

Report of new Rye Historic Family Graveyard Committee

Historic family graveyard research was begun at RHS by Louise Tallman in the 1970s. In 2012, because of a new state law about such graveyards, the Rye Heritage Commission (RHC) was given management of the 60 sites belonging to families who did not want to move their ancestors to the new Central Cemetery in 1893.

RHC created a new committee in 2024 and the four members have reviewed the several conflicting lists of sites which were on file with the RHC, and consolidated all into one master listing for use going forward. There are 60 locations on our master list, approximately 40 with engraved headstones and 20 plain stones with no information. Some are located on Star Island and one on West Road which is technically in North Hampton. The original three ring binders of info and photos are in the town museum.

Each of the sites has or will be visited by someone from this group. There are a few sites remaining to be confirmed with a visit and the team is continuing to complete this part of the project. Visits confirm the location, condition and new photographs are taken.

Some current caretakers who are looking after sites have been identified and we have their contact information. As more are confirmed, they will be added. Several sites are being maintained already. If you are presently taking care of a gravesite, it would be very helpful to the Committee if you would reach out to share your contact information with us. Please e-mail RHC chair – alexherlihy@comcast.net

Three other volunteers have stepped forward to offer assistance in clearing and maintaining sites as needed.

The present plan is to hold a gravesite cleanup day / project for the entire group of volunteers to participate in during late September or early October. A visible location will be chosen and possibly this can raise interest for other volunteers to join.

One site on Locke Road has already been cleared and cleaned up by two volunteers.

Long term goals are:

To update the driving tour of Rye graveyards to include more locations. It has also been suggested that we create web links for each site which will provide the visitor with an easy way to see detailed information on that location should they be interested.

Signage for the sites which are accessible by road.

Regular group volunteer cleanup days, similar to what is already in place for beach cleanup.

Promote adoption of a site to youth groups through Scouts, schools or other civic organizations. This could be a learning opportunity for them to do research on Rye history or genealogy.

Solicit Rye businesses to sponsor or adopt a site, which could be a way to provide funding for signs.

The listing spreadsheet of graveyards is a fluid document. It will be posted on the Rye Heritage Commission web site for access by anyone. Contact info or other sensitive data will not be included for public knowledge. Historical information documented by Louise Tallman will be retained.

Possibly enlist assistance for headstone maintenance or other infrastructure needs such as fixing broken markers, righting toppled markers, dealing with sunken stones.

Provide specific geo-location info to town offices so that these sites can be marked on the town tax maps. Some already are as indicated by a cross on the map.