

Graveyard discovery

Residents aim to preserve burial site

By Michael Kelley
Staff Writer

The Eastern Trail near Portland Farms Road is familiar terrain for John Koller, who lives on Summerfield Lane, a short distance from the trail. Koller has been using the trail for walking and cross-country skiing several days a week for a decade.

Only recently did Koller become aware that part of the Eastern Trail behind the Hillcrest Retirement Community cuts through a family graveyard that dates back to at least the 1790s, nearly 100 years before the town's first cemetery — Scarborough Memorial Cemetery — was established.

"I've lived here for 10 years and I probably have walked or skied by this graveyard 200 or 300 times," Koller said.

Koller said roughly a month ago, a father, who was checking out the graves with his son, alerted him to the old cemetery. One of the graves, the only one still standing on the property, dates back to 1793.

"A lot of people use the trail. You don't realize it is there unless you are looking for it," said Koller, while on a walk along the Eastern Trail last week. "The date on that grave — 1793, that's 20 years after we became a country. Back in those days there must have been a homestead or something here."

Now, almost 220 years later, there is little indication from the trail of the graves, although with the Eastern Trail's expansion toward South Portland several years ago, the site is much easier to find.

The Scarborough Historical Society has been working over the years to chronicle the cemeteries in town by taking pictures and noting who is, or once was, buried on site. Dorothy Shaw Libbey began documenting old family burial sites in Scarborough in the 1960s. Today, the historical society, which is opened 9 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays, or by appointment, has two large binders dedicated to the information.

"The first time I visited this cemetery and documented it was in August of 1988 and found the site to have been vandalized with gravestones broken into pieces and strewn about," said Scarborough resident Janice Makowski, who has done

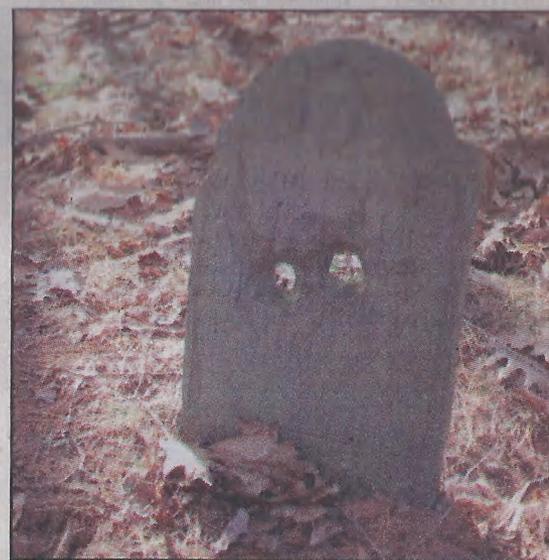


work to update Libbey's findings. "I then went back in 1997, with Becky Delaware from the historical society. When Becky and I visited, we covered up some of the gravesites since they had the appearance of having been dug up. Some of the stones appeared to have bullet holes, so we tried to protect them from future, further vandalism."

Today only one of the 17 graves that had once been on the property, which was once home to the Eben Libby Farm, can be read. That grave belongs to David Wilbur, a young boy who died at 14 days old in 1793. The grave reads: 'David, son of Mr. John and Mrs. Mary Wilbur Died 1793 aged 14 days.'

According to online records of the First Church of Scarborough, John Wilbur and Mary Jones married on Oct. 14, 1784.

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John Koller, a resident of Summerfield Road, a short distance from the Eastern Trail, was walking along the trail a month ago when he found a private family cemetery just off the trail. The cemetery sits on land that once belonged to the Eben Libby Farm. Koller is hoping to preserve the cemetery from further deterioration. Left, the only gravestone still standing belongs to David Wilbur, the son of John and Mary Wilbur, who died as an infant in 1793. (Michael Kelley photos)

Graveyard

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“History of Durham, Maine,” a book by Everett S. Stackpole confirms this.

“John Wilbur, brother of Nathaniel, Senior, married, 14 Oct. 1784, Mary Jones in Scarborough. They had twelve children, none of whom remained long in Durham.”

Although they cannot be seen today, Libbey indicated that there were marked gravestones for Mr. Samuel Jones, who died at 72 years old on Oct. 6, 1791 and Mr. Williams Jones (no date of death given). Hannah Jones, who died at 84 years old on Sept. 23, 1807, may also be buried on the property.

Online genealogical records indicate that William Jones, Samuel Jones and Hannah Jones were siblings.

David Wilbur’s grave, Makowski said, was adorned with a death’s head. While pursuing a master’s degree in American and New England Studies at the University of Southern Maine, Makowski used Scarborough’s cemeteries as a topic of several of her research papers. In doing research, Makowski said she found three other gravestones with a death’s head: one on Mitchell Hill Road and two in Black Point Cemetery. All three of the gravestones with the death’s head belonged to members of the Libbey family. Makowski said on Jan. 12, 1800, Nathaniel



Wilbur (possibly John’s younger brother) married Eunice Libbey. That, she said, could be the connection as to why Wilbur is buried on land once owned by the Libbey family.

The cemetery is on property that was once home to the farm that Eben Libbey, Nathaniel’s son, once operated. Today the DesFosses family owns the property. Theresa DesFosses said her parents have owned it since the late 1940s.

The cemetery is one of dozens that were mapped through GPS by Code Enforcement Officer Tom Reinsborough and Scarborough Police Capt. Marla St.

Pierre.

“What my intention was, is some of these cemeteries have long been forgotten,” St. Pierre said. “The ones that I could find I noted so should we have construction happen, I can make sure people are aware a cemetery is there and there is no damage from the construction.”

St. Pierre said many of the cemeteries are in severe disrepair.

“Some of these cemeteries haven’t been taken care of, so they are hard to find and the stones are laying down or are

There is little indication that there was once a family cemetery of 17 gravestones on property just off the Eastern Trail. The gravestones, which date back to the 1790s, have been the target of vandalism over the years, causing many of them to be unrecognizable.

(Michael Kelley photo)

damaged,” St. Pierre said.

While it is not known what role the Jones and Wilbur families played in Scarborough’s history, Koller said he is willing to do what it takes to preserve the site. He said he would love to see a sign on the Eastern Trail pointing to it and protective fencing around the graveyard.

“I just hate to see the history lost,” he said.

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