FORM E - BURIAL GROUND
Massachusetts Historical Commission
Massachusetts Archives Building
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

Assessor's Sheets	USGS Quad	Area Letter	Form Number
112 105			800

Town Groton

Place

Address or Location Hollis and School Streets

Name Old Burying Ground

Ownership ***Public*** X ***Private***

Approximate Number of Stones 2,000

Earliest Death Date 1704

Latest Death Date c. 1900

Landscape Architect

Condition Excellent

Acreage 4

Setting Town Center

Photographs
(3"x3" or 3-1/2x5" black and white only) Label photo on back with town and property address. Record film roll and negative numbers here on form. Staple photo to left side of form over this space. Attach additional photos to continuation sheets. **See Continuation Sheets**

Sketch Map
Draw or duplicate a map of the burial ground showing its location in relation to the nearest cross streets and/or major natural features. Show all buildings or major features within the burial ground, and between the burial ground and nearest intersection. Label streets including route numbers, if any. Indicate north **See Continuation Sheets**

Recorded by Sanford Johnson

Organization Groton Hist. Comm.

Date (*month/day/year*) 5/06

Follow Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey Manual instructions for completing this form.

Visual/Design Assessment
Describe landscape features, gravestone materials, designs, motifs, and symbols that are either common or unusual. Note any known carvers.

Introduction

Groton's Old Burying Ground came into use in the mid 17th century although at that time, burial markers were either nonexistent or made of wood and so none survive from the period. The date of the first burial has been determined by the Groton historian Dr. Samuel Green to bear the date 1704 and belongs to James Prescott. During the Colonial Period, the appearance was that of a small cleared parcel of relatively level land with rolling mounds occupied by slate markers, most with arched tops. The Old Burying Ground retains this form despite efforts across the state during the 19th century to imitate Rural or Garden style cemeteries such as Mount Auburn in Cambridge. It contains approximately 800 recorded burials and as many as 3,000 actual burials. The boundaries form a rectangle and were fenced in stone during the 19th century. Burials continued into the early 20th century but were increasingly infrequent after the establishment in 1847 of the Groton Cemetery east of Chicopee Row.

Landscape

The 17th century appearance of the Old Burying Ground was that of a grassy parcel of short rolling natural earthen mounds occupied by arched slate gravestones. Located southwest of the junction of Hollis and School Streets and one quarter mile north of the Town Hall, the burial ground has historically been mowed and its volunteer growth of bushes trimmed as if it were a farm field. Nineteenth century structures include tombs along the north wall of the burial ground, some on low earthen mounds. Ornamental trees planted on the grounds include oak and other species of hardwoods as well as a variety of evergreens. Nineteenth century efforts were made to improve the access through the burial ground by constructing an east-west cart path among the earthen mounds and stones. The south edge is wooded while the remaining three sides are clear of trees and offer views into the burying ground from Hollis and School Streets.

Stone walls separate the cemetery from Hollis and School Streets and from the parcel to the south. These walls are fairly consistent in appearance and are made of random-range, quarry-faced granite ashlar with split granite slabs for a capstone. The walls appear to have originally been dry laid and then strengthened with mortar at a later date. The south wall along the wooded parcel is the only one not to have received this treatment. The height averages around three feet.

Access to the burying ground is through two wrought iron gates. The Hollis Street gate (on the east side) has split granite quarry-faced posts four feet in height that, on the south side, may have been separated from the wall to provide human access and deny animal access when the gate is closed. The paired swinging gates are around three feet high, three feet in width and are made of moderately ornamental wrought iron. The west gates are also wrought iron and match the size and pattern found at the east entrance. Posts here are also quarry faced granite.

There is a single route for circulating among the gravestones and connects the gateways described above. It is a relatively straight route that bends slightly according to the contours of the ground. In locations where the path nears an earthen mound, sides of the path rise steeply to a height of three or four feet.

Plot boundaries in the burying ground are not clearly defined except in a small number of instances. Four families have their group of markers surrounded by four or six granite posts which in one case, that of the Brown family, are connected by a chain that has been draped between the posts. While family groups clearly exist, they rarely have curbstones or other features to delineate the edges of the family plots but rely on the proximity of their stones to convey the boundaries. An exception is the Champney Family whose obelisk is the largest marker in evidence and who have the boundaries of their small plot marked with low granite curbstones perhaps eight inches in height.

Markers

Quality of workmanship of the slate marker is in a few instances obscured by the fact that the stone has deteriorated or been broken. Inscriptions also vary in quality and detail but overall, the quality and state of repair are very good. The simplest markers have fine, narrow letters with little relief or depth. Some of this type are well organized and clearly laid out. Others are jumbled in the way words are divided among lines. Later slate stones from the 19th century are more likely to demonstrate clear, deep, stylized letters with a pronounced serif and well thought out organization relative to the shape of the stone.

Markers appear in a variety of shapes. Those from the earliest period are most commonly cut in a rectangular form with an arched top, representative of the figurative portal between life and death. The shape is also considered an abstraction of the human head and shoulders. This form of marking the passage from life is a Puritan concept brought from Boston and elsewhere during the region's period of first settlement. Eighteenth century stones are typically carved with one of a variety of motifs. Some early stones have faces inscribed in portals, such as the 1790 stone of Ede Sawtell, the two-year old daughter of Lieut. Elnathan Sawtell, resident of 330 Old Dunstable Road. Representative of the spirit of the deceased glancing back into the world of the living while simultaneously offering the living a preview of the afterlife, the portal is rich in Puritan symbolism and attitudes toward the transcendent nature of death. In addition to the portal are abstracted vegetation and beaded trim at the edges of the Sawtell marker.

The symbol of winged death, in the form of either a skull or abstracted human head flanked by a pair of feathered wings spread wide, occurs frequently on stones carved in the late 18th century. This is another representation of the belief that the human spirit was released at the time of death for the flight heavenward. An example of this design motif is found on the stone of Simon Patch, who died in 1776 as a result of wounds suffered in the Battle of White Plains, NY. He is remembered by a shouldered arched stone with floral trim at the edges and a death's head flanked by wings atop a swag motif. The death's head takes on an unusual detail in the stone of Col. William Bulkley. Here, the winged skull is surmounted by a hand wielding a sword. An unusual variation of the arched marker is the pointed arched type such as that of Jacob Lakin who died in 1758 at the age of 58. The arched top has a triangular field reaching above the rounded arch and inscribed with a winged death's head and two skulls symbolizing the permanence and gravity of death as well as an hourglass to symbolize the unstoppable passage of time. Captain

Solomon Woods, who died in 1783 at the age of 36, has a slate marker that is typical in its size (around two and a half feet tall), the design in the arch which contains a winged death's head and the inscription "Memento Mori" which is a command to visitors to remember the dead. The marker is unusual in that the inscription gives the cause of death which was a falling tree. There are a small number of double stones, either with a double arched top or single arched top as in the case of Captain Amos Lawrence and his wife Abigail who died in 1785 and 1784 respectively.

Based on classical influences exerted by the spreading glow of the Enlightenment, new images for gravestone ornamentation rapidly made the older themes seem outdated. Urn and willow designs appear frequently on gravestones from the Federal through the Victorian Period. Both slate and sandstone markers exhibit this late 18th and early 19th century motif that is an icon of sorrow and grief. Change from the puritan death's head to the classically inspired urn and willow marked a change in the way death was viewed by New England society. Previously, the event was considered a common reality whose dim portent reflected the stern view of life as a struggle for survival. The Post-Puritan view of death adopted a sentimental quality that spoke more of the emotional state of those left behind than of the journey of the deceased, causing the replacement of darkly spiritual carvings with abstract sorrowful imagery. Captain Asa Lawrence's 1804 slate marker has an urn under a spreading willow tree and scrolled carving along the edges. The use of columns in gravestone design, frequently of the Doric order, also exists and is evidence of the pervasive influence of imagery popularized by publications and designs featuring drawings of classical architecture. Captain John Williams, who died in 1822 at the age of 76, has a mason's square on his marker, a design that appears on several other stones.

A marker type with three examples in the old Burying Ground is the tablestone used to mark the graves of the Reverend Caleb Trowbridge (1760), Col. Oliver Prescott (1804) and Col. William Lawrence (1764). Here, brick piers or vertical granite slabs support horizontal slate slabs inscribed with dates and commemoration of their service to the community.

The variety of stone types also includes marble and granite which are less common than slate. Marble stones are mainly from the mid 19th century and have simple forms based on rectangular slabs which in some cases have low pointed tops such as the marker for Vestaa Sawtell who died at 82 years of age in 1887 which makes this one of the later gravestones. Granite monuments include the John M. Gilson family marker which is approximately five feet in height and bears a burial date of 1898, also one of the later interments. This is one of two granite markers with a polished surface.

Perhaps five obelisks mark occupants' burial places. The largest of these is the Champney family maker. Commemorating the life of Francis Champney who died in 1837 and made of marble, the base of the shaft is flanked by four marble slab markers for additional family members. It is unusual not only for its size but for the fact that the plot boundaries are marked by low granite curbstones that form a square approximately 10' across.

Tombs

Tombs exist along the wall at the north edge of the burying ground. These are split granite slab markers with inscriptions placed a short distance behind the walls and are elevated slightly above by their earthen mounds. Others

are built into the top of the wall with well-worn inscriptions facing up. Dates on the tombs range from around 1820-1840 and were the burial place of Sylvester Jacobs in 1839, F. A. Blood (no date), Jacob Williams in 1828, among others.

Plantings

Shrubs and trees exist on a limited basis and may have been placed as commemorative plantings. This is certainly true for one example which has a plaque at the base placed by the Groton Bow Scouts to commemorate George Washington's 200th birthday in 1932.

Existing Conditions

Overall, gravestones and the landscape on the Old Burying Ground are in good to excellent condition. Little vandalism has taken place and broken stones appear to have been replaced and repaired where necessary. Grounds are well-kept and there is little damage from lawn mowing equipment, a frequent problem in some cemeteries. Few if any names of stone carvers are visible. Frequently in other burial grounds the names of the craftsmen are seen in the lower right corner below the inscription of the person interred but this does not seem to be the case here despite the fact that the well-known family of grave stone carvers named Park lived in town and quarried their stone from Pin Hill in Harvard for several generations. Despite the lack of ornamentation, or perhaps because of it, the large number of remaining 18th and 19th century markers make it possible to get a clear sense of historical burial and grave stone carving techniques in Groton.

Historical Narrative
Explain religious affiliations and major period of use. Discuss how this burial ground relates to the historical development of the community.

Groton's first settlers chose the corner of the current Hollis and School Streets for their second meetinghouse in 1678. While the location of the church was changed in 1714, the Old Burial Ground remained at the original site and was the sole public place of burial in the town until 1847 when the Groton Cemetery was opened on a parcel east of Chicopee Row. The earliest people to be buried in the Old Burying Ground were likely to have been remembered by very simple markers which were probably made of wood according to Dr. Green. This material would of course have disappeared over time as a result of deterioration, thus concealing the locations of those interred prior to around 1704, the date of the oldest slate marker. A location in the burying ground near the northeast corner has few stone markers and may be the resting place of some early residents whose wood markers have deteriorated. Suggestions by experts in historic landscapes are that the naturally occurring earthen rolling mounds are part of the original topography of Groton and that one of the few places they survive is in the Old Burying Ground since it has not been plowed for planting crops.

The town of Groton had only one public place of burial for a period of 192 years, which is unusual for towns in the region. It is more common to have burial grounds and cemeteries in the geographically distinct parts of a town as well as a larger central one, usually near the meetinghouse. It may be that in Groton, the threat of attack by Native

Americans prevented the settlers from branching out in this regard and instead they chose to congregate their dead in one place in order to avoid potential acts of desecration during the relatively frequent times of alarm experienced by all frontier towns.

1704-1830

Dr. Samuel Green, historian of Groton in the late 19th century, performed a great deal of research on many local subjects including the burying ground. His sources were the town reports and his personal recollections. His book Epitaphs of the Old Burying Ground in Groton, Massachusetts, done in 1878, includes information on the development of the site and numerous inscriptions that he caused to be transcribed. The town is fortunate to have this resource as many stones are now too worn by weather to be read clearly. Given the excellence of his work and the quality of his sources, much of what follows is based on his efforts. Dr. Green states that the burying ground was in use from 1678, the time of the town's re-occupation after its destruction by fire by Native Americans. The earliest stone he mentions is from 1704 and commemorates the life of James Prescott, a blacksmith. Many of the earliest stones were suspected to have come from England prior to the establishment of the grave stone quarry in Harvard although these do not appear to be so documented.

The initial committee to oversee the burying ground was appointed in 1710 and consisted of Ensign Farnsworth, Samuill Scriptor Sr., Thomas Tarbell, Samuill Parker and Joseph Lakin, Clark. The grounds were unfenced at this time and the boundaries unclear. Boundaries were determined in 1724-5 and a wooden fence erected at that time. Maintenance was addressed during the period by exchanging mowing and fence repair services with William Shattuck in return for the hay he might harvest. Fence repairs soon became burdensome and in 1738, a stone fence was voted to be built four and one half feet tall and covered by a flat cap stone. The east and west edges were voted in 1739 to receive the wall as described except for the substitution of a wood cap for the stone while the remaining sections were marked by a ditch wall.

Laurel Gabel and Theodore Chase, in their book Gravestone Chronicles, note that 14 members of the Park family worked at gravestone carving and stonemasonry from 1750-1850, some in Ayer and Harvard. The first family member to work in the town was William who emigrated from Scotland to what is now Ayer and carved stones from c. 1750-1788. His sons Thomas (who marched on Concord and carved a commemorative plaque at Lexington Green) and John joined their father's business in 1765 and 1767 respectively, and carved stones for cemeteries in Worcester, Essex and Hillsborough (NH) Counties. Their work at this site includes the stones of Simeon Ames (1760), the John and Sarah Holden double stone (1753), Susanna Parker (1753), William Pierce (1754), James Green (1756), John Blood (1758), Amos Farnsworth (1775), Benjamin Green (1776), Samuel Bowers (1768) and Captain John Sawtell (1790). William Park's grandsons and great grandsons also carved gravestones.

Dr. Green notes that in 1794, Deacon Samuel Lawrence of 44 Farmers Row was directed to repair the table marker of Reverend Caleb Trowbridge which might explain why this example has brick piers when most others of this type have granite bases. Shortly after this event, the town voted to enlarge the burying ground by acquiring of Joseph Richardson a parcel south of the original boundary. This was carried out in 1802 when the town also voted to fence this section. A hearse house was placed in the burying ground in 1803 but is no longer extant.

An interesting interment is that of Joshua Bentley who rowed Paul Revere across the Charles River on the night of April 18th, 1775 prior to his ride into Middlesex County to warn of approaching British regular army soldiers. Other Pre-Industrial period burials of note include that of Captain Asa Lawrence who led Company G of Groton Minutemen to Concord and Lexington on April 19, 1775. The company arrived too late to take part in the fight but played a role later at Bunker Hill. Simon Patch served as a private in Col. Brooks' regiment and fought at the Battle of White Plains, NY where he was wounded in December, 1776. Private Patch would return to Groton but died of his wounds three days later. Other military veterans include Col. John Bulkley who served in the French and Indian War and Col. Oliver Prescott and Col. William Lawrence who both played prominent roles in the Revolutionary War.

1830 - 1897

Maintenance efforts were mounted in 1845 with a town meeting vote to repair the walls and set some fallen stones upright. In 1851, Noah Shattuck requested permission to enclose and ornament his plot in the newly stylish Garden Cemetery mode. Permission was denied and the subsequent note in Green's narrative concerns the 1853 town meeting article to see if the town will vote to repair the breach in the stone wall made by the removal of Noah Shattuck's tomb. The outcome of the vote is unknown but it is apparent that Mr. Shattuck altered his burial plans to include the Groton Cemetery east of Chicopee Row, established in 1847 with a design reminiscent of the Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge which was influential in cemetery construction throughout the country after the 1830s. The burying ground committee bought a new hearse in 1843 from the Albert Tolman Co. of Worcester. Dr. Green notes that the hearse was kept in the "Gun House" which is depicted on the 1856 Walling map at the northeast corner of the burial ground and south of the Chaplin School. Dr. Green's recollections in the 1890s were that a circus came to town yearly to and set up on the common north of the old Burying Ground and may have done so as early as 1800.

Changes to the burial ground in 1872 included the improvement of the stone walls surrounding the graveyard with drainage beneath the stone, construction of additional walls at the north side near the tombs, pointing the whole with mortar and placing a granite cap stone on top. Also, granite posts with iron gates were placed at gateways, a walkway through the center from east to west was constructed and trees were planted. The south wall was constructed of rougher stone construction and does not match the other three sides in refinement, a condition that remains today. Around the same time, the committee voted to remove the tops of the tombs and fill the interiors, leaving the bodies in place. Dr. Green quotes from the committee's report that this would provide the people interred in the tombs with a permanent burial place "which is more than can be said of them now", suggesting some kind of deterioration or desecration had taken place. Committee members Samuel Rowe, Henry Bancroft and Joseph D. Blood were responsible for the suggested changes. Additional changes in 1874 came as a result of a bequest of $1,500 from Samuel P. Hemenway, formerly of Groton and later a resident of Boston, for fencing and beautifying the Old Burying Ground for which Samuel Rowe, the builder of Groton's Town Hall in 1859, was paid $300 to implement and $50 per year to oversee. Mr. Rowe went on to remove dead trees and shrubs and to repair the sidewalks. Dr. Green mentions in his Groton Historical Series that the hearse house was located in 1893 at the north edge of the burying ground near the Chaplin School at 75 School Street. While the hearse house was shown to the south of the school on the 1856 Walling map, the 1886 bird's eye view and 1889 atlas show the school with a rear addition that may be the hearse

house. This may be the existing rear ell of the Chaplin School, a wood-frame, 1 ½-story gable-roofed form. The next year, an address was given by ex Governor Boutwell of 172 Main Street concerning the history of the graveyard in which he recollects that there were no trees present until after 1846.

1897-1950

Site visits show that very little of consequence, other than regular maintenance, has been done to the Old Burying Ground since the mid 19th century when the path and stone walls were constructed. Few granite monuments exist or other markers from dates after the turn of the 20th century, leaving the appearance of a burial ground from the time before the design of the influential Garden Style Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge which had a great deal to do with the design of the Groton Cemetery, established in 1847 in order to present a more modern burial alternative to Groton residents.

BIBLIOGRAPHY *and/or* REFERENCES

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X **Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.** ***If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Eligibility Criteria Statement form.***

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Town	**Property Address**
Groton	Hollis and school Streets

Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard
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Boston, MA 02125

Area(s) **Form No.** 800

National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

Individually eligible Eligible only in a historic district

Contributing to a potential historic district Potential historic district **X**

Criteria: **X** A B **X** C D

Criteria considerations: A B C D E F G

Statement of significance by: Sanford Johnson
The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

Groton's Old Burying Ground is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criteria A and C at the local level. The burial ground meets criterion A for its association with events that have made a contribution to broad patterns of local history. The Old Burying Ground has functioned as a place of burial to Groton's residents since the mid 17th century. For nearly two centuries, it functioned as the town's principal place of burial and is the final resting place for many of the town's historically significant personages.

The Old Burying Ground is eligible for the National Register under criterion C for its distinctive design and physical characteristics that illustrate not only Colonial Period burial practices but also the historic topography reflected in the short rolling mounds found throughout the burial ground. Early burials took place beneath wood markers which have disappeared although later Colonial burials have slate headstones which bear evidence of the stone carvers' art in the form of death's heads and urn and willow designs. The narrow circulation path creates an austere pathway through the landscape that reinforces the sense of a simple Colonial Period burial ground.

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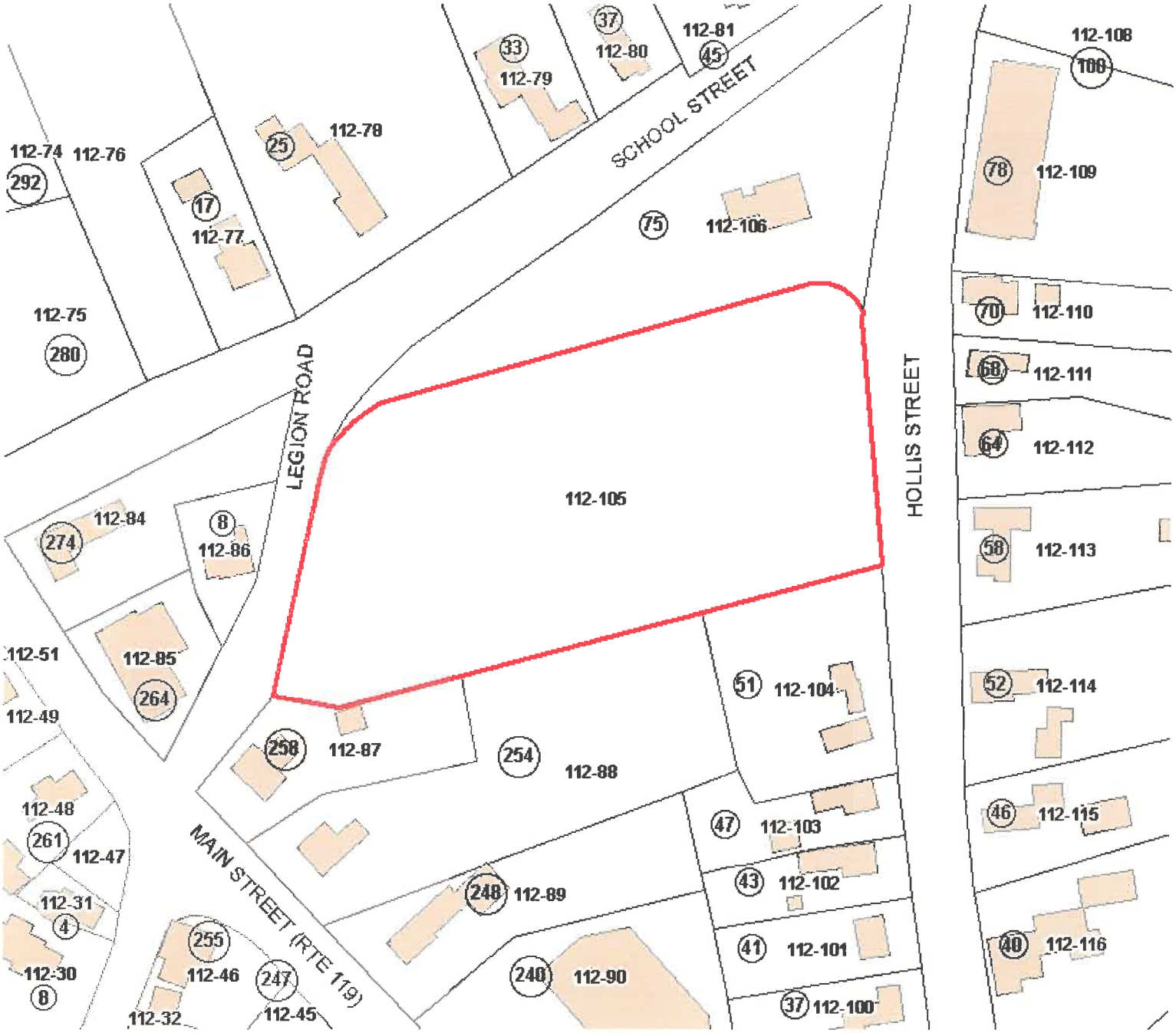
Sketch Map **North toward top**



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Photos

Old Burying Ground, East View

Old Burying Ground, South View

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Town Groton

Property Address Hollis and school Streets

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Photos

Old Burying Ground, East Gate

Old Burying Ground, Plot Delineation

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Photos

Old Burying Ground, South Wall

Old Burying Ground, Champney Obelisk,

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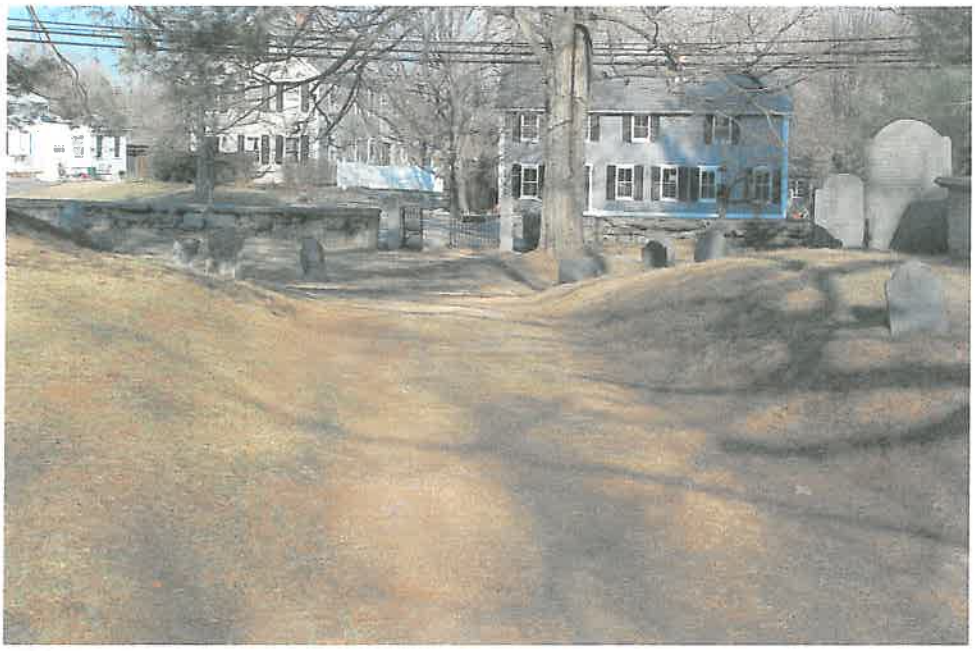
Photos



Old Burying Ground, Path

Old Burying Ground, Northwest View

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Captain Asa Lawrence, 1804

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Photos

Col. John Bulkely, 1779

Jacob Lakin, 1758