

Huntington Rural Cemetery (1851)

555 New York Avenue, Huntington (between New York Avenue & Oakwood Roads)

The Huntington Rural Cemetery is a private, not-for-profit cemetery located south of the center of Huntington Village, between New York Avenue and Oakwood Roads. The cemetery was incorporated in March 1851, pursuant to a law governing the management of rural cemeteries in New York State adopted in 1847. It is one of the earliest rural cemeteries in New York State to be incorporated under this law. The management of the cemetery is governed by a nine member Board of Directors.

The rural cemetery movement began in the second decade of the Nineteenth Century, growing out of a need to provide both a permanent and dignified resting place for the dead as well as a place of beauty and contemplation for the living. At the time, cemeteries in cities were running out of space and it was not unusual to have bodies removed so that others could be buried. In the beginning, rural cemeteries often served as parks as well, although contemporaneous with this movement, the first public parks, such as Central Park in New York, were also being established and designed. Huntington Rural Cemetery was founded after identification of similar needs and is said to have been modeled after Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn, which was itself modeled after Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge Massachusetts, the earliest of the rural cemeteries. In an editorial dated February 28, 1851, *The Long-Islander* urged the establishment of a new cemetery, lamenting “We have almost fancied whilst passing the present burial place [the Old Burying Ground], and seen the bones of those who have been deposited there, sacrilegiously thrown out and exposed, to make room for others, that we could hear a low murmur of reproach against those who ‘permit such things’ and witness an involuntary compression of those lying near, that they might escape the ruthless spade. Surely there should be peace in the possession of ‘God’s Acre.’” This belief in the quiet and permanence of a proper burial place was paramount in the formation of the Huntington Rural Cemetery Association, under whose direction the cemetery was established.

Initially the cemetery association purchased 10 acres consisting of a portion of the farm of Abel K. Conklin, whose family later donated the David Conklin Farmhouse to the Huntington Historical Society in 1911. A map of burial plots was drafted in 1853 and the first burial, the child of Isaac Hull took place in September 2, 1853. Within 10 years several sections were added. Purchases of additional land were made in 1866, 1892, 1893, 1896, and 1924. Today approximately 20 of those acres contain burial plots, with the remainder still woods.

From its founding, the cemetery served as the community cemetery for Huntington, Huntington Station, and Cold Spring Harbor, although persons from other areas of the Town, or even from outside its boundaries, are buried there. From its inception, based on the documentary evidence available, the cemetery evidently admitted all persons regardless of race, creed, nationality, or economic status, even before such practices were typical in many community institutions. For example we see many African-American families represented from the founding years of the cemetery to the present. Possibly the most noted African American burial is that of Samuel Ballton, known locally as the “Pickle King” for his skill and success in growing cucumbers for the pickle industry, who died in 1917 (see the separate Samuel Ballton narrative for information on this former slave and Civil War veteran).

As the community cemetery for Huntington for a period of 150 years, numerous other persons of local, and even national, significance are buried there. A March 1951, *Long-Islander* article recites the following:

There rest most of the citizens who founded the Association. Seventy-two Civil War veterans are there – veterans of World War I and II, and there is a memorial stone for Abner Crossman, a soldier of the American Revolution. Admiral Hiram Paulding, a grandson of John Paulding, was buried there in 1878. Cannon balls mark the corner of this plot, and further along lies his son-in-law, Brig.-Gen. Robert Meade of the U.S. Marines.

There also are the Browns of Brown Brothers Pottery fame. Admiral Prime, a descendent of the Rev. Ebenezer Prime, Revolutionary pastor of the Old First Church; and nearby, Moses L. Scudder who did much to preserve the baptism, marriage and death records of the Old First Church by having them printed. Rev. Samuel Carter is there also and a group of doctors, including Dr. Walter Lindsay of the Civil War and who came here after the close of that war, to remain and practice here for fifty years.

Others of note include Henry C. Platt and Charles R. Street, attorneys in Huntington in the second half of the Nineteenth Century. Together they crafted a significant legal opinion on the rights of the Board of Trustees of the Town of Huntington whose job it was to manage the Town’s underwater lands. Charles R. Street was later responsible for organizing, transcribing, and publishing in three volumes, the important early records of the Town of Huntington. Henry Platt delivered the keynote address “Old Times in Huntington” at the town’s centennial celebration in 1876. They practiced together in Huntington Village until the death of Street in 1894. Harry Chapin, the popular balladeer and songwriter, who was killed on the Long Island Expressway in 1981, is also buried in the cemetery. Suffice to say after 150 years many important leaders of the Town are represented among the cemetery’s ranks.

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