

## How DID the Barre Cemeteries Come Into Being?

by Dwight D. Harrington, Cemetery Commissioner 2014



Wilson Cemetery vault, fall of 2013

Recently, during a trip through the historical archives, a newspaper article came to light concerning Barre's cemeteries. The article appeared in the March 28, 1931 edition of the Barre Daily Times as part of a series of articles on Barre history written by Dean H. Perry, the paper's editor at the time. Perry prepared an in-depth series on Barre history in celebration of its 150th anniversary of its 1780 charter. Part 21 of 49 dealt with local cemeteries.

Local citizens began the search for locations for cemeteries in 1793, the year Wildersburgh officially became an organized town. The people of that era did not use the term cemetery, they chose the term, burying yard. The term lives on in Wilson Cemetery, the old maps show several areas designated as "Old Yard" with a number. They selected two areas, one on each side of the Jail Branch. One area lay on the road connecting Trow Hill to Cobble Hill, this might have been along what is now West Cobble Hill Road. The other area lay on the road from South Barre towards West Hill, this could be the current West Hill Cemetery.

The town selected the two parcels and went about the business of obtaining the properties from the owners. Unfortunately, by the next town meeting, 1794, they could not gain title to the lands. The citizens met again in 1795 and appointed a committee of three to obtain three different parcels of three acres each for use as burial yards. Attendees of the 1796 meeting heard from the committee, they had arranged to purchase six acres from Bartholomew French, four acres at \$10 each, more for the other two. When the voters considered accepting the proposal, they instead voted to obtain one and a half acres on the second division of the English School lot, an area already used for burials. A second area lay on lands of Lt. Jonas Nichols.

The second parcel, the Nichols land, is now known as the Wilson Cemetery. According to the March 16, 1797 deed, the lot began at a large hemlock stump on the road leading from Isaac Thompson's to Captain Nathan Harrington's on the west side of Nichols; thence running north along Thompson, 16 rods, a corner; thence easterly 10 rods, a corner; thence southerly 16 rods to the above mentioned road, a corner; thence westerly on the north side of the road to the first mentioned bound. The deed estimated the lot to be about one acre. A rod is an old measurement of land being 16 1/2 feet in length. Running the math, the plot would have been 264 feet by 165 feet in size, or 43,560 square feet, and indeed, one acre in size. These days, you can visit Jonas Nichols in Wilson Cemetery over in the "Old Yard 4," but the cemetery is much, much

larger since he sold that first parcel of land to the town. It is difficult to determine how long the burial yard has been in use, the oldest stone still readable found at Wilson has a date of 1798, a year after the deed had been signed and recorded.

Barre City and Barre Town became separate political entities back in 1895. The land records found in the Barre Town clerk's office stretch back from today to the beginning of the year 1895. References in deed book one send the reader back to say, Book 32. The Book 32 found in the town vault is not the one being referenced. Down in the Barre City vault, there are two sets of books, the first set contains Books 1 through 33 and reach back into the late 1700s. (Book 1, Page 1, Hyde to Banner, carries a date of 13 May 1793.) You can find the Nichols to the town deed in the old Book 1, page 207. Nichols sold the property for \$6.66, the selectmen of the town made the purchase. The deed listed Gardner Wheeler, Samuel Cook, and John Dodge as the selectman. [Cook's name is difficult to read and is a best guess.] Jonas Nichols signed the deed in front of witnesses Benjamin Walker and Jonathan Hollister. Walker also certified the deed as a justice of the peace, and Wheeler filed it on March 16, 1797 as the town clerk. Someone with a bit of time and a bit of knowledge about maps and deeds, would be able to track down more deeds that would show the growth of the Wilson Cemetery to its current size and configuration.

The year 1804 brought the Mower Cemetery to the town. Thomas Mower received a higher price for his land when he sold a half acre to the Barre selectmen, they paid Mower \$7.00. The deed can be found in the old books at Book 3, page 63. In part, the deed described the site as in the front of the first division lot of Matthew Lyons' right in Barre. "Beginning at a stake standing in the west line of said lot at the south side of the

road that leads to Paul Nas ...; thence east on the south side of said road to a ledge of rocks and to go south far enough to contain a half acre in a square form to be for use of the town of Barre for a burying ground." Thomas Mower signed the deed on 13 April in front of witnesses Jacob Scott and Brooke(?) Gale, sworn before Enos Town, Justice of the Peace, and the deed recorded on April 13, 1704. Residents now know it as the West Hill Cemetery, both Thomas Mower and Enos Town can be found there today.



The sun creeps in to the West Hill Cemetery on a warm summer day, the site used to be the Mower Cemetery when the town bought it.



Marker for Jonas Nichols who died in 1841 at the age of 96 years. (Old Yard 4, Wilson)

As the town grew and more of its citizens passed on, the need to add to the cemetery holdings arose. Tax payers purchased the rest of the Ezekiel Wood lands in the area of Elmwood to expand the area. According to the 1931 newspaper article, workers laid out the new cemetery in 1867 and by the publication date, this section had also been mostly filled as well.

Their work done, the citizens went about their business, the burying yard in place. Then, in 1816, the voters decided to obtain another one. The town raised \$150 to buy land next the widow of Ezekiel Wood's land. This land became Barre City's Elmwood Cemetery. This land, at the back side of Elmwood, also became the final resting place for those previously buried at the Cobble Hill burying ground, those interred there moved down from the hill. So far, no further information concerning the burial yard on Cobble Hill has been found. Apparently those interred there have been moved to Elmwood, the grounds they previously occupied reclaimed and now used for a different purpose.

Back in those days, the main road ran in a different location to connect Trow Hill and downtown. The old road came off the hill and proceeded in a more straight line through the location where the current Elmwood vault sits, then over the hill, across the old Spaulding High School lot, and through where the Masonic Temple is located. That would put the Elmwood Cemetery much closer to the old road, this layout predates the Washington Street and Hill Street intersection you find today.



Maplewood Cemetery on a foggy, fall morning as the sun breaks through.

From early on, town residents concentrated their burials in the Wilson and St. Sylvester's, the latter owned by the church, not the town. As time progressed, along about 1895, Hope Cemetery came into the picture. At a later time, St. Monica's put in their parish cemetery on Beckley Street, eventually this cemetery would be turned over to the city. The town did not obtain the Maplewood cemetery until 1855, at that time, the burying yard could have been referred to as the Farwell cemetery as found on page 2 of the Barre Town Cemetery Deed Book 1.

No information could be found to document the Maplewood Cemetery prior to 1855 even though burials took place there around 1800. At the time of the sale to the town, the burying ground lay on



The final resting place of Deacon Thomas Mower, he sold the land to the town at the West Hill Cemetery.

the lands of Elias O. Persons. (Now Elias lays in the west section of the cemetery.) Data found in the Barre City Land Records, Book 13, Page 424, showed Elias selling the land to the Town of Barre. Persons sold the land to the town for \$10, the deed stated the purpose of the land transfer to be for “the social worship of God,” sounding more like a church lot. Further on in the deed, the description also stated the land contained about three quarters of an acre and the same land enclosed by a fence and used as a burying ground. Up until this deed, the cemetery lay on private land. Persons transferred the parcel to the town on 13 January 1855 with the deed recorded in the town records on 22 February 1855.

Twenty-one years later, Charles D. Persons sold more land to the town for the expansion of the Maplewood Cemetery. [Perhaps Charles might be the son of Elias, Charles is in the South2 section of Maplewood.] The expansion included a strip of land on the north side of the cemetery, 7 2/3 rods [126.5'] wide, and a strip on the east of 1 – 1/2 rods [24.75'] wide. A very small sketch appeared on the deed showing the old cemetery and the location of the expansion. Persons signed the deed on 7 October 1876 and the town clerk recorded the deed on 13 October 1876 at Book 18, Page 472. One point of interest, the deed and the sketch do not reference Farwell Street, instead showed what is now Nichols Road as the main road and referred to it as “the highway.” Checking back with the deed from Elias, that deed also referenced Nichols Road as the highway, the description called for the lands of Persons on the east side of the cemetery, not another road.



The two “Persons” who sold the Maplewood Cemetery to the town can be found among those buried there. Elias, on the left, is in the West Section, he sold the first parcel to the town. Charles D. is in the South2 section, his land transaction added to the size of the burying yard. It seems as if all four of the major players in the start of the town cemeteries found a way to stay with their lands forever.

Since their beginnings, Barre’s burying grounds have grown, there have been more deeds, more land for use. Unfortunately, most of the old records no longer exist concerning the evolution of our cemeteries. Perhaps some of the old deeds might still be found nested in books. It would be quite a find to discover where the old records might have been placed, to discover more of the history of our cemeteries. Times have changed, rules have changed, and our burial customs different, but, thanks to Dean H. Perry and his research, we know much more about the origins of our burying yards.