



# 2025

# ANNUAL REPORT

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# Introduction



The property at West Main Street and Waverly Avenue contains five historic cemeteries dating back to 1793, preserving more than 230 years of local, state, and national history. The Main Street entrance leads to Lakeview and Rice Cemeteries, owned by St. Paul's Episcopal Church. The Waverly Cemetery section includes Gerard, Old Episcopal, and Union Cemeteries, legally abandoned burial grounds maintained through a partnership between the Town of Brookhaven and Friends of Lakeview Cemeteries.

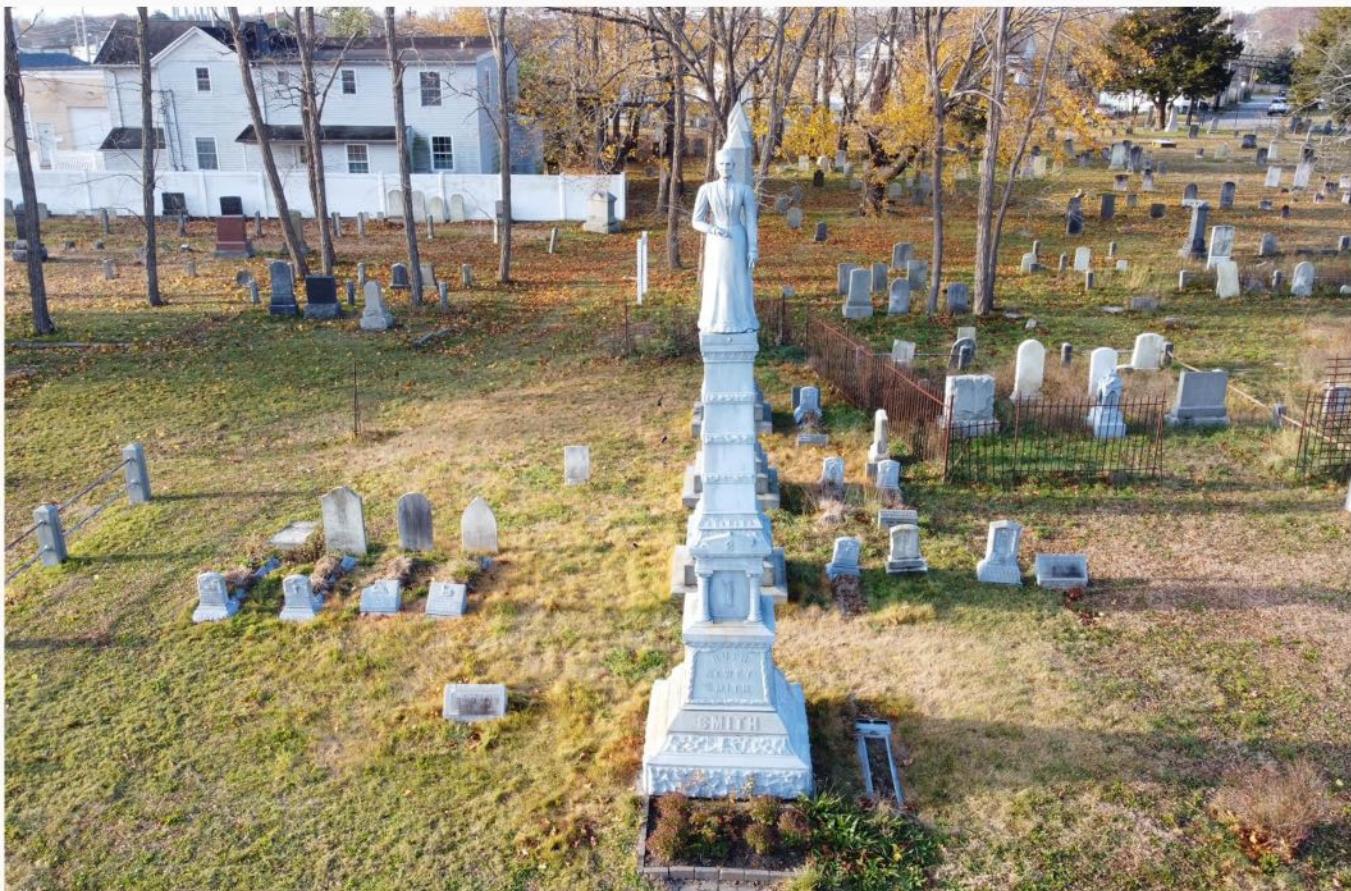
These cemeteries represent an irreplaceable public historical resource. Once gravestones deteriorate or collapse, names, dates, and stories are permanently lost. Our mission is to preserve and restore these grounds for the benefit of future generations.

**Our mission: "To restore, improve and preserve the historic cemeteries located on West Main Street in Patchogue Village."**

2025 has been another productive year for Friends of Lakeview Cemeteries, made possible through the dedication of our volunteers and the continued support of our donors and partners in local government. Our work this year focused on time-sensitive preservation, public safety, and increasing public access to one of Patchogue's most historically

significant sites. As the Lakeview and Waverly cemetery grounds preserve more than 230 years of Patchogue's history, including graves dating back to 1793, this is one of the oldest continuously preserved burial grounds in Suffolk County.

# A Tribute to Hans Henke



We begin this report by mourning the passing of Hans Henke, longtime Village Historian and founding force behind the restoration of these cemeteries. Hans began organizing volunteer preservation efforts in the 1990s, clearing overgrowth, mapping burial plots, and documenting gravestones, work that ultimately evolved into Friends of Lakeview Cemeteries.

His decades of commitment laid the foundation for everything we do today. His legacy lives on through the restored grounds, historical records, and growing community of volunteers he inspired.

We extend our deepest condolences to his daughter, Village Trustee Susan Henke-Brinkman, and to his family.

# 100 Gravestones Restored

A 2021 professional assessment detailed over 300 gravestones in Waverly Cemetery in need of professional repair, and dozens more that volunteers can restore and/or clean. Thanks to our generous donors, the 2024 Gardiner Foundation Challenge Match grant and a Suffolk County Parks Hotel-Motel Fund grant, we were able to commit \$19,000 to this effort in 2025. As a result, we reached a major milestone of 100 gravestones restored since 2023, approximately one-third of the professional restoration work identified as necessary.

While this progress is significant, over 200 gravestones remain at risk of collapse, breakage, or becoming permanently illegible if restoration is delayed.



# Volunteer Restoration Team



Throughout 2025, volunteer teams worked on-site several days each month, carefully cleaning gravestones using D/2 Biological Solution, a preservation-approved method that safely removes biological growth without damaging stone.

This year, we also welcomed young men completing community service requirements, who were trained in proper preservation techniques while making meaningful contributions to the site. Collectively, volunteers contributed hundreds of hours of labor, restoring dozens of gravestones and improving accessibility.

In 2026, we will expand volunteer training to include stone straightening and stabilization, further increasing preservation capacity while reducing long-term restoration costs.

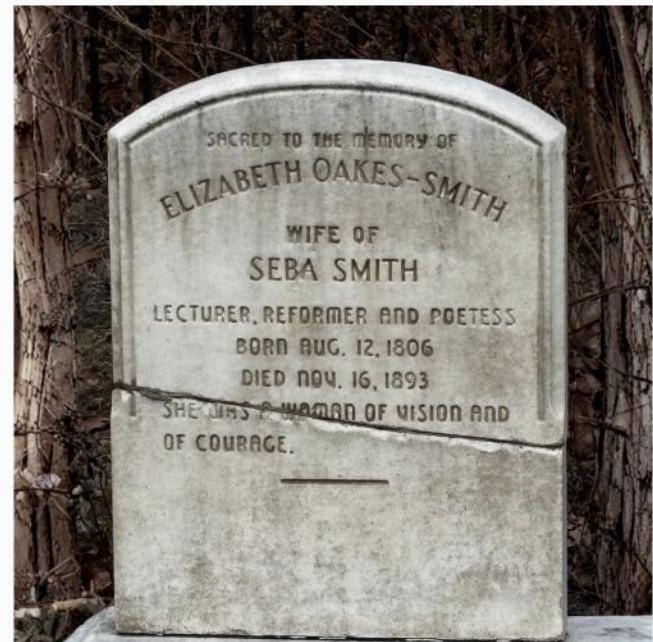
Though early records are scarce, it is estimated that upwards of 1,000 people are buried in these cemeteries. With the help of our partners, donors, and volunteers, we work to preserve and restore the headstones that are left.

# Elizabeth Oakes-Smith Gravesite

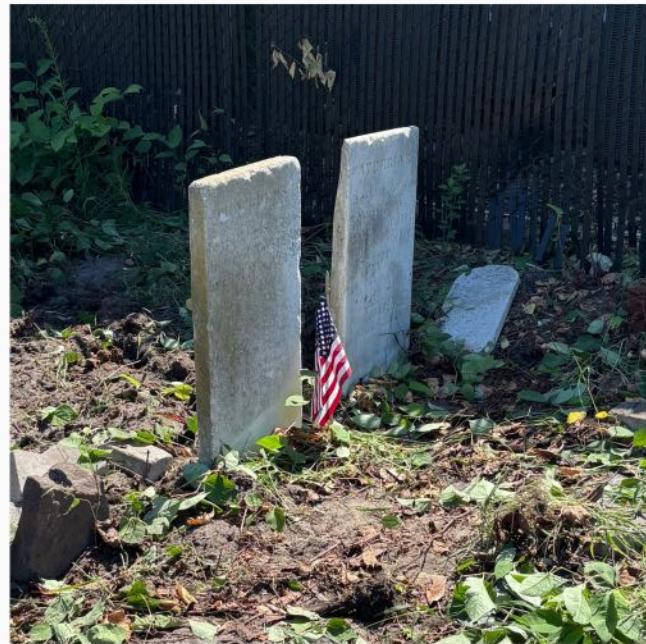
Elizabeth Oakes-Smith, her husband Seba, and son Edward are buried in the Lakeview section and their large home known as “The Willows” once stood just inside the Main Street gate. This poet, fiction writer, editor, lecturer, and women's rights activist is, arguably the most famous person interred in the cemeteries.

In cooperation with Elizabeth Oakes Smith Society and St. Paul's Episcopal Church, the restoration of their gravesite has begun, including installation of brick pavers and a concrete bench.

Future phases include educational signage to interpret her life and national significance, positioning the cemeteries as an important cultural and educational destination.



# Restoring History Beneath the Surface



In 2025, Friends of Lakeview Cemeteries undertook an important preservation effort focused on the removal of invasive Japanese knotweed from portions of the cemetery grounds. Japanese knotweed is an aggressive, fast-spreading plant that can cause significant damage to historic landscapes, monuments, and burial sites by disrupting soil and obscuring gravestones.

As the knotweed was cleared, two historic gravestones, long hidden beneath years of overgrowth, were revealed. The stones mark the resting place of John Beers, dated 1798, and his daughter, Catherine.

This discovery transformed an essential maintenance project into a meaningful moment of historical rediscovery, reconnecting the present-day community with the cemetery's earliest history. It also reinforced the importance of ongoing preservation work in honoring those laid to rest and protecting Lakeview Cemeteries for future generations.

# Clean-Up Days

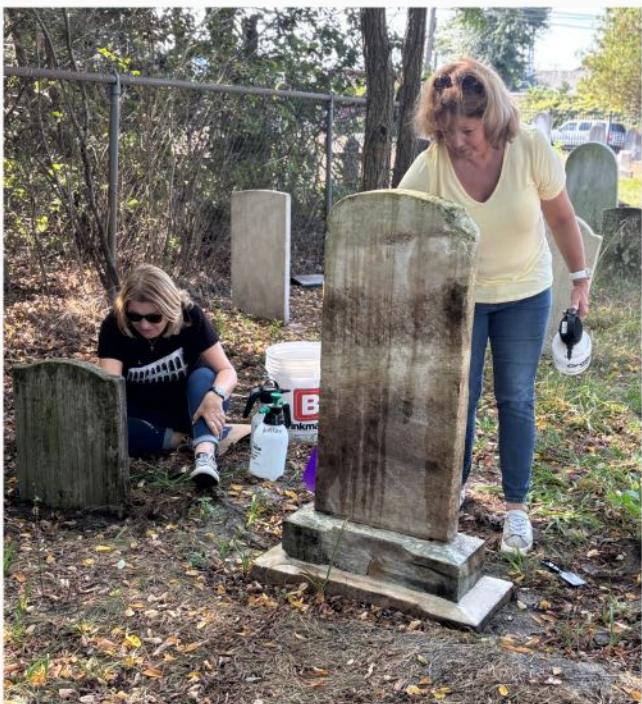


Since 2017, Friends of Lakeview Cemeteries has organized regular community clean-up days. In 2025, volunteers, community service participants and members of the Patchogue Garden Club assisted with:

- Leaf and litter removal
- Cutting back invasive vegetation
- Planting and landscape improvements

These efforts are critical to preventing gravestones from becoming buried, displaced, or damaged.

We are deeply grateful for the ongoing assistance of the Town of Brookhaven Parks Department and the Village of Patchogue Department of Public Works, whose support is essential to maintaining safe public access.



Significant progress was also made in Union Cemetery, the oldest section of the property located immediately north of the service station at the corner of Waverly Avenue and West Main Street, which contains graves dating back to 1798. Years of invasive overgrowth had obscured stones, some of which may still be buried below grade. Continued probing and excavation are necessary to recover these historic markers.

# Grants and Fundraising

In 2025, Friends of Lakeview Cemeteries continued to grow and strengthen its base of support through a combination of individual contributions, community fundraising efforts, and public and private grants. This balanced approach reflects both the generosity of our supporters and our commitment to actively securing the resources needed to preserve and protect Lakeview Cemeteries.

We were fortunate to once again receive support from Suffolk County through the Parks Hotel-Motel Fund grant. We thank our county legislators for their continued advocacy and long-standing commitment to Friends of Lakeview Cemeteries. This recurring support has been instrumental in helping us advance preservation efforts and long-term planning.

Together, these sources of support demonstrate both strong community engagement and responsible stewardship. They also reflect our ongoing efforts to diversify funding, ensuring the organization remains resilient and well positioned to meet current and future needs.

**\$100 raised = *1/3 of a headstone restoration***



# Why Your Support Matters



Friends of Lakeview Cemeteries relies on annual support to carry out the day-to-day work that preserves, maintains, and honors these historic burial grounds. While grants and institutional funding are vital, many come with specific restrictions that limit how funds can be used. Individual donations provide the flexibility needed to address essential operational needs and respond to emerging priorities.

## Your support helps fund:

- Routine maintenance and preservation of cemetery grounds and monuments
- Research, documentation, and educational initiatives
- Planning and administrative functions that ensure accountability and sustainability
- Community outreach that builds awareness and appreciation of Lakeview Cemeteries' historic significance

Every contribution, regardless of size, plays an important role. Annual support ensures that Friends of Lakeview Cemeteries can continue its mission thoughtfully, responsibly, and with the flexibility required to care for this irreplaceable community resource today and for generations to come.

# Marketing

Our marketing volunteers have continued to raise the visibility of our work through e-mail newsletters, social media posts and press releases. We updated our Google Maps and Yelp listings, resulting in thousands of public views, and helping position the cemeteries as a destination for heritage tourism as Patchogue continues to grow as a vibrant downtown.

Website traffic at PatchogueCemetery.org increased, with more visitors signing up to volunteer and receive updates. We also began installing QR codes on signage, allowing visitors to access historical information on-site using their smartphones. We will be adding the code to our existing signs as well, once the weather is warmer.



**10,000**

Total views on Google



**975**

Email contacts



**10,878**

Total emails sent



**3,700+**

Followers on Facebook and Instagram



# 2026 Goals

## Gardiner Foundation Challenge Match

We will once again be applying for matching funds based on donations from January through June. All donations, large and small, will be matched and we will be launching a fundraising raffle early in the year.

## Lighting and Public Safety

The iconic monuments in the cemeteries used to look fantastic at night because of lighting that was installed by the committee in the 2000s. Unfortunately, many of the lights are not functioning now. The system needs to be re-wired professionally, according to code, a large project we really need help with.

## Union Cemetery Restoration

We will continue work to stay ahead of the invasive plants and begin probing and excavating to locate any historic gravestones buried there after years of neglect and overgrowth.

## Fence Repair

A severely damaged fence along Union Cemetery poses both aesthetic and security concerns and must be repaired to protect the site.

## Educational Signage and Mapping

We will begin to place educational signs with QR code links to specific sections of our website for information about the people and history of the cemeteries.

We are also starting to plan a design for a large map on the side of our tool shed to help people find their way around the cemeteries. We will be seeking a sponsor or sponsors to cover the cost of this map.

## Guided Tours

We will be scheduling regular guided tours of the property as a fundraiser, and as a way of educating the community about the rich history of this site.

## Semiquincentennial Plans

In preparation for the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, we will be working on restoration and educational projects related to the veterans, patriots and citizens from that period who are interred here.

# Contact Us



## Committee

Arlene Guzman Capobianco, Chair

Carol Tvelia, Father James Reiss, Paula Murphy, Tom Ferb, Lynn Davis,  
Christopher Capobianco

