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Secretary of the Commonwealth

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CENTER CEMETERY, SOUTHAMPTON, 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 approved the Center Cemetery in Southamton for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places at its December 12, 2012, meeting. 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 the Center Cemetery will help to preserve an important part of Southamton’s history that still functions as a vital part of the community today.”

Center Cemetery, 178 College Highway, sits on flat land in a rural setting that has been largely unchanged in more than 200 years. From the original, small burying ground (now Sections Two, Three, and Four), it has been enlarged at the north and south to comprise 12 sections on 6.5 acres. The cemetery contains 1,912 markers in 820 family plots, and is estimated to contain more than 3,000 graves overall. The earliest known burial dates from 1738. Center Cemetery has served as Southamton’s principal burial place since the town’s settlement. A significant cross-section of Southamton inhabitants are buried here, including original settlers, veterans of several wars including the Revolutionary War, and those who made significant contributions to the town’s history. The 1866 Soldiers Monument—a tall, red sandstone obelisk topped with an eagle and dedicated to those who fought in the Civil War—dominates the main entrance. The cemetery is fronted by a decorative iron fence installed in 1900, which is in good condition. Gravestone iconography in the cemetery reflects changing tastes in funerary art over time, and includes motifs such as death’s heads, soul effigies, and willows and urns. Three regional stonecutters are known to be represented among the cemetery’s monuments: O. M. Clapp, S. D. Marble, and T. Sturges or Sturgis. The earliest burials were unplanned, with stone markers widely scattered and later stones filling the gaps.

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State House, Room 337, Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Starting in 1865, new sections of the cemetery were laid out in grids, signaling a shift toward planned burial places. Today, the cemetery is well maintained and still serves as an active place of burial. In 2009, the town began to consider acquiring an additional sixty acres to the north and west, as the cemetery is nearly full.

The Center Cemetery is one of 6 historic resources around the Commonwealth approved for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places by the Massachusetts Historical Commission at this meeting.

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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