

Testimony Concerning House Bill 535, “Abandoned and Neglected Cemeteries Fund – Establishment and Income Tax Checkoff”

This testimony is in SUPPORT of the Bill (FAV)

I’m submitting testimony in my role as Treasurer of the *Granite Historical Society*. Within the Granite community there are 15 family cemeteries (that we know of) situated on private land. A few of these cemeteries have just one grave marker standing; others have more than thirty. Most are totally neglected and seriously overgrown with trees, vines and weeds. Some have been vandalized over the years. Our organization is currently engaged in putting together a database – property owners, condition of the cemeteries and who is buried there, etc. Most burials in these cemeteries date to the 19th century, a few to the 18th century. Some of the burials were unmarked to begin with; in other cases, markers were removed or have disappeared into the ground. We know who was buried in some of these unmarked graves; for others, we don’t know, and maybe never will. Our plan is to keep the database updated with annual visits to the sites and ongoing research.

Three years ago our organization restored one of the larger cemeteries – we call it *The Quaker Hill Cemetery* – in coordination with the current landowner and with the help of some grant money from the Patapsco Heritage Greenway. We installed a sign with a UR code with which visitors can access information about the burials. A few of our members volunteer to keep the grass mowed on a continuing basis. We’re now planning to tackle another restoration at the *Dorsey Family Cemetery*. That cemetery is located on a plot of ground originally named “Scotchman’s Desire” settled by Francis Dorsey in 1732 - - Francis was the son of the famed Marylander, Colonel Edward Dorsey.

In testifying I’d like to encourage legislative action that might counteract the neglect and desecration of these private cemeteries endure. Such legislation might enact tax credits to encourage landowners to be more responsible stewards of cemeteries located on their property, or it might enact legal penalties for landowners who engage in desecration or look the other way while others do so. I would also encourage that some thought given to allowing public access to these historic sites. I’ll offer three scenarios here in Granite to illustrate my point:

1 – *The Worthington Family Cemetery*. Over 30 graves, the first of which dates to the 1784. Located on a land-locked piece of ground owned by a gynecologist who practices in Philadelphia. To date, he has not answered any of our phone calls or any mail sent to him.

2 – *Hamilton Family Cemetery*. Over 20 graves (that we know of), the first of which dates to 1824. Located on a 120-acre farm which was part of William Hamilton’s 1752 patent called “East Lothian”. In addition to Hamilton family members, workers at the largest of Granite’s quarries, “The Waltersville Quarry”, are also buried there. Our organization did a clean-up of that cemetery about 30 years ago but the current farm-owner now refuses any access.

3 – *Walters-Blunt Cemetery*. Almost 30 graves, the first of which dates to 1786. This was the family which owned that “Waltersville Granite Quarry”. This property changed hands a few years ago and the current owner will not give our organization access to view the cemetery or the rest of the property. Ironically, this property is listed with the Maryland Historical Trust, but our pleas to the Trust haven’t resulted in any action either.

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