

TOWN OF BOONE
SPECIAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
November 14, 2023, 3:00 p.m.
Planning and Inspections Conference Room & WebEx Video Conferencing

Historic Preservation Commission Members in Attendance:

Chair Eric Plaag, Chuck Watkins, Vardell Smyth, and Riley Ziegler

Council Member Liaison: Virginia Roseman

Town Staff in Attendance:

Jessica Mitchell-Advanced Planning Specialist, and Marlene Crosby-Board Secretary

Others in Attendance:

Brenda Councill, Jill Privott, Katie Mack, Rebecca Triplett-Johnson, Susan Keefe, JC Feimster, and Luke Barber-Watauga Democrat

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Eric Plaag called the Boone Historic Preservation Commission meeting to order at 3:04 p.m.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Commission Member Smyth made a motion, seconded by Commission Member Ziegler, to adopt the agenda as written.

Vote: Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Plaag referred to the Town of Boone Rules of Procedures for Boards and Commissions for Public Comment. He explained that public speakers would have five minutes per speaker, and there was no objection from the members on the time allotted.

Chair Plaag opened the floor for public comment.

The first speaker was Dr. Susan Keefe, who stated she had no comments on the draft cemetery interpretative panels and complimented the HPC on their work on the draft.

The second speaker was Ms. Katie Mack, who stated she had no comments on the draft cemetery interpretative panels, and she complimented the HPC on their work on completing a comprehensive draft.

The third speaker was Ms. Rebecca Triplett Johnson, who stated she was a former resident of Boone, and she represented multiple families and descendants of those interred in the cemetery. She said they asked the HPC to continue researching and working hard on raising public awareness of the project to get multiple inputs on the draft panel text. They wanted to ensure everyone was considered without a time limit placed on the project so the information received could be as thorough and inclusive as possible.

The fourth speaker was Ms. Brenda Councill, who stated that she is a resident of Watauga County and not a resident of Boone. She pointed out that she was concerned about the fence separating the two sections,

and she wanted to know the historical facts regarding the reason for the fence. She stated that both sections of the cemetery were privately owned. She asked why one section of the cemetery would be fenced and the other would not. She asked the HPC if they had researched the Greene Horton acquisition in 1894 of the Black section of the cemetery. She did not think it was necessary to include the sentence that the "town has made several improvements to provide for the cemetery's long-term preservation." She noted that she had visited many historic cemeteries and had not seen cemetery interpretative panels of this nature in any of those cemeteries. She said it appeared that the cemetery's history was being overanalyzed and that some speculative and unfounded research was being added based on some of the statements in the draft cemetery panels text. She noted that some descendants are unhappy with the present draft's wording. She said the draft needs to have a brief, balanced historical description. She pointed out that the word "segregation" was used three times in one paragraph. She asked for the text to be rewritten inclusively.

The fifth speaker was Ms. Jill Privott, who stated that she was a resident of Boone. She noted that she agreed with Chair Plaag on the proposed change made at the last meeting regarding the first sentence of Panel 1. She said this proposed change was more historically pointed and delineated and told the cemetery's history with specificity. She noted on Panel 2, in the second sentence, that racial segregation was common in the United States. She pointed out that from a historical and best practice perspective, the words "racial" and "ethnic" are not interchangeable. She explained that "racial" is a term used to describe physical characteristics, and "ethnic" or "ethnicity" encompasses a broader range. She asked the HPC to research this information because she said the word "racial" would be more accurate. She noticed the word "segregation" was used several times and asked that the usage of it be reduced. In the paragraph that begins with "more than 265 known burials," she said there is no way to know the common practice for field stones in the cemetery over a long period, and she thought this topic was overemphasized.

Mr. Luke Barber from the Watauga Democrat joined the meeting at approximately 3:10 p.m. Chair Plaag confirmed that Mr. Barber did not want to speak at this meeting and he was there to observe.

Chair Plaag closed the floor for public comment at approximately 3:21 p.m.

Chair Plaag responded to some of the statements made during public comment regarding the reasoning for putting up the fence. He explained that a memo was included in a previous meeting packet dated August 24, 2023, that he authored for the Historic Preservation Commission and Town Council on the history of fencing and segregation in the cemetery. He said the memo included photos showing various fence iterations and detailed discussion with documented sources. He reiterated that in the 1890s, several issues of the Watauga Democrat covered this topic. He explained a desire to put up a plank fence around the "city cemetery" (as described at that time) on privately owned land. He said this effort involved only putting up the fence around the white section of the cemetery by town residents in combination with the Councill family members and various civic leaders. He said the first fence appeared to survive until the 1920s when it was discussed to put up another fence that was not completed. He noted that in images from 1950, there appeared to be a hedge row that showed a clear boundary around the white section of the cemetery.

Chair Plaag talked about the third fence. He said it was campaigned on by the Democratic Mayoral Candidate and the Democratic Town Alderman Candidates in 1957. They promised to install a fence around the privately owned "town cemetery" when elected that year. He added that by 1950, they had funded and installed the fence using town funds.

Chair Plaag stated that a commentator had given the impression that the cemetery was two separately owned parcels. He noted that no deed record existed for the Black section of the cemetery. He pointed out from photographic evidence and a WPA Survey from 1937 that a headstone for John E. Maricle was placed in the Black section of the cemetery that clearly shows Council Cemetery on it. He said there is no doubt that the Black section of the cemetery was Council family land. He noted one exception was a tiny portion of land adjacent to Brown Street, which was Lot 45 on the Kestner plat, discussed in detail in the August memo. He explained how the Boone Chapel trustees of the cemetery purchased this portion of land to expand the Black section of the cemetery that was privately owned at one time. He said the cemetery's trustees created the Jordan Council Memorial Cemetery in 1998 and 1999. He continued that they created it specifically for the purpose of making a claim upon the Black section of the cemetery. He said trustees claimed the driveway parcel that fronted Howard Street despite no deed record. He said the Jordan Council Memorial Cemetery group was formed to legalize ownership of the two sections of the cemetery, Lot 45, and the driveway parcel to combine them with the white section. He said the intent was to create one large cemetery parcel with the two lots owned by the Jordan Council Memorial Cemetery group and the other two owned by the town cemetery's existing trustees. He noted the trustees for both groups were the same people.

Chair Plaag talked about the issue of the Greene Horton acquisition of land not being addressed by the HPC. He explained in the 1990s that a student from Appalachian State University was interested in the cemetery, and he made a statement without documentation that the Black section may be a parcel purchased by Greene Horton sometime in the 1890s. He explained that a discussion came up on social media regarding this topic excoriating the HPC for the proposed panel text. He said that many claims were made, and one of the claims was made by Michael Hardy, who stated that the HPC had ignored the Greene Horton parcel. He added this claim stated that the student had confirmed that Greene Horton owned the land where the Black section was located. He continued that Mr. Hardy had not done his research because it differed from what the student said in the report. Chair Plaag noted that the deed the student referred to made a clear reference to a road at the northwest corner of the parcel that went between the white and Black sections of the cemetery. He referred to the deed details that noted Greene Horton owned the land immediately to the south of the Boone Chapel parcel. He said this information had been publicly available for four months, and he did not want to spend more time on it. No other comments were made on this topic by the commentators or Commission members.

BOONE CEMETERY INTERPRETATIVE PANELS – REVIEW OF FINAL DRAFT TEXT

Chair Plaag referred to the November 7, 2023, draft on page two of the meeting packet. Chair Plaag noted that these are the revisions the HPC agreed upon at their last meeting. He indicated that he had made some minor changes that he noted in the footnotes. He mentioned that Commission Member Watkins had submitted an entirely new revised text for review at this meeting. He asked Commission Member

Watkins to voice his rationale for the revised text after the HPC had agreed on the final draft revisions at their last meeting. Commissioner Member Watkins said the HPC did not agree to any final draft text. He said they reviewed the proposed text line by line and that the revised text would be provided back to the HPC for re-examination. He said the HPC did not finalize the proposed text at the last meeting a week ago. Commission Member Watkins explained that he re-submitted the revised text for the panels to clean up the language by removing some duplication and some regrouping of wording from one panel to the other. He added that when you match panels or mix graphic elements with the portions of text, the amount of text should be approximately the same on each panel. The last reason he gave for submitting this text was to try to find common ground between the public and the work of the HPC on this project.

Revised Sign #1: Boone Cemetery Rules

Chair Plaag noted there was an issue with the rules and regulations sign for the cemetery on whether pets should or should not be prohibited, and he asked the HPC to discuss this topic.

Discussion ensued on the Boone Cemetery Rules sign. Chair Plaag noted that he drafted the proposed text for the sign from the October draft version that Commission Member Smyth had submitted for review by the HPC. Chair Plaag pointed out that St. Philip's and the Salem Moravian Graveyard prohibit pets, but Bonaventure and Unitarian Church in Charleston, South Carolina, do not prohibit pets (photos permanently on file).

Chair Plaag opened the floor for the HPC to give their feedback on this sign issue. Commission Member Smyth said when he researched this topic, pets were prohibited because many people used the cemetery as the only area where people could walk their dogs. He said it is not an issue in Boone because there are a lot of places for people to walk their dogs. Commission Member Ziegler said her personal opinion was that pets should be prohibited in cemeteries because of the lack of respect from pet owners to use the dog bag station provided for them. Commission Member Watkins stated that he was unsure about this issue. He said if you allow pets, you must provide a dog bag station, which must be monitored. He continued that on the other hand, if you do not allow pets and people come to the cemetery with dogs, what will they do with the dog while they visit the cemetery. Commission Member Smyth pointed out there is a dog bag station at the cemetery. Chair Plaag noted that the dog bag station at the cemetery has sometimes been an issue because it was not emptied regularly. He asked Ms. Mitchell to remind the Public Works Department to try to keep it emptied. Ms. Mitchell said she would contact the Public Works Department on this issue. Chair Plaag noted that on several occasions when he was at the cemetery, he encountered occasional dog manure, even with the dog bag station in place. He also mentioned the issue of dog urination, and there is no apparent way to stop it. He agreed with Commission Member Ziegler on prohibiting pets in the cemetery for the reasons he just stated.

Motion and Vote:

Commission Member Ziegler made a motion, seconded by Chair Plaag, to recommend to the Town Council approval for pets to be prohibited in the Boone cemetery.

Vote: Aye – (Plaag, Watkins, Ziegler)

Nay – (Smyth)

The motion passed.

Motion and Vote:

Commission Member Smyth made a motion, seconded by Commission Member Watkins to submit to Town Council for approval of the proposed rules sign text.

Commission Member Watkins asked if the rules and regulation sign would be considered separate from the interpretative panels. Chair Plaag replied there was a previous discussion by the HPC that the rules and regulation sign would not be an interpretative panel structure, and that it would be simply a sign with the Town of Boone logo on it with a listing of the approved text information and positioned immediately outside the pedestrian gate into the cemetery. Chair Plaag added that this sign would be made in-house with an aluminum material similar to the other Town signage.

Commission Member Smyth wished to amend the motion to add that the proposed rules and regulations sign for the cemetery would match similar signs in the Town of Boone and be mounted outside the pedestrian entrance gate into the cemetery. Commission Member Watkins accepted this amendment to the motion.

Vote: Aye – All

Nay- None

The motion passed.

**REVISED SIGN #1: Boone Cemetery Rules
(Final Version from HPC)**

- The Boone Cemetery is owned by the Town of Boone.
- The cemetery is open to the public year-round from dawn to dusk.
- Desecration of gravesites in any form is a violation of North Carolina law.
- Visitors are reminded that this is a sacred space and not an area for recreation or sport.
- Be respectful of other visitors.
- Grave markers are unstable, old, heavy, and fragile.
 - Do not sit, stand, climb, or lean on any grave marker.
 - Do not attempt to perform a “rubbing” of a gravestone.
 - Do not attempt to clean grave markers.
 - Children must be supervised at all times.
- Do not remove or disturb grave goods, including flags, flowers, small stones, or artifacts left by mourners.
- Pets are prohibited.
- For additional information, contact the Boone Town Manager at (828) 268-6200.

Revised Panel #1: Boone Cemetery

Chair Plaag referred to the Revised Panel #1: Boone Cemetery and the revisions from Dr. Andrea Burns from Appalachian State University submitted via email to Staff; Staff shared the email with the HPC prior to this meeting. He suggested to the HPC that they review the draft cemetery panel text to compare the

revisions submitted by Commission Member Watkins and Dr. Burns. There was consensus from the HPC to review the revisions in this manner.

Discussion ensued on the draft text, sentence by sentence. With final draft text as follows:

REVISED Panel #1: Boone Cemetery

(Final Version from HPC)

Benjamin Councill, Sr., once owned the land historically associated with the Boone Cemetery. He probably inherited the land from his father, Jordan Councill, Sr., upon the latter's death in 1838. The Councils and others from interrelated families were among the earliest burials. People enslaved by these families prior to the American Civil War were also buried here. As was the practice throughout the United States before the 1960s, this cemetery was segregated, with Black people buried in the eastern part and White people buried in the western portion. At times, a fence separated the two sections.

By the 1880s, locals treated this area as the town cemetery, even though it remained on privately owned land. Overcrowding became an issue in the 1930s. By the 1950s, the cemetery was rarely used for new burials as both Black and White residents developed new burial spaces outside of Boone's downtown. In 2015, the Town of Boone acquired both sections and has since made improvements to provide for the cemetery's long-term preservation.

Resting here are many of Boone's civic and cultural leaders, elected officials, and veterans of the nation's wars, including those who fought on both sides of the Civil War. The Boone Cemetery remains a sacred space for reflection on the lives and history of those interred here. [215 words]

[Aerial image of Boone Cemetery from ca. 1907] *Caption:* Detail crop showing the Boone Cemetery from the northwest, circa 1907. Image courtesy of the Historic Boone Collection, Digital Watauga Project. [21 words]

Motion and Vote:

Commission Member Ziegler made a motion, seconded by Commission Member Smyth, to recommend to the Town Council approval of the proposed final revisions to the Boone Cemetery Interpretative Panel #1 text and to place it outside the cemetery gates.

Vote: Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion passed.

Ms. Mitchell added to the discussion about whether the HPC wanted to discuss directional language to add to the interpretative panel as a sticker mounted. Chair Plaag responded that the Commission would revisit this topic after reviewing Panel #2 text.

Discussion ensued on the draft text, sentence by sentence. With final draft text as follows:

REVISED Panel #2: A Divided Cemetery

(Final Version from HPC)

The stones at your feet mark the fence line that once divided Black and White burials in the Boone Cemetery. Slavery formally ended in 1865, but widespread racial segregation, including at burial sites like the Councill Cemetery, remained common in the United States until the 1960s. During that period, locals usually called the cemetery's eastern section the "Colored Cemetery" and the western portion the

“City Cemetery.” Cemetery trustees and town officials maintained the western part but often neglected the eastern portion.

In 1898, civic leaders erected a fence fully enclosing the White portion. Town officials installed a second fence in 1958 and took over maintenance of the privately owned western section. The Town of Boone acquired both sections in 2015 and removed the fence that physically and symbolically divided the cemetery.

Although more than 265 known burials in the White section are usually marked with formal memorials, most graves in the Black section went unmarked or were designated with fieldstones or other temporary markers, most of which have been lost or displaced. Today, only four original headstones remain, not including the replacement markers for three Union soldiers buried here in 1865.

In 2016, a ground-penetrating radar survey located nearly 200 unmarked graves in the Black section, each of which is now designated by a flat fieldstone. Although these particular graves remain unidentified, the names of those known to be buried here are recorded on the large memorial installed by the Junaluska Heritage Association in 2017. [245 words]

[Aerial image of Boone Cemetery, circa 1950] *Caption:* Aerial image of Boone Cemetery from the northeast, circa 1950. Image courtesy of the Palmer Blair Collection, Digital Watauga Project. [20 words]

Motion and Vote:

Commission Member Smyth made a motion, seconded by Commission Member Ziegler, to recommend Town Council approval of the proposed final revisions to the Boone Cemetery Interpretative Panel #2 and to place it at the crest of the hill of the cemetery on the dividing line between the two sections of the cemetery.

Vote: Aye – All
Nay – None

The motion passed.

Ms. Mitchell asked the HPC, regarding the motion for Panel #1, to clarify the reasoning for the panel being located outside the cemetery gates rather than inside the gates. Chair Plaag responded that from a previous discussion, most individuals, as town residents or visitors, do not know about the cemetery. He stated to have the panel outside the cemetery gates to draw attention to it. Chair Plaag asked the Commission if there was any objection to the panel being inside the cemetery gates if the Town Council wished to do so; there was no objection.

Discussion ensued on directional language to include on the panels as references to one another. Chair Plaag stated that he was not opposed to a sticker to address this. Student Member Ziegler agreed that if the panel were removed, a sticker would be best with easy removal. Chair Plaag added that if a future Commission wished to add another panel, a sticker could also be modified to address that. Ms. Mitchell said she could discuss creating a sticker and an attachment to the panel with Public Works.

Ms. Mitchell confirmed that the Commission still desired to include a brochure box for one of the panels to tie in with the Downtown Walking Tour. Chair Plaag confirmed and added that the brochure box should

be added to the first panel. Council Liaison Roseman said the cemetery still has a fascinating history that she hopes will be addressed.

ADJOURNMENT

Commission Member Smyth made a motion, seconded by Commission Member Watkins, to adjourn the meeting at 5:35 p.m.

Vote: Aye – All

Nay – None

The motion passed.

Eric Plaag, Chair

Marlene Crosby, Board Secretary