



Provincetown cemeteries

History HIGHLIGHTS

by Laurel Guadagno

The Town of Provincetown Public Works Department oversees the care of four cemeteries: Cemetery Number One, Cemetery Number Two, the Gifford cemetery, and the Hamilton cemetery.

The oldest town cemetery is Cemetery Number One located between Court and Winthrop Streets. There is a long-standing belief that the four Pilgrims who died while the Mayflower was in Provincetown are buried in this cemetery. For many years local teachers took school children to the cemetery and pointed out a memorial stone to the four people who died while the Mayflower was here. It is located just to the left of the entrance. Time has a way of playing tricks with memory, and I am convinced that this memorial stone has become a gravestone in people's memories and given rise to the belief that some of the Mayflower Pilgrims are buried here. The oldest burial in this cemetery is actually that of Desire Cowing, wife of John who died on February 8, 1723/4 at age 40. We know this because of the work of Stanley Smith, Edward Whorf and Philip Cobb who, in September 1905, made literal copies of all the deaths recorded on the gravestones in Cemetery Number One. They presented all the genealogical information they found in the more than 400

All you who come my grave to see:
As I am now, so you must be.
Prepare in time, make no delay
For in my youth I 'as call'd away.

When looking for information about burials in Provincetown, researchers are fortunate to have the benefit of the work of Lurana Higgins Cook, Hugh Francis Cook, Anne Gleason MacIntyre and John Stuart MacIntyre. This group of Provincetowners published a list of Provincetown Massachusetts Cemetery Inscriptions in 1980 for the Old Section of Cemetery Number Two, the Gifford, and the Hamilton Cemeteries.

The old section of Cemetery Number Two began in 1800. It is located on the north side of Cemetery Road. Burials are still taking place in this cemetery and lots are still being sold in the New Section of the cemetery. Lot number 446 is a particularly poignant one. Here are buried three people who lost their lives during the 1898 Gale known as the "Portland Gale," who were passengers from the ill-fated Steamer Portland, after whom the storm was named, and the third froze to death in the rigging of the Schooner Lester A. Lewis that went aground in Provincetown Harbor during the same storm. Arctic explorer Donald MacMillan



Photo Vincent Guadagno

Cemetery Number One, located between Court and Winthrop streets, is the oldest in town.

been able to find out who owned these two cemeteries prior to the town. I suspect they were probably associated with the Center Methodist Episcopal Church. Nonetheless from evidence in Town Reports, it seems clear that the town took over these cemeteries in 1962. The 1963 Report of the Cemetery Department under the heading Gifford Cemetery says, "A great deal of effort and work has been utilized in this cemetery since it was placed under the supervision of the Cemetery Commission at the last Town Meeting." Later in the same report the Commissioners refer to the Hamilton-Gifford Cemetery as one.

The Town's Civil War Memorial is located in four lots in the Gifford Cemetery. Sometimes even lots with no stones have a tale to tell. Directly behind the Civil War Memorial is an empty lot. This lot is listed in the name of Colin Stevenson, Captain of the Schooner *Carrie D. Knowles* that disappeared on a whaling

Farragut made mention of Josiah Freeman, in his official report of the battle. He writes further, "In that memorable battle, at the mouth of the James River, off Newport News, between the Rebel ram *Merrimac* and the Union fleet, when the *Cumberland* sank, a Provincetown boy went down in her, fighting his gun manfully to the last. His name was Josiah C. Freeman and to his memory Post G.A.R. have named their Post for him."

Cemeteries are primary sources for genealogical research, a kind of outdoor archive or history museum. Diana Hume George and Malcolm Nelson in their book, "Epitaph and Icon," write that the old burying grounds of Cape Cod are "a durable but fragile statement of the record of human endeavor in a lovely but harsh and difficult place. ... They record the deaths of individuals, and also the history of local cultures ..." Every time I take a walk through one of these ceme-