Shelter Island Presbyterian Church: North & South Burying Grounds

Conditions Survey & Recommendations for Treatment

Shelter Island Chapter NSDAR
Cemetery Restoration Project

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A. CONDITIONS SURVEY

1. INTRODUCTION

The Town of Shelter Island lies between the north and south forks of Suffolk County on eastern Long Island, New York. It was settled in 1652 by Nathaniel Sylvester and his wife Grissel Brinley following its purchase from the native inhabitants the prior decade. But it was not until the middle of the next century, c. 1742, that land was set aside for a church and burying ground[1]; erected about 1743, the first meetinghouse stood until 1816 when it was replaced with a larger building, which in turn was rebuilt after a fire in 1934. The two historic burying grounds associated with these three edifices flank the present church (north) and stretch across Route 114 (south) which bisects the two parcels. The earliest recorded interment was that of Ellenor Terry, who died at the age of 93 in 1747; the death of Jonathan Havens, aged 68, followed soon after in 1748. While neither of these early headstones is extant, several others survive from the second half of the 18th century, the first of which appears to be that of James Conkling (1754) followed by that of Ruth Havens (1759). Today, the two historic burying grounds continue under the ownership and maintenance of the Shelter Island Presbyterian Church. The South Burying Ground remains an active cemetery.

In total, there are currently 535 primary monuments and numerous associated footstones and grave markers surviving in the North and South Burying Grounds, many dating from the late 18th and 19th centuries. Out of concern for the deteriorating conditions of these monuments and associated cemetery features, the Shelter Island Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution contracted with historic preservation consultant Zachary N. Studenroth to conduct a *Conditions Survey* and prepare *Recommendations for Treatment*. The project and the following report are meant to help guide future conservation treatments, stone repairs and site improvements. The report contains data gathered between January and April of 2012 that documents the

[1] The expression "burying ground" is employed in this report, although the alternate "burial ground" may be found in prior surveys and in current descriptions of other historic cemeteries. The distinction may no longer have great significance, although "burying ground" is the term most found in 17th and 18th century usage. It connotes the more active process of interring the deceased in a plot of land set aside for the purpose, whereas "burial ground" is the more passive term that appears to derive from modern origins, and refers to a designated place in which the burials are found.

current condition(s) of the study site, and prioritizes the condition ratings for each monument to facilitate the planning of repairs and treatments.

2. GENERAL DESCRIPTION

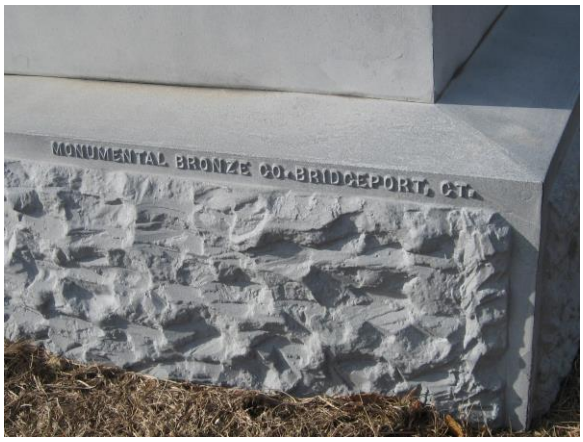
Both the North and South Burying Grounds are situated on relatively flat, open grassy parcels of land that stretch north and south of the Shelter Island Presbyterian Church (Section/Block/Lots 15/3/64 and 15/3/63.1, respectively; see: Appendix H). They have occupied this location since the mid-18th century, when a half acre of land was given and dedicated in 1742 by Jonathan Nicoll Havens for the purpose of constructing a church and laying out a burying ground.[2] The main thoroughfare that crosses the island (presently Rte. 114) bisects the parcels, as it has since they were laid out and the first church was built. The North Burying Ground is the smaller of the two (1.4 acres, inclusive of the church and parking areas), and extends only a short distance to the north directly behind the church and alongside the building immediately to the west (PHOTOS 1-3). Adjoining it to the east and west are parking lots that flank the church while a larger, active cemetery borders it to the north. The South Burying Ground, which is roughly square in shape, is the larger of the two (1.7 acres) and occupies the land to the south of the roadway (PHOTOS 4-6). It is bordered by a low chain link fence along its northern boundary with Rte. 114 (PHOTO 9) and tall hedge rows of privet and other bushy vegetation along the remaining three boundaries.

Large trees, which can pose a serious threat to the integrity and longevity of historic burying grounds, are at a minimum. No significant trees occupy the North Burying Ground, although several are situated nearby within the adjacent active cemetery to the north, posing a potential issue with regard to falling tree limbs. By contrast, several large trees are growing within the South Burying Ground, and in at least one instance, engulf several headstones (PHOTO 9). In addition, a recent program of introducing small trees throughout the site appears to be in progress. The tall hedge that borders the South Burying Ground on its east, south and west sides poses a potential threat because of the moisture that it traps, which in turn promotes bio-growth on the stones' surfaces. Remediation of this vegetation will be addressed elsewhere in the report.

With regard to the monuments themselves, a typical range of stone types can be observed that characterizes their respective periods, beginning with carved sandstone and slate of the 18th century, which gave way to marble throughout much of the 19th century, and eventually to the very

[2] Jonathan Nicoll Havens was the grandson of George Havens, who had purchased 1,000 acres at the center of the island from Nathaniel Havens in 1700. Jonathan Nicoll Havens and many others of the family are interred here.

durable granite which has remained the preferred stone type since the early 20th century. An unusual feature at both sites is the prevalence of cast zinc monuments, which are easily distinguished from stone due to their matte grey surface finish (PHOTOS 37-40). Marketed in the last quarter of the 19th century primarily by the Monumental Bronze Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut, these "white bronze" markers never displaced the popularity of marble or granite and remain unusual in any historic burying ground. Remarkably, 10 large zinc monuments and innumerable smaller markers occupy the two sites, pointing most probably to a very successful sales agent who served the area (Connecticut, it may be remembered, is not too far away!).[3] Also of great interest are the early table type monuments; these too are relatively plentiful, given their usual scarcity (PHOTOS 25, 47, 55). A total of 7 table types may be found, and despite some conditions issues, they are comparatively well preserved.

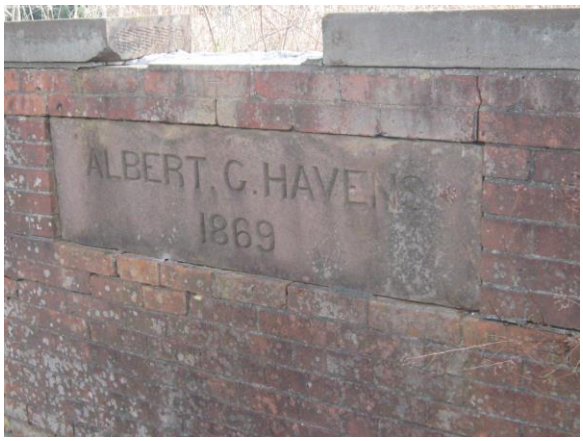


Another general observation is that neither of the two historic burying grounds preserves the usual array of additional features associated with their long period of use: e.g., fencing, furniture, railings demarking family plots, etc. One set of rough hewn stone posts survives from a fence in the North Burying Ground that once enclosed the Nicoll family plot (PHOTOS 3, 8). The posts are typical of a mid-19th century picket type fence in which horizontal rails were bolted through the stone to form supports for the wooden pickets. After the rails and pickets failed, the original wood fence appears to have adopted chains at a later period, as suggested by the iron "eyes" embedded in the top holes. The only other instance of historic fencing occurs in the North Burying Ground where a short length of cast iron Victorian-era fence extends along the roadway between the church and the west parking lot (PHOTO 7). The South Burying Ground is bordered along the roadway by a low chain link fence that appears to have been installed in the mid-20th century (PHOTO 9).

Finally, it should be noted that the South Burying Ground preserves an unusual monument in the form of a mausoleum, remarkable for the fact that the site is virtually flat and therefore would have posed a fundamental obstacle to the construction of this form of mortuary feature (PHOTOS 10-13, 32). Seemingly undaunted, the designer(s) devised a way of excavating a burial vault and mounding earth above it, which in turn is held in place at the front and back by brick walls capped with slate that rise approximately 5 feet above grade. The mausoleum preserves a large slate slab that is centered against the front at grade level which appears to cover the steps leading to the

[3] A trade catalog issued by the Monumental Bronze Company dating c. 1890 and bearing the imprint of "J. Wm. Beebee, Agent, Sag-Harbor, N.Y." was used to illustrate zinc monuments by the Pennsylvania Tombstone Project (http://usgwarchives.net/pa/1pa/tscarvers/monumental-bronze/monumental-bronze.htm). It is surmised that Beebee was the local agent who successfully promoted and supplied the zinc markers to the North and South Burying Grounds. The catalog preserves a margin notation with a reference to an actual monument in the South Burying Ground, the Woodruff/Griffing obelisk (#PC 328).

vault below. While further investigation of this fascinating tomb is beyond the scope of the survey, it should be noted that condition issues impacting its integrity would warrant a thorough assessment of its exterior and interior construction prior to conservation.[4] Any exploration of the vault would require the permission and cooperation of appropriate legal authorities.



3. SURVEY METHODOLGY

Historic burying grounds, and in particular the North and South Burying Grounds of the Shelter Island Presbyterian Church, should be understood and treated as outdoor museums that can function as valuable resources for the study of a region's settlement patterns, culture, social history, industry and art. And like any group of museum artifacts, the issues and procedures involved in preserving and conserving such collections are similar:

- Inventory the collection
- Assess and describe the artifacts (location, materials, condition, etc.)
- Determine appropriate repairs and conservation treatments
- Recommend maintenance and preservation program

The work of this project follows these principles and provides the sponsor with priorities for repair and conservation treatment, as well as general recommendations for future maintenance of these sacred and historic sites.

Research was first undertaken of prior surveys of the two sites.[5] The purpose of this research was two-fold: to integrate the findings of previous surveys, which helps to consolidate data and facilitates future research, and to provide additional information in instances where the original monument has deteriorated beyond its former legibility. Fortunately, an early survey of the sites (1881) transcribed inscriptions or portions of carvings that can no longer be deciphered; remarkably, only two or roughly 4% of the 43 monuments recorded in 1881 have since been lost, while the remainder of the stones is still extant. In 1971/72, the "documents committee" of the Shelter Island Historical

[4] The *Sag Harbor Express* carried the following notice on September 2, 1869: "Albert G. Havens, of Shelter Island, just built a family vault in the grave-yard at the Presbyterian church, on the Island, it being the first vault ever built there." Havens and his family were residents of New York City, but it is believed that only he was interred on Shelter Island. Albert G. Havens died later that year.

[5] In addition to the written surveys, two cemetery plans dating from 1940 were examined and are attached as Appendix F ("Map of Property Owned Now or Formerly by Trustees of the First Presbyterian Church of Shelter Island," July 31, 1940) and Appendix G ("Plan of the South Cemetery of the Shelter Island Presbyterian Church," September 1940).

Society conducted a survey of the two sites and prepared a typed "List of Tombstone Inscriptions on Shelter Island" for accessioning in 1973. This and a survey undertaken by Alan Krauss in 2002 are unlike the late 19th century assessment, in that the scope of the recent projects was to record all of the stones surviving in the two burying grounds, rather than only those that were of antiquarian interest.[6] The two recent surveys were not designed as conditions assessments, however, but rather as a list of monuments and their inscriptions. The Krauss survey also includes schematic maps that number and group the monuments according to family associations and other indicators. For this reason, the Krauss survey has been referenced in the current project and is appended to the report.[7]

A third resource dating from 1983 is Richard F. Welch's *The Gravestones of Early Long Island 1680-1810*, which is a broad survey dealing primarily with stone carvers and their artistic styles and motifs. Welch lists the "Presbyterian Churchyard" on Shelter Island in his attribution chart, where he identifies the work of four known carvers or their workshops: Lamson, Stevens, Buckland and Hill. For an in-depth discussion of these carvers and their distinctive styles, the reader is referred to Welch's informative work. Lastly, Clement M. Healy's 2005 *North Fork Cemeteries* (Arcadia Publishing's "Images of America" series) is organized as a walking tour guidebook of historic burying grounds from Riverhead to East Marion, including Shelter Island. The book is not a comprehensive catalog, but rather an introduction to the headstone motifs and a snapshot of the prominent people interred in the burying grounds. Its use of archival photographs and period maps is especially interesting and the book as a whole provides a basic introduction to the burying grounds of the region.

Published histories of Long Island have also provided invaluable information or insights into the lives of individuals interred at these burial sites. Chief among them is of course Jacob E. Mallman's *Historical Papers on Shelter Island and its Presbyterian Church* originally published in 1899 and reprinted by the Shelter Island Public Library in 1985. Mallman assembled not only an authoritative account of the island's acquisition and early settlement, but also a detailed genealogy for virtually all of the prominent families associated with its development throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The birth and death dates, marriages and other family relationships associated with individuals interred at the burial sites can be compared to verify information which is now difficult to decipher from the stones themselves. Other published sources include Benjamin F. Thompson's *History of Long Island* (reprinted 1918), which contains an interesting discussion of the brothers Benjamin and Shadrach Conkling, and Munsell's *History of Suffolk County* (1882), which gives details concerning the construction of the early church and other information.

In addition to these resources, research was conducted in archives and institutions including the Shelter Island Historical Society, East Hampton Historical Society (Morton

[6] The purpose of the 1881 survey, which was undertaken by Edward Doubleday Harris, Esq., and later published in the *New England Historical and Genealogical Record* (1900), was to record epitaphs dating from before 1800. Such antiquarian motives are understandable for the time period, but it is regretted that the surveyor didn't also record the monuments that he considered too "modern" for the time, which have of course become the historic monuments we see today! The article is included in its entirety in this report as Appendix A.

[7] Appendix B.

Pennypacker Collection) and Suffolk County Historical Society, to name a few. Historic photographic collections were consulted, notably those of George Brainard (Brooklyn Museum), Eugene Armbruster (New York Public Library), and Hal B. Fullerton (Suffolk County Historical Society). Of particular interest are the late 19th and early 20th century photographs of the two burying grounds that are preserved in the collection of the Shelter Island Historical Society. A selection of these images has been reproduced in this report. While the focus of the survey remains that of cataloging the current physical conditions of the monuments and formulating recommendations for their conservation and treatment, the methodology of the project included historical research because of the perspective gained from understanding the way(s) in which the resources have evolved over time. Historical references and photographs of specific monuments are noted on the survey forms.

Special forms were then prepared for both the field recording and final reporting components of the project.[8] The 4-page field recording forms capture a wide range of data, including the name of the interred and their relevant dates, association with other burials if known, the geographical setting and proximity to other monuments, and the stone type, conditions and evidence of previous alterations or repairs. Each monument was surveyed in the field using the 4-page forms (photographs, conditions notes) and a system was devised that gives each primary monument a unique, sequential number. The conditions were rated from 1 to 4, the higher numbers signifying a greater degree or threat. (While it is unusual to find a monument that doesn't exhibit some condition issues, most fall within the 1 to 2 range, signifying a relatively high level of integrity.) Those that were rated a 3 are considered "at risk" and those rated 4 are "threatened" and require attention as soon as possible to prevent irreparable loss.

After completion of the field work, the data was reviewed and summarized in a spreadsheet that is appended to this report.[9] This format was created to capture the essential data for each monument, making it more accessible than the individual forms that were appropriate for field work. References to former surveys, research and historic photographs, where applicable, are noted on the forms to ensure that the data or images from these sources is accessible for comparative purposes. Inadvertent errors discovered in former surveys were corrected, and due to the nature of many stones that have become increasingly illegible over time, errors or omissions may be detected in the present survey as well and should be corrected as necessary in the future.

[8] The form was modified from one developed in 2004 by the University of Pennsylvania while under contract to the Town of Southampton . Attached as Appendix C.
[9] Appendix D.

Following the field recording work, the task of evaluating and analyzing the data began. Basic statistics were derived concerning the range of stone types, forms and conditions, which serve as an overall assessment of the sites (see: **4. SURVEY FINDINGS**). The use of a rating system (1 to 4, with 1 being the least and 4 being the highest) for noting condition issues in the field became the primary tool for measuring and assessing the relative "risk" level for each monument. While other factors may eventually contribute to this analysis, such as associations with notable people or the design characteristics of an individual monument, the number or degree of conditions affecting the physical integrity of each monument is paramount for the purposes of this survey. Evidence of former repairs, especially those that have failed or appeared especially weak or unsightly, was also factored into the risk assessment.

As a result of this analysis, each monument was assigned a number from 1 to 4, with those having the highest number (4) signifying the group that needs attention as soon as possible. Those with a rating of 3 should be monitored, while those with a 1 or 2 may be considered adequately or well preserved, requiring no treatment at this time.

4. SURVEY FINDINGS

In general, the integrity of the monuments in both the North and South Burying Grounds is comparatively high, especially when consideration is given their relative age and exposure to the elements. The survey found that of the 535 monuments recorded and surviving from four centuries, 40 (8%) date from the 18th century, 297 (55%) from the 19th century, 170 (32%) from the 20th century, and 6 (1%) from the current century. A small number of stones (22 or 4%) contain no dates or are indecipherable. Some of the earliest stones are remarkably well preserved, in fact, although a range of conditions was recorded that is characteristic of the stone types and their respective antiquity. Of the total monuments surveyed, the overwhelming majority was classified as complete (i.e., over 75%) (PHOTOS 14-15); relatively few are incomplete (i.e., less than 75%) (PHOTO 16), and only a handful are either broken at grade or survive only as indecipherable fragments (PHOTO 17). Even those that are rated "complete" may be in poor overall condition, however, due to such defects as surface erosion, fragmentation, excessive bio-growth, failed repairs and severe tilting.

The predominant monument form is the "single" type (PHOTOS 18-19), while examples of the "double" type are far fewer in number (PHOTOS 20-21). The majority of the monuments are also simple "headstones w/o footstones" (PHOTO 22), although a representative number of the earliest markers preserve their footstones (PHOTO 23) and a small handful survives, sadly, only as footstones. Of the compound monuments, by far the greatest number are "headstones with bases" (PHOTO 24), with the balance made of up tables (PHOTO 25), blocks on bases (PHOTO 26), pedestals (PHOTO 27), obelisks (PHOTO 28), and columns (PHOTO 29). A single "tomb," the semi-subterranean mausoleum of Albert G. Havens, stands out as a unique example of the form among all of the monuments (PHOTO 10-13, 32).

With regard to their orientation, the majority of the monuments face west and among those with footstones, the latter typically face east. This burial tradition is Christian in nature and anticipate the Christ's "Second Coming" when he would rise (like the sun) from the East, an event to which the interred could bear witness by sitting up from his or her prostrate position. The practice persisted well into the 19th century, and it is probable that the monuments dating before this period that do not observe the tradition were relocated or reset.[10]

Four stone varieties – sandstone (brownstone), slate, marble and granite – and two metals – cast zinc ("white bronze") and true bronze – are the primary materials employed for monuments throughout the two burying grounds. Characteristically, the material used generally reflects the time period in which it was most popular, with a majority of the sandstone (36 or 7%) (PHOTO 23, 25, 31, 33, 41, 45-46, 55) and slate (17 or 3%) (PHOTOS 34, 53) dating from the 18th century; marble (289 or 54%) (PHOTOS 15, 18, 20, 22, 26-29, 35, 42-44, 48, 51, 54, 56) from the 19th century; and granite (177 or 33%) (PHOTOS 14, 19, 21, 24, 30, 36, 52) from the late 19th and 20th century. As noted elsewhere, the zinc monuments (10 or 2%) (PHOTOS 37-40) enjoyed a far shorter period of popularity and date within the last quarter of the 19th century. The bronze markers (6 or 1%) are characteristic of contemporary monument practices.

With the exception of the zinc monuments and markers,[11] virtually all of the stones exhibit some degree of "bio-growth" of varying types and combinations (PHOTOS 23, 41-42); this category includes algae, lichen, mold and moss, often in combination. As noted previously, the newer granite monuments are less likely to host such bio-growth, and when they do, it does not appear to damage their hard stone surfaces. By contrast, the more porous sandstones and marbles typically host some form of bio-growth, and in addition to its unsightly appearance, it is potentially destructive to the crystalline structure of these stone types. Also common to most of the stone markers was some degree of mower abrasion (PHOTOS 43-44). Over time, this can result in stone loss at the edges which in turn weakens the monuments, and the visual impact is both unsightly and irreversible.

One condition that is characteristic of early sandstone and many slate monuments is the presence of "bedding cracks," which is the result of the sedimentary origins of the stone (PHOTOS 45-46). In exceptional cases, the stone is sufficiently hard to resist the penetration of water that otherwise leads to a "freeze-thaw" cycle and delamination of the stone. More frequently, however, the water penetrates the stone from the top and finds its way between the layers, eventually expanding and contracting, and in some extreme cases leading to the entire loss of the outer face. Like sandstone, slate is a sedimentary rock as well but much harder and therefore more durable. Despite the frequent appearance of bedding cracks in slate monuments, it is not a condition that typically leads to the loss of the carved face.

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[10] By the end of the 19th century, with the influence of "rural" cemeteries that emphasized the beauty and serenity of the landscape over the monuments themselves, the orientation of markers became more random, although the use of rows or secondary markers clustered around a single monument persisted.

[11] Over time, a thin protective skin of zinc carbonate developed which gave the monuments their characteristic color. This naturally protective patina is the key to the long-term corrosion resistance of the monuments.

Common to both the sandstone and marble monuments is some visible degree of "surface erosion," which is due to the softer or more porous nature of these stone types when contrasted with slate and granite (PHOTOS 47-48). Many sandstone and marble monuments display some degree of surface erosion, and some are left virtually illegible as a result. The chemistry behind this phenomenon is linked primarily to "acid rain." Acid precipitation or "acid rain" is essentially water in the atmosphere that absorbs elements from the air. When sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides or other chemicals combine with water in the atmosphere it becomes a weak solution of nitric or sulfuric acid. Materials exposed to this acid may corrode or deteriorate when in contact with the rain, dew or fog. Over time, acid rain produces a detrimental effect to the stone surfaces, effectively softening and ultimately erasing the carved detailing, as may be seen in countless examples throughout the survey.

Two additional conditions that are associated primarily with the older stones are "buried/sunken" and "tilted/fallen." The buried or sunken stones are a symptom of age or, in some cases, the attempt to reset a stone that broke at grade level and became detached from its lower section (PHOTOS 49-50). When associated with the natural evolution of the soil, a buried or sunken stone has fallen victim to the surrounding soil, which rises over time as a result of grass clippings and other natural materials decaying and adding to the grade level. More commonly, however, buried or sunken stones are those which have broken off at grade and either been reset in an upright position or left to disappear beneath the ground. A close examination of the carving and its relationship to the outer borders of the stone can usually distinguish the stones that have been reset from those that are "sinking" due to natural causes. Similarly, titled and fallen monuments (PHOTOS 51-52) have responded to or are reflecting a natural phenomenon; akin to the freeze-thaw cycles that result in the delamination of sedimentary stones, a similar expansion and contraction of the soil that supports a monument can result, over many years, in a stone beginning to tilt. Gravity plays its part as well, and in extreme cases such a stone may topple over and break. Human mischief is acknowledged as a potential threat or explanation for a tilted or fallen stone, although the monuments in the survey betrayed few signs of being maliciously handled.

Other frequent conditions noted throughout the survey included "cracked," "fragmentation," "flaking" and "failed repair." Cracked stones display obvious fractures or linear discontinuities which can be of variable length, depth or orientation (PHOTO 53). This condition is rarely encountered with granite monuments, but occurs in the other stone types either as a result of natural forces (i.e., water penetration) or from falling. Fragmentation refers to the loss or absence of original fabric, often the result of the freeze-thaw cycles previously described (PHOTOS 15, 16, 47 54). Flaking occurs along the edges of monument after persistent mower abrasions, or can be the result of laminal losses commonly associated with slates and sandstones (PHOTOS 41, 45, 55). Finally, unsightly or failed repairs are self-explanatory and result from the use of improper techniques or materials, leading often to the further deterioration of a monument (PHOTO 56).

Often overlooked, one of the most threatening conditions to historic burying grounds where monuments are exposed to extremes of weather is overgrown vegetation

such as large trees, hedge rows, and shrubbery (PHOTOS 57-60). While the North Burying Ground is virtually devoid of such plantings, the south side exhibits several examples of towering trees, overgrown shrubbery and hedges. These plantings may have begun as decorative or commemorative in nature, but left unpruned or maintained, large trees pose serious threats to the monuments beneath them. Either as a result of uprooting, or from the loss of limbs due to storms or disease, trees can become destructive agents in burying grounds and a major maintenance concern. Overgrown hedges cause problems as well, by harboring moisture that is harmful to the monuments because it promotes bio-growth. It was noted that numerous small trees are being introduced into the South Burying Ground; while well-intentioned, this practice is ultimately detrimental to the site and should be discontinued.

In summary, a wide range of conditions is present throughout the North and South Burying Grounds that threatens the longevity of the monuments and their associated markers and footstones. The present survey compiled data for each monument and assessed a relative rating from 4 to 0 which will assist in determining priorities for treatment. It was determined that 32 monuments (6%) are rated the most "at risk" with a 4 rating; 69 monuments (13%) are rated 3 and pose less risk; 220 (41%) and 170 (32%) are rated 2 and 1, respectively; and the remaining 44 (8%) are rated 0 with no apparent condition issues observed. It is therefore the 101 monuments rated 3 and 4 (less than 20%) that require the most immediate attention, of which only 32 (6%) are rated as most "at risk." The following *Recommendations for Treatment* addresses the conservation and repair priorities displayed by this group.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TREATMENT

Shelter Island's North and South Burying Grounds, with 535 primary monuments and over 100 grave markers and footstones surviving from 1754 to the present, preserve a wonderful collection of mortuary features that characterize burial practices from the Colonial to the modern era. Individuals that were instrumental in the settlement of the island and with the early history of Long Island are interred here; the work of significant gravestone carvers is represented; and the opportunity exists to stabilize an otherwise vulnerable historic resource from further decay and irreparable loss. The Shelter Island Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution has recognized the importance of these burying grounds and initiated a program for their preservation by contracting for this *Conditions Survey*. The following *Recommendations for Treatment* are provided as an outline for undertaking the preventative maintenance, conservation treatment and repairs, and educational outreach that will be necessary to stabilize and preserve these historic and sacred sites.

It is recommended that the following key components be incorporated into the planning and implementation of a long-term preservation plan for the North and South Burying Grounds:

1. LANDSCAPE & GROUNDS PRESERVATION & MANAGEMENT
2. MONUMENT REPAIR, RESTORATION & TREATMENT
3. EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS & PUBLIC OUTREACH

1. LANDSCAPE & GROUNDS PRESERVATION & MANAGEMENT

Prior to planning and implementing any program of cleaning, repairing or restoring the monuments, an effective approach to the natural environment that surrounds them is essential. This is the physical context within which the monuments were originally set and defines their future prospects for maintenance and preservation. Management of the landscape and grounds is therefore a high priority; in fact, no effective plan that addresses the conditions of the monuments can be initiated until a complementary plan for the grounds is adopted. The following steps are recommended:

a. Tree work

Within the South Burying Ground, and to a far lesser extent in the North Burying Ground, tall trees dominate areas of the site and pose a serious threat to the long-term longevity of the monuments. While it would be easy and convenient to prescribe that all large trees simply be removed from the site(s), it is assumed they are regarded as ornamental and appropriate and, further, that some may have been associated with the burials themselves. It should be agreed, however, that large trees left unpruned pose a threat to any structure or artifact within their vicinity because of falling limbs due to age, disease or extreme weather events.

It is recommended that a professional arborist be contacted to undertake an inventory of the trees and their respective conditions; and that a plan for pruning and/or removing these trees be adopted and implemented as a high priority. Care must be taken to ensure the preservation of monuments, footstones and markers that may already be impacted by tree trunks, branches and root systems, as further damage to these historical resources may result.

b. Bushes, shrubs and hedgerows

Bordering the South Burying Ground on its east, south and west boundaries is an overgrown hedgerow composed of privet and other plant materials. Originally an effective means of marking the boundaries and enclosing the site, these plantings are very overgrown and, in some instances, have shrouded the monuments and markers situated along the boundary. The negative impact of this condition is generally visual and specific to the longevity of the monuments and markers: the moisture that plant materials retain is destructive because it harbors and encourages biogrowth; and the leaves that are lost each season accumulate and add to the build-up of soil, eventually leading to the loss or obscuring of the monuments.

In addition to the boundary plantings, numerous shrubs have been allowed to grow to maturity within the South Burying Ground. An overgrown boxwood, for example, threatens to overcome adjacent monuments. Usually introduced as decorative elements, these plantings now threaten the integrity of adjacent monuments and markers. And finally, a recent program of planting new saplings throughout the South Burying Ground has been initiated by a well-meaning volunteer without regard for its long-term impact on the site.

It is recommended that the hedgerow along the east, south and west boundary of the South Burying Ground be pruned aggressively. Precautions must be taken to ensure that the monuments and markers located in the northwest corner of the site be protected in this process. Further, all shrubs and bushes within the site should be pruned or removed. Those that threaten to overwhelm adjacent monuments, and those that are now too large to prune effectively, should be removed. Finally, all tree saplings that have been introduced recently should be replanted elsewhere; while the intention of this program was unquestionably well-intentioned, its negative impact on the site and the long term preservation of the historic monuments cannot be overstated. All future plantings should be carefully regulated and accepted conditionally. If the preservation of monuments and markers is determined to be the priority concern, the introduction of plant material(s) must be defined as a secondary objective.

The North Burying Ground, while free from the threat of overgrown plant material, nevertheless adjoins an active cemetery in which there are several large trees bordering its northern boundary. It is recommended that arrangements be made to ensure that the limbs of these trees are pruned as soon as possible to ensure the long-term preservation of the historical monuments.

c. Fences

Fencing of various types and time periods often defines or surrounds a burying ground. It is also frequently found within a site, demarking a family plot or other subdivision of the whole. While no intact system of internal fencing survives at either the North or South Burying Ground,[12] perimeter fencing may be observed at both sites. That which survives requires further study, however, because a determination should be made regarding the historic value or interest of what remains relative to the future maintenance and preservation of each site.

The North Burying Ground preserves two systems of fencing, one internal and the other external. The internal fencing survives as a series of roughly shaped granite piers that once served as posts that supported a system of horizontal wooden rails and pickets. This form of fencing is well documented on eastern Long Island, and while preserved at other burying grounds; it is also known to have been used for distinctive residential properties. Presumably when the wooden elements had deteriorated, the granite piers were re-purposed as supports for a system of iron chains that were draped between iron eyes which remain embedded in the holes that

[12] A late 19th century photograph in the collection of the Shelter Island Historical Society reveals that internal fencing once marked some family plots within the South Burying Ground, and that a picket fence stood along its north property line.

were drilled into the piers. It may be observed that a second series of holes is preserved toward the bottom of each pier, which survive from the earlier system of wooden rails and pickets.

A second system of fencing survives at the south side of the North Burying Ground facing Rte. 114, to the left (west) of the church. This is a remnant of the Victorian era, cast iron border fencing that evidently stretched further to the west before the creation of the parking lot. The South Burying Ground now retains only a chain link fence along its north boundary facing Rte. 114. The remaining three sides are bordered by hedgerows. The date of installation of the chain link fence is undocumented, although it appears to date from the mid-20th century. An historic photograph of the late 19th century (below) reveals that a picket fence once stretched along the north side of the site, although it cannot be determined if the posts were of stone (like that of the internal system in the North Burying Ground) or of wood.

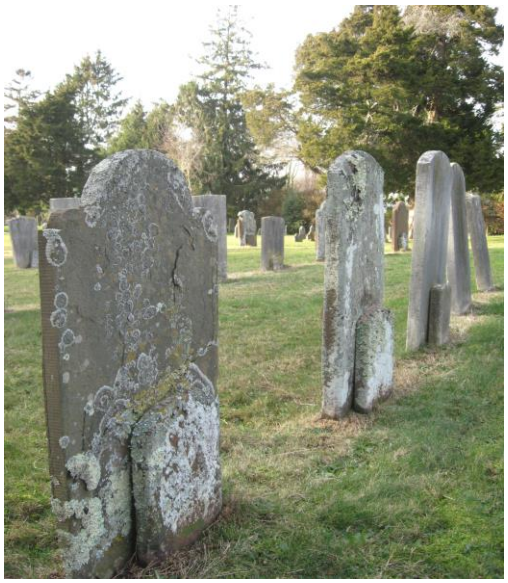
Another historic photograph (below) suggests that at least a portion of the South Burying Ground preserved a section of decorative iron Victorian fencing like that preserved on the north side; a small section of its iron gate may be seen in the lower right. It, too, was removed and replaced with the chain link fencing seen today.

Early views also identify board fences that stretched to the east and west of the church. This common form of fence is often used along the side and rear yards of properties and is combined with "better" types that are reserved for the front. Such seems to be the case at the church property, as seen in these two historical views.

It is recommended that the historical photographs of the North and South Burying Grounds be studied further in relation to the present day use of each site, taking into consideration circulation patterns and other factors. A plan can then be formulated for the restoration or reconstruction of fencing along the boundary lines and within the sites. Fragments of existing historical fence should be preserved and restored. These include the length of Victorian era iron fence that survives to the west of the church (a portion of which appears in early views), as well as the stone piers in the North Burying Ground (which once supported a picket fence and were re-purposed later to support iron chains). Lacking now is historic fence along the north boundary of the South Burying Ground, which appears to have been a combination of decorative iron Victorian fence (at the west end/entrance) and wooden picket fence.

d. Grass

Both sites are covered with grass, and historic photos of the South Burying Ground confirm that it was then, as now, an open meadow. Properly maintained, grass is relatively easy to manage and resistant to extreme fluctuations in temperature, rainfall and other weather conditions. But it presents challenges, as the extensive mower abrasion to the monuments found throughout both burying grounds attests. Fortunately, measures that are sometimes taken to facilitate mowing, such as the resetting of footstones against the back of headstones (as may be observed in the North End Burying Ground in Southampton Village, seen at left) was never attempted at the Shelter Island Burying Grounds. Nevertheless, the



characteristic scraping of mower parts and damage associated with weed whackers is a pervasive condition and one that deserves serious attention.[13]

As a first step, it is recommended that training be provided anyone entrusted with the maintenance of these sites. Careful use of mowers can avoid direct contact with the stones and eliminate future damage. Similarly, weed whackers can be fitted with a guard that prevents direct contact of the string on the stones. A professional lawn care company experienced in exercising extreme care in their operations is the best choice for this work.

As an alternative and long-term solution to the potentially adverse affects of lawn maintenance, consideration should be given to the re-planting of portions of the two sites with "eco-turf" or "eco-lawn", which is a mix of hardy, low-growing ground covers that require little maintenance. These ground covers were first developed as a part of the "green" movement in the 1990s in response to the desire for replanting conventional lawns with ground covers that require less watering and fertilizing. Their popularity has accelerated, however, and found new applications. Even a partial re-planting with low-growing ground covers to replace the grass in the immediate vicinity of the monuments would reduce mowing time and remove the lawn mowers from contact with the stones. It would also eliminate the need for weed whacking. While this may be costly and time-consuming in the short-term, the long-term benefit would be considerable and if measured against the annual cost of lawn care, potentially even cost-effective.

2. MONUMENT REPAIR, RESTORATION & TREATMENT

Repair, restoration and/or treatment of the historic monuments, grave markers and footstones are one of the primary objectives of this survey. But prioritizing the work is important; resources are limited and the project is long-term. The approach must be broad-based, combining organized efforts among coordinated and trained volunteers with professionals such as arborists, stone setters, metal workers and conservators. The central purpose of the *Conditions Survey* is to determine priorities for treatment, which in turn enables the planning and implementation of the work. Grading the monuments from "4" to "0" on a scale of conditions ranging from "worst" to "best" facilitates this process.

As noted in **Section A. 4.**, only 101 or 19% of the 535 monuments rated a "3" or "4" placing them in the "at-risk" category. The remaining 434 or 81% rated between "0" and "2" and therefore exhibit few or no condition issues whatsoever. Nevertheless, all of the monuments with the exception of those exhibiting no conditions at all (8%) are eligible for some level of attention, such as cleaning or resetting. A comprehensive approach to the repair, restoration and treatment of the two burying grounds must first take into account what tasks and skills are appropriate to which category of monument and its respective condition. Volunteers may be trained and deployed for certain jobs, whereas only highly trained specialists should be used to address the more challenging conditions. Distinguishing between these approaches is key to the success of the project.

[13] It may be noted that the low piers and pipes that once marked off some of the family plots in the South Burying Ground were probably removed to facilitate cutting the lawn.

Experience suggests that the best way to proceed is by creating a Stewardship Committee to oversee the project and to assign a project manager whose responsibilities include training and coordination, procurement of supplies, and reporting to the committee on a regular basis. The project manager must be familiar with the tasks that are appropriate to the volunteers, because he or she will in turn help to train them in the techniques and materials that have been approved by the committee. The project manager must also be able to identify those tasks that are best left to professionals, and to bring that recommendation back to the committee for further action. It is likely that the project manager will require special training, and it is recommended that the committee provide that by providing the means to attend workshops or other training opportunities offered for the purpose (e.g., those sponsored by the *Association for Gravestone Studies*).

Generally speaking, volunteers can quickly learn the techniques of cleaning biogrowth from the monuments, by utilizing approved cleaning agents, hand tools and procedures. Essential to this task, and often problematic, is finding a reliable source of water used for diluting and flushing away the cleaning agents. At times a sympathetic neighbor can be the source of the water, although an extra long hose may be necessary! Transporting the cleaning agents and tools to and from the site, organizing the supplies and ensuring that enough are available to all who volunteer, trouble-shooting as challenging situations arise, maintaining a volunteer log that records who has worked on a given day and for how long, and cleaning the tools at the end of a session are all the work of the project manager.

Another task appropriate to volunteers is mowing the site, cleaning out brush, and related grounds care. This can otherwise be a large expense and, if handled by someone unskilled or unsympathetic to the fragile nature of the monuments, a continuing degradation to their condition. Unlike a residential lawn, a public park or even a golf course, it should be accepted that a historic burying ground does not require the same level of care and can appear less “manicured” than other grassy areas. If volunteer labor is not an option, it is crucial that those who are employed for the work are properly trained.

Another area of volunteer assistance concerns the re-setting, realigning and repair of small monuments, markers and footstones. The safety of all involved is of critical importance, because at no time should health or the risk of injury be a concern of volunteer involvement. Smaller stones such as

individual grave markers and footstones are potentially eligible for resetting. This may entail careful removal from the ground for realigning, or in the case of a stone that has been discovered below grade or cast aside on the edges of the site, a determination as to its original location and restoration to that place.

Specialized knowledge in the methods and materials of resetting stones is of course necessary, as is the experience of having undertaken such work gained initially through professional instruction. It is difficult to generalize with regard to the physical limits of what is appropriate for volunteer work in this area, but if a stone requires more than one individual to handle it, it is best left to a professional stone setter or conservator. Occasionally the resetting of a stone follows its discovery, either as a result of probing beneath the ground surface or by investigating along the verge of the site. In either case, extreme caution must be taken to prevent unintended damage to the stone. Probing must be carried out with care and the recovery and transportation of a stone to its intended destination puts the stone at additional risk.

While hand-cleaning and, to a lesser extent, resetting and realigning of smaller monuments and markers may be undertaken by volunteers, the repair and conservation treatment of most monuments should be contracted with professional stone setters and conservators. Large monuments are massive and extremely heavy, requiring specialized equipment, skill and expertise. Those that exhibit advanced deterioration, severe breaks, or detachment require the experience of a professional stone conservator. This work may be costly, thus prioritizing it is necessary. The *Conditions Survey* has laid out a broad set of criteria for assessing the stones in terms of needed repairs and treatment based on relative condition values, but other considerations may apply. For example, an individual of compelling historical interest to the community whose grave marker is in need of repair may be prioritized for treatment despite the fact that other stones may exhibit more advanced deterioration. Alternatively, certain conditions (such as the loss of a brownstone's outer layer due to spalling) may be difficult or impossible to treat, or so costly that a judgment may be made to expend resources on other stones where a greater number may be treated and their deterioration arrested. These decisions are best made by the committee, where differing views can be voiced and consensus reached.

3. EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS & PUBLIC OUTREACH

A key component in the implementation of repairs and improvements to the North and South Burying Grounds is public outreach. This may be accomplished through various means, one of the most effective being educational workshops offered to the public free of charge and videotaped for viewing and distribution to a wider audience after the fact. While there are costs associated with this endeavor, some aspects of the project (e.g., the videotaping) may be undertaken by volunteers or be underwritten, and the workshop itself is not only a means of showcasing what is possible but also an opportunity for on-site training for those who are directly involved in the work. Raising awareness and recruiting new volunteers to the work is an ongoing process, and one that is well served through hands-on demonstration workshops that produce real results.

Public outreach should begin with the formation of a Stewardship Committee whose responsibility is that of guiding the ongoing preservation and restoration of the sites. Given the fact that the North and South Burying Grounds are owned by the Presbyterian Church, the first step is to seek approval (in writing) for the project between the committee and the church. You may have already accomplished this; if not, it lays the foundation for undertaking work at the site, in which there are potential liabilities. The Stewardship Committee (referenced above in the context of providing direction to volunteers and being responsible for making the "tough" decisions about how to prioritize resources) should be broadly representative of the community. Its members should be active civic leaders whose interests extend to other concerns and interests on the island: e.g., garden club and historical society members, open space people, elected officials, town personnel, teachers, seniors, troop leaders, librarians, and business people of all sorts. Through a broad coalition of community members, you will extend your reach to a wide network that shares an interest in preserving aspects of the island for current and future generations. They also form a network of communication to a larger group from whom you may draw potential volunteers.

Funding will always be a challenge. Consideration should be given to nominating both sites to the State and National Register of Historic Places; through landmark designation, there may be eligibility for grant support. Certainly the historic stature and recognition that landmark designation implies will contribute to any fundraising effort. Precedent has been set in the Town of Southampton for nominating a group of historic burying grounds as a "multiple resource district." If the North and South Burying Grounds are not eligible on their own, the district may be widened to encompass other historic burying grounds or other types of resources. With or without landmark designation, it is important to communicate the historic significance and precarious condition of the sites to Town officials. Despite the fact that these burying grounds are owned and maintained by the Presbyterian Church, they preserve the remains of Shelter Island's earliest settlers and the stones are among the earliest records of the 18th and 19th

centuries. As public records, they fall within the purview of the Office of the Town Clerk, whose responsibility is to preserve and safeguard them from loss and deterioration. The grant-writing capabilities and funding allocations of the municipality far exceed those of most civic organizations. It is therefore suggested that Town officials be informed of this "vision" of the monuments within these historic burying grounds in the interest of encouraging them to partner in the project.

The proposed Stewardship Committee, once formed, should secure the endorsement of a non-profit organization such as the Shelter Island Historical Society. Through such a partnership, the committee can accept goods, services or funding for the project and provide the donor with a tax deduction equal to its value. This incentive is likely to encourage giving, especially if it helps to leverage other donations through a matching gift program. It is important to remember that volunteer hours are valuable donations as well; properly logged and documented, they can also serve to leverage additional gifts. The relationship of the committee to its "parent" organization and to the property owner should be defined and clarified by the Stewardship Agreement[14] in which the purpose, responsibilities, liabilities and other aspects of the project are clearly articulated.

In summary, the goal of the Shelter Island Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution to preserve and restore the North and South Burying Grounds of the Shelter Island Presbyterian Church may be met through careful planning and the involvement of other community groups and motivated individuals. The first step – that of defining the scope of the project – has been accomplished through the completion of this *Conditions Assessment and Recommendations for Treatment*. Distribution of the report and public presentations to elected officials, civic organizations and others will begin the process of encouraging support for the project. The formation of a Stewardship Committee is the next step, and one that should be taken in conjunction with cooperation with the Presbyterian Church, with whom the agreement will be made. Either the DAR or the Shelter Island Historical Society can act as the lead organization in this partnership, but it is important that a non-profit serve in this capacity to ensure that gifts of goods, services and funds are tax-deductible.

Once the committee is formed, its task is to formulate short- and long-term objectives. Strategies for meeting these objectives start with assigning responsibilities; a project manager is needed to direct efforts on site, a fundraising subcommittee is needed, and public outreach must be coordinated. Central to the effort is the concept that the monuments preserved in the North and South Burying Grounds are the records of Shelter Island's early settlers, patriots, and residents who through their collective enterprise helped to shape the community that all enjoy today. While owned and maintained by the Presbyterian Church, these monuments preserve vital records that are invaluable to historians and, more importantly, to the Town of Shelter Island itself. Realizing that so many of the historical records of the island have been tragically lost, the retention of these lithic records is made all the more significant. With the leadership of a Stewardship Committee that draws participation from all quarters of the island, the success of the burying ground preservation and restoration project is assured.

[14] Appendix E.