

Cutter Cemetery

For the Keene Sentinel

by

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OF THE HISTORIC CEMETERIES of Jaffrey, the most striking and interesting is perhaps Cutter Cemetery. It lies at the edge of the Jaffrey Center village on Harkness Road quite close to Route 124. In days past this section of Jaffrey could just as well be named “Cutterville” because of the preponderance of Cutters, Cutter homesteads and Cutter businesses within earshot.

What’s striking about it is the allée of sugar maples. The now ancient trees run up the center drive and along the boundary walls giving both an ordered and a serene appearance, especially when the leaves are on the trees. Time has seen some gaps develop here and there but the grand layout still survives very nicely. (To fill the present and future gaps the Monadnock Garden Club and the Garden Club of Dublin have joined together in a Garden Club of America Centennial Project—restoring the Sugar Maples of Cutter Cemetery. Cuttings from the existing trees are being propagated for the long term while new trees will be planted in the next year or two.)

The cemetery was laid out “...in 1836 in accordance with the wishes of John Cutter...” (1765-1835) who lived beside the site chosen. His house, the largest in the village, still stands. At the start and for nearly a century the cemetery was for the Cutter family alone. Scattered through most New Hampshire towns are private family burying grounds, many now derelict and unseen, away from the road and obscured by forest. Not Cutter. What’s interesting and unusual is that it is large—over an acre—whereas its counterparts elsewhere are more likely to be a thousand square feet or less. And it’s grand, not only for its stately maples but its cast iron fencing and entrance gate and it’s large cut granite holding tomb (erected 1836).

Although it’s unclear exactly why, the “...yard was entrusted to the care and ownership of the town in 1927.” From that date there has been a small but steady influx of non-Cutters. Presently no lots are available to purchase though burials are still occurring. And even Cutters. Long-time Jaffrey schoolteacher, Mildred Cutter, joined her ancestors in 2007, below the maples.

The filling up of Cutter Cemetery leads us to another interesting aspect of this cemetery: it has a modern extension. If you wander up the center drive to the end and turn left, you will see an opening in the wall. This leads

you to Cutter Extension, a grassy 1.5 acre meadow with views to Monadnock. In May of 2004, the Town of Jaffrey purchased the land so that there would continue to be an active burying place with available lots in the center of town. Fully 69% of the acquisition cost was met by private donations, the remainder appropriated by a vote of Town Meeting two months before. A single reddish granite obelisk stands there now, marking the first and so far only interment; and in due time there will be others on the hillside overlooking John Cutter's house.

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