



NORTH AND UNION CEMETERIES

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

EDGE RESTORATION PLAN

December 2016

Prepared for the
City of Portsmouth

Prepared by
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INTRODUCTION

Portsmouth owns and manages four historic interment sites scattered throughout the city, Point of Graves Burial Ground, North Cemetery, Union Cemetery, and the Pleasant Street Burial Ground. Two of these properties, North and Union Cemeteries, lie along the southwest side of Maplewood Avenue, adjacent to the North Mill Pond. North Cemetery, established in ca. 1753, is the largest 18th century coastal burying ground north of Newburyport, Massachusetts, covering approximately 1.5 acres and containing over 400 graves. Union Cemetery, bordering North Cemetery to the north and dating to 1844, occupies just one acre and is dominated by burials organized into family plots.

As early as 1900, the cemeteries' residential setting began to change, and today the properties stand at the crossing of the Boston and Maine Railroad tracks and the busy Maplewood Avenue thoroughfare. A vacant lot lies to the east (across Maplewood Avenue), and a salt-storage area sits to the west, modern adjacencies that have detracted from the cemeteries' historic character, and undermined their importance in Portsmouth's past. Recent plans, on the part of the city, to upgrade the North End neighborhood fostered an interest in upgrading cemetery landscapes, and spurred the need to study them further.

The purpose of the foregoing Edge Restoration Plan was to complete the first in a multi-phase effort to preserve the North and Union Cemeteries' landscapes. The project involved researching and documenting the historical development of the properties, and making schematic recommendations for treating the cemeteries' edges. All work on the study was completed in accordance with the U. S. Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for the Preservation of Historic Properties, Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT of NORTH and UNION CEMETERIES



The mansion and gardens of Nathaniel Meserve (afterwards owned by Col. George Boyd and George Raynes) was built in 1740 and stood to the east of the burying ground site. This image was painted in ca. 1774 (courtesy of the Portsmouth Athenaeum).

North Cemetery

The origins of North Cemetery date to the mid-18th century and the growth of Portsmouth northward from the town's original 1623 settlement. Up until the 1750s, burials had taken place on individual properties as well as an established grave yard, the Point of Graves (established in 1671).¹ When the latter became filled, town leaders sought out a new place to inter the dead. Land that would become North Cemetery was owned by Colonel John Hart, and located on "Strawbery Banke Creek," afterwards known as Islington Creek, and today the North Mill Pond.

¹ Pearson and Bennett, Vignettes of Portsmouth. On March 2, 1671, Captain John Pickering agreed "that the towne shall have full libertie without any molestation to inclose about about half an acre on the neck of land on which he now liveth, where the people have been wont to be buried, which land shall be impropriated forever for the use of a burying place, only the said Pickering and his heirs forever, shall have libertie to feed the sane with neat cattle." Pearson and Bennett, Vignettes of Portsmouth.

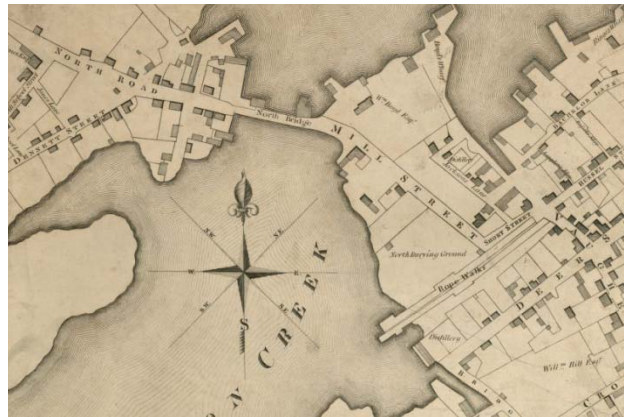
North and Union Cemeteries, Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Edge Restoration Plan

In 1753, Col. Hart sold approximately one acre of his land to the town. The transaction took place following an inquiry made by a committee, set up by town leaders to locate “a lot or lots of land in the town convenient for a Burying Place.”² The deed for the property, conveyed on July 26th, stated,

“[k]now all men by these presents that we John Hart of Portsmouth in the Province of New Hampshire (gent) and Sarah, my wife...in consideration of ye sum of one hundred fifty pounds New tenor Bills of credit...a certain lot of land in Portsmouth aforesaid containing one acre more or less bounded as follows: beginning on ye street leading to ye dwelling house of Col. Nathaniel Meserve, eighty-two foot northerly from ye ropewalk measuring upon ye street, thence runs south fifty four degrees west, two hundred and fourteen foot and six inches, thence north forty degrees west, two hundred and three foot two inches, thence north fifty four degrees east two hundred and fourteen feet six inches to ye street, thence upon ye street south forty degrees east to ye place whereas begins being two hundred and three foot two inches...to have and to hold granted and bargained premises...for use of ye inhabitants and their successors forever for a Burying Place...”³

While the burying ground became official in 1753, it is likely that at least one burial had taken place in this location prior to this time, that of Jothan Odiorne (1703-1751). Odiorne’s grave is the oldest known and marked interment at North Cemetery. A small powder house (date of construction unknown⁴) stood along the cemetery’s northern edge, near the mill pond.

At the time of the cemetery’s establishment, land in this area of Portsmouth held residences (including the Col. Nathaniel Meserve estate) as well as maritime-related businesses, located along the creek. A substantial bridge spanning the creek was built in 1764 by Peter Livius,⁵ and following its construction, mills were established, as well as rope walks, sheds used in rope fabrication.⁶



The J. G. Hales map of Portsmouth in 1813 showed both the powder house and firehouse, situated within the boundaries of North Cemetery. Rope walks stood along the south edge.

² The Portsmouth Town Records (1695-1799), p. 132A/Volume II.

³ Libre 0041/Folio 0098, Rockingham County Registry of Deeds.

⁴ The powder house may have been constructed as early as 1774, as a small rectangular structure appeared on a plan of Piscataqua Harbor, Town of Portsmouth, produced that year. The structure is not labeled on the plan.

⁵ Bridges across the creek appear, from early maps, to have existed prior to 1764; Livius formally petitioned the town so that he could construct this bridge.

⁶ Rope walks appear on the 1839 map of Portsmouth, although, as indicated by the Cutter deed, stood on the south side of North Cemetery prior to 1809. They remained in use until after the War of 1812.

North and Union Cemeteries, Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Edge Restoration Plan



The Franklin Pierce Volunteer Fireman's Building (Ward Room No. 1) stood at the southeast corner of North Cemetery. The row of poplar trees lining the cemetery's east side is visible at the right side of the image (ca. 1897-1899). (Courtesy of the Portsmouth Athenaeum)

In the early 1800s, the size of North Cemetery increased and shortly thereafter its setting changed. In 1809, the town purchased the one-half acre parcel from Dr. William Cutter for \$1,000, located along the cemetery's south edge. The terms of the conveyance included reservation of *"a road fifteen feet wide running westerly by the rope walk aforesaid from Mill Street aforesaid to said Mill Pond."*⁷ Poplar trees, planted in an even row, stood along the eastern edge, as did some type of wall, with a gate at near the southeast corner.⁸ A 32' by 39.4' firehouse, known as the Franklin Pierce Volunteer Fireman's Building or Ward Room No. 1, was constructed in the southeast corner sometime before 1813.⁹ In 1840, the Eastern Railroad was completed to Boston and entered Portsmouth replacing the former rope walks, creating an even harsher

southern edge. Sometime after the railroad was introduced, the city built a wooden fence along the south edge to shield the track activity, and also constructed a stone and brick wall along the east edge.¹⁰

By the late 19th century, fewer and fewer interments took place at North Cemetery,¹¹ and newspaper accounts from this time reported that the landscape had fallen into disrepair. In 1869, The Portsmouth Herald published "A Ramble in Our Cemeteries," in which is noted:



North Cemetery, as it appeared in 1942. Grass had grown to substantial heights, and shrubs had emerged around the headstones. (Images of America, Portsmouth Cemeteries)

*"[t]he Old North Burying Ground, unadorned and neglected, was forty years ago about the same uninviting spot that it is now, and was then the principal burying place in Portsmouth. It was suggestive of all that is somber, and its weird aspect, with its street-bordering sentry-like Poplars and its irregular and frost-thrown stones, make it seem like a wondering place for uneasy spirits, and gave currency to the many ghost stories that terrify the superstitions."*¹²

Libre U184/Folio U233, Rockingham County Registry of Deeds.

⁸ "Plan of the North Burying Ground in the Town of Portsmouth, 1810," dated September 7, 1939. The plan showed the cemetery boundary with this gate.

⁹ J. G. Hales 1813 Map of Portsmouth shows this small Greek Revival style building, as well as the powder house. It is possible the firehouse depicted on the Hales map was replaced with the structure shown in the 1897-1899 photograph.

¹⁰ The wall, constructed on mortared stoned, topped with mortared brick and a concrete cap, appeared in the 1897-1899 photographs.

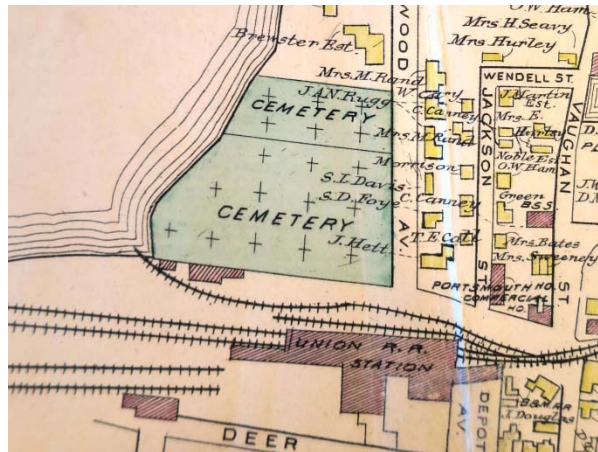
¹¹ The latest recorded interment at North Cemetery took place in 1926.

¹² The Portsmouth Herald, August 14, 1869.

City neglect of North Cemetery continued well into the 20th century, with several reports of vandalism, unmown grass, and littering appearing in The Portsmouth Herald in the 1950s and 1960. By the 1970s, the city recognized the historical importance of the property by erecting historical markers honoring early provincial and state leaders interred at the site (1977), and also nominating it to the National Register of Historic Places (1978). In the early 2000s, the Mayor of Portsmouth established a Blue Ribbon Committee on historic cemeteries, and the effort brought city-wide attention to the importance of North Cemetery. As a result of this committee, repair and straightening of stones took place in the early 2000s, and an interpretive sign was placed near the southeast corner, informing visitors of the cemetery's historical importance. Most recently in August of 2016, the 210-foot mortared stone and brick wall along the eastern (Maplewood Avenue) edge was taken down, and the bottom stone portion reconstructed and repointed.

Union Cemetery

The impetus for establishing a second cemetery in Portsmouth's North End is unknown. However by the 1840s, hundreds of interments had taken place at North Cemetery, and the one and one-half acre property was nearing capacity. Residents likely sought to expand North Cemetery by purchasing an abutting piece of land, "situated in a waterfront location and once across from the elegant Boyd-Raynes mansion and shipyard."¹³ In 1844, Benjamin Carter, John G. Brewster and Thomas D. Dailey deeded one-half acre "for and in consideration of the sum of six hundred dollars paid to us in land, do convey in lots or shares the following described property for a private family burying ground and to be known by the name of the Union Cemetery." The deed, dated June 20th, provided a detailed description of the new cemetery's layout:



The 1899 New Hampshire Atlas of Towns and Cities included both cemeteries. Vaughan Street had been renamed Maplewood Avenue.

"The above described premises is laid out and divided into forty lots with suitable [space] for family burial lots in the following form. Beginning at the first-named bounds on Vaughan Street is an alley seven feet wide and continuing that [width] westerly to the mill pond, then arranging of lots from an alley by said Vaughan Street of seven feet wide northerly and nine feet wide at the southerly end. The cross alley in the center is one hundred and seven feet from Vaughan Street to commence on the northerly side and is six feet wide running southerly. The first range of lots on the northerly side is sixteen feet six inches wide and twenty feet deep from the street westerly to the mill pond, each and every lot, ten in number, is of the same dimension. The middle alley is nine feet two inches wide at the gateway, and [sustains] that width to the receiving tomb. This third range of lots adjoining southerly side of middle alley is sixteen feet six inches wide. The five lots nearest the Vaughan Street is twenty-one feet deep. The fourth range of lots is sixteen feet six inches wide. The five lots nearest to Vaughan Street is twenty-one feet

¹³ Gurney, 47.

deep more or less. The remaining five lots is twenty feet deep. Towards the mill pond, the alley on the northerly side of the lots adjoining the North Burying Ground is seven feet wide from the street to the mill pond.”¹⁴

The deed referred to a plan drawn to reflect this forty-lot layout. While the conveyance occurred in 1844, the cemetery likely did not officially open until 1847, as the keystone of the iron arch above the entry bears this date. Historical records suggest that families purchased the defined lots, and some leased the lots (or portions thereof) for terms of 1,000 years to other families.¹⁵ The bulk of interments took place in the latter half of the 19th century, with a few burials added in the early 20th century. In 1869, The Portsmouth Herald reported that at Union Cemetery, “symmetry, taste and beauty everywhere meet the eye with delightful suggestions of the beauty of the scenes those who have gone before are enjoying, while they rob death of many of its terrors.”¹⁶

At some point in the late 19th or early 20th century, care of Union Cemetery fell into the hands of the City, and neglect ensued. In 1950, The Portsmouth Herald reported that, “[t]he North and Union Cemeteries off Maplewood Avenue on the shore of the North Mill Pond stood knee-high in grass and weeds. More than a dozen headstones had been knocked over, and some had been dragged from theirs...a wooden fence that once stood on the side facing the railroad tracks has long since rotted away, leaving the cemetery open to tramps and vandals.”¹⁷

Preservation of some Union Cemetery features took place beginning in the 2000s, spurred by the work of the Mayor’s Blue Ribbon Committee. Tasks included the straightening and resurfacing of the east-facing wrought iron fence and gates, and placement of an interpretive sign near the main (east) entrance. In 2015 the old receiving tomb’s brick chamber, having suffered from severe desecration, was demolished, and the façade preserved as a means of preserving some of the historic old structure.

Closing and Abandonment of North and Union Cemeteries

By the 1850s, the City of Portsmouth again faced a shortage of burial space in its established cemeteries, as the population had nearly doubled between 1800 and 1850. In 1853, The Daily Morning Chronicle opined that a “city cemetery” was needed,

“We have suggested some thoughts on the subject several weeks ago, and will now state more particularly, that the Old North Burying Ground has been considered full for many years. This fact was made use of an argument to encourage the purchase of lots in the Proprietors’ Burying Ground at its commencement. The successful sale of lots in this last named ground at the south end, and the fact that nearly all the lots therein were sold, probably induced the Proprietors to get up the little, but beautiful Union Cemetery

¹⁴ Libre 0314/Folio 0062, Rockingham County Registry of Deeds, June 20, 1844. Note that Vaughan Street (also known as Mill Street and Elm Street) was the name at this time for Maplewood Avenue.

¹⁵ Libre 0350, Folios 0137, 0138, 0139, Rockingham County Registry of Deeds, April and May 1852.

¹⁶ The Portsmouth Herald, August 12, 1869. The article refers to the new South Cemetery as exhibiting the same characteristics as Union Cemetery.

¹⁷ The Portsmouth Herald, May 10, 1950.

adjoining the Old North Ground. There are very few vacant places in either of these grounds.”¹⁸

In 1857, in response to this plea, the Society for the Care of the South Cemetery in Portsmouth” was formed, a private entity set up to provide a large, singular place of interment for the city. The new South Cemetery abutted four smaller burying grounds, Proprietors, Harmony Grove, Sagamore and Cotton and these sites were incorporated into the new cemetery. As noted under the narratives above, burials at both North and Union slowed after the opening of South Cemetery, and both properties fell slowly into disrepair. The last interments at both took place nearly 100 years ago.

Historic Cemetery Styles

As detailed above, North Cemetery and Union Cemetery were established nearly 100 years apart, at different periods in history. Americans’ approaches to commemorating the dead shifted during this time, and distinct variations in the cemeteries’ landscapes reflect these shifts, as follows:

North Cemetery: Colonial Burial.

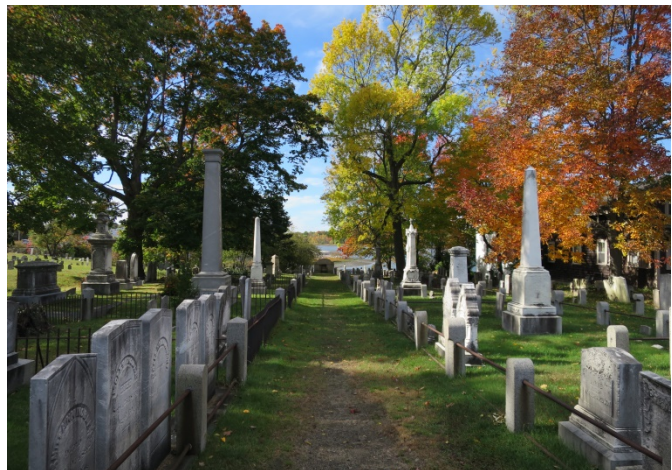
The North Cemetery landscape exhibits characteristics typical of 18th and early 19th century American burial. Single graves dominate, marked with portal-shaped tablets made from native brownstone or slate and intricately carved by local or regional artisans. Graves are arranged in rows and unrelated individuals were interred adjacent to one other (the burial ground was not pre-plotted and graves were not pre-sold). Typically Colonial burial grounds did not contain roads or paths, and trees consisted of native species. Fences and/or stone walls often enclosed the site.

Union Cemetery: Victorian Burial.

In contrast to North Cemetery, Union Cemetery’s landscape was planned and plotted, and plots sold to families. Owners outlined their plots with fencing, curbing, or coping, and placed a prominent family monument at the center (often surrounded by smaller gravestones for individuals). Material shifted away from slate and brownstone



North Cemetery in 2015. The landscape typifies the Colonial style of American burial with individual tablet style markers arranged in rows.



Union Cemetery in 2015. The landscape reflects the Victorian approach to burial, with planned family plots, enclosed with fencing and marked with large, central obelisk.

¹⁸ The Daily Morning Chronicle, May 9, 1853. Proprietors’ Burying Ground was established in the south end of Portsmouth in 1830.

towards marble and granite, and carvings displayed Victorian imagery. Roads and paths were introduced to provide carriage ways and typically followed the contours of the land.

PERIODS of SIGNIFICANCE

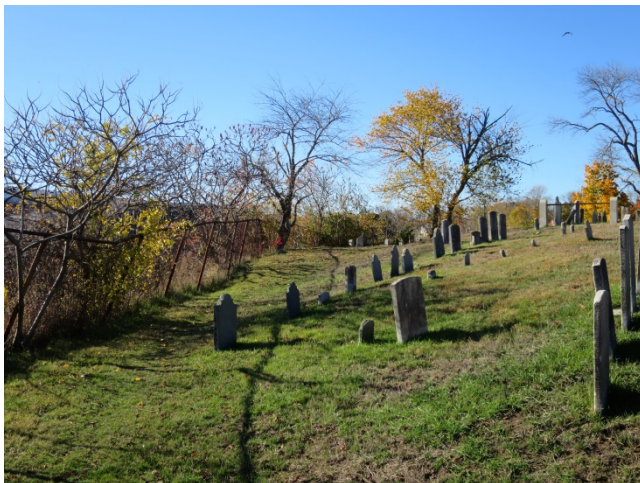
The period of significance for North Cemetery is 1753 to 1930, the time during which the property was actively used for burials and landscape features reflected the Colonial style of burial. The perimeter stone wall, cart path along the southern edge, native Sugar Maple trees, and tablet-style markers all date to this period. The period of significance for Union Cemetery is 1844 to 1930, the time during which the site accepted burials and landscape features reflected the Victorian style of cemetery design. The perimeter fence, entry gates, carriage path and “alleys” between plots, the family plots and associated details, and the mature shade trees all belong to this period. Future efforts to preserve the cemeteries should adhere to these Periods of Significance and meld, as closely as possible, with the associated cemetery design styles.

EXISTING EDGE CONDITIONS

North Cemetery

Today, North Cemetery is bounded on the east by Maplewood Avenue, south by the railroad tracks, west by a salt-storage yard and the North Mill Pond, and north by Union Cemetery. The most complementary edges stand to the east and north, with the south and west detracting from the cemetery’s historic character, as follows:

East. The cemetery sits at the edge of Maplewood Avenue, separated by a granite curb, bituminous asphalt sidewalk, and mortared cut stone (granite) wall. Most of the historic buildings that once stood across Maplewood Avenue were removed during a period of urban renewal, and today two very large asphalt parking lots and a one-story bank building fill the opposite side of the street. As noted in the historical narrative, the wall was likely built prior to 1897-1899, and included several courses of mortared brick atop the stone, capped with pitched stone or concrete material. Sometime in the last century, this cap was replaced with concrete slabs. In 2016, the slabs and courses of brick were removed as part of a wall restoration effort. Three mature Silver Maple trees stand inside the wall and



North Cemetery’s south edge is marked by an aging chain link fence, infiltrated with Staghorn Sumac. This edge treatment continues around the south side, detracting from the landscape’s historic character.

are spaced evenly along this east edge. The wall reconstruction (including reconstruction and re-pointing) vastly improved the condition of this edge. A single granite post, standing approximately fifteen from the cemetery’s southeast corner, marks the end of the wall. Remnants of the fifteen-feet-wide right-of-way and cart path leading westward to the Mill Pond, reserved by William Cutter in his 1809 conveyance of land to the city, remain. This corner also held, for a period of approximately 100 years, the Franklin Pierce Volunteer Firemen’s building.

South. A six-feet-high aging chain link fence, dating to the mid-20th century¹⁹, lines the south edge, separating the cemetery from an access road to the salt storage area and the railroad tracks. Today, the fence is rusted and leans in several spots, and volunteer trees, including Sumac, have grown in and around the fence, resulting a ragged, unkempt appearance.

West. The chain link fencing continues around the cemetery's west side and is in equally poor condition, with small trees and shrubs growing into and around the fence. The fence and trees only minimally block the salt storage area that lies to the west between the cemetery and North Mill Pond.

North. Union Cemetery abuts North Cemetery's north side with a row of mature Sugar Maple trees reinforcing the boundary. This is the strongest edge, with the tall obelisks in Union's family plots providing a complementary backdrop to the individual tablet-marked North Cemetery graves.

Union Cemetery

Union Cemetery is similarly bounded on the east by Maplewood Avenue and west by the North Mill Pond, with a residential enclave on the north, and North Cemetery to the south. Each of the edges complements the historic character, with the strongest edges lying to the east, south and west, as follows:

East. Maplewood Avenue lines the east side, defined by a granite curb and bituminous asphalt sidewalk (a continuation from the North Cemetery edge). Instead of a mortared stone wall, the cemetery's founders placed a set of granite columns at the northeast and southeast corners, and erected a wrought iron fence and gates to formally mark the cemetery entrance. Above the arch, in a keystone, is the name of the cemetery and the date, "1847." The gates, posts, arch, and fencing all appear in good condition, and perfectly complement the Victorian style of the site.

South. As described above, North Cemetery abuts Union Cemetery to the south, with a regular row of Sugar Maples standing along the boundary between. The rolling, open and informal character of North's Colonial style landscape, with its hundreds of single tablet markers, provides a complementary backdrop to the more planned, organized and ornate Union Cemetery landscape.

West. The west edge of Union Cemetery falls off into the North Mill Pond, with the historic receiving tomb (façade only), punctuating the open, un-vegetated view from the cemetery across the pond. The tomb façade has recently been restored, further strengthening the visual appeal of this edge.



The façade of the historic Union Cemetery receiving tomb, recently restored, punctuates the view from the cemetery westward, across the pond. A bench has been placed to allow visitors to rest, reflect, and take in the view.

North. Several historic residential-scale

¹⁹ A photograph published in the 1960s in The Portsmouth Herald showed that this fence was standing at the time, and appeared relatively new.

structures stand on land to the north, with little separation between the cemetery and abutting neighbor. While the closeness of the two properties may compromise the privacy of both, the abutting buildings are remnants Portsmouth's North End and therefore complement the cemetery's character.

RECOMMENDED EDGE TREATMENTS

North Cemetery

East:

- Maintain the existing mortared stone wall, inspecting the structure each year for loose mortar, cracks and/or shifting. Clean as needed to remove grime. Do not replace the mortared brick courses that once stood atop the wall.
- Remove the aging Silver Maple trees as they begin to decline. Removal of these trees from behind the wall will preserve the wall's structural integrity, preventing roots from pushing against the back (cemetery) side. Do not re-plant trees behind the wall.
- Replace the existing bituminous asphalt sidewalk with a more historically-compatible material, such as brick or asphalt block pavers.

South and West:

- Remove the existing chain link fencing and replace with 5' height black vinyl-coated chain link along the south edge and the portion of the west edge that abuts the salt storage yard.
- Plant a screen of evergreen trees inside the fence along the south edge and the portion of the west edge that abuts the salt storage area.
- Inside the cemetery, along the west edge, plant a cluster of poplar trees. Historically, these trees stood inside the cemetery (albeit along the east edge), and can be reintroduced along the west edge to screen of the salt storage area.

North:

- Maintain the existing row of Sugar Maple trees defining the boundary between North and Union Cemeteries. As these trees age and begin to decline, introduce new plantings to replace the old.

Union Cemetery

East:

- Continue to maintain this historic entrance by regularly inspecting the stone columns and wrought iron fence, gates and arch for damage and/or decay, and repairing the damage/decay as soon as it occurs.
- Replace the existing bituminous asphalt sidewalk with a more historically-compatible material, such as brick or asphalt block pavers.

South:

- As noted above, maintain the existing row of Sugar Maple trees defining the boundary between Union and North Cemeteries, replacing trees in decline with new plantings.

West:

North and Union Cemeteries, Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Edge Restoration Plan

- Continue to maintain this edge's open views across the North Mill Pond, but removing volunteer vegetation, and stabilizing the pond banks, as required and permissible.²⁰

North:

- Consider planting shade trees, including maples poplars, along this edge to provide a gentle, yet visually appealing and historically complementary separating between the abutting residence and the cemetery.

If loitering in Union Cemetery around the receiving tomb's façade becomes a long term concern, the City may consider enclosing the property with wrought iron fencing, matching the exiting style along the east edge. Victorian era cemeteries were typically and often enclosed in this manner.

²⁰ Loitering of individuals around and behind the historic tomb façade was observed during the course of this study.

HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY

Abbreviation:

CAR = City Annual Report

Before 1753.

The first European to explore and write about the Piscataqua River area was Martin Pring, who came to the area from England in 1603. Portsmouth, on the west side of the river, was settled in 1630 as Strawberry Banke, and incorporated as the Town of Portsmouth in 1653.

What is known today as the North Mill Pond was "Strawberry Banke Creek," and afterwards Islington Creek. Clement Campion owned eight acres on "Campion's Neck," which comprised what stretches from the North Burying Ground to Raynes' ship-yard. [Portsmouth Records, 1645-1656, 50 (Appendix)]

Jothan Odiorne was interred in (b. 1703) 1751 on land that would become North Cemetery. (Portsmouth Herald, 2003)

On March 2, 1671, Captain John Pickering agreed "that the towne shall have full libertie without any molestation to inclose about about half an acre on the neck of land on which he now liveth, where the people have been wont to be buried, which land shall be impropriated forever for the use of a burying place, only the said Pickering and his heirs forever, shall have libertie to feed the sane with neat cattle." (Pearson and Bennett, Vignettes)

1753.

Approximately one acre Land that would become North Cemetery was "sold to the town for a cemetery by Col. John Hart." It is believed that interments may have taken place on this site before this time. (Foster, 102)

The Portsmouth Town Records (1695-1799) included several entries about this transaction:

- p. 132A/Volume II: "Vote that Rich. Wibird esq, Mr. Henry Sherburne, merch., Elliot Vaughan Esq., Mr. Charles Treadwell and Captain Mark Langdon be and hereby area committee to inquire who has a lot or lots of land in the town convenient for a Bureing Place and Make Report of their proceedings at the adjournment of this meeting." Voted.
- p. 136A/Volume II: "Voted that those who have a Desire to build Vaults in the Burying Place may build them at their own charge and that the selectmen for the time being to mark our said vaults shall be built as they shall judge to be necessary for that Purpose."

“Vot’d that the Old Burying Place be shut up and that the Selectmen suffer no Body be buried there except in the Tombs.”

- p. 133B/Volume II: “Whereas there was a Committee voted at the last Adjournment and they Report they cannot Purchass one Place Sufficent for a burying place, Voted that (the committee) be and hereby are appointed a committee to act for and Purchass one or more tract or tracts of land for the use of the town to burying the dead in and make Return of your doings unto the Selectmen as soon as may be and that the Selectmen Raise money to Pay for the same at the Charge of the town and take a Deed or Deeds for said land in such manner as by Council learned in the law shall be advised.”

The deed for the property, conveyed on July 26, 1753, stated, “[k]now all men by these presents that we John Hart of Portsmouth in the Province of New Hampshire (gent) and Sarah, my wife...in consideration of ye sum of one hundred fifty pounds New tenor Bills of credit...a certain lot of land in Portsmouth aforesaid containing one acre more or less bounded as follows: *beginning on ye street leading to ye dwelling house of Col. Nathaniel Meserve, eighty-two foot northerly from ye ropewalk measuring upon ye street, thence runs south fifty four degrees west, two hundred and fourteen foot and six inches, thence north forty degrees west, two hundred and three foot two inches, thence north fifty four degrees east two hundred and fourteen feet six inches to ye street, thence upon ye street south forty degrees east to ye place whereas begins being two hundred and three foot two inches.* (Approximately 1 acre)

...to have and to hold granted and bargained premises...for use of ye inhabitants and their successors forever for a Burying Place...” (Libre 0041/Folio 0098)

“The original lot of land embracing [North Cemetery] was, in 1753, purchased by the town for one hundred fifty pounds, on condition that it should be kept for a burial-ground, from Colonel John Hart, who commanded a New Hampshire regiment at the Crown Point Expedition in 1756, and also at the siege of Louisburg in 1758, where he died.” (Gurney, 48-49)

- 1764. Peter Livius made a proposal to the town to build a bridge across Islington Creek and the town accepted his proposal. Construction of mills (the “North Mills” or Livius’ Mills) followed. (Foster, 104)
- 1800. Portsmouth’s population was 5,339.
- 1809. Dr. William Cutter deeded a parcel of land to the Town of Portsmouth for \$1,000. The deed described the land: *“beginning at the southerly*

*corner of the upper burying ground on Mill Street and running westerly and northerly by said burying ground to Land of William Hart; then westerly by said last mentioned land to the Mill Pond; then southerly by said Mill Pond to the ropewalk now or late know by the name of Wentworth Ropewalks; then easterly by said ropewalk to Mill Street aforesaid; then northerly by said Mill Street to the bounds first mentioned with water privilege thereto belonging excepting and reserving out said lot a road fifteen feet wide running westerly by the rope walk aforesaid from Mill Street aforesaid to said Mill Pond, said granted premises being the same which I purchased of Edward Hart as his deed dated to me the tenth day of April 1801 and recorded in the records of said county, Lib. 158, Folio 154...the said granted premises with all the privileges to and for the use of a burying ground for the Town of Portsmouth aforesaid forever. January 12, 1809.
(Approximately ½ acre)*

1813. Hale produced a map of Portsmouth showing the “North Burying Ground” on the northeast shore of Islington Creek, and bordered on the northeast side by Mill Street. The powder house stood along the north edge of the cemetery, and the firehouse (32 x 39.4 feet) stood at the southeast corner, next to the rope walks.

1817. Dr. William Cutter died (Person Record, Portsmouth Athenaeum)

1840. Paid Mr. Rugg for stock and labor repairing fence at North burial ground. (CAR, 3)

Also in 1840, 1840: Eastern Railroad was completed to Boston, it being the first one entering Portsmouth and connecting it with the neighboring towns and cities by rail...Previous to 1863, when the present station was built, there stood here a wooden depot with a belfry; hanging therein was a bell, which was rung previous to the departure of all trains...before the Revolution two rope-walks occupied this site, extending from Vaughan Street to the north Pond, the remaining in use until after the War of 1812; and one of them for several years afterward was carried on by John Underwood, who lived at the corner, just above, bearing his name. (Gurney, 47)

1844. Benjamin Carter, John G. Brewster and Thomas D. Dailey, All of Portsmouth deeded a parcel of land “for and in consideration of the sum of six hundred dollars paid to us in land, do convey in lots or shares the following described property for a private family burying ground and to be known by the name of the Union Cemetery, situated in Portsmouth aforesaid and bounded as follows: *beginning at the southeasterly corner of land belonging to John G. Brewster on Vaughan Street and running by said Brewster’s land and others westerly two hundred and thirty-six feet (236’) to the mill pond and thence by said mill pond ninety-one feet (91’) to the northwest corner of the North*

Burying Ground belonging to the Town of Portsmouth and thence by said burying ground two hundred and four feet (204') to Vaughan Street and thence northerly by said Vaughan Street ninety feet four inches (90'-4") to the bounds first begun at." (Approximately ½ acre)

The deed included a description of the cemetery layout: "The above described premises is laid out and divided into forty lots with suitable [space] for family burial lots in the following form. Beginning at the first-named bounds on Vaughan Street is an alley seven feet wide and continuing that [width] westerly to the mill pond, then arranging of lots from an alley by said Vaughan Street of seven feet wide northerly and nine feet wide at the southerly end. The cross alley in the center is one hundred and seven feet from Vaughan Street to commence on the northerly side and is six feet wide running southerly. The first range of lots on the northerly side is sixteen feet six inches wide and twenty feet deep from the street westerly to the mill pond, each and every lot, ten in number, is of the same dimension. The middle alley is nine feet two inches wide at the gateway, and [sustains] that width to the receiving tomb. This third range of lots adjoining southerly side of middle alley is sixteen feet six inches wide. The five lots nearest the Vaughan Street is twenty-one feet deep. The fourth range of lots is sixteen feet six inches wide. The five lots nearest to Vaughan Street is twenty-one feet deep more or less. The remaining five lots is twenty feet deep. Towards the mill pond, the alley on the northerly side of the lots adjoining the North Burying Ground is seven feet wide from the street to the mill pond."

The deed suggests that a plan had been drawn to reflect this layout: "[r]eference may be had to a plan of lots to be kept by the committee of said company for the time being. The lots commence numbering from the northeast corner lot - which is number one, and number from north to south until it (arrives?) at number forty, as described above."

1847. Union Cemetery may have officially opened, following the securing of land in 1844. 1847 is the date in the keystone of the iron arch above the entryway. Knoblock described the property as "situated in a waterfront location and once across from the elegant Boyd-Raynes mansion and shipyard.
1849. Portsmouth was incorporated as a city.
1850. Portsmouth's population was 9,738.
1851. The Portsmouth Herald reported, "The people of Portsmouth hardly need to be reminded that we have not proper and adequate burial ground belonging to the City...more than twenty-five years ago, the want of a new burial ground, or enlargement of the old ground, was felt in the town of Portsmouth, and some movement was made toward purchasing two strips of land adjoining the North Burying Ground. This

[effort] failed, and now the Eastern Railroad covers one of these strips, and a private burying ground, neatly laid out occupies the other. (5/24/1851)

1852

In this year, several deeds were conveyed as leases for lots in Union Cemetery. Existing lot owners leased portions of the lots for terms of up to 1,000 years. One such lease was issued by Kittredge Sheldon to Oliver Hanscom:

“Know all men by these presents that I, Kittredge Sheldon of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, for and in consideration of the sum of forty dollars to me paid by Oliver Hanscom of the same Portsmouth; the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, have demised and leased until the said Hanscom, his heirs and assigns, the westerly half of the lot of land No. One in the Union Cemetery on Elm Street, formerly Vaughan Street, in said Portsmouth, which said lot is particularly designated in the Plan of said Burying Ground and bounded as follows: *beginning at the northeast corner of Lot No. Five owned by Nathaniel Dennett Jr., and running southerly by said Dennett’s lot sixteen feet eight inches, to Lot No. 2, owned by James Dodge, thence running easterly by said Dodge lot, ten feet six inches, and thence running northerly sixteen feet eight inches to the alley, and thence running by the alley ten feet three inches to the bounds of the first named.* To have and to hold the same to the said Oliver Hanscom his heirs and assigns with all the privileges thereunto appurtenant for and during the term of one thousand years upon the condition that said premises shall be used and occupied for no other purpose than as a place of interring the dead, either in graves or tombs, and this lease shall cease and determine whenever and as soon as the demised premises shall be used by said lessee, his heirs or assigns for any other purpose than is herein provided and expressed.”

1853.

The Daily Morning Chronicle published “A City Cemetery,” “[i]t is obvious to all who have walked over the grounds here, that the City of Portsmouth has no such [city] cemetery. We have suggested some thoughts on the subject several weeks ago, and will now state more particularly, that the Old North Burying Ground has been considered full for many years. This fact was made use of an argument to encourage the purchase of lots in the Proprietors’ Burying Ground at its commencement. The successful sale of lots in this last named ground at the south end, and the fact that nearly all the lots therein were sold, probably induced the Proprietors to get up the little, but beautiful Union Cemetery adjoining the Old North Ground. There are very few vacant places in either of these grounds. (5/9/1853)

1857.

The “Society for the Care of the South Cemetery in Portsmouth” was formed (see 1927).

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1869. *The Portsmouth Herald* printed "A Ramble in Our Cemeteries," which included, "[t]he Old North Burying Ground, unadorned and neglected, was forty years ago about the same uninviting spot that it is now, and was then the principal burying place in Portsmouth. It was suggestive of all that is somber, and its weird aspect, with its street-bordering sentry-like Poplars and its irregular and frost-thrown stones, make it seem like a wondering place for uneasy spirits, and gave currency to the many ghost stories that terrify the superstitions." (8/14/1869)
- The article continued, "[t]he contract as we now enter the Union and South Cemeteries is more pleasing. Their symmetry, taste and beauty everywhere meet the eye with delightful suggestions of the beauty of the scenes those who have gone before are enjoying, while they rob death of many of its terrors." (8/14/1869)
1884. The Portsmouth Herald reported that Michael J. Griffin had been appointed superintendent of the City's burying grounds.
1896. Sarah Foster wrote The Portsmouth Guide Book, and in it, noted that a row of old poplars stood along the cemetery's edge at Maplewood Avenue. (p. 101, Walk Eight) Foster also noted that "Interments had previously been made here, although the Point of Graves had been the principal burial place. (p. 102)
1900. Portsmouth's population reached 10,637.
1907. An appropriation of \$50.00 was listed for "cemeteries" and also an expenditure for the same amount, paid to M. J. Griffin and Son. (CAR, 30)
1908. \$35.26 was paid out to Gardner V. Urch for labor on the police station and North Cemetery, as well as \$50.00 for M. J. Griffin. (CAR, 5)
1909. \$50.00 appropriation -- paid out to M. J. Griffin. (CAR, 49)
1910. Paid \$50.00 to M. J. Griffin for cutting grass. (CAR, 45)
1911. Paid \$50.00 to M. J. Griffin for cutting grass. (CAR, 42)
1913. Paid M. J. Griffin & Son for the care of the cemetery and cemetery work. (CAR, 43)
1914. Paid \$65.00 M. J. Griffin & Son for cemetery work. (CAR, 45)
1915. Paid \$50.00 to M. J. Griffin & Son for cemetery work. (CAR, 45)
1916. Paid \$50.00 to M. J. Griffin & Son for cemetery work. (CAR, 45)

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1917. Paid \$50.00 to M. J. Griffin & Son for cemetery work. (CAR, 48)
1918. Paid \$100.00 to M. J. Griffin & Son for care of the cemetery. (CAR, 54)
1924. The City Annual Report noted that improvements had been made to Maplewood Avenue, including construction of curb, sidewalk and retaining wall (concrete and 230' in length). (CAR, 75) Also in 1924, a \$100.00 appropriation was made for the cemeteries. (CAR. 50)
1927. The Portsmouth Herald reported that the "Society for the Care of the South Cemetery in Portsmouth" was formed in 1857, and included Proprietors (1830), Harmony Grove (1847), Sagamore, and Cotton (1671), all adjoining. (5/28/1927)
1928. The CAR reported that a \$100.00 appropriation was made for the cemeteries. (CAR, 52)
1929. The CAR reported that a \$100.00 appropriation was made for the cemeteries. (CAR, 58)
1930. Portsmouth's population reached 14,495, with the greatest concentration in Ward 2.
1946. The CAR included the Mayor's inaugural address in which he appointed a cemetery committee, which would be "permanent in the future." (Item 11 of the Address)
- 1948, 1949, 1950. The CAR listed \$550.00 budgeted in each of the three years for the cemeteries.
1950. In May of this year, The Portsmouth Herald published an article, "Old Cemeteries Wasting Away." In this, the paper described the condition of North and Union Cemeteries: "The North and Union Cemeteries off Maplewood Avenue on the short of the North Mill Pond stood knee-high in grass and weeds. More than a dozen headstones had been knocked over, and some had been dragged from theirs...a wooden fence that once stood on the side facing the railroad tracks has long since rotted away, leaving the cemetery open to tramps and vandals."
1965. The Portsmouth Herald reported that litter and vandals had befouled North Burying Ground. The grass was knee-deep, litter and debris was scattered throughout, and vandals had overturned stones and smashed them). An image included in the article shows chain link on the south side. (6/5/1965)
1968. The Portsmouth Herald reported that vandalism had occurred at North Cemetery, including the bending of iron fencing, and smashing of the top of an "ornamental tomb." (3/1/1968)

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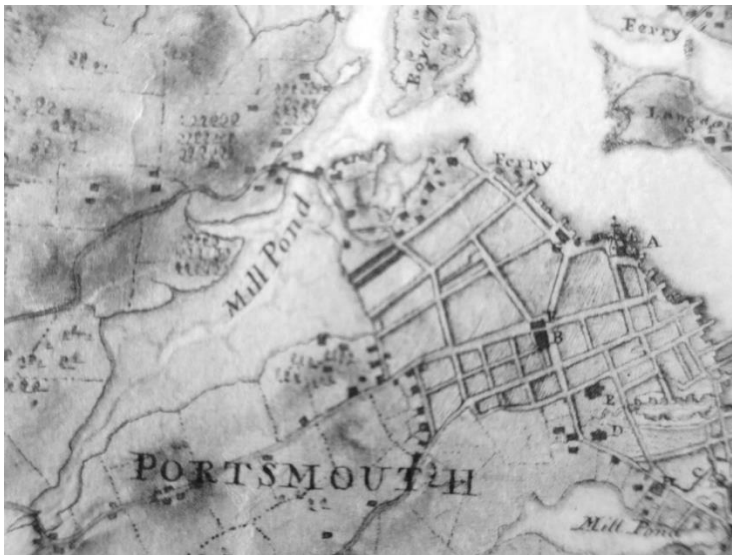
1977. In April of this year, The Portsmouth Herald published an editorial opinion: "An honor long overdue," noting "[t]he new green and white marker at North Cemetery, placed by the state to honor early provincial and state leaders, was long overdue." (4/25/1977)
1978. North Cemetery was placed on the National Register of Historical Places, and in the nomination, noted for its inclusion of the town's residents of the day, but also those who gave Portsmouth the beginnings of the diversity it enjoys today (first Jewish resident, a member of Portsmouth's first Roman Catholic parish, and the graves of several African American residents -- some marked and some not). (Knoblock, 49)
1989. The Portsmouth Herald reported that the marker of Olive H. Ayers had been returned and re-set at North Cemetery. The stone, dating to 1821, had been found in a resident's back yard and had been held at Strawberry Banke since 1988. (8/31/1989)
2003. In July, The Portsmouth Herald reported that workers in the ancient North Cemetery were repairing and straightening stones. Syphers Monument Company had reset several stones. (July 27, 2004)
2006. The Portsmouth Herald reported that signs had been placed at the historic cemeteries throughout the City (including North), through funding from the New Hampshire Charitable Fund. (10/10/2006)
2013. In September, John Wastrom, masonry consultant, completed a study of Portsmouth's historic cemeteries and burying grounds, "Existing Conditions Assessment Report and Restoration Plan." In this document, Wastrom estimated that the east wall at North Cemetery was constructed shortly after the cemetery was opened in the mid-18th century. (The source of this date is not provided in the report.)
2015. In July, The Portsmouth Herald reported that a "desecrated tomb [was] now clean and closed." The article referred to the receiving tomb at Union Cemetery, which had been severely vandalized, and had been cleaned and locked by officials. HarborCorp Development Company had committed a donation of \$20,000 for future work at North Cemetery. (7/1/2015)
2016. In August, The Portsmouth Herald reported that mason Thomas Ahern had deconstructed the 210-foot wall in front of North Cemetery, arranged and/or numbered the stones, and was putting it all back together again, one rock at a time. (8/21/2016)

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HISTORIC MAPS AND PHOTOGRAPHS



The Meserve Estate, ca 1740. (Portsmouth Athenaeum)

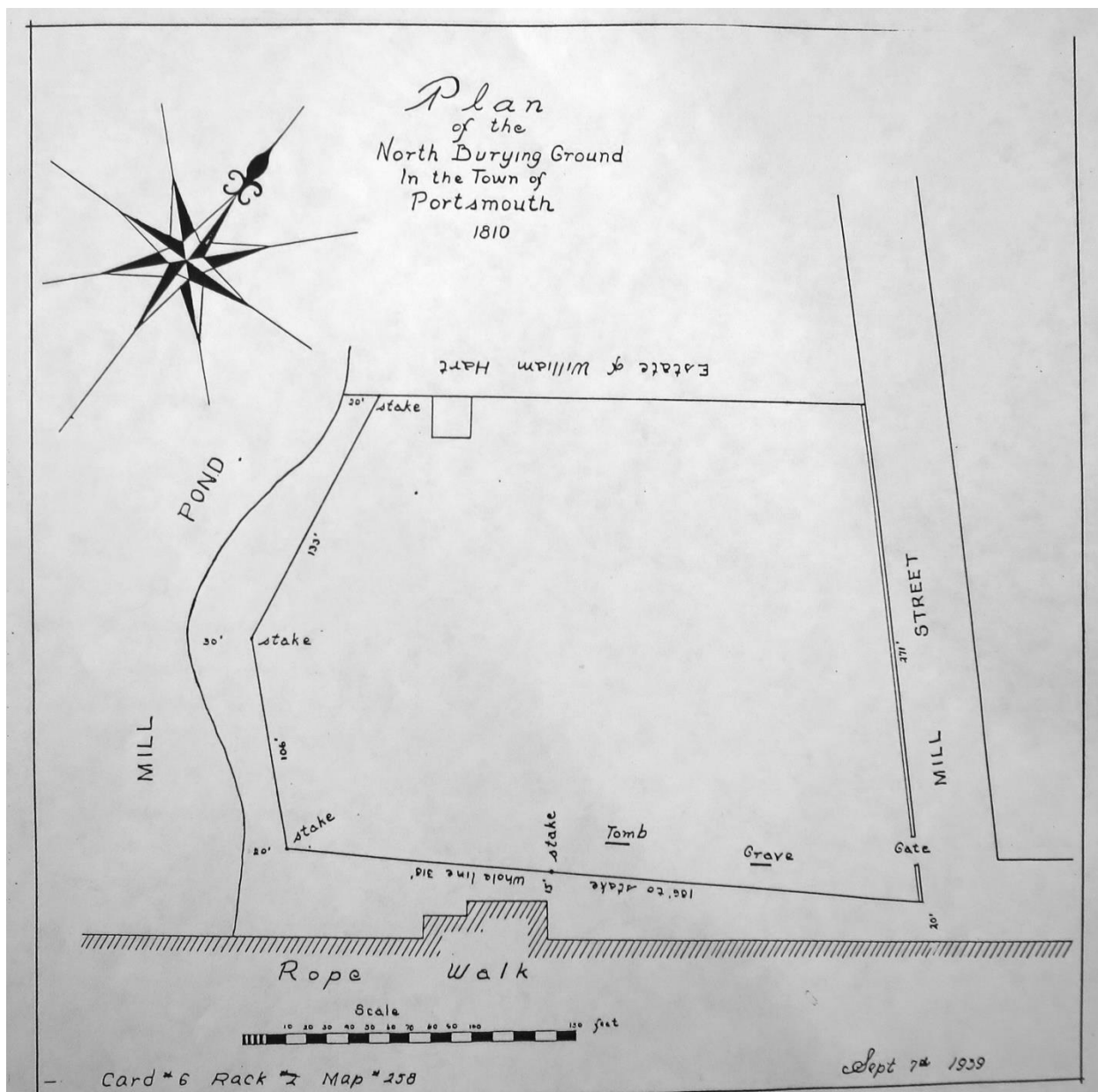


A Plan of Piscataqua Harbor, Town of Portsmouth, 1774. (Portsmouth Public Library)



Plan of the Town of Portsmouth, including Newcastle and Great Island, Phineas Merrill, 1805. (Portsmouth Public Library)

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Plan of the North Burying Ground in 1810. Drawn in September 1939. (Portsmouth Public Library Collection)

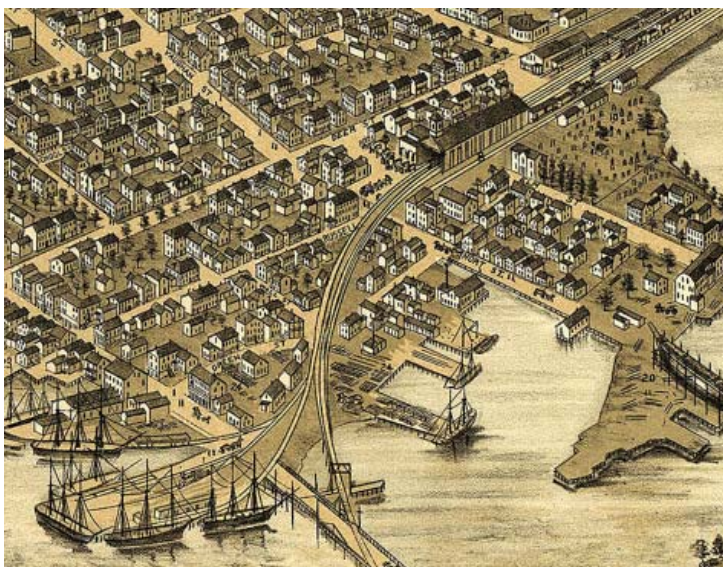
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Map of the Compact Part of the Town of Portsmouth in the State of New Hampshire, J. G. Hales, 1813. (Portsmouth Public Library)



Map of the City of Portsmouth, NH, H. F. Walling, 1850 (Portsmouth Public Library)



Bird's Eye lithography of Portsmouth, J. J. Stoner, 1877.

This is a detailed historical map of a section of Deer Creek, Missouri. The map shows various land parcels owned by individuals such as J.G. Moses, Miss M. Moses, B.M. Rogers, W. Ward, O.W. Ham, Mrs. H. Seary, Mrs. Hurley, Mrs. M. Rauld, J.N. Rugg, S.I. Davis, S.D. Royce, J. Heft, T.E. Codd, Mrs. Bates, Mrs. Greenady, Mrs. Martin Est., Mrs. E., Mrs. W., Noble Est., O.W. Ham, Green, D.S., Mrs. Johnson, D. Mason, Mrs. C., Mrs. Dunbar, J.W. Martin, and S.H. Hammond. Key locations include the TH MILL POND, Raines Est., Brester Est., J.C. Moses, Maplewood, WendeLL St., Jackson, Green, Plank Mill, Union R.R. Station, and Deer Creek Depot. Two cemeteries are shown: one with crosses and another with plus signs. The map also depicts several streets including Wendell St., Jackson, Green, Plank, and Deer Creek. A railroad line runs through the lower portion of the map, passing the Union R.R. Station and the Deer Creek Depot. The map is oriented with North at the top, and the creek flows from the bottom towards the top right.

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Images of the North End and North Cemetery from Gurney, C. S., Portsmouth Historic and Picturesque, 1902.



North Cemetery in 1942, depicted in Glenn A. Knoblock's Portsmouth Cemeteries, 2005.



National Register of Historic Places
Nomination for North Cemetery, 1977.

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National Register of Historic Places
Nomination, 1977.

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Gurney, C. S., Portsmouth Historic and Picturesque. Portsmouth: Strawberry Banke, 1902 (Reprinted 1981).

Knoblock, Glenn A., Portsmouth Cemeteries. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005.

Pearson, Helen and Harold Hotchkiss Bennett, Vignettes of Portsmouth. Portsmouth: Pearson and Bennett, 1913.

Maps (arranged chronologically)

1774. A Plan of Piscataqua Harbor, the Town of Portsmouth

1805. Plan of the Town of Portsmouth, including Newcastle and Great Island, Phinehas Merrill

1810. Plan of the North Burying Ground in the Town of Portsmouth (drawn 1939)

1813. Map of the Compact Part of the Town of Portsmouth in the State of New Hampshire, J. G. Hales

1850. Map of the City of Portsmouth, NH, H. F. Walling

1877. Portsmouth, bird's eye lithograph, J. J. Stoner

1878. Sanborn Map of Portsmouth, NH, Sanborn Fire Insurance Company

1888. Map of the City of Portsmouth, W. A. Greenough & Co., Boston

1892. Part of the City of Portsmouth, Town and City Atlas of the State of New Hampshire

1899. Map of the City of Portsmouth, W. A. Greenough & Co., Boston

1930. Olde Strawberry Banke, A Map of Portsmouth, An Old Town by the Sea, Vaughan & Rundlett

1955. "Land in Portsmouth, NH," Plan No. 02897

1966. "Vaughan Street Project," Plan No. D-2407 (2 Sheets)

North and Union Cemeteries, Portsmouth, New Hampshire
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Photographs

Franklin Pierce Volunteer Fireman's Building (Ward Room No. 1), Portsmouth Athenaeum PS0856
Franklin Pierce Volunteer Firemen's Building with Poplars in North Cemetery, Portsmouth Athenaeum PS0856-2
"Old North Cemetery," National Register of Historic Places Nomination, April 1976 (2 images)

Public Documents

City of Portsmouth Annual Reports – 1840-1950.²¹

National Register of Historic Places Nomination for North Cemetery, May 1977.

Portsmouth Records, 1645-1656 (a transcript of the first thirty five pages of the earliest town book),
Portsmouth, NH, with notes by Frank W. Hackett, 1866.

Portsmouth Town Records, 1695 - 1779

Wastrom, John, "Existing Conditions Assessment Report and Restoration Plan, Historic Burying Grounds
and Cemeteries, Portsmouth, New Hampshire," September 9, 2013.

Newspaper Articles

Portsmouth Herald:

5/24/1851, "Public burial grounds."

8/14/1869, "A ramble in our cemeteries."

1884, "Michael J. Griffin appointed superintendent at city burying grounds."

5/28/1927, "Society for the Care of South Cemetery in Portsmouth, NH."

6/5/1965, "Resting place of famous disgrace to city."

3/1/1968, "Vandalism reported."

8/31/1989, "Olive H. Ayers marker returned."

10/10/2006, "Signs placed at historic cemeteries."

Daily Morning Chronicle:

5/9/1853, "A city cemetery."

²¹ Separate expenditures were not listed for each of the burying grounds. The City Council did maintain a committee dedicated to burying grounds for a short period of time, but no individual reports were filed on the cemeteries' status.

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Deeds

North Cemetery:

Libre 0041, Folio 0098 (John Hart to the Town of Portsmouth), July 26, 1753

Libre 0184, Folio 0233 (William Cutter to the Town of Portsmouth), January 12, 1809

Union Cemetery:

Libre 0314, Folio 0062 (Benjamin Carter, John G. Brewster and Thomas D. Dailey to____ for Union Cemetery), June 20, 1844

Libre 0350, Folio 0137 (Jonathan Barker to John H. Bartlett for Lease of Lot No. 13 in Union Cemetery), May 4, 1852

Libre 0350, Folio 0137 (John Ham Bartlett to Joseph H. Berry for Lease of Lot No. 13 in Union Cemetery), May 4, 1852

Libre 0350, Folio 0138 (Kittredge Sheldon to Oliver Hanscom for lease of Lot No.1 in Union Cemetery), April 30, 1852

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