

Quabbin Park Cemetery

Built as part of the Quabbin Reservoir project, the Quabbin Park Cemetery holds the remains of 6,601 known graves removed from the Swift River Valley. Altogether, 7,613 graves were disinterred from thirty-four cemeteries scattered throughout eight towns.

Developed out of former farmland and woodland in Ware, the cemetery was viewed suspiciously at first by the residents of the valley. Many of the first graves to be removed from the valley cemeteries were not reburied at Quabbin Park Cemetery because of the concern that the cemetery would not be well-cared for by the state. However, popular opinion soon changed in favor of the new cemetery as the residents saw the beautiful design, as well as the care taken by the crew in charge of disinterring and re-burying the graves

“One man, a former resident, was so desirous to see for himself how the work was done that he came from his home near Boston and lived there for 10 days until he saw the bones of his ancestors removed to the new plot, the monuments set and the land graded. When asked if he was satisfied, he replied that he had no idea that such good care was taken, and that he could find nothing to criticize.”

Letters from Quabbin, 1938
Amy Spink and Mabel Jones



Quabbin Park Cemetery in 1942.

Prior to moving any graves the Metropolitan District Water Supply Commission (MDWSC was the agency responsible for clearing and building the reservoir, now known as DCR) plotted and mapped the cemeteries. Photographs were taken of every gravestone and all data was recorded. Then those families with recorded deeds were contacted and asked where they wanted to have the bodies reinterred. If the family chose Quabbin Park Cemetery, the bodies were reburied by the MDWSC in new lots but in the same position and layout as they had been originally. Residents were not charged for reburial at the new cemetery. If they chose to have family members reburied at other cemeteries, they were not charged for the transport, although they would have had to purchase burial lots there. As well, if a family owned unused burial lots at the former cemeteries they were entitled to lots in the new cemetery.

“Burial lots in Quabbin Park Cemetery will be assigned and conveyed by the Commission, upon application, to persons who would have been entitled to burial in such burial grounds as the Commission may have removed...”

MDWSC Quabbin Park Cemetery Rules and Regulations, 1932.



This Civil War monument was originally in Enfield, MA. It was removed to Quabbin Park Cemetery when Enfield was cleared for the Quabbin Reservoir.

Along with graves, the MDWSC moved the town war memorials of Dana, Enfield, Greenwich and Prescott to Quabbin Park Cemetery. Today these monuments have come to memorialize the four towns themselves.



Quabbin Reservoir
Department of Conservation and Recreation
Division of Water Supply Protection
Office of Watershed Management
485 Ware Road
Belchertown, MA 01007
413-323-7221
www.mass.gov/dcr/watershed

During the process of grave removal many “growsome stories” circulated about what kinds of horrors were being uncovered. Skeletons with long hair and nails and corpses found as if they had been fighting to escape their coffins were reported on in the press. However, in 1932 and 1933 a number of articles were printed in the local Springfield papers that laid to rest many of these rumors.

“As a matter of fact the opening of the graves is nothing like as growsome (sic) as has been represented in some of the stories current. Rarely is anything to be seen but coffins more or less intact, or, in the older graves, bones.”

Springfield Union Republican Sunday, 2/5/1933

In regards to the nature of the work, there were stories that the laborers would have to submit to a physical exam and live in quarantine for two to three years after leaving the job in order to prevent the spread of disease. However, one undated news article describes the reaction of N. Leroy Hammond, an MDWSC engineer in charge of the cemetery project, to these stories.

“Mr. Hammond laughed away these ideas and said it was just an everyday job to the ordinary laborer.”

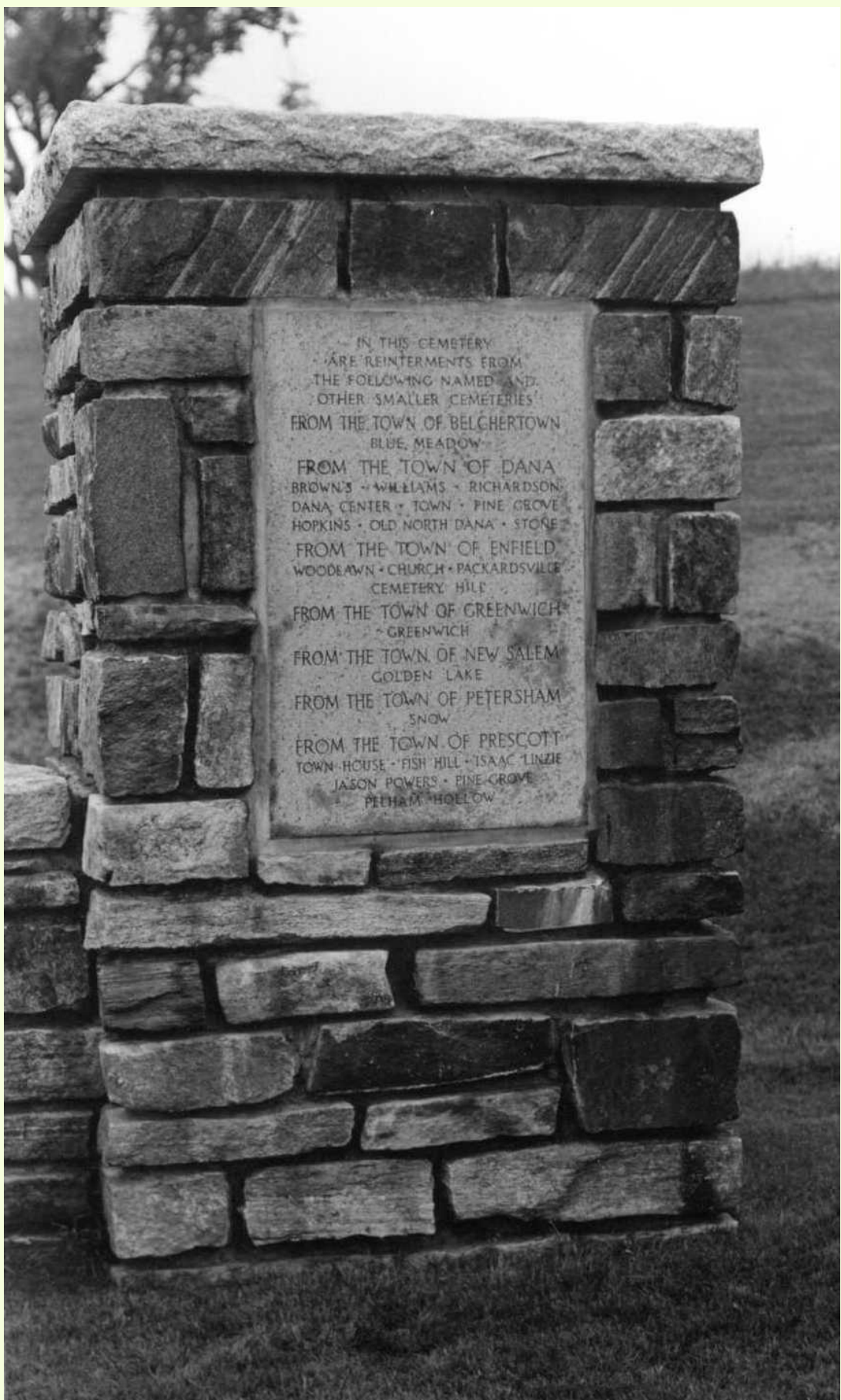
One possible reason for the rumors surrounding this project was the fact that the state did not allow photographs to be taken or spectators to watch as they removed graves.



N. Leroy Hammond laughed away the rumors surrounding the removal of the cemeteries in the valley.

Visitors often wonder what may have happened to any Native American burying grounds in the valley. As these areas were not officially recorded they were left undisturbed by the MDWSC.

The entrance to Quabbin Park Cemetery is marked by two stone columns that include stones from the foundation of every church in the valley. As well, bronze plaques were placed on these columns, listing the name of every cemetery removed for the reservoir project.



The bronze tablet at the entrance to the cemetery.

Today Quabbin Park Cemetery consists of approximately 22 acres. It is still an active cemetery, however, purchase of burial lots is restricted to former residents of the four towns, their direct descendants, or employees and former employees of the DCR.

Unfortunately, when Quabbin Park Cemetery was built, the new plots were not grouped by cemetery so much of the historical integrity was lost. Yet any visitor that takes the time to look closely at the gravestones will find fascinating details that bring to life these long buried people.

Quabbin Park Cemetery has a number of examples of “portrait stones” or soul effigies, primarily from the Greenwich Cemetery. These are not actual portraits of the deceased but are meant to represent them. When looked at closely, the “portraits” are identical to one another but each stone includes details that individualize them.



A portrait stone marks the grave of Prudence Fay. The portrait is shown with a bonnet to identify her as a woman.



Sarah Cooley's gravestone is marked “Death is Certain.”



Deacon Stone's family chose “Remember Death” to mark his gravestone.



The Thayers' gravestones are of marble, a common choice in the nineteenth century.

The marble stones pictured above mark the graves of Elizabeth Thayer and her daughter Laura, who both died in the 1870's; Elizabeth at 46 and Laura at 19. Elizabeth's stone on the right shows a common symbol seen on gravestones, hands clasped in farewell. Laura's shows a hand pointing upwards, showing that Laura is now in Heaven. Nineteenth century stones generally have less stark reminders of death (unlike eighteenth century ones such as Sarah Cooley's “death is certain”) and have more romantic or sentimental reminders of the lost loved ones.

Marble was a more expensive stone used to mark graves, and became more popular in the nineteenth century. However, many of the marble stones and monuments did not hold up well over time, and eventually gave way to polished granite.



This photo to the left shows the monument that marks the graves of several members of the Samuel Collins family. The section shown is marble, which was placed on a granite base. A draped urn, such as this one, harked back to the classical period, and represented sorrow. The addition of the bird, representing the soul, is a unique touch.

The white marble of this monument has changed color due to lichen and long time exposure to the elements.



Along with memorials to the deceased, the grave stones and monuments at Quabbin Park Cemetery bring alive the people that made the stones. Many of the gravestones would have been the work of local carvers. Particularly in the eighteenth century, gravestone carving was usually a secondary occupation of a local craftsman. Looking closely at the stones we can see the marks of their work. The photo to the left shows the chisel marks of the workers who made it.

Located a few miles east of the Winsor Dam, the cemetery is open to visitors during daylight hours. As it is an active cemetery, we ask visitors to be respectful of others and to refrain from gravestone rubbings.