

HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY

The following timeline outlines the physical changes to the Old Burying Ground landscape, from the time of its inception in 1726 to the present. It serves as a basis for the narrative history found in section two of this plan, and helps to determine the period of historical significance for the landscape.

1645. The area that would become known as Stoneham was settled as a farming community and called “Charlestown End.”
1725. “The northern part of Charlestown, including all the lands lying on the east side of Woburn, the south side of Reading, the west side of Ma[l]den, and the north side of the fifth range of the first division of Charlestown woodlots were set off December 17, 1725, and constituted a separate township, by the name of Stoneham.” Stoneham continued to adjust its boundaries. In 1734, the town annexed parts of Malden and Reading. In 1853, a portion of Stoneham was annexed to Melrose. (Vital Records, pp. 1-2)
- By 1724, approximately 250 individuals lived in Charlestown End, but continued to attend meeting houses in Charlestown and South Reading (to the north).¹ Efforts began to separate from Charlestown, and the December 17, 1725 Act of the General Court required the inhabitants of Stoneham to erect a house of worship, procure and “Learned and Orthodox minister,” and provide for a school-master. Stevens noted that the first preacher who was hired for some months was Rev. Joseph Champney. He stated further that securing a settled minister...”was considered a question of such vital importance to the welfare of the people, that it was voted in town meeting assembled to set apart a day for prayer to ask God’s direction in the choice of a minister, and so strong was their religious faith, that they doubted not their prayers had been answered when in the following month they elected the Rev. James Osgood.” Mr. Osgood, who came from Salem, was called in October, 1728. Accepted in April, 1729, and was ordained on September 10th.
1726. The early record books of Stoneham recorded a vote on January 4th to choose a committee to see and inquire for a place for a minister’s house and meeting house and place for burying, and to make a report to the next Town Meeting. The records indicate the committee chosen consisted on Captain John Vinton, Daniel Green, and Timothy Holden, Sr. This was the second town meeting, the first taking place on December 24, 1725.
- On March 16, the record book showed a vote for the Selectmen providing for the town burying place, in a location most convenient to the town. In July, a vote was taken to rescue the deed of the land of the meeting house place and burying place.
- Land was acquired for the Old Burying Ground. The Cambridge Registry of Deeds (book 66, page 493) stated that James Hay sold two parcels of land – the Meeting House Lot (one acre and a quarter wanting ten poles), and the Burying

¹ According to Stevens’s History of Stoneham, Massachusetts with Biographical Sketches of Many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men (1891), the town consisted of 65 males who were taxed.

Place, for 13 pounds, 5 shillings. It was described as, “a Quarter of acre by Measure butted and bounded as follows northerly Easterly – Southerly and Westerly on said James hay’s own land and the said Burying Place lies on the Plain near a bridge on the West side of it by a Steep Hill in said Hay’s land.”

1728. The first legally recorded burial took place at the Old Burying Ground.
1746. At a general Town Meeting in Stoneham on Tuesday, the fourth Day of March 1746 the inhabitants being lawfully warned and assembled Left (Lieutenant) Joseph Green was chosen moderator of a meeting. The Town Meeting “voted and raised fifty pounds old tenor for the Burial of the Reverend Mr. James Osgood,” and “voted and chosen Left Joseph Bryant and John Geary a Committee for to see the buying out the said money that the town raised for the Buring the Reverend mr. James Osgood.”
- At a General Town Meeting in Stoneham on September the 18 Day 1746 the Inhabitants being lawfully warned and assembled. “Voted and paid fifteen pounds old tenor for getting mr. Osgood deceased Gravestone. Voted and Chosen Jonathan Green and Isaiah Green a Committee for to get mr. Osgood gravestons.”
1758. Land was added to the Old Burying Ground. On May 24, 1758, a vote of the town raised and granted three shilling and four pence to pay for acknowledging and recording a “deed of Stoneham burying place.” The Cambridge Registry of Deeds (book 66, page 497) stated that James Hay gave an additional three quarters of an acre as an addition to the Burying Place, “for the Love and good Will I bear to the Town of Stoneham...” Its location was recorded as, “beginning at the Stone standing at the northeast corner of the Burying Place that I sold to said Town of Stoneham and from then extending westerly Eight Rod to a Stone now standing near the South Side of the Path that leads from Stoneham Meeting House to Stoneham Parsonage House across my farm, from thence extending Southerly twenty Rod to another stone standing in my Land Southwesterly from the Southwest Corner of said Burying Place, from thence extending Eight Rods Easterly to another stone Standing Southerly of the Southeast Corner of said Burying Place, from thence extending Northerly twenty Rods to the first mentioned bound, with Strait Lines on every Side of said piece of land including within said bounds the one Quarter of an acre I sold to the Town of Stoneham for a Burying Place and with said Quarter of an acre said bounds include one acre of Land and the above said three Quarters of a[n] Acre of Land that I hereby give to the Town of Stoneham is for an addition to their said Burying Place with the Proviso that whenever the Town of Stoneham are inclined to and will have the above said piece of Land fenced The town of Stoneham shall make and maintain all the fence round said Piece of Land forever all upon the Town of Stoneham’s Cost and Charge and said piece of Land is bounded all round on my other Land.”
1765. The population of Stoneham was 340.
1773. Town meeting voted to make a board fence on the north side of the burying place, and to buy a burying cloth. Minutes included the following entries:

“13ly Voted that ye fence ? as to be maid [sic] from ye Buring Hill Down to ye Road by mr Searls is to be Don [sic] in ye same way and manner yt? Highways in sd Stoneham are Done.”

“14ly Voted and Raised a Eleven pounds to bild [sic] ye above fence.”

1774. Town meeting minutes included the following entries:

“3ly Voted and Raised the sums here after mentioned to Defray the Necessary Charges of the town of Stoneham in part for ye present year”

“0:12:0 to finish ye bord [sic] fence at ye Burying place.”

1800. The population of Stoneham was 380.

1803/1808. Thomas Gould sold and conveyed two tracts of land in Stoneham to the Town. In the deed descriptions, mention was made of a road leading by the burying ground (and the new meeting house). The deed was signed in 1803 and recorded in 1808.

1828. Town records reported a vote to enlarge the burying ground, providing the land can be purchased at a reasonable price; and a vote to enlarge the burying ground by adding one acre of land (providing the same); and a vote to appoint a committee made up of Darius Stevens, John W. Wright and Daniel Gould, Esq., to explore the purchase. In November of the same year, a vote was taken to discharge the committee.

1830. Town records recorded votes to (1) enlarge the burying ground; (2) add $\frac{3}{4}$ acre of land to the burying ground; (3) to add $\frac{1}{4}$ acre of land to the burying ground; (4) to fence the burying ground; (5) to build a tomb; (6) to appoint a committee made up of Peter Hay, Esq., Elijah Richardson, Jr., and Darius Stevens, to explore the above.

1833. Town records included a vote to enlarge and fence the burying ground; as well as a vote to grant liberty to any person or persons to build a tomb, providing they do not disturb the dead, under the direction of the Selectmen.

1834. Town Meeting voted to (1) exchange land with Thomas Gould, Esq. giving him the land where the old Meeting House formerly stood and shut up the old road running through the same for three quarters of an acre of land west and adjoining the burying ground; (2) to appoint a committee to oversee the transaction; and (3) instruct the committee to use their best judgment as respects giving said Gould the privilege of feeding [sic] the Burying Ground.

1835. Town Meeting voted to have the wall in front of the grave yard rebuilt.

1836. Town Meeting voted to move the hearse house to the west end of the horse sheds, rather than to the Burying ground, as the posted warrant article stated. Town Meeting voted not to build a tomb for winter use.

1837. Pleasant Street was laid out, extending from the meeting house to the Town House, for use by the public.
1842. Town Meeting's warrant included a vote to choose a committee of George W. Dike, Asa Hill, and Benj. F. Richardson to "provide a piece of land to place the Hearse House upon with instructions to move the same."
- Town Meeting's warrant included another article to see if the town will purchase a piece of land "for a burying ground provided a piece suitably located...can be bought for a reasonable sum."
1843. The committee reported that the town could purchase the lands of the Gould heirs, but concluded that "it was expedient to purchase lands of the Goulds heirs for that purpose." It was then voted to instruct said committee to purchase a piece of land for that purpose of Joseph Barrett and wife, provided said land can be bought for ninety dollars per acre. It was voted further that said committee be also instructed (provided said purchase be made) to divide said lands into suitable lots and avenues for burial purposes and have them sold at auction." These actions pertain to the establishment of the new cemetery on William Street.
1844. On April 1st, Town Meeting voted "that the committee on the Burial-ground be instructed to move & repair the Hearse House as they think proper." The Hearse House is shown on the 1844 Stoneham Cemetery map as being on the northwest edge of the property, which is now the intersection of Pomeworth and William Streets.
- The Stoneham Cemetery, located at the site of the current Old Central School (originally the 1901 high school), was consecrated on May 15, 1844. It was laid out by a town committee. At the time, a single street (today's William Street) ran along the west side. A plan drawn in 1936 from the original plan noted that the cemetery was discontinued in 1900 and the bodies removed. In subsequent Town Reports the name 'William Street Cemetery' and 'Stoneham Cemetery' were used interchangeably.
1845. Town Meeting voted on March 4, (1) "to build a tomb for the town" (2) "that the Selectmen and Sexton be a committee to build the tomb – the size and manner be left discretionary with them;" and (3) "that the tomb shall be built in the Old Grave Yard."
1850. The population of Stoneham was 2,085.
1853. Town Meeting of March 11, 1853 recorded a vote for "[t]he town to repair the Fences around "old burying Ground" and otherwise improve same." Edward Bucknam and Amasa Farrier were chosen as a committee to carry the effort into effect. Another vote appropriated "fifty dollars to repair the fence and improve the "old Burying Yard."
1856. A Report of the Cemetery Committee (page 62, vol. 6) stated, "[i]n 1856 the town began to take measures to secure ground for another Cemetery – A committee was

chosen and instructed to invite proposals from any and all persons in town who owned land which might be considered for the purpose – “...the Town voted to purchase (as to best offered) a lot of Eleven acres on Farm Hill...But on consultation they came to the conclusion that the people would never be satisfied with it if laid out – and there was a strong possibility that land admirable adapted for a rural Cemetery would soon come into the Market for Sale...These grounds contain twenty three acres – situated about one-fourth mile westerly from Main Street ~ on the North side of Fulton Street - the main thoroughfare to Woburn...The front part contains seven acres of open and nearly level and – with a find natural border of trees on the West & North... The highland section of sixteen acres is spread out on a beautiful southern slope, rising from the level of the front lot towards the north in gentle swells, with all the graceful variety of hill and valley – silent dell & deep forest.” (Prepared by Geo. W. Dike, Amasa Farrier, Reuben Locke, Jr. Committee)

1857. The Town records of March 2 included a statement that, “...no Town Way shall be hereafter be bid out by the Selectmen of a less width than forty feet.” Records of April 6 included a vote, “that a committee of five be chosen to ascertain what land can be purchased for enlarging the Cemetery, also ascertain what other portions of land can be purchased for the location of a new Cemetery – also to ascertain the several amounts for which said land may be obtained and report the same at the May meeting.” It was also voted to appoint George W. Dike, B. F. Richardson, Edward Bucknam, Ira Gerry, and Amasa Farrier to the committee. The Town records include lists of properties with costs, and in June, a vote was taken “in favor of two lots on Farm Hill containing about 11 acres that could be purchased of Amos Hill and Jona[than] Hay and Francis Hay for the sum of \$1650.
1858. Robert Gerry produced a map of Stoneham that was the first to show the burying ground. Oriental Court did not appear, and adjacent to the burying ground were houses occupied by Kingman, Green, Dean, Richardson, and Gerry. The Stoneham/William Street Cemetery was labeled simply “Cemetery.”
1859. Town records included a vote to “purchase land of Wm Richardson for a Cemetery providing the expense of the same do not exceed the sum of one hundred and Fifty Dollars per Acre. It was voted further that the “Town Treasurer can give a note of 15 years.” It was also voted to authorize the Town treasurer “to give Cyrus Hay a deed for a piece of land on William Street adjoining the Cemetery, providing said Hay will give to the town a Deed of a piece of land, at present belonging to said Cemetery ~ note having been conveyed to the Town. In April 1959, it was voted that “the Town will sell the land on Farm Hill (purchased for a Cemetery) at Auction.”
1860. Town records contained a vote “[t]o see if the town will prohibit further burial in the Old burial ground,” and an additional vote, “[t]o leave the matter in reference to burials in the Old Burying Ground to left discretionary with the Selectmen.
1861. ca. 1861, Oriental Court was laid out.

1862. Town Meeting voted to form a committee of five to take charge of Lindenwood Cemetery, with the understanding that the committee would serve without pay. Eleven individuals were nominated, four of whom declined. The first Trustees of Lindenwood Cemetery were: Geo. W. Dike (5 years), Reuben Locke, Jr. (4 years), Sumner Richardson 2nd (3 years), Edward Bucknam (2 years), D.H. Messer (1 year).
1864. The Selectmen's minutes of June 7 recorded a vote to let "Mr. Morse cause sign boards to be erected in the 'Old Cemetery' forbidding persons crossing there or trespassing in any way."
1868. On May 12, Perley Green and his wife, Sarah G. Green purchased approximately 1/3 of an acre of land on Pine Street, in between and abutting John Kingman's and Robert Turnbull's land. The property description detailed the northern property line running "easterly by said Kingman's land and the TOMB lot about fourteen rods seven and one quarter feet to the burying ground; thence southerly by said burying ground sixty feet to the land of Robert P Turnbull..." This description suggests that between the Kingman lot and the burying ground was some type of tomb. The 1875 Beers Atlas showed this area as blackened, suggesting some type of civic, educational, or religious use.
1872. Between 1872 and 1877, the Town Reports noted that owners of lots in the William Street cemetery were exchanging them for lots in Lindenwood.
1873. The Town Report recorded that a new fence had been built around the Old Burying Ground at an expense of \$68.
1874. A map of Stoneham created by G. M. Hopkins showed the cemetery in the shape of a parallelogram, bounded on the northwest corner by John Kingman's property. Kingman owned a house and two smaller buildings (one to the south of the house and one to the east).
1875. F. W. Beers & Co. published the Atlas of Middlesex County, Massachusetts, which included the Town of Stoneham. The Old Burying Ground is shown, with a blackened square at its northwest corner, indicating some type of religious or civic building.
1878. The Trustees of Lindenwood Cemetery stated in the annual Town Report that a committee had been established to repair the wall on the east side of the Old Burying ground, and to do the job properly, they found it necessary to remove several graves. Completion of the wall was anticipated for spring (1879?). (p. 27)
1879. The annual assessment showed that the property belonging to John Kingman (west side of the burying ground) consisted of 2250 SF of land, including a 2800 SF house, 400 SF cottage, and 125 SF barn. (In the 1880s, Kingman was paid for caretaking the burying ground.)
1880. The Town Report noted that pitch pines were removed from the Old Burying Ground, and 150 young trees – mostly maples, were planted, along with an *Arbor vitae* hedge. The Report stated, "...we have caused to be cut and sold all the pitch

pinetrees standing in the old yard, the proceeds of which has been expended in replacing them with trees more ornamental and better adapted to the situation. One hundred and fifty or more young trees, consisting mostly of maples, have been set out, and also a continuous hedge of Arbor-vitae along the easterly side of the land.” (p. 21)

- 1888. The sewer was extended along Oriental Court, undermining the wall. Patching was required. (pp. 110-111)

- 1889. George H. Walker & Co. published an Atlas of Middlesex County. John Kingman owned the adjacent property (northwest corner), which contained the house and two smaller structures. The cemetery retained the same parallelogram shape. In the late 1800s, the town continued to remove bodies from the William Street cemetery to Lindenwood.

- 1890. The population of Stoneham reached 6,155.

- 1896. The Town Report stated, “[a]t the last annual Town meeting, March 4, 1895, it was voted that the Trustees of Lindenwood Cemetery be a committee to take charge of William Street Cemetery and the Old Grave Yard...” The amount appropriated for the care of both cemeteries and rebuilding the wall on Oriental Court was \$150. The Trustees stated, “we have expended for the care of both cemeteries and rebuilding the wall on Oriental court \$121.99, leaving a balance unexpended of \$28.01.”

- 1897. The Town Report stated, [i]n taking care of the ...old yard, the Trustees have endeavored to stop making a dumping ground for all kinds of rubbish, that the citizens have complained of for the past years by covering the rubbish up and cutting some of the underbrush and posting notices forbidding people from using it for that purpose. We have also straightened up the headstones in both of the yards, and filled up some holes in the old yard. (p. 116)

- 1900. The 1900 report of the Trustees of Lindenwood Cemetery stated, “There is a matter which the Trustees would like to have the town take into consideration, that of rebuilding the wall on Oriental Court. As the wall is not, it is impossible to keep the children from making a playground of the Old Yard. When the sewer was put through Oriental Court, the wall was undermined and has settled and it thrown out of shape. We would recommend that the wall be re-laid in cement so that the children cannot climb over it, and to have large stones laid eight feet apart, for the purpose of putting a fence on top of the wall, the cost probably about Three Hundred dollars (\$300); and as the preserving of the Headstones and Monuments in the yard is the duty of the town to attend to, we would respectfully call you attention to the same.”

Also in this year, the Town Report recorded a Town Meeting vote to “take for school purposes that certain tract of land, (known as the William Street Cemetery,) acquired for Park purposes under authority of Chapter 446 of the Acts of the year 1899.” The vote was 123 in favor and 5 against. Town Meeting also voted “that

the remains and monuments in William Street Cemetery shall be removed therefrom on or before June 1st, 1900.” (p. 51)

1911. The yearly appropriation for cemetery care included a special line item to rebuild the Old Burying Ground wall.
1914. The 1914 Town Report recorded a warrant article vote “to raise and appropriate the sum of \$400.00 for tearing down the present wall of the Old Burying Ground on Pleasant Street, and for making necessary excavations, and reconstructing 398 linear feet of wall 5 feet high, laid in cement, as called for under estimates furnished the Finance Committee by Superintendent of Public Works, Mr. Sweeney.” Also in this year, the Town Report noted that “the old burying ground retaining wall on Oriental Court was rebuilt, laid in cement and pointed up at a cost of \$389.08.” (p. 110)
1915. The population of Stoneham reached 7,489.
1916. The 1916 Town Report included a warrant article vote “to raise and appropriate the sum of one hundred and ten dollars for the construction of a stone wall on the northerly side of the Old Burying Ground, abutting Pleasant Street, to be expended when interested parties contribute an additional \$50.00 as agreed.” (pp.45-46)
1917. The 1917 Town Report recorded, “[d]uring the year the wall surrounding the Old Burying Ground has been completed in a most satisfactory manner and is a great improvement. The plaque presented to the Town by Hon. Levi S. Gould was placed in a conspicuous place in the front wall.” This report was made by the Trustees of Lindenwood Cemetery, who also stated, “[y]our Trustees would again call the attention of the citizens to the necessity of using all methods possible to prevent the Old Burying Ground being used as a playground and loafing place. Each season that this is permitted results in fresh desecrations and depredations in this sacred spot, and it is to be hoped that all citizens seeing such occurrences in the Old Burying Ground will report them to the proper authorities that all vandalism may be prevented and those perpetrating it may be properly dealt with. In this place rest many of the earliest inhabitants of the town and their resting places should be respected.” (pp. 127-128)
1924. The last burial took place at the Old Burying Ground.
1935. In the Town Report, the Trustees of Lindenwood Cemetery reported, “[t]here are a few available lots left in the Old Cemetery and it will not be long before an entry will have to be made in the new purchase and lots and graves made ready.” (p. 129) (The ‘new purchase’ refers to land added to Lindenwood in 1933).
1937. In May of this year, the Independent reported that “[c]onsiderable damage has been done by youthful pranksters in the old burying ground on Pleasant Street to many of the old markers on the graves. Cemetery trustees have taken steps to prevent further malicious destruction, but ask the co-operation of parents and teachers of students and youngsters living in the vicinity to prevent further

malicious destruction.” A sum of \$625 was appropriated by the town to erect a fence to enclose the Old Burying Ground, and to repair headstones. (p. 25)

In June, 1937, the Independent reported that a new wire fence had been constructed around the burying ground on Pleasant Street.

The Town Report included a report of a “Committee of Fencing Old Burying Ground” who noted, “[i]n the March meeting of 1937 the citizens voted to erect a fence to enclose the Old Burying Ground on Pleasant Street and appointed a committee for same, Your committee received estimates from different companies. The contract was awarded to the lowest bidder – The Security Fence Company – for the sum of \$625.00. This company filled the contract in a very comfortable manner.” (p. 226) The committee consisted of George B. Williams and Charles W. Messier.

1938. The Town Report noted that, “[a] number of the older headstones in the Pleasant Street Cemetery that were split by age and the weather, have been encased in metal sheaths which will preserve them for a long time.” The report also mentioned that a chain link fence had been added.
1941. The Lindenwood and Pleasant Street Cemetery Trustees reported in the annual Town Report that “during the past two years we have had about twenty-five of the old monuments capped with copper plates. This should prevent these monuments from falling apart and preserve them for their historical value to our future generations.” (p. 82) The WPA undertook a recording of Veterans’ Graves during this year, as noted in the Town Report, as well as in the Independent. (June 6, 1941)
1942. The Town Report stated that the cemetery trustees had donated 500 – 600 feet of iron pipe to the war effort. (p. 143) The WPA Veterans’ Graves Registration Project continued, creating a map of the Old Burying Ground, identifying each of the veterans’ gravesites.
1944. The Town Report stated that the “Pleasant Street Cemetery remains one of the historic landmarks of the Town of Stoneham, being unused but not overlooked, given the necessary care and attention for its preservation.” (p. 154)
1945. The Town reported noted, “[t]he headstones in Pleasant Street Cemetery which have become cracked by weather and by reason of age are being capped with copper thus prolonging their life for many years. One tree was removed and two others, which were endangering adjacent houses, were trimmed.” (p. 106)
1949. The Town Annual Report noted that the capping of stones with copper was continuing in the Old Burying Ground. (p. 144) Ten trees were also removed from the site. “It was also necessary to remove ten trees to improve the appearance of this old historic landmark.” (p. 144) Stone capping continued into 1950.
1953. Plans were made to paint the cemetery fence (Town Report, p. 236)

1956. Painting began on the Pleasant Street Cemetery fence. (Town Report, p. 148)
1957. Care and management was transferred to the newly formed Board of Public Works. (Town Report, p. 177) Annual reporting on the Old Burying Ground was discontinued in the Town Reports.
1976. In January of 1976, Oriental Court was officially accepted as a Street. Up until this time it was considered a private way. (DPW files)
1984. Old Burying Ground is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.