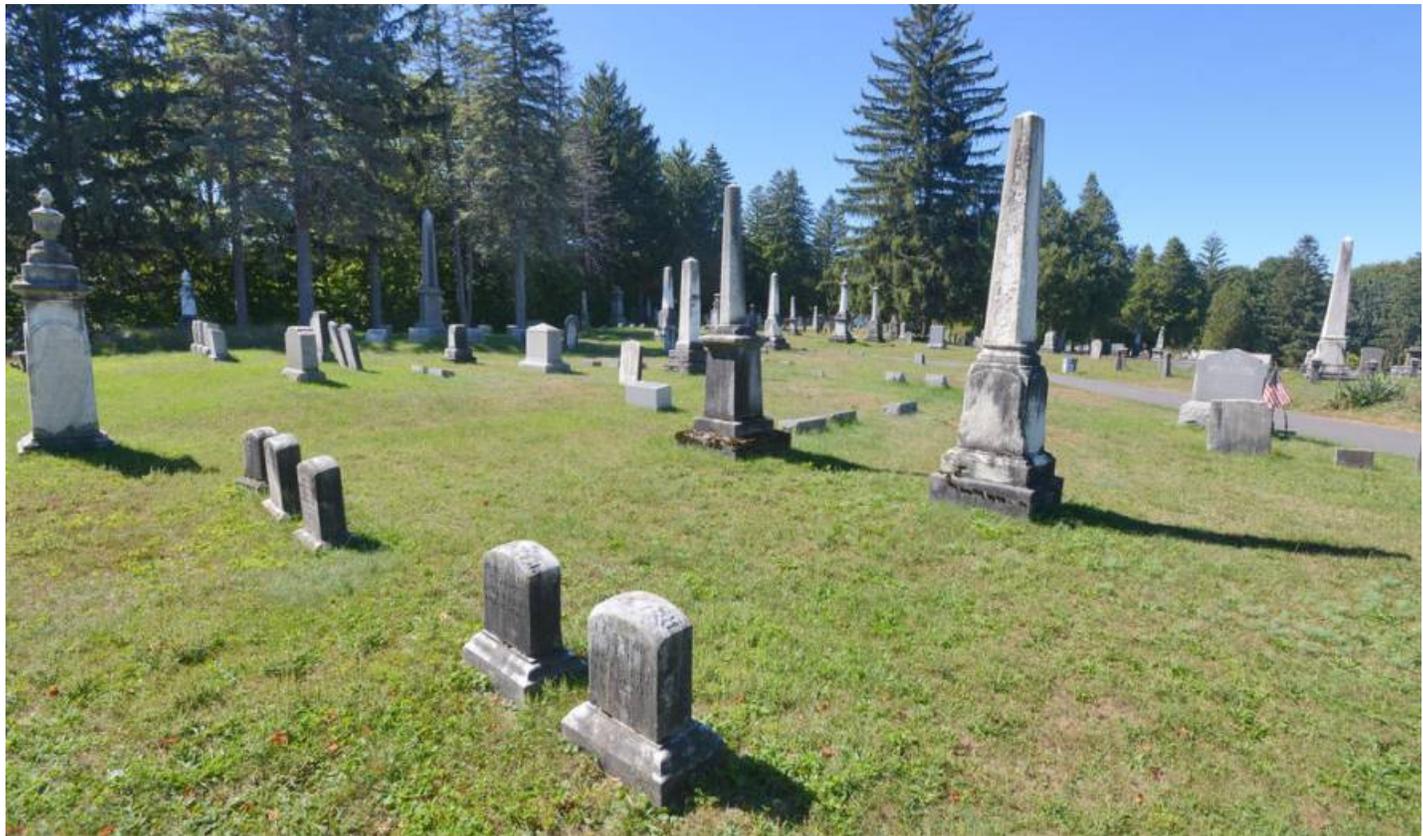


# Rome Sentinel



CHANGE NEEDED — Grand View Cemetery on West Street in Whitesboro will soon be under the ownership and care of the Town of Whitesboro. The cemetery's association dissolved itself and offered the property to the town because it could not afford to maintain the site due to a sharp decline in revenue in recent years. □(Sentinel photo by John Clifford)

## Buried in costs, many cemeteries forced to seek town takeovers

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### STEVE JONES

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WHITESBORO — In what is becoming a growing trend, Grand View Cemetery is the latest private cemetery to be turned over to a municipality. Amy Kasprzyk, who resigned as secretary-treasurer of the cemetery's association just before the vote to turn over the cemetery, said there just is not enough money left to maintain the site.

The cemetery at 14 West St. is basically as old as the town, which was founded in 1788, Kasprzyk said. In fact, town founder Hugh White is buried there. The site covers nine acres. There are 5,000-6,000 plots with another acre of space left.

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On Aug. 30, Kasprzyk called an emergency meeting of the board. There she resigned her post and asked for a new secretary-treasurer to take over or that the cemetery be put in the hands of the town. The board voted to turn Grand View Cemetery over to the town, she said. That transfer will likely take until early 2017 to be completed.

Grand View Cemetery is non-denominational, noted Kasprzyk, and so it does not have the financial support of a church or diocese. Most funds come from people buying plots, with a much smaller portion from the price of burial services. All the routine costs are going up — for such things as lawn mowing. Meanwhile, sales of family plots are declining, Kasprzyk said.

By turning ownership over to the town, the site can still offer new plots and the long-term fund for maintenance required by the state can help with costs.

The New York State Association of Cemeteries, which oversees regulated cemeteries, has seen the same problems affecting many other sites. “It’s increasingly becoming a problem magnified by” a state imposed tax cap for municipalities, said David Fleming, government relations advisor for the association.

The state allows municipalities to help with in-kind services (things like mowing or bookkeeping, but not money) to allow them to help non-profit cemeteries stay in operation. But in many cases, it’s just not enough. Cemeteries continue to struggle as more people switch to cremation rather than burial, Fleming noted.



The Association does not have updated statistics on private cemeteries and municipal ownership. In 2001, the state Department of State released a report on cemetery funds that showed that at the time there were less than 1,800 regulated not-for-profit cemeteries in New York. Since 1990, more than 150 regulated cemeteries have failed, it stated. Each abandoned cemetery on state average would cost local government \$65,000 annually to maintain, including \$2,500 per acre for a cemetery to do just basic maintenance. It stated that 74 percent of New York’s large cemeteries were underfunded and 66 percent of New York’s small cemeteries were underfunded.

Whitestown has already taken over Glenside Cemetery and a small cemetery on Gibson Road, and may soon be asked to take over Parkhurst Cemetery, noted Town Supervisor Shaun J. Kaleta. He said he expects the town to accept the transfer of Grand View.

Kaleta said the town is taking over because it must take care of these cemeteries rather than let them languish. However, he noted, he’d prefer that they be put in the hands of new volunteers who can oversee operations. “We’re still looking for volunteers or organizations to step up.” Otherwise, maintenance falls to the town Highway Department,

which is already busy. Those interested can contact the town offices.

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