

Sunapee's Historic Buildings & Places – by Barbara B. Chalmers
Old Eastman Cemetery
466 North Road



Cemetery Established:
1802

Use:
Public Burying Ground

2019 photo of Old Eastman Cemetery from the Sunapee Historical Society Collection

Property History: This Sunapee burial ground is located in the northwest corner of Lot 5 in the 4th North Range, granted in 1771 by England's King George to Saville proprietor Samuel French. He forfeited his land in 1780 for non-payment of taxes. In 1797 Isaac Eastman bought this 85-acre lot for 72-pounds 10-shillings, then cleared land and began to build a farm. At the 1798 town meeting, a committee was appointed to recommend sites for two town burial grounds, one north of the Sugar River, and one south of the river. During the March 1800 town meeting, a site for the north burial ground on Francis Smith's farm was recommended, but at the next year's town meeting, voters reconsidered and decided to establish the burial ground on the east side of North Road on land owned by Isaac Eastman. Another vote funded building stone walls around the parcel to protect graves from stray farm animals. Joseph Pillsbury bid 3-shillings and 5-pence per rod (16.5-ft) and got the job. None of these walls exist today.



The earliest surviving headstone, shown at left, is for the 1802 death of Ruth Simons George, Isaac Eastman's sister-in-law, who died at age 32. She was married to Daniel George, soon to become the village miller at Otter Pond Brook. Next from 1816 is the grave of Isaac's daughter Sally and his wife Mehitable from 1820. Sunapee's burial grounds, like others in New England, orient graves east/west, with the head of the coffin toward the west. It was believed that the spirit of the deceased would rise and face the sun of a new day. If the body was buried between head and footstones, with inscriptions facing outward, the inscription faces west. If the headstone inscription faces east, the body is buried east of the headstone. Early New England gravestones were made of thin slabs of black slate and from the mid-1800s Vermont marble and Sunapee granite were used. Egyptian design influenced public art from the mid-1850s, introducing obelisk monuments which became popular. They were considered tasteful with pure uplifting lines, and a symbol of the great ancient cultures. Their shape used little space and their simple lines cost less to make than elaborate monuments.

By the mid-1850s more burial plots were needed at Eastman. In 1857 Elijah George, who owned the farm on the north side of the cemetery sold a quarter-acre for \$5 to neighbor John Trow for burial plots. This new section more than doubled the size of the burying ground. In 1876 Horace Everett who then owned the Elijah George farm began to sell some of his land abutting the burial ground for grave sites. Two years later his creditor, Sylvester Rowell of Croydon. Owned the farm and he laid out a grid of 50 four-grave lots and sold them at a cost of \$8 each until his death in 1896. During this period, some plot deeds were recorded at the county registry. Shortly before

Sylvester's death, he set aside more land in 1896 for cemetery plots east of the area already established. He had a map drawn by his son-in-law Reuben Gove Smith, which is now lost to time. This map is referred to as the 1896 Plan B expansion. Sylvester's widow continued to sell cemetery lots until 1909, when she sold all the unsold lots to their son Wesley Rowell for \$25.

Meanwhile, in 1898 the former Isaac Eastman farm on the south side of the original Eastman burial ground was sold to William Perry of Boston who had married Cora Wiggins of Sunapee. He began to sell cemetery plots from his land until a divorce forced the sale of the farm to Cora's brother Burt Wiggins. The sale included all the unsold cemetery plots in Perry's expansion area.

Typically, when a lot was purchased, no funds were set aside for future plot maintenance. By the early 1900s, Sunapee's cemeteries were in poor condition with uncut grass and weeds, broken and unpainted fences, and fallen over gravestones. At the 1908 town meeting, the poor condition of the cemeteries was a topic of discussion resulting in the appointment of a cemetery committee to make repairs. Moses F. Knowlton and Almira B. Abbott led the effort, followed by her husband Almeron. Funds for repairs were voted annually and a trust fund was established for perpetual care donations. Townsfolk were encouraged to make donations of \$75 or more for the care of family plots. The July 1, 1910 *Argus and Spectator* newspaper reported that the cemetery committee had begun work at the "lower village yard" where the fence was painted, gravestones reset, and sunken grave surfaces filled, leveled, and seeded. Similar improvements were made at Eastman Cemetery.

By 1933 a total of 23 lots had been sold at the Perry-Wiggins extension of Eastman Cemetery, but very few plot deeds were recorded. That year the town voted to buy the remaining unsold Perry-Wiggins extension lots from Burt Wiggins and spent \$350 to do so. Also in 1933, Sylvester Rowell's son, Wesley sold all his unsold lots, 63 in all to Edward Perkins, the postmaster of Sunapee, then to his widow Pearl Perkins. By 1958 the Cemetery Commissioners closed a deal with Burt Wiggins to buy more land, a 100 by 102-foot parcel east of the Perry-Wiggins extension. A fence was installed by the town but a dispute over its location ensued that went to court for settlement. The town moved the fence. No more land was purchased from Burt Wiggins for the cemetery as the Commissioners looked elsewhere for land in the early 1960s.

The original section of Old Eastman Cemetery, chosen as the town's first burial ground for north of the Sugar River, has 146 known graves, 34 without markers, and probably more that are unknown. The 1858 Elijah George expansion has 108 known graves, 12 without markers, and probably more that are unknown. The 1878 Rowell extension has 134 known graves, 11 without markers, and perhaps a few unknown graves. Sylvester Rowell's 1896 Chart B area, later known



2022 photo of Old Eastman Cemetery

as the Perkins Extension, has been developed in a limited way with 35 burials in 12 lots. The Perry-Wiggins Extension has nearly 300 graves. In the past twenty years, one or two burials a year still occur at Old Eastman Cemetery on a hilltop that once had a panoramic view and where now in fall, Mount Sunapee can still be seen through leafless trees.

New Eastman Cemetery

473 North Road



Cemetery Established:
1963

Use:
Public Cemetery

2022 photo of New Eastman Cemetery from the Sunapee Historical Society Collection

Property History: Sunapee's newest cemetery is located in the southeast corner of Lot 4 in the 5th North Range, granted in 1771 by England's King George to Saville proprietor Abner Greenleaf who sold his grant, probably to Bailey Bartlett of Haverhill, Massachusetts. In 1796 Bailey sold this undeveloped 85-acre lot for 38-pounds to Francis Smith of Beverly, Massachusetts. Francis, his wife Hepzibah, and their five children established a farm here on Smith Hill. At the 1798 town meeting, a committee was appointed to recommend sites for two town burial grounds, one north of the Sugar River, and one south of the river. The committee reported back at the 1800 town meeting to recommend a site at the southeast corner of Francis Smith's farm. Although the recommendation was accepted, the following year at town meeting voters reconsidered and decided to establish the northern burial ground on the east side of North Road at land of Isaac Eastman (Old Eastman Cemetery.) Ironically, the site first considered is the location of New Eastman Cemetery. Lot 4 remained in the Smith family until 1886, when the farm was purchased by John Coughlin Wiggins. The Wiggins family farmed here until 1946 when Kaarle Lehtinen bought the farm. Kaarle was a Finnish immigrant and Newport mill worker who by hard work and shrewd real estate investments became a wealthy man.

In the early 1960s when the Sunapee Cemetery Commissioners decided more land was needed, they decided not to try to expand Eastman Cemetery any further by buying more land from Burt Wiggins. Instead, chairman George Merrifield negotiated to buy land on the west side of North Road from Kaarle Lehtinen. In 1963 Kaarle sold 7.1-acres at the southeast corner of Lot 4 for \$1,700 to the town for a cemetery. With this purchase, the commissioners thought enough land was secured to serve the town well into the future. The south side of the parcel was the first area to be cleared of trees, stumps, and rocks, then graded, filled, and seeded. This was Section A with nearly 90 four-grave lots. In February 1965 Lot 1-A was sold to Robert W. Cowan for \$50.

Section B with 102 four-grave lots was the next area to be prepared with lots for sale by the end of 1967. Section C was cleared, graded, and seeded, but still requires more fill to enable vault burials. A limited number of lots have been sold and used along the Section B edge of this section. Around 2006 Section D was established at the north side of the cemetery loop road where 37 burials have occurred through 2022. Another section is planned for the future. As 2022 closes, there are approximately 560 burials at New Eastman Cemetery.