

# Last resting places ignored

A Commentary

With elaborate care we honor our history, celebrate the past and glorify our ancestors while, at the same time, we allow their last resting places to grow weedy and unkempt. Most of our village cemeteries are unmown, their plantings unpruned; they look run-down and seedy.

Memorial Day observances include parades and gatherings to hear speeches honoring those who died for the principles upon which our nation was founded more than two centuries ago. Yet the graves of the valiant are neglected.

On the Fourth of July our Independence is commemorated. Displays of fireworks light up the night skies and exploding rockets shatter the peace of the summer evening. All this at considerable expense. Yet the burying grounds where the Patriots sleep are unheeded.

Money for perpetual care of gravesites is made a clause of most wills, and generations of Cape Codders have provided funds for the care of cemeteries. All cemeteries in the Town of Barnstable, according to court decree, were to benefit from proceeds of a trust fund left by the late Mrs. Marky Kirkman, long-term resident of Cotuit. Property taxes assessed upon real estate may be allocated for necessary maintenance of cemeteries. Despite these sources of funds, most of the town's cemeteries are a disgrace.

Hillside Cemetery in Centerville is but one example; it is by no means an exception. Yet here lie our dead heroes and here lie, too, our forebears, our beloved dead. And here, too, in time, many of us shall be laid to final rest.

Money for parades, fireworks, beautifying parks, refurbishing town offices, for providing most services the public demands-- that money is found. Yet most of our burying grounds lie like slighted pastureland.

Not all town-owned cemeteries are allowed to deteriorate. Cotuit's Mosswood is maintained and manicured with as much tender care as most residential gardens. Mosswood's appearance clearly reflects the time and money spent there while the rest of the town's cemeteries look forlorn.

Where does the fault lie? Let us turn to the 1983 Annual Report of the Town of Barnstable to see if any answers may be found there. Page 16 records the monies spent by the Department of Public Works for salaries and expenses in its various areas of responsibility.

	Salaries	Expenses
Administration	\$115,740	\$ 26,750
Engineering	246,883	5,235
Highway	450,379	116,110
Sanitation	93,735	45,384
Water Pollution Control	220,584	48,350
Structures and Grounds	316,024	151,053
Snow and Ice	28,200	106,091
Vandalism		1,000
Subtotal	1,471,545	499,973
Cemeteries	45,768	5,035
	1,517,313	505,008

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	Expended '82	Approved '83	Recommended '84
Salaries-	\$42,223	\$64,289	\$42,212
Expenses-	4,529	5,035	5,338

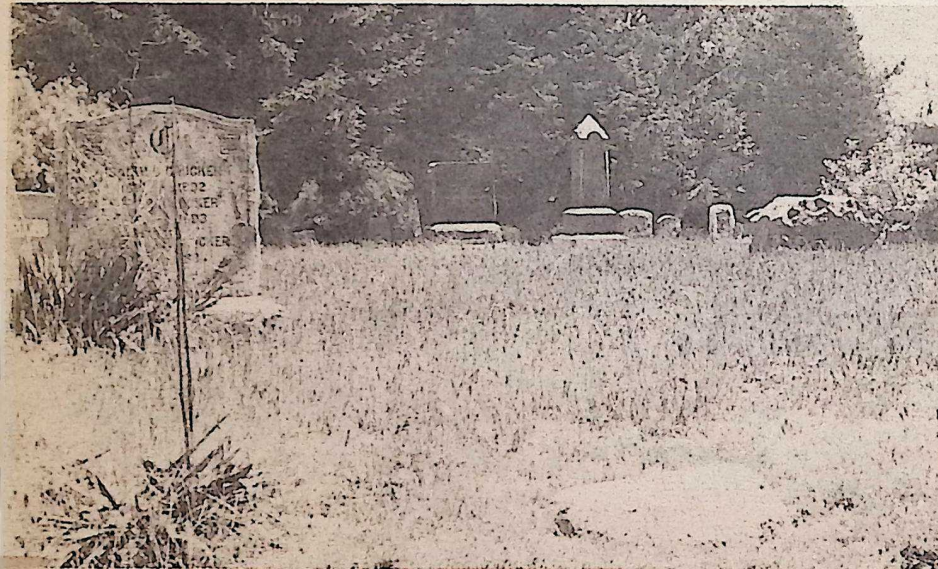
Page 164: Report of the Department of Public Works: CEMETERIES:

"One hundred (100) acres of grass located amidst the one hundred seventy (170) acres of seventeen (17) town-owned cemeteries were maintained with limited personnel. The Division and the Department share the many concerns expressed by relatives and friends of the deceased, but until such time as additional resources can be made available, it is doubtful that any marked improvement can be achieved."

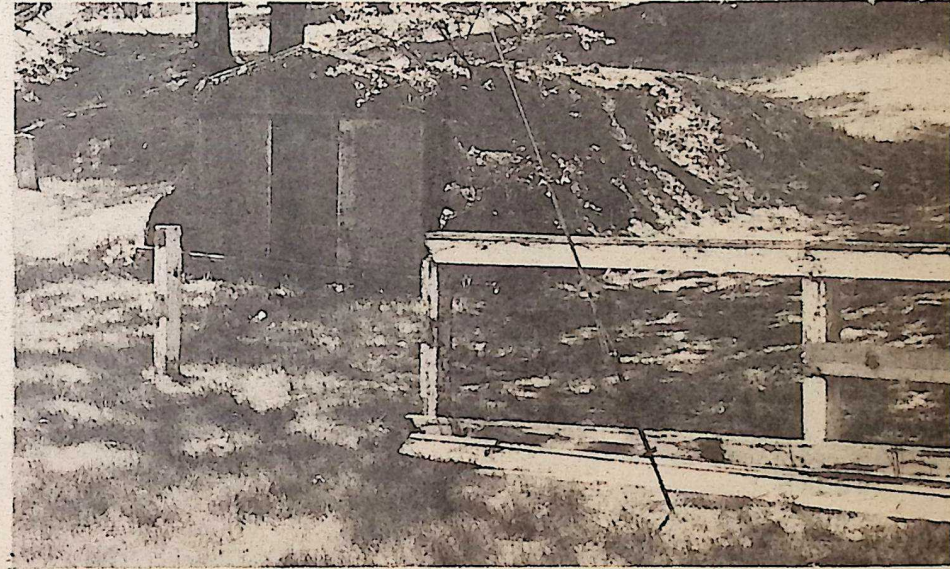
The attitude expressed in the above paragraph, and money expended on other projects, indicate little or no dedication to maintenance of cemeteries. For example, there are 103 parks, rotaries and traffic islands maintained by the DPW. These, the DPW reports, constitute "21.3 acres of grass to be mowed, watered and raked along with fifty (50) flower beds that must be prepared, planted, weeded and watered."

The flower beds in the traffic islands are lovely! No one denies that. And they are appreciated. Nevertheless, while traffic island flower beds are prepared, planted, weeded, and watered, our cemeteries are sadly neglected.

With the DPW spending over a million and a half dollars a year for salaries, and half a million more for expenses, could not some more equitable expenditure be made to keep burying grounds looking presentable?



Hillside Cemetery in Osterville, overgrown and in need of care.



(Photos by Pat Germani)