

ETCHED IN STONE



JULIE HUSS/Staff photo

Dorothy Goldman spends many a day in the Forest Hill Cemetery in East Derry working to photograph and categorize all the graves. With thousands of graves at Forest Hill, Goldman said the work keeps her busy and is a great way to learn new things and appreciate the area's history.

Derry woman works to bring town's graveyard history to life

BY JULIE HUSS
STAFF WRITER

DERRY — It's one of Dorothy Goldman's favorite strolls to take on an early spring morning.

It's quiet, serene, and hardly a sound can be heard, except for the occasional peck of a woodpecker on a tree limb, or a hymn-like chime coming from the neighboring church spire.

Goldman spends a lot of time strolling among the stones at East Derry's historic Forest Hill Cemetery — a space she calls "her territory" these days — and hopes to bring the intense history of this area to the town in a documentation and photography project.

On this particular morning, Goldman is out in force with all she needs for her day's work at the graveyard. Camera in hand, cleaning tools close by, and pages and pages of previous cemetery documentation to help guide her, she walks in and around the thousands of tombstones that stand on this hill in East Derry.

Goldman's gravestone project is part of a new research book she and town historian Richard Holmes hope to complete so people can learn about the vast history of everyone who lies in this 35-acre space, and what the unique intricacies and carvings of the stones look like. The stones tell many stories, Goldman said.

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She's loved graveyards all her life, and recalled trips to burial grounds in Portsmouth as a young girl. As her parents perused the rows of stones for family members, she wandered and explored.

"I'd be running around as a toddler, looking at the pretty stones," she said.

Goldman said previous work to index the graves at Forest Hill proved very helpful, and the new book project will include information on veterans' graves and a comprehensive collection of photos of the stones.

Forest Hill has stones dating back to the area's earliest settlers and many, Goldman noted, are in disrepair from aging, neglect, and the ravages of time. Some stones are missing, some overlooked, and as she travels from section to section, she photographs the headstones, the family plot markers, and everything in between that might make the family's stories come together.

And the stones do tell stories, she said. She has found stones that speak of horrendous disease taking the lives of four children in one family. She ponders the epitaphs that are poetic and sweet, and give details of the person who lies there. A large family plot marker is surrounded by small, simple stones engrave with just "Babies" or "Mother."

"It's so interesting," she said. "You can see where families come together and you can see how illness can strike out a family."

She loves to read the epitaphs, though, and relishes in the poetry and words of those times long ago.

Goldman said the photo project will give the town a chance to learn so much more about the

people who were the fabric of this area in generations past and how the stones remain as a testament to their lives.

When she leaves the solitude of Forest Hill, Goldman's work does not stop. Hours into a typical night can include work online to document her work, or helping others searching for a loved one's grave through the Internet site "Find a Grave." People can request help with a search through the site and Goldman has offered her expertise to many. The Salem resident also participates in the Daughters of the American Revolution and belongs to a Civil War group. History is what she is all about.

She even reported a mystical, possibly paranormal, experience while wandering Forest Hill near a unique and embedded set of stones in the older part of the cemetery. Mother/daughter Lucinda and Betsey Stewart lie here and some say they are often seen in photographs of the area.

Goldman believes in keeping this cemetery documented for future generations to appreciate. She said the condition of many of the older stones is deteriorating and she hopes cleanup and repair can help keep the stones standing.

The countless names she encounters while on a typical day's jaunt around Forest Hill are starting to become very familiar, Goldman said.

"You do get to know the people," she said. "I just love the old areas; there is so much to do here. And this is the history of this area. You have to save it; once it's gone, it's gone."

Goldman invites anyone interested in the Forest Hill project to contact her at forest_hill_cemetery07@yahoo.com.