

It's About Time

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Massachusetts Cemetery Restoration Groups:

- Danvers State Hospital
- Northampton State Hospital
- Worcester State Hospital
- Medfield State Hospital
- Metropolitan State Hospital
- Tewksbury State Hospital

Inside this issue:

<i>Worcester State update</i>	2
<i>Giving Names and Faces to Cemetery Restoration: Al and Celia</i>	2
<i>Boston State update</i>	
<i>Medfield State update</i>	3
<i>Tewksbury State update</i>	3
<i>Northampton State update</i>	3
<i>What's Happening Nationally</i>	4
<i>Metropolitan State update</i>	4
<i>Danvers State update</i>	5
<i>Giving Names and Faces to Cemetery Restoration: Annie</i>	5
<i>Massachusetts Legislative update</i>	6

Discovering, Recovering and Making Consumer/Survivor History in Massachusetts

At state hospitals all across Massachusetts there is a terrible sight: row upon row of small concrete markers with only a number. These anonymous graves mark the resting place of our sisters and brothers -- former patients who died at state hospitals -- abandoned in life and death.

Until now.

Today consumers/survivors and our allies across the state are leading the struggle to have more than 20,000 graves in 18 state hospital cemeteries properly restored and memorialized. We want proper names on the graves - not numbers. We want the cemeteries to have flowers, benches and a statue commemorating the lives of the human beings who are buried there.



Who is number 115?

National Group of DMH Commissioners Support State Hospital Cemetery Restoration

In July 2001, state mental health commissioners from the 50 states and the US territories gathered at their biannual meeting and voted to approve a position statement supporting the restoration of state hospital cemeteries. They said,

“Forgotten and neglected graves of persons who died in state psychiatric hospitals convey a

message of devaluing the people who struggled with mental illness, contribute to the burden of stigma that people still face today and perpetuate a negative image of the state hospital.”

The position statement also lists recommendations for action by states to ensure their cemeteries are properly restored, maintained and memorialized.

Worcester State Hospital

Contact person: Alfred Bacotti, Dir. Glavin Regional Center (508) 845-9111 ext. 221

There are two cemeteries at Worcester State Hospital. Hillside West, the smaller of the two is on the site of the Glavin Center and 217 patients from Worcester State Hospital were buried here between 1918 and 1924. In the fall of 1999, following many years of work by a committee of staff and family members, a rededication ceremony celebrated the restoration of this cemetery. Hillside West is now beautifully landscaped,

with the original stone wall rebuilt, gates at the entrance, and proper headstones for the people buried there.

The larger cemetery, Hillside East, holds the graves of patients buried between 1925 and the mid-1980's. Restoration of this cemetery is still in process. It's surrounded by an old stone wall that has had to be restored, and a lot of landscaping has been necessary to cut back the forest

which had encroached upon it. Gates and pillars have been installed with the cemetery's name on them. Research has turned up the names and dates of birth and death for all of the people buried here. Currently, efforts are being made to provide headstones for each grave. Al Bacotti estimates it will be possible to place 200 stones a year. There are 1200 graves total, so it will be another 4 years before this work is completed.

Giving Names and Faces to Cemetery Restoration: Al and Celia

From the Worcester Telegram and Gazette, September 23, 1999 by Lee Hammel

"It ain't going to be no jail sign on my back," Al Warner said as he leaned over the grave of his mother, his hands a bit shaky at 86 years old. "My mother had the jail sign on her back."

Warner was taken out of his mother's arms when he was 3 years old. She went to Worcester State Hospital, and he went to a school for people with mental retardation. He

would be sent to three such schools in his life.

The "jail sign" was the number on a piece of cement that was the only marker on his mother's grave, and the graves of 10,000 other people buried on current and former state property across Massachusetts.

And Warner is right — he won't have the "jail sign". Nor

will his mother, Celia Warner, even though she had nothing but a number for a grave marker since she died at age 40 in 1922.

Because of efforts by Warner and many others, stones with names have been placed over the graves of Celia Warner

and 214 other people buried near her in Hillside Cemetery.

"It ain't going to be no jail sign on my back," Al Warner said as he leaned over the grave of his mother, his hands a bit shaky at 86 years old.

Boston State Hospital

Patients from Boston State were buried at Mount Hope, a city cemetery across the street from the hospital. The grave markers are small numbered stones., no names, no dates. A former hospital chaplain re-

calls burials being conducted in what he said was an undignified manner, often without any family present and with no service.

There is no cemetery restora-

tion group for Boston State Hospital, but one is needed. If you would like to be part of a group, the *It's About Time* staff could help get something started. Please give us a call, if you are interested.

Medfield State Hospital

Contact: Faye Stylianopoulos (617) 522-5768 or Bob Canal (508) 359-7312

Medfield State Hospital has buried its patients in two locations. Initially, the hospital used space in the town cemetery —Vine Lake — where 521 patients were buried. Later the hospital established its own cemetery on the grounds and an additional 839 patients have been buried here, with the latest burial occurring in 1988.

The cemetery had been very overgrown until recently when a local Boy Scout troop began

clearing it. Now some of the markers are visible. The markers are small stones with numbers scratched onto them.

Currently, the restoration committee is negotiating with DMH to get access to the names of people buried in the cemetery on the hospital grounds. Their hope is to purchase and install markers with names and dates of birth and death. The hospital's COO, though, is concerned about the viability of

sustaining landscaping in the cemetery and has suggested it may be more practical to erect a wall of remembrance, with people's names on it, rather than having individual markers.

Faye Stylianopoulos says the committee's biggest challenge, at this point, is increasing the number of consumers/survivor members involved. If you are interested in getting involved, please call Faye or Bob at the numbers above.

Tewksbury State Hospital

Contact: Curtis Florey (978) 532-1100

There are three cemeteries on the grounds of Tewksbury Hospital with at least 10,000 graves in them. Tewksbury Hospital opened in 1854 and its cemetery directory dates back to 1891 and contains 9,342 names. Patients who died between 1854 and 1891 are not recorded, so the total number of graves is not

known. The grave markers, three-inch high metal circles with crosses in the middle, are rusted and easy to miss because of the overgrowth of weeds. Although on occasion community groups have done some clearing of overgrowth in the cemeteries, the hospital has no money in its budget for regular maintenance.

Curt Florey, formerly the president of the board of trustees at the hospital would like the cemeteries cleaned up and preserved. But this is not a goal one person can accomplish — there needs to be a restoration committee. If you are interested in helping form a committee, please contact Curt.

Northampton State Hospital

Contact: Rebecca McCauley (413) 585-5768

Website: <http://users.javanet.com/~tclement/NSH/Main.html>

The NSH Burial Site Project is working to have the cemetery "properly memorialized, recognized as a distinct historic site, and to have the site cared for with dignity and respect." (from the website) Although records for the ceme-

tery have been lost, 181 burials have been confirmed with another 413 probable burials at the site. The location of the cemetery is known but there are no longer any grave markers there. Some have speculated the markers have sunk

below ground level over time

*Be sure to check out
this project's website!*

What's Happening Nationally . . .

Did you know that while we're working to restore state hospital cemeteries in Massachusetts, similar efforts are going on in several states all across the country? We know of consumers/survivor groups in Alabama, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, and Washington — please let us know if you've heard of others. In each issue of this newsletter, we'll give you information about what's happening in another state.

In 1998, the Georgia Consumer Council discovered 30,000 graves in four cemeteries at what used to be Milledgeville State Hospital in Georgia. Over the years grounds keepers had pulled up and thrown the metal grave markers into piles. The cemeteries had also been allowed to get terribly overgrown.

The Georgia Consumer Council went into action and partnered with the state to have the overgrown cemeteries cleared out. There was no way to match the markers with names of patients buried in the cemeteries and no way to restore the markers to their original po-

sitions. So the group decided to erect a gate and a statue to memorialize the people buried in the cemeteries, with some of the markers symbolically incorporated into the metal work of the gate. Other markers have been used to line the pathway between the gate and the statue.

The group began a fundraising campaign to have an ornate gate built at the entrance to the cemetery. They also raised \$35,000 for a bronze sculpture of an angel. On October 7, 2001 the statue was erected at a ceremony attended by 150 people, with television and newspaper coverage.

Metropolitan State Hospital / Fernald Center

**Contact: for DMH — Ross Ellenhorn (781) 862-3600 x421 or Paul Ottenstein (781) 641-8127
for DMR — Joanne Ciardello (781) 894-3600 x2103**

At least 100 people attended a Dedication Ceremony held last May on the grounds of the Metropolitan State Hospital / Fernald Center cemetery. The following is an excerpt from the invitation to this event:

The Met-Fern Cemetery is situated at the border between a vacant psychiatric hospital and a parcel of conservation land. Little exists to signify its presence to any passersby. Approximately 350 ex-patients of Metropolitan State Hospital and the Fernald Center are buried

in the cemetery. Their headstones, often sunken, deep in the ground or fallen to the side, mark each life with only a number. Our primary goal is to recognize each of those buried as unique individuals by providing headstones with a name, date of birth and death and any relevant signifying information. In addition, we hope to beautify the cemetery and to assist with the continued upkeep of the cemetery grounds.

The Met/Fern Cemetery Pro-

ject has names of the people buried in the cemetery and wants real markers to replace the original numbered pieces of cement. They also want an access road to the cemetery.

Currently, the group is working to get representation on the Citizens Advisory Committee dealing with the sale of the state hospital land. They are also hoping to increase the number of consumer members in their group — get in touch with any of the people listed above if you are interested.

Giving Names and Faces to Cemetery Restoration: Annie

Sam Chivers spent a year searching through the death records at Danvers Town Hall, trying to find names of the people buried in the cemeteries at Danvers State Hospital. As she gathered bits and pieces of information, she often found herself wondering about the people buried in graves with only a number to remember them by. Sam wrote the following about the woman buried in grave #2:

Annie was 31 years old when she came from New Brunswick, Canada and resided in Boston, Massachusetts. Possibly Annie was French speaking or was bi-lingual. She made her living as a domestic worker -- in other words a cleaning lady, most likely for the upper classes. The medical record described Annie as having an excellent character -- probably a hard worker with strong hands and tough skin from her

hands-on labor. Perhaps she had dark hair, curly and long down her back. She was petite but could easily hold her own. She hoped this travel to America would find her a better life. She had hopes. She fell in love with a young fellow, but the relationship turned sour, a big disappointment for Annie. The let down felt like a disaster, and it was this that brought Annie to Danvers State Hospital. Her clinical record says that the precipitating cause for her admission to Danvers State Hospital was disappointment in love. On June 22nd, Annie was escorted by train from Boston to the insane asylum in Danvers. She must have walked up the hill to the hospital grounds where beautiful gardens and fountains held the promise of peace of mind. Again, Annie's hopes must have been high.

The asylum hoped to be a place of serenity and a place that would help her feel better.

Annie, like many immigrants, traveled with no family to America. She was alone except for one person who came to visit her at the hospital. Her name was Martha Dean. The visit was probably a brief moment of comfort.

Annie died 10 days after her admission. The reason cited in the clinical record was "exhaustion." Perhaps on a more human level, it was a broken heart.

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Danvers State Hospital

Contact: Pat Deegan (978) 462-7258

The big news from the Danvers State Memorial Committee is that grave numbers are being matched with names of patients. Committee members, working with Tom Tagen of the DMH North East Area Office, have identified 542 of the 677 people buried in the larger of the two cemeteries at Danvers. Of these, they have matched 354 names with grave

markers. There are also 93 numbered markers in the smaller cemetery and 84 of the people buried there have been identified, although it has not been possible to match any names with numbers. The Committee is estimating they will be able to install 400 individual grave markers with names and dates of death. The remaining names will be

engraved on a wall of remembrance. The numbered markers will be left in place for historical purposes, so we won't forget how people were originally buried

It's About Time: Discovering, Recovering and Making Consumer/Survivor History in Massachusetts

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We're on the web!
www.DSMC.info

It's About Time is a completely consumer/survivor-run and controlled empowerment education project that seeks to advance the consumer/survivor movement and to build a stronger sense of pride and heritage in our community. The project involves significant numbers of consumers/survivors from across the state in researching and celebrating the consumer/survivor movement in Massachusetts. In addition, the project involves consumers/survivors in *making* history by restoring and properly memorializing abandoned state hospital cemeteries; training consumers/survivors to advocate for how closed hospital property should be used and how the money from the sale of the property should benefit ex-patients; and fighting stigma through TV, radio and newspaper coverage of these efforts.

Legislative Update

Thousands of graves lie abandoned, decaying and neglected in state hospital cemeteries, state schools, public health hospitals and prisons around the Commonwealth. At just the state mental hospital cemeteries, there are close to 20,000 graves, almost all of them marked only with a numbered piece of cement. The ex-patients buried there are human beings. Many were forgotten in life. We must not forget them in death.

Senate Bill 1530 and House Bill 932 will finally clean-up and restore the cemeteries and keep them that way!

S. 1530 and H. 932 call for the establishment of *The Commonwealth Public Facilities Burial Ground and Cemetery Preservation Fund* for the purpose of:

- Identifying, restoring, protecting, maintaining and memorializing any cemetery found on any past or present or future state-owned land
- These properties would include current and former prisons, state schools for people with developmental disabilities, Public Health hospitals, and state mental institutions

- The funds for cemetery restoration will come from the sale or lease of state owned property (.5% of sale/lease)
- The bill also calls for an accounting of the names of all those buried in cemeteries at former or current state facilities.

This vitally important bill has successfully passed through the legislature's State Administration Committee and is now in the Senate Ways and Means Committee. Hopefully action will be taken on the bill this year. To learn more, visit the *It's About Time* website (address above).