

Delaware First State Cemetery Association
April 12, 2022
Minutes

A meeting of the Delaware First State Cemetery Association was held at Holy Cross Early Learning Center in Dover, Delaware on April 12, 2022. President Len Dornberger called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. Len introduced the two other board members in attendance - Lou Ottaviano, Vice President and Jim Frazier, Secretary/Treasurer. Those members and guests in attendance then introduced themselves. Len then asked attendees to submit their ideas for future topics on the papers on each table.

The minutes from the last pre-pandemic in-person meeting on October 22, 2019 were then presented. With a motion made by Paul Buckley and seconded by John Woomer, the minutes were accepted as presented.

A virtual meeting was also conducted by Mark Christian via email on May 11, 2021, whereby the slate of Len Dornberger (President), Lou Ottaviano (Vice President) and Jim Frazier (Secretary/Treasurer) was approved by the members' majority for two-year terms each, with 26 votes for and none opposed. These appointments were then reapproved by today's attendees, with a motion by Paulette Sammons and a second by Lou Ottaviano.

Jim Frazier then gave the Treasurer's report. Jim assumed the Treasurer responsibilities on July 1, 2021. Jim and Len made ownership changes at M&T Bank, and Jim made similar management updates with the IRS and the DE Division of Corporations. New checks were ordered. Tweaks were made to the membership list. Annual IRS and Division of Corporations filings were made in early 2022.

Jim then discussed the need to update the DFSCA website. It was established in 2014, still uses HTML code to publish the pages and has a clunky backdoor access process for editing. Jim has been in touch with Lang Designs, our original developer and current website host, about possibly moving our website into WordPress, a common web publishing package that is easier to use. [Note: Jim currently uses WordPress with

two other entities – Barratt’s Chapel Cemetery and Town of Magnolia – and stated it's much more user-friendly for edits and management.]

Lang Designs proposed an upgrade to WordPress for a one-time payment of \$540.00. After discussion, Jim motioned that we accept the proposal; second was made by Lou and the motion passed.

Five new members have joined since Jim took over on July 1, 2021, with their two years beginning at the time of joining. Members prior to July 2021 have already been afforded free membership extensions due to the pandemic. All of them will be contacted in October 2022 to renew their memberships. The balance of the association checking account as of April 1, 2022 was \$4,518,38. On a motion made by Paulette Sammons and seconded by Lou Ottaviano, the Treasurer’s report was accepted as presented.

Candace Casto, State of Delaware liaison with the Delaware Cemetery Board, then gave an overview of the State’s Distressed Cemetery Fund. Her PPT slides will be posted on our update website.

Jim then walked the attendees through a presentation entitled “The Greening of North American Cemeteries” put together by the Green Burial Council of Placerville CA. It makes a strong case for natural, or green burials, eliminating embalming, caskets, vaults and the trappings of traditional funerals and cemetery maintenance. Points raised in subsequent discussion:

- a. Embalming is still generally required.
- b. There may need to be legal and environmental changes effected first.
- c. The Muslim Cemetery of DE is already performing some of these.
- d. DE law is somewhat open-ended on burial requirements.
- e. Current practice pretty much defaults to individual cemetery requirements.
- f. Final disposition of cremains ends at the crematory.
- g. Older marble stones are not holding up over time. Moving to granite has been helpful in maintaining onsite identifiers of the deceased.

Discussion topic then moved to the statistics of burials vs cremations being seen by the attendees. Projections of the National Funeral Directors Association about a huge swing from burials over to cremation

has not translated to similar stats locally. Jim Frazier related that Barratt's Chapel Cemetery installed a 328-niche columbarium unit in 2017 based largely on the above projections, but to date has sold only 29 niches. Burials, on the other hand, have remained steady, and his Board of Directors is planning to expand onto unbroken adjacent parcels to accommodate the growth.

Another attendee related that less than 1/3 of their niches are spoken for. They also are encountering situations where they find discarded cremains boxes and suspect that the ashes are being spread within the cemetery property without the expense of a site purchase. This makes future documentation impossible, except anecdotal information gathered from the discarded boxes. Some discussion ensued about establishing an official "spreading ground" to help head off this haphazard practice.

Sharon Hills is seeing less than 7% cremains vs burials. Holy Cross, although cremation is now permitted by the Catholic Church, is running at about 36% cremation vs burial, but attributes that to their marketing rather than church doctrine.

Other points:

- a. Many folks are simply keeping ashes at home in closets and on bookshelves. Concern voiced over the chain of custody, possible loss, or lack of a dignified resting place.
- b. Nightmare scenario of family wishing to divide the cremains.
- c. Society in general is more mobile, and families move and even split up more frequently, making disposition complicated.

Some additional general comments:

- a. Temporary funeral director markers are falling apart over time; after 6 months absent a marker, cemetery should step in to mark it and document it.
- b. Provision of markers in Smyrna by the Veterans Administration.
- c. Many older gravesites are challenging, with ornate bronze and concrete structures that are deteriorating, let alone the trimming needed around them.
- d. Purchase of plots is generally in perpetuity. You purchase the right to inter, not a piece of real estate.
- e. Time limit on unused plots? Not likely in Delaware.

There being no further business to discuss, on a motion made by Len Dornberger and seconded by Jim Frazier, the meeting was adjourned at 12:16 p.m. Lunch was then served. President Dornberger reminded everyone that the next DFSCA meeting was scheduled for October 25, 2022 at 10:30 a.m., again in the Holy Cross Early Learning Center.

Respectfully Submitted,

James Frazier
Secretary/Treasurer

Attendance Roster

Len Dornberger	Holy Cross Cemetery
Lou Ottaviano	Sharon Hills/Odd Fellows
Jim Frazier	Barratt's Chapel Cemetery
Candace Casto	Delaware Cemetery Board
Jennings Hastings	Asbury UMC / Glenwood
Jona Rickards	Friendship UM Church
Sylvester Rickards	Friendship UM Church
Martell Rickards	Friendship UM Church
Paulette Sammons	Our Lady of Lourdes Cemetery
Cyntha Figgs	Our Lady of Lourdes Cemetery
Benzena Rogers	Muslim Cemetery of Delaware
Carmen Hardcastle	Whatcoat UMC
Paul Buckley	St Peter's Episcopal / Smyrna
Faith Kuehn	DHSS Holloway Campus Cemetery
John Woomer	White Clay Creek Cemetery