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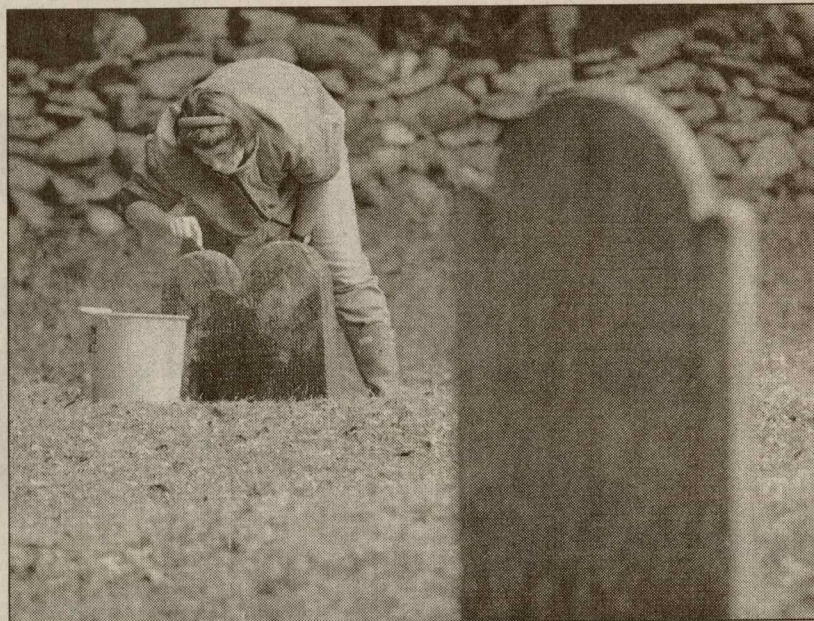
Worthington

HISTORICAL CEMETERIES: Worthington Historical Society is hosting a demonstration on the maintenance and restoration of cemeteries Saturday at 10 a.m. at Brewster Cemetery, Almond Johnson Road.

W. Frederick Oakley, conservator of the National Association for Gravestone Studies, will lead the demonstration.

BAZETTE
8-10-94

Worthington headstones read, set right



CHRISTOPHER EVANS

Alicia Ralph, above, of Northampton, and Ramona Gallagher, at left, of Worthington, use a solution called Photo-Flo to clean gravestones at the Brewster Cemetery in Worthington Saturday.

By RICK REIKEN
Staff Writer

WORTHINGTON — As those who gathered Saturday in Brewster Cemetery learned, a little water and a wooden Popsicle stick can go a long way toward maintaining the beauty of the graveyard's marble headstones.

Led by W. Fred Oakley Jr., of Hadley, the group of about 20 spent the morning washing, scrubbing, and resetting stones — some dating back to the late 1700s — in the small, sloping cemetery on Almon Johnson Road.

And with the help of Oakley, who is a National Association for Gravestone Studies trustee and conservator, and several members of the town's Historical Society, the volunteer corps learned how to categorize stones by iconography, shape, and the language of their inscriptions.

For instance, during Colonial times, when many could not read and write, much of the iconography was symbolic, according to

Oakley.

"When you see a winged hourglass with all the sand at the bottom, you can understand that," he said.

Oakley also noted that "round-shouldered" gravestones tend to be older than "square-shouldered" stones, and that urn-and-willow engravings came in around the turn of the 18th century.

"When you start studying gravestones, you're in a world of art," he said.

To restore the stones, Oakley provided water and brushes for scrubbing, and Popsicle sticks for cleaning dirt and lichen out of the crevices of engravings.

The stones also were washed with a non-ionic detergent called Photo-Flow and the swimming-pool cleaning solution calcium hypochlorite, also known as HTH.

Oakley said bleach is to be avoided, as it will cause stones to turn yellow. He also warned that high-pressure cleaning techniques, such as sand-blasting, can take "years and years off the



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potential readability of the stone."

While some participants were busy scrubbing, others spent the morning resetting stones.

Once a stone is off its center of gravity by more than 15 degrees from the vertical, it risks internal fractures, naturally falling and breaking, or becoming a candidate for a prankster's "push-over," according to Oakley.

Historical Society President Edward Claydon worked with Donald Dorrington, of Scott Road, to dig out and right an 1841 stone.

To lift the approximately 300-pound stone, they used a chain-link and pulley apparatus called a "tripod." In the process, they learned that up to 40 percent of a "slab" gravestone — as opposed to one having a base — may be underground.

Some people, like Susannah Brown of West Street, expressed interest in the sense of history involved in reading and interpreting inscriptions on old gravestones.

Brown spent the morning washing and scrubbing grave-

stones with her son, Ben Schnare, 10. Asked what he found interesting about old gravestones, Ben said, "I like the fact that they spook my sister."

Ed Rzeppa, of Boston, said he was roped into the activity when he came to visit the Feakes family on Almon Johnson Road. But he found it to be more fun than he'd anticipated, he admitted.

"It's a good-karma thing to do," said Rzeppa. "I hope that somebody in the future will do the same for my gravestone."