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Secretary of the Commonwealth

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OAK GROVE CEMETERY, FALMOUTH, APPROVED FOR NOMINATION TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Secretary of the Commonwealth William F. Galvin is pleased to announce that the Massachusetts Historical Commission recently approved Oak Grove Cemetery in Falmouth for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination will be submitted to the National Register of Historic Places at the National Park Service in Washington, DC, for final consideration and designation.

“The Massachusetts Historical Commission is dedicated to preserving the Commonwealth’s rich historic, architectural, archaeological, and cultural resources,” Secretary Galvin said. “Inclusion of Oak Grove Cemetery in the National Register will help to preserve Falmouth’s largest 19th-century burial place, which contains a significant quantity of funerary art that reflects changing burial practices over time.”

The 18.9-acre Oak Grove Cemetery was established in 1850, and quickly became Falmouth’s most popular place for family burial lot ownership. Oak Grove’s older sections represent the ideals of the Rural Cemetery movement and the more geometric configuration of formal 19th-century cemeteries. The irregularly shaped parcel was purchased and developed in various phases by a committee of Falmouth citizens that formed in 1849.

The cemetery includes a number of veterans’ graves, including Revolutionary War veteran Jonathan Green—whose death predates the creation of the cemetery, but whose remains were later moved here—and ten veterans of the War of 1812, about 40 Civil War veterans, more than 100 World War I veterans, and around 116 World War II Veterans.

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Oak Grove is the site of the town's only cemetery monument to the Civil War, erected in the late 19th century by the Falmouth chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR). One of the most prominent Falmouth residents interred here is Katherine Lee Bates, author of the song "America the Beautiful." In addition, at least eleven of Falmouth's historic whaling captains are buried in Oak Grove.

The cemetery contains approximately 5,150 headstones and monuments; the oldest are made of marble, and approximately 300 display Victorian-era funerary motifs including roses, lilies of the valley, and ivy. The most elaborate sculptural family monument in Oak Grove is a large, clothed, marble female figure in repose, mounted on a granite pedestal centered on a Bourne Family plot. By the late 19th century, granite had become the predominant material for grave markers; Oak Grove has thousands of granite markers in a variety of colors and styles, including distinctive pink granite quarried in West Falmouth.

The cemetery also includes an excellent example of Colonial Revival architecture, the Elizabeth G. Parke Memorial Chapel, completed in 1935 and designed by Ernest Gunnar Peterson Architects of Falmouth. The Oak Grove Cemetery Association of Falmouth, Inc. officially incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1988, and continues to maintain the cemetery in good condition.

Secretary Galvin serves as Chairman of the 17-member board, which meets regularly and considers historic resources eligible for the National Register four times a year.

The National Register is the nation's official listing of significant historic resources. In Massachusetts, there are over 70,000 properties listed in the National Register. The Massachusetts Historical Commission has been administering the National Register of Historic Places program in Massachusetts since 1966.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission is the office of the State Historic Preservation Officer and the State Archaeologist. It was established in 1963 to identify, evaluate, and protect important historical and archaeological assets of the Commonwealth. Visit our website to learn more about the Commission's programs (www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc).

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