

Two families claim same plot in town run burial ground!

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Well folks, it's that time again. I hope you all have enjoyed good health, and for those who have not, let us all pray you have a speedy recovery. Get in your favorite chair and perhaps sit by a window so you can enjoy the warm sun. You may see the squirrels and chipmunks scattering around. Have your favorite beverage handy by and see what we have for you this time.

Fall is quickly falling upon us, the leaves are turning color, the birds are thinking about moving south. The animals in the forest are preparing for the winter ahead, and so are we!

In this issue we have the president's report, an article from a VOCA member about a problem that is common in cemeteries everywhere, (guess who is buried in my plot!), we will have some trivia, and a review of some of Vermont's cemetery laws, can anyone find Robyn Miller of Burlington?, a look in the Vault, and a request by VOCA member Jane Woodward.

**Trivia:** Buddhist monks have long practiced self-mummification. Some Japanese monks used to prepare themselves for self-mummification through a technique called "sokushinbutsu". They ate a substance diet of nuts and seeds for 1000 days to get rid of all their fat, and then spent the next 1000 days eating only bark, roots, and

drinking the tea of a poisonous tree called the "urushi", in an effort to make their body both dehydrate and toxic to parasites. Finally they would place themselves inside a stone tomb, ring a bell once each day. When the bell failed to ring, the other monks would seal the tomb, wait another 1000 days, and then open it up to find out if the monk had mummified. Only about 20 such monks were successfully mummified in this manner.

## ~~~~~Presidents Report: Fall 2009~~~~~

Vermont's short summer was shorter than normal. I would like to report that my giant pumpkin plant produced massive fruit. Unfortunately, the wet weather that hit Vermont *all summer* literally sank much of my produce in the mud, including my attempt at a massive pumpkin. However, the individual that provided me with the hybrid plant did win first place with a 600 pound pumpkin at the Vermont State Fair, and he still has an 800 pound pumpkin on the vine! Next year I am thinking about growing rice.

I am sure that the wet summer weather also impacted cemetery restoration projects this year. Hopefully, some work was accomplished. If you have pictures and/or stories regarding your local project, please send any information to our editor, Harry Fisher.

I have received numerous inquiries from individuals regarding genealogical issues. I have been forwarding these requests to the appropriate VOCA footstones to see if they could provide assistance.

The Department of Corrections, (DOC), work crews continue to expand to different cemetery projects around Vermont. I was recently informed that some old burial grounds in Windsor County are benefiting from this on-going VOCA/DOC effort. If you are interested in the availability of DOC work crews for your cemeteries, please contact DOC Field Office Director Mike O'Malley at 802-786-5099.

I do have a few VOCA presentations lined up for the fall. It is a great way to give VOCA publicity and add new members to our rolls. If you

know of any organization that would be willing to host a presentation, please let me know.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our October 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting. If any member has agenda items or other concerns regarding VOCA, please do not hesitate to send an e-mail to [tgifvt@msn.com](mailto:tgifvt@msn.com) or call me at 802-773-3253.

Tom Giffin  
President

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Trivia: According to the statistics from Wikipedia, each year in America the following environmental nasties get sent below ground with our dearly departed. 30 million board feet of hardwoods for caskets, 90,272 tons of steel for metal caskets, 14,000 tons of steel for vaults, 2,700 tons of copper and bronze for caskets, 1,636,000 tons of reinforced concrete for vaults, and 827,060 gallons of embalming fluid, which most commonly includes formaldehyde.

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### A summary of some of Vermont's Cemetery laws:

The town clerk must ensure deaths can be registered and burial transit permits issued when the office is closed. The clerk must appoint annually, within five days after the clerk's election or appointment, one or more deputy registrars for this purpose. The name of the deputy or deputies must be recorded in the town records and the commissioner of health must be notified of the names.

Cremation must wait for a medical examiner certification that no further inquiry into cause and manner of death is necessary.

State law does not require embalming, but local board of health and/or the town health officer can require it to be done.

Burial must generally be at least five feet deep.

State law does not limit the disposition of cremated remains. No permit is required for scattering cremated remains.

When a pauper dies in town and is to be buried there, the burial will be arranged and paid for by the town. Also the town must provide a suitable headstone, if one is not available through family, friends, or the estate. The marker or headstone must be erected within three years of the date of the burial.

The select board of a town has oversight and control over the public burial grounds unless the town has voted to elect cemetery commissioners. Once a town votes to elect cemetery commissioners, those commissioners will be responsible for the care and management of the town cemeteries. They will be authorized to "exercise all the powers, rights, and duties with respect to such care and management" and the select board will no longer be responsible for overseeing and managing the town cemeteries.

Cemetery commissioners will be a board of 3 members or one of 5 members. The law provides that any vacancies are filled by the remaining commissioners, not by the select board.

All public bodies that hold meetings must provide the public with an opportunity to participate in the meeting. Routine day to day matters that do not require action by the public body may be conducted outside a duly warned meeting, provided that no money is appropriated, expended, or encumbered.

When three voters of a town make a request to the select board or cemetery commissioners to maintain a private burial ground that has been abandoned and which has become unsightly, or has displaced headstones and monuments, the board is required to take some action.

Home burials are permitted in Vermont. The law provides that a private individual may set aside a portion of land he or she owns to use as a burial space for immediate family members, as long as this does not violate the health laws and regulations of the state and the town in which the land is situated. Check to be sure your town does not have a local ordinance prohibiting home burials. A map of the burial site should be drawn and recorded in the land records of the town clerk's office. It is also a good idea to add an easement to the deed permitting access to the burial ground. A death certificate and a burial transit permit are required. The site must be at least 150 feet from a water supply, (100 feet from a drilled well), and 25 feet from a power line. Avoid areas with a high water table, and bury at least 20 feet from the setback of a property line.

The town may grant temporary access to private burial grounds.

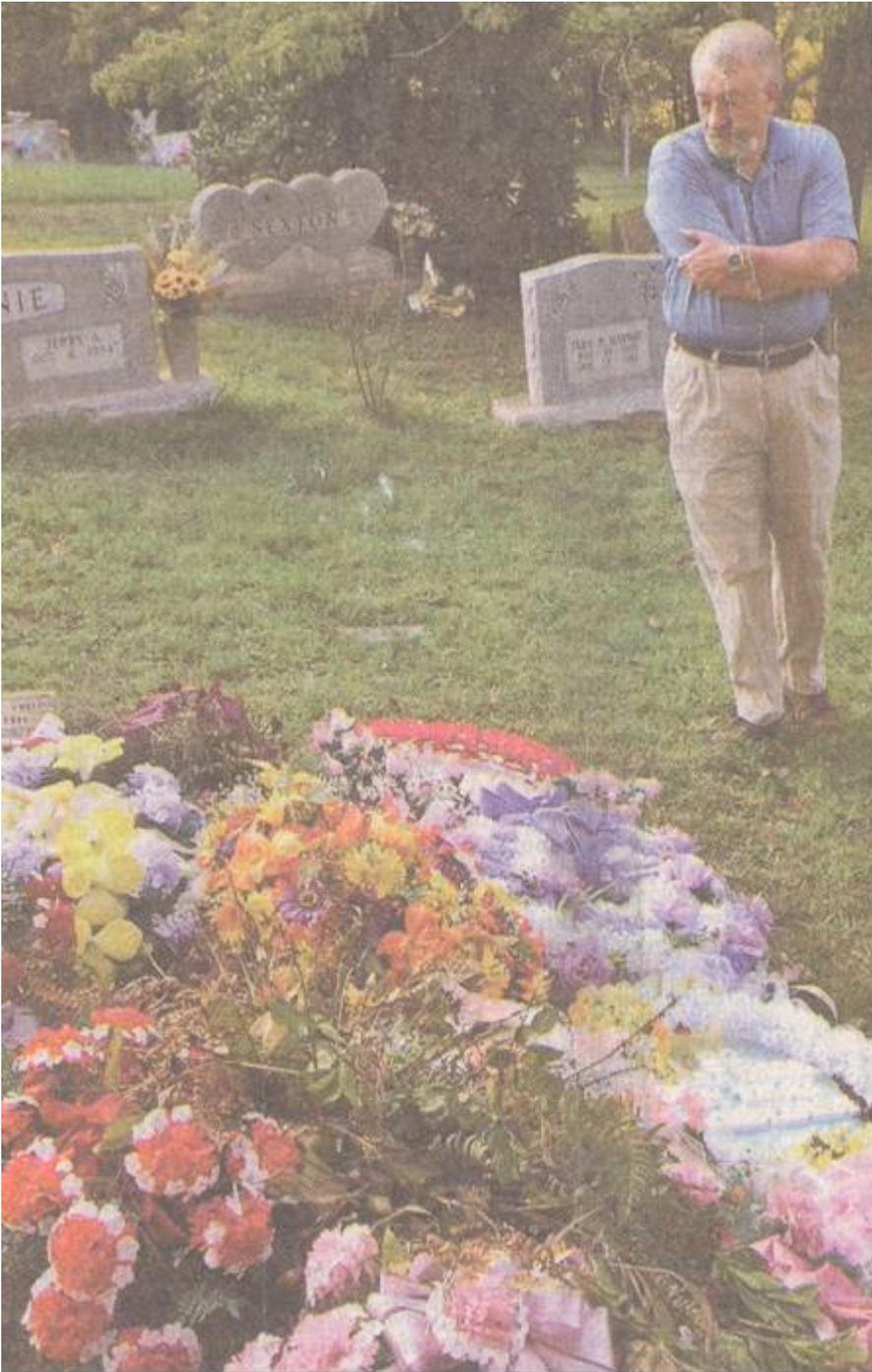
Every cemetery that is not owned and operated by a town or by a religious or ecclesiastical society must be established, owned and operated by a nonprofit corporation which is called a cemetery association. A cemetery association is formed by filing articles of incorporation with the Secretary of State. The cemetery associations by-laws and its rules and regulations will determined how the association is run, and how decisions are made, also the cemetery association treasurer must post a bond.

The law provides that if a cemetery association dissolves, the cemetery becomes a public burial ground if it is not owned by a church, or a by a religious or ecclesiastical association.

The owner of a cemetery lot may leave the lot, by will, to any relative who may survive him/her.

Corrections on death certificate can be made with in six months of the date of death by the town clerk. After six months it must be done by probate court in which the original certificate is filed.





Two families claim the same plot. The Haynie and Lunsford families have long been good friends, and the friendship continues to this day.

Jerry Haynie looks over Vernie Lunsford's grave as he talks about the confusion that resulted in the Lunsford family burying her in what he understood was his family's plot.

Now the town must deal with the perplexing problem of what to do next. Haynie said this is not a family feud, nor does he have any problems with the Lunsford family.

This is not an uncommon problem

in cemeteries. But it does stress the issue of having competent people working as sextons, and that if you have purchased a burial plot, you might take the time to revisit it and confirm that everything is in order.

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Old Headstones, a new passion for Burlington resident Robyn Miller. In the past three years Robyn Miller has cleaned more than 90 headstones. The Elmwood Avenue Cemetery, where she grew up, is her favorite cemetery. Robyn developed a passion of wanting to care for these headstones, some more than 100 years old, and covered with moss. She

wanted to learn how to clean them. She did a lot of research and visited the granite quarry and worked on different pieces of granite. She was cleaning one stone a week at Elmwood Avenue until they locked that cemetery up. Now she comes to Mount Calvary, her grand-parents are buried there, and sometimes she goes to Williston and Essex. There are six cemeteries she frequently visits. It is so peaceful to be in a cemetery. It takes about three hours to clean one stone. I had cleaned one stone that revealed a soldier who was in the Army in 1924. Many stones reveal lambs, you know, for babies. This year she has started taking pictures and is starting a book. Robyn would like to learn how to repair stones. Maybe start a business!

Perhaps County Rep, Bob Hooper could locate Robyn Miller and introduce her to VOCA.

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**A look in the Vault: Welcome our new members!**

1 Julia & Thomas Bright, Elaine Blodgett, Steve Rowe, L Dian Carlisle, and Mary Murphy.

2 Please check your renewal date on your address label. Just above your name is your member number followed by the date you need to renew your membership.

3 Louise Lessard is the new representative for Caledonia County

4 Don't forget the fall meeting, October 3<sup>rd</sup> (Saturday) in Williamstown, Vermont. Send \$10.00 to Nadine Martin, (802-479-9664) 84 Washinton St, Barre, Vt 05641. Roast Pork for lunch. Directions: I-89 north to exit #5, go right off ramp (left if I-89 southbound), about 4 miles to Brush Hill Rd, (on your left), a few hundred yards up Bush Hill Rd you will see a school on your right, turn left across from the school to the Masonic Lodge. VOCA signs will help guide you in Williamstown.

5 I am trying to arrange to have someone speak about American Indian burials for this meeting.

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Trivia: Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.

Henry Ford

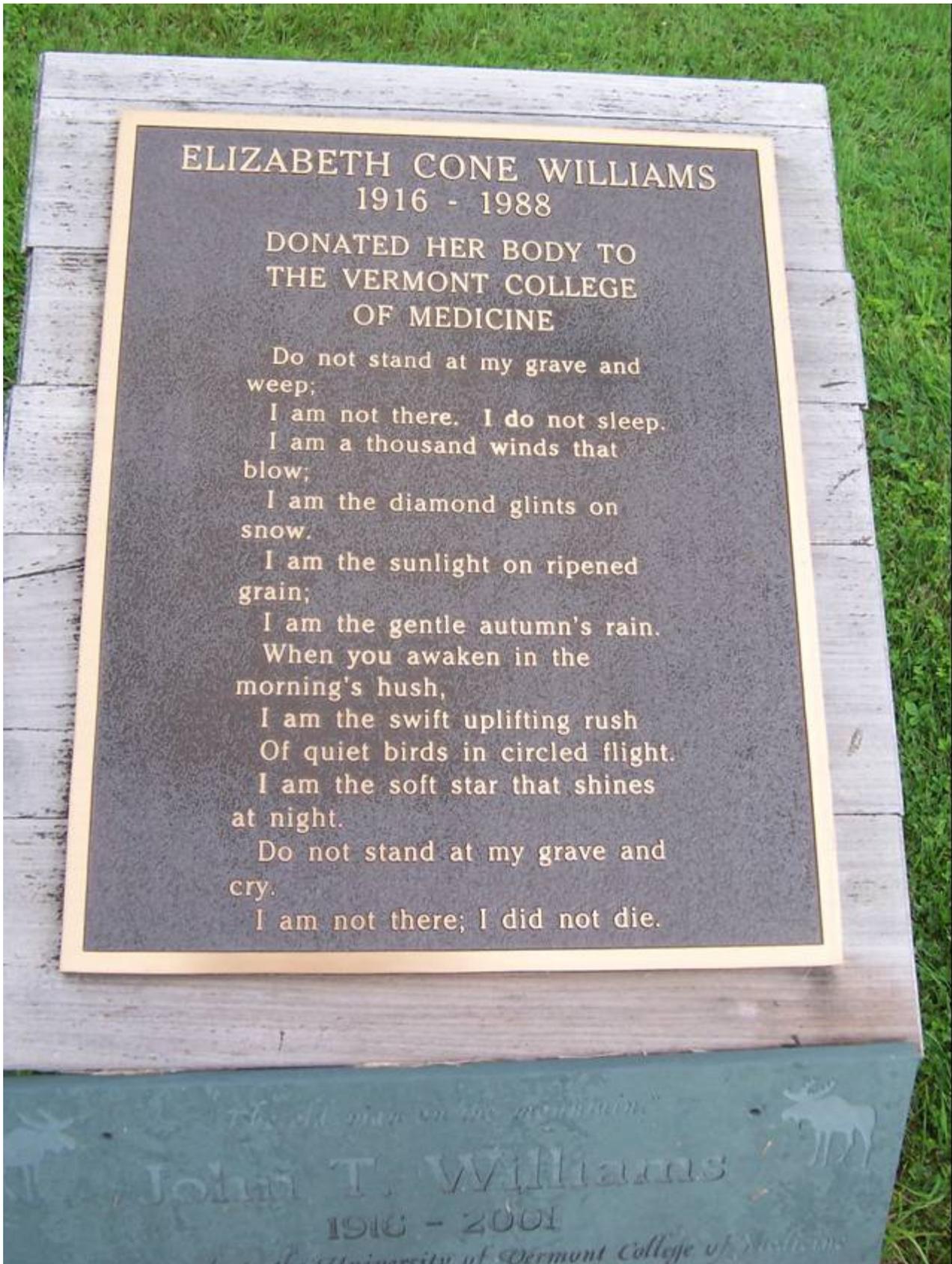
In the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years that count.

Abraham Lincoln

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The photo on the next page was provided by Peggy Jenks. It is located in the Wells Village Cemetery, Rutland County, Vermont.

Mr. Williams found this poem in his wife's purse after she died. This poem is by Mary Elizabeth Frye (1904-2004). At the 2008 Association for Gravestone Studies conference, Nariko Kurosava of Tatebaynshi, Japan did a program on the poem saying that it has been translated into Japanese by the Japanese singer-song writer Man Aria and titled "A Thousand Winds". It is very popular in Japan. Elizabeth Cone Williams (1916-1988) and her husband John (1916-2001) both donated their bodies to the Vermont College of Medicine.



On March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009 Joan Woodward sent the following letter to the editor: I bet I am the only member who lives in Oregon! (*we have three members who live in Oregon*), I've been to Pownal, VT once, and doubt that I'll ever get back, I am 88 and legally blind.

I am interested in the Reuben Jepson Farmyard Cemetery in Pownal and just 3 miles from Williamstown, MA. You cleaned it up once, when members of our family had rediscovered it. The recent issue of your news letter interested me, because we only found graves in one end of the fenced area. Four were members of my family, the Houghtons. Betsy Houghton married Thomas Jepson, so that ties us into the cemetery's namesake. The old farmhouse is below the cemetery, which is on a hill. In back of the cemetery and close to it is the farmdump, containing building materials among other things. Over a century and a half things blowing over the cemetery from the dump could easily cover a dozen graves. In fact I saw a piece of plasterboard protruding from the cemetery soil. Among the earlier family members whose graves I have not found are Joseph Houghton Sr. (died before 1800), his wife Martha, William Cummings and his wife, Rut. Their daughter Amy Cummings married Benjamin Houghton.

Then on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009 Jane wrote a second letter:

I have a story about a brave Vermont soldier, and I would like to solve the mystery. Where did he die and where is he buried?

The story about Joseph Houghton Jr was handed down in notes from my great, great grandmother, Betsy Houghton Jepson and recorded by her son-in-law, Martin N Johnson, my grandfather.

Betsy said: Joseph Houghton, uncle of Betsy married Eunice Stark. He was drafted. Four children were sick at the time. He did not want to go, but Eunice told him, Joseph, you go, and I will take care of the children. He went, but was exposed to the rain and died in Plattsburg NY. Can VOCA help find where he is buried?



Circle One

Renewal + member number / Change of address / New member

Name \_\_\_\_\_ member # \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Town/City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Dues are for calendar year: 1 year \$10.00, 5 years \$40.00, and lifetime is \$140.00

**\*\* A new member joining in Oct or Nov or Dec will have dues applied to the following year \*\***

**Make check payable to VOCA, mail to: Harry Fisher, VOCA Treasurer, P O Box 266  
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