

Reading Bi-Weekly Update April 3, 2014

Reading Applies for Civil War Preservation Grant... And Events planned to honor the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War



In honor of the 150th Anniversary of the American Civil War, funding was approved in the State of Massachusetts' FY 2014 budget for Civil War Preservation Grants. The purpose of the grants is to preserve objects and documents in the Commonwealth which are significant to the history of the Civil War. The guidelines state that matching funds be used for the "renovation, rehabilitation, preservation or enhancement of objects including existing markers, memorials, monuments, and plaques significant to the commemoration of the American Civil War and Civil War veterans. Proposals for construction of new markers for significant sites currently lacking markings will also be considered." Matching funds will be granted in amounts up to 50% of the total project costs, but not to exceed a maximum grant of \$7,500. The Town of Reading, through a collaboration between Community Services staff and volunteers, has applied for one of those grants.

Forty-eight soldier's names are listed on the Civil War monument at Laurel Hill Cemetery. They all died as a direct result of the War, either from injury or disease. Twenty-seven of those that died are buried at Laurel Hill. The remains of the other Reading soldiers were not brought back to be interred here. Several of the gravestones of those 27 soldiers are in need of significant repair and/or stabilization. Others do not

have any gravestone or marker at all. The Town is currently seeking proposals from several local well-respected preservation companies who could do the repair/stabilization work.

In order to secure the matching funds, donations are being accepted. Any amount will be gratefully appreciated. Checks should be made out to "Veterans' Memorial Trust Fund", and sent to the Veterans' Memorial Trust Fund, c/o Frank Driscoll, Veterans Service Officer, 16 Lowell Street, Reading, MA 01867. Please include "Civil War Preservation" in the memo line of your check. The Fund will act as a conduit for donations. Monies that currently exist in the Veterans' Memorial Trust Fund will not be used for this project. If the Town is not awarded a grant, or if the amount is less than applied for, all funds collected will be used to do as much of the restoration work as possible.

Over the last three years, much effort has been undertaken to research information about Reading's involvement in the Civil War. In 1860, the year before the War started, the population of Reading (including men, women and children) was only 2,662. Reading's 1874 Town History lists 411 men (and one woman!) who were in the Military or Naval Service who were either residents of Reading, or who were credited on the quota for Reading. That is equivalent to almost 60% of those who were eligible to serve. The war had a profound effect on the Town's economy, its industries, and its families. And as we celebrate the 150th Anniversary of that War, it seems only fitting that we make the effort to honor those soldiers by making sure that they have appropriate monuments on their graves. Please help us achieve that goal.

Also, please note that in our continuing effort to mark this anniversary, there will be a new guided walk at Laurel Hill Cemetery on May 17th to learn about and visit the graves of some of those who served in the war and survived to come home to Reading. And on September 20th Parker Tavern and the Reading Antiquarian Society will host a Civil War Living History Encampment. The men and women re-enactors who represent the 15th Regiment Mass Volunteer Infantry will set up camp on the grounds of the Tavern on Washington Street. They will give us a glimpse of the War from both a military and a civilian perspective. Watch for more information on both of these exciting events.

Laurel Hill Cemetery is located in the center of Reading's downtown and is the final resting place of 241 Civil War soldiers, sailors and marines. 48 Reading soldiers died as a direct result of the War. All are memorialized on our Civil War monument, dedicated 6 months after the end of the war in 1865. Twenty-seven of those soldiers are buried at Laurel Hill. Unfortunately, 7 of those soldiers' stones have fallen into extreme disrepair and 2 have no marker on their grave at all. The Town would like to have the existing stones repaired/stabilized by a certified preservationist, and markers placed on the graves of those that have none.

Over the past three years, Reading residents have been learning about Reading's involvement in the Civil War. Several well-attended walking tours have been conducted at Laurel Hill Cemetery to visit the graves of Reading soldiers, lost as a direct result of the Civil War, who are buried there. A lecture with PowerPoint presentation and display of artifacts was held at the Reading Public Library to give information about the soldiers whose bodies were never brought home to be buried. It included research about their families, where they died, their regimental histories, and the homes in Reading where they lived. Our 2013 Memorial Day Ceremony's keynote address, attended by hundreds, focused on the Civil War, the naming of Laurel Hill Cemetery, and the history of the building of the Civil War monument.

Later this year, there will be additional walks at Laurel Hill, focusing on some of the survivors of the War, another lecture on others who survived, and the Civil War Living History Encampment to be held at Reading's historic Parker Tavern museum. A self-guided Civil War walking tour is being developed for Laurel Hill Cemetery. Reading wants its residents to be aware of the impact and the commitment of the

former residents of Reading to the cause of the Great Rebellion and therefore we want the condition of the monuments and markers on these graves to show our respect for their service.

The Board of Cemetery Trustees has obtained permission to restore the stone from the family that owns one of the lots. The other lots no longer have existing owners, and therefore permission falls under the jurisdiction of the Board so that the integrity of the Cemetery will be maintained.

The condition of the seven stones in need of repair varies greatly. Three stones are lying on the ground and broken. One stone has a base that is separated into three pieces and the stone itself is cracking. The top of two other stones is broken off. One was repaired at some earlier point, and needs further attention. Several of the stones have wonderful symbolism on them. The repair/stabilization of those 7 monuments will be completed as soon after the Grant is approved as possible.

Through our local Veterans' Service Officer, flat granite markers will be secured for those 3 graves that do not have any marker or monument, and the work to install them will be completed as in-kind work by our Cemetery Department workers, as soon as they are received.



Civil War Memorial located in the Laurel Hill Cemetery



Questions: If you have any questions about all the activity going on around town... just ask and we will find you the answer!

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