

APPENDIX A: HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY

Beginnings – Before 1723

1620. The Mayflower landed in Provincetown Harbor and stayed for 67 days. Several passengers set out to explore the land, and reported finding sassafras and oak. Finding the land unsuitable for farming, the entire group set out for Plymouth. Four Pilgrims died while the Mayflower was docked in Provincetown; their place of interment is undocumented.
- Before 1700. Records of births show that the town was likely inhabited before 1700. Jennings stated that “it is the general opinion, that the first permanent settlement was made on, or about the year 1680, but the name of the party that settled is lost in tradition, or at least has been so conflicting that it is impossible to determine the true one.” (p. 21)
1714. The precinct of Cape Cod was established.
- 1717-1718. The first meeting house was constructed (see 1763).

Establishment – 1723 to 1800

1723. The first permanently marked burial appeared in the cemetery, that of Desire (Desier) Cowing.¹ The cemetery was likely established around this time. Deyo’s History of Barnstable County, Massachusetts noted that, “the proximity of the old burying ground on the northeast side of the plain, corresponding with the prevailing practice of early days of locating the burial place near the church, goes to confirm the tradition.” (p. 986)

Several authors have published claims that a small cemetery existed in Provincetown prior to 1723. Nancy W. Paine Smith, in The Provincetown Book, stated that, “an older cemetery, with a few stones, and evidently unmarked graves, existed on Franklin Street until 50 years ago (until 1872).” A May, 1944 newspaper article (publication unknown) stated “[t]he 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 names 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.” *Despite multiple claims, no known primary source documentation of an earlier cemetery exists.*

¹ A newspaper article dating to October 15, 1964 (publication unknown) was included in Althea Boxell’s scrapbook. It claimed that while cemetery crews were performing clean up operations, they came upon a grave with a date of 1701. However, the gravestone inventory completed for this project did not locate a grave with this date.

1724. The first records of proceedings in Provincetown were made.
1727. The township of Provincetown was established, and incorporated soon thereafter. Following this establishment, families began moving away, and in 1748, only two or three families remained. By 1755, only three houses remained, with NO people.
1748. The Town of Provincetown was incorporated within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
- 1763 or 1773. According to Jennings, the first place of worship for the inhabitants of Provincetown was built by the government, "situated on 'Meeting House' plain, so called, the location not very definitely pointed out, but on or near the extreme north-west end of what is now the "Old Cemetery." (p. 21). Deyo states that in 1773, the original 1717-1718 meeting house was rebuilt in the same location, presenting a conflict in historical data. It is safe to assume that at least two meeting houses stood at Meeting House Plain, beginning in the early-mid 1700s and until 1773, when the building was demolished and rebuilt on a higher location to the north and east of the plain and cemetery.
1776. By this year, the population had been restored. Twenty houses stood, housing 36 families and 205 residents. However, at the close of the Revolutionary war, no one remained.

Expansion – 1800 - 1890

1800. Cemetery Number Two was established to the north of Winthrop Street Cemetery.
1835. The first road in Provincetown – Commercial Street – was laid out.
1850. Winthrop Street was laid out.
- 1860-1865. Seven soldiers who served in the Civil War are interred in the Winthrop Street Cemetery. They include Stephen Atwood, Seth Nickerson, Solomon Cook, John Talcott, Alexander Gross, Jeremiah Thorndike, and George Hallett.
1868. Bradford Street was laid out.
- By 1870s The cemetery was surrounded by a wood fence with turned posts.
- 1880s. Street lights were added to Provincetown.
1880. The first report on the condition of the cemetery appeared in the town report. It noted that Mr. John Young was serving as superintendent and that persons were defacing monuments, and that many cemetery posts and rails were poor and in need of replacement. The fence also needed painting.

1884. The town report noted that 500 feet of fence was completed on the back side of the cemetery, completing the rebuilding of broken down fence.

Embellishment – 1890 - 1960

The seventy years between 1890 and 1960 marked a period of great pride, on the part of the town, in caring for the cemetery. Efforts undertaken during this time included righting tilted stones; asking that persons allowing cattle or fowl to wander into the cemetery be reported; making provisions for shipwrecked sailors or strangers by placing small tablets at their graves; asking that people marring stones be reported. In 1912, the commissioners adopted a set of formal cemetery regulations. Between 1911 and 1915, the Ladies' Research Club became involved, planting trees and, in 1919-1920 erected a tablet in memory of the passengers that came over on the Mayflower and died in Provincetown Harbor.

1890. Trust funds were established for the cemeteries, per the provisions of Chapter 264, Acts of the Legislature of 1890.

1891. The Provincetown Cemetery Commission was established with three commissioners. The entity produced their first annual report in 1892, referring to "Eastern Cemetery" and "Western Cemetery" (Winthrop Street).

1898. The town report noted that two long sections of fence had been erected and that rubbish had been removed, and the road on the western side improved.

1899. The town report stated that a greater part of expenditures for the year were spent on the western cemetery fence and repairs.

1900. The cemetery commissioners reported the following: "A large part of the money appropriated at the last annual meeting has been expended in removing brush, leveling banks and building a new fence around Cemetery No. 1...[m]any of our citizens having lots there prefer to use them instead of removing the remains of their families to other places. We desire that our citizens may give notice of persons using any grounds owned by the town for burials for deposit of refuse material, also, the name of owners of cattle or fowl that frequently go at large and sometimes travel into these sacred enclosures."

1901. The commissioners noted that "in the [Old Burial Yard] were laid to rest the founders of the town and several generations of their descendents including heroes of the Revolution." (Annual Town Report. p. 124)

1902. The commissioners reported that "in Cemetery No. 1 many headstones which were lying on the ground, or out of true, have been set up and straightened. This alone adds greatly to the appearance of our cemetery. A number of trees and brush, having ceased to be ornamental, have been removed. The fences enclosing the cemetery are in good condition." (Town Annual Report, p. 109)

1905. The commissioners asked again for names of persons who were permitting their cattle and fowl to roam free, breaking the pickets of the cemetery fences.

1911. The commissioners noted that “on November 27th, at the request of the Research Club, all the cemetery commissioners met a committee of that club. At that meeting the matter of improving the appearance of Cemetery No. 1, which is the oldest cemetery in town, was discussed and it was voted that \$50 be paid to the Research Club to be used to beautify this cemetery...”
1912. The commissioners continued, “with the aid of the Ladies Research Club a great deal of work has been accomplished this past year in beautifying Cemetery No. 1 and we must say that they deserve a great deal of credit, not only from ourselves but from our citizens.” (Annual Town Report, p. 142) The Ladies Research Club continued to beautify the property from 1913 through 1916.
1917. The commissioners reported having sodded the south side of the hill and repaired the fence.
1918. The commissioners noted that people were destroying fences and taking fresh flowers and plants from graves and lots, and leaving the gates open. They stated, “the cemetery is a place set apart to receive the sacred remains of our dead and NOT for spooning.” (Town Annual Report, p. 140)
1919. All of the yearly appropriation for the commissioners was spent to repair the fence at Cemetery No. 1. (Annual Town Report, p. 138)
- 1919-1920. The Ladies Research Club erected a tablet in memory of the passengers that came over on the Mayflower and died while moored at Provincetown.
1925. The cemetery commissioners reported accepting a gift of a suitable fence to enclose the cemetery.

Modernization & Decline – 1960 - 2000

1962. The town assumed control of the Gifford and Hamilton Cemeteries, in addition to Cemetery No. 1 and Cemetery No. 2.
1963. The town cleaned the cemetery of brush and debris and added the fence surrounding the Mayflower passengers’ memorial stone. The commissioners reported that the south hill was eroding during strong storms: “our present problem in this cemetery is with this south bank which continues to break down with the storms and the vandalism that goes on year after year. It is our hope that some time in the future this problem can be remedied. It is also our hope that in the future a new fence will be installed.” (Annual Town Report, pp.72-73)
1964. The commissioners reported trimming trees and repairing/painting the cemetery fence. They noted, “[w]e have been able to beautify this [Old Historic Cemetery]. Several weeks were spent by our men in this cemetery cutting down brush and unpleasant tree growth. This growth hid many of the graves. A new section of fence was installed at one end of the cemetery. We

hope this will help children from playing in the cemetery. Other parts of the fence have been repaired and painted. New gates and a new entrance lends a pleasant atmosphere to a previously disgraceful looking piece of town property. Historical stones and markers have been uncovered. Trees were trimmed and cared for throughout the cemetery. (Annual Town Report, p. 32)

1966. The poured concrete wall supporting the southern edge of the cemetery was constructed, “the sand bank at the Old Cemetery...is being taken care of and a wall is being erected to save the graves which are on the edge of the banking. (Annual Town Report, p. 44)
1968. Elm trees that once grew along Winthrop Street were removed (likely after infestation of the Elm Beetle). The last recorded burial took place at the cemetery in this year (Elmira Pierce).
1970. Maintenance tasks included painting the cemetery fence green and continuing to remove brush.
1971. An article appeared in the Sunday Cape Cod Standard-Times, reporting that an effort was underway to restore the cemetery in preparation for the 350th celebration of the first Thanksgiving. The article noted that parts of the cemetery had been vandalized, with stones removed (bases and all). It also observed that the cemetery contained “Hens and Chicks,” a species of Sedum that resemble small cabbages, and that the presence of the plant indicated an “ancient area.”
1978. A CETA project in the cemetery involved clearing of the overgrowth from the headstones, and Barnicoat and Sons of West Yarmouth were hired to restore many headstones (Providence Advocate, April 6, 1978).
1983. William Whitney, landscape architect, prepared a master plan for the cemetery that included the following features: 200 trees and shrubs including 2 chestnuts planted outside the fence; railroad ties to support walkways; chain link fencing. Species in this plan included forsythia, dogwood, tulip trees, sycamores, sweet gums, honeysuckles, and white birch. In 1984, the cemetery commissioners reported that the site now “resemble[d] a park.” The chain link fencing was also installed – seen as a means of preventing further erosion in the cemetery. School children had been crossing over the cemetery for years, going to and from school, and in some areas the erosion was as much as 3’ deep. (Gary Chefetz, “The Oldest Cemetery in Provincetown,” 1983)
- 1984-2000. The chain link fence remained locked and while it deterred vandals, it also led to a period of neglect. By the end of the 19902, the landscape was largely overgrown, with dense vegetation obscuring many graves.

Rebirth – 2000 to the Present

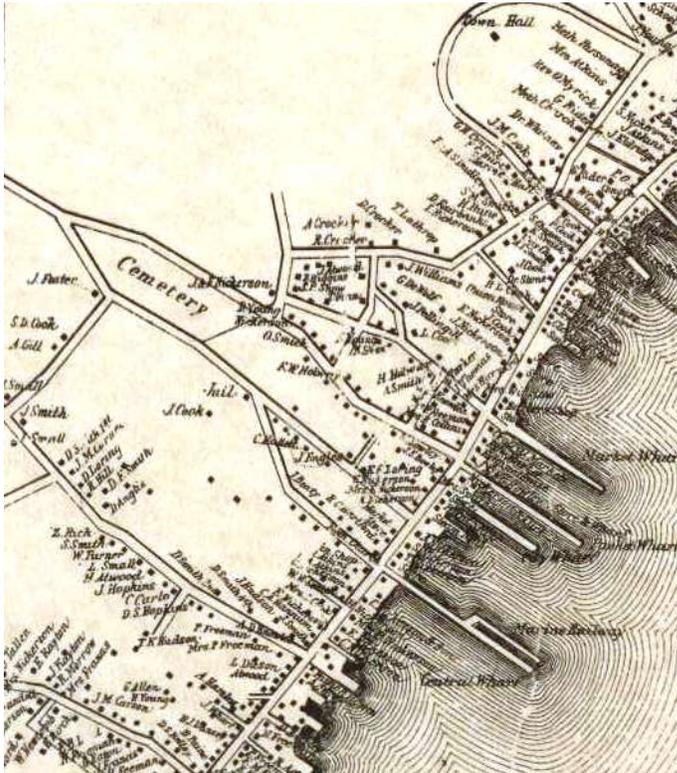
- 2000-2001. The Town of Provincetown received a \$37,916 Historic Landscape Preservation Grant from the Department of Environmental Management for

improvements at the cemetery. In 2001, a preservation plan for the Winthrop Street Cemetery was completed and in the following year, two new entrances and a perimeter fence was erected. Signs were placed at both entrances, providing interpretive and regulatory information to visitors.

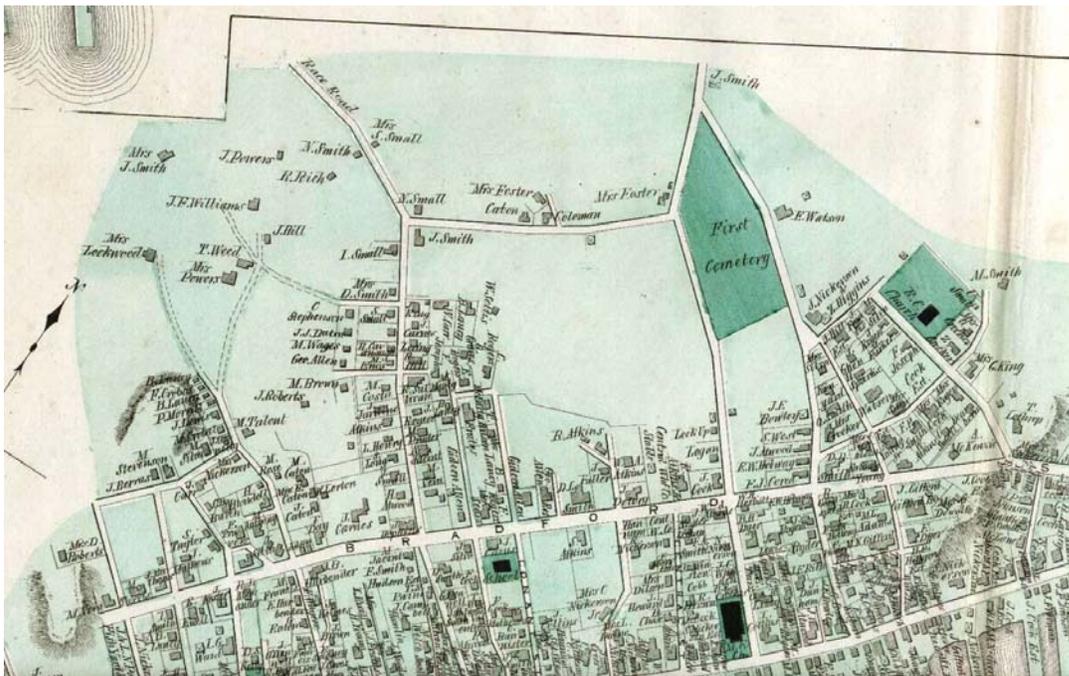
2000s.

During at least two work days, AmeriCorps crews cleared brush and debris from the cemetery, helping to keep invasive growth away from a majority of gravestones and monuments.

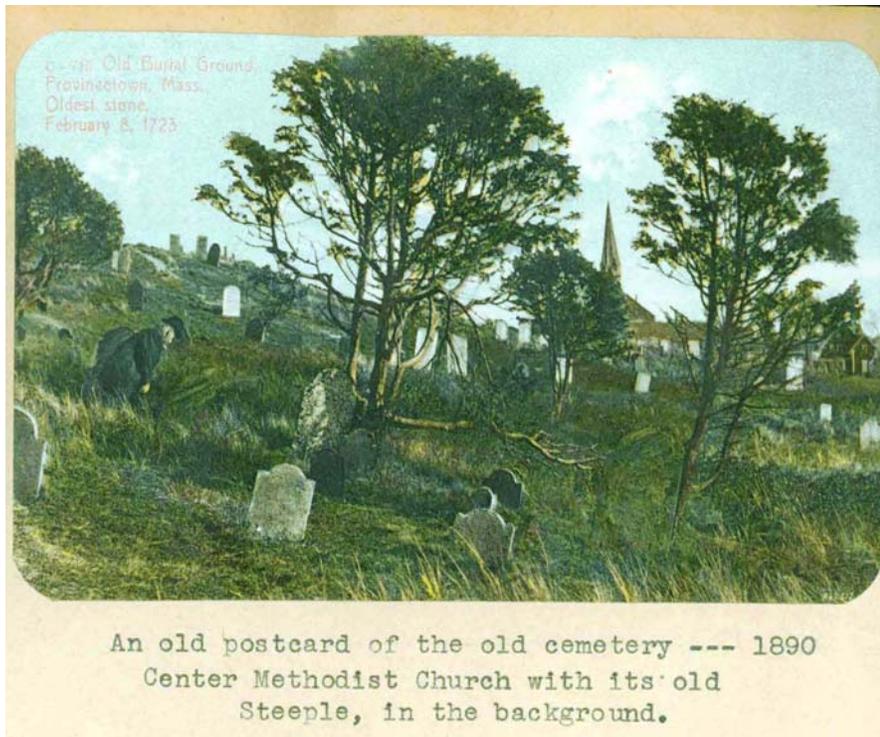
HISTORIC IMAGES



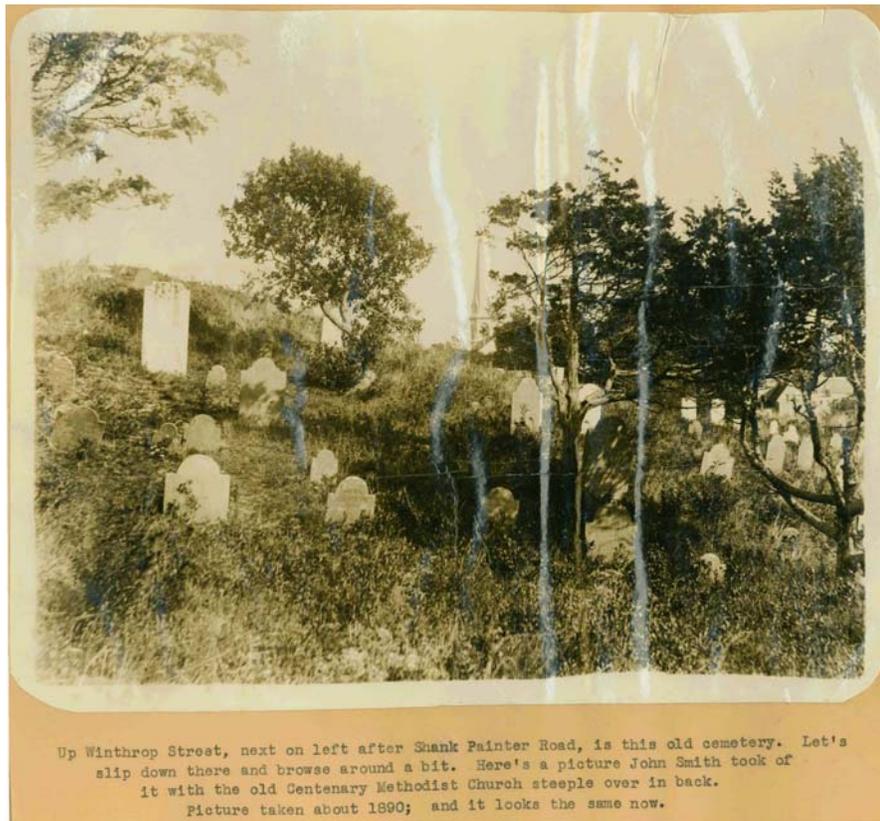
1858 Walling Map



1880 Barnstable County Atlas



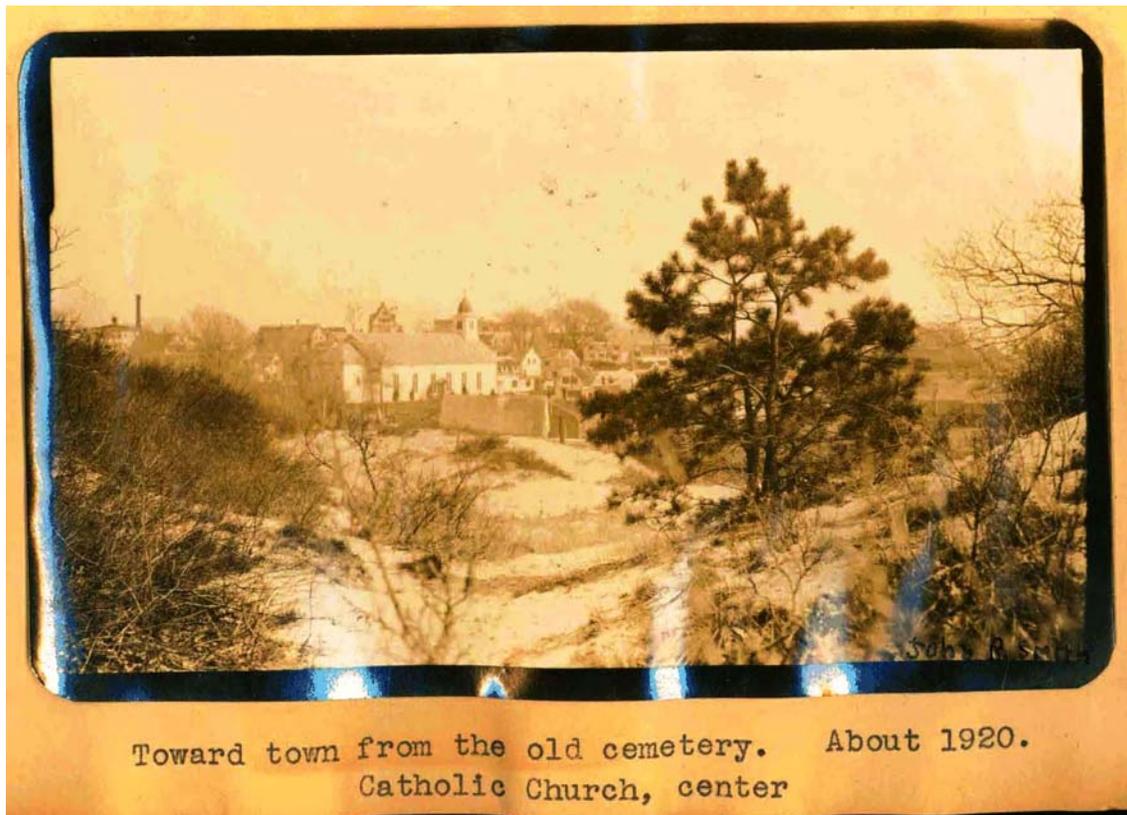
1890 – Oldest known image of the Cemetery landscape



Ca. 1890 – Oldest known photograph of the Cemetery landscape



1900 – Well house on Court Street with Cemetery in background



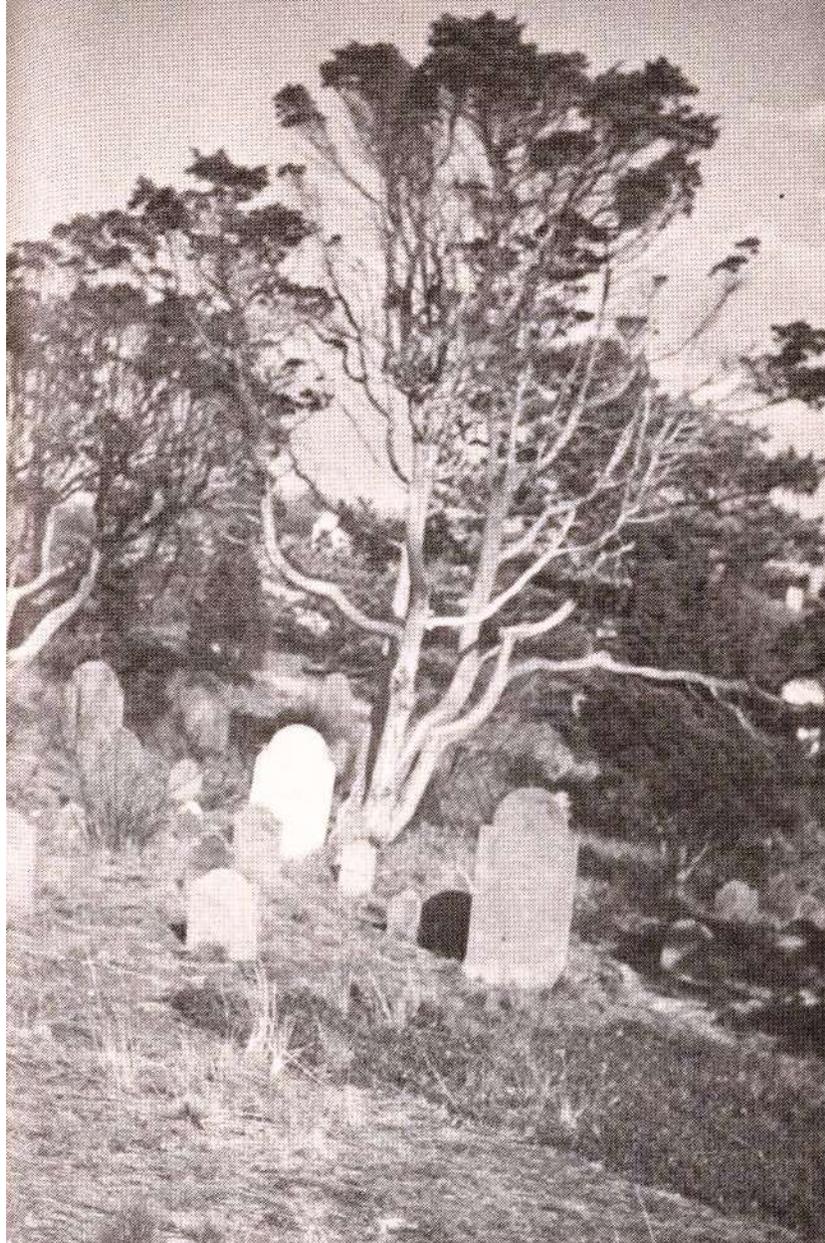
Ca. 1900 – View of town from Cemetery interior



Ca. 1920 – Gravestone of Joshua Mayo



1920 – Ladies Research Club commemorative boulder and plaque



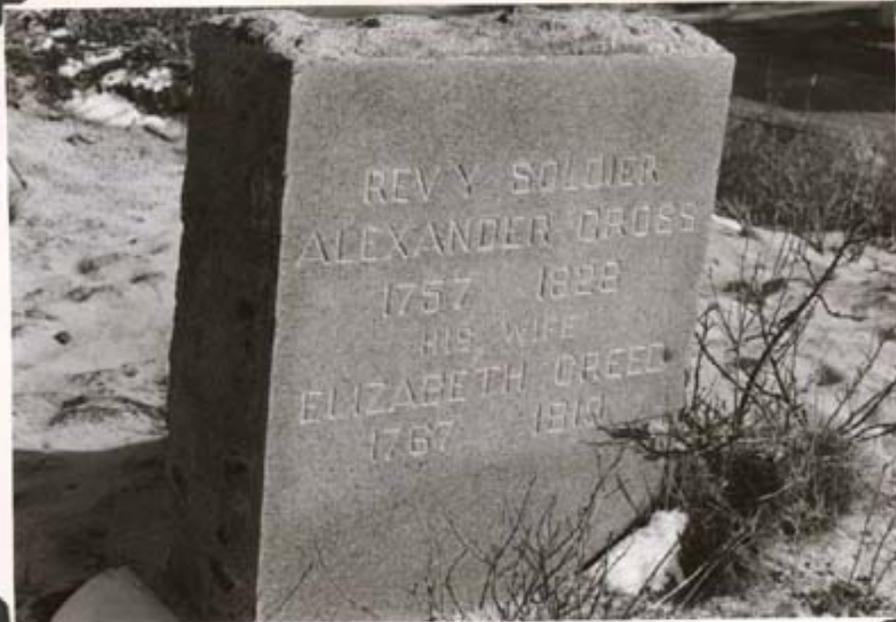
1953 – Cemetery interior



Ca. 1970 showing many features added in the mid 1960s (images continue on next nine pages)

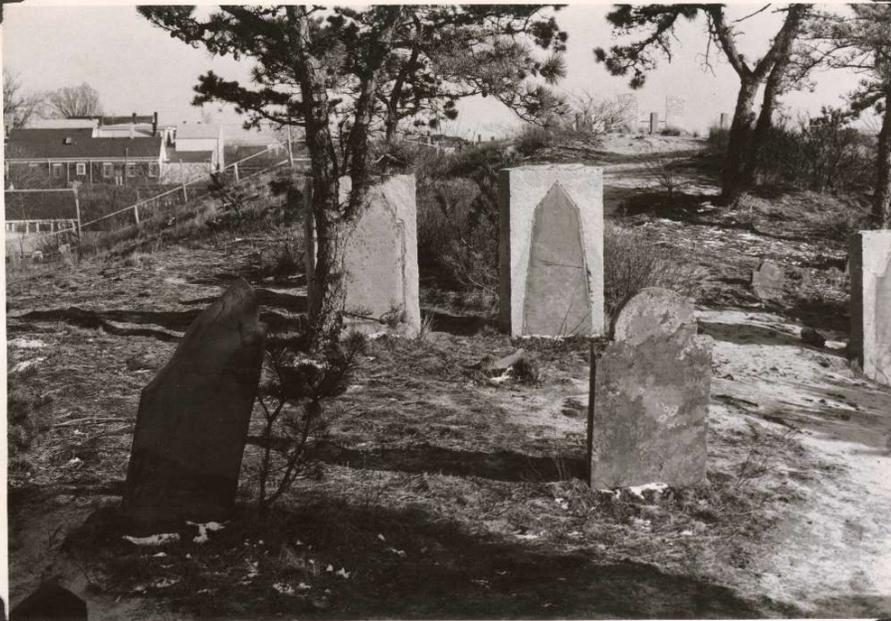


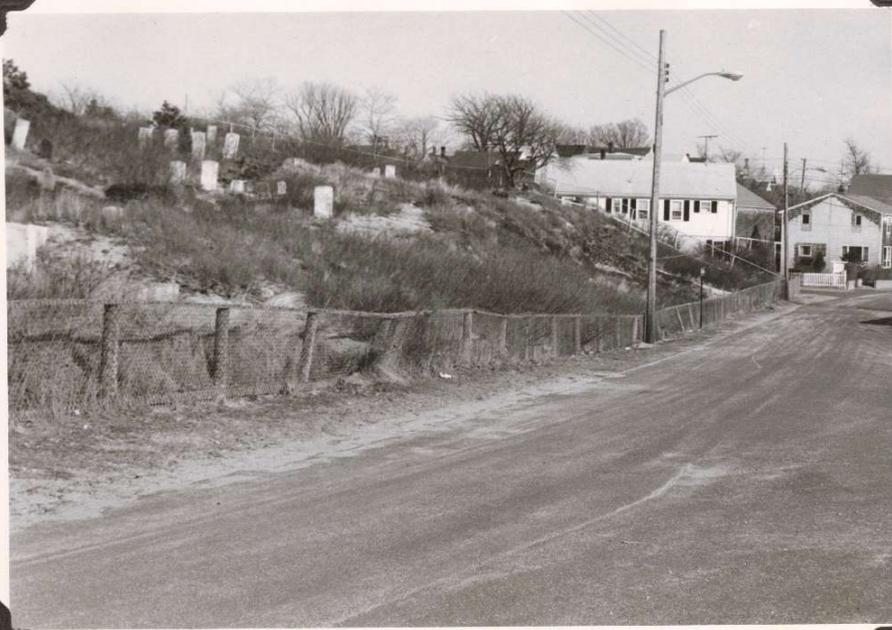
















2001 – Conditions of the Cemetery prior to completion of the 2001 Preservation Plan



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