

The Maine Old Cemetery Association

By Russell C. Farnham, CG

In 1968, Dr. Hilda M. Fife, using the Vermont Old Cemetery Association (VOCA) as a model, saw a similar need to identify small, neglected cemeteries throughout the state of Maine. Sponsored by the Maine League of Historical Societies and Museums and the University of Maine's Department of History, Dr. Fife chartered the Maine Old Cemetery Association (MOCA) as a non-profit organization. Initially, the primary purpose of MOCA was to locate old cemeteries in order to encourage their care and preservation, which would in turn aid in the preservation of historic information. Over the years MOCA has worked with scout troops, Masons, various historical societies, and other organizations to clean up deserted and neglected cemeteries as they are identified. They also inspire and motivate local efforts by town or city officials to assist in this endeavor by calling attention to cemeteries in disrepair through local media channels.

As the growth of MOCA began to accelerate, programs were developed to record the writings on tombstones in order to preserve their historical and genealogical interest. MOCA has taken on the herculean task of recording and documenting the inventory of every cemetery in the state, whether large and well known or small and well concealed. What an absolutely worthwhile goal! It is refreshing that MOCA, in addition to recording the tombstone inscriptions, also gathers the dedicated volunteer resources necessary to accomplish this task. Once the inscriptions are recorded, the next step is to transfer the raw material into some form of permanent record and make it available to repositories in the towns of Maine and beyond. It is a vast undertaking, made even more difficult by the condition of the stones themselves. Some tombstones are hundreds of years old and are worn due to long exposure to the environment. Older tombstones that are not set properly become cracked and settle, or even disappear, beneath the soil.

There are several active MOCA projects that may be of great interest to genealogists. They are described below.

Bicentennial Inscription Project (BIP)

During the bicentennial year, MOCA received a grant for their Bicentennial Inscription Project (BIP), in which they would compile information on Revolutionary War soldiers buried in Maine. The BIP covers 7,500 veterans who lived in Maine before, during, or after the war, and includes their names; dates of births, deaths, and marriages; and burial places. The data collected has been entered into a computer, printed out, and distributed amongst the following libraries:

- Ancient Landmarks of Parsonfield, Route 160
- Bangor Public Library
- Belfast Free Library
- Cutler Library, Farmington
- Fogler Library, University of Maine, Orono
- Maine Historical Society, Portland
- Maine State Library, Augusta
- Patten Free Library, Bath

MOCA Cemetery Inscription Project (MIP)

The MIP will hold great interest to researchers who are into "tombstone hopping," while searching for the grave of an ancestor. This project consists of the transcription of information from every tombstone in hundreds and hundreds of cemeteries. Before MIP was begun, researchers would generally head to larger cemeteries in hopes of finding the elusive graveyard holding the remains of an ancestor. However, someone who lived far away with limited time on their hands would be hard pressed to visit (let alone *find*) a 200-year old family cemetery in the back field of an old deserted farmhouse located a half-mile off the Route 23 county highway road, and 100 feet beyond a cluster of oak trees and bushes, with nothing but a crude slate marker, engraved by hand, that is partially covered by the earth. Oh me! Such dedication on the part of these inspired volunteers! They give up their free time (often on weekends) because of a sincere desire to preserve the final resting places of departed individuals.

Surname Index Project (SIP)

While MIP just listed the names and dates inscribed on the tombstone, the Surname Index Project went a step further. In addition to listing the available information from gravestones, family relationships are recorded from cemetery records, genealogies, etc. For example, if a tombstone read: "Mary, wife of John Gilbert and dau of James Jones," Mary would be cataloged not just as Mary Gilbert, but also as Mary Jones, dau of James Jones, and the names indexed accordingly. Or, if cemetery records revealed that "Gertrude Smith Jones was the dau of John Smith," then both John Smith and Gertrude Smith would be indexed. The Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints filmed the results of this enormous project, and a typescript copy of these several volumes, which cover every county in Maine, has been deposited at the Maine State Library in Augusta. Researchers must search by cemetery, which means all volumes must be searched when the location of a death is known but the cemetery is not.

The Marble Records

These are the record books of the Marble Monument Company and its predecessors, spanning the years 1855-1918. This was a business that originated in Bath and flourished in Skowhegan, and their records contain the inscriptions of stones that were carved by the company. In addition to more than 50,000 names and address of purchasers, these records include the name of the cemetery the stones were delivered to, and in many instances, a diagram of the stone itself. The originals of these records are kept at the Maine Historical Society in Portland, but a copy of the originals plus a computerized index will soon be available at the Maine State Archives in Augusta.

MOCA recognizes the need to make their enormous amount of data available to researchers and the general public, and to that end, they have clearly defined their present goals and priorities. Foremost at the top of the agenda is to transfer the mountains of handwritten, typescript, photographed, or sketched data into the computer. While this monumental task slowly proceeds, new cemeteries continue to be discovered, requiring inventories to be taken, and beginning the cycle over again. MOCA exists solely on the volunteers who beat down the bushes to find new cemeteries and trudge out on their free time to write down inscriptions appearing on tombstones. They are anxious to develop a core of computer literate individuals who could provide valuable and much-needed assistance from the comfort of their own homes.

Two of the largest counties in Maine have been completely inventoried and computerized. Within the past six years, MOCA has published four volumes of the *Maine Cemetery Inscriptions, York County*, containing 107,277 entries (Augusta, ME: MOCA, 1995), and the latest, *Maine Cemetery Inscriptions, Kennebec County* (Rockport, ME: Picton Press, 2000), in six volumes, containing 135,094 entries. The latter title is also available on CD. The Kennebec volumes (\$399) can be acquired from the publisher; however, the York County volumes (\$260) and the Kennebec CD (\$99) are available directly from MOCA (P.O. Box 641, Augusta, ME 04332-0641). The indices to more than a quarter million names are without regard to the location of the cemetery, but the interior pages are arranged first by town and then by cemetery, enabling a researcher to conveniently view all cemeteries within a town or city. Purchasing these highly acclaimed publications directly from MOCA enables them to recapture the large sums of money initially advanced to publish these beautiful volumes.

It is estimated that more than 75% of the inventory of Maine cemeteries has been completed. Typescript volumes for every county in Maine are on file at the Maine State Archives.

Membership in the Maine Old Cemetery Association is open to the public for a mere \$5 per year, or \$20 for five years, with lifetime membership available for \$100. A nifty quarterly newsletter is mailed to members, whose numbers are heading toward the 1000 mark. Questions regarding MOCA "look-ups," volunteering, new cemeteries or those being neglected, speakers, membership, or any matter of interest, may wish to contact:

Cheryl Patten, President
RR#1, Box 2980
Smithfield, ME 04978
Tel: 207-634-2156

Roland Jordan, Treasurer

42 Hector St.
Auburn, ME 04210
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Researchers may write to MOCA at the following address or visit their [website](#) :

Maine Old Cemetery Association
P.O. Box 641
Augusta, ME 04332-0641