

Sutton Center Cemetery Restoration Project

Cleaning of Gravestones – supplemental information

My primary advice is to read the Gravestone Conservation manual that Betty & Carlo Mencucci wrote for the Rhode Island Historic Cemetery Commission website, <http://rihistoriccemeteries.org>. You will find it on the Documents drop-down.

Please examine each stone before starting the cleaning process. If a stone has multiple cracks (usually slate) or areas where the material is granular (usually marble), it is better to not physically clean the stone. However, it may be possible to apply some cleaner to kill the mold, lichens and moss. If in doubt, don't clean or spray on anything.

Use only plastic tools and brushes. Do not use any metal scrapers, putty knives or brushes as these **will** cause permanent damage to the marble gravestones and brown stone bases. Metal tools can also damage the slate gravestones and granite monuments.

Course nylon bristle brushes work best for removing the mold, moss and lichens. There are also nylon bristle grout brushes that are useful to clean the inscriptions. Plastic knives are also useful (and cheap) to scrape moss and lichens from the inscriptions and other grooves. The clear plastic is harder but won't damage the stone.

Regarding cleaning product, do **not** use **any** chlorine-based product, such as bleach, industrial-grade sodium hypochlorite or calcium hypochlorite. (I am aware that the Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation guidelines include HTH and SST, which contain calcium hypochlorite, as acceptable products. I disagree with that advice. High chlorine concentration can chemically degrade the calcium carbonate in marble, limestone, sandstone and brownstone. Also, as these are porous stones, when the water evaporates the crystals that form from the residue can mechanically break down the stone crystals.) Please relay this caution to your friends who clean or are considering cleaning gravestones.

D/2 is the most frequently recommended product. EverKlean ReVive is another recommended product. Also, Wet & Forget Outdoor was mentioned in a recent Washington Post article. Although these products are different formulations, each contains a similar chemical to stop the growth of lichens, mold and moss.

I have used all three products with similar results. However, I find that the D/2 is more "soapy" which – for me – made it easier to work the surfaces of the stones.

Do not expect to bring the appearance of any stone back to what we think it must have looked like when new 150 or 250 years ago. Virtually all of these stones will retain some discoloration – often due to the natural composition of the stone. Do take a second look at the stone the next day or, even better, two or three weeks later. You will be pleasantly surprised.

None of these products is externally hazardous. However, you may find that your skin is sensitive to prolonged contact. Best practice is the wear rubber gloves and safety glasses. On a breezy day, be aware of the airflow direction to avoid spray blowing into your face. And, obviously, don't ingest any of the cleaners.

For this project, the Sutton Cemetery Commission will purchased some D/2 cleaning kits and pails of D/2 product. If you would like to borrow a kit for a few hours or day of work or want to replenish the D/2 that you have already used, contact cemetery commissioners Jim Renaud or Jim Johnson. Donna Wood at Town Hall can contact one of them for you.

If you decide to purchase your own D/2 kit, I have found that Atlas Preservation (<https://atlaspreservation.com>) has the best pricing. Depending on the size of the stones or monuments you are cleaning, the 5 quarts of D/2 supplied with the kit (as a 1 quarts spray bottle and 1 gallon of refill) are enough to clean between 20 and 30. For this project, contact Jim or Jim to replenish.

Ross Weaver
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