Our Evolving Burial Ground: We Want Your Input
Survey Results

Mt. Toby Burial Ground Group
March 2005

Completed questionnaires = 52
(Note: Some questionnaires were completed on behalf of more than one person. Non responses are not included in this report.)

1. Are you aware (or were you aware, prior to picking up this survey) that Mt. Toby Friends Meeting has its own burial ground?

Yes__47__
No__5__

2. What do you know about it, briefly?

Most indicate bits and pieces of information—e.g., its location, that there are burials, people who are buried there, that only flat stones are allowed, that it has needed mowing, that the land is rocky…

A few have been involved extensively and/or for some time with Burial Ground.

3. Would you and/or your family be interested in using it for burial?

Yes__22__
Probably__2__
Maybe__14__
No__15__

4. What questions do you have about the burial ground?

Where is it?
Who is eligible? What are the requirements?
Can a long-time attender be buried there?
Can a non-attending spouse/partner be buried there?
Why not just offer burial to anyone who asks?
Do reservations need to be made, or notice given, ahead of time?
Can I buy a plot?
Can family members be buried together?
How much does it cost? What is the perpetual maintenance cost?
Is cremation required?
What is acceptable for markers?
Why no raised markers?
Can I have a memorial marker, with remains elsewhere?
If I donate my body to a medical school, can my cremains be placed here?
If you lost a body part, could you have it cremated and buried here, and have an "in"?
Is it ok to scatter ashes there rather than have them buried?
As it's located in an aquifer, are embalmed bodies allowed?
Are green burials allowed?
What is the policy on flowers and plants?
Can burials take place in winter?
Are there boundaries? How much space is available? How many can be buried there? What happens when it's full? Can it keep expanding?

5. There are some established policies, but the burial ground is fairly new and still evolving. Thus, we would like to know what people in the meeting envision for our burial ground. Please give us your comments on what you would like to see, or can imagine, with respect to:

a. the visual appearance of our burial ground

As is – 10
It should be tranquil, welcoming, friendly – 4
It should be simple, plain, unadorned, aesthetically pleasing – 11
It should be natural, pastoral, blend into surroundings, unobtrusive, even hard to find – 8
It should be tidy, orderly, mowed, cared for - 5
It should be simple yet set off as sacred - 1
It should be easy to care for - 1
Can there be shrubbery around it? A flower border? A grassy area? A fence and gate into it? Trees and benches? – 8
Right now it looks neglected, unwelcoming, like a corner of a sheep pasture - 3
Boundaries and a sign would be good – 1
I'd like a fence and gate into the Burial Ground - 1
I'd like to see trees and benches - 1
There should be no parking nearby – 1
I'd like an Ash Garden for scattering ashes - 1

Summary/Sense: Support for present arrangement, with interest in more plantings and better maintenance. Strong interest in simplicity, although that can mean quite different things to different people.

b. accessibility

Fine as is - 18
Very important - 5
Aisles or pathways, mowed or paved, wide enough for wheelchair, from parking lot and/or meetinghouse - 7
Suggest path and entrance - 1
Would like spots for reflection nearby - 1
What about access in mud and ice? Can winter accessibility be arranged for visitors? - 2

Summary/Sense: Present arrangement is ok for most, unless we build a fence or wall. (See other comments in (c) below.) There is recognition by others that accessibility could be improved, especially with walkways. More conversation will be needed on how many paths, where, and what surface would best serve us. Winter accessibility, both for visitors and burials, will entail further conversation.

c. fencing

Yes - 5
No/not needed – 16 (includes emphatic no and no but)
Not sure/why? - 8
Should be natural - 1
A fence would exclude other areas, would conflict with our understanding of death – 2
Fence sheep out from the part with burials - 1
If we have one it should be unobtrusive, sturdy, not formidable, not too permanent – 3
Perhaps a little one to know [the Burial Ground] is there – 2
Maybe not on all sides; on one side, to separate parking - 2
Just a gate at the beginning – 1

There should be some indicator of the boundary – 3

I like it without a fence; could there be trees/shrubs/a hedge/flowers/plantings/a stone wall to mark boundaries? - 8

Summary/Sense: There is objection to formal fencing with distinct separation of inside and outside. There is support for indicating boundaries, for creating a space that is peaceful and separated from cars, and that uses minimal fencing and/or natural materials such as trees or stones.

d. signs

Yes! - 1
No/not necessary - 6
Simple - 8
Natural - 1
Stone or wood, artfully crafted; stone or wood – 2
Small, low, not too large - 11
One would be good; just one, at entranceway – 7
At least one sign at drive pointing to Burial Ground – 1
Should be "below the radar" – 1
Only the stone markers – 2

Summary/Sense: There is support for one identifying sign. We might consider the suggestion of a directional sign as well, for visitors.

e. grave markers or stones

As is - 13
Flat/flush with earth is better, easier to mow, less expensive to maintain, consistent - 21
Should be simple, small, not decorative in keeping with Friends' practice - 3
Natural - 1
Should be recessed - 1
Slightly raised would be easier to see, but harder to mow – 1
Concerned that flat markers will get grown over – 1
Flat markers will get grown over, so they need maintenance - 1
Whatever families want – 3

Yes! Give stone carvers something to do, have death angel motifs and provocative words so people will come to see/read them – 1

Summary/Sense: There is much support for our current practice of having flat, smallish, surface-level grave markers. Maintenance is much easier, though we should bear in mind that they are not maintenance-free. Current policy is "There will be no standing markers or headstones, only flat markers about 1' by 2'. . . . Markers are, of course, optional" (Appendix II, Handbook).

f. plantings

Yes – 14
No – 5
Not sure - 2
Should encourage plantings - 1
Small/sparse/low plantings - 4
Bulbs/perennials/small ornamentals – 2
Non-invasive species, edible/non-toxic - 2

Are families permitted to plant bulbs? - 2
Plantings as border rather than on graves - 2
Should be low maintenance – 2
Plantings mean maintenance questions: mowing? Which areas are communal? Are plantings in honor of someone? Who cares for them? - 2
Would they be under care of plantings keeper? -2
What do families/people buried there want? -2
1-2 trees at border – 1
I'd love to see a big spreading tree with a bench beneath facing the mountains - 1
Can a memorial tree be planted over [scattered?] ashes, not necessarily in the Burial Ground? –1
An overall plan would be good - 1

Summary/Sense: Current policy states "There is no planting in the burial ground" (Appendix II, Handbook). However, there is clearly interest in plantings. If we wish to revise the current policy, our eventual plantings plan will need to take shape alongside decisions about a border/fencing, presence or absence of sheep, and how maintenance will be handled.

g. uses in addition to burial (sheep grazing, kids playing, etc.)

Sheep: yes 3, no 3, maybe 2
Kids: yes 7, no 3
Both ok/fine/great: 7
Hard to prevent these uses - 1
Sheep and kids ok if plantings are protected - 10
Sheep and kids not wanted - 3
Sheep excrement no - 1
Kids playing is ok - 2
Ok for kids to walk but not *play* - 1
Yes! Makes for good energy/otherwise is waste of good land - 2
Family picnics - 2
Meditation - 2

Summary/Sense: There is a sense among many (though not all) that multiple uses would be best; sheep are cool, and may help reduce our need for mowing. However, we must recognize that if sheep are present, other uses become more complicated, as we must factor in sheep droppings, potentially destructive grazing, and electric fences. Agreeing to keep sheep out would mean we could consider plantings, fencing/borders, and kids'/adults' activities on their own merits.

h. maintenance/"perpetual care"

Yes - 3
Yes, mowing - 3
Mow or graze - 2
Feels funny to drive the mower over graves - 1
Minimal care is fine - 2
Simplicity - 2
Keep stones cleared of overgrowth - 1
Care of fence and gate - 1
Consistent with rest of meetinghouse - 1
Meeting should decide level of care - 1

Clarify who is to do it—Grounds? A free-standing, long-term committee? Incorporate into workdays? Volunteers? Paid? - 8

Hard to imagine it – 1

Require annual payment – 1

Summary/Sense: There is general agreement that maintenance needs to be done. Comments and questions concern what is to be included in maintenance and how it should be carried out. Plantings, fencing/borders, signs, and pathways, if we add them, will all require some degree of maintenance as well. Current policy specifies that "Grounds Committee is responsible for maintaining the burial ground" (Appendix II, Handbook).

i. fees for use of the burial ground (no fee is charged now)

Approve of charging no fee - 21

What kind? – 1

Be flexible - 1

No fee, but encourage voluntary/suggested donations - 7

What fees do other meetings charge, and what are they used for; we should talk about fees - 1

Modest fee (for modest costs) - 4

(Only) if needed for costs/maintenance/paid caretaker; any fee should be tied to care - 10

Probably should have—perhaps on sliding scale - 1

One-time only, if any - 2

One-time $50 fee - 1

Fees could go into burial fund—voluntary contributions for maintenance or support for poorer members' burial - 2

Summary/Sense: Most prefer no fee. Many recognize that a fee may be appropriate, but are clear that it should be related to our costs and in any case should not be high. Investigating the practice of other meetings might be helpful to us. Our current policy states that "There will be no charge for a burial plot . . . . The Overseers [now Care and Counsel] will suggest a suitable donation to the burial ground fund, which will pay for the maintenance of the burial ground and associated expenses" (Appendix II, Handbook). If we increase the level of maintenance required (see (h) above), our costs may increase.

j. other aspects of the burial ground

A bench or two would be nice - 6

Create virtual space for privacy – 1

Big question is who can be buried here - 1

Should be for members and family only - 1

Should be only for members of the Mt. Toby community – 1

The issue of separation from other non-Quaker family members if I/we use this burial area - 1

Who is to do the grave digging? - 1

Can we have double decker graves? - 1

What health regulations must be followed? - 1

Summary/Sense: Eligibility is a concern. Note: Some comments were included in other sections of the report.

6. What is your preference for disposition of your remains upon death?

a. cremation __35__
b. burial with casket and vault __0__
c. green burial __6__
cremation or green burial __3__
d. undecided __2__
whatever my family wants __1__
e. need more information __1__; what kind(s) of information do you need?
What is green burial? - 12
What is most environmentally benign? - 1
Is cremation best? – 1
Is cremation not green? - 1

Summary/Sense: Most expect to be cremated; ashes may or may not be buried, and they may or may not be buried at Mt. Toby. Many are interested in the possibility of green burial. No one expressed interest in traditional burial.

7. How old are you? ____ years

30s - 3
40s – 16
50s - 12
60s - 12
70s – 9
80s - 2

8. Other comments or concerns we haven't addressed:

Keep it simple.
I plan to be scattered elsewhere. Can there be a memorial plaque, perhaps in the lobby?
Have a yearly remembrance of all who have died
Must have good record-keeping
Users should be asked (1) their preference of undertaker, (2) desires specific to memorial meeting
I'm interested in its history. Who is buried there? Can there be a map, with names of those buried, posted inside the meetinghouse?
Thanks for doing this!
Keep up the good work!

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<u>Issues on which there seems to be general (if not unanimous) agreement</u>:

The Burial Ground should be restful and welcoming. One or more wheelchair-accessible pathway(s) would be appropriate. A bench or two would be appreciated. A fence is not needed, although creating some sense of privacy (that is, space for reflection) and separation from parking are suggested. Boundaries should be marked somehow—not with a fence, but perhaps with plantings and/or a stone wall, and an identifying sign would be helpful. One or more trees may be appropriate, perhaps as part of the boundary marking. Flat grave markers are appropriate.

The Burial Ground Group recommends that we agree not to permit sheep grazing on the portion that is in use.

Issues needing further discernment:

(1) Specifics as to

o marking of boundaries;

o what sort of surface for pathways;

o what is to be included in "maintenance," beyond mowing, and how it is to be carried out;

o and probably other questions as well.

(2) We generally prefer not to have a fee for use, though we may want to look into other Friends' practices and return to the question of fees after we have a better sense of our own maintenance costs.

(3) If we are no longer entertaining the idea of sheep grazing, do we want to revisit our policy on plantings on graves? If so, what guidelines would be appropriate?

(4) There have been many questions about who is or ought to be eligible for burial in the Burial Ground. Do we want to revisit our policy, or let current policy (previously discussed at length in the meeting) stand?

(5) No one expressed interest in a traditional burial; the overwhelming preference of respondents is cremation, with some interest in green burial. Since the Burial Ground is set up for traditional burial—that is, plot size and spacing are based on standard casket and vault sizes—perhaps we want to reconsider our overall plan. In addition, several people expressed concern about the effects of embalming fluid on groundwater, interest in environmentally appropriate body disposal, and questions about cremation versus green burial. Perhaps information sharing and discussion on these topics would be helpful as we consider what we want for our Burial Ground.

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* (to whom address questions or comments concerning this report)