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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Nat. Register of Historic Places
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Rockville Cemetery and Bristol and Mexico Monument

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 45 Merrick Road [ ] not for publication

city or town Lynbrook [ ] vicinity

state NY code NY county Nassau code 059 zip code 11563

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this _X_ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property _X_ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ **national** ___ **statewide** _X_ **local**

Richard Pierpont DSHPO 9/21/15
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

✓ entered in the National Register ___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register ___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:)

Joe Edson for Beall 11.16.15
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

X	private
	public - Local
	public - State
	public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

	building(s)
	district
X	site
	structure
	object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
	1	buildings
1		sites
	1	structures
1		objects
2	2	**Total**

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY / Cemetery
RECREATION / Commemorative Monument

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

FUNERARY / Cemetery
RECREATION / Commemorative Monument

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

N/A

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation:
walls:
roof:
other:

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Rockville Cemetery, which was established in 1791, occupies a roughly rectangular, 14-acre, level parcel on the northwest corner of two heavily traveled county roads, Merrick Road and Ocean Avenue, in the Town of Hempstead. The entrance is on Merrick Road, which runs along the entire south side of the cemetery. Ocean Avenue borders the property to the east. A three-foot-high masonry perimeter wall runs along the edge of the property by those two roads. The cemetery is bounded on the north and west by single-family residential properties in the village of Lynbrook. The homeowners have built fencing at the rear of their properties.

The Rockville Cemetery is situated on the sandy rise of a glacial out-wash plain on the southern half of Long Island. Smith's Pond lies to the east just across Ocean Avenue. It is a former mill pond on the Mill River, which rises in central Long Island at Garden City and runs seven miles in total length to Hewlett Bay. The nearness of the cemetery to the mill pond is more than coincidental. The Rockville Cemetery's oldest name, "The Old Sand Hole Cemetery," derives from late 18th century mining of the sandy strata that abounds in the cemetery and which was used in the construction of the mill dam.[1] The place-name, "Near Rockaway," from which the cemetery got the Rockville Cemetery name, is no longer used. It once included what are today the three villages that surround the cemetery: East Rockaway, Lynbrook and Rockville Centre.[2]

There is a private, single-lane, paved road running through the cemetery property, with entrances on Merrick Road and Ocean Avenue. The entrances have no gates. The road widens slightly to form a small, paved parking area adjacent to the office just inside the main entrance. Built ca. 1945, the one-story, side-gabled frame office is covered in aluminum siding and rests on a concrete foundation. The building has an English cottage style design. A one-bay, cross-gabled projection extends from the southernmost bay; the steep gable has slightly curved eaves. An arched doorway is located centrally on the bay. An exterior brick chimney is located just north of the projecting entry bay. The four-bay by two-bay cottage has a later, shed-roofed addition that wraps around its north and west elevations. A steep front gable marks the entrance to this addition on the east elevation. Two hundred feet north of the office building is a garage and work area. This area backs onto the residential properties to the west. The garage is a rectangular frame building clad in aluminum siding with a flat roof. Excess soil accumulated from grave digging is stored within a concrete block structure adjacent to the garage. Both the office and garage postdate the historic period and have been counted as non-contributing.

Before 1912, three different churches were situated on the east side of the cemetery; after the third church burned, the footprint of the building was filled with new burials. Rockville Cemetery's organization and landscape still mark it as an early, churchyard cemetery. The graves are closely spaced, with barely noticeable grassy footpaths wandering throughout. Few trees are located throughout the cemetery, and landscaping is minimal.

There are two distinct areas of the cemetery. The older, historic portion (19th through early 20th century) runs along Merrick Road and occupies the central portion of the site. The gravestones in this section are primarily situated in rows running north to south. These markers have a variety of designs and materials, including a notable collection of white bronze monuments as well as more simple marble stones. Although the official

[1] R. Bassett Preston, *The History of Rockville Centre* (Uniondale, N.Y.: Salisbury Printers, 1969), 9.

[2] The name "Near Rockaway" derives from the Rockaway Indians that originally inhabited the area. The "Near" descriptive relates to the relative "nearness" of the place to the Town Hall at Hempstead as compared to Rockaway, East Rockaway, and Far Rockaway. The term "Near Rockaway" was used from 1670 until about 1850, when separate hamlets formed in the area.

cemetery records were destroyed by fire ca. 1960, a privately held record prepared by members of the Mormon Church from direct examination of burial records and grave markers does exist. At least one-third of the grave markers recorded on that list are no longer extant.[3] The list records 2,642 burials dating from 1799 (a child of Samuel and Mary Smith, age 1 month) through 1960. As portions of the cemetery were used as a "free ground" for much of its history, countless unrecorded burials of poorer members of the community are also included within the cemetery boundaries. Surrounding the historic area on the west, north, and east are flat-on-the-ground, bronze markers. These burials are not included on the ca.1960 cemetery record. The majority of these markers postdate 1965 and are placed in rows running east to west.

A tall, marble obelisk rises from the center of the Rockville Cemetery surrounded by a plot of land named "The Mariners Burying Ground." This obelisk, known as the Bristol and Mexico Monument, was erected in 1840 and has been counted as a contributing object. The monument stands atop a grassy mound and reaches a total height of eighteen feet, making it easily visible from the two adjacent, heavily-traveled roads, Ocean Avenue and Merrick Road. The Bristol and Mexico Monument marks the mass grave of 139 victims of two American shipwrecks, the *Bristol* and the *Mexico*, in the winter of 1836-37.

Today the Rockville Cemetery -- with over 200 years of interments -- serves as a valuable resource to the surrounding community. It provides genealogical information and historical connectivity not available anywhere else. The cemetery and Mariners Burying Ground serve as an outdoor, educational site for historical society events, Irish-American cultural ceremonies, and local school trips.

[3] George M. Easter, "Records of Rockville Cemetery," 1953, available on the Abrams Family Webpage, <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~abramsc/HTML/Rockville.HTM>.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [X] A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [ ] C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- [ ] A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- [ ] B removed from its original location.
- [ ] C a birthplace or grave.
- [X] D a cemetery.
- [ ] E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- [ ] F a commemorative property.
- [ ] G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Exploration / Settlement
Maritime History
Ethnic Heritage – Irish American

Period of Significance

1799 - 1943

Significant Dates

1799, 1837, 1840

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance extends from 1791, the date of the first burial, to 1943, when the town ceded authority to a private corporation that began to market space to non-residents.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

The Rockville Cemetery and Bristol and Mexico Monument meet the requirements of Criteria Consideration D due to its age, association with local history and with an important historic event.

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Rockville Cemetery is locally significant under Criterion A for its association with the early settlement of Near Rockaway, a region which eventually developed into the villages of Lynbrook, Rockville Centre, and East Rockaway. The site is an early settlement cemetery that became a primary burying ground for communities in Near Rockaway for over two hundred years. A Methodist church (no longer extant) was established on the land in 1791; a churchyard cemetery developed soon afterward and the first burial dates to 1799. As a small crossroads community developed around the church and cemetery in the early 19th century, the small settlement cemetery grew into one of Near Rockaway's primary burying grounds. Community leaders, including the founders of Lynbrook and Rockville Centre, and generations of prominent families are all interred in the cemetery. Rockville Cemetery retains its historic settlement-era landscape, and the site of the Methodist church (1791-1912) remains evident.

The cemetery is additionally significant for its association with the local response to the shipwrecks of the *Bristol* (November 21, 1836) and *Mexico* (January 2, 1837) and the impact that they had on residents of Near Rockaway. The cemetery holds the mass grave of 139 people, the majority of whom were Irish immigrants who died in those two wrecks. Beginning in the 1820s, Irish immigration to New York began to increase dramatically. Poor economic conditions, including isolated potato blights and displacement and job loss due to the disruption of cottage industries as a result of the economic revolution were exacerbated by population growth. Many hoped to escape these conditions by immigrating to America and the promise of good wages and new opportunities; most came through New York City's port. As the number of Irish immigrants grew, conditions on ocean-going ships deteriorated as did their reception upon arrival. The residents of Near Rockaway reacted to the disasters by creating the Mariners Burying Ground and the Bristol and Mexico Monument at the Rockville Cemetery. They prepared the bodies for burial and they organized perhaps the longest-ever funeral cortege on Long Island---300 horse-drawn wagons. The events also affected young Walt Whitman -- who was then living on Long Island -- so profoundly that he included a poem in *Leaves of Grass* years later about the wreck of the *Mexico*. Other artists were drawn to the tragedies: Nathaniel Currier created prints, and noted artists Thomas Chambers and James Fulton Pringle created oil paintings. The *Bristol and Mexico Monument,* erected in the center of the cemetery in 1840 using local contributions and money found on the victims' bodies, commemorates the event and has become the focus of renewed 21st century interest in the cemetery. [4]

Early History of Near Rockaway

The first inhabitants of the area, circa 900AD, were the Rockaway Indians (originally the Rechqua-Akie), a local group of Algonquin Indians. Before the arrival of the Europeans probably fewer than 1,000 native people lived in all of what is now the southern half of Nassau County. A Dutchman, David DeVries, was the first to encounter them when he traveled to Long Island by foot from New Amsterdam (today's New York City). This was in 1643. DeVries endeavored to make an agreement enabling the Dutch to trade peacefully with the Indians. DeVries wrote the following about his pleasant encounter with these Indians and their one-eyed sachem, Tackapousha, on the banks of what is now the Mill River, close to the cemetery.[5]

[4] The discussion relative to Mariners Burying Ground, and the *Bristol and Mexico* Monument is taken primarily from Arthur S. Mattson, *Water and Ice: The Tragic Wrecks of the Bristol and the Mexico on the South Shore of Long Island* (Lynbrook, N.Y.: Lynbrook Historical Books, 2009).

[5] Arthur S. Mattson, *The History of Lynbrook* (Lynbrook, NY: Lynbrook Historical Books, 2005).

> At evening we arrived at Rechqua Akie where we found the chief, who had one eye, with two or three hundred Indians and about thirty houses. They led us into his house and treated us as to what they had as oysters and fish that they catch there.[6]

Stone tools and arrowheads have been found not far from the cemetery, including a stone clam knife. There is no evidence of Indian burials in the cemetery itself. The last of the Rockaway Indians died in 1818.[7]

The English arrived just months after the Dutch with a vastly different agenda. They traded the land for a few axes and trinkets and soon began to drive the Rockaways off the land, fencing it in for farming, and also constructing grist mills and saw mills. At one time there were seven mills on the Mill River.[8] Just a stone's throw across Ocean Avenue from the Rockville Cemetery is DeMott's Mill Pond (known today as Smith's Pond), which was constructed in 1710. There is a physical connection between the mill pond and the cemetery. During its early years, the Rockville Cemetery was locally known as "The Old Sand Hole Cemetery." This comes from the fact that before there was a cemetery, sand from the undeveloped property was mined and used in creating DeMott's mill dam.[9] A photo of the cemetery from 1917 shows that the sand hole was still in existence at that date. The "old sand hole" is now gone; it likely became a depository for excess material from nearby grave digging.

The earliest burials in the Rockville Cemetery demonstrate – based on surnames – that the first European residents of the area were English. Near Rockaway (the first English name for the area) was a hotbed of Loyalist support for the British king during the Revolutionary War. On June 22, 1776, the woods across Ocean Avenue from the cemetery became the site of a skirmish between George Washington's militia and some Loyalist irregulars from Near Rockaway. That skirmish is referred to as "The Battle of the Swamp."[10]

Establishment of "The Old Sand Hole" Church and Rockville Cemetery

A nineteenth-century Methodist Prayer Book indicates that by 1785 there were 40 houses and farms near the Merrick Road and Ocean Avenue intersection.[11] That same year, a circuit-riding Methodist preacher helped to organize the first church congregation in Near Rockaway. A 20-foot by 30-foot meetinghouse and parsonage were built in 1791 on land donated by Isaac Denton the year before. That first piece of land is entirely within the boundary of today's Rockville Cemetery, though neither is extant.[12] Soon after, perhaps as early as 1791, land just to the east of the church began to be used for burials. This is where the oldest grave stones in the Rockville Cemetery are located. The earliest recorded interment is the unnamed child of Samuel and Mary Smith, age 1 month, in 1799.[13]

Methodist preachers (one of the first was the Rev. Benjamin Abbott) rode a 300-mile circuit on horseback to reach their widespread Long Island parishioners. Seeking a permanent pastor, the residents built a parsonage and school across Merrick Road from the cemetery and church. Soon the intersection of Merrick Road and Ocean Avenue became known as Parson's Corners. For a time, the Mill River was even named Parson's Creek. (It was later changed back to Mill River.) At its peak around 1830, "downtown" Parson's Corners was the center of social and economic activity for all of Near Rockaway. It had a church, cemetery, and parsonage,

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[6] Preston R. Bassett and Arthur L. Hodge, *The History of Rockville Centre*, (Salisbury Printers: Uniondale, NY, 1969.)
[7] Mattson, *Lynbrook*.
[8] Patricia C. Sympson, *East Rockaway* (Arcadia Publishing: Chicago, 2009).
[9] Marilyn Nunes Devlin, *A Brief History of Rockville Centre* (The History Press: Charleston, 2011).
[10] Devlin, *Rockville Centre*.
[11] Methodist Prayer Book. On file at the Lynbrook Historical Collection, Lynbrook Public Library.
[12] Steven J. Willner, "Lynbrook Legacy – the Story of our Community" (Valley Stream, N.Y.: Maileader Publishing Corp., 1960).
[13] Easter, "Rockville Cemetery."

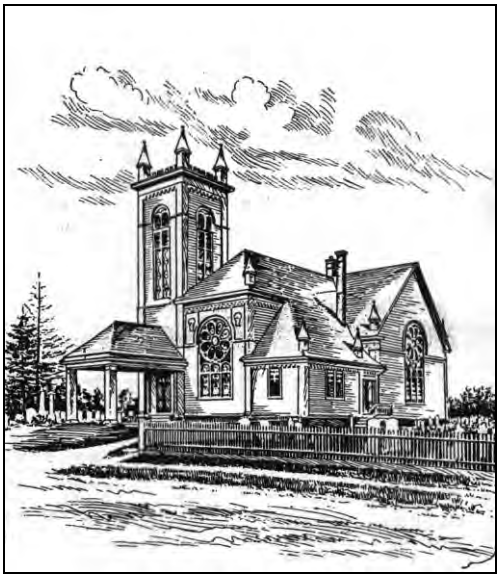
a tavern, a one-room schoolhouse and a general store -- which also served as the Near Rockaway post office. For a while it must have seemed to the dozens of families in the area that a village center would remain there and prosper. But this was not to happen. The farmers and fishermen thrived, but the little hamlet of Parson's Corners withered away. In the mid-1800s the village of Lynbrook formed to the west, the village of Rockville Centre to the east, and the village of East Rockaway to the south. Only the Old Sand Hole Methodist Church and Rockville Cemetery remained to tie the three communities together.

In 1874, a beautiful new church was built, one of the largest on the South Shore of Long Island. In 1897, disaster struck when the second "Old Sand Hole" church burned down, possibly due to arson. The once-solid Near Rockaway congregation now fractured into three parts: one group moved to Lynbrook (St. James Methodist), another to Rockville Centre (St. Marks Methodist), and a third elected to rebuild the Old Sand Hole Church at the site. A smaller church was built in a rambling Gothic style at the former site, alongside the cemetery. On October 26, 1912, that third and last "Old Sand Hole" church building burned to the ground. From that point on, only the Rockville Cemetery and its gravestones remained to remind us of what was once the very heart and soul of the long-gone farming and fishing community called Near Rockaway.[14]

[14] Mattson, *Lynbrook*.

The First "Old Sand Hole" Church and Cemetery. (1791-1874)

The Second "Old Sand Hole Church" and Cemetery (1874 – 1897)



The Third "Old Sand Hole Church and Cemetery (1898-1912)

Rockville Cemetery and the Near Rockaway Community

The Rockville Cemetery was the last resting place of the rich, the poor, and the middle class of the three communities that were once collectively known as Near Rockaway. For the majority of the historic period, a portion of the cemetery was used as a "free ground" for burials; the community's poorest families were able to bury their dead there without having to pay a burial fee.[15] As seen from the following table, the cemetery contains the graves and grave markers of many leading families. These are the people who determined the course of economic, political and social development of the community. The table is based on a 1953 record that was made from an examination of church records and extant headstones.[16]

The list has been edited to include only the families with ten or more family members buried here. Despite this sharp limitation, the 998 burials listed in the table compose nearly 40 percent of all recorded burials from 1799 to 1960. The table demonstrates that families that came to Near Rockaway stayed for generations. One could also surmise, simply from the many streets named after these families, that they made significant contributions to the three communities of Near Rockaway.

Family	Number of Burials	Noted for
Abrams	217	East Rockaway President -Street name
Brower	103	Street name
Carman	49	ER President - Street name
Combs	25	Hospital Founder - Street name
Cornwell	202	Street name
Davison	51	Suffragettes, Library Founder, Mill Owner, Shipyard Owner - Street name
Demott	57	Street name - Mill Owner
Denton	16	ER President – Mill Owner – Donor for Mariners Burying Ground -- Street name
Doxey	27	Street Name – Brook name
Frost	22	LPD Patrolman Killed in Line of Duty
Hall	18	Pond name
Hendrickson	10	Street name
Horton	11	Street name
Jackson	32	Street name
Johnson	62	ER Presidents - Street name
Langdon	47	Street name
Mott	31	Street name

[15] Sworn Statement of Carman S. Langdon, Nov 5, 1885, Town of Hempstead Records Office.
[16] Easter, "Rockville Cemetery." This record is considered the most complete historic record of the cemetery. The church records it was based on were lost to fire during the mid-1960s, and some of the headstones no longer exist.

Family	Number of Burials	Noted for
Pearsall	136	Founder of Lynbrook - Street name
Pettit	25	Founder of Rockville Centre, First Postmaster
Remsen	10	Street name
Rhame	10	School
Rhodes	26	--
Rider	28	Street name
Ryder	11	Street name
Seaman	16	Street name
Shaw	15	--
Simonson	20	Bank founder
Smith	93	Street name, Rockville Centre name, Miller, Pastor of Old Sand Hole Church, Pond
Soper	19	--
Southard	31	Street name
Sprague	18	County politics
Terell	17	Street name
Watts	38	Street name
Wood	48	NY State Lt. Governor
Wright	68	Mayor of RVC
Total	998	

Source: Easter, "Records of Rockville Cemetery"

As one of the primary cemeteries in Near Rockaway, the Rockville Cemetery became the burying place for community founders, politicians, civil servants, prominent businessmen, veterans, and activists alike through the mid-twentieth century.

Wright Pearsall (1811–1898), Founder of Lynbrook

The single most impressive family marker in the cemetery belongs to the family of Wright Pearsall (1811–1898). He is the founder of Pearsall's Corners, which was renamed Lynbrook in 1894. Wright Pearsall grew up an enterprising and restless young man who, while still in his teens, left Near Rockaway for New York City to seek his fortune. Wright found success as a New York merchant but decided to move back to his roots in Near Rockaway. In about 1835, he became a partner with his father, Samuel, in operating a general store in today's East Rockaway. Wright also operated a small fleet of coastal packet ships to move local produce to New York City and ship trade goods back to Near Rockaway.

In 1853, Wright Pearsall and his father bought 50 acres of land at the intersection called The Five Corners, one-half mile west of the Rockville Cemetery. Seeing tremendous business potential at the Five Corners, Wright relocated his home and his general store to the northwest corner of the intersection of Hempstead

Avenue and the Merrick Road. Today, a historical marker in a small, triangular park identifies the location where the store once stood. Business boomed and the store became so widely known that the corners and the surrounding community became known as Pearsall's Corners. The name of the hamlet was changed to Lynbrook in 1894. Although the Pearsalls once were the largest and most influential family in what is now Lynbrook (136 burials, the most in the cemetery), there are today no direct Pearsall descendants left in Lynbrook.[17]

The Pettit Family

The Pettit family markers, with 25 total burials, oddly do not include the name of Robert Pettit, the visionary founder of Rockville Centre. There is speculation, because so many of Pettit's contemporaneous relatives are buried in the Rockville Cemetery, that he died far from home or that his body was lost. In any event, this businessman was the village's first postmaster and was the prime mover in the creation, around 1848, of the hamlet of Rockville Centre.

The Smith Family and Mordechai "Rock" Smith

The cemetery has an informational bronze plaque, and possibly a grave marker as well, that recognizes the Rev. Mordechai "Rock" Smith (1765-1852), the man for whom Rockville Centre is named. Smith, whose family has 93 family members interred, was the most respected resident on the east side of the Mill River at the time the hamlet of Rockville Centre was being formed. He was a farmer, owner of the largest mill on the Mill River, and for over 20 years the beloved pastor of the Old Sand Hole Church. The "Rock" in the name Rockville Centre is a tribute to Mordechai Rock Smith.[18]

The Davison Family

The Davisons were the most influential family in East Rockaway in the 19th century; 51 members of this family are buried in the cemetery. Several of them deserve recognition. The three Davison sisters, Irene (1841-1878), Amelia (1856–1939), and Susan (1866-1934) (see photo of gravestone), organized suffragette marches on Long Island and in New York City. They also founded the first library in the village, the Baisley Free Library, in a building that stands today. The sisters have their own gravestone. Their father and mother, Oliver (1830-1916) and Sarah (1832-1896) (see photo of gravestone), are buried nearby. In addition to their landholding and nautical businesses the Davisons owned the East Rockaway Grist Mill, a building constructed ca. 1689. It is a museum in East Rockaway today. The Davison family still owns a shipyard in East Rockaway.

Military Burials

There are many military burials in the cemetery, but none are documented from before the Civil War. Pearsall's Corners sent sixty-two soldiers, virtually every able-bodied young man, to fight for the Union cause. It is not known how many died in battle and were buried elsewhere, but all of the returning veterans are said to have been buried in the Sand Hole Cemetery.[19] At least one man, James T. Wetmore (1840-1863), was killed in action, at Chancellorsville, and his body returned to Lynbrook. There are 46 veterans from the Civil War to WWII listed on the cemetery record.

Sgt. David Driscoll (1842-1922) was one of Long Island's greatest Civil War heroes. He was the son of Mary Driscoll and Capt. John Driscoll, both Irish immigrants. In 1861, the year the Civil War broke out, Driscoll was nineteen years old and living with his parents at 105 Smith Street in Pearsall's Corners (now Lynbrook). He had just become engaged to be married. On October 21, 1861, Driscoll enlisted in the Union Army and was

[17] *Brooklyn Eagle*, December 21, 1898; *South Side Observer*, December 23, 1898; Mattson, *Lynbrook.*
[18] Preston, *Rockville Centre*; Nunes, *Rockville Centre*.
[19] Mattson, *Lynbrook*.

assigned to Wheeler's 13th Individual Battery, NY Light Artillery. Afraid to tell his parents and his fiancée that he had enlisted, Driscoll hid his newly issued army uniform in his parents' barn.

Most soldiers in the Civil War left the service as soon as they could after completing a one-year stint. Many draftees even paid others to fight in their place. Not David Driscoll. Although he had an honorable discharge in hand after a year of hard fighting, he re-enlisted at the height of the war and fought for three more years, seeing many of the Civil War's worst battles from Pennsylvania to Georgia. He fought at Rappahannock Crossing, Cross Keys, Cedar Mountains, Fords of the Rappahannock, Sulphur Springs, Groveton, Second Bull Run, and Chancellorsville. At Gettysburg, Driscoll's artillery unit defended the Union line against Pickett's Charge, killing almost 2,000 Confederates and suffering 10 percent casualties themselves. He also fought at Wanapatchie, Orchard Knob, Lookout Mountain, Mission Ridge, and the relief of Knoxville. He saw action at Rockyface Ridge, Buzzards Roost, Dug Gap, Resaca, Near Cassville, and New Hope Church. Then he fought at Dallas, Alkakoona Hills, Marietta, Kenesaw Mountains, Ruff Station, Chattahoochee River, Peace Tree Creek, the Siege of Atlanta, Wilkinson's Pike, and Murpheesboro. Driscoll rose to gunnery sergeant. He was discharged on July 18, 1865, shortly after the last fighting stopped, and was awarded many medals for his military achievements. President Abraham Lincoln awarded one of those medals.[20]

Lynbrook Police Patrolman Kenneth Frost and the Frost Family

The Frost family has 22 burials, including that of Lynbrook Police Patrolman Kenneth Frost ("The finest motorcycle policeman in Nassau County"). He was killed on May 3, 1931, when his motorcycle was struck by an automobile as he was responding to an emergency call.

Peter W. Lees

Noted golf course designer Peter W. Lees (1868-1923) is buried in the cemetery. Lees became, according to his *New York Times* obit in 1923, "one of the foremost golf course architects in the country." Locally, he designed at least two Long Island courses, Lido Beach and one of the two Garden City courses. Lee's ideas on turf development are still used today.

The Turkish Plot

A Turkish fraternal organization in New York City purchased several dozen adjacent plots for their members during the early 1940s. Their almost identical trapezoidal marble stones each has a crescent moon and star engraved on them. The oldest grave is from 1941.

Shipwrecks of the Bristol and Mexico

The Mariners Burying Ground at the Rockville Cemetery honors the memory of the passengers who died in the shipwrecks of the *Bristol* and *Mexico* in 1836 and 1837. The wrecks deeply affected the residents of Near Rockaway, who helped to rescue survivors and bury the dead. The monument was paid for in part with money taken from the clothing of the victims, three-quarters of whom were Irish immigrants. On January 12, 1837, the *New York Sun* – one of New York City's largest newspapers at the time – emphasized how terrible the twin tragedies were, stating, "The history of the world cannot furnish two more awful calamities of a similar nature, following each other in such quick succession."[21]

[20] *New Era,* November 15, 1922.
[21] "Two Awful Shipwrecks," *New York Sun*, January 12, 1837.

The two shipwrecks cost 215 lives in all – 100 by drowning on the ship *Bristol* on November 21, 1836, and 115 by freezing to death on the deck of the *Mexico* on January 2, 1837, all within a few hundred yards of the South Shore of Long Island. The two American tall ships were returning to New York from Liverpool, their holds filled with cargo and with European immigrants. Tragedy struck after the New York Harbor Pilots were not on station to guide the ships into port. The ships were both wrecked on unpopulated barrier islands just a few miles southeast and southwest of Near Rockaway.

In the summer of 1836, circumstances conspired against the poor in Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. They were caught in the whipsaw-effect of high unemployment and localized famines. The depression of the 1820s had destroyed flourishing cottage industries such as weaving and lace-making throughout the United Kingdom. This was followed by the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution, which eliminated most of the cottage work that was left and employed fewer workers in factories. Author Arthur Gribben gives an example to show that the severe unemployment problem in Ireland was decades in the making; according to historian Arthur Gribben, "between 1821 and 1841, the proportion of Kilmacshalgan's parishioners working in industry and other non-farm pursuits fell from 57% to 18%."[22]

According to Stanley Johnson in his *History of Emigration* (1913), the supply of workers so exceeded demand in Ireland and Scotland that by 1838 wages were less than half the amount paid in 1820.The combined effect was devastating. Farm families were suffering too. Although most researchers date the Irish Potato Famine as beginning in September 1845, a significant potato blight struck isolated areas of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales ten years earlier. For example, in the summer of 1836, as the *Bristol* and the *Mexico* were on their way from New York to Liverpool, Long Island's *Hempstead Inquirer*, citing "foreign sources," reported that 100,000 people had been displaced from their farms in the British Isles because of the blight. That same year, the *Liverpool Mercur*y noted that there were 10,000 displaced farmers in western Scotland alone.

Adding to the problems of unemployment and blight was the explosion in population, particularly in Ireland. Arthur Gribben indicates that even as poor Irish families became increasingly dependent on the potato crop, both as a source of employment and as a subsistence crop, the Irish population continued to increase. Between 1821 and 1845, the population of County Sligo rose from 146,000 to 200,000.[23]

These problems were small individually, at least by the awful scale of the Great Famine, but there were regions of Great Britain and Ireland where these negative effects converged with destructive force: jobs lost because of a business depression, jobs displaced by the Industrial Revolution, population growth, and increased demand for food. When localized potato blights destroyed both the food supply and the safety net of farming as a source of employment and income, there was nothing left. Stanley Johnson cites cases where desperate men went to distant towns to arrange for their emigration to America, "in order that their home liabilities might be shirked."

Word spread across Ireland that the economic situation was altogether better in the United States, especially in New York State following the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825. Most of the Erie Canal had been dug by Irish laborers using pickaxes and shovels. These men were brought to America by canal contractors who provided free passage in exchange for a six-month work contract. The pay was one dollar a day for hard labor from dawn to dusk, a wonderful wage for these emigrants. Many were able to save enough to send for their relatives and friends.

Due to the canal, the value of merchandise flowing through the Port of New York increased from $84 million in 1825 to $146 million in 1836, and New York City experienced labor shortages. Demand for labor also rose in

[22] Arthur Gribben, *The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).
[23] Gribben, *The Great Famine*.

the Hudson Valley, Albany, Rochester, and Buffalo. Largely because of this demand, the number of emigrants entering through the New York rose from 12,000 in 1825, to 21,000 in 1827, and to 75,000 in 1836.

It was only natural that more Europeans emigrated to New York City than to any other port in the United States, regardless of their final destination. They simply went with the flow by booking passage aboard the numerous cargo ships sailing the long-established, transatlantic trade route. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the relatively small numbers of emigrants aboard each ship received food and accommodations at least on a par with what the crew got. These early emigrants were generally skilled workers looking for better opportunities. However, as the number of emigrants increased dramatically in the mid-1830s, and as their condition of poverty worsened, the manner in which they were treated declined until they were considered no more than human cargo.

In 1836, fifty-eight thousand British and Irish passengers—almost double the number from the year before—took passage to New York, many in response to the predatory tactics of English passenger brokers. The brokers used every method at their disposal to drum up business. The following is an emigrant canal engineer's contemporaneous description of how this was done:

> [T]here were hand bills, placarded on every corner, tree, pump and public place in the city of Dublin, and for forty or fifty miles in the surrounding country, stating, in substance, that the people were fools not to leave the country, where there was nothing but poverty staring them in the face. That laborers were so much wanted in America that even women were employed to work at men's work. . . There is one or more agent in every principal town in Ireland.[24]

In 1842, Charles Dickens sailed as a first-cabin passenger aboard a New York-to-Liverpool packet, accompanied by a shipload of steerage-class passengers. He excoriated the brokers' tactics:

> Above all it is the duty of any Government, be it monarchy or republic, to interpose and put an end to that system by which a firm of traders in emigrants purchase of the owners the whole 'tween-decks of a ship, and send on board as many wretched people as they can lay hold of, on any terms they can get, without the smallest reference to the conveniences of the steerage, the number of berths, the slightest separation of the sexes, or anything but their own immediate profit.[25]

A third of the passengers on the *Bristol* and the *Mexico* were women and children unaccompanied by men. Another third of the passengers were family groups accompanied by men. Among them were the Hopes and their four children from Dublin and the Peppers with their six children from England. These families were willing to risk everything to emigrate together as a family to seek new opportunity in America. The final third of the passengers were men traveling without families. Many of them were leading the way for others back home. They were mostly farm workers and laborers who had waited to book passage until their harvesting and seasonal work was done. The passengers aboard the *Bristol* and the *Mexico* were so desperate to emigrate that the danger of a late fall crossing on such small vessels was less important than saving a pound or two of their limited funds. Indeed, few of them had resources beyond a dream for the future and a vision that they could somehow establish themselves in America and do well.

The English overlords in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales were happy to see these emigrants leave. After all, these "labouring poor," as they were called, were considered to be a virtual under-caste that could never rise out of their miserable condition. An editorial in *Dublin University Magazine* (1835), a British-leaning periodical, defined a typical Irish dwelling as "a seminary for the education of pigs." Not content with that insult, it added:

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[24] Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *The Rise of New York Port* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1939).
[25] Charles Dickens, *American Notes and Pictures from Italy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957).

> Much of the misery in Ireland is apparent, not real; and many of the privations under which the people labour, and which, to a stranger, would seem to imply much suffering, proceed from an utter indifference about comforts and decencies, which, in England, would be deemed indispensable, and which a very ordinary effort of industry or ingenuity would be more than sufficient to supply.[26]

Sadly, there was no "American welcome" awaiting these emigrants beyond the family or friends who had preceded them. Just a few months before the two ships set sail, New York City's largest newspaper, *The New York Sunday Morning News*, printed a prominent editorial entitled "European Emigrants" that was bluntly critical of emigration.

European Emigrants

An editorial in the *New York Sunday Morning News,*
May 22, 1836.

> The tide of emigration from the demoralized communities of the old world, which has been constantly setting towards this country, is from year to year, and from day to day, becoming stronger. Can no means be taken to check it? How much longer are we to sit quietly and suffer this moral pestilence to roll unrestrained over this land? We establish quarantine regulations to guard against the introduction of the miasma of contagious diseases. We enforce them in the strictest manner, and at great expense, and yet offer no obstruction to the free admission of social and political infection. What inconsistency! Disease at the worst will lay waste to but a small portion of the country – destroy a few hundred or a few thousand of our inhabitants, while the unrestricted admission of the ignorant, lazy and vicious emigrants from England and Ireland, will in time entirely blight the fair fruits of our free institutions, and debase to the low standard of European pauperism the present high moral and intellectual character of our people.
>
> Within a month past, several thousand of degraded beings, who would be a disgrace to the social and political state of the most barbarous nation on the globe, have arrived at this port [the Port of New York]. Every vessel that arrives comes crowded with them, and many thousands more are collected at Liverpool and other English ports, waiting for passage. We might, were it not for them, dispense entirely with our prisons, our penitentiaries, and our alms-house establishments. At least three-fourths of the inmates of the alms-house at Bellevue are foreign paupers, who have been sent over for us to support, by the poor-masters of England and Ireland.
>
> When and where is this state of things to end? Are we to go on forever importing European vagrants in increasing ratio – a ratio out of all proportion to the increase in our native population? Will no one of our legislators take the subject in hand, and endeavor to restrain an evil, compared with which the plagues that affected the hard-hearted monarch of Egypt, were but trifles! If not, the people must do it for themselves – and they must do it soon, too.

Popular fiction of the day described priests seducing women in the confessional booth, booklets told of nuns cutting infants from the womb and then tossing them to dogs, and "Break the Pope's Neck" was a favorite children's game. In 1834, a convent was burned in Charlestown, Massachusetts, after a vicious anti-Catholic sermon. In 1836, Samuel F. B. Morse—at a time when he was still developing the telegraph—ran for mayor of New York City on an anti-emigrant and anti-Catholic platform. His unsuccessful run came on the heels of a series of articles and a book he published claiming the United States would soon fall under the yoke of Catholic despotism.

But in the autumn of 1836, none of these immigration issues mattered to the owners of the ships *Bristol* and *Mexico*. After all, these desperate immigrants were a cargo that could load itself aboard their ships, did not have to be insured, and were willing to pay in cash up front. Moreover the officers and crew of the *Bristol* and the *Mexico* had more than enough to worry about without concerning themselves with the human cargo aboard their ships. They had an ocean to cross, and winter was fast approaching.

[26] "Ireland in 1834," *Dublin University Magazine* 25 (1835): 2.

The *Bristol* was first of the two ships to arrive at the Port of New York. Tragically, the New York Harbor Pilots decided to take the day off. There were no pilots' rules at the time, but this would change soon after the two ships wrecked and 215 lives were lost. Because of the dereliction of duty by the pilots, Captain McKown was forced to retreat out to sea. A storm came up and wrecked the ship just 400 yards off Rockaway Beach, Long Island.[27] One hundred passengers and crew drowned. Forty-four were saved when rescued from shore.

Despite the fact that this was the largest accidental loss of life in the history of the United States to that time, the initial reaction to the disaster locally was mostly greed. Robbers from as far as thirty miles away descended on the bodies as they washed ashore. Fingers and earlobes were sliced off to get at the jewelry, and trade goods were stolen from the beach. Little respect was paid to the dead, who were summarily buried in a potter's field on the uninhabited barrier beach.

The local reaction to the wreck of the *Mexico* was quite different. On January 2, 1837, six weeks after the wreck of the *Bristol* at Rockaway Beach, the *Mexico* was wrecked at Long Beach, NY. Once again, the New York Harbor Pilots were not on station. This time they were celebrating the New Year at Riley's Tavern in New York City. When the *Mexico* was driven ashore in near-zero-degree temperatures, 115 passengers and crew froze to death on the deck of the ship. Only eight people -- Captain Winslow and seven crewmen -- were saved. Word of the wreck of the *Mexico* at Long Beach spread through the Town of Hempstead. The stories were appalling—of the victims' screams fading away in the night, and of bodies washing onshore encapsulated in ice, rows of frozen corpses laid out in Lott's barn in Hempstead South.

Unlike the wreck of the *Bristol*, which was in a no-man's-land in the County of Queens, the Town of Hempstead took control of the beach to prevent any stealing from the victims or the wreck of the Mexico. Citizens of the local communities took charge of the corpses and prepared them for a decent burial. Funds were donated for a "Mariners Burying Ground" in Near Rockaway, and a formal ceremony was orchestrated for the funeral. Later in the year, the bodies of the victims of the *Bristol* were brought to the Rockville Cemetery and interred at the burying ground, making the final total 139. In 1840, a monument was erected.

Establishment of the Mariners Burying Ground, and the Bristol and Mexico Monument

In his book *Tragedies of the Seas* (1841), Charles Ellms described 37 tragic shipwrecks that occurred between 1808 and 1940; the wreck of the *Mexico* rated among them. He related how nearby residents responded within days of the disaster: [28]

> By this terrible calamity a greater number of lives were lost than by any previous shipwreck on the coast of the United States. . . The humane inhabitants of Hempstead and its vicinity, being actuated by the purest sentiments of philanthropy, held a public meeting on Friday, the 6th of January, at which the following preamble and resolutions were adopted:[29]

[27] After 175 years of storms and hurricanes, there is no known evidence of the *Bristol* wreck. Recent archaeological evidence indicates that some remains of the *Mexico* may exist off of the coast of Long Beach; further study is required for a positive confirmation. Both wrecks were close enough to ensure that they were thoroughly salvaged.

[28] Historical and contemporary place names in the southern part of Nassau County are confusing to say the least. For example, there are the Town of Hempstead, the Village of Hempstead, Hempstead Beach and Hempstead South; and there are Far Rockaway, Near Rockaway, Rockaway Beach, Rockville Centre, and East Rockaway. Richard A. Winsche, *The History of Nassau County Community Place-Names* (Hempstead, N.Y.: Long Island Studies Institute, Hofstra Institute, 1999) is a fine resource into the origins of these names.

[29] Ellms is correct that, "a greater number of lives were lost than by any previous shipwreck on the coast of the United States." In fact *each* of the wrecks was the largest accidental loss of life in the then 60 year history of the United States.

> The inhabitants of the Town of Hempstead, feeling themselves called upon by the recent awful and distressing shipwreck, and unprecedented loss of life on the melancholy occasion, held a large and respectable meeting on Friday evening, when it was unanimously,
>
> *Resolved*, That since it has pleased the Great Disposer of events to cast upon our shore the bodies of many friendless fellow-creatures, suddenly deprived of life by a most disastrous shipwreck, we deem it a solemn duty, devolving upon us, to cause them to be decently and properly interred;
>
> — that a committee of twelve be appointed to collect contributions for the purpose of purchasing a piece of ground, to be forever reserved solely for the interment of bodies which shall hereafter be cast upon our beach; and, also, for the further purpose of erecting a suitable monument over the bodies now to be interred.
>
> Whereupon the following gentlemen were named as the committee:
>
> John Bedell, Richard Carman, Nathaniel Seaman, Jacob Coles, Stephen C. Shedeker, Platt Willets, Peter T. Hewlett, Oliver Denton, John W. De Mott, Daniel Mot, John I. Lott, and Raynor R. Smith [the hero of the rescue of the eight survivors of the *Mexico* wreck].
>
> The committee, having succeeded in obtaining ample funds, have purchased a lot of ground adjacent to the burial-ground of the Methodist church, [at] Near Rockaway, and to be attached to the same, under the restrictions of the resolutions; and every arrangement has been made for the interment of the bodies in a respectable manner, and with appropriate ceremonies.[30]

The cemetery of the Methodist Church in Near Rockaway was chosen as the final resting place for the *Mexico's* victims because of its relative closeness to where the bodies lay in Lott's barn. The money recovered from the victims—about $300—was held in escrow by the wreck-master, pending claims from heirs. This money would be used three years later, in 1840, to erect a monument at the site. Within just a few days, local contributions were raised to acquire enough land to expand the Old Sand Hole Cemetery and create a Mariners Burying Ground north of the church. Peter T. Hewlett donated some of the land and Oliver Denton (he is buried in the Rockville Cemetery) donated the lumber for the coffins. The lumber was milled at the East Rockaway grist mill.

The committee began arrangements for the burial of the forty-three bodies initially recovered. Women from the Village of Hempstead went to work purchasing funeral garments with their own funds and brought them to Lott's barn. There they prepared the still-frozen bodies of the women and children, and "with their own hands enshrouded [them] in the habiliments of the grave." The male bodies were prepared by local men. As the week wore on, ten more bodies were recovered for a total of fifty-three.

Three bodies were omitted from the committee's tally of "fifty men, women, boys and girls." They were black sailors from the ship, who were counted separately . . . as "colored." Slavery was slow to disappear in New York State, and technically still existed in 1837. A 1799 statute freed all slaves born after July 4 of that year. But even for those children of slaves it was freedom delayed, because they had to wait twenty-five or twenty-eight more years (until 1824 for enslaved women and 1827 for enslaved men) to receive their promised freedom. An 1817 statute gave freedom to all slaves born before July 4, 1799—but those slaves had to wait ten years, until July 4, 1827, at which time all New York slaves, including their parents, were made free. Even then, slavery was not entirely repealed, for there was an exception: nonresidents could enter New York and remain there with their slaves for up to nine months at a time. New York's "nine-months law" stayed on the books until 1841.

[30] Charles Ellms, *Tragedies of the Seas; or, Sorrow on the Ocean, Lake, and River, from Shipwreck, Plague, Fire and Famine* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1841), 236-246.

In 1837, racism was deeply embedded on Long Island. Although the white residents of Near Rockaway were generous in donating land and preparing the white victims for burial, they were unwilling to prepare the bodies of the black sailors. Charles Ellms indicates that "the colored bodies were committed to the care of the colored people of the neighborhood, and interred at the same time, and within the same enclosure."[31]

Although the black sailors were to be buried within the Mariners Burying Ground "enclosure," they were not buried in the same wide grave where the whites were laid shoulder-to-shoulder in their coffins. The black victims got their own, separate grave. Further reinforcing the inferior status accorded to anyone of African descent, the committee posted an official, segregated, order-of-procession for the carriages that transported the bodies three miles from Lott's barn to the cemetery: "The Clergy. Committee of Arrangements. The Corpses (Women, Men, Children, Colored). Pall-Bearers. Friends and Relatives. Citizens."

The procession on Wednesday, January 11, 1837, was the longest Long Island had ever seen—300 horse-drawn carriages and wagons. Fifty-two farm wagons carried the coffins, one body to a coffin, except for Mr. and Mrs. William Pepper, who were placed together in one coffin, locked in a frozen embrace. Once the procession reached the Mariners Burying Ground and the coffins lowered into the two graves, the Rev. Carmichael began his oration. Tears had been flowing even before he began, not because the victims were known to the residents of Near Rockaway—indeed, the dead were strangers to most of the mourners—but because one-third of the coffins were so small. They contained the bodies of children. The Rev. Carmichael quoted from Matthew 8:25, "Lord save us, we perish," and declared that these deaths just a few yards off Long Island's South Shore were tragedies beyond any human understanding, that they were part of God's unknowable plan.[32]

Over the next few weeks after the initial burials, more of the *Mexico's* victims washed up along the South Shore of Long Island, making a total of eighty-three recovered bodies. Relatives and friends claimed some of the bodies, and they were buried elsewhere. In all, sixty-two bodies were eventually interred in the Mariners Burying Ground.

Six weeks before the *Mexico* burial ceremony, the unclaimed bodies of the victims of the wreck of the *Bristol* had been hastily buried in a sandy potter's field at Rockaway Beach. The possibility of eventually moving those additional 77 victims to the Near Rockaway burial site may have influenced the committee's decision to acquire such a large plot as it did. But it was not until 1839, two years later, that victims of the wreck of the *Bristol* were re-interred, with ceremony, at the Mariners Burying Ground, joining the victims of the *Mexico*.

In 1840, using local contributions and $300 of still-unclaimed funds taken from the bodies of the victims—which funds the legislature of the State of New York finally released from escrow—a Monument Committee authorized the purchase of a memorial to be placed at the Mariners Burying Ground. Peter T. Hewlett of East Rockaway wrote in his diary that he headed the group that went to the village of Sing Sing (today's Ossining), New York to commission the carving of a white marble obelisk.

The monument was carried to East Rockaway by coastal sloop and then taken by horse-drawn wagon up Ocean Avenue to the Rockville Cemetery. It was erected on November 28, 1840, where it stands today, marking the mass grave of 139 victims. Text was engraved on each side of the monument describing the disasters and referencing the community's response to them.

[31] Ellms, *Tragedies of the Seas.*
[32] The Rev. Carmichael's Bible citation is carved on the Bristol and Mexico Monument. At the time, the Rev Carmichael had no knowledge that the New York Pilots' negligence was the proximate cause of the wreck.

(On the East side)
To commemorate
the melancholy fate of the
unfortunate sufferers
belonging to the *Bristol*
and *Mexico*, this monument
was erected; partly by the
money found upon their
persons, and partly by the
contributions of the
benevolent and humane,
in the County of Queens.

(On the South side)
TO THE MEMORY OF 77
Persons chiefly Emigrants
from England & Ireland,
being the only remains of
100 souls composing the
Passengers and crew of
the American ship *Bristol*.
Capt. McKown, wrecked on
Far-Rockaway beach.
Nov. 21, 1836

(On the West side)
All the bodies of the
Bristol and *Mexico*
recovered from the Ocean
and decently interred
near this spot,
were followed to the grave
by a large concourse of
Citizens and Strangers
and an address delivered
suited to the occasion
from these words,
"Lord save us, we perish,"
Matth. 8. 25. v.

(On the North side)
To the memory of
sixty-two persons
chiefly Emigrants from England
and Ireland; being the only
remains of 115 souls,
forming the passengers
and crew of the American
Barque *Mexico,*
Capt. Winslow, wrecked
on Hempstead beach.
Jan. 2. 1837 [33]

[33] The obelisk gives the date of the wreck of the *Mexico* as January 2, 1837. This is correct so long as the night of January 2 is taken to include the still-dark, early-morning hours of January 3, when the vessel actually struck the bar off

(Also on the base, on the North side, the following lines are inscribed)
In this grave, from the wide Ocean doth sleep,
The bodies of those that had crossed the deep,
And instead of being landed, safe on the shore,
In a cold frosty night, they all were no more.

Nathaniel S. Prime wrote in his *History of Long Island* (1845) that the preceding lines of verse were:

> "Worse than doggerel poetry. Our grave yards abound with similar examples of bad grammar and contemptible trash, called poetry:
> Enough to rouse a dead man into rage,
> And warm with red resentment the wan cheek."

So outraged were the local residents at the poor poetry carved on the monument that they demanded an explanation from Peter T. Hewlett, chairman of the monument committee, who responded:

> The committee finally adopted the [poem] in question, simply for the reason, that the individual who prepared it, had pledged a liberal subscription toward the monument, on condition that it should secure the preference.

Part of the Mariners Burying Ground has been used for non-maritime burials, within the boundary dimensions originally carved on the monument. An unknown person several decades ago chiseled the plot's dimensions off the monument, leaving a horrid gash. They were probably unaware that Nathaniel Prime had long ago written the monument's full text in his book, *The History of Long Island*, published in 1845. The book still exists, and it spells out the amount of land set aside for the Mariners Burying Ground, as originally carved on the south base:

The Inhabitants of the County
impelled by A generous sensibility
have Purchased thirty feet front and rear
by One hundred and Sixty one feet deep[34]
of this yard and set it apart exclusively
as a Mariners Burying Ground.

Commemoration and Implications of the Bristol and Mexico Shipwrecks

Near Rockaway's compassionate act of caring for the bodies of the immigrants, none of whom were known to the local residents, was remarkable for the time and place. Not only were the victims foreigners, but three-fourths of them were, as the *New York Sun* had just written, "ignorant, lazy and vicious emigrants from Ireland." Fortunately there were others who realized that these deaths were not simply the result of forces beyond men's control. The disasters were instead the product of pernicious maritime regulations and practices that favored ships' cargos over the lives of emigrants and sailors—particularly when they were poor, Irish, Catholic, or black. But change was in the air. Over the next decade, politicians – perhaps noting the care for

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Hempstead Beach. This was common usage in the early nineteenth century. Contemporaneous newspaper accounts report that the *Mexico* was in fact wrecked on Tuesday, January 3, 1837 at about 4AM or 5AM. The *New York Sunday Morning News* (January 8, 1837), *New York Herald* (January 5, 1837), the *Supplement to the New York Sun (*January 12, 1837), and the *New York Morning Courier* (January 5, 1837), all give January 3. Two contemporaneous historians also give the morning of January 3, 1837 as the date and time of the wreck. See Benjamin Thompson's *History of Long Island,* Vol. II (1843) and Charles Ellms' *Tragedy of the Sea* (1841).

[34] This fourth line was obliterated from the monument.

the victims demonstrated in Near Rockaway, and also reacting to complaints from ship owners and insurers – began demanding changes to maritime safety regulations and procedures.

The disasters had a profound effect locally and nationally due to their substantial coverage in major newspapers. The thrilling newspaper accounts of the wrecks set the stage for New York's eventual leading role in journalistic investigative reporting. James Gordon Bennett, publisher of the New York *Herald* newspaper, even received a punch in the face from a NY harbor pilot when his questioning became too aggressive. This kind of pursuit of the facts behind a story was almost unheard of in the mid-1830s.[35]

Outrage over the New York Harbor Pilots' dereliction of duty resulted in massive changes in that corrupt monopoly system. The pilots hid behind a 48-year-old federal law that appeared to guarantee that their self-governed monopoly could continue to thrive under the protection of New York State law. But the pilots' "states' rights" argument was undone by the concluding phrase of the act: "until further legislative provision shall be made by Congress." With the disasters of the *Bristol* and the *Mexico* fresh in their minds, Congress did act, and they did so immediately. On March 2, 1837, they passed a law stating the following:

> That it shall and may be lawful for the master or commander of any vessel coming into or going out of any port situate upon waters which are the boundary between the States, to employ any pilot duly licensed or authorized by the laws of *either of the States* bounded on said waters, to pilot the said vessel to or from said port, any law, usage, or custom to the contrary notwithstanding.[36] (Italics added.)

The result was dramatic, and it happened literally overnight. The very next day, the New Jersey pilots sailed out past the Hook, looking for any customers they could find, whether bound for New Jersey, Staten Island, Manhattan, or Brooklyn. The pilot system of New York Harbor would never be the same. A New Jersey official made the following observation three years later regarding the beneficial effect of opening competition between the New Jersey and New York pilots:

> And I do further declare that . . . the pilots up to March 1837, were not in the habit of going to sea; and, since then, I have seen the New York and Jersey pilots seventy miles from Sandy Hook. I have no reason to know that any unusual complaint has been made by ship-masters or merchants, as to the pilots, for the last three years.[37]

Shortly after the wrecks, the United States Treasury Department permanently added sea-rescues to its coastal patrol mission. Eventually this mission was assigned to the U.S. Coast Guard, which was established years later. On February 11, 1837, with the wrecks of the *Bristol* and the *Mexico* clearly in mind, the New York Chamber of Commerce sent a "memorial" to Congress asking the federal government to take steps to prevent such tragedies. The Chamber asked that the revenue cutters' sea rescue service be permanently reinstituted. A bill was passed by Congress on December 22, 1837, under which cutters once again were sent out "to cruise upon the coast, in the severe portion of the season . . . to afford such aid to distressed navigators as their circumstance and necessities may require; and such public vessels shall go to sea prepared fully to render such assistance." Furthermore, the cutters were required to be "prepared to afford aid in case of shipwreck."[38]

The haphazard nature of the rescues (from shore) of the *Bristol* and the *Mexico*'s survivors resulted in a redefinition of the federal job of lighthouse keepers to be *life savers* as well. In 1837, Congress issued a

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[35] Mattson, *Water and Ice*, 109-112.
[36] William Pennington, *A Statement of the Facts and Circumstances Relative to the Operation of the Pilot Laws of U.S., with particular reference to New-York. June, 1840 (Newark, N.J.: M.S. Harrison & Co., 1840).*
[37] "Statement of James Bergen, Notary Public, of New Jersey" in Pennington, *Statement of the Facts*.
[38] Mattson, *Water and Ice*, 254; John Spears, "Story of Beneficent Shipwrecks," *New York Times*, July 24, 1907)

redefinition of the mission of the U.S. Lighthouse Service, when it required lighthouse keepers to meet a new standard by having "fitness for life saving in the surf." Eventually this mission was assigned to the U.S. Life Saving Service, which was established in 1848 following some awful wrecks off the New Jersey coast. At that time, Congress authorized $10,000 to provide "surfboats, rockets, carronades and other necessary apparatus for the better preservation of life and property from ship-wrecks on the coasts."[39] Raynor Rock Smith, the hero of the wreck of the *Mexico,* was named keeper of the Fire Island Light. No one could argue that Smith lacked fitness for "life saving in the surf." Daniel Treadwell wrote in his journal, *Personal Reminiscences* (1842) that the rescue of the *Mexico*, led to the "incorporation of the Life Saving Benevolent Association." This organization still exists today. Operating out of the Seamen's Church Institute in New York City, the association continues to make monetary rewards to rescuers. [40]

The Ambrose Lightship was placed permanently on station in the New York Bight. When the twin Navesink Lights were constructed on the New Jersey Highlands in 1828, their visibility from a masthead fifty miles at sea was thought to make the Sandy Hook Lightship redundant; and so it was moved from the New York Bight to the Delaware Cape, where the need was deemed to be greater. Immediately following the wrecks of the *Bristol* and the *Mexico*, the Department of the Treasury received numerous complaints about the removal of the lightship. The complainants argued that if the lightship had been on station in the Bight, the captains of the *Bristol* and the *Mexico* could have used the lightship's bell and lights as references in keeping safely out to sea, and yet not too distant from the coasts. Within months of the two wrecks, the 230-ton lightship *W-W* was placed on station seven miles out in the Bight. Lightships remained there until 1967, when the station known as the Ambrose Lightship was discontinued. [41]

The events also affected artists. Several print-makers, from Nathaniel Currier to an anonymous Welshman, produced dramatic scenes of the wrecks.[42] Thomas Chambers painted *The Wreck of the Bristol,* which is currently held by the Indiana University Art Museum. Chambers's works are today collected by Long Island Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, among others. James Fulton Pringle painted *The Wreck of the Mexico*, held by the Long Island Museum at Stony Brook. Pringle's works are today collected by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Fennimore Cooper Museum, among others. Walt Whitman was a seventeen-year-old Long Islander at the time of the two wrecks. He later wrote that he was "almost an observer" of the wrecks, and was so profoundly moved by the twin tragedies that he later, as a mature poet, joined the themes of *death* and *the sea* in his works. Whitman also included dramatic yet accurate details of one of the wrecks in what is probably his most haunting poem, "The Sleepers," in *Leaves of Grass*.[43]

The Sleepers
Stanza Four in *Leaves of Grass*

The beach is cut by the razory ice-wind, the wreck-guns sound,
The tempest lulls, the moon comes floundering through the drifts.

I look where the ship helplessly heads end on, I hear the burst as
she strikes, I hear the howls of dismay, they grow fainter
and fainter.

I cannot aid with my wringing fingers,
I can but rush to the surf and let it drench me and freeze upon me.

[39] Spears, *New York Times,* July 24, 1907.
[40] Mattson, *Water and Ice*, 255
[41] Mattson, *Water and Ice*, 256.
[42] Mattson, *Water and Ice*, 245-246.
[43] Mattson, *Water and Ice*, 237-244.

I search with the crowd, not one of the company is wash'd to us alive,
In the morning I help pick up the dead and lay them in rows in a barn.

Whitman wrote in a prose work, *Specimen Days*, that the *Mexico* was indeed the ship that he was referring to in "The Sleepers." It was not necessary for him to name the ship in the poem itself. All the major and minor New York City and Long Island newspapers had printed detailed stories of the wreck, and "The Sleepers" matched those accounts with such precision that there could be no doubt about the reference. When Whitman published that poem in the 1850s, New Yorkers still had clear memories of the twin tragedies thirteen years earlier.

Rockville Cemetery during the Twentieth Century[44]

On October 26, 1912, the third and final Methodist church to occupy the site burned to the ground and a new church (named, ironically, "The Old Church") was built elsewhere in Lynbrook. Burial plots continued to be deeded by Hewlett Smith, who may have been an appointee of the trustees of the Old Church. The trustees of the relocated church regularly solicited donations for the upkeep of the cemetery. However, without the church building there, the cemetery's condition deteriorated. Burials continued in the "Free Ground" portion of the cemetery, where those too poor to buy a plot could be buried.[45] In 1927, the Town of Hempstead appointed a cemetery supervisor. Town records show that the supervisor had to continually appeal for funds. The deterioration continued. According to a newspaper clipping from 1937, stored at the Lynbrook Library's Historical Collection, the situation was severe: "After the church was removed from the graveyard, the cemetery became overgrown and for years the monument was almost hidden."

The same clipping says that in 1932-33 a Depression-Era public works project cleaned up the cemetery and created a concrete retaining wall around the Bristol and Mexico Monument. From that time until 1943, the town board provided sufficient funds for the maintenance of the cemetery. But in 1943, the town board tired of being a cemetery operator and placed its "ownership" into the hands of the private, non-profit, Rockville Cemetery Corporation. The corporation is supervised by the New York Cemetery Trust. The corporation built the current office and garage to assist in the management and maintenance of the cemetery.

After the Rockville Cemetery Corporation took over management of the cemetery, the percentage of burials from local families slowly began to decrease. Since 1943, the Rockville Cemetery has been increasingly used for burials of people from outside the traditional area once known as Near Rockaway (Lynbrook, Rockville Centre and East Rockaway). Today the majority of burials are of people from Brooklyn and Queens in New York City, many of them African American.

There are at least two burials of notable individuals that postdate the period of significance. In a reflection of the changing patterns of use of the cemetery, neither man grew up or lived in the communities nearby the cemetery. Devoted fans pay their respects to James Shane Sheppard (1935-1970) and Gary Davis (1896-1972), two famous African American rock musicians, each year.

R&B/Doo-Wop musician James Shane Sheppard (1935-1970) was the lead singer of the musical group The Heartbeats. The group formed in 1958, in Jamaica, Queens, New York. Known for their hits such as "Darling How Long," "A Thousand Miles Away," and "Crazy For You," the group recorded on the record labels, Rama, Hull, Roulette, Guyden, and Gee. They continued to record (having numerous successes) and appeared at

[44] The information about the cemetery from 1900 to 1941 was found in the Town of Hempstead Records Office.
[45] It is uncertain just where the "Free Ground" lies within the cemetery, because many of these unmarked graves have been repurposed with new burials.

venues such as the Brooklyn Fox, the Apollo Theater, with other musicians including Ray Charles, the Flamingos, and B.B. King. Other recordings by The Heartbeats are “After New Year’s Eve,” “Your Way,” “500 Miles To Go,” “I Won't Be The Fool No More,” “Down On My Knees,” and “Everybody's Somebody's Fool.”
In 1961, shortly after the breakup of the group, Sheppard continued to sing as a solo artist. That same year he met up with some old friends, Clarence Bassett (The Five Sharps) and Charles Baskerville (The Videos). The three men decided to start a new group and called themselves, Shep & The Limelights. They soon signed with Hull Records Label, one of Sheppard's old labels. Together the group recorded the memorable ballad “Daddy's Home.” The song went to number two on the charts and was one of the group's better known songs. This was followed by the release of the number seven hit, “Our Anniversary,” in 1962. Other recordings by The Limelites are “Easy To Remember,” “In Case I Forget,” “Steal Away (With Your Baby),” “The Monkey,” “Who Told The Sandman,” and “Three Steps From The Altar.” By 1966, the group was having problems and disbanded. In 1970, Sheppard reunited with Bassett and Baskerville, but the reunion was short-lived. On January 24, 1970, Sheppard was found dead in his car on the Long Island Expressway. He was the victim of an apparent robbery, having been beaten to death. He was just 35 years old.[46]

The early life of South Carolina-born blues musician Gary Davis (1896-1972) is sketchy. Partially blind at birth, he lost his sight completely during his formative years. Davis showed an interest in music at an early age and built a guitar from a pie pan, teaching himself to play. He also taught himself to play harmonica and banjo. In the early 1930s, he turned to religious music and was ordained a Baptist minister. It was about this time that he teamed up with Blind Boy Fuller in Durham, NC. Both artists traveled to New York City and recorded several sides for the American Record Company in 1935. Eventually making New York City his permanent residence, he subsequently made numerous recordings while also preaching the gospel and playing his songs in the streets of Harlem.

With his ragtime flavored blues and finger-picking style, Davis influenced many artists, most notably Stefan Grossman, Dave Van Ronk, Taj Mahal, Dave Bromberg and Ry Cooder. He became a well-known figure in folk circles and performed at all the major festivals in the early 1960s, appearing at the Newport Folk Festival, playing his raspy voiced sermons, most notably his "Samson and Delilah (If I Had My Way)," and "Twelve Gates to the City." He was also the subject of two television documentaries, one in 1967 and one in 1970. His influence is heard in modern American music from the Grateful Dead and Bob Dylan to Keb Mo, Olabelle and Resurrection Band. He died of a heart attack on his way to a performance.[47]

Available space has become so limited at the cemetery that new graves are primarily obtained from repurchases from existing plot owners. As the owner/operators have put it: “The Rockville Cemetery is almost full.” As a result, the corporation merged its management with two other cemeteries: Plain Lawn Cemetery in Hicksville and Springfield Cemetery in Springfield Gardens, Queens. Economies of scale help make the merger work financially. The cemetery operators have, under New York State Cemetery Trust regulations, accumulated a fund of well over one million dollars from past burial fees for ongoing maintenance of the Rockville Cemetery.

During the past 20 years, interest in the history of the Rockville Cemetery and Mariners Burying Ground has dramatically increased. This was accomplished in part through the publication of four books: *The History of Lynbrook*, *The History of East Rockaway*, *The History of Rockville Centre*, and *Water and Ice: The Tragic Wrecks of the Bristol and the Mexico*.[48]. Equally important has been the formation of the Historical Society of East Rockaway and Lynbrook (HSERL). This group has offered numerous history programs in the Rockville Cemetery and in the Lynbrook Public Library. Interest on the part of Irish American organizations such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Gaelic Society of St Agnes Cathedral (Rockville Centre) has also grown.

[46] “Rockville Cemetery,” *Find-A-Grave*. <http://www.findagrave.com/php/famous.php?page=cem&FScemeteryid=65842>.
[47] “Rockville Cemetery,” *Find-A-Grave*.
[48] Mattson, *Water and Ice*; Mattson, *Lynbrook*; Sympson, *East Rockaway*; Nunes, *Rockville Centre*.

In recent years, an annual ceremony has been held at the Bristol and Mexico Monument that is attended by dozens of historically-minded residents, public figures, and Irish-American groups. This year, 2015, marks the 175th anniversary of the erection of the *Bristol and Mexico Monument*. Over 100 people are expected. In addition, a Lynbrook-TV series, *A few Moments of Lynbrook History,* has been developed and is regularly shown with separate segments that cover the Rockville Cemetery, the Mariners Burying Ground, and the History of Near Rockaway. Finally, re-enactment programs and docent-led visits to the cemetery are conducted for local school programs and the general public. These programs emphasize the importance of the Rockville Cemetery to local and U.S. history.

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South Side Observer, December 23, 1898.
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"Two Awful Shipwrecks," *New York Sun*, January 12, 1837.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
____previously listed in the National Register
____previously determined eligible by the National Register

Primary location of additional data:

____State Historic Preservation Office
____Other State agency
____Federal agency
____Local government

Rockville Cemetery & Bristol and Mexico Monument
Name of Property

Nassau County, NY
County and State

____designated a National Historic Landmark
____recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_____
____recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
____recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

____University
____Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 13.23
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18	613476	4501942	3	18	613213	4501718
2	18	613501	4501807	4	18	613228	4501908

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

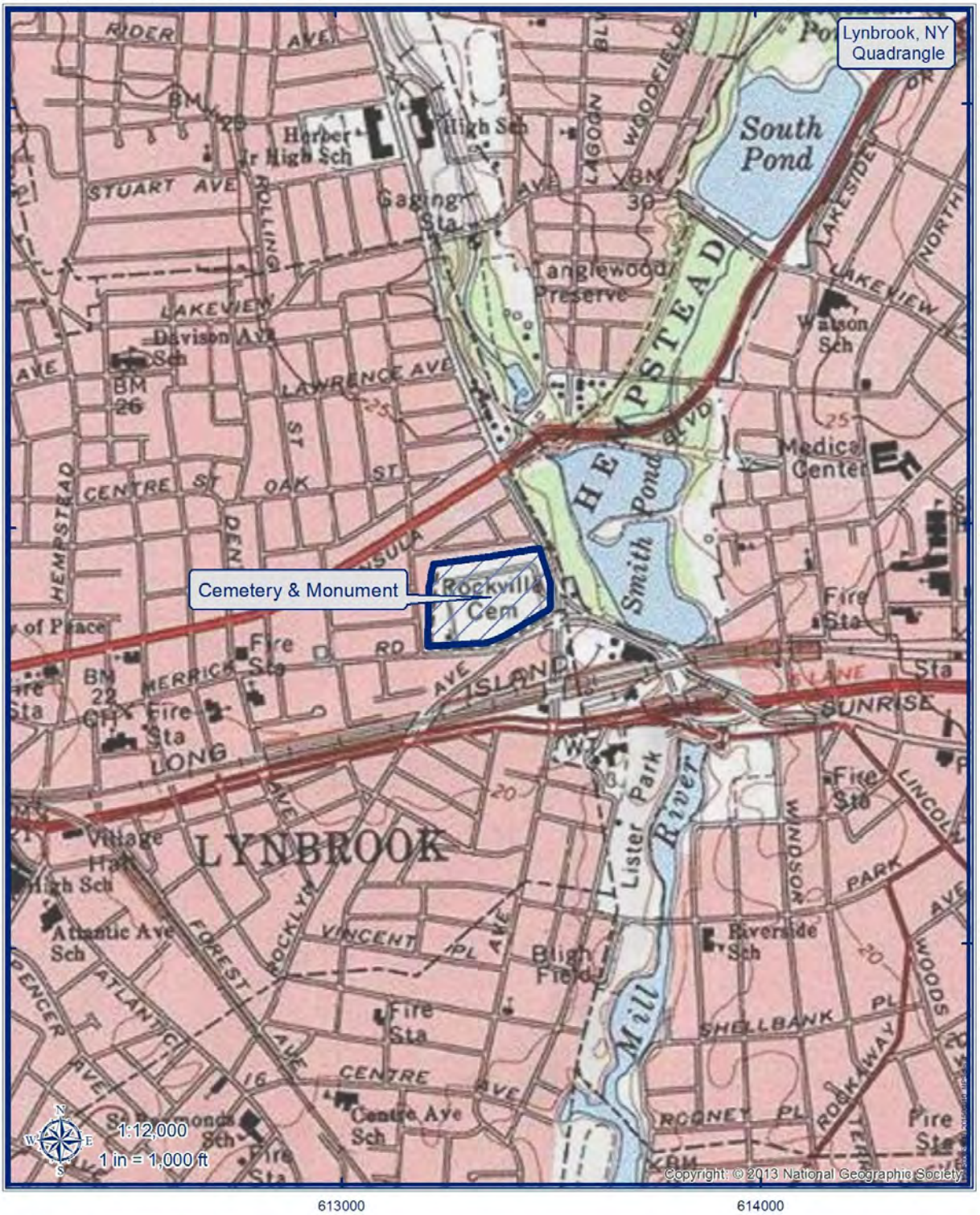
The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary was drawn to include the parcel historically associated with the Rockville Cemetery.

Rockville Cemetery & Mariner's Monument
Hempstead, Nassau Co., NY

45 Merrick Rd.
Lynbrook, NY 11563



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter

Feet
0 330 660 1,320

Cem. & Monument

NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Point	Easting	Northing
1	613476	4501942
2	613502	4501866
3	613501	4501807
4	613355	4501729
5	613213	401718
6	613228	4501908

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter

0 110 220 440 Feet

Cem. & Monument

NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Art Mattson, Lynbrook Historian (edited by Jennifer Betsworth, NY SHPO)

organization _____ date June 2015

street & number 28 Hart Street telephone _____

city or town Lynbrook state NY zip code 11563

e-mail LYNHISTORY@aol.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

  A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Rockville Cemetery and Bristol and Mexico Monument

City or Vicinity: Lynbrook

County: Nassau State: NY

Photographer: Jennifer Betsworth

Date Photographed: May 12, 2015

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

NY_Nassau Co_Rockville Cemetery_0001
Rockville Cemetery, facing southwest

NY_Nassau Co_Rockville Cemetery_0002
Rockville Cemetery, facing northwest

NY_Nassau Co_Rockville Cemetery_0003
Rockville Cemetery, facing east

NY_Nassau Co_Rockville Cemetery_0004
Rockville Cemetery, facing west

NY_Nassau Co_Rockville Cemetery_0005
Rockville Cemetery, historic church location, facing southeast

NY_Nassau Co_Rockville Cemetery_0006
Rockville Cemetery, facing northwest

NY_Nassau Co_Rockville Cemetery_0007
Rockville Cemetery, facing west

NY_Nassau Co_Rockville Cemetery_0008
Rockville Cemetery, Bristol and Mexico monument, facing northeast

NY_Nassau Co_Rockville Cemetery_0009
Rockville Cemetery, Bristol and Mexico monument, detail, facing northeast

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Robert Guerriero (Rockville Cemetery, Inc.)

street & number 45 Merrick Road telephone

city or town Lynbrook state NY zip code 11563

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

RIDER

BRAITHWAITE
DE ABREU

ABRAMS
MILO ABRAMS
1855 — 1906
OSCAR ABRAMS
1884 — 1891
SARAH J. MOTT
1841 — 1906
HORTON
WILLIAM BOND
1852 — 1919
PHEBE ANN BOND
1850 — 1926
LONG BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

WICHT

JORGE
BROWN
WHEELER
FURMAN PEARSALL JR.
OCT. 28. 1880 — NOV. 15. 1908
1877 GERTRUDE 1972
1888 WRIGHT 1958
CHILDREN OF
1854 EDWIN F. PEARSALL 1938
AND
1856 MARY T. PEARSALL
THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD I SHALL NOT WANT
ROBERTSON
BELOVED MOTHER AND GRANDMOTHER
OLA ELIZABETH

IN
MEMORY OF
AMELIA
WIFE OF
ZECHARIAH ABRAMS
BORN
AUG. 15. 1803.
DIED
AUG. 16. 1880.
IN
MEMORY OF
ZECHARIAH ABRAMS
BORN
SEPT. 8. 1799.
DIED
APRIL 21. 1876.

1868
FATHER
MOTHER
ALEXANDER DAVISON
DIED
AMELIA DAVISON
DIED
JANUARY 11TH 1868
DAVISON

P. Hill
The Inhabitants of the County
Impelled by A generous sensibility
have Purchased thirty feet front and rear
of this yard and set it apart exclusively
as a Mariners Burying Ground.