

TECHNICAL REPORT

**PRINCE HALL MYSTIC CEMETERY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOWN-WIDE RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY
TOWN OF ARLINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

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Introduction

The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL) has completed its investigations of the Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery as part of the Town-Wide Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey for Arlington. This report presents the tasks involved; the results, including a summary of the background research; and management recommendations, including explanations of the technology involved with the recommended additional testing.

As part of the Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery survey, PAL did the following:

1. Performed archaeological field reconnaissance to identify and document specific locations in the cemetery that are likely to have significant archaeological features and deposits.
2. For locations that could be adversely affected by future ground-disturbing projects, provided recommendations for a future, separately funded investigation using ground-penetrating radar (GPR) and/or archaeological testing for belowground features (e.g., gravestones, vaults, and grave shafts), systematic soil probing for buried grave markers, and methods for documenting existing conditions within the cemetery.
3. Provided recommendations consistent with the historic cemetery preservation plans for the Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery to meet the goals of historic preservation planning, maintenance and management, and public interpretation.

The Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery (ARL.802; ARL-HA-1) was the first and only Prince Hall masonic cemetery in the United States. Prince Hall (1735–1807) founded the Masonic Lodge in Boston in 1776 (see *History* below for more information).

As an archaeological site, the Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery is connected with Boston’s nineteenth-century African American community and is an important piece of evidence of its influence and presence in Boston during that time (MHC site form). The cemetery is also as an individual property in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) at the local level under Criteria A and D for its historical and cultural associations with the first Prince Hall Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons. The strong association of that group and the site with the history of Massachusetts’ African American community attests to its role as a commemorative site. The cemetery also falls within the previously recorded Alewife Brook Site (19-MD-264) and could contain undisturbed deposits of Native American cultural material dating to the Pre-Contact Period (Dempsey and Friedberg 1998; Pendleton 1989).

Cemetery Description

The Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery, also referred to as “Prince Hall Cemetery,” is on Gardner Street in East Arlington and was established in 1864. The cemetery is within a residential block with Norcross Street to the south, Granton Park to the west, Fremont Street to the north, and Gardner Street to the east, where the cemetery entrance is located (Figure 1 and Photograph 1). The cemetery was cleared of its nineteenth-century aboveground features (e.g., gravestones) at some time in the early twentieth century once it was no longer in use (Dempsey and Friedberg 1998).

A plaque at the entrance reads as follows:

Most worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge
Jurisdiction of Massachusetts Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery
Instituted in October 1864 at Arlington, Massachusetts
Accepted and Included on November 25, 1999 in the National Register of Historic Places
Dedicated May 31, 1999
M.W. John G. Bynoe, Grand Master
R.W. Joseph B. Snowden, Grand Secretary

The cemetery is on an approximately 9,500 square foot (0.2-acre) grass-covered lot surrounded by wooden and chain-link fences covered in deciduous vegetation to the north, west, and south sides, and to the east by a rod-iron fence along a sidewalk and Gardner Street (see Photograph 1). It is entered by a set of four concrete steps and a concrete walkway, which leads to a centrally placed modern, black granite monument that is approximately 10 feet long, 4 feet high, and 1.5 feet thick on an approximately 20-x-20-foot concrete pad.

The monument's east (front) face (Photograph 2) reads as follows:

Prince Hall Cemetery
Dedicated by
M.W. G. M. Thomas Dalton
The Prince Hall Grand Lodge F. & A.M.
Oct. 13, 1864
Rededicated by
M.W. G.M. Chester R. Isles
June 2, 1990

and its west (back) face has

Prince Hall Masonry F. & A.M.
First Organized July 3, 1776

In addition to the monument, two granite stones with no markings are visible within the lot. These stones are described in the National Register Form as a "base and obelisk" that are side-by-side near the Gardner Street side of the lot. The base is a 2-foot square granite block with a slightly beveled top rising approximately 18 inches from the ground; the obelisk is a partially buried broken slab of granite with squared edges lying at an angle to the west of the block (Photograph 3). No other surface remains, or artifacts were noted on the ground surface during the field reconnaissance survey.

The topography of the cemetery is visibly mounded along the eastern and northern edges and otherwise flat with an elevation of approximately 25 feet above sea level, which is approximately 4 feet higher than street level (Photograph 4). The mounding is visible on a LiDAR image¹ (Figure 2). Soils within the cemetery consist of somewhat excessively drained Merrimac Urban land complex fine sandy loam with 0 to 8 percent slopes (USDA–NRCS 2022).#

¹ LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) uses a laser to collect measurements to create three-dimensional models and maps of objects and environments.

History of the Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery

The cemetery's history is well documented in a 1989 report of a geophysical survey conducted by Boston University's Center for Archaeological Studies. Information from this study is included in the 1998 National Register Form. The report and the form are on file at the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) in Boston. The National Register Form can also be viewed using the Massachusetts Cultural Resources Information System (MACRIS) online mapping resource. The following summary of the history of Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery is excerpted and adapted from the Boston University report (Pendleton 1989) and the National Register Form (Dempsey and Friedberg 1998).

The cemetery was established in 1864 by Prince Hall Grand Lodge Grand Master William B. Kendall as a place for African Americans to bury their loved ones. Records indicate the cemetery was in use until about 1897 before falling into disuse. It is unclear why burials on the property stopped. In the 1980s, the Prince Hall Grand Lodge in Dorchester and the Arlington Historical Society formed the Prince Hall Mystic Arlington Cemetery Association, which is responsible for the cemetery's upkeep.

A popular Methodist Minister, Prince Hall was originally from Barbados and fled the country with his native father and white mother to Massachusetts to avoid persecution. He was the slave of William Hall of Boston until 1775 and, as noted above, Hall founded the Masonic Lodge in Boston in 1776. During the Revolutionary War period he was the undisputed leader of the African American community and, after his death in 1807, the lodge was renamed in his honor ([Africans in America/Part 2/Prince Hall \[pbs.org\]](#)).

Grand Master Kendall purchased the Gardner Street parcel in 1856 from Davis Locke before deeding it in 1864 to the lodge's Masonic Order for the cemetery. The parcel was originally part of the Locke Farm, which Locke subdivided for sale as house lots at the time. The MHC site files (Form E Burial Form for ARL.802) lists the cemetery as possibly the first and only cemetery purchased and maintained by Black Masons in the country. Among those buried there is abolitionist Jonas W. Clark (1799–1870), one of the first to attempt to integrate public education in Boston.

According to Pendleton (1989:11), the Prince Hall Grand Lodge misplaced or did not keep records of the burials in the Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery, and no other documents have ever been found. However, according to 1960 newspaper articles and court records pertaining to the vacant cemetery lot (designated as Lot 26), which are referred to in the 1989 report, it had a circular mound of dirt approximately 10 feet in diameter surrounded by six stone posts, behind which stood a central obelisk monument surrounded by a metal fence (Pendleton 1989:16). Other accounts noted at least eight headstones in the cemetery and that a farmer ripped up several with his plow. In addition, the six stone posts may have been included in the count of headstones (Pendleton 1989:17).

The Death Records of Boston list only two people buried in Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery—Jonas W. Clark in 1870 and William H. W. Derby in 1875 (Pendleton 1989:19). However, *Find a Grave* records accessed online in October 2022 contain the names of 16 burials in the Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery dating from 1869 to 1894, including those of Clark and Derby (Table 1). Each record of the burials on the *Find a Grave* website includes the place and year of birth and death, parents' names, occupation, and cause of death. The records also indicate that no grave marker is on the lot and that, according to the Town's records, the named persons are not buried in any other cemetery in Arlington. This suggests that the website's information likely was obtained from the Town's death records.

Table 1. Names and Birth and Death Dates of Those Buried at Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery.

Name	Birth Date	Death Date
Lilley C. Evans	5/1868	4/8/1869
Jonas W. Clark	6/17/1799	1/26/1870
Albert Morton	6/17/1800	6/24/1870
Hattie West	6/17/1801	7/4/1871
Anna Harris	6/17/1802	3/26/1872
Frank Boram Hicks	9/24/1871	6/17/1803
Thomas Bagby	6/17/1804	2/23/1873
Lydia Burns Barnett	1872	4/10/1894
William H. W. Derby	1829	6/17/1875
Warren Wilson Redman	11/28/1875	1/28/1876
Maud M. Williams	2/1860	7/16/1880
Emma Rhodes	4/12/1881	7/12/1881
John Redman	6/17/1834	8/20/1884
Hamilton A. Grant	4/5/1886	4/5/1886
Ferdinand Robert Jones	8/1885	7/21/1886
Tabitha Turner	1873	9/13/1891

(source: [Memorials in Prince Hall Cemetery - Find a Grave](#)).

During the 1989 geophysical survey, a few small and isolated anomalies were identified belowground within the cemetery boundary; however, the results were inconclusive. One large unidentified anomaly was reported as possibly representing buried remains of the original cemetery gate, the stone posts, and/or the central stone obelisk on a stone base (described above) or a group of graves (Pendleton 1989:31).

The lot containing the Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery is also in an area that was heavily occupied by groups of Native Americans beginning at least 8,000 years ago during the Pre-Contact Period. The lot is within the area recorded as the Alewife Brook Site (19-MD-264), which is likely part of a larger pre-contact village site that occupied the entire west bank of Alewife Brook from Saint Paul Cemetery in Arlington north to the confluence of Alewife Brook and the Mystic River and includes the pre-contact Wyman Farm (19-MD-370) and Goat Acre (19-MD-262) sites. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, hundreds of artifacts (e.g., stone tools) were collected from farm fields and along the banks of Alewife Brook and Mystic River that are now curated at Harvard’s Peabody Museum in Cambridge. The cultural material assemblage from the Alewife Brook Site includes artifacts dating to the Middle Archaic to Late Woodland periods (8,000 to 500 years ago). However, since no formal documentation or excavation of the site was ever done, extraordinarily little spatial or contextual information is available about the location.

Management Recommendations

Based on the historical and archaeological information presented above, several unmarked graves of the Prince Hall Masonic community could be present within the existing Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery parcel, where only the modern monument and possible nineteenth-century obelisk and base fragments are now visible. PAL recommends additional testing before the Town of Arlington initiates any revitalization projects within the cemetery to identify any unmarked buried remains and/or historical features. Controlled testing and/or mapping can establish the total number of graves in the cemetery and their horizontal and vertical patterns. This testing should include an updated intensive geophysical survey (i.e., ground-penetrating radar [GPR]) and limited subsurface probing or an intensive archaeological survey (involving excavations) in the areas of proposed ground disturbance.

Depending on the results of the GPR and intensive survey testing, additional background research may be warranted. Because any undeveloped land in the cemetery parcel also has the potential to yield information about pre-contact Native American settlement and subsistence practices in eastern New England, archaeological investigations within the cemetery could identify subsurface features (e.g., fire pits and/or post molds) cultural material (e.g., stone tools) that provide evidence of such pre-contact occupation. Archaeological resources related to the area's possible agricultural use during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries may still be on the property.

Testing Explanations

The following sections explain the technology involved with the recommended additional testing in the Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery.

Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR)

GPR is an active, noninvasive geophysical testing method that records contrasts in the dielectric (i.e., nonconducting) properties of subsurface materials (Clark 2001; Conyers 2004, 2006). A pulse of transmitted electromagnetic energy emitted from an antenna is reflected or absorbed by such contrasts, and the resulting reflections are recorded to produce a vertical profile of the pulse reflections. Most of these reflections are generated at interfaces between materials of differing relative dielectric permittivity (i.e., at the boundary of different stratigraphic layers where changes in the velocity of the originating signal occur). A two-dimensional GPR profile is a representation of vertical and horizontal stratigraphy consisting of individual traces that result from a single pulse of energy and the resulting reflections at a specific location that are digitally merged to produce an image of dielectric contrasts. In this sense, GPR is not providing a stratigraphic profile, but is generating a representation of local dielectric contrasts that provide a proxy for subsurface stratigraphic changes.

When used for archaeological testing, GPR can identify buried historic shaft features such as wells, privies, building foundations, and trenches due to dielectric contrasts that often exist between feature fills (soils) and their surrounding sediments; the visible truncation of internal stratigraphic layers; and/or the high reflection amplitudes of electromagnetic signals from bricks or stones. GPR surveys have been useful in identifying unmarked graves in New England. Like any shaft feature, a grave is a vertical cut through and disturbance of the natural soil column. Grave fill usually contains internally chaotic characteristics derived from disturbance of natural soil layers that contrast sharply with undisturbed subsoil (Bevan 1991) and is recognizable in a GPR profile. Furthermore, unlike a soil disturbance, well-preserved coffins and brick and concrete vaults provide ideal point-source objects to generate strong GPR data that are easily recognizable as graves.

The depth of radar penetration depends on numerous factors, including antenna frequency, sediment type, moisture content, soil compaction, and salt content. Higher frequency antennas are capable of resolving smaller targets and interfaces than those that can be identified with lower frequency antennas at the expense of depth penetration. Moisture content increases sediment density through filling of interstitial pore spaces, while compaction causes a similar effect through compressing spaces between particles. The presence of water, salts, and clay particles in the sediment increases conductivity and thus reduces the quality of GPR data (Conyers 2006:145). Clays, shale, and other high conductivity materials may attenuate or absorb GPR signals (Conyers 2004, 2006).

Intensive Archaeological Survey

Depending on the results of the GPR survey, an intensive archaeological survey may be beneficial to determine if there are any significant features within the cemetery that should be investigated and/or may

be used to validate the results of the GPR survey. Subsurface investigation can include ground probing to detect buried gravestones, stone walls, or structures, or excavating small (50-x-50-centimeter [approximately 19.7-x-19.7-inch]) test pits to locate more subtle features such as grave shafts and/or post molds. A post mold is the stain or imprint of a disintegrated wooden post in which the hole is filled with decayed matter visible in the subsoil. Any identified post molds could represent fences or railings that were once within the cemetery or around any of the possible structures that were once present.

Best Management Practices

The Town should follow best management practices for any revitalization work within the Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery, as described in *Massachusetts Laws Relating to Gravestone Preservation* (Appendix A) and as outlined in Lynette Strangstad's *A Graveyard Preservation Primer* (2nd ed., 2013 American Association of State and Local History) and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation's *Preservation Guidelines for Municipally Owned Historic Burial Grounds and Cemeteries* (3rd. ed., 2009: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/preservation-guidelines-for-municipally-owned-historic-burial-grounds-and-cemeteries/download>).

Overall, photographic documentation and updated mapping using a submeter GPS unit should be conducted before moving gravestones, monuments, stone walls, or any other features within the cemetery.

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2022 *Natural Resources Conservation Service Web Soil Survey: Middlesex County,
Massachusetts.* Electronic document, <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app>, accessed
July 2022.

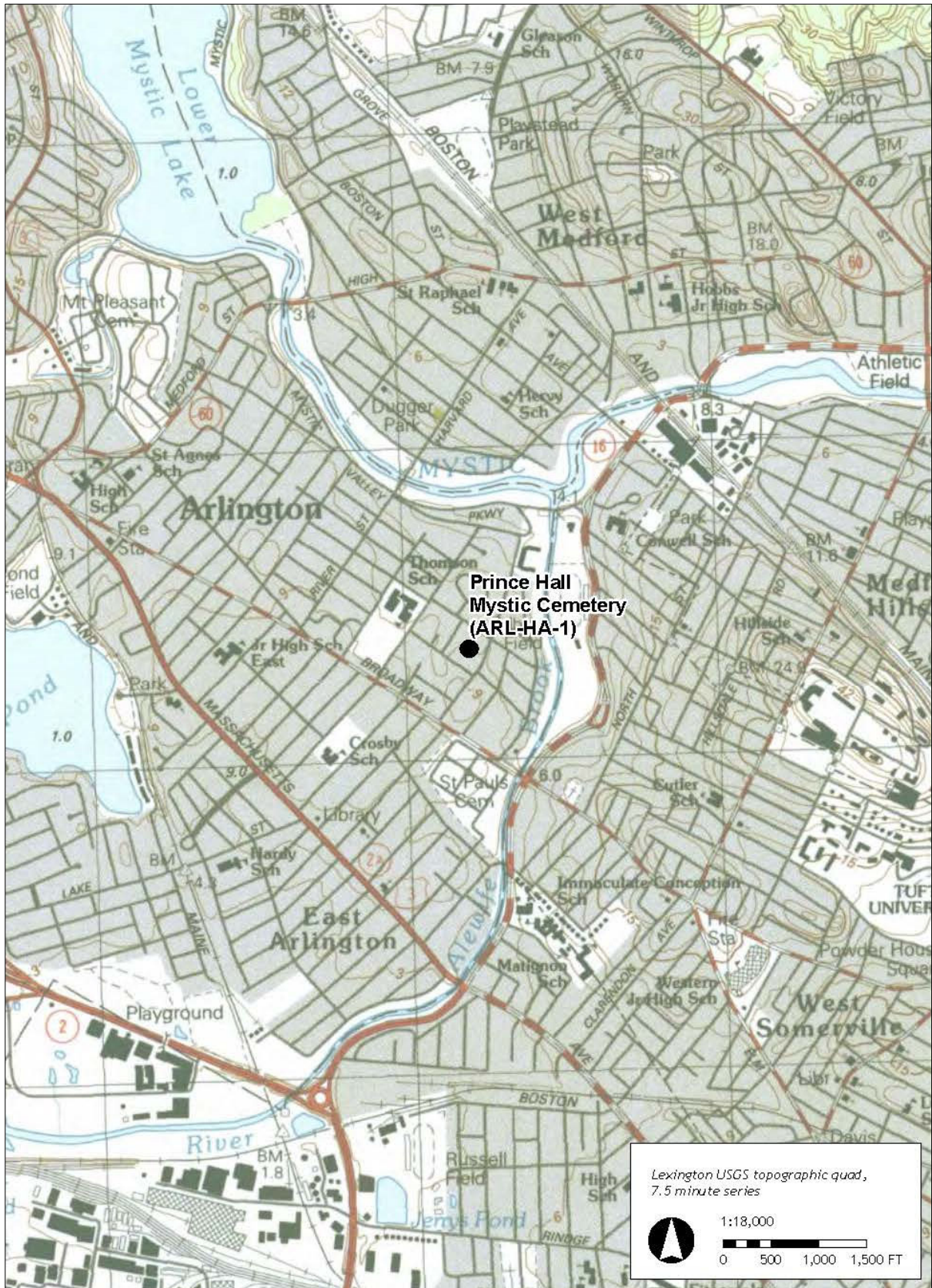


Figure 1. Location of the Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery on the Lexington USGS topographic quadrangle, 7.5 minute series.

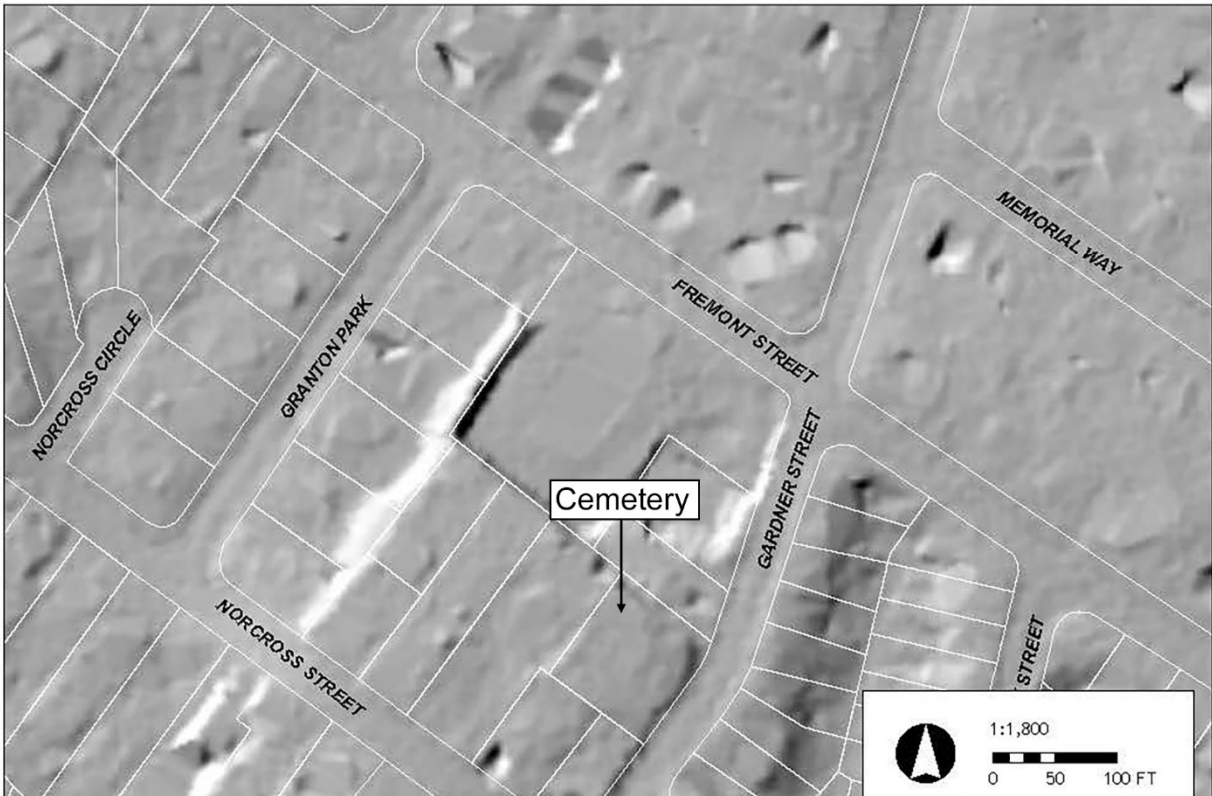
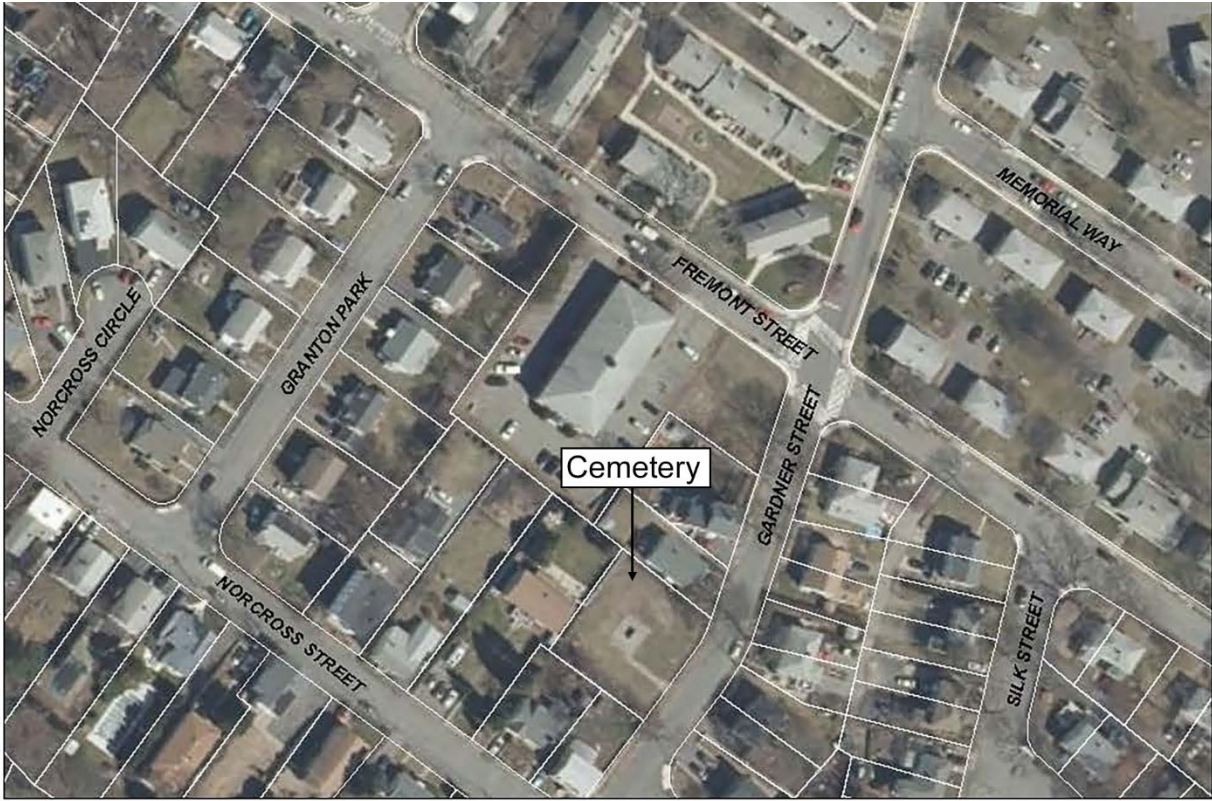


Figure 2. Location of the Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery on 2021 aerial and 2021 Lidar shaded relief.



Photograph 1. Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery, view northwest from Gardner Street.



Photograph 2. Modern granite monument, view southwest.



Photograph 3. Possible nineteenth-century granite base and obelisk, view southeast.



Photograph 4. Mounding along northern and eastern edges of Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery, view west.

APPENDIX A

MASSACHUSETTS LAWS RELATING TO GRAVESTONE PRESERVATION

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MASSACHUSETTS LAWS RELATING TO GRAVESTONE PRESERVATION

General Laws, Chapter 114

Section 16. Any town may annually appropriate and raise by taxation such sums as may be necessary to care for and keep in good order and to protect by proper fences any or all burial grounds within the town in which ten or more bodies are interred and which are not properly cared for by the owners, and the care and protection of such burial grounds shall be in charge of the cemetery commissioners, if the town has such officers, otherwise in charge of the selectmen.

Section 17. A town shall not alienate or appropriate to any other use than that of a burial ground, any tract of land which has been for more than one hundred years used as a burial place; and no portion of such burial ground shall be taken for public use without special authority from the general court. "Burial place", as referred to in this section, shall include unmarked burial grounds known or suspected to contain the remains of one or more American Indian.

Section 18. Any town having within its limits an abandoned or neglected burying ground may take charge of the same and keep it in good order, and may appropriate money therefor, but no property rights shall be violated, and no body shall be disinterred. No fence, tomb, monument, or other structure shall be removed or destroyed, but the same may be repaired or restored.

Chapter 272

Section 71. Whoever, not being lawfully authorized by the proper authorities, willfully digs up, disinters, removes, or conveys away a human body, or the remains thereof, or knowingly aids in such disinterment, removal or conveying away, and whoever is accessory thereto either before or after the fact, shall be punished by imprisonment in the state prison for not more than three years or in jail for not more than two and one-half years or by a fine of not more than four thousand dollars.

Section 73. Whoever willfully destroys, mutilates, defaces, injures or removes a tomb, monument, gravestone, American flag, veteran's grave marker, metal plaque, veteran's commemorative flag holder, commemorative flag holder representing service in a police or fire department, veteran's flag holder that commemorates a particular war, conflict or period of service or flag, or other structure or thing which is placed or designed for a memorial of the dead, or a fence railing, curb or other thing which is intended for the protection or ornament of a structure or thing before mentioned or of an enclosure for the burial of the dead, or willfully removes, destroys, mutilates, cuts, breaks or injures a tree, shrub or plant placed or being within such enclosure, or wantonly or maliciously disturbs the contents of a tomb or a grave, shall be punished by imprisonment in the state prison for not more than five years or by imprisonment in the jail or house of correction for not more than two and one-half years and by a fine of not more than five thousand dollars. In addition, the court shall order any person convicted of an offense pursuant to this section to pay restitution to the owner of the property that was damaged, destroyed, mutilated, defaced, injured, or removed.

Section 73A. In any city or town which accepts this section, the provisions of section seventy-three shall not prohibit the removal, in accordance with rules and regulations promulgated by the state secretary, of a gravestone or other structure or thing which is placed or designed as a memorial for the dead, for the purpose of repair or reproduction thereof by community sponsored, educationally oriented, and professionally directed repair teams.

Section 75. Whoever, without authority, removes flowers, flags or memorial tokens from any grave, tomb, monument or burial lot in any cemetery or other place of burial shall be punished by a fine of not more than one thousand dollars or by imprisonment for not more than six months.

Rules and Regulations Issued by the Secretary of State

1. Permits to restore and reproduce gravestones under the provisions of Chapter 448 of the Acts of 1973 shall be issued by the Secretary of the Commonwealth after he shall have satisfied himself that the proposals for such restoration and/or reproduction meet the standards of educational value, community interest, and professional competence. In making this determination, the Secretary may call upon the assistance of the staff and members of the of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, local historical district commissions, and local, regional, statewide, and national historical and other learned societies and individuals whose experience he may deem relevant.
2. Reproduction of the gravestones may only be done for historical purposes by nonprofit organizations.
3. Request for a permit must be submitted upon application form and shall give a detailed plan of the gravestone restoration project.