

North End Burying Ground, Southampton, New York Gravestone Preservation Workshop, September 22 – 24, 2016

SUMMARY

The Town of Southampton's Historic Division sponsored a burying ground workshop on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, September 22 – 24, 2016 at the North End Burying Ground, under the auspices of Town Clerk Sundy A. Schermeyer. Professional stone conservator Joel C. Snodgrass, a principal with Steward Preservation Services, demonstrated "best practices" and provided training for participants who attended the public session on Saturday, September 24. Approximately 15 participants attended the public session and one volunteer assisted on Thursday and Friday. The event was generously supported by the Howell Family Association, over 50 of whose ancestors are interred at the site, which dates from the early 1700s.

This year's program focused on the repair of slate and sandstone tablets of Howell family members, as well as restoration of a monumental marble King family obelisk, whose broken condition required stabilization. Because of its height and weight, the obelisk was disassembled, old cement repairs removed, and its base leveled before reassembly with structural adhesives. The shaft of the obelisk had broken and was no longer secure, causing a safety hazard for visitors to the site. Repairing the Howell family tablets enabled the conservator to demonstrate special techniques reserved for slates and sandstones, which are prone to delamination. Employing liquid grouts and capping mortars, Snodgrass repaired eight of the headstones in danger of disintegration. In addition, the marble headstone of Frederick, infant son of Elmira J. and Frederick Howell, Sr., was repaired and reset. Its brownstone base was found buried in line with other family members. Approximately 40 marble headstones – including Howell family stones – were treated with an antimicrobial solution that cleans unsightly mold and lichen.

The program was the most recent in a series of annual burying ground workshops designed to advance the goal of repairing and preserving the town's historic headstones while demonstrating techniques employed in the work to the general public. The workshop was offered free of charge. The Town of Southampton owns and maintains ten historic burying grounds, of which the North End Burying Ground is the largest with 668 headstones. In 2015, in celebration of the town's 375th anniversary, the Old Southampton Burying Ground was restored with support from the Robert D. L. Gardiner Foundation.

DESCRIPTION

After meeting at the site with Town Historian Zach Studenroth, stone conservator Joel Snodgrass developed a list of objectives for the three-day workshop. These included restoration of the King obelisk previously identified as a high priority for stabilization. Numerous Howell family headstones were selected on the basis of a range of conditions, with "at risk" sandstones demonstrating advanced delamination identified as a priority treatment. Tasks such as removing

lichens and applying an antimicrobial cleaning agent were reserved for volunteer participation. The goal for the three-day workshop was to restore the King monument, stabilize and repair between six and ten headstones, and treat as many stones with the cleaning agent as time allowed.

Day One

On Thursday, the focus was preparing the King monument (ID #286) for restoration. Due to its height, weight and composite design consisting of a tapering shaft supported on two marble bases and resting on a rubble stone footing, care was taken to erect a large hoist capable of lifting the heavy pieces and lowering them to the ground in order to level the lower base. A complicating factor was that the shaft was previously broken and repaired with hard cement which had failed, leaving its upper portion unsecured. Each component of the obelisk was cleaned of cement and biogrowth, and the lower base was leveled with slate shims.

Five Howell tablets were prepared for multi-step treatments (ID #189, # 190, #191, #404 & #405). These sandstones were selected as a high priority due to advanced delamination. Preparation included removing loose stone from within cracks and behind loose layers using an air hose and hand techniques. Treatment using liquid grout injected behind the layers and tinted mortar to cap the edges is a two-day repair, to be undertaken on Days Two and Three.

A small marble stone leaning against the headstone of Millicent J. Howell (ID #434) was observed to be that of infant Frederick, and resetting it identified as an objective.

Day Two

On Friday, the objective was to reassemble the King monument (ID #286), begin grouting five Howell headstones (ID #189, # 190, #191, #404 & #405), and apply antimicrobial solution to approximately 40 stones in the southeast corner of the site (ID #1 – #42). The upper base and tapered shaft of the King monument were prepared for hoisting after the lower base had been leveled, shimmed and mortared, and allowed to set over night. All of the elements, cleaned of cement repair mortars, were “dry fit” before application of structural adhesive and reattachment. The repair was scheduled for Friday to enable the structural adhesive to set overnight, allowing for removal of excess adhesive and application of mortar fills on the final day.

Grout injection on stones #189, # 190, #191, #404 & #405 was begun. Each stone was completed to about the mid-point, allowing for the grout to set and final injection and edge caps, to be done on the final day.

Day Three

On Saturday, the “public” day, approximately fifteen participants attended. The majority of participants observed the repair process and learned about techniques, materials, etc. Several others came prepared to work; these participants were shown cleaning procedures (plastic

scrapers, brushes) and techniques of applying the antimicrobial solution. Approximately 15 stones were cleaned.

Conservation treatments continued. The joints of the King monument (ID #286) were pointed with mortar, liquid grout injected into the five Howell stones (ID #189, # 190, #191, #404 & #405) which were then capped, and open joints in three additional slate and sandstone Howell stones were capped (ID #167, #168 & #169).

The infant Howell headstone was repaired and reset, after probing discovered its original brownstone base and marble stub. This was found below grade in the gap between the headstones of Millicent J. Howell (ID #434) and Elmira J. Howell (ID # 435). The inscription on the stone identifies the infant Frederick Howell's parents to have been Elmira J. and Frederick Howell, Sr. (ID #436). A new number (ID #434A) will be assigned the stone and added to the survey.

CONCLUSION

The objectives of the three-day workshop were met. The tall King obelisk, which posed a safety concern due to its broken shaft, was disassembled, cleaned of failed repairs, and reset using a structural adhesive selected for climate and exterior application and pointing mortar. Eight Howell family headstones were grouted; five of them, all sandstones displaying severe delamination, were restored and three others were stabilized. The headstone of Frederick Howell was reattached to its base and reset in line with four other Howell family members, including the infant's mother and father. And another section of the burying ground was treated with antimicrobial solution, bringing the site closer to completion which is necessary before updating the photographic survey in undertaken (last performed in 2006).

The educational goal of the workshop was met as well. Participants came to observe or lend a hand, and many left contact information. One volunteer spent two days working alongside the conservator, gaining knowledge of techniques and materials used in the work. Others became familiar with the cleaning process and learned about new techniques that stabilize stones once thought beyond repair. The work was supported with a generous donation from the Howell Family Association, many of whose ancestors are interred at the site.