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## Old Belmont cemeteries haven't aged gracefully

Making a tour of several old burial grounds in Belmont, you might see some signs of age. Some are hard to find, while others are easily spotted.

At the Judkins/Hunt Cemetery on the corner of Hurricane and Union Road, some stones were damaged beyond repair. Some markers damaged long ago were being held straight up next to their original bases. One marker showed signs of irreparable damage, while others did not have visible lettering. Bean Hill Cemetery on Bean Hill Road showed more signs of aging, with one marker flat and broken on the ground. The only way to get into the cemetery is over the wall because the iron gate had been rusted shut years ago.

Ladd Hill Cemetery on Ladd Hill Road had the most growth on its property, with no markers remaining of the people that may or may not still be there. The marker that does remain has been broken in half.

Diane Marden, the vice president of the Belmont Historical Society, said there is currently an effort under way to repair the damage that time has done to the burial grounds.

"They're in very poor shape," she said. "(Cemetery Trustees and I) have gone out a couple of times and looked at the issues with each cemetery."

Marden said that the historical significance of these cemeteries was important, and that there should have been more of an effort to preserve them.

"(Those whose remains are interred there) created this town," she said. "They were instrumental in making Belmont what it was."

In the 1700s, when Belmont was first being settled, there were very few roads, according to Marden. Burial grounds were limited to family properties, forming family plots. Once roads were established, building roads to these family plots became a necessity for easier access. But the advent of more roads also eliminated the need for the family plot.

"They stopped using them," she said.

With the lack of care of the family plots, and the advent of town cemeteries, many of the 33 current burial grounds have been abandoned, resulting in the lack of care. Marden said that a cleanup effort is being organized, but no specific plans can be made until it is determined what each cemetery needs.

"We know we have to take care of these types of issues, but we're just getting our hands wet at this point," Marden said.

One project in the works for the spring is to put signage and numbers on each cemetery.

None of the current cemeteries have indicators of which one they are, although all the cemeteries can be found on Marden's website at [www.belmontnh.net](http://www.belmontnh.net) or at the Belmont town website, [www.belmontnh.org](http://www.belmontnh.org).

But another pressing issue is not just cleaning up the cemeteries, but also determining who is buried in the plots. Some cemeteries, such as the one on Ladd Hill Road, may not be cemeteries in active use, but there is no way to determine if the bodies have been moved from the original plots without digging up the ground.

"This is why the cemeteries list is so long," she said. "We have possible closed cemeteries that we find, they're rumored to be closed, the stones are taken... but we don't see a record in the cemetery trust. There's no verification that they were moved."

Marden said that, besides honoring the founders of the town, the care of the cemeteries was important to help those who are working on their genealogy, and to honor those who died in various wars. She also said that the cemeteries provided a history of the town, with many cemeteries having young children who were buried there during the times of cholera outbreaks early in the town's history.

It gives us a knowledge of what was happening in these times," she said.

This year, the Belmont cemetery trustees are asking for \$10,000 in capital improvements funds to make repairs on these cemeteries as well as signs. Marden said that the best they can hope for is to be able to come before the townspeople at Town Meeting and present their case to the taxpayers.

"Hopefully over time they will be looking great," she said. "But it will be up to the taxpayers to decide."

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