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## Caring For the *Dead*.. ..For Some,

By William M. 'Bill' Wood, Editor

# *A Way of Life!*

**T**radition in early Americana dictated that the care and perpetual disposition of a loved-one's remains received the same respect and consideration as the departed once enjoyed in life. The effort and attention paid to the care of one's final resting place, in-effect was interpreted as the highest tribute the living could render to honor the memory of the departed.

While attending school in rural Calvert County, on our 15-mile trip to and from school, our bus route passed by a local church cemetery. As we passed this particular cemetery, I remember the pristine condition of *one particular* gravesite. Located by the road on the edge of the cemetery, this one particular gravesite always appeared as though it received constant care from the entire church congregation. In fact, it was the tireless dedication of a fallen fireman's bereaved mother.

No matter what the season, holiday or not, this site was adorned with trimmed grass, clean and shining headstone, and flowers of many varieties, arranged and fashioned as if by the hands of a floral designer. The granite headstone was clean and clear as a looking glass.

This site compels the passer-by to notice the ever-vigilant care, devotion, and love dedicated to preserving this persons memory of how they lived, rather than how they died.

Equally compelling to ponder as to how would this person's final resting place appear had their loved-one *not* tendered such affection and dedication. Such is the case involving entire cemeteries, both public and private. Missing or defaced headstones, and mangled terrain that looks as though a lop-sided tiller went on its-own war-path.



Photo & Rendering of "Charles Hill" Cemetery,  
Upper Marlboro, MD - Bill Wood

Broken or missing flower vases, and no idea where the *once-vertical* cenotaphs *actually* belong.

Without the ageless care and maintenance required to keep a cemetery presentable, many are doomed to the battering elements and inevitable neglect.

In the October 2006 issue of FAMILY TREE MAGAZINE, in an article written by Nancy Hendrickson, "No matter how well-intentioned, repairing a tombstone with caustic materials such as concrete or bleach does *more harm* than good." "Water and a soft brush are the safest cleaning materials." Even well-intentioned family members, genealogists, and other maintenance efforts cause more harm than the advent of vandalism

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## “Cemeteries that *look neglected* are *most at risk* for vandalism”

**T**he effects of time and neglect aren't the enemy causing the most destruction, that's left to the **actions of vandals!**

Cowardly and despicable acts of vandalism are not only disrespectful, they are criminal and completely accountable.

On vandals, Nancy Hendrickson states: “Crime destroyed not only the sense of peace befitting a final resting place, but also the tombstones value as historical records and relics.”

In the same article, Hendrickson quotes Charlottesville, VA-based Restoration Expert Shelly Sass, saying “cemeteries that *look neglected* are *most at risk* for vandalism. That includes rural cemeteries and historic public burial grounds in older, high-crime neighborhoods.”

### WHAT YOU CAN DO..

Suggested solutions to reversing the ‘welcome sign’ to vandals are:

1. Improve lighting
2. Have fence installed
3. Volunteer organizations assistance providing any needed general maintenance
4. Promote the idea of an ‘Adopt a Cemetery’ mentality {similar to the “Adopt a Highway” programs which are already mostly successful throughout the United States}
5. Help inspire Focus Groups through petitions and written correspondences to locally elected and oversight officials

### The Clock Is Ticking..

Even before needed assistance can be sought and rendered, one must face an even faster approaching enemy to the already-neglected cemetery—**Time!**

Time can steal the secrets of a family's history by simply allowing the natural elements to invisibly change the essential data on memorial cenotaphs and other personalized markers.

In the time it takes to formulate any intention or plan of salvage, the clock is already providing the most destruction of the history recorded in the grave yard by its natural caustic effect on the stones, plaques, and monuments.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO..

At minimum, purchase a few of the cheap disposable cameras. Photograph each and every headstone or other memorial which provide a rich source of data for present and future genealogists as well as historians.

Keep in mind to *take notice* of and *record anything else* that appears on the headstone, which is not written. These items also bear witness to the departed affiliation with a religious or non-religious organization. Most recognizable seals or logos: Masonic, Knights of Columbus, Fire, Rescue or EMS insignia, as well as police or military, or even elected officials or sports or entertainment fields.

## “Photograph each and every headstone”

One inscribed segment of a headstone might also be a reference to the existing **vegetation** near that particular site at the time of the interment.

Why record vegetation? Aside from the historical agricultural, horticultural, and botanical valuable data, taking note of recorded existing vegetation, might offer needed information in the event some vegetative species become extinct, due to conditions attributed to blight, or other meteorological event. In an advent of agricultural obliteration due to sprawl, such recorded information might offer a possible blueprint for possible future topographical and biological restoration .

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**William Harbin of PG County**  
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Willett and Mary his wife, the foregoing accountants and made oath on the Holy Evangelist...." IT APPEARS TO ME THAT THIS IS WILLIAM'S WIFE MARY WHO HAS REMARRIED BETWEEN 1733 & 1735 TO EDWARD WILLETT. MARY WAS DESIGNATED AS HIS WHOLE & SOLE EXECUTRIX IN HIS WILL. (From LDS Film #0012904 Probate Prerogative Court Accts of Estates, Vol 13-16, 1735-38, Page 18)

1760 Mary is supposed to have had the following after her marriage to Willett: Tabitha b 5/4/1734, Elizabeth b 5/25/1736, Sarah b 5/4/1738, William b c1740, Ninian b c1842, Mary b 11/1/1745.

Mary died ?1760 (from "Colonial Settlers of Prince George County, MD" per ? Cornelia Barton) (She must have been considerably younger than Wm - born c1705, m Wm at c19 yrs, 1st child at c21 yrs, last child at c40 yrs, d c55 yrs).

Children:

John #347 b 8/20/1711 m Anne d 1790's MD/SC

Margaret #361 b 4/20/1713 m d

Johanna #362 b 3/30/1715 m d

William #364 b 5/30/1718 m Elizabeth Brawner d

Elizabeth #423 b 6/15/1720 m d

Elisha #424 b 6/5/1722 m Elizabeth Allen (per Glenn) d ?1792

Joshua #426 b 12/29/1726 m Elizabeth Ray/Kemp 3/1/1753 d 1790's IN

James #1966 b 12/29/1727 m Eleanor Bailey c1751 d 1778 MD

Ann b 1729 m ?George Vandiver d

Edward #433 b 1731 m Lydia 1763 d 1804 NC

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{Image right, example of Harbin Crest, Source: [http://www.geocities.com/abcheraldry/coats\\_crests.html](http://www.geocities.com/abcheraldry/coats_crests.html)}



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Headstone from Ogden family Cemetery, Huntingtown, MD - Bill Wood

In the case of the above headstone, a prominent feature inscribed in stone is a rendering of what appears to be a Weeping Willow tree. The gravesite in question is a neighbor of this writer. Their family have resided here nearly 40 years, on the site of once was the 18th century home belonging to the Ogden family.

I was informed by the son of the present property owner that this particular tree, once flourished in and around this neighborhood, many years ago. Today, no evidence is left of the once-thriving Willow trees. The present absence is attributed to a blight, that earlier, took many of these trees. Presently, another tree is fast-dieing in this locality, the Locust. Disease to trees is growing throughout the state! Due to the infestation of a specific pest, it is now *illegal* to sell firewood cut from the *Ash* tree in Southern Prince George's County. Having legitimate recorded information on a particular species could help determine the proper reintroduction of a once extinct species to that locality.

With the purchase of their home nearly 40 years ago, the **implied** social responsibility of upkeep for graves came with their property. The responsibility of maintaining these two graves are totally voluntary. No known local requirements, responsibilities, covenants or laws were conveyed at or since settlement of the present owner.

**IN NEXT BULLETIN ISSUE:**

**"Access to Family Cemeteries,  
easier *said* than *done*!"**

Cited quotations in this article, written by Nancy Hendrickson, permission courtesy Diane Haddad, Newsletter Editor, Family Tree Magazine [www.familytreemagazine.com](http://www.familytreemagazine.com)

Restoration Expert Shelly Sass website: [sassconservation.com](http://sassconservation.com)

