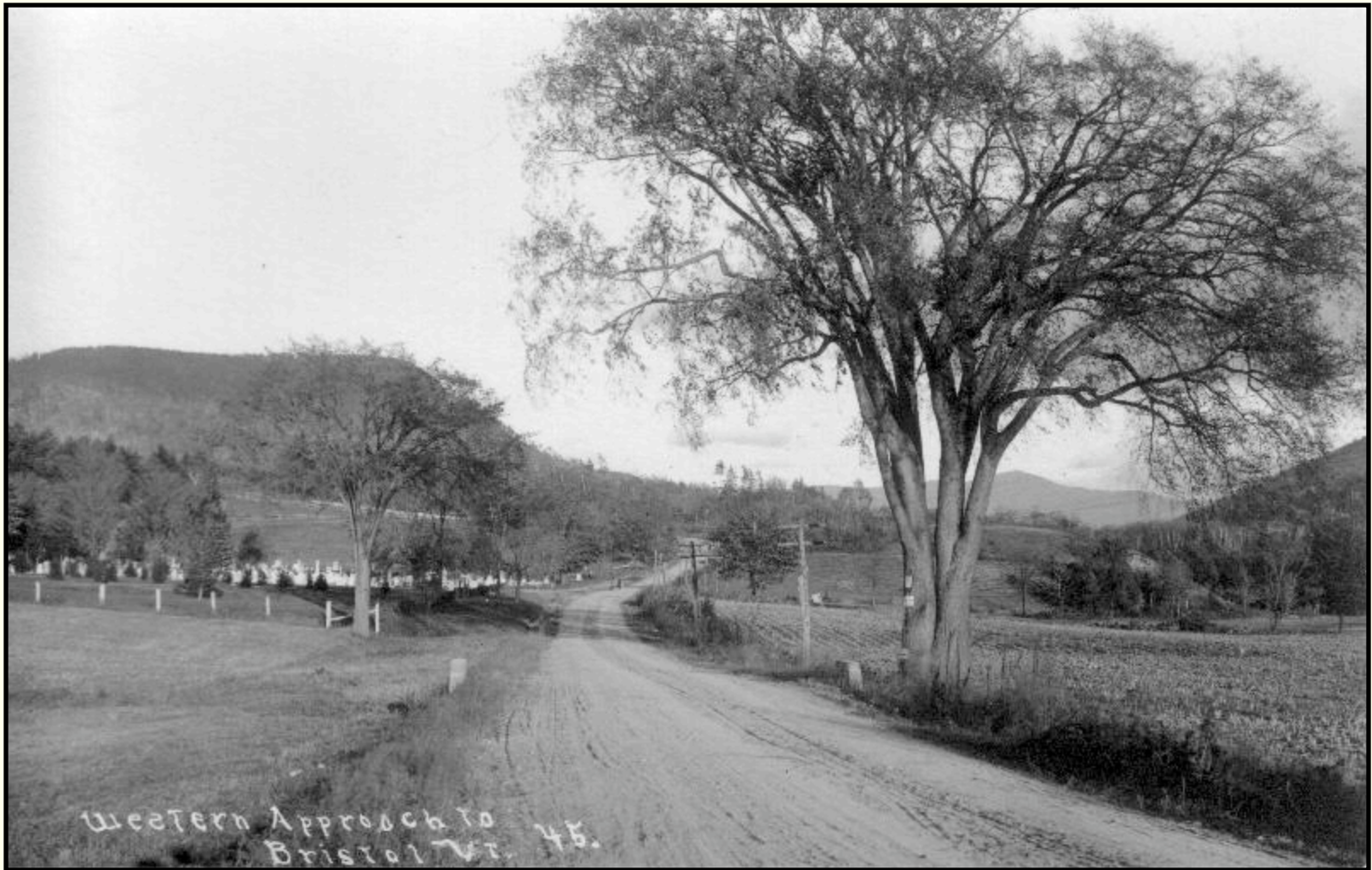



# **Here Lie the Bodies**

**A Look at Vermont's Cemeteries  
and their Place in the Landscape**



LS07562 The Western Approach to Bristol, VT, undated. Bristol has 6 known cemeteries.

**“Quick! Touch the ceiling! Get your feet off the floor!  
Hold your breath... We’re coming to the cemetery!”**

Cemeteries make many people uncomfortable, even spooked. But be brave  have a look! Cemeteries dot our Vermont landscape; they are all around us. You can even spot them from the air.



LS04596 Rt. 2 East Montpelier, along the Winooski River, April 1959. The Plainmont Cemetery is one of 21 known cemeteries in Montpelier. It has 700 graves, with the first burial in 1909. Close to the Plainfield town border, it is owned & maintained by Plainfield.

Look for cemeteries next to old churches and meeting houses...



LS06344 Rockingham Meeting House, Rockingham, VT, taken after 1960. First burial in 1780, about 1200 graves. Rockingham has 13 known cemeteries.

around our cities and towns...



LS07482 Stafford, VT October 1940. Stafford has 16 known cemeteries. Cemeteries were often set on hills to protect from flooding, and often had commanding views of the town.

and along country roads.



LS07310 Caption reads "Looking up Camden valley from Moraview (?) cemetery... Sandgate, VT, taken before 1942." This is probably the West End – Camdon Valley Cemetery, with 400 gravesites; burials from 1786-1980. Sandgate has 6 known cemeteries. Sometimes cemeteries were built on fertile ground, sometimes not.



West Wheelock Cemetery, Wheelock, VT, July 2005. There are 145 gravesites in this abandoned cemetery, on an abandoned road, almost half without gravestones. Used from about 1800-1905. The town has recently pledged to keep it mowed. Wheelock has 9 known cemeteries. (photo: JA)

**Some cemeteries, way up in the hills, or back in the woods, have been forgotten; now overgrown and hidden. But you might spot them if you notice these tell-tale clues:**

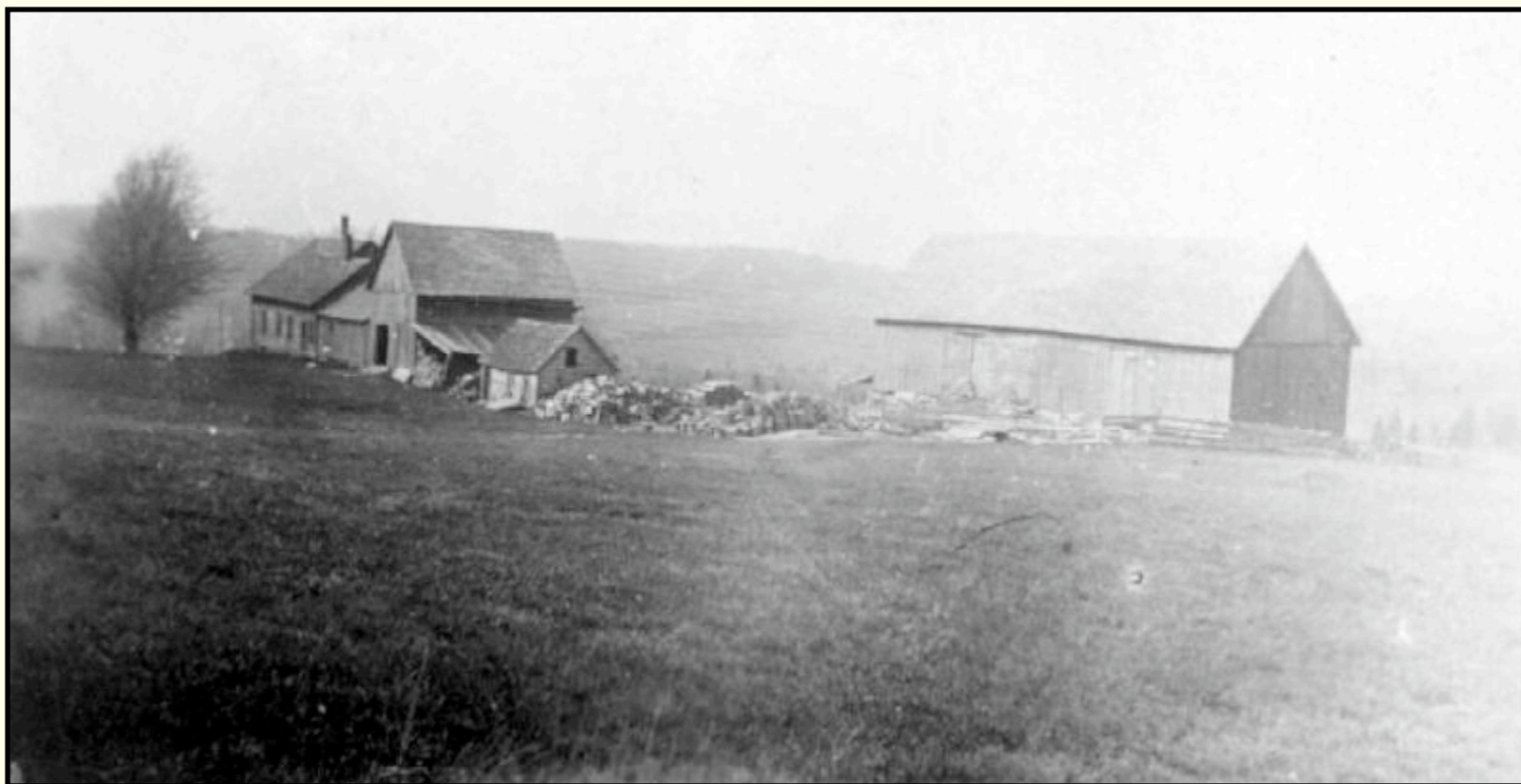
- old stone, wood or metal gates and fences;
- depressions in the ground from sunken graves;
- escaping Lily of the Valley, or Myrtle: flowers that were often planted on graves;
- Cedar trees among hardwoods: Cedars were often planted at each side of the entrance, or around the perimeter. Called the “tree of life”, they were planted to symbolize everlasting life after death.

The earliest humans to be buried in Vermont were Native Americans: Archaic, Abenaki and Woodland peoples. Their graves were not marked with gravestones, so they are harder to find than the cemeteries we've been looking at. Archeologists and construction crews have found these burial grounds in Vermont, sometimes on purpose and sometimes by accident.



LS01705 Jordan's Bay, Isle La Motte, VT, undated. Isle La Motte was the site of one Archaic burial ground.

During Colonial times, the early settlers usually buried their dead near their homes, in a family burial plot. They marked the grave with



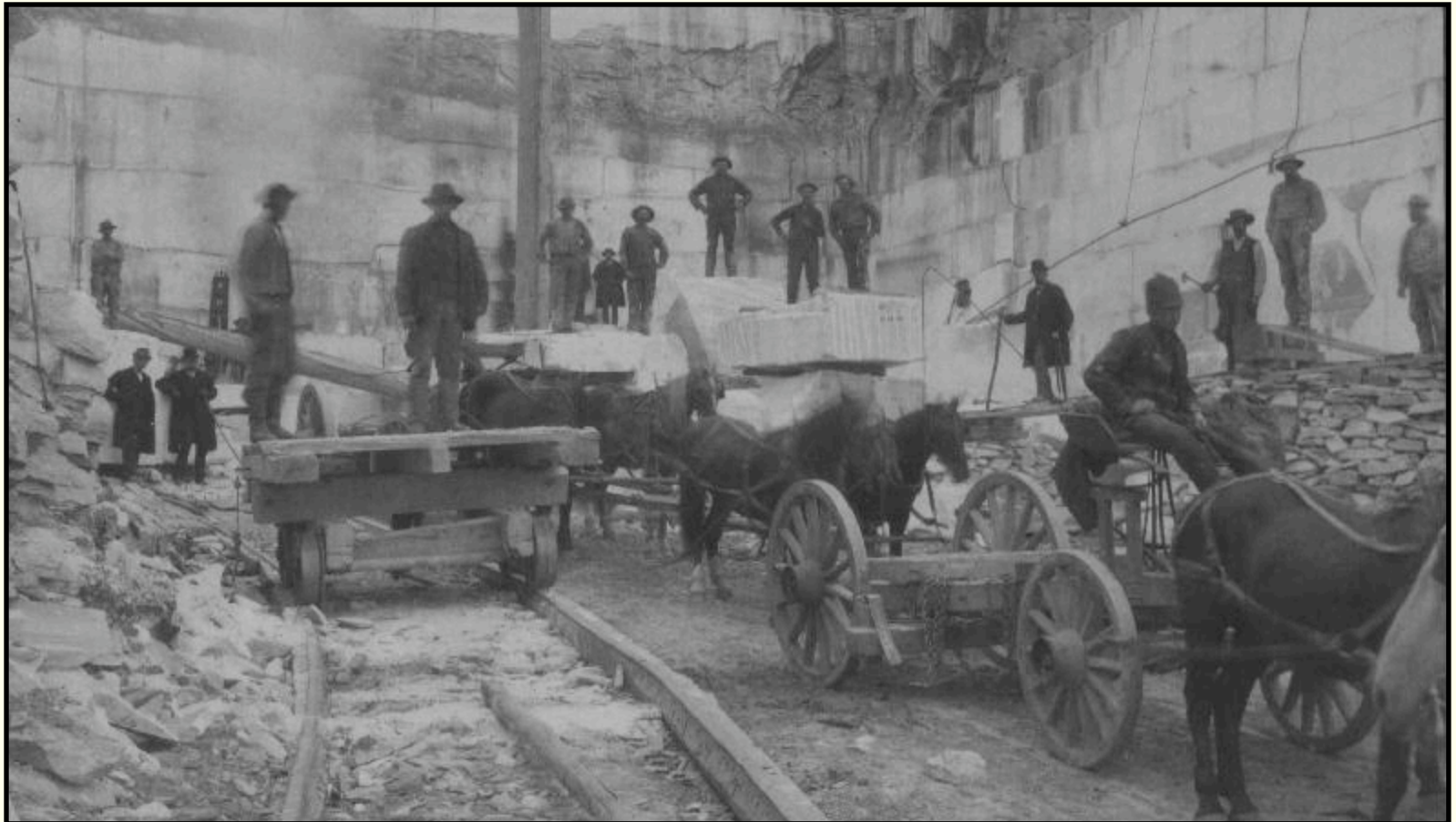
LS00631 Babcock Family hill farm, Greensboro, undated. The area is now forested, and all but the foundations gone.

As settlements grew, graveyards near churches and in towns were built. They were plain and simple, laid out in an east-west direction so the dead could sit up and face the sun on Judgment Day. Sandstone and slate were popular for gravestones; they were softer and easier to carve than boulders, and were found locally.

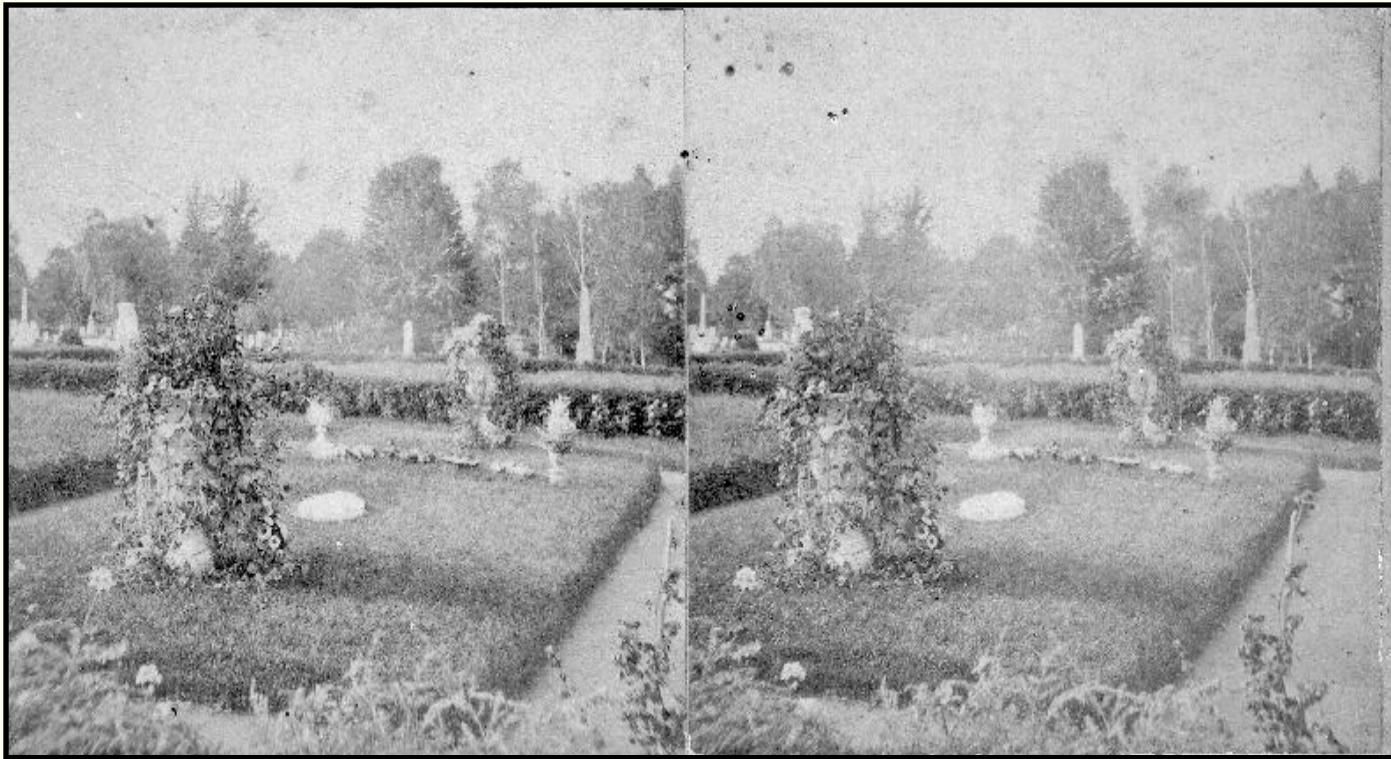


LS00684 Slate Quarry and Mills, Fair Haven, VT. Postcard, mailed 1907

In cities outside Vermont, the “in” gravestone material changed from slate to white marble during Victorian times (beginning about 1880), and Vermont followed the trend. As luck would have it, there was



LS02218 Mt. Aeolus Marble Quarries in East Dorset, VT, 1887.



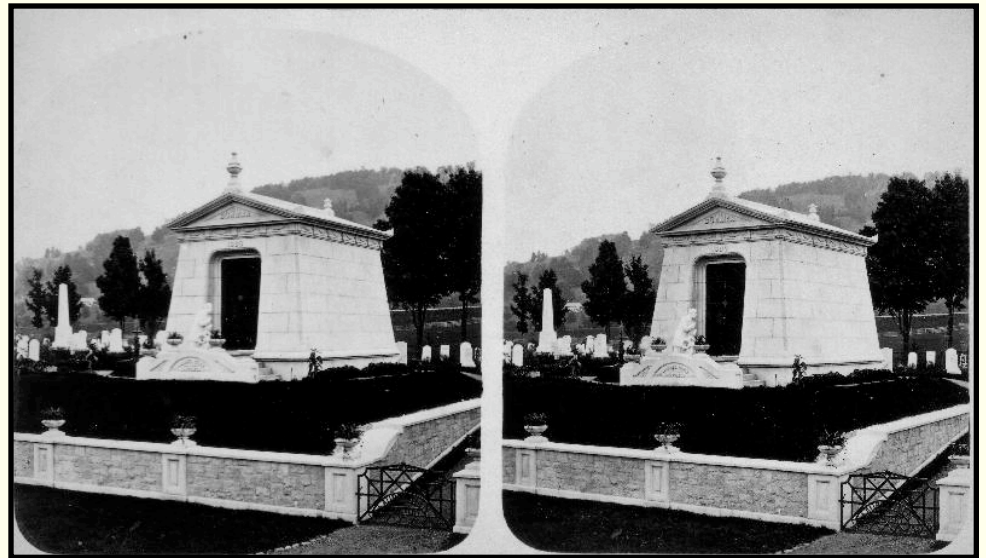
LS03185 Stereoview shows Mary Bracket's grave in Prospect Hill Cemetery, Brattleboro, VT, undated. One of 14 cemeteries in Brattleboro, Prospect Hill has 3000 graves; first burial in 1788.

**Along with the marble Victorian gravestones came a new Victorian way of thinking about death, which was not as grim as in Colonial times. A new concept for graveyards was needed. Instead of the somber, plain burial grounds of the past, new graveyards, called "cemeteries" (meaning "sleeping place" in Greek) began. Cemeteries were designed to sooth and comfort. Besides gravestones there were lawns, benches, pathways, trees, flowering bushes, and sometimes even a pond. This was a place where visitors could sit and reflect, stroll and contemplate, or meet friends and picnic. This "garden" or "rural" cemetery idea inspired the movement to build public parks across the United States.**

In garden cemeteries, artwork was not reserved just for tombstones. Sculpture and artwork was everywhere, and often very fancy and elaborate.

In a garden cemetery look for:

- **Mausoleums, crypts, tombs & vaults**
- **Fountains, pedestals, urns, statues**
- **Gates, fences & walls**
- **Gatehouses, caretaker's buildings & storage sheds**

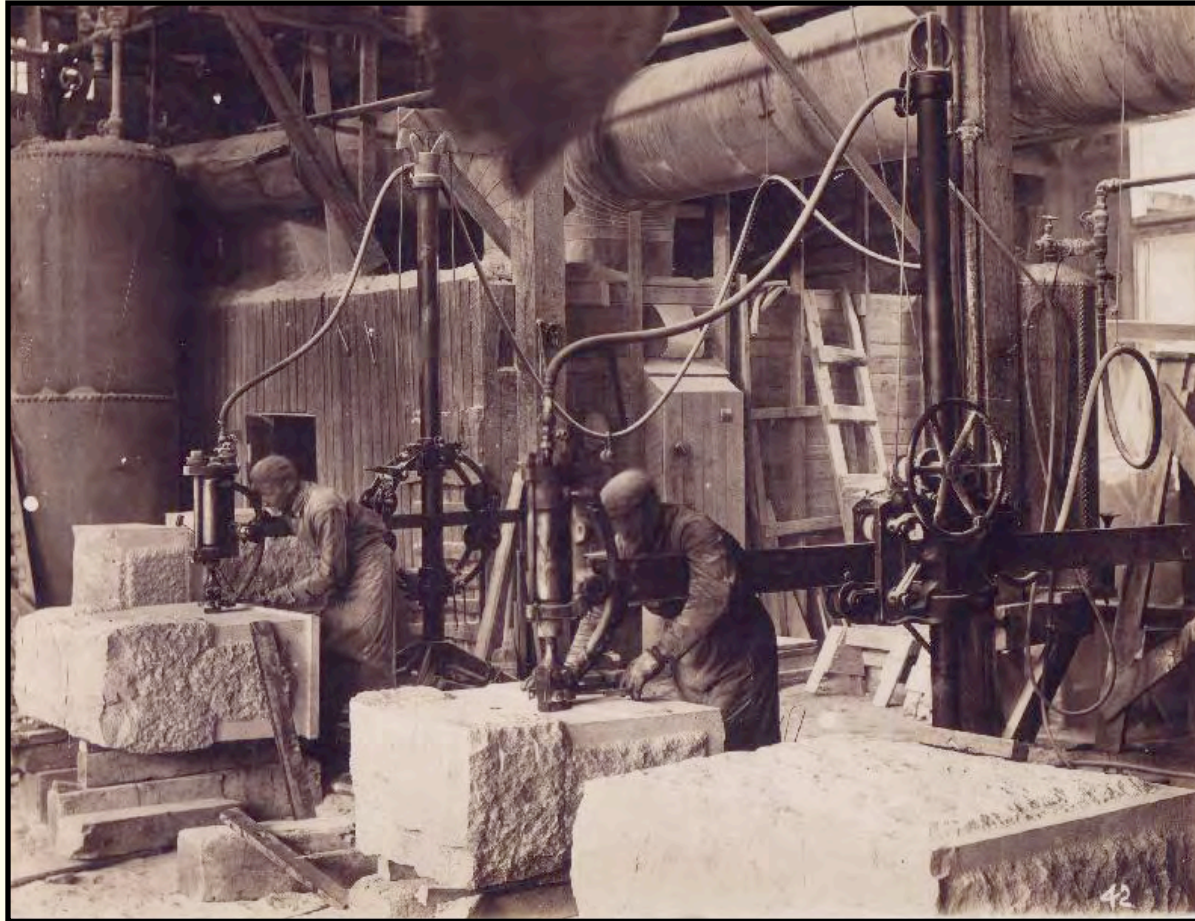


LS03526 Bowman family Mausoleum, Laurel Glen Cemetery, Cuttingsville, Shrewsbury, VT; stereoview. Undated; first burial in this cemetery was in 1817



LS05675 Mumfield(?) Stenson(?) Monument, Cemetery, Rutland, VT stereoview, undated.

But marble gravestones didn't hold up very well. They were susceptible to pollution, weathering, lichen and moss. Over time, the marble deteriorated, sometimes crumbling off into "cemetery sugar." Granite became the stone of choice (and still is). Vermont had tons of granite in its landscape. Barre became "The Granite Capital of the World".



LS02216 Pneumatic Surfacing Machines in Operation, granite cutting shed, Barre, VT, 1920.



LS05981 Cemetery Entrance, St. Johnsbury, VT,  
Right-hand side of a stereoview, undated. St. Johnsbury  
has 6 known cemeteries, one with over 13,000 graves.

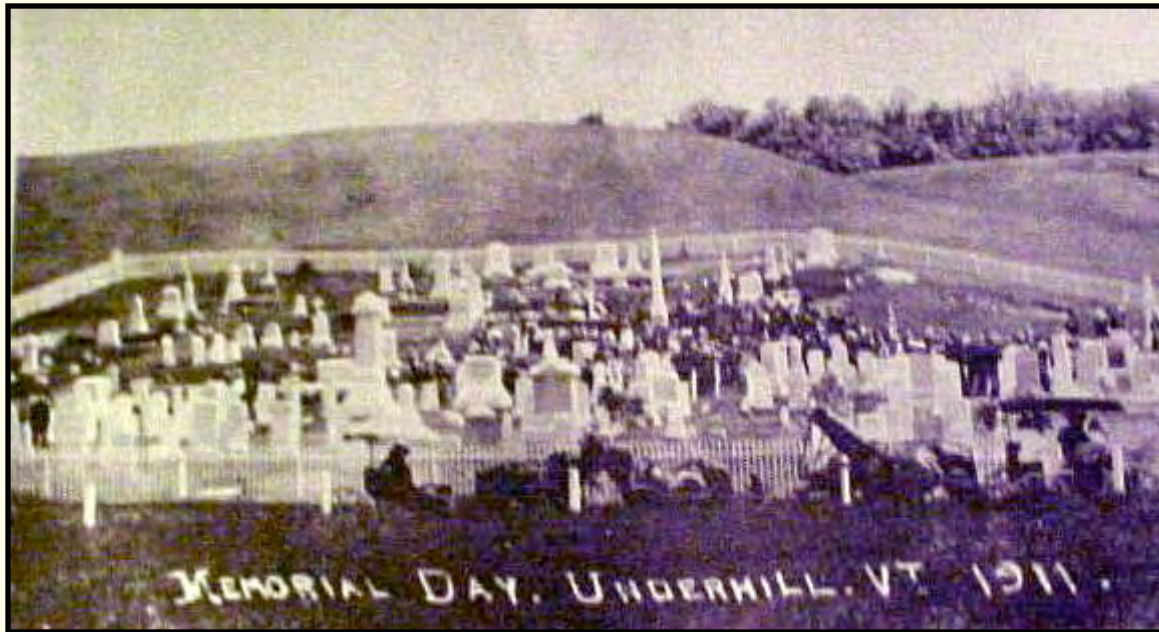
Whichever type of burial ground you visit ☒ family plot, churchyard, graveyard, or cemetery (and many large cemeteries are a combination) ☒ you will notice it is a great home for vegetation and wildlife. You'll understand why cemeteries got the nickname "a city's green lungs":

- **Sometime cemeteries have the largest tree species around, as cemeteries are usually not disturbed by development**
- **Sometimes they have unusual species of trees**
- **The lush vegetation and the usually quiet**



LS02719 The caption reads, "A funeral procession passes Caspian Lake House and homes enroute to the cemetery - Black and white horses pull the hearse." Greensboro, VT. undated.

**Where are we headed? Will another idea for cemeteries catch on in Vermont? The newest idea for cemeteries is a “green” cemetery, where bodies are buried, or cremated remains scattered, in a natural wooded area, without embalming or caskets. Graves may be marked with flat markers, but not monuments. Green cemeteries are less costly, have less impact on the environment, yet still provide a place for loved ones to visit, complete with hiking trails! People who like the idea believe it protects green space, rather than consumes it like the cemeteries we now know. Vermont certainly has plenty of landscape for green cemeteries. What do you think?**



LS00923 Memorial Day, Underhill, VT, 1911. Underhill Flats Cemetery; since 1842 over 300 burials; still used today. There are 7 known cemeteries in Underhill.

With over 1,900 cemeteries in Vermont, there is bound to be one near you. Some Vermont cemeteries have only one grave; some have thousands. Some towns have more than 20 cemeteries within their town lines; four towns have none: Averill, Ferdinand, Glastonbury and Lewis. Why would that be?

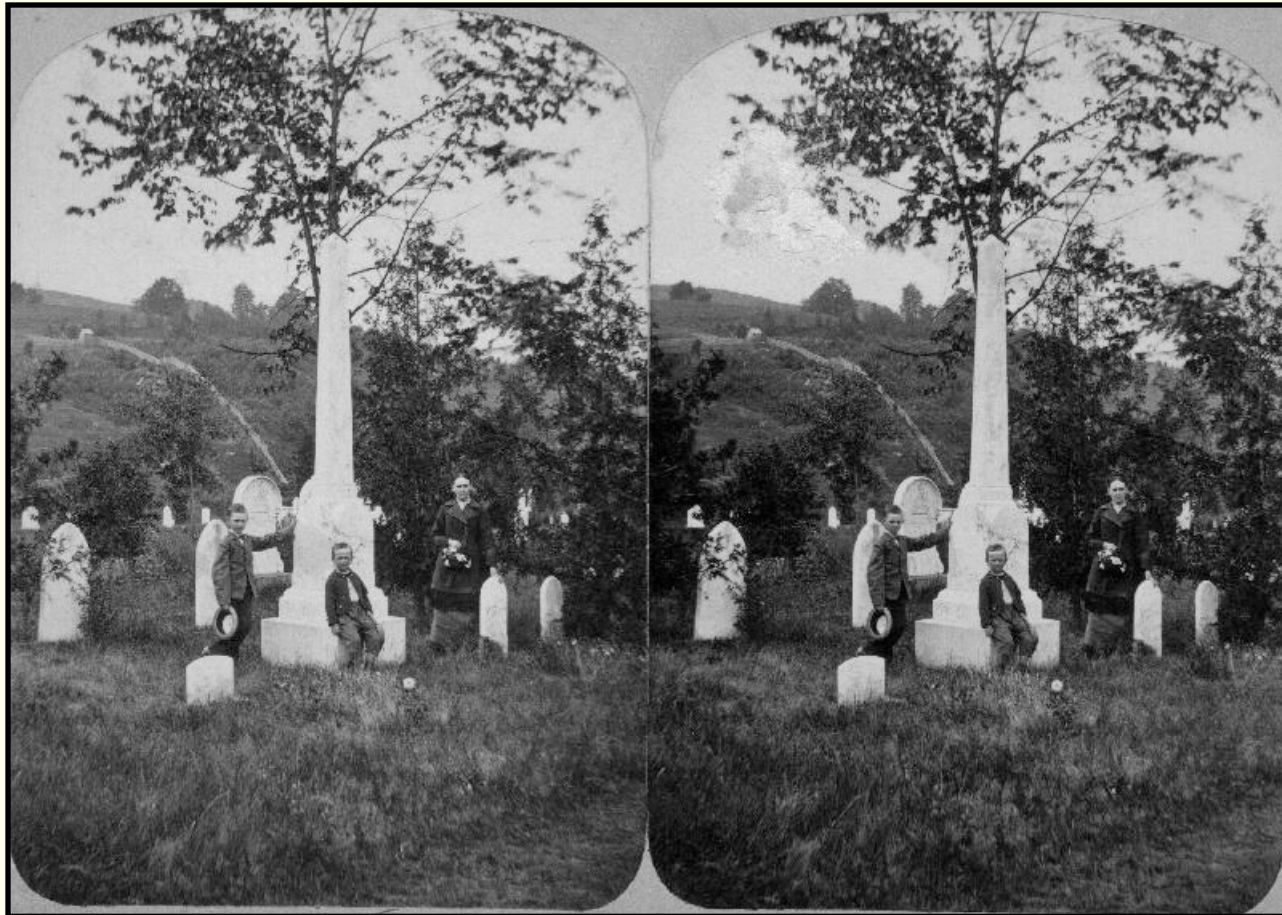
There are many things to discover in cemeteries! Besides the different stone material, types plants, animals, designs and landscapes, you can discover what is on the stone itself. Carved into gravestones are artwork, names, dates, facts, sayings, and poems, each giving us clues about the life of the person buried there.

**Don't let graveyards give you the goosebumps! Have fun exploring a cemetery!**

## A few parting shots and last words....

*Inscription on the gravestone of Wm. F Townsend, Baptist Cemetery, Sheffield, VT:*

“I came to the place of my birth, And said to the friends of my youth,  
Where are they? An echo answered Where are they?”



LS04876 Three people in cemetery, Northfield, VT, undated. Northfield has 10 known cemeteries.

*Inscription on stone of Morman R. Drake & infant son, 1789-1883, Baptist Cemetery, Sheffield, VT:*

**“No costly tablet here, nor pompoms lay: No storied urn, nor animated bust  
This simple stone directs the fondest way to pour our sorrows o’er their precious dust”**



LS04032 Ide Family monument being carried on wagon from Railroad to Mt. Pleasant Cemetery, St. Johnsbury, VT, undated. The Ide obelisk was no “simple stone” and was surely a “costly tablet”!



LS07023 North Hero, 1949. North Hero has 5 known cemeteries.

“I walk over the dead with every step,  
They seep upward through grasslands and sidewalks,  
Their gestures grand, their small intentions  
A part of me ...”

## Credits

Presentation compiled by Joan Alexander, Glover, VT, January 2005 as project for  
“The Changing Face of Vermont Landscapes” UVM course.

Prepared for use with elementary school students.

## Photos

All photos: Landscape Change Program website: [www.uvm.edu/perkins/landscape](http://www.uvm.edu/perkins/landscape),  
(Except West Wheelock Cemetery photo, taken by Joan Alexander)

To see more info on any of the LCP photos, just go to the LCP website, choose “Advanced Search”  
and enter the photo’s LS number in the text search field.

## Information

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