

Spurling Cove Revolutionary War Cemetery Preservation

ANNE GRULICH

On July 27, 2016, Fred Wieninger and his nephew, Benjamin, barged their truck and equipment out to GCI to raise, level, and wash the 11 extant headstones and 4 footstones in the Spurling Revolutionary War Cemetery near the town dock on Spurling Cove. Only 11 headstones for the 25 known burials remain. This much-anticipated day dawned hot, windless, and buggy. How hot was it? So hot the polyester resin used to mend the headstones set in record time! So hot we ended our day at Hitty's Café with root beer floats.



Fred Wieninger preparing resin.

A lot went on before Wieninger's work began. Bob DeForrest and Doug McMullin of the Maine Coast Heritage Trust visited the cemetery and explained the conservation easement and public access path. Blair Colby disc-mowed a pathway through the field and around the cemetery for Wieninger's truck. Ben Sumner weed-whacked the cemetery twice. Northeast Geophysical Services' ground penetrating radar (GPR) team

(Mike Scully and Mike McCormick) surveyed the cemetery on June 15 in an effort to locate buried gravestones. They mapped stones visible on the surface and anomalies one, three, and four feet beneath the soil, placing red flags at promising spots. I did some shallow probing both before and after the GPR



Above and right: Mike Scully and Mike McCormick from Northeast Geophysical Services (Bangor) survey the Spurling Cove Cemetery with ground penetrating radar. Photos: A. Grulich



Wieninger's truck at the Spurling Cove Cemetery.



CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

*Below: Two fragile, red slate
headstones for Frances “Fanny”
Spurling (1760-1824) and
her son Benjamin (1787-1804).*



*Above: Jessi Duma reveals the
headstone for Robert Spurling, Sr.*

*Right: The inscription carved for
Robert Spurling, Sr.*

Photos: A. Grulich



survey. Lo and behold, on July 13, with the help of the GPR report, my probing, and Jessi Duma's brute strength, we uncovered a large, fractured, white marble headstone lying face up 8" below ground. As Jessi's expression shows, the thrill was palpable (see photo above). Using our precious water bottle, we held our breath as we rinsed decades of mud off the stone revealing the inscription carved for Robert Spurling, Sr. in 1844.

Another poignant moment occurred as Fred Wieninger raised two fragile, red slate headstones (shown at right) that lay partially buried, face down, side by side. Frances “Fanny” Spurling (1760-1824) was buried next to her 17-year old son, Benjamin (1787-1804*). Both stones are badly delaminated. Fanny's inscription is no longer visible, and Benjamin's is half peeled away. His stone may not survive another winter. It was visitor Martha Rose who deciphered the footstone initials (F.S. and B.S.) in the raking morning sunlight before the headstones were raised, and later transcribed the remains of young Benjamin's tender inscription. (*Prior research says death date was 1809)



Research - Spurling Cove Revolutionary War Cemetery

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Of course, it's not all fun in the field. There's some fun in the Archives, too. A pile of earlier research on the Spurling Cemetery by Leslie Victor Stanley (LVS) in 1973, copious notes from Ralph Stanley's genealogical research, conversations with islanders, and letters from two concerned descendants formed the basis of investigations and raised several questions.

Where is the cedar cross marker for the Loyalist interred between a Son of the American Revolution and his wife? Andrew Herrick was buried in 1812 before Benjamin Spurling, Sr. (1836) and his wife Fanny (1824). Herrick's grave apparently had no marker until about 1955 when his namesake placed a cedar cross on his burial site. (LVS doesn't mention Herrick in his records.) The marker was last seen in 2000 when another of Maine's cemetery historians, Tom Vining, documented the cemetery. Does the brick feature discovered during our July probing mark Fanny Spurling's burial or Andrew Herrick's? It's the only such feature discovered so far.



Andrew Herrick's marker.

Photo: Tom Vining



Why are Joseph and Sarah L'Grow (Legrow) buried here?

LVS and a Legrow descendant, Cynthia Brown Robertson, tell us that in their later years, the Legrows were part of either Thomas Manchester's or Benjamin Spurling's household, and contributed Joseph's \$39- a-year Revolutionary War pension to the household. Joseph Legrow's will mentions his cousin, Thomas Stanley, and friend, Thomas Manchester. These families came up together from Marblehead, MA, to settle on Mount Desert Island. In 2003, Cindy Robertson cleaned and righted several stones, including the Legrows, and contacted GCIHS about the importance of the cemetery.



Joseph Legrow's headstone

Photos: Cynthia Robertson 2003

Photo at left: Findagrave.com



Sarah Legrow's headstone

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

LESLIE VICTOR STANLEY'S INTERPRETATION OF HOW THE SPURLING CEMETERY #1 WAS LAID OUT —

Two Rods Square on the high land, north of the landing Beach and about four rods inland from the shoreline, by Benjamin and Fanny (Guptill) Spurling, Sr. in 1875 when their infant daughter, Easter died.

| | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Lot #1 Mr. Joseph Le Grow 1833 | Lot #2 | Lot #3 Easter 1785 | Lot #4 Ben, Jr. 1809 | Lot #5 Fanny 1824 | Lot #6 Ben, Sr. 1836 | Lot #7 Samuel 1837 | Lot #8 |
| Lot #9 John S. 1829 | Lot #10 Enoch 1811 | Lot #11 Thomas 1811 | Lot #12 Ben 1811 | Lot #13 Mary 1841 | Lot #14 Robert, Sr. 1844 | Lot #15 Caroline G. 1847 | Lot #16 |
| Lot #17 | Lot #18 dau d. 1830-40 | Lot #19 Tom, Jr. 1835 | Lot #20 Samuel 1810 | Lot #21 Hannah 1841 | Lot #22 Tom, Sr. 1831 | Lot #23 William 1839 | Lot #24 Henry 1840 |
| Lot #25 Stillman, Jr. 1843 | Lot #26 Stillman, Sr. 1843 | Lot #27 | Lot #28 | Lot #29 Caroline 1825 | Lot #30 William 1832-33 | Lot #31 Edward H. 1847-48 | Lot #32 |

When Enoch, Sr. died on Oct. 26, 1838 they started a new Cemetery inland, to the west about 60 rods from the first Cemetery.

How can we honor these 25 forebears whose names and stories we know but whose tombstones have disappeared?

Rumors of vandalism in the 1950s and '60s by a person now deceased haunt this project. In 1971, LVS noted that only Joseph Legrow's headstone was standing, and none of the stones visible today correspond with the diagram of the cemetery LVS drew for the 25 burials in 32 plots in 1973.

Were some headstones removed from the site or did they sink and our probing missed them?

Or perhaps, the LVS map was hypothetical; but LVS' diagram was nearly perfect for the 101 graves in the Stanley Cemetery restoration project two years ago.

Did the cemetery extend further east and some burials erode out of the cliff?

Was someone farming the land and moved the stones aside to simplify plowing?

If the stones were moved outside the expected cemetery bounds, they could lie buried among the brambles on the hillside. Time will tell.

We're grateful to many folks, especially the Great Cranberry Congregational Church and the citizens of Cranberry Isles who funded the project. We thank Steven Herrick and his Uncle Andrew for their extensive genealogical research, and Cynthia Brown Robertson for preserving several stones at the cemetery, sharing her family's genealogy, and urging us take action. We thank Ralph Stanley for donating his Uncle Les' research papers and the late great Bruce Komusin for putting it online at gcihs.org. Thanks to Maine Coast Heritage Trust for being so supportive of our efforts, and to the Weibel family who own the property and visited the cemetery one gorgeous summer morning. Watch for pictures and blogs in the coming weeks as we post the Spurling Cemetery information on the GCIHS Cemetery Preservation Committee's website (Stanleycemetery.com).



Benjamin Spurling, Sr. Headstone

Inscription:

SACRED
to the Memory of
BENJAMIN SPURLING.
who died
Dec. 30, 1836:
aged 84 yrs.

He is a Son of the American Revolution (SAR) who served in Castine area from July 28, 1779 to Sept. 28, 1779. Father of 11 children, he lived in what is now known as the Rome house on GCI.