was comparatively easy to carve, its disadvantages became apparent over time. It was not as permanent and carvings began to erode. Improved quarrying technology made granite more readily available towards the end of the 19th century and it soon replaced marble as the preferred stone for grave markers.

Influences of the Rural Cemetery Movement

Although many of the burial grounds of Massachusetts, including most of those examined in the Historic Cemeteries Preservation Initiative, were established prior to the rural cemetery movement, the influence of these new ideas was widely felt throughout the Commonwealth. Burial grounds were no longer considered desolate places to be avoided but places of solace to the living as well as permanent resting places for the dead. Many cemeteries developed after the 1830s integrated some aspects of the rural cemetery movement into their design. This new generation of cemeteries featured curvilinear roads and paths, rustic ponds, extensive plantings and more ornate architectural features. Some were laid out by the growing number of surveyors, gardeners and landscape architects who specialized in design of rural estates and cemeteries.

Many of the Commonwealth's older burial grounds were also upgraded during the 19th century, giving them a more park like appearance. While many of the gravestones are older, the romantic image of a tree covered Colonial burial ground is largely a 19th century phenomenon. Municipal records indicate that fencing, tree planting and other improvements were common during this period. One of the most dramatic changes was the addition of vegetation as a normal part of the cemetery landscape. Trees were added to all of Boston's existing burial grounds within 15 years of the founding of Mount Auburn Cemetery. Decorative Victorian embellishments, including fencing, were another common addition to older burial grounds. Elaborate entry gates were often added, representing earthly gates to paradise.

Lawn-Park Cemeteries and Memorial Parks

After the Civil War, public interest focused less on cemeteries because newly established large parks provided better opportunities for recreation. There were also changing attitudes about the earlier emphasis on death. Evolving technology, most noticeably the advent of the lawnmower and vastly improved granite cutting techniques, were also strong influences.

The Lawn-Park cemetery image, exemplified by Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati, Ohio, was influenced by the late 19th century City Beautiful movement and attempted to balance formalism with naturalism. Family monuments set in large lawn areas replaced individual markers. The clutter of the individually enclosed family lots was replaced with a more unified, park like landscape. Few clusters of trees or shrubs interrupted the expanses of lawn.

As the Lawn-Park style became more popular, the fences and hedges began to disappear in many older cemeteries as well, due partially to the difficulty of maintaining the enclosures and mowing around them and partially for aesthetic reasons. These elements, in very close proximity with each other, competed visually to the detriment of the broader cemetery experience.

Another late 19th century trend was an increase in the number of cemeteries associated with particular religious or ethnic groups, particularly in industrial cities. As the population of Massachusetts became more diverse, many groups chose to establish their own cemeteries, often retaining distinctive features from their own culture.

Other groups acquired sections in municipal cemeteries where they could be buried together in a cemetery 'neighborhood' that would include those with whom they had lived. During the latter part of the 19th century, many municipal burial grounds assumed a commemorative and patriotic function, serving as the location of civic monuments and gatherings like Memorial Day ceremonies.

By the early 20th century, cemeteries became even more park like. The 1913 establishment of Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California took the Lawn-Park cemetery to a new dimension as the use of flush burial markers placed a greater emphasis on lawns and created a sense of spaciousness and unity, reducing visual distractions. Plantings became a backdrop for large artistic memorials that emphasized community rather than individual.

Some of the older cemeteries in Massachusetts adopted the new aesthetic of Forest Lawn for expansion areas. A prime example is Greenlawn Cemetery in Nahant where the sense of lawn and ocean view create an overall ambiance of tranquility and community. It is believed that the planned new municipal cemetery in Belmont will also be developed in a similar manner.

Since World War II many cemeteries favored efficiency of burial over aesthetic considerations. Uniform rows of straight plots, coupled with uniform or back to back placement of headstones of similar size and limited vegetative development, have left an impression of warehousing the dead.

Recent Trends

As reported in the Wall Street Journal, demand for burial space is growing across the nation. In 1996 there were 2.3 million deaths in the United States, 14% more than in 1986 according to the National Center for Health Statistics. Deaths are expected to increase to 2.7 million a year by 2007. Cemetery space shortages are particularly acute in the Northeast where large tracts of land in and around urban areas are difficult to find and very costly. Almost half of 49 cemeteries in a Boston area survey expect to run out of burial space within 10 years.

In more rural areas, where land is more available, less expensive and the demand for such space is less because of smaller populations, adequate burial space does not appear to be a significant current issue. Many smaller communities in rural areas have amassed sufficient land for burial purposes to serve them for many decades.

The development of cremation in the late 19th century provided an economical alternative to traditional interment under headstones. Although public acceptance has been slow, according to the Cremation Association of North America cremation accounted for 22% of dispositions in Massachusetts in 1998, up from 17% in 1993 and 4% in 1968. It has been projected that cremation will be chosen in almost 25% of deaths in Massachusetts by the year 2000, and that is projected to rise to 45% by 2010. However, other sources estimate that about 50% of cremains are not placed in a traditional manner like in columbaria, mausolea or family graves.

The potential impact of broader acceptance of cremations could be significant on landscape image and development. With less importance attached to individual vertical headstones, the landscape expression could again dominate over stone artifacts.

*Contemporary cemetery treatment,
Watertown*



Conclusions

Burial grounds and cemeteries in the Commonwealth offer a variety of visual impressions. Some, particularly the older, smaller burial grounds, present the image of a single period or short span of time. Others, particularly the larger sites, exhibit characteristics of several of the influences, styles or trends in cemetery development because they had sufficient space for them to endure and develop areas sequentially over a long span of time.

For much of the 20th century, many historic burial grounds and cemeteries have suffered the adverse impacts of neglect. A number of factors influenced this plight of municipal cemeteries today. Perhaps the most important is the fact that once a site becomes full and inactive, it no longer generates income and no longer has or needs sales appeal. Many burial grounds and cemeteries were essentially abandoned after the sale of all of the plots. The lack of sufficient endowment funds meant that there were no funds for maintenance and long term care.

Competing needs and low municipal budgets, coupled with increased labor costs, have generally placed the maintenance and preservation of historic burial grounds and cemeteries low on a municipality's priority list. Municipalities have many needs for the funds that they have available. Improvements in the tools and devices for maintenance over the last century have reduced, but not eliminated, labor requirements.

Sites that are taken care of tend to have high visibility and significance in the community. They are also often recognized as an important component of the local tourism industry. Recent broadened interest in the preservation of cultural landscapes has uncovered the wide ranging information and significance that these properties have to offer.

Afterword

The purpose of this historic overview is to provide a sense of the major trends in cemetery development, and allow readers to identify where a specific cemetery or part of a cemetery might fall in this spectrum. It is not intended to be a definitive history. There are several excellent contemporary publications on the historic development of burial grounds and cemeteries in the United States. Perhaps the most comprehensive is David Sloane's *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History*. Others focus on specific periods of time like John Stilgoe's *Common Landscape of America, 1580-1845* and Blanche Linden-Ward's *Landscapes of Memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery*.

*Eroding stone carving detail in marble
Watertown*



GUIDELINES FOR PRESERVATION PLANNING

Before physical improvements begin, careful planning is needed to determine an appropriate overall approach and to set priorities. This is done through the preservation planning process which has three steps: documentation, evaluation, and decision making, all of which are described briefly in this section. For additional information see Lynette Strangstad's, *A Graveyard Preservation Primer and Preservation of Historic Burial Grounds, Information Series No. 76* as well as *National Register Bulletin No. 41, Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places*. Full citations are in the Bibliography.

DOCUMENTATION

The first step in any effort to protect a historic burial ground or cemetery is to compile information on its origins, evolution over time and current conditions. This documentation process, which involves both historical research and on site observations, provides valuable information about the site and also forms the basis for subsequent evaluation and decision-making. The information generated as part of the documentation process also becomes part of the historical record of the burial ground, and can be used for other purposes, such as gaining public appreciation and support for the property.

Documentation is most commonly undertaken by local historical commissions, sometimes working in collaboration with one or more preservation consultants who may be art, landscape architectural or social historians, cultural geographers or have training in other related fields.

Documentary Research

The documentary record is often the best place to start to gain an overall understanding of the evolution and development of a burial ground or cemetery. Information on a specific cemetery, especially one that is municipally owned, is often found within the community in which it is located. While each city or town is organized differently, local historical commissions, historical societies and municipal libraries are often a good starting point. Valuable records can also be found in other municipal offices such as the city or town clerk [birth and death records]; the cemetery commission [cemetery inventories, physical and policy changes] and the community's annual reports [expenditures, capital improvements]. Documentary information can also be obtained from local histories, historical maps and atlases, property deeds, land plats, newspaper accounts, standard and aerial photographs, Vital Records, family histories and genealogies, census schedules and tax records.

When investigating historical era Native American cemeteries, families and individuals, the Indian Affairs records from the Massachusetts State Archives and the 19th century Earle Report can provide helpful information. Also useful are military records which provide brief service records for war veterans [e.g. municipal military musters, Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the Revolutionary War, Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the Civil War, Massachusetts Soldiers in the French and Indian War]. Finally, oral histories and community traditions often generate helpful hints on cemetery locations, construction, enlargement and repair.

National Register Bulletin No. 41 offers a description of the type of documentation to be collected. While it is not always possible to find information in all categories, the summary below is a useful starting point.

"Documentation begins with compiling information on the background of the site and its development over time. Such information would include the date the burial place was established, the period in which it was active, the circumstances under which it was established and maintained, and the cultural groups, individuals, organizations, agencies, or corporations responsible for initial and subsequent development. For a burial place with design distinction, such as a large comprehensively designed cemetery, information should be provided about those who designed the overall landscape and its architectural features, and those who carved or fabricated individual monuments and grave markers. An analysis of components of the burial place would include identification of methods of construction and manufacturing techniques, as described in stone cutters handbooks, fabricators' catalogs, and professional publications. Characteristic plant materials, layout of burial plots and circulation features, acreage encompassed, and the purpose or function of areas and features within the site boundaries also are important. The research should determine when newer tracts were added to the site and describe the site in relation to its surrounding landscape."

Documentary research should be compiled into a written narrative accompanied by graphic documentation, such as maps and photographs, if available. In addition, it may be useful to compile a binder containing supporting information which can be consulted when additional questions arise.

Site Survey and Condition Assessment

The walkover or site survey is another key step in identifying the significant features of a burial ground or cemetery. The site survey reveals how burials are placed in the physical environment and how the natural environment is altered to memorialize the dead. If at all possible, data gathered during the walkover should be recorded on a site map. If a detailed survey map is not available, an assessors map can provide the basic outlines of the property and key details can be sketched in. The maps prepared for the cemeteries described in this report can serve as models. Lynette Strangstad's *A Graveyard Preservation Primer* offers guidance on selecting a datum point which can be used to prepare a more accurate survey of site features.

It is often desirable to take photographs of current conditions as well. They should include overall views as well as details of significant features. While color photographs provide a good visual record, black and white photographs are required for Massachusetts Historical Commission [MHC] survey forms and National Register nominations. To avoid duplication of effort, MHC and National Register requirements for photo documentation should be reviewed before photos are taken.

The following list of features to be identified and evaluated is adapted from *National Register Bulletin No. 41*, which should be consulted for additional information.

- *Topography*, including slope and elevation, both within the burial ground and in relation to its larger setting
- *Natural Features* such as streams, hills and native vegetation, and naturalistic features such as ponds, lakes and land forms
- *Spatial Organization* or arrangement of man-made features within the cemetery [i.e. rectilinear, grid-like, curving or naturalistic]
- *Views and Vistas*, both within the site and external to it
- *Characteristic Vegetation*, including trees, shrubs, grasses, ornamental flower beds and specimen plantings
- *Circulation* features such as roads, paths, steps, pavement materials
- *Gateways, Fences and Hedges* used for boundary and spatial definition, especially perimeter walls and fences, also features defining individual burial plots, such as fences, curbs or changes in topography
- *Grave Markers*, including gravestones, monuments and mausoleums, for which typical or outstanding examples should be described [see section below on grave marker inventory, which is often undertaken as a separate project]

- *Cemetery Buildings* such as chapels, gate houses, offices, greenhouses, hearse houses and crematories
- *Site Furnishings* such as signs, flagpoles, lighting, benches, planters and fountains and commemorative features such as cannons and sculptures

The primary goals of the site survey are to document the property's present physical character in comparison with its appearance during the period of its most active use and to identify major planning and preservation issues. The visual examination of surface remains may also be important for locating unmarked burials and defining the spatial extent of unbounded burial grounds or cemeteries. Visual inspection can also reveal where original cemeteries were later enlarged or enclosed, where the natural landscape has been modified, or associated historic features, such as ancient roads and "ways" have been obscured by subsequent development. A systematic search for broken or displaced markers, marker fragments or bases, tomb mounds, family plot markers and surface depressions often signals potential burial locations.

An effective way to begin a pedestrian survey is by perambulation of the interior and exterior cemetery walls to search for evidence of changes to the external boundaries, access ways, and gates, and to search for associated structures, former roads and access ways. Close inspection of stone walls and fences may reveal differential masonry techniques and a variety of materials, indicating where an original wall or fence has been repaired, or where earlier material has been removed. Often fragments of broken markers are found at the base of the burial ground or cemetery walls, and outside the site, where they were thrown during episodic tidying or have fallen down slope from the site. A systematic walk from north-south through the interior of the cemetery may identify rows of head and foot stones aligned east-west according to Christian tradition. When the internal configuration and spatial array of the burial rows is known, anomalous surface conditions will indicate absent markers, walkways, pathways and tree falls and may also reveal changes to entrances and gateways. Vacant portions of the burial ground, particularly remote corners, can indicate the location of unmarked graves where town paupers were buried.

*Stone carving detail in slate
Old Hill Cemetery, Newburyport*



Grave Marker Inventory

Stone by stone inventories recording the number, materials, artistic and historic significance, and condition of the gravestones must form the basis for stone conservation programs. More specific information regarding grave marker inventory can be found in the appendix.

Subsurface Investigations

Excavation in a historic burial ground or cemetery is strongly discouraged, but is sometimes necessary for planting, the repair or installation of walls or other structures, or to resolve drainage issues. All excavation, to any depth, requires review and approval in the form of a permit from the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the advice of a professional archaeologist.

Archaeological excavation of burial grounds and cemeteries can be conducted only by professional archaeologists and is generally limited to the search for unmarked burials. Archaeologists can exhume human remains from a burial ground or cemetery only after a special permit has been obtained from the State Archaeologist at the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and only if exceptional circumstances warrant their removal.

Archaeologists employ a variety of means to search for unmarked burials, including documentary research, informant interviews and site locational models. Field techniques include geophysical or remote-sensing methods such as electrical resistivity, electrical conductivity and ground-penetrating radar. Systematic probing to search for buried gravestone fragments is another way to identify unmarked burials and to find broken burial markers. Remote sensing and probing are employed during the preliminary search for unmarked burials which are subsequently investigated by standard manual excavation.

Unmarked burial grounds can also be identified by machine assisted soil stripping. During soil stripping archaeologists monitor the removal of consecutive soil layers to search for changes in soil color and texture associated with burials. Prior to machine excavation archaeologists test to determine whether graves contain evidence of surface treatment, to identify the natural stratigraphy, and to predict the depth at which the burials have been interred. This method is particularly effective to search for clustered burials which have been associated with Christian Native American cemeteries.

When an unmarked burial ground or cemetery is identified, archaeologists conduct field investigations to determine the size of the site, define the boundaries and identify the spatial array of the burials. Angle-oriented hand trenching is an effective means for exposing grave shafts to reveal the spatial array of ordered rows within the cemetery. When the size and boundaries of unmarked burial grounds or cemeteries have been identified, archaeologists can then establish physical boundaries so that the site can be protected from development in surrounding property. These methods are also appropriate for defining the extent of small family plots and confirming that burials do not extend beyond the known perimeter. Excavating historical burial grounds and cemeteries is the exception, not the norm and should be undertaken only by a professional archaeologist under permit.

Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey Procedures

Once a burial ground or cemetery has been identified as being potentially historically significant, the local historical commission should contact the Massachusetts Historical Commission to determine whether an MHC survey form has been prepared for the property or whether the property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. If a survey form has not been prepared or if the survey form on file does not meet current standards, a survey form should be completed. This important step provides first level documentation and evaluation of a property's history and current appearance as well as providing key factual data. The MHC *Historic Properties Survey Manual* should be consulted prior to preparation of MHC survey forms.

Ideally survey of burial grounds is done as part of a broader survey of municipal resources so the individual property can be evaluated in relation to other historic properties within a community. Contact MHC survey staff for additional information regarding municipal surveys.

EVALUATION

The documentation phase described above provides background information on the history and current conditions of a burial ground or cemetery. The second step in the preservation planning process is evaluating the historic significance and integrity of a property in relation to others of its period, type and location.

A primary goal of the evaluation process is to determine whether the burial ground or cemetery is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Any community interested in the National Register should contact the National Register staff at the Massachusetts Historical Commission for general information procedures, time frames and documentation requirements. Before a nomination is prepared, the local historical commission must contact MHC for an opinion of eligibility and to obtain the nomination forms. MHC generally requires that a community have a completed community-wide survey before proceeding with National Register nominations.

The National Register of Historic Places

The National Register is the official federal list of districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture. National Register properties have significance to the pre-history or history of their community, state or the nation. Properties listed on the National Register must possess historic significance and integrity.

In order for a property to be listed on the National Register, a nomination form must be prepared which includes a detailed description of the property and an evaluation of its historic significance. Nominations may be initiated by private individuals, organizations or government agencies. With the exception of federally owned properties, nominations for properties in Massachusetts are submitted to the Massachusetts Historical Commission for evaluation. Nominations recommended for listing by the state review board are then referred to the National Park Service which administers the National Register program.

When the National Register program was established, listing of burial grounds was not encouraged unless they were of exceptional significance. More recently burial grounds have been recognized for their many aspects of significance and can now be nominated as long as there is adequate justification to support the nomination.

*Emily Dickinson gravesite
West Cemetery, Amherst*



Preparation of a National Register nomination often provides the first complete record of the history, significance and current conditions of a cemetery or burial ground and can be a valuable asset in understanding and appreciating the area. It often gives new importance and status to a neglected property. A major benefit of the National Register is that listed properties are eligible to apply for state and federal preservation grant programs. While listing in itself does not impose restrictions on a property, National Register listed properties are subject to Massachusetts Historical Commission review on all actions that are funded, licensed or permitted by state or federal government agencies.

Listing on the National Register requires thorough documentation and evaluation of the history, significance and current status of a property. Preparation of the forms is usually done by a historian or other preservation professional. Properties are determined to be eligible by the Massachusetts Historical Commission, who recommends their listing on the National Register. There are a number of National Register Bulletins to provide guidance. Most directly relevant is *National Register Bulletin No. 41, Guidelines for Evaluating and Registering Cemeteries and Burial Places*. Assistance is also available from the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

Significance

Significance is the importance of a property, as defined by four criteria recognized in National Register nominations. Each property nominated must satisfy one or more of these criteria [listed below]. Generally properties must be at least fifty years old to be considered eligible for the National Register. They must also be significant when evaluated in relation to major trends of history in their community, state or the nation.

- *Criterion A:* Associated with historic events or activities or patterns
- *Criterion B:* Associated with important persons
- *Criterion C:* Distinctive physical characteristics of design, construction or form
- *Criterion D:* Potential to provide important information about prehistory or history

In addition, as outlined in *National Register Bulletin No. 41*, burial grounds, cemeteries and graves qualify for the National Register *only* if they meet certain special requirements or Criteria Considerations *as well as* the standard National Register Criteria. These considerations also apply to religious and commemorative properties, as well as properties that have achieved significance within the past fifty years. As stated in *Bulletin No. 41*, "cemeteries and graves may qualify under Criteria A, B or C if they are integral parts of larger properties that do meet the criteria, or if they meet the conditions known as *criteria considerations*."

Bulletin No. 41 provides the clearest discussion of the Criteria Considerations and should definitely be consulted throughout the evaluation process. One important example is the discussion of Criteria Consideration C which states that

"A birthplace or grave of a historical figure is eligible if the person is of outstanding importance and if there is no other appropriate site or building directly associated with his or her productive life."

In other words, if a residence or workplace associated with an individual is still in existence, this might be determined to have a more direct association with the significance of an individual than his or her grave site.

Criteria Consideration D must also be considered. It states that

"A cemetery is eligible if it derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events."

Burial grounds and cemeteries commemorate many individuals and may express important spiritual beliefs. While this alone does not qualify this type of site for National Register listing, other factors may make a burial ground or cemetery eligible for listing. A burial ground's age and scope may reflect larger historical trends like patterns of early development of an area by a particular group. A cemetery may be associated with a significant historic event. A cemetery may also be eligible for the quality of design represented in its funerary art, landscape development or construction techniques.

Integrity

Integrity is the authenticity of a property's historic identity or the extent to which a property evokes its appearance during a particular historic period. While evaluation of integrity is often a subjective judgment, it must be grounded in an understanding of a property's physical features and how they relate to its significance. The National Register recognizes seven factors that define historic integrity. Retention of these qualities is essential for a property to convey its significance.

- *Location* is the place where the historic property was constructed or the historic event occurred.
- *Design* is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure and style of a property.
- *Setting* is the physical environment of a historic property.
- *Materials* are the physical elements of a particular period.
- *Workmanship* includes the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular period.
- *Feeling* is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period.
- *Association* is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.

In evaluating the integrity of a burial ground or cemetery, the following questions should be asked:

- To what degree does the burial place and its overall setting convey the most important period[s] of use?
- To what degree have the original design and materials of construction, decoration and landscaping been retained?
- Has the property's potential to yield significant information in American culture been compromised by ground disturbance or previous investigation?

DECISION MAKING

Once the documentation and evaluation phases have been completed, decisions must be made regarding an overall approach and priorities for implementation. While decisions regarding the preservation of individual artifacts within a historic burying ground or cemetery are relatively straightforward, decisions related to an appropriate overall preservation philosophy are more complex. Conflicting needs between various features within a burial ground [such as trees and grave markers] need to be resolved and decisions need to be made about changes that have occurred over time. Archaeological considerations also need to be included in the decision making process.

Ideally a preservation master plan is prepared to provide a careful framework for decision making. It can be a relatively brief document, such as the plans prepared for the burial grounds and cemeteries included in this report. A more detailed report may be needed in a situation where complex decisions need to be made. This might occur where major work is needed or in an active burial ground where new burials need to be accommodated sensitively into the existing landscape.



Forefathers Burying Ground, Chelmsford

Preservation Philosophy

The National Park Service has identified four broad philosophical approaches that can be applied to a historic property, known as preservation treatments. While it is useful to be aware of all four, preservation and rehabilitation are usually the most appropriate treatments for most burial grounds or cemeteries. Accurate restoration to an earlier period is rare and reconstruction of a burial ground would generally not be considered appropriate.

- *Preservation* focuses on the maintenance and repair of existing materials and retention of a property's form as it has evolved over time. This is an appropriate treatment for most burial grounds and cemeteries, particularly those that are no longer in active use. Preservation is a conservative approach which involves minimal change or alteration and is often the least expensive as it involves the fewest alterations.
- *Rehabilitation* acknowledges the need to alter or add to a historic property to meet continuing or changing uses while retaining the property's historic character. This treatment, often used for buildings, allows modifications to the character of a property to accommodate new or expanded uses. Rehabilitation might be appropriate in an active cemetery where changes are needed to facilitate ongoing or expanded use or for specific features within a cemetery, such as walkways which need to be upgraded to provide for universal access.

- *Restoration* is undertaken to depict a property at a particular period of time in its history, while removing evidence of other periods. While restoration of specific features within a burial ground or cemetery is often undertaken, restoration of an entire burial ground to an earlier period is generally not recommended as it would necessitate the removal of later additions [even graves] which may be important features in their own right.

- *Reconstruction* recreates vanished or non-surviving portions of a property, usually for interpretive purposes. This treatment is used when nothing remains from a historic period and sufficient information is available to recreate it from documentary sources. Plimoth Plantation is one Massachusetts example of a reconstruction which was undertaken because there were no surviving examples from that important period in American history.

When changes are made to any historic property they should respect the character defining features, those essential qualities that give a property a sense of time and place. These features are often delineated in National Register nominations or other planning documents. They may include the spatial organization of the property as well individual features such as buildings, burial markers, lot enclosures, walls, fences, gates, steps, views, topography, water features, trees, shrubs, ground covers, roads, paths, signs and site furnishings.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

The Secretary of the Interior's standards provide guidance to property owners, design professionals and contractors prior to and during the planning and implementation of project work. The standards below are for rehabilitation, the most commonly selected treatment for historic landscapes.

- A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
- The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alterations of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
- Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
- Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
- Distinctive features, finishes and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.

- Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture and other visual qualities and where possible materials. Placement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
- Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
- Significant archaeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
- New additions, exterior alteration or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
- New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Establishing Priorities

Once an overall preservation philosophy has been established, the next step is establishing priorities for implementation. These should be based on a variety of factors. The following questions can offer guidance in evaluating projects and setting priorities.

- *Consistency* - is the project consistent with the overall preservation philosophy established for the burial ground?
- *Significance* - does the project improve a historically or archaeologically significant feature or features?
- *Visibility* - is the project aesthetically important or prominently located within the cemetery?
- *Safety* - does the project eliminate or reduce existing or potential safety hazards?
- *Public interest* - is this a project that will generate public interest and support?
- *Condition* - does this project protect a deteriorating resource or improve an unsightly area?
- *Funding* - are funds realistically available for the project from either public or private sources?
- *Management* - will the project generate additional maintenance needs and if so have these needs been addressed?

The primary focus of recommendations for improvement is the protection, stabilization and preservation of character defining features.

The clean up of each site is critical to remove the detrimental effects of volunteer growth and evidence of vandalism, reducing the general misuse of the grounds and generally making them a more desirable place to visit. General clean up and low cost, high visibility maintenance efforts can be the most effective in terms of reclaiming a property and building subsequent support for a historic burial ground or cemetery.

Preservation of historic artifacts, tomb structures and retaining walls is generally given high priority because these efforts will prevent significant deterioration of these valuable resources and reduce risk to visitors. Additional improvements typically need to be made related to landscape issues [pruning, planting, pathways, etc.] and making improvements for visitors [site amenities, fences and gates, lighting and an informational and interpretive sign system].

Repair and restoration priorities should be established and worked on as funds become available. Thus, priority lists should be arranged in order of importance with a probable cost assigned to each item. Projects can generally be grouped into three priority levels: high, medium and low. However, these should not be treated as rigid categories. In certain cases it would make economic sense to combine selected items that have different priorities to avoid redoing high priority work when it is time to work on lower priority items at a later date.

Before any work is undertaken, professionals should be consulted and permits should be filed with the Massachusetts Historical Commission in accordance with state law.

High Priority Items

The first priority should always be clean up and removal of litter and other debris. Items regarded as high priority are typically related to issues of public safety, structural stability and protection of significant historic fabric or resources. These items should be corrected within one year. High priority items include resetting and repair of heavily damaged grave markers, including restoration of foundations, erosion repair, vegetative removals, pruning and fertilization of trees, and removal of graffiti. High priority items at high visitation sites also include path work, fence and gate restoration, structural items like mound tombs, path and stair work and identification sign placement.

Medium Priority Items

Items listed as medium priority should be corrected within five years and relate to issues of security, preventing accelerated deterioration or damage which could lead to higher future costs, replacement of items that are expected to last less than five years, and repair or replacement of items that significantly detract from the appearance of a burying ground or cemetery. Medium priority items can include lawn repairs, additional planting, cyclical tree pruning, maintenance of structures, conservation of two part grave markers with visible stains at the junction of the marker and base and consideration of adding water supply. Care should be exercised with the latter so as not to harm archaeological resources.

Low Priority Items

Low priority items include cosmetic repairs and future considerations that can be delayed at least five years. Low priority items typically include stone conservation of granite markers that have shifted and marble markers that are currently in satisfactory condition, additional planting and the addition of informational and interpretive signs at sites with low visitation. As visitation of a site increases, the priority level for signs should be reconsidered. Other low priority items include consideration of replicating missing historic components or the relocation of distracting overhead utility lines.