

TRURO Daily News

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Onslow Island Cemetery milestone celebrated

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ONslow – A joyous occasion occurred in a local cemetery on the weekend.



A special unveiling ceremony took place in the Onslow Island Cemetery on Saturday. It was the celebration of the site's 250th anniversary and a plaque was unveiled in recognition of the event, assisted by Bruce Curry, left, and Allison Groves. Monique Chiasson – Truro Daily News

A special ceremony commemorating the 250th anniversary of the Onslow Island Cemetery took place on Saturday with an estimated 80 people in attendance.

For Marie McCully Collier, of Bible Hill, the event was touching because of the amount of history her family has in the cemetery. Her husband, parents, grandparents, even great-great-grandparents and three uncles are all buried in plots at the cemetery.

"It's important to recognize all the people who came before us and those who continue to maintain the cemetery," said McCully Collier, 74, who is also the cemetery's trustee

president. "The more you look into history the more you want to learn the value of it and the development of the whole community."

The Onslow Island Cemetery, dating back to 1763, is one of the oldest cemeteries in Nova Scotia and one of more than a dozen graveyards in Colchester County containing the remains of the Planters from the 1700s. In 1901, an Act of the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly incorporated the Trustees of the Onslow Cemetery Company.

During the ceremony, emcee Jim Lorraine revealed a fact not known by everyone: the site used to be an island and people had to go to it by boat.

As time passed, more and more work and effort was been poured into the site and people with ties to the cemetery want the surrounding communities to know that. One of those people who dedicated many hours at the cemetery is Allison Groves, who was a grave digger at the site since 1945.

"This is wonderful," Groves, 88, told the Truro Daily News shortly after helping with the unveiling of a commemorative anniversary plaque at the cemetery.

"I guess I did (hundreds) of graves, mostly volunteer. Nobody else wanted to do it or would do it," he laughed, regarding his longtime commitment.

A number of people commented during the ceremony how peaceful the site is and how perfect the sunny weather was for a celebration that hopefully included deceased loved ones looking down on the event. The gathering also included guest speakers, an anniversary cake and cemetery tours.

In addition, to mark this historic occasion, a brief history of the cemetery is being prepared for publication with the assistance of the Colchester Historical Society and Museum.

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Did you know?

- There are about 400 headstones/plots in the Onslow Island Cemetery, with room for more than 400 more.
- It costs a few thousand dollars a year to maintain the cemetery, and is dependent on donations.
- Recent work on the site has included fixing a culvert washed out by the fall flood of 2012 and ongoing work on road paths in the cemetery.
- One of the first recorded burial names from the cemetery is Mary McNutt, an infant.
- There are 11 trustees members.