



NEWSLETTER 2021

April 2021

www.FriendsofMiddleboroughCemeteries.org

www.FACEBOOK.COM/THEFoMC

The Friends of Middleborough Cemeteries Inc. is a 501(c)3 organization operated solely by Volunteers. No one is paid therefore we depend on donations to support the organization. You can donate by sending a check to Friends of Middleborough Cemeteries Inc, P.O. Box 172, Middleborough, MA 02346 or via PayPal.

The purposes of the corporation are as follows:

1. To preserve, maintain and restore the cemeteries located in Middleborough, Massachusetts including the graves, burial grounds, and burial plots,
2. To promote and improve awareness of the history and care of Middleborough cemeteries
3. To preserve and promote the memory of those persons interred within Middleborough, Massachusetts.

If anyone is interested in checking us out, we have monthly volunteer meetings (currently held on ZOOM) on the third Thursday at 7:00 PM. Please send an email to clerk@friendsofmiddleboroughcemeteries.org if you would like to join us at the meetings and you will be sent a ZOOM invitation usually two days before the meeting..

Please feel free to forward this Newsletter to anyone you know who might be interested. We are always looking for new friends and volunteers. There are many opportunities available.

Volunteer Opportunities

For those of you who like to get out in the Fresh Air or who have computer skills and are interested in Genealogy Research check, out the opportunities on the next page.

The **Documentation and Cleaning Team** will begin work in the cemeteries sometime in May or June weather permitting.

Anyone interested can specify if they are interested in one or both. All volunteers will be trained on the proper way to do each. Documenting is easy with a specialized form for this purpose. All cleaners will be supplied with all the tools necessary. Anyone interested in learning one or both can contact me.

Chris Hubble

Email: cehubble@comcast.net

508-697-4763

The Veteran's Team will also be starting their Field Research in May or June (weather permitting).

The Veterans Field Research consists of going into the cemeteries and walking up and down each aisle checking for any indication that the interred may have served in the US Military. We have a pre-existing list of names from 1982 and we know many of our loved ones have passed since then so we need to find them and add them to the list. We work in teams of two people each. One to Read the stones and One to Check the list and verify the information we have on the list against what is written on the stone. If the person is not already on the list, a form will be filled out so we can add them to the list. We generally only work from around 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM but you can leave at any time if needed. If you can walk, read and write, you are qualified to help.

For those people who want to volunteer but have mobility issues but have computer skills and are interested in the Genealogy of our Veterans, you can help by researching the Veterans from the list. This information will be used to validate that the person did serve in the Military. You will be given a Flash Drive with a list of names from our list of Potential Veterans that were identified during the Field Research. You can use one or more of the Genealogy sites to look for records to add to the Veteran's Profile. This information may be used in a future exhibit to honor the Middleborough Veteran 's. In the past we did an Exhibit at the Middleborough Public Library on Civil War Veterans which was very successful. The information will also be entered into a searchable database that is in the process of being created for the Veterans interred in Middleborough, Massachusetts. We also hope to add all people interred in Middleborough Cemeteries to this database as well.

If any of this work to Honor Our Veterans sounds like something you would like to help with, please contact Ginny Kraus at clerk@friendsofmiddleboroughcemeteries.org or Tel: 508-468-5925

The Stories In The Stones

John Tomson

by Jeff Stevens for the Friends of Middleborough Cemeteries



Gravestones like the John Tomson stone may well be the only way our grandchildren see our historic gravestones in Middleboro. If you go to the back of the Nemasket Hill Cemetery, on the crest of the hill, you find some of the oldest stones, dating back to the 1690s. Before that, graves were marked with wooden posts called "rails" that have all rotted away over the centuries. John Tomson died in 1696 and would have had a very old stone if it was made at the time of his death. This stone isn't made of local slate and has an image created by Beza Soule that wasn't made until the 1780's. It is a replacement stone. John and his wife Mary are buried side by side and each has a "new" stone with their names and dates and images that would not have been on their original markers. The originals are gone. Let's hope the family is caring for them. Our old stones are going fast and may not be seen by future generations.

John Tomson has an interesting story. He moved to Middleboro from Plymouth and he was the commander of the local militia during the uprising of native people that we call King Philip's War. When the war broke out, the local people took refuge in the "fort" that was close to the Nemasket River behind what is now the Early Childhood Center (the 1927 High School). John brought along his long gun, an early hunting piece that was over 7 feet long. An Indian came over several days, stood across the river, and made insulting gestures towards the fort. The garrison decided to have their best marksman, Isaac Howland, use the long gun to solve the problem. The shot hit

Stories in the Stones (continued)

and killed the offending native in what was considered a truly remarkable shot. Middleboro's early settlers stayed in the fort for about 6 weeks before escaping to Plymouth. The fort and all the early homes were burned down and the Tomson's and others only returned to rebuild when the war was over. For many years, an historic marker on Route 105 commemorates the fort, the obscene gestures, and the remarkable marksmanship. It may have been the only historic marker to an obscene gesture in the country !

Our wonderful gravestones have marked the final resting places of our ancestors and early settlers for over 300 years. The soft local slate that they were made from is breaking apart from standing on end during our winters. Cutting the grass in the old cemeteries can damage stones accidentally, and increased acid rain and air pollution lead to algae and lichen growth on stones that eat into and destroy the images and words on the stones. Few stones will survive the next hundred years. Get out and look at these pieces of history. Sadly, even being carved in stone will not make them last forever.

Middleborough Cemeteries Trivia

Nemasket Hill Cemetery

Did you know?

By Jeri Thayer

Nemasket Hill Cemetery is the oldest Cemetery in Middleborough. The "History of Middleborough, Massachusetts" written by Thomas Weston, A.M. of the Suffolk bar writes. "It was set apart by the proprietors of the Twenty Men's Purchase in 1662, and was used by the early settlers as their only burial place for more than 2 generations. It was formerly known as Old Burial Hill, or simply, The Hill. The oldest stone is that of Elizabeth Vaughan who died June 24. 1693, aged sixty-two years."

Albert H. Washburn, 1866-1930, who is buried at Nemasket Hill Cemetery with his wife and children, served as "first envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary" to the Republic of Austria. He died in Vienna in 1930.

Ambassador Washburn donated the funds used to establish the Ann White Washburn scholarship, which is still to this day presented to graduating seniors, in memory of his mother.

More Trivia on Nemasket Hill Cemetery.

This response was written by Carol Damon, President of Nemasket Hill Cemetery

Inquiry:

Dear Sir: Next month my sister & I will visit your town. We would love to locate our ancestor's headstone. Lieutenant John Tomson 1617- 1696. Thank you kindly.

Carol Damon's Response:

Hi! Nemasket Hill is located at 515 Plymouth Street. The main entrance is closed, but if you drive to the end of the wooden fencing, there is another entrance. Take the first right heading back toward the main entrance. Just a little history, as you make your way to Jon Thomson...the arch and gates were provided by funds raised by a sewing circle that met across the street and erected in 1921. Turn left at the end of the road, keeping the building on your right this is a chapel (erected in 1911) that was partially provided by funds from the sewing circle and Count Magri held a tea party to obtain funding, as well. Take your far right after the chapel driveway...this is Prospect Avenue. As you drive, look for steps on your left. If you go up the steps, please notice the small outlined grave.. it is for Minnie Bump. She was the sister- in-law of Tom Thumb. Minnie also appeared in Barnum and Bailey's circus with her sister, Lavinia and Tom. She died in childbirth as she was giving birth to a full size baby. Minnie was actually smaller than her sister or Tom at 34 inches. As you continue driving, there is a mausoleum for Washburn. The Washburns owned the first and oldest grain mill in the country until it burned about 15 years ago. The mausoleum was purchased through Sears and Roebuck Catalog and arrived in pieces on the railroad. Multiple buckboards were on hand to bring the stone to be assembled. If you continue straight, there is a gated lot in front of you. This was an ambassador to Austria. Take a moment to enter. Immediately On your left inside, there is a small, rounded stone. It is the Mike marker from the Ambassadors home in Austria. Walk beyond the tablets...which are the only ones at Nemasket. Look down the back of the lot. You will see the Nemasket River. There was a footbridge that the townspeople used to bring their departed to the cemetery. Notice the steep hill. There are 22 steps leading up from the river. So, you are actually in the "front" of the cemetery. Notice as you travel along the oldest stones are found here. Once back in your car, the river meanders along on your right. On the left, look for Tosh stone, somewhat across from Cornish on the river side. Once you have found Tosh, which is not a very long drive from Ambassador...maybe 3 car lengths...Thomson stone will be behind/beside Tosh. Recently, I was sent an article from a Boston newspaper dates 1860s. It stated the Thomson's had a reunion at which they decided to build a life sized statue of Jon, so they had him and his wife exhumed. He was 7ft 2 in tall with blonde hair and there was a story that Mary fighting off Indians with a rifle got 2 teeth knocked out from the

Carol Damon's Response (continued)

strength of the gun. It was true, Mary was missing 2 front teeth. So, they reinterred them in copper caskets and buried them very, very deep and filled it in to create a base for the statue out of bedrock. You may notice what appears to be an outline of rock, which would make you think it is the boundary of a lot. The statue never happened, so years later, the Thomson society had replicas of their stones made. About 2 years ago, I received a phone call from a pub in New Bedford as they found

Mary's original stone in the pub's foundation. They turned it over to Plymouth. Jon's long gun is in the Taunton museum. As you stand here, look around. You will see the oldest stones in the cemetery. I sprayed them with D2, which is an environmentally safe product that works with the sun to kill off vegetational growth. It is working as you now can start to read them. Enjoy your trip. Best wishes. Carol President of the Nemasket Hill Cemetery Association. FYI we are all volunteer, no paid employees and are trying to rehab the chapel so it may once again be used for its intended purpose. If you would like to make a donation toward our efforts, there is a drop box on the chapel door or you may send it to Carol Damon 651 Seekell Street East Taunton, MA 02718. No amount is too small 😊 ..

Look for our next Newsletter in June where we will have another "Stories in the Stones" and highlighting a different cemetery in the "Middleborough Cemeteries Trivia" with interesting information you may not have known.