

Old Swan Lake Cemetery - 1865 Depot Street, Dennis Port

Old Swan Lake Cemetery, Depot Street, Dennis Port, is a privately owned and operated cemetery. It is under the control of the Swan Lake Cemetery Association, Inc., a non-profit corporation run by unpaid volunteers.

Dennis Port was the only one of the early villages in the Town of Dennis which did not develop a community cemetery in early times. While there were a number of family plots in the village (Wixon, Kelley, Chase, Gage families), many interments of village residents were done elsewhere (West and North Harwich, South Dennis).

In 1864, Dennis Port was the most populous village in town. A loose association of Dennis Port residents was formed to identify a site for a burial ground. Then-vacant land, 8 acres, was donated by Jeremiah and Sophia Kelley in October 1864. The land was cleared by the residents, plots and pathways laid out, and the lots were sold to residents at minimal cost. All maintenance was strictly voluntary. One enters the Old Swan Lake Cemetery through a graceful stone arch that was erected by the Society of Willing Workers in 1925.

In 1919, after the shipping industry collapsed and population plummeted, proper care of the cemetery could not be maintained. The Swan Lake Cemetery Association was then formally organized into a Corporation and its charter was granted by the Commonwealth on 5 Apr 1919. Perpetual Care was then instituted and a regular organization has continued to this day.

The cemetery is characterized by its diversity of monuments, from the elaborate to the plain. Many mariners, from Captains to common sailors, are interred there. A member of the original U. S. Life Saving Service, Alton J. Baker (1880-1958), is buried here.

Being a close-knit village cemetery, nearly all the individuals buried there are related to one another by blood or marriage. A number of burials pre-date the cemetery's founding, having been moved there from other sites.

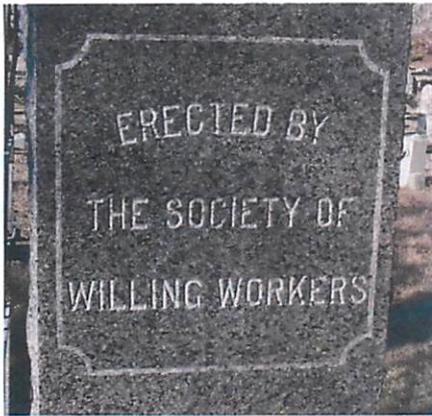
The most notable internment is that of Benjamin Franklin Baker (1862-1927), the only native of Cape Cod to have been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. He had been a USN Coxswain on the USS Nashville in Cienfuegos Harbor, Cuba, in the Spanish-American war, when he and his mates, while under fire, exhibited "extraordinary bravery and coolness" while cutting two large submarine trans-Atlantic cables connecting Cuba and Spain. He also served in the Boxer Rebellion, China, and in World War I.

There are a number of stones dedicated to mariners who were lost at sea, including many of the crew of the famous Cross Rip Lightship, which was lost in the ice. There is also a potter's lot, containing the unknown and the indigent.

Old Swan Lake Cemetery continues active, as does its association and lots continue for sale to the public. For information please contact Burton R. Derick, President, at (508) 398-3183 or bderick37@comcast.net. News and updates can be found on Facebook, search "Swan Lake Cemetery Inc."



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Willing Workers engraving on arch



Benjamin F. Baker died May 19, 1927