

New signage marks historic New Paltz burial ground

by [Frances Marion Platt](#) / June 26, 2018 / 0 comments



Town of New Paltz Historic Preservation Commission Chair John Orfitelli and General Manager of Hampton Inn by Hilton New Paltz Randy Nogueira on the Put Corners Burial Ground, which is located adjacent to the Hampton Inn property. (Photo by Lauren Thomas)

Once a separate hamlet lying between Ohioville and the Village of New Paltz, the Thruway Exit 18 gateway area now known as Putt Corners was originally spelled Put Corners, though it was pronounced the same. The name was conferred by 19th-century settler Napoleon Purdy, after his previous home of Putnam County. Purdy built a hotel at the crossroads around 1858 — “a center of entertainment, lavish parties and dance lessons,” according to the Town of New Paltz Historic Preservation Commission — and then rebuilt it after it was destroyed by fire in 1874.

These days a new hotel, the Hampton Inn, stands very close to the same site as Purdy’s. And right next door, on the south side of its parking lot, lies a graveyard that served the tiny community for eight decades. The earliest of its 120+ graves, from 1801, belongs to Maria van Wagenen; the last two, from 1880, belong to Henry J. Freer and Cornelius Polhamus. By the century’s end, large cemeteries on the outskirts were all the rage, and the New Paltz Rural Cemetery on Plains Road was open for business.

"The Put Corners Burial Ground site is owned by Historic Huguenot Street and was designated a local historic landmark by the Commission in 2009," chair John Orfitelli told attendees at last Wednesday's reception at the Hampton Inn. The event marked the unveiling of a roadside marker and an interpretive plaque created by the Commission for the historic site. Also scheduled to happen was the awarding of a Certificate of Appreciation from the Commission to the hotel's owner, Jayesh Modhwadiya, for his support of the restoration of the Burial Ground, as well as for providing funding for the roadside marker and interpretive plaque.

Modhwadiya was, however, unable to attend the reception due to a family medical emergency; hotel manager Randy Nogueira accepted the honor in his stead. Orfitelli went on to praise Modhwadiya's community-mindedness throughout the process: "Very early in the design phase of his hotel, Jay reached out to the Commission and asked for our input. We suggested Jay visit Historic Huguenot Street and the Mohonk Mountain property and to try and capture the features of the buildings and houses and to incorporate them in his hotel design. Jay attended many meetings with the Commission reviewing his plans and soliciting our comments. Well, we think he did an outstanding job, and thank him for making a hotel that captures many of the elements unique to New Paltz."

Orfitelli continued, "The proximity of the hotel to the Burial Ground was a concern to the Commission. We highlighted the importance of preserving the area for the community, as well as providing his visitors with an opportunity to learn about the history of New Paltz. Jay was very receptive to helping, and offered to restore the stone wall and fund the creation of signage for the site."

The roadside marker will not actually be installed until the Town Highway Department has completed its current sidewalk construction project along South Putt Corners Road — "probably in the fall," Orfitelli estimated. The painted metal sign incorporates the same burgundy-and-white color scheme used by other New Paltz institutions (such as the school district's sports teams) and features an original logo created for the Commission by graphic designer Kate Brodowska. In the center of the logo is a Hudson Valley apple, with fleurs-de-lys flanking it on either side, and at the bottom, a descending dove representing the Holy Spirit: an element of the traditional Huguenot Cross.

Also on view was a mockup of the interpretive panel that will be installed at the graveyard site. Designed by Matt Maley of Visualstuff Studios, its final form will be "a lamination on aluminum core with a special anti-graffiti coating and placed on a stand within the Burial Ground area," according to Orfitelli. Against a background painting by Ivar Elis Evers from the collection of the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, the interpretive panel brims with historical details about the site and the people laid to rest here.

"These residents include descendants of the earliest town families, who had been in the area for generations, such as the Terwilliger, Bevier, Deyo and Freer families. The most common family name in the cemetery is Johnson, with 19 interred, many of them children," reads the proposed text. "Put Corners cemetery offers evidence of an era when life expectancy was much shorter. Many children succumbed in childbirth or due to illnesses and epidemics. Of the approximate 120 people buried in this cemetery, at least 49 were children under the age of 10, many in their first year of life. Mary York Bevier, for example, lost her husband, Isaac Bevier, and four of her children in the year 1820. She went on to live another 39 years, passing away in 1859 at the age of 73." (History buffs may note that 1820 was the year that an unidentified virulent fever appeared in the Philadelphia area and quickly spread throughout the Northeast, reaching epidemic proportions before it ran its course in 1823.)

The Put Corners Burial Ground has two entrances, but the one on the southern side has no parking area. Nogueira confirmed that visitors would be welcome to use the Hampton Inn parking lot at 4 South Putt Corners Road if they wish to pay a visit to the historic site.