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Old cemetery to be restored

By NEIL NICKERSON

PROVINCETOWN — There's an old cemetery in Provincetown, between Court and Winthrop streets, that's been around a long time, about 270 years, and steps are underway to restore it to conditions it was in the late 1800's and early 1900's.

Arthur Bickers, 81, of 6 Central St., chairman of the

town historical commission, in a conducted tour of the ancient burying ground, pointed out the many broken grave stones.

Much of the damage was done during the recent winter, he said. Oldest grave in the cemetery, according to gravestone, was for a Cowing—first names were not clear—who died and was buried in 1723.

Bickers, long associated with the Pilgrim Memorial Monument, and an expert in the history of the town, said there is only \$500 available to aid in restoring the cemetery, and he doubts if that can go far.

One of the better looking tablets was that established in memory of the four persons who died while the Mayflower was in Provincetown harbor

in 1620.

This stone was set up in memory of Dorothy May Bradford, the wife of Governor Bradford, a drowning victim, and to James Chilton, Jasper Moore and Edward Thompson. This stone was erected by the Research Club during the 300th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims. The Research Club has merged with the Pilgrim Memorial Museum.

There are many visitors to the old cemetery, Bickers said, and the hope is to have it in good condition for the Pilgrim celebrations this fall, commemorating the first Thanksgiving.

Vandals spared no particular section, and even Bickers' great grandparents' stone was knocked over and

splintered. His great grandmother, Gemime Caton, wife of Emmanuel Caton, was born in 1796 and died in 1868.

In one section of the cemetery, vandals took stones, bases and all, and the beer cans in one area signify that drinking parties are not unusual. The area is fenced in, but it is not effective, Bickers said. In one instance, he said, pieces of stone from the cemetery found their way into one barbecue pit.

The names on the headstones standing depict much of Provincetown's past the Nickersons are prominently a part of the past, as are the Catons, the Pierces, Dunhams and others, and many of the streets of the town were named for them.

In those old day, there apparently was a formal atmosphere because there's one headstone of a man who died in 1850, that bears the word "Mr." before the given name.

Another thing that indicates the age of the cemetery is the "hens and chickens" plants, growing wild. Bickers said this is a sign of an ancient area. The plants, which get hardly above ground level, resemble small cabbages, and it was believed come from the cabbage family.

"We are striving for restoration of the cemetery to what it was years ago," he said. "We have \$500 to work with—I don't think we can do much with that," he added.

May 11, 1944

See first picture on next page.

About the Old Cemetery

The June 6, 1912 issue of the Provincetown Advocate had a story telling something of Provincetown's oldest cemetery. It is a story which was read at a meeting of the Research Club whose members at that time were interested in the restoration of this cemetery. Since the publication of that story the club placed a bronze marker there in memory of the Mayflower passengers who died in Provincetown prior to the landing of the Pilgrims in Plymouth.

The names inscribed on the marker are Dorothy May Bradford (drowned in Provincetown Harbor, Edward Thomson, Jasper Moore and James Chilton.

The cemetery in which these Mayflower passengers were buried was destroyed in 1873 in the laying out of Bradford Street. It was situated at the head of Franklin Street, the oldest street in town and named in honor of Benjamin Franklin. Not far from the foot of this street was the pond in which the Pilgrim mothers did their first washing in the New World. At one time the house abutting this early historic site bore a marker attesting this fact, and the house was named "Pilgrim Mothers." My mother, Mrs. Anna C. Snow, (nee Lancy) was born in this little Cape Cod house and so through sentiment I have kept the little home although most of the land surrounding it has been taken or bought by others. I believe the family now living in the little house thought the name and sign attracted too much attention and so removed them.

Gertrude DeWager.

Provincetown Advocate, Thursday, April 6, 1978

Restoration

Restoration work began Monday at Provincetown's oldest cemetery as part of the historical commission's four-year plan to improve it.

Barnicoat and Sons, a West Yarmouth monument and sign firm, started working on the tombstones Monday. Many of the stones have settled over the years, burying their engravings. Others have been knocked over and defaced.

The company will remove the stones and set them in concrete in the same location. This will prevent settling in the future and give them a firm base to

stand on.

Problems developed immediately when schoolchildren put their footprints in wet cement while it was drying. Members of the historical commission ask that people stay away from the cement. The stones marred by footprints will have to be re-set.

Wayne Barnicoat said Tuesday that he uncovered a tombstone laid in 1727, the oldest found so far. It belonged to Mary Bacon. Others dated in the 1930s have been found. Barnicoat said he expects to find other old ones partially buried. Once the stones have been set in concrete Barnicoat will work on cleaning up the engravings and faces of the tombstones.