

Poplar Hill Cemetery Funding Request – December 3, 2018

Poplar Hill Cemetery Association was established in 1872 as the state's first non-profit organization by the Vermont legislature. Like other endowments from the late 1800's, decades of inflation and loss of membership have reduced its assets to a point where it can no longer continue to maintain the cemetery. By 1959, fundraising letters were returned undeliverable and maintenance fees owed by members were unpaid. In the fall of 1960, the board removed funds from the perpetual care account and put them into a stock fund to gain interest. Eventually, this was migrated to an Edward Jones account in 1996 in the amount of \$16,770. This has sustained the cemetery for the last 22 years, but this has dwindled to \$1,393.

The board made a plan to research and contact descendants of those buried in the cemetery in an effort to appeal for funds, but a larger crisis intervened. On May 27, 2011, a tremendous storm hit the local area three months before Hurricane Irene would hit again. The cemetery suffered a

landslide on the bank overlooking North Montpelier Pond. In the picture, one can see the stakes we set up three feet around the perimeter.

Today, the sticks closest to the camera have gone over the edge and a few of the ones in the middle are teetering. We are one large storm away from seeing the closest graves tumbling towards the pond. The cost of remedial action is clearly beyond the resources of PHCA. Another structural



problem is the lack of land for expansion and little potential for selling lots. Recent budgets, primarily for maintenance, have been around \$3,500, so there is not even enough money available to cover maintenance for another year. Inaction is no longer an option.

We approached Calais, in which town the cemetery resides and they requested more time to study the situation. They felt East Montpelier should be involved since most of those buried in Poplar Hill were from our town. They suggested the possibility of a joint effort, on the model of a fire district, but in the meantime, asked us to request \$1,500 from both of the towns to carry us through next year. Since that meeting, we have met with the Agency of Natural Resources and the Army Corps of Engineers and they have determined there would be little impact on water quality so no permits would be required. Rough estimates volunteered by the state geologist and an engineer put the cost of stabilizing the bank at \$100,000 to \$150,000, which we hope the towns could receive from state or federal funds, that a nonprofit such as PHCA could not. See attached sheets for the most recent Treasurer's report and financial updates.