

Friends Sub-Committee Needed for Rye's Historic Graveyards

In the 1970s Rye historian Louise Tallman and other Rye Historical Society members documented and cared for some of the sixty plus historic graveyards. RHS created a guide to a dozen of the more prominent road side graveyards that are available on request from RHC.

Some are clearly visible along the road and some are off road. Family members were always buried on their farmstead until the public cemetery opened in 1893, but over sixty families refused to disinter and rebury their ancestors. Over the years descendants or neighbors kept up some of these graveyards, but most remain uncared for.

In 2012 a new state law was enacted which protects historic graveyards and the Rye Select Board charged the Heritage Commission (RHC) with their management and documentation. RHC does not have the capacity to do justice to upgrading the documentation of the sites nor has it had too much success in finding caretakers who will keep them clean of brush and alert the commission if there are any issues. Descendants have the right of first refusal on being caretakers, but if no one appears, then anyone can adopt the graveyard

The best solution is the creation of an on-going Friends sub-committee of RHC, similar to the historic signage committee that is continuing its work this year. The two tasks above are not a burden and it is possible that some members of this Friends group would become caretakers.

Information on the graveyards may be seen today on the Rye Heritage Commission web site. Tabs on the left provide details of the 2012 law, a list of the graveyards and current caretakers. The most recent active caretakers who have reported to RHC are the Sanderson and McCune families at the Brackett and Parsons Road sites.

It is common practice for town government boards to request the formation of such sub committees that are focused on a specific task. If you have questions or are interested in joining this new Friends group, please contact RHC chair Alex Herlihy (alexherlihy@comcast.net 603 997 6742).

Alex Herlihy, Rye Heritage Commission