



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

Restoration expert Rob Surabian works to right headstones at Rockport's Old First Parish Burying Ground, which dates to the early 1700s.

Monument makeover

Burying Ground stones being restored

By Stephen Hagan

» Staff Writer

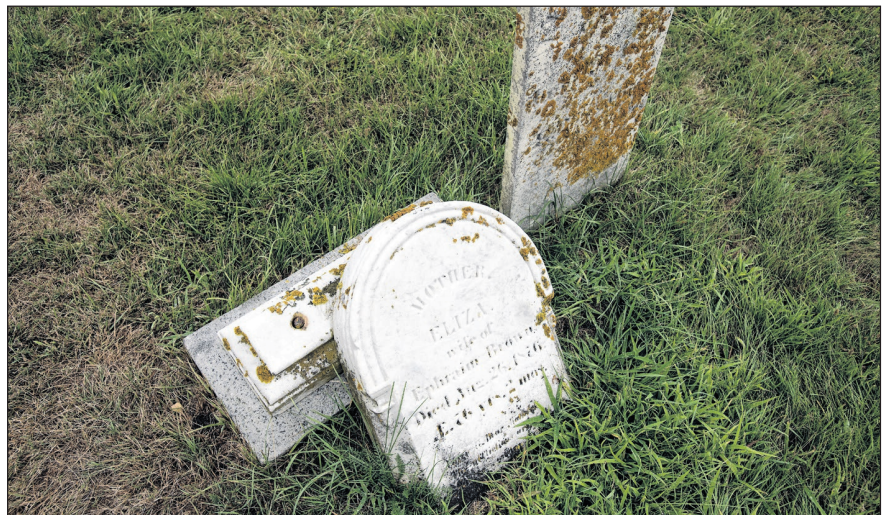
ROCKPORT — Many visitors to Old First Parish Burying Ground, which dates to the early 1700s, often struggle to make out the faded names etched on the headstones.

“I live right around the corner and I see so many people trying to read the names and they can’t,” said Andrea Quinn, a member of the the Sandy Bay Historical Society’s Board of Directors.

A \$100,000 restoration project is taking place at the cemetery, located off Beach Street across from Front Beach. Quinn said the three-year effort, which started three weeks ago, will restore and clean the gravestones.

“It is in poor condition,” she said of the Burying Ground, also known as Sandy Bay Cemetery. “Most stones are broken, dirty and faded with age. The walking path can be difficult for some to ambulate through due to frequent runoff from rain. We’d also like to improve upon the path.”

The work, she said, is designed to make the stones’ etchings legible. It will include the addition of quick response (QR)



Rockport’s Old First Parish Burying Ground, which dates to the early 1700s, is in the midst of a renovation project. Many headstones have faded or fallen off their pedestals, as seen here.

barcodes that will enable visitors to conduct self-guided tours at the burial ground.

cemetery, Quinn said, many with connections to modern-day Gloucester and Rockport families.

Rockport history

There are 540 people buried in the

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State Sen. Bruce Tarr, R-Gloucester, is a descendent of Richard Tarr, the very first person buried there in 1732, as well as Jabez Tarr, a Revolutionary War hero.

“This historic burial ground is not only the sacred place that holds many of those people that have built the town but also a rich cultural resource that gives us an ongoing opportunity to connect with and an understanding of the humanity and legacy of residents that have come before us and their place in history,” Tarr said. “The people making this restoration happen deserve our thanks and support for making sure this treasure will endure into the future.”

More than a few of Rockport’s earliest settlers are buried there, including the Tarrs, Pooles and Hales. Hannah Jumper, a leader of the Rockport Temperance movement in 1856 who died in 1865 is also buried there.

Other notable Rockport residents who are buried in

the cemetery include Revolutionary War soldiers with the names Saville, Abbott and Knowlton.

“Many of our residents can tie their ancestry to someone buried in this cemetery,” Quinn said.

But the aging cemetery needs work as names on many headstone have faded over the years.

“I would say that 95 percent or more (of the burial ground) is in need of restoration,” Quinn said. “The initial phase of the restoration of the stones has started.”

Restoration expert Rob Surabian has been hired to conduct much of the work, she said.

The work ahead

The project budget is being funded partly by volunteer contributions, Quinn said. Some materials for the project have been donated by Rockport Department of Public Works, which maintains the cemetery.

“They’ve been great partners so far,” Quinn said. “We received approval from the Sandy Bay Historical Society that saw this as a worthwhile project.”

The project also will restore a shed used to house an old funeral hearse that dates to the 1800s. Quinn said work on the shed to the shed will include painting, adding “anti-glare” windows and new lighting.

“It’s in fairly good condition,” Quinn said of the hearse. “We’re going to replace the glass and put some lighting in there.”

Gravestones in the cemetery are covered by moss and dirt and many are broken, said Rich Fitzpatrick, chairperson of Sandy Bay Historical Society’s Old 5th Parish Burial Ground Restoration Committee. The committee is part of the .

“Many have sunken to where they’re no longer erect,” he said. “Our goal is to clean the stones and remove the lichens and moss and to repair the broken stones with modern safe techniques. We want to repair them to the most contemporary standards with modern techniques.”

Fitzpatrick said the project will not disturb any of the graves.

“It’s going to look great,” he

said. “We’ll create more access and visibility from the street. It will mean a lot to Rockporters. It will make Rockport even more proud of its history.”

Help on the way

Quinn estimated there are approximately 1,500 members of the society, including about 15 members of its Board of Directors. Members may be called on to volunteer for the project, she said.

Society members plan to solicit Rockport student volunteers who will need to complete 40 hours of community service before they graduate.

The Boy Scouts may also be enlisted to help.

“It also may be a good project for an Eagle Scout candidate,” Quinn said. “We’re trying to reach out to local scout leaders to see if someone can volunteer.”

Contributions can be made to the restoration project via a GoFundMe account at <https://gofund.me/53525e24>.

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