

# Bedford pushes to preserve gravestones

## ◆ Important history:

Non-profit group raising money to provide extra care for town cemeteries.

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**BEDFORD** — A group of Bedford residents are working hard to piece together parts of the town's history

Added to that financial challenge is the aftermath of this winter's windstorm, which toppled 20 trees in Bedford's cemeteries, damaging 30 gravestones. Wood said it will cost an estimated \$10,000 to fix the markers.

But neither the economy nor the windstorm have discouraged the group. Last week, the Friends hired local preservationist Kai Nalenz to fix the gravestone of John Goffe, one of Bedford's founding fathers. Nalenz used a special crane, clamps and epoxy to piece the 224-year-old stone back together.

"It has to be done by somebody like this — he's a conservator. He has special equipment like this crane to lift it up and all the clamps and he knows how to do it," said Wood, who watched Nalenz reassemble the heavy slate monument. "We could go out with Elmer's glue and put it back together, but it wouldn't stay, right? He's got a special adhesive that he uses."

Given the Friends' commitment to preserving Bedford's history, Goffe's gravestone was a meaningful starting point. One of the first area settlers, Goffe moved to Bedford in 1744, building a cabin and gristmill near what is now Citizen's Bank on South River Road. A renowned military leader who served as a captain in the French and Indian War, Goffe petitioned the governor to incorporate Bedford in 1750. He died in 1786, and is buried at the Old Bedford Cemetery on Back River Road.

For the past 20 years, Wood said, Goffe's gravestone has lain shattered on the grass. But that all changed last week when Nalenz used his crane and epoxy to graft the stone's long-separated halves back together. Nalenz, who owns Bedford's Gravestone Services

— one gravestone at a time.

Ravaged by weather, time and vandalism, a number of the town's historic gravestones — some dating to the early 18th century — have tumbled, corroded or split into pieces. This spring, the Friends of the Town of Bedford Cemeteries are working to rebuild that shattered past.

"Maybe somebody hit it with a baseball bat, vandalism — you don't know what caused that," said John

Wood, one of the group's founders and a Bedford Cemeteries Trustee. "But it's got to be fixed right, and that's what we're trying to do."

Formed last year, the non-profit organization is raising money to provide extra care for the town's cemeteries, which aren't considered funding priorities with local municipalities short of money all around.



Using an epoxy and specialized tools, a local conservator last week repaired the gravestone of John Goffe, founder of Bedford. Goffe's gravestone broke into pieces 20 years ago. Goffe, buried in the Old Bedford Cemetery, died in 1786.

of New England, said fixing the old gravestones takes patience and special training.

"Modern stones are mostly granite — with the old stones we have sandstone, slate, marble, schist and limestone," Nalenz said. "I am actually trained in applying a special restoration mortar for missing pieces, and each mortar is for a certain type of stone. It just takes a lot of experience with historic markers to make sure that they're repaired properly."

Wood said a descendant of Goffe contributed to the \$350

cost of fixing her ancestor's gravestone. That descendant, a woman from Alaska, first found out about Goffe's gravestone from the Bedford Cemetery Trustees' new Web site, which posts data on the town's 3,000 burial plots.

The Web site is part of a comprehensive effort launched by Wood and others to make people aware that cemeteries are some of the town's most vital historical resources. On May 8, the Friends will bring that history alive with a tour of the Bedford Cemetery at

12:30 p.m. and the Old Bedford Cemetery at 2:00 p.m.

Wood said he hopes educational efforts will convince more people to help maintain some of the town's most important — but overlooked — monuments.

"There's a lot of interest in having this done," Wood said. "It's a shame to leave something like that broken when it's somebody so important to this town."

For more on Bedford's cemeteries, visit [www.bedfordcemeteries.org](http://www.bedfordcemeteries.org)