



FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

P. O. Box 994 ♦ Greenfield, MA 01302-0994 ♦ (413) 376-4747
www.FuneralConsumersWMass.org

Newsletter

Spring 2018

Pull up a chair, let's talk about death...



Heather Massey of Falmouth, MA, decorated an old library chair with catchy slogans and designs. She brought this to the October 2017 conference of the Massachusetts Councils On Aging, where she and Sandy Ward staffed a joint FCAWM-FCAEM information table in the Exhibit Hall.

Her chair definitely helped start conversations!

Council on Aging directors and staff appreciated the information we provided, not only at our table, but also in a workshop we co-taught with Jasmine Tanguay of FCAEM. Twenty-one people attended our workshop titled “What Funeral Consumers Need to Know: Options and Choices for After-Death Care.” We plan to attend the next MCOA Conference (October 24-26, 2018, in Falmouth). Proposals for two workshops have been submitted.



REPORT of the 2017 ANNUAL MEETING

On Sunday, October 15, 2017, FCAWM members gathered at Rockridge Retirement Community, Northampton, for the annual FCAWM membership meeting and enjoyed refreshments hosted by Eileen Pratt. A panel addressed questions about cemeteries (see program summary next page) after our required business meeting of reports and elections.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: Sandy reported on several outreach activities during the preceding year, including our first participation in a MA Councils on Aging conference (October 2016), where she and Heather Massey of FCAEM staffed a joint exhibit table and spoke with senior center directors. Sandy gave presentations at two senior centers as a result. She and Cecile Richard met with Resident Services Coordinators (RSCs) of Appleton Corp, and then were invited to give talks to residents in five locations. Sandy also talked to staff at the Hospice of the Fisher Home.

FCAWM added the option of online donations, thanks to Cecile's research and implementation. Sandy began using Mail Chimp, a more robust email program for sending FCAWM newsletters to those members who prefer electronic delivery.

Several potential new projects were mentioned. Randee Laikind wants to reach out to town clerks and boards of health. Joan is investigating a more active way to do the next funeral home price survey. Sandy proposes a survey of local cemeteries. More volunteers, of course, would help us launch these efforts.

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Editor this issue: Sandy Ward

The FCA of Western Massachusetts is a non-sectarian, all-volunteer, non-profit corporation dedicated to protecting a consumer's right to choose a meaningful, dignified and affordable funeral or memorial service.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer Joan Pillsbury reviewed the financial status of FCAWM. For FY 2017 (September 2016 through August 2017), income was \$2,106, and expenses were \$2,534. The bank balance at the time of our meeting was \$2,969.84.

ELECTION OF TRUSTEES and OFFICERS

Sandy presented the slate of members running for re-election as Trustees:

Joan Pillsbury (3 years)

Joanna Brown (one year)

and then invited nominations from the floor to fill open seats on the board. Lynn Lovell volunteered to serve, and was welcomed.

Lynn Lovell (one year)

This slate passed unanimously.



Lynn Lovell and Sandy Ward

Officers elected for the coming year:

- President: Sandy Ward
- Vice-President: Cecile Richard
- Treasurer: Joan Pillsbury
- Secretary: Joanna Brown

Announcements:

The FCA biennial conference will be in Rochester, NY, June 21-24, 2018.

Randee Laikind, on behalf of the Death with Dignity movement, invited us to hear Dr. Roger Kligler speak in Northampton the next day on "The Death I Want: A Doctor Fights for His and Our Last Rights."



“On Board” at the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame



FCAWM registered for a table at On Board, a biennial event in Springfield that aims to match nonprofit organizations with diverse volunteers willing serve on boards.

On Wednesday evening November 29, 2017, Cecile Richard (in photo at left), Sandy Ward, and Joan Pillsbury (photo below) greeted visitors during this active two-hour event. We were delighted to recruit two women eager to serve on our FCAWM board. Unfortunately scheduling problems later precluded their attendance at our board meetings, so they have not yet joined us.

Our outreach via On Board was valuable in other ways, as we met leaders of other nonprofits, such as Jewish Family Services of Western Massachusetts, and informed them of our services. We met individuals who were glad to know we existed, and picked up our membership brochure. We met members of several African-American churches in Springfield; they expressed interest in our message and picked up our literature. We encouraged them to invite us to come talk to groups at their churches.



Cemetery Survey: Volunteers Needed

Our Fall 2017 newsletter described the need for a directory of local cemeteries. At our fall meeting three people volunteered to help with this new project. We decided to delay until after winter. Meanwhile we learned that Green Burial Massachusetts had launched a related project, engaging a Simmons School of Library and Information Science graduate student to design a database and begin contacting towns in Massachusetts to ask about their cemeteries and policies regarding green burial. This spring she has made an excellent start. The GBM project overlaps well with what we, in FCAWM, want to accomplish for western MA. GBM President Judith Lorei and FCAWM President Sandy Ward are now collaborating on expanding the design of the GBM database and the survey questions to serve the needs of consumers in general, not just those seeking green burial options. We aim to create a useful directory of active cemeteries, including both municipal and private ones. What we learn during this survey, and an update on its progress, will be reported at the FCAWM Annual Meeting on Sunday October 14 (see page 8).

Can you HELP? We already have some partial lists. We'd appreciate help entering basic information (e.g., town name, county) into the existing database, which is accessible online, so you could work at your own pace, from home or anywhere with Internet access. We also need people to make phone calls to various towns, to ask specific questions (we'll provide a script) about their cemeteries and write down the answers (on form we'll provide). Could you contact YOUR town? Or several towns in YOUR county? Please contact us at fcawmass@gmail.com or leave phone message at **413-376-4747**. *Thanks!*



Answering Questions about Cemeteries: Panel with Joshua Slocum, Joan Pillsbury, and Carol Coan

Annual Program, October 15, 2017

Sandy Ward introduced the panelists.

Joshua Slocum, Executive Director of the national FCA, pointed out that New England has many municipal and church-owned cemeteries that are run on a non-profit basis, rather than large for-profit cemeteries.

Joan Pillsbury spoke about the four municipal cemeteries in Gill, where she is a Cemetery Commissioner. There are by-laws for all four. The cost for a lot (4 x 10 ft.) is about \$200 and they require vaults to keep land from sinking. At the time of the burial, the lot is marked, then opened and the funeral home comes with the body. She would like to see a green cemetery in her town.



Carol Coan is a caretaker for the Mt. Toby Friends burial ground in Leverett, MA. Carol prefers the term burial ground because that is what happens there. The word “cemetery” comes from a Greek word for sleeping. In the burial ground they are not just sleeping, they are all dead, quipped Carol. The meeting house was established about 50 years ago, and in 1985 the burial ground was approved. There are about 20 "presences" there. Two of the first three burials were conventional burials. The meeting disallowed non-biodegradable materials several years ago, and now requires options such as pine, willow or a biodegradable shroud. Carol prefers the shroud, as the dirt that is mounded up then settles quickly. Wicker or willow rattan can take a few years to break down, and hard woods such as mahogany or oak would take many years.

Question: Are there laws about how deep a body must be buried? Carol: No, but typically in Massachusetts graves are 5 feet to bottom, allowing for a grave liner. With a shroud or other green burials, typically 3 1/2 or 4 feet to the bottom. Josh: No state law in any state requires a casket or any container or a concrete vault. When we talk of vaults or concrete grave-liners, they may have come in due to fears of grave robbing in the 1800s, but concrete liners began being used for large cemeteries to make it easier for large mowers. I have never heard of a grave being dug up by an animal.

Question: A woman whose grandmother died a year ago complained about poor service from a monument company (6 months delay to get the monument in place; the cross is broken and has a huge crack in it). She wrote to the company, which referred her to engravers. The woman spoke to the DPW and learned that this monument company has had numerous complaints of late monument installation. The DPW said that engravers usually only inscribe the lettering, not handle the stone work. Josh encouraged her to contact him via funerals.org; FCA can sometimes assist with disputes.

Josh: For-profit cemeteries get away with false promises. Small cemeteries are less likely to have these problems. Home funerals were the norm until the corporatization of funerals.

Question: Is there any state law against two people being buried at separate times in the same grave?
Joan: Towns regulate their cemeteries. In Gill, it is not allowed.

Question: Is it allowable to dig up a grave? Joan: Not allowed to disinter. If you bury on private land and get permission from the board of health, you could do it. Carol: Towns make the rules for town cemeteries; for private cemeteries, it is up to the cemetery board. Chapter 114 in the Massachusetts General Laws governs operating cemeteries.

Question: Are there any laws about what to do with ashes? Sandy: No specific regulations except to follow other laws (such as not putting them on others' property; laws re parks, etc.)

Question re transporting the body for green burial: Carol: Funeral homes must use a hearse, but individuals may use any vehicle. Death certificate and burial permit ("Disposition, Removal and Transportation Permit") are required before the body can be moved. The body may be brought across state lines. The body must be transported in a dignified manner (covered).

Question re water issues: For your own land, you will need to get your town to approve the burial, including ground water issues (boundaries, existing buildings, wetlands). It is inappropriate for towns to ask for a percolation test. Josh: NY is one of several states that make it impossible to do a home funeral. In 2008 someone was about to open a green cemetery: a politician decided to enact an ordinance to require all of the commercial burial practices. Never believe anyone who tells you something, even clerks, until they show you the law. Many people believe things that are not true.

Question: What do you see nationally as trends, given that so many cemeteries are running out of space? Josh: No shortage of burial space outside of congested cities. Given the rise of cremations, there won't be a shortage of burial space. Many cremated remains are not buried but are scattered or kept on a shelf. I don't believe that every person needs to have a 4 by 10 foot plot. In Europe, graves are rented only for a period of years. Sandy: In a German village where my husband sought gravestones of his ancestors, no old dates were found; plots had been recycled. Bones from previous burials had been removed to an ossuary in nearby church.



Question: How to arrange a green burial? Carol: The unembalmed body needs to be kept cool, immediately; the funeral director should know that. The communal process of backfilling the grave can be meaningful to the family. Judith Lorei, President of Green Burial Massachusetts (GBM), announced that West Leyden just opened up

green burial for anybody. Shutesbury is working on opening a green burial section. GBM has films and presentations, will speak at libraries or senior centers, to educate and advocate about green burial.

Josh: Green burial is not a special new product. It is not about buying a special product. It is about crossing things off the list that you are not going to buy. "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good." Choose not to be embalmed. Choose not to use a metal or hardwood casket. Use the fiberboard container. If the cemetery requires a vault, ask to use only top and sides, not bottom.

Joan spoke about her journey with choosing green burial for her husband. When she sent her children to buy a fiberboard casket, the funeral director did not have one, so she bought a pine box. Her family rented a van and brought him to Cedar Brook Burial Ground in Maine.

An audience member reported that Wilbraham allows non-residents to be buried there.

Question: Is there any law about how names are listed on a grave stone. Answer: No.



Steelmantown Cemetery in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey

Reflections by Sandy Ward

In April, at a meeting of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Eastern Massachusetts, I watched a video about a neglected cemetery and two caring people who, almost accidentally, became involved in transforming it into something special that now inspires others.

This remarkable story is heart-warming and worth sharing. Perhaps you have already heard about it. Perhaps you have seen this 28-minute video, which is freely viewable online. It was new to me, and I want to report and reflect on recent consequences and Massachusetts connections to this story.

The April showing was in celebration of Earth Day, in a program titled “Natural Burial and Conservation in Massachusetts” with invited speakers from the Southeastern Massachusetts Pine Barrens Alliance (SEMPBA). This program was part of the annual meeting of FCAEM, which I attended as an FCAWM representative. In the process, I learned much about the ecology of pine barrens, a rare and endangered ecosystem. Three dedicated SEMBPA volunteers spoke passionately about the urgency of preserving this fragile habitat.

I was struck by the similar predicaments of SEMPBA, FCAEM, and FCAWM: tiny all-volunteer nonprofit organizations trying to educate the public and accomplish big tasks with only a few too-busy volunteers. I was inspired by SEMPBA Vice President Frank Mand’s advice about seeing volunteers as satellites orbiting around the core mission. “We pull them down for specific tasks” (aligned with their talents and choices); each volunteer has connections to their own “satellites.” For example, Denise Stowell was able to bring together 70 people in a February 2018 Symposium to discuss a possible new solution for land conservation in the Plymouth, MA, pine barrens. Denise, after her mother’s death, had asked questions about green burial options, learned about Steelmantown Cemetery, organized a fact-finding trip to this “green” cemetery in N.J.’s Pine Barrens, and realized the potential for SEMPBA. A natural burial ground is now actively being planned in Plymouth.

What a difference one person can make! Because of Denise, two different causes (saving pine barrens and promoting green burials), and the people who care about each, have been brought together. Because of Ed Bixby’s visit to an abandoned N. J. cemetery, and the actions he took to get the place cleaned up, a whole new approach to that cemetery has touched others in meaningful ways.

Here is the link to the short video of Ed Bixby and the Steelmantown Cemetery:

<http://greenburialcouncil.org/resources/steelmantown-cemetery-video/>

Personally, I’m pondering what role I might play in preserving a small neglected graveyard with broken headstones and a few plaques honoring ancestors who fought in the American Revolution. It’s in Danvers, MA, near my childhood home; I tried to find it last fall, but access is obscured by a row of houses built in the 1950’s. A local fellow has now scouted it, sending me photos of the sad situation. I can relate to Ed Bixby’s initial reaction: somebody ought to DO something! I don’t live there anymore, but I do write a blog about Danvers, so perhaps, as a ‘satellite,’ could help raise awareness.

Locally, I’m recommending the Steelmantown video to the Loomis Village staff as a followup to an FCAWM presentation I gave May 17. The audience of 25 was receptive and asked good questions, some about green burial. I think they’ll enjoy this film.



Please make checks payable to **FCAWM** and send to P. O. Box 994, Greenfield, MA 01302.
Your contributions are tax-deductible. We are a 501c3 organization.

___ YES! I want to renew support for the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts and its mission of promoting and protecting a consumer's right to choose meaningful, dignified, and affordable final arrangements: funeral or memorial services, care of the body and disposition of human remains (including burial, cremation or donation). I'm enclosing my voluntary contribution of
___ \$15 ___ \$25 ___ \$50 ___ \$100 or \$ _____

___ I'm NEW. Please enroll me and send the "Before I Go, You Should Know" planner and membership package. (Suggested new member donation is \$30.) I am enclosing \$ _____

___ Please send me ___ copies of the "Before I Go, You Should Know" planner. I enclose a donation of \$ _____ to reimburse FCAWM for the expenses of acquiring and mailing the 30-page, spiral-bound planner. (Suggested minimum \$15 per copy.)

___ I have time and interest in helping FCAWM. Please contact me about volunteer opportunities.

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address (if different from that on reverse side): _____

E-mail: _____ **Prefer to receive newsletters via email? Yes No**

✂----- cut here -----

THANK YOU!

Nominating Committee this summer:

President Sandy Ward will soon appoint a Nominating Committee composed of one Trustee and two members at large.

Could YOU help on this short-term task?

The goal is to develop, by mid-September, slates of candidates for the FCAWM board and for officers for next year. Those slates should be announced in the fall newsletter, and voted on at our Annual Meeting on October 14.

We encourage recruitment and election of interested persons who have not served before, to "annually reinvigorate" this organization, as stated in the Bylaws.

Perhaps YOU haven't served before, and would like to be asked? Please let us know!



National FCA Conference June 21-24

Several FCAWM members including Carol Coan, Sandy Ward, Cecile Richard, and Randee Laikind will travel to Rochester, N.Y., for the Funeral Consumers Alliance conference.

The keynote speaker will be Stephen Brobeck, Executive Director, Consumer Federation of America. Workshops include Dying in America: Cultural Insights from Refugees and Immigrant Populations; Writing a Journalistic Obituary; and Blended Funerals: Doing It Yourself With Some Professional Help.

These conferences only happen every other year, and are rarely so close to New England. For more about the conference, visit the FCA website: funerals.org/fca-conference-2018/



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Save the date!

Sunday, October 14, 2018, 2:00-4:00 pm
Annual Meeting and Program

Rockridge Retirement Community, 25 Coles Meadow Rd, Northampton, Massachusetts

Which Cemeteries Allow ... ?

Cemetery policies are not uniform. Some cemeteries are governed by town officials, some by elected commissioners, some by churches, synagogues, or other religious organizations. Others are run as private businesses. Practices can vary widely. How can you determine WHICH cemeteries will allow what you and your loved ones want? If you desire a “green” or natural burial, which cemeteries allow that?

More details about this program will be in our Fall newsletter.

Come hear what we are learning as we survey cemeteries. FCAWM and Green Burial MA are working jointly to compile a directory of cemeteries (see page 3).