

A Journey Through the Barre Town Cemetery Individual Lot Deeds

by Dwight D. Harrington, Cemetery Commissioner, 2014

When the Barre Town Cemetery Commission decided to add the cemetery records to the town webpage, the data sources turned out to be a shotgun blast of media and miscellaneous documents. We had the old maps, dog-eared and taped up along the edges due to age, sketches masquerading as maps, the diligent work of others, and the card file of lot owners. One untapped source turned out to be the deed books stored away in the vault at the clerk's office. Others undoubtedly reviewed them in the previously mentioned diligent work, but these documents, usually out of site, might not jump out as a prime source among the maps and cards.

The deed books don't really reach back that far in time, at least when compared to the big picture anyway. The oldest deed recorded in the town's cemetery deed books is for the lot belonging to Calvin T. Bond, a Civil War veteran resting in Section C of Wilson Cemetery. His deed can be found in Cemetery Deed Book 1, Page 1. Page 2 of that same book has the first deed for the Maplewood Cemetery, that of William Farwell.

This deed does not use Maplewood as the name of the cemetery and is the only deed to refer to the burial ground as the Farwell Cemetery. Bond's deed has a date of 29 March 1902, Farwell's 12 Jun 1903.



Without searching the known sources of information, it would be difficult to assess the method in which our commission predecessors did business when they began their tenures in 1895 at the town and city governmental split. For awhile, the cemetery lot deeds resided in the land record books alongside regular parcel transactions. Although cemetery transactions are the same type of real estate sales as selling any lot, one can assume the commissioners formulated a plan to separate the deeds and store them in their own deed books. The decision to change to a separate cemetery book system would have been made right around the year 1901. The last deed purposely recorded in the land records has a date of 28 January 1901, the first in the separate deed book has a date of 29 May 1903. By 1903, cemetery deeds had their own home, no longer being lost inside the large volume of normal real estate transactions.

Judging from the entries in Book 1, it almost appears the commissioners of that era began a similar process for consolidating known data for the Barre Town cemeteries combined into a central location. Much of the first half of Book 1 has long strings of deeds with the same date on each. It would not make sense that the commission sold all of the lots at the same meeting, but rather they made an attempt to catch up with paperwork to match the existing conditions in the cemeteries. In a 2013 review of the books, 1425 or so deeds could be found.

The first 99 pages in Book 1 have been signed by the same person, Charles N. Barber, on behalf of the cemetery commission and the Town of Barre. Barber, a current resident of Maplewood, his monument provides the focal point for the cemetery, apparently served as commissioner or perhaps even as sexton, until mid – 1912 or so. A second individual, the town clerk, signed at the bottom of each deed.

Another piece of data that appears in the first book of cemetery deeds, but not any of the others, showed the date of the cemetery meeting associated with the deed as prepared and signed. Volume 1 shows meeting dates of 1902 through 1950. Reviewing the dates, it appears the commissioners met annually, rather than the current monthly meetings. The dates can be confusing, there are several places the deed writer over wrote the year making it appear the commissioners met the same day each year for several years in a row. For example, 17 August 1905, 1906, and 1907. The first meeting has been recorded as 29 March 1902. Some meetings took place in the summer, some in the fall, most in the winter, perhaps around town meeting day.

Closer examination of the early deeds show the meeting dates span several deeds, even though the signatures carry different dates. As meetings occurred once a year, Barber would have a whole year's worth of deeds to sign at one sitting. On the other hand, commissioners might have been playing catch up in getting deeds into the books. For example, the 17 August meeting referenced above had 23 deeds associated with it. The signatures carry dates between February 1906 and February 1908. The meeting dates show the changes in year, but not month or day, the changes seem to mirror the signature years. Perhaps the commission prepared a large number of lots to have deeds prepared at a single meeting, Barber signed them as they came to him. (Confusing to say the least, I'm confused anyway.)



Prominently perched on the dominant hillside within Maplewood Cemetery, this monument belongs to the C. N. Barber family. Charles Barber served on the Barre Town Cemetery commission from the mid 1890s to the mid 1910s.

Although not unheard of, the deeds did not necessarily show up in a timely manner. Barber's signature showed up on one other deed, Book 1, Page 223. Nestled between a December 1923 and a May 1924 deed, this one has a date of 29 March 1903. Apparently, Barber's affiliation with the committee came to an end in 1914. In 1917, he went into the US Army for a two year term of service, including a trip to France during the First World War. His family monument is now the dominant feature in our Maplewood Cemetery.

Another indication of this batch processing of deeds would be that of William Wylie in Maplewood. His deed carries the reference date of 17 August 1905 but occupies the page between a 1929 and a 1931 deed. Mary Hunter's deed shows the same wide gap in time, her deed is from 5 November 1909, but between deeds of 1941 and 1942.

The multiple strings of deeds with the same date seem to tie back to a specific meeting of the commission. It would be possible the commissioners reviewed blocks of information within the cemeteries and generated as many deeds as they could at each meeting. The deeds would be prepared over time and filed with the town clerk when completed. Many of these deeds in each string carry different filing dates, the date when the clerk received the deeds and officially entered them into the town records.

One deed did slip by and wound up in the land records at Book 12, Page 395. The page had a statement the deed had been filed in error and belonged in the cemetery book, another deed for the same lot can be found at Cemetery Book 1, page 114. The deed in the land records, however, contained a six part set of rules for the cemetery, probably the original basis for today's rules and regulations. Simply outlined:

- 1st: The lot must be used for the burial of the dead under the personal charge of the keeper of the cemetery.
- 2nd: The lots and grounds are to conform to the grade established by the commissioners and no walls, hedges, or fences can be added.
- 3rd: The lot owners have the right to put up a monument or plant shrubs or plants.
- 4th: If shrubs or plants become detrimental to adjoining lots or paths, the commissioners have the duty and right to remove them.
- 5th: The commissioners have the duty and right to enter and remove from any lot offensive monuments or other objects.
- 6th: No vault, partly or wholly underground, may be erected without the consent of the commissioners according to plans approved by them.

Many of the other deeds in the land records carried statements concerning the purpose of burial of the dead. Other clues to the past surfaced as well. An 1896 deed listed the commissioners of the day, William Farwell, Lewis Keith, C. N. Barber, A. G. Whitcomb, and D. A. Camp. Another deed stated the lot to be in the "new cemetery as surveyed and laid out in 1890 by the cemetery commissioners." The deed belonged to Charles Payne, Wilson, Section D, Lot 58.

No mapping from the 1890 layout of the Wilson Cemetery has been seen as of late. Without this evidence, tracing the development of the cemetery is best guess only. The earliest deeds refer to Section 1, as a rule, concerning Wilson, some deeds have no reference at all to section. Comparing the names and lot numbers to a more modern map, Section 1 lots sold in areas including Sections A through E, and the Old Yards 1, 2, 5. In those days, a fence marked the eastern edge of the cemetery, the area used for single graves and some welfare burials. The fence disappeared with the development of New Sections A and B. By 1915, the list of sections included Section 2 and Section 3. Officials even began calling portions of Old Yard 1, 2, and 5 as a "new yard."

As the old sections filled up, expansions to the north began. The year 1938 brought the first deed filed in the Main section. The area had another name in some deeds, that of Main at E, either a reference to the location near section E or a meshing of the two areas. At the far end of the main section, section F appeared. The small section, only 17 lots, carried deeds between 1963 and the last dated 1991. For a short time in the '40s to 1951, some deeds referred to the area as "New E." Shortly after the introduction of the main section, deeds began to appear in the North section, beginning in 1940. This section has brought the developed areas the farthest north to the cemetery boundary. Empty lots still exist in the north section and this area has the cemetery's above ground mausoleums.

Development continued to the west as well and by the mid-60's, Section G became available. For a time, most of the deeds signed involved lots in Section G. One thing separates G from the other sections, the width of a grave is only three and a half feet rather than the four feet in other parts of the cemetery. With the modern concrete liners used in today's burials, Section G provides very tight quarters indeed.

In 2006, the lots in the current New section began to sell. The word new provides the description for a certain area of the cemetery based on the era of the person doing the describing. As seen above, a new section went on sale in 1915 and in the 1940s, references to a New E appeared. In the current world, the new section begins at the old Section East where the single graves had been located and moved further east to the hedge on the current east edge of the cemetery property.

The plans came from a plan by local surveyors Chase and Chase dated 2005, they used other information from a drawing by Grever and Ward dated 9/14/77. One difference in this area comes from a more thoughtful design. Rather than plain boxes drawn on paper, provisions had been made to include landscaping between lots and sections. The lots have also been based on a 4 foot wide grave, not so in other sections where 10 foot wide lots are common.

Several factors, including the economy and cultural beliefs, brought interest in the cemetery providing above ground storage for cremation ashes. After several inquiries to the sexton, the commission decided to look into providing a columbaria park. As the ideas gelled into a design and the taxpayers asked for seed money, the project began to roll. Not all of the local citizenry supported the idea, some less than amused that the granite center of the world would provide the above ground facilities. Barre had long been famous for its grave markers and memorials, some felt the columbaria would hurt the granite industry. To address this, the commission required Barre granite be used in construction of the 96 – niche units, thereby merging the changing public demands and our long, granite based heritage.



The deeds for the columbaria niches are a bit different from the traditional grave lots. With a grave, the land is conveyed to the lot owner(s) in a traditional real estate transaction. Except for the rules and regulations controlling the cemeteries, lot owners have control of the land. On the other hand, the town retains the ownership of the columbaria structure, niche holders purchase the rights to the space inside the niche to store the urns. The process is the same in both graves and niches, a buyer receives a deed signed by members of the cemetery commission and the deed is filed in the cemetery deed book to become part of public records.

MAPLEWOOD

The Maplewood deeds are not so clear. Additional challenges exist in sorting out the cemetery. Many deeds did not reference a section, an analysis of the deeds shows that the same section had many names, some sections had the same name as others at some point in time. With the added confusion, cemetery commissioners are re-naming the sections for use in the future, the existing deeds matched to the names on the lots and new schematics prepared.

WEST HILL

In the town's West Hill Cemetery, no lot deeds exist, except for a single lot. All the legible stones carry a date before the 1900s. As no records concerning the cemeteries can be found, deeds are not available. One lot has been identified as useable in the cemetery, a modern day deed exists for this lot. In 2013, the cemetery commission voted to close the cemetery to all who did not have a current deed to the cemetery, between lack of written information and conditions at the site, the commissioners decided the cemetery should not be otherwise disturbed.

First deed found in the Barre Town Land Records: 8 June 1896 (in current Section D)
First deed found in the Barre Town Cemetery Records: 29 May 1903 (in current Section C)

- Section A: first deed – May 1921 last deed – May 1967
- Section B: first deed – May 1903 last deed – July 1982
- Section C: first deed – May 1903 last deed – October 1979
- Section D: first deed – January 1905 last deed – September 1977
- Section E: first deed – January 1904 last deed – August 1986
- Section E-New: first deed – June 1944 last deed – September 1951
- Section F: first deed – November 1963 last deed – August 1991
- Section G: first deed – May 1966 last deed – July 2013
- Section 1: first deed – May 1903 last deed – May 1925
- Section 2: first deed – November 1915 last deed – September 1920
- Section 3: first deed – June 1915 last deed – May 1921
- Section New Yard: first deed – March 1921 last deed – July 1941
- Section East: first deed – December 1921 last deed – May 1986
- Section Main: first deed – July 1938 last deed – December 2011
- Section Main-E: first deed – March 1955 last deed – May 2004
- Section North: first deed – June 1940 last deed – July 2007
- Section New: first deed – October 1985 last deed – June 2009
- Section New A: first deed – September 2006 last deed – May 2013
- Section New B: first deed – May 2006 last deed – Jun 2013
- Section OY1: first deed – September 1940 last deed – April 1975
- Section OY2: first deed – April 1958 last deed – August 1990
- Section OY3: first deed – July 1965 last deed -
- Section OY4: first deed – December 1959 last deed -
- Section OY5: first deed – December 1962 last deed – August 1970
- Section 1: first deed – December 1959 last deed -
- Section 2: first deed – April 1958 last deed -
- Section 3: first deed – July 1965 last deed -
- New yard/old yard: first deed – May 1921 last deed – July 1941

BACKUP DATA:

From Land Record Book 1, Page 147

Town of Barre to William Forester(?)

Description:

Being Lot No. Two (2), ten feet long by ten (10) wide in the Wilson Cemetery, so called, as surveyed and plotted by the direction of the Cemetery Commissions and agents for the new Town of Barre to be used for burial purposes for the dead and for no other purpose whatever. Dated June 20, 1896.

From Land Record Book 1, Page 159

Town of Barre to Mrs. H. B. Russell

Description:

Being burial Lot No. 68, ten feet long and ten feet wide, situated in the Wilson Cemeter, "so-called," said lot of land shall be used for burial place for the dead and no other purpose whatever, except to erect head stones or monuments to the memory of the dead. Dated Jun 8, 1896.

From Land Record Book 12, Page 395

Town of Barre to Murdo Beaton

Description:

... to be used for burial purposes, subject however to the conditions and limitations and with the privileges following to wit: First: That said lot shall be used as a burial place for the dead, and for no other purpose and all burials therein shall be under the personal charge of the keeper of the cemetery to whom shall be paid such a fee for opening a tomb or digging a grave as shall be established by the by – laws of the cemetery commissioners. Second: That all lots and grounds shall conform to the grade established by the cemetery commissioners, no fence or wall shall be erected, no hedge shall be grown about said lot. Lot and section marks will be furnished by the cemetery commissioners. Third: That the proprietors of said lot shall have the right to erect monuments or headstones and to cultivate shrubs and plants upon the same, but no trees shall be cut down or destroyed without consent of the commissioners. Fourth: That if any trees or shrubs shall in any way become detrimental to adjacent lots, avenues, or paths, or dangerous or inconvenient to passengers, it shall be the duty of the commissioners for the time being and have the right to enter into said lot, remove such tree and shrubs or parts thereof as are dangerous or inconvenient. Fifth: That if any monument, effigy, or any structure whatever, or any inscription be placed in or upon said lot which shall be determined by the majority part of the commissioners for the time being to be offensive or improper, the said commissioners or a major part of them shall have the right and shall be their duty to enter said lot and remove said improper object or objects. Sixth: That no vault, partly or wholly underground, shall be erected on said lot except by consent of the commissioners, in writing and according to plans and specifications approved by said commissioners.

Dated 18 April 1916, the deed had been flagged at the top of the deed as an "error," and (Recorded in cemetery records.)

Book 2, page 1, Town of Barre to C. J. Estabrook, dated 9 September 1896. The deed contained a list of the cemetery commissioners of that time: William Farwell, Lewis Keith, C. N. Barber, A. G. Whitcher, and D. A. Camp. Barber and Whitcher can be found in the Maplewood Cemetery. (There is also a William F. Farwell at Maplewood, but not necessarily the William on the commission.)

The first deed in the town land records: Book 1, page 1: dated 9 March 1895 and referenced a deed in Book 32, page 174. (The town and city parted in 1895.)

LIST OF MEETINGS FROM THE DEEDS IN CEMETERY DEED BOOK 1

29 March 1902	26 May 1919	3 March 1936
17 June 1903	18 June 1920	2 March 1937
26 June 1903	1 March 1921	1 March 1938
23 March 1904	13 May 1921	7 March 1939
17 August 1905	16 November 1923	7 March 1940
17 August 1906	4 March 1924	7 March 1941
17 August 1907	3 March 1925	18 January 1942
17 April 1907	2 March 1926	18 January 1943
27 April 1907	1 March 1927	18 January 1944
17 April 1909	6 March 1928	18 January 1945
24 April 1909	5 March 1929	4 January 1946
27 May 1912	4 March 1930	15 April 1946
24 April 1911	4 March 1931	15 April 1947
16 June 1915	4 March 1932	18 November 1947
14 June 1916	7 March 1933	15 April 1948
9 May 1917	6 March 1934	15 April 1949
26 June 1918	5 March 1935	18 April 1950