

# HISTORIC BURYING GROUNDS INITIATIVE NEWSLETTER

## Preserving Boston's 16 Historic Burying Grounds



BOSTON PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT

MARTIN J. WALSH, MAYOR

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## HISTORY OF BENNINGTON STREET CEMETERY

Bennington Street Cemetery, located in East Boston, is the second-most-modern cemetery in the Historic Burying Grounds Initiative program. Established in 1838, it is one of only two sites in the program to be referred to as a “cemetery” rather than a “burying ground.” The word “cemetery” denotes a site created after the founding of Mount Auburn Cemetery in 1831 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Mount Auburn was the first of the rural or garden cemeteries that featured large, landscaped tracts of land on the outskirts of the urban area and offered an escape from congested city living. This style was opposed to the utilitarian and sometimes neglected style of the old burying grounds in the middle of the city. Although variations of the garden cemetery would be the preferred design style for the rest of the 19th century, Bennington Street Cemetery never became a garden cemetery; instead it incorporated features from both types of burial sites. Bennington Street Cemetery is the only burial site in the Historic Burying Grounds Initiative that was designated as part of a planned community.



The present-day East Boston is a peninsula, extending to the southwest from the towns of Revere and Winthrop towards the center of Boston. Originally it was a series of five islands. Noddles and Hog (or Breed's) Islands

This 1806 map of Boston shows the five islands that became East Boston. Map reproduction courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library

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# Letter from the Director

It has been a while since the last edition of the Historic Burying Grounds Initiative Newsletter came out. I do apologize if there are any ardent fans out there. But there has been plenty of restoration work going on in the burying grounds and more work currently in the planning stages. While funding is always tight for restoration of historic burying grounds, one exciting new development took place in 2018: the first funding became available from the Community Preservation Act (CPA). This act was approved by Boston voters in November 2016 and created a fund financed by a one percent surcharge on residential and business property tax bills. The City of Boston uses this money to fund projects which support affordable housing, historic preservation, open space, and public recreation. In the latest round of funding in March 2019, \$34 million was awarded to projects in these four areas. The Historic Burying Grounds Initiative was awarded \$104,000 for gravestone conservation in Copp's Hill Burying Ground in the initial round of funding in 2018. We are so excited that Boston voters supported this funding source! The Field Notes article follows two other restoration projects that were funded by private grants.

I enjoy writing the articles about the history of different burying grounds. There is always something new that I discover. Conducting the research has a "down-the rabbit-hole" quality to it. I start out with the basic facts and pursue new facts and leads as I come upon them, which inevitably leads to other new facts and avenues of research, and the chain goes on and on. The outcome is not always what I predicted, wherein lies one of the great joys of research. The downside of this kind of research can be red burning eyes and an achy neck and wrists from staring at the screen and using the mouse. Although I have been managing these burying grounds for nearly 20 years, I still learned many surprising facts while researching Bennington Street Cemetery. I have visited that site countless times never being aware of how many people were actually buried there!



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### *Historic Burying Grounds Initiative*

Our mission is the comprehensive restoration, on-going conservation and heritage interpretation of Boston's historic burying grounds.

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# FIELD NOTES: *TWO GRANTS FOR BURYING GROUND RESTORATION*

Applying for grants is an important way to fund the never-ending needs of restoration and maintenance that historic burying grounds require. We are fortunate in Boston to have some granting organizations which financially support historic preservation. Two projects that we have completed in the past two years that were partially funded by grants are described below.

The first grant project was gravestone conservation and resetting in Central Burying Ground, which is located



Above: The gravestone of Mrs. Ann Kiley before being conserved.  
Below: The two parts are glued together with an epoxy adhesive and clamped together while the epoxy cures.

on the southern edge of Boston Common. The project received a grant from the Freedom Trail Foundation Preservation Fund for \$10,000. The Preservation Fund helps to support preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration for official Freedom Trail sites. The projects must help to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects of

the elements and man-made wear and tear on Boston's precious 17th, 18th, and 19th-century sites.

Since the gravestones are outside and constantly exposed to damaging weather and temperature variations, gravestone conservation is not a single-event undertaking, but rather a continuous project. There are over 12,000 grave markers in Boston's historic burying grounds and a headstone which does not require the attention of a conservator during one project, can require conservation later on. The ground is always shifting and over the years upright headstones can start to tilt and can fall over and break. A particular weak point of headstones is the point where the stone enters the ground. Many headstones have broken at this point and are either lying on the ground or have been reset into the ground with the epitaph halfway covered. If a broken stone is set into the ground this way it makes it impossible to read the full epitaph. The carved portions underground also create an easier entry path for moisture to get into the stone. Gravestones



The missing bottom piece of the headstone is replaced with tinted concrete in order to reset it at the correct height in the ground.

which are lying on the ground are among the most endangered headstones. It is very easy for someone to accidentally step on the headstones and break them into more pieces, complicating the repair process and forever weakening them.

The goal of this project was to conserve all headstones in Central Burying Ground which were lying on the

## TWO GRANTS FOR BURYING GROUND RESTORATION

ground, leaning against other objects, or tilting and in danger of falling down. During a walk-through of the site with a stone conservator, we identified all the headstones which met our criteria. One additional headstone whose carved face was about to fall off was also included in the project. The conservator submitted a detailed proposal for the conservation and resetting of all of the stones selected for this project. The appropriate repair for a headstone in this situation is to attach a new subterranean part



This headstone was returned to its spot in Central Burying Ground.

to the headstone, either of stone or concrete. If the stone is thick enough, stainless steel pins are inserted in the headstone part to attach the original headstone and the new part together. After the subterranean part has been attached, the headstone can be reset properly into the ground. Sometimes parts of the broken stone cannot be found, leaving an incomplete epitaph. We judged that it was better to keep stones with an incomplete epitaph standing up in the site, rather than to store them in the fragments collection, hoping the missing pieces will be found someday.

The second grant project was masonry repair and restoration at Hawes Burying Ground and Union Cemetery in South Boston. This project received a grant from the George B. Henderson Foundation for \$27,000. The total cost of the construction was \$214,000. The Henderson Foundation is solely devoted to the enhancement of the physical appearance of Boston and immensely contributes to local culture and historic values. The two tiny sites abut each other and appear to be one site, but Hawes Burying Ground was established in 1821 and Union Cemetery was established in 1842. (For more information see HBGI Newsletter from 2017). A row of partially above-ground tombs on the Union Cemetery side forms the dividing line between the sites. Another

row of above-ground tombs runs along the western edge of Hawes Burying Ground. A 6-foot metal picket fence forms the border of the street side of Union Cemetery. The fence panels are anchored into 8-foot-tall brick columns, which were a 20th-century addition to the site. Together the sites only cover 0.38 acres.

The scope of the work included rebuilding of the low brick wall which runs along the western side of both sites and forms the rear wall of the tombs in Hawes Burying Ground, the 12 brick columns in Union Cemetery and one in Hawes Burying Ground, repair and painting of the Union Cemetery fence, and repairs to the transverse tombs. The lack of plans for the original installation of the wall, piers, and tombs complicated this otherwise straight-forward scope of work. During the design phase we were unsure if the brick columns and wall had an underground foundation, since many old walls were built without one. Preliminary investigation indicated the wall had a foundation but the columns did not. The portion of the brick wall that runs behind the tombs in Hawes Burying Ground presented more challenges for



These close-up shots of two different columns illustrate some of the problems. The left column shows extensive cracking and mortar loss. The right column shows more cracking and two types of bricks.

the project. Without the original plans, we could only guess at how the tomb was built. We believed that the tombs had a rear wall integrated into the tomb structure and that a secondary brick wall was built at a later date to delineate the boundary of the site. The existence of a foundation was also unknown but it was difficult to verify due to the inaccessible location of the tombs. A narrow alley measuring only 2.5-feet-wide separated the tomb from the wall of the neighboring house. We decided to prepare construction plans based on what we be-

## TWO GRANTS FOR BURYING GROUND RESTORATION

lieved was the most likely scenario, knowing that they might be altered if different conditions were discovered during construction.

As soon as demolition started we found the answers to our questions. Both the perimeter wall (including behind the tombs) and brick piers had foundations. However the current columns were built on top of the foundations, but not keyed into them. This fact could explain why serious structural problems with the columns have occurred repeatedly over the years, and why the various repairs undertaken always proved ineffective. The contractor used the old foundations but reinforced the whole structures by drilling holes in the foundations to insert reinforcing bar. We also discovered that there



Above: Crumbling bricks at the bottom of the pier contributed to structural instability. Below: The finished product. The same brick was used for all of the piers creating a uniform look.

was not an earlier wall sealing up the back of the tombs on the west perimeter wall. Upon dismantling the brick wall we quickly realized that removing the brick wall would completely open the rear of the tomb and we adjusted our plans accordingly.

Some work also took place on the transverse tombs that form the boundary between the sites. In one tomb part of the granite entry side wall had fallen into the tombs

years ago. A makeshift repair had been performed to block the opening using available masonry elements and blobs of concrete. Recently the repair started to fall apart and the tomb was no longer securely sealed. Upon inspection, we found the side wall located inside the tomb in an intact state. Our contractor pulled the wall out of the tomb and reset it in its original location. Several of the granite copings that run the length of the tomb had shifted forward in some spots. To correct this



Before and after photos of the repair of the broken tomb doorway.

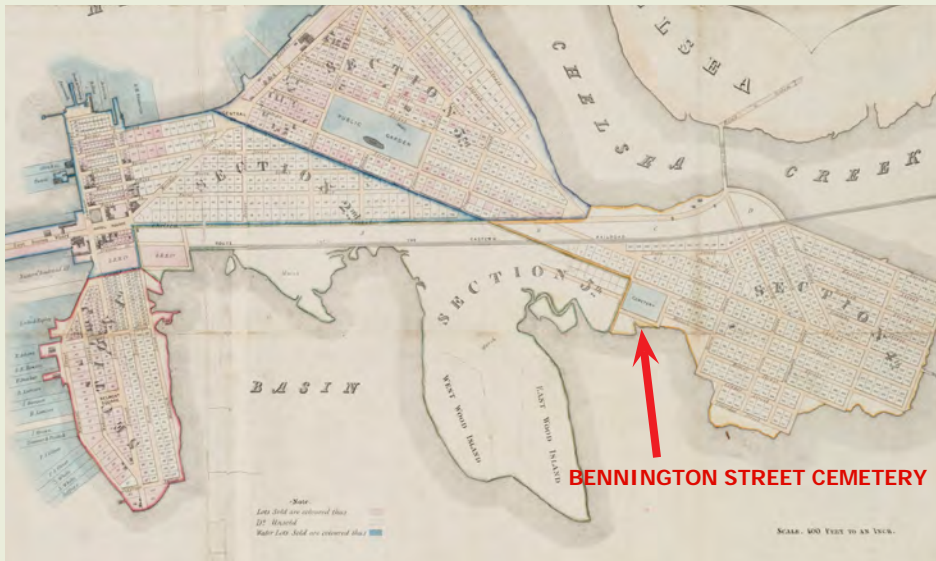
issue our contractor pinned the copings into the wall below to prevent them from shifting forward again and reset them flush along the wall.

Restoration work also took place on the metal picket fence. The fence panels were removed before the brick columns were demolished. They were cleaned down to bare metal and repainted. A permanent repair was made on one of the upper hinges which held up a panel of the double-leaf gate, when the gates were removed. Several years ago this hinge rusted through and the gate partially fell off and was only attached by one hinge. A short-term repair was made to allow the gate to open and close in the interim before reconstruction. The restoration contract is complete with the exception of lawn restoration which will take place in September.

## HISTORY OF BENNINGTON STREET CEMETERY (continued from first page)

were joined together by landfill to create the main part of East Boston. The tiny Bird, Governor's, and Apple Islands were eventually joined together through significant amounts of landfilling to create Logan International Airport. Hog/Breed's Island was declared part of Boston in 1635 and Noddles Island in 1637. The islands were mostly uninhabited until the formation of the East Boston Company by special legislative act in March 1833. The goals of the East Boston Company were to earn shareholders a profit by developing on Noddles Island an infrastructure that would support residences and businesses and by selling property lots to the public. In the act of incorporation, the state legislature required that the company set aside lots for "engine-houses, school-houses, burial grounds, and for other public purposes" that would be turned over to the City of Boston for those uses. The deed for the burial ground was conveyed to the City of Boston on July 15, 1838, and was formally established by the City as a burial site the following day.

The site chosen for Bennington Street Cemetery was part of an area called Section 4 or "Middle Farm." This part of the island consisted of uplands, with a higher elevation than most parts of the island and no interior marshes. It was located northeast of the area closest to Boston, which was the area that saw the first develop-



This 1837 map of East Boston shows the planned development of Noddles Island into five sections and lots within those sections. Bennington Street Cemetery is in section four. Map reproduction courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library

ment. The cemetery site was on the edge of the Section 4 area, overlooking Boston Harbor. The 3.63-acre site sloped down to tidal flats at the rear boundary. Although individual plots were drawn on maps in the 1830s, active development in Section 4 did not occur until the latter part of the 19th century.

The City started making investments in Bennington Street Cemetery shortly after its establishment. The first fence was erected when the site officially opened in 1838 at a cost of \$255.65. Seven

years later a new fence was built around the cemetery at a cost of \$312.79. The request to build the second fence was made to City Council by a group of people led by the wealthy East Boston businessman Noah Sturtevant (buried in 1861 in Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge). During this same period ornamental cast iron fences were being erected around the perimeter of the burying grounds in Boston Proper but the fence at Bennington Street was built out of wood. This fence was burned by arsonists in 1863 and was subsequently rebuilt. A sea wall was also built in the rear of the site. Presumably sea water was coming into the site, due to high tides and storms. To this day, rising ground water is still a problem in the rear of the site.

Between 1844 and 1853, nine above-ground tombs were built in the northwest corner of the cemetery. The tombs were all built by private individuals. However only one of these nine tombs, owned by William Burnett, a stevedore (longshoreman) originally from Ireland, was used as a final resting place for the owners' family members. The other tombs were built with the goal of selling burial space to individuals seeking a burial

## HISTORY OF BENNINGTON STREET CEMETERY (continued from previous page)

place. Two of the tombs were built by undertakers and two other tombs were resold to one of these undertakers. Interestingly enough both of the undertakers were buried in other cemeteries! The cost to bury someone in these tombs would have been less than an individual in-ground grave because the deceased person would have been buried with strangers. Many people were interred in the other eight tombs between 1845 and the early 1850s. After that burials in these tombs began to dwindle, eventually becoming rare. Although a study



Above-ground tombs in the northwest corner of the cemetery

of every burial in Bennington Street Cemetery has not been made, based on a selective review of the Boston vital records, it is quite probable that hundreds of bodies were buried in some of these tombs. In September 1855 the City Registrar was directed to stop issuing permits to undertakers to deposit bodies in tombs for the purpose of speculation. This directive was issued to stop the abuse amongst some shady undertakers of selling the same tomb space to individuals and secretly removing bodies and reselling tomb space when the tombs were full. It is not known if this practice existed in Bennington Street Cemetery. One reason to believe it did not is the fact that the tomb numbers are noted in the death records and some tombs were used frequently during certain time periods and then rarely used after that, with other tombs being used in the new

time periods. The records indicate that some people initially buried their family member in a tomb and then reinterred them later in a grave in the same cemetery. The City of Boston built a row of three tombs along the east perimeter wall in 1850 at a cost of \$320, on the other side of the cemetery from the private tombs. These tombs were used as receiving tombs, which were a place to deposit bodies while awaiting burial in the ground.

East Boston proved to be a popular setting for new businesses due to the availability of undeveloped land and the easy access to Boston Harbor. The population growth of the island was linked to the growth of local industry. In particular the number of ship-related industries and factories with goods or raw materials requiring sea transportation started growing, in turn creating an increasing demand for laborers. Immigrants from the Canadian Maritime Provinces, Ireland, Scotland, England, and Germany worked in the newly created jobs. A smaller number of people also came from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and France. By the year 1855, 39 percent of the population of East Boston was foreign born. The countries from which the greatest number of immigrants came were Ireland and Canada. Many Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe arrived in the 1890s. Immigrants from Italy started arriving in large numbers around 1905.



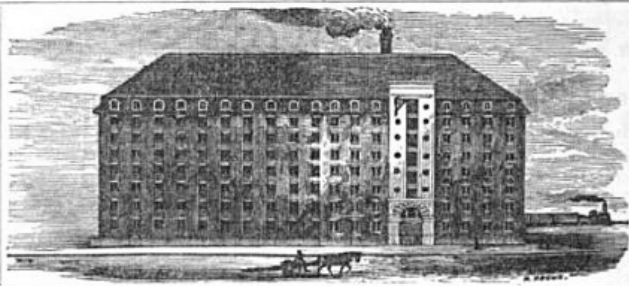
The ship "Niagara" in Atlantic Dock, East Boston, ca 1855. The waterfront economy was the source of many jobs at that time.

A closer look at the East Boston vital records provides an insight into life at the time. The first

## HISTORY OF BENNINGTON STREET CEMETERY (continued from previous page)

two burials in the site were infants. Robert Tomlinson, aged 22 months, who died on October 28, 1838, was the son of John Tomlinson, a trader and/or loader, and his wife Elizabeth, both immigrants from Nova Scotia. John Tomlinson was among the first people to build a new house on the East Boston island, erecting his house on Sumner Street in 1834. Elizabeth died from tuberculosis in 1848 and was also buried in Bennington Street Cemetery.

**BOSTON SUGAR REFINERY.**

Building Erected in 1834. Enlarged and Improved, 1850.		Located on Lewis Street, between Webster and Sumner Streets.
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This extensive establishment, incorporated in 1834, is located at East Boston, on Lewis street, between Webster and Sumner streets. The Company is in a prosperous condition. During the past year they have greatly improved their Refinery, by making considerable additions to it: thus affording increased facilities for the enlargement of their business, which is annually increasing.

THOMAS LAMB, Treasurer and Agent. Office, 134 State Street.

An advertisement for the sugar refinery where Johan Starke worked. This refinery was the first manufacturing business in East Boston.

Both Robert and Elizabeth were reinterred in Woodlawn Cemetery in Everett, MA, in 1862 to be rejoined with John who died that year from a stroke. The only other burial in the site in 1838 was a 3-month-old baby named Thankful Small, whose cause of death is only listed as “infantile” and who was buried for free due to poverty. No information about the parents is given. In the first two years of operation there were only 16 burials in the site. Half of those were infants under the age of two. The first adult buried in the site was Phoebe Granger, who died in October 1839 and whose cause of death is listed as “dropsy” (edema). Her husband Leman, a carpenter, fell on hard times at some point after her death and died of tuberculosis in 1846 at the House of Industry, a workhouse for the poor in South Boston. He was also buried in Bennington Street Cemetery. The story of Johan Starke, who died 1867, tells a common tale of immigration to East Boston. Johan immigrated to the United States in 1849 and was employed as a “sugar baker,” as were called those who worked in the sugar refinery industry, in East Boston. He lived in factory housing with 36 other German men all working as sugar bakers. He married an English immigrant and had several children. At some point he changed professions becoming a rigger on sailing ships. He petitioned for US citizenship in 1856 and was naturalized in 1864. He died three years later at the age of 43 of an unknown illness. His unusual headstone has a German epitaph.

During most of the 1850s, in addition to providing burial space to East Bostonians, Bennington Street Cemetery also served as a burial place for Bostonians too poor to pay for a grave. By that time, the old burying grounds in Boston Proper had been used continuously for burials for almost 200 hundred years and were too full to allow new graves. The South End Burying Ground on Boston Neck (Washington Street) which had opened in 1810 was also reaching full capacity by 1850. Previously many city poor burials were in that burying ground due to the newness of the site and the large



This is the headstone of Johan Starke, a German immigrant who worked in a sugar factory. Marble was a popular choice for headstones in the mid-19th century but did not hold up well to the weather.



## HISTORY OF BENNINGTON STREET CEMETERY (continued from previous page)

number of tombs owned by the City for this purpose. But that space had filled up too and the City desperately required new space for burials. A ban on new graves dug in the city proper was enacted to prevent disinterment of old burials to make room for new bodies and also because in-town burials were seen as a danger to public health. Only burials in existing family tombs were allowed. Although there was a fair amount of space in Bennington Street Cemetery, it was difficult to transport bodies there from other parts of the city. Access to East Boston from Boston Proper was only by ferry. For the years 1858-1860, the City Auditor's Annual Reports itemized costs for ferry trips to Bennington Street Cemetery, presumably for the burial of the city poor. The highest amount listed was \$41.00 in 1857-58. The City of Boston wanted to build a large modern cemetery but at that time the large towns of Roxbury and Dorchester had not yet been annexed by the City of Boston and there were no areas with large undeveloped tracts of land inside the Boston city limits. An act to allow the City of Boston to purchase burial land outside of the city limits was passed by the state legislature in 1849. In 1857 the City of Boston purchased the land for Mount Hope Cemetery in Mattapan. Burials of the city poor were conducted at Mount Hope Cemetery starting in mid-1858.



This veterans headstone is for Robert Kilcupp. He was born in Nova Scotia in 1825 and immigrated to Boston in 1845. He worked as a teamster (a person who drove a team of draft animals) and lived in East Boston with his wife, also from Nova Scotia. He enlisted in September 1862 in Third Massachusetts Cavalry Regiment, Company E, as a private. He was promoted to corporal at some point. He was discharged for disability in October 1863 in Port Hudson, LA. He died in May 1866 after a 10-day battle with pneumonia. He lived at 127 Marion Street, which was replaced by the old East Boston High School around 1901.

Military veterans were also buried in Bennington Street Cemetery. Some veterans are identifiable because of a military headstone. Others mention their service in the epitaph. Most of the veterans fought as Union soldiers during the Civil War although a couple served in World War I. Starting in 1879, the US government decided to issue headstones to veterans who were buried in private cemeteries. There are approximately 40 headstones which are identifiable as veterans headstones, whether the epitaph is legible or not. An additional eight men whose headstones cannot be found are listed in a database of veterans who received military headstones and were buried in Bennington Street Cemetery. The headstones for the Civil War veterans were made out of marble, which did not wear as well as slate or granite in the New England climate, and many headstones are now illegible or close to illegible. Doubtless there are other people buried in the cemetery who did military service but did not choose to get a veterans headstone.

The Bennington Street Cemetery did not appeal to some residents of East Boston. Many Irish immigrants to East Boston chose to be buried in the various Roman Catholic cemeteries in the Boston area, particularly those in North Cambridge and Charlestown. Jewish immigrants also wished to be buried in consecrated land. In 1840 there were fewer than 40 Jews living in Boston. In order to be buried in a Jewish cemetery the body had to be transported to Touro Cemetery in Newport, Rhode Island. In 1844 the new congregation of Ohabei Shalom petitioned Boston City Council to purchase a section of Bennington Street Cemetery to use for Jewish burials. When the City denied the petition, this spurred the congregation on to purchase a plot of land elsewhere in East Boston which became the Ohabei Shalom Cemetery that same year.

The City of Boston continued to make physical improvements at the cemetery. Although the site of Bennington Street Cemetery was considered to be on the "upland" part of the island, it was located right near the coast, border-

## *HISTORY OF BENNINGTON STREET CEMETERY (continued from previous page)*

ing on the tidal flats of Boston Harbor on its southern edge. The sea wall built in 1846 needed frequent repairs and upgrading. A portion of it was rebuilt in 1864. A larger project of rebuilding the sea wall took place in 1872-73 at a cost of \$1,100. By 1897 the wooden picket fence running along the front and east side of the cemetery was completely dilapidated. The Cemetery Department petitioned City Council for money to replace the wooden fence with a new iron fence but that request was rejected and the fence was not replaced until 1913 when a 7-foot "stout" wire fence and gate were erected. An attractive fence was not installed until 1942 as part of a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project at the cemetery. It was during that project that the current front fence, brick piers, and brick and stone perimeter walls were built. The total cost of the project was \$18,821, with the federal government contributing \$13,842 and the City of Boston paying the rest. The project also included asphaltting the existing gravel paths in the site.



This privet hedge is 126 years old!

The privet hedge that currently grows along the front fence was planted in 1893 when the cemetery was under the control of the Board of Health. It originally went all the way around the perimeter of the site, but now only exists along the Bennington Street side. An excerpt from the 1893 Annual Report described the work:

A hedge of California privet was planted at the burial ground on Bennington street for the entire distance surrounding it, after a thorough and careful preparation of the ground devoted to this use, which consisted of surface-grading, freeing the soil from stones, tree roots, and other objectionable matter, and incorporating therein a sufficient quantity of rich compost. There were used for this purpose about 2,000 of best quality nursery-grown plants, two years old. It is expected that in a few years this hedge will have made sufficient growth to form an efficient and permanent enclosure for this area, taking the place of the unsightly board fence which has surrounded it for years. The entire cost of this work was \$235.

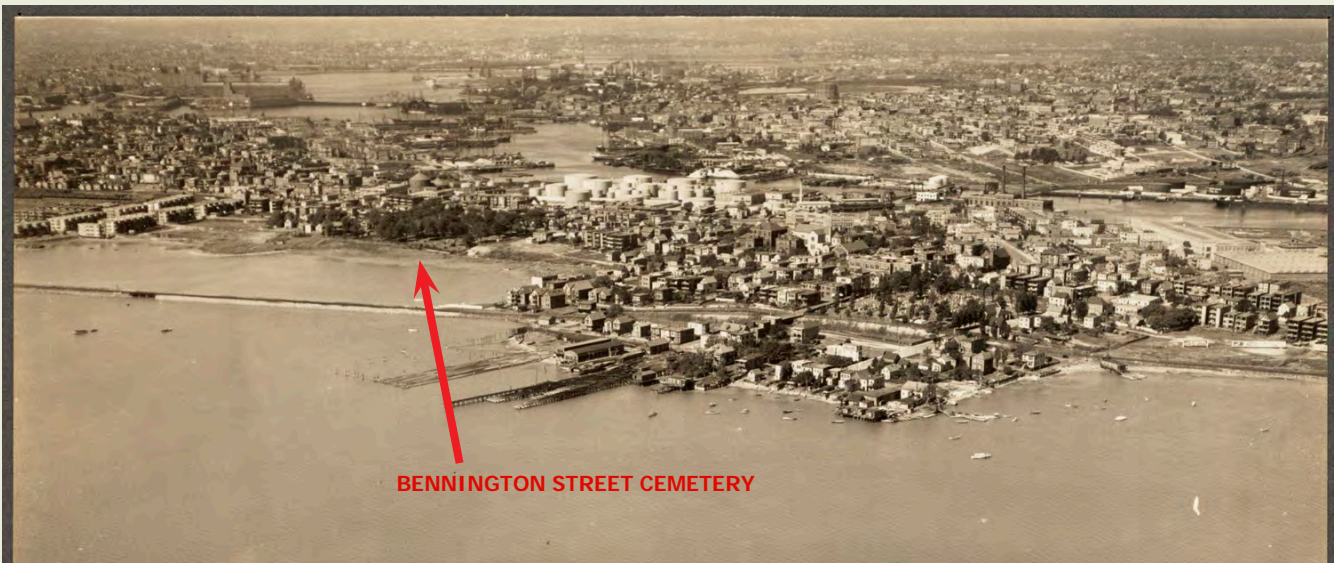
Trees were also an important landscape feature at the site. Based on the Cemetery Department Annual Report 1912-13 stating that 8 trees were removed and 50 trees trimmed that year, we can gather that the site had a lot of tree cover. Before the land was filled behind the cemetery in the 1950s, local residents used to gather in the site to picnic under the shady trees and take in the ocean breezes.

Many private garden-style or lawn-park cemeteries opened in Boston and the surrounding towns in the second half of the 19th century, but Bennington Street continued to be frequently used. The 1898 Annual Report of the Cemetery Department stated that in the 20-year period between February 1879 and February 1899, 2,970 people were buried there. In 1898 it was the second-busiest cemetery owned by the City of Boston, just behind the significantly larger Mount Hope Cemetery. As in the older burying grounds there were many more people buried there than have headstones. Taking the year 1902 as an example, 99 people were buried in Bennington Street Cemetery but there are only six headstones with that date. In total the site contains ap-

## *HISTORY OF BENNINGTON STREET CEMETERY (continued from previous page)*

proximately 450 grave markers and 12 tombs which is clearly far fewer grave markers than burials. By 1906 the 3.62-acre cemetery was starting to fill up and was closed to new burials, allowing only people who had already purchased graves or spouses of previously interred people to continue being buried there. Ironically, construction of a small office at Bennington Street Cemetery commenced that same year. Burials tapered off in the first part of the 20th century.

When the site was opened in 1838 it faced the tidal flats of Boston Harbor which led to the Atlantic Ocean. The birth of aviation led to the creation of Logan Airport in the 1920s, which drastically altered the geography of East Boston. The original airport was built on filled mud flats on the southeast side of the island. As the airport grew, more and more land was created on the adjacent mud flats, gradually getting closer to the Bennington Street Cemetery shoreline. It was not until the early 1950s that solid land bordered the cemetery



This aerial view of East Boston was taken in 1925. It shows the rear of Bennington Street Cemetery coming down to the water of Boston Harbor. The Boston, Revere Beach and Lynn Railroad, a narrow-gauge railway for commuters, traverses the water in front of the cemetery. That railway line is now defunct.

on the Harbor side when a parking lot and an extension of the blue line train were built behind the site. Interestingly enough a small inlet of water behind this parking lot persisted until the 1980s. Adjoining the cemetery is Al Festa Little League Field, which was built by Massport (owner of the airport).

The solitude found in Bennington Cemetery belies the busy nature of the site at the end of the 19th century. The low number of gravestones in such a spacious site gives the erroneous impression that this site was not heavily used. Sadly, many headstones are now difficult or impossible to read because they are made of marble. The ethnic make-up and economic focus of East Boston changed significantly in the 20th century. Different waves of immigration brought different populations to reside on this (former) island and industries focused on railroads, factories, and eventually airplanes replaced ship-building businesses. With the cemetery now closed to new burials, the interments that remain are a silent witness to the century between 1838 and 1938 when the vast majority of burials took place. Histories of places are often told in terms of great deeds by wealthy or prominent individuals. This cemetery tells a history of working-class people, often born in other countries, who drew their livelihood from local industries and raised their families as new generations of Americans.

# BEFORE & AFTER: LANDSCAPE RESTORATION AT DORCHESTER NORTH BURYING GROUND



An view of part of the site taken around 1915 shows the trees, shrubs, and walkways that were established in beautification efforts started in 1834.

The burying ground landscapes have changed over time. Before the new garden style cemeteries began to appear in the 1830s, landscaping was not a topic that concerned the managers of burying grounds. Burial of the dead was the only activity that took place in there and no beautification of the spaces was undertaken. The most important thing was to keep people and animals in or out, depending on the circumstances (i.e. to keep out grave robbers and roving cattle and keep in grazing animals when the site was leased

for pasturage), so the town records are filled with references to fence building and maintenance. People did not come to the old burying grounds to admire plantings or experience nature.

After the founding of Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, where the new style of garden cemeteries was launched, many cemeteries strove to imitate that landscaping style. Dorchester town records describe the concerted effort that was undertaken by the town to beautify Dorchester North Burying Ground starting in 1834. The town convened a committee of six men to come up with a plan to ornament the site chaired by Samuel Downer, a local resident. He was also the founder of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society and was involved in the creation of Mount Auburn Cemetery. Relying on funds appropriated by the town government and private donations of money, planting materials, and labor, the committee removed weeds and vines, repaired fences, and reset and cleaned headstones. They planted over 100 trees and numerous shrubs and flowers also. Ornamental cast-iron pathway signs were installed considerably later in 1908. Due to this flourish of distinctive 19th-century landscaping activity, the Historic Burying Grounds Initiative's Master Plan called for restoring the landscape to a Victorian-era style.



A close-up view of the many plantings in the burying ground in the early 19th century

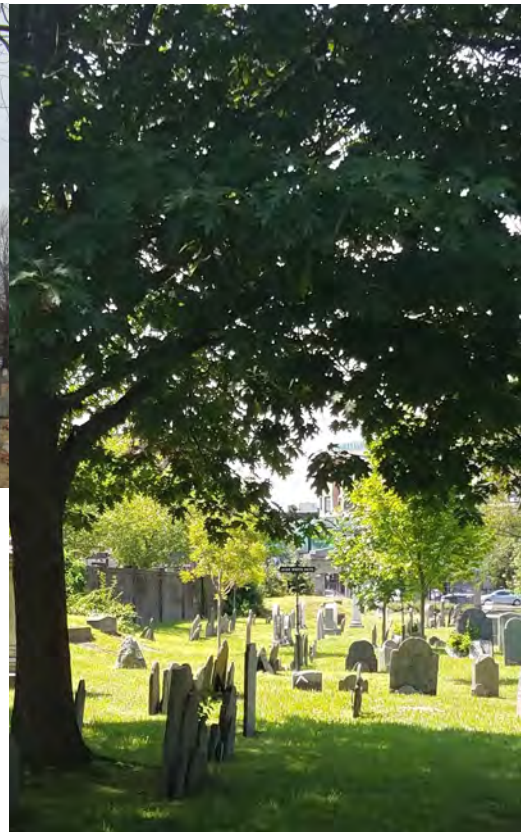
# BEFORE & AFTER: LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

Fast forward to 2017 and there were still many trees in the burying ground but there were also a growing number of stumps and diseased or dangerous trees. A few trees fell over during storms and one tree was hit by lighting. A tree with a crack down its trunk was grow-



Two large trees used to form an allee down this pathway. One died and the other one was damaged in a storm.

ing near Columbia Road. The biggest, most majestic tree in the burying ground, a Norway maple which was over 100 years old, was showing many signs of ill health. Previous attempts to cable the large tree limbs in order to strengthen the tree had failed. It was apparent the tree was at the end of its lifespan and could pose a danger to people visiting the burying ground. Many trees had grown up against the masonry walls that surround the site or into underground tombs, creating situations for existing or potential destruction of these structures. Vines were growing up and over the site walls, creating entry points for moisture. The signage marking the pathways was in very poor condition with all of the signs severely rusted and most of the signs broken or missing.



The same view shows three new trees: an American elm, a tulip tree, and a Japanese Pagoda tree.



The pink arrow indicates the Norway maple during the period 1905-11.



The same Norway maple about 110 years later. This glorious maple was witness to the entire 20th century.

Starting in 2017 we worked with a landscape architect to help us return the site to its Victorian-era style to make sure future generations are able to experience and admire large mature trees. The Victorian era was a romantic period. Horticulture as a hobby and an industry was taking off and seed houses and nurseries were emerging on the east coast, while continental exploration, global trade, and plant breeding meant that new species and cultivars were becoming more and more available.

# BEFORE & AFTER: LANDSCAPE RESTORATION



New trees waiting to be planted



Replicated pathway signs harmonize well with the landscape

The Victorian landscape reflected these trends by selecting exotic plants, showy flowers, and interesting leaf types. The tree and shrub species selected for these improvements are those that were used during this era of garden design. They have splashy flowers and berries of white, pinks, and purples and some also add fragrance to the historic landscape. Approximately 40 trees ranging from saplings to the giant Norway maple were removed because they were dead, dangerous to visitors, deleterious to masonry structures, or invasive. Large trees were pruned to encourage safety, growth, and light. Vines were removed from the walls. All of this removal made room for the planting of 28 trees and 126 shrubs. The types of trees planted are: horse chestnut, red horse chestnut, apple serviceberry, cornelian cherry, redbud, tuliptree, Japanese pagoda tree, American elm, and Japanese cedar. The types of shrubs planted are: beautyberry, gray dogwood, slender deutzia, and lilac. A cloud of fragrant lilacs will perfume the main entry gate in spring. New pathway signs were also cast to replace the old broken ones.

A similar landscape restoration project using the same planting palette was carried out on a smaller scale at Bunker Hill Burying Ground in Charlestown. That site was established in 1816 and was also identified in the Master Plan as a site that should have a Victorian-era planting style.

## *SITES INCLUDED IN THE HISTORIC BURYING GROUNDS INITIATIVE*

*Bennington Street Cemetery (1838)*

*Bunker Hill Burying Ground (1816)*

*Central Burying Ground (1754)*

*Copp's Hill Burying Ground (1659)*

*Dorchester North Burying Ground (1633)*

*Dorchester South Burying Ground (1810)*

*Eliot Burying Ground (1630)*

*Granary Burying Ground (1660)*

*Hawes Burying Ground (1816)*

*King's Chapel Burying Ground (1630)*

*Market Street Burying Ground (1764)*

*Phipps Street Burying Ground (1630)*

*South End Burying Ground (1810)*

*Union Cemetery (1841)*

*Walter Street Burying Ground (1711)*

*Westerly Burying Ground (1683)*