

Grant aids refurbishing of Winthrop St. Cemetery

By Liz Winston
BANNER STAFF

Thanks to a \$37,916 Historic Landscape Preservation Grant from the state Dept. of Environmental Management, Provincetown's oldest cemetery will soon be getting a much-needed facelift.

With funds from the grant, which will be matched by the town to bring the total project cost to \$72,916, the Winthrop Street Cemetery will be carefully refurbished with input from both the Cemetery Commission and the Historic Commission.

"We're delighted to get this grant," said Town Manager Keith Bergman. "It will mean an improved asset for the community, one which hasn't received the amount of care and attention it needed."

The three-acre cemetery, which is located between Winthrop and Court streets, includes both wood-



Photo Vincent Guadagno

Town cemetery employee Roger Legg at a memorial stone dedicated to the four Pilgrims in the Winthrop Street Cemetery.

ed and open areas. Currently, it is surrounded with a locked chain-link fence; most of it is overgrown with brush.

A Town Meeting vote in April allowed for the matching funds upon receipt of the grant. "If we vote for this, will the locks be taken off the gates so we can visit our loved ones?" one voter asked on the Town Hall floor.

According to Director of Public Works David Guertin, whose department will be responsible for the bulk of the cemetery restoration, the locks will in fact be taken off the gates, new "historically appropriate" fencing will take the place of the chain link, and brush will be cleared and replaced with plantings. In addition, walkways

will be redefined, damaged memorials restored, and historic areas denoted with new signage.

"This project is long overdue, and the area has been long ignored," Guertin said.

Four people believed to be Pilgrims who died while the Mayflower was docked in Provincetown are buried in the cemetery, which has graves dating back to 1723. A memorial stone dedicated to the four Pilgrims is located just inside the main entrance.

Guertin, Bergman and the Cemetery and Historic commissions will oversee how the grant is used. Maintaining the historic integrity of the cemetery is one of the main concerns, said Historic Commission member Roger Keene.

"There are many reasons why that cemetery is important for a lot of people," Keene said. "Any excavation has to be done very, very carefully. Sometimes the less you do, the better — you don't want to be invasive."

For instance, Keene said, holes or depressions in the ground should not necessarily be filled in when renovating historic cemeteries — they could be former graves.

The DEM has recently published a book addressing those very issues, which provides guidelines for preserving historic

burial grounds and cemeteries. The publication, which includes practical recommendations for restoration aspects such as landscaping, access and security, and fences and gates as well as case studies, photographs and diagrams, will be a useful tool in the Winthrop Street project, Keene says.

Planning and design services for the restoration (allotted about \$15,000 of the budget) will be contracted out through a bidding process, Guertin says. Actual construction efforts (estimated to use up the remaining \$58,000 from combined town and grant funds) will be done in part by the DPW.

Over \$900,000 in Historic Landscape Preservation Grants has been awarded to communities across the state. Of the 63 applications the department received for funding this year, Provincetown was one of 25 communities (and the only town on Cape Cod) selected to receive grants.

Established in 1997 by the Cellucci Administration to support preservation and restoration efforts of municipal landscapes that are listed on the State or National Historic Register, the grant program provides funds for inventory and planning, construction, preservation maintenance and public education and stewardship.