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## Historic cemetery damaged, board okays quick repairs

By Steven Schwadron

The Provincetown selectmen declared an emergency Monday to circumvent a lengthy bidding process to repair damage by vandals to the fence protecting the historic Oldest Cemetery.

Two selectmen, Dick Henrique and Fred Ambrose, opposed the motion because they said the situation, while serious, did not constitute a legal emergency.

Early Friday morning, vandals ripped down 150 feet of fencing around the cemetery erected just two weeks ago by CETA workers renovating the area. The commission is offering a \$200 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the vandals.

The most damage occurred on the Court Street side of the cemetery, where the oldest stones are located.

Originally, officials planned to reinforce the fence so it would last for at least two or three years and to plant shrubbery around the cemetery this spring. The shrubbery would grow thick enough to act as natural protection for the cemetery, which has gravestones dating back more than 200 years. However, the commission held off

on the spring planting because of the town's precarious water supply.

Fred Klein, commission chairman, asked the selectmen Monday to declare an emergency so repairs would not be tied to a cumbersome formal bidding process. Bylaws require a major project to follow specific bidding procedures, which Klein said would take six weeks to two months.

"We're coming into the tourist season now," he said. "It won't take more than a breeze to blow down what's left of that fence."

Klein said the commission wants to fence the entire perimeter of the cemetery, a total of about 700 feet. He later said one informal estimate for installing a chain-link fence was \$4600, but that the commission has not yet decided what kind of fence it wants.

The selectmen okayed the request with two conditions. First, at least three bids must be sought. Klein said he intended to get more than three bids. Also, the selectmen retained the right to review the bid selection.

Commission members adamantly asserted by Town Meeting vote the cemetery was their jurisdiction. The selectmen do not have the right to interfere, they said.

Henrique and Ambrose opposed the request because they said it did not constitute an emergency. Recently the selectmen have called emergencies during the winter storms and because of possible gasoline contamination of the water table.

"You can't call this an emergency," Henrique said. "A decaying fence was damaged by vandalism." Town crews could make patch repairs while a formal bid process is conducted. The intent of the bylaw requiring that process is clear, Henrique said.

But Selectman Mary-Jo Avellar said the cemetery is a valuable piece of real estate that has suffered from neglect and is now in immediate danger.

In response to questions, Klein said temporary fencing would not be sufficient. He said the vandalism upset him so much that he almost carted the historic grave markers to Town Hall for safekeeping.

"I'm sorry I have to say this, but I'm very angry," Klein said. "When we have animals doing this kind of thing, we have to put up something to keep the animals out."

Henrique said no fence would keep out a person with a strong desire to vandalize the cemetery.

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## Historic cemetery to be cleaned

Preston Babbitt, chairman of the Provincetown Historical Commission, has organized a clean-up to restore and remove broken bottles and trash from the town's oldest cemetery between Court and Winthrop Streets.

Babbitt recruited Provincetown and Truro Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts to aid in the clean-up, but he said any person who wants to get involved, especially those with pruning shears, should meet at the Shank Painter parking lot at one o'clock on Saturday.

"There's always been quite a bit of vandalism" at the cemetery, Babbitt said. But the commission will soon be replacing the present three-foot-high fence with a six-foot chain-link fence, which Babbitt hopes will deter the vandals "at least a little."

"If it won't keep them out, a six-foot fence will at least slow down people older than 12," Babbitt said.

Money for the fence and for an erosion control program the commission started was appropriated at town meeting four years ago.

"But we couldn't decide what kind of fence to get, and then we tried to get extra money from the Bicentennial, and what ended up happening was that the money just sat there," Babbitt said.

Erosion of the sandy soil from the cemetery's hillside site is caused by school children cutting through it, Babbitt said. In order to help hold soil on the hill, the commission is building a set of broad steps with railroad ties on its Court Street side.

Garbage bags for the clean-up have been donated by Dyer's Hardware and the A&P, Babbitt said. "I'm trying to stir up some enthusiasm about this wonderful old cemetery."

The oldest stone in the cemetery dates back to 1724, said Babbitt, "though I haven't found it yet. But there are some wonderful slate stones from 1780 that are in almost new condition. A lot of the stones, however, have fallen down or been tipped over. Some of them were actually smashed by someone," Babbitt said.