



Wilson's Winter Waiting Room

by Dwight "Harry" Harrington, Cemetery Commissioner

On Saturday, the 10th of February, 1923, a note appeared in the Barre Daily Times under the heading of "Talk of the Town." The note told readers of a display window at the B. W. Hooker and Company store where they would see a "water color sketch" of the vault proposed for the Wilson Cemetery up on the "hill." This gave the voters of the town the chance to view the proposed structure before they voted on whether or not to fund it when they came together at Town Meeting in March of that year. Voters had discussed building a vault during the town meeting of 1922, but no real indication could be found in the newspaper as to the results of those talks. Prior to the 1922 debate, the same notice about the water color sketch in Hooker's window appeared in the paper in time for that town meeting. The voters would have similar discussions concerning the vault at their meeting in 1923.

The voters met on March 6th, 1923 gathering in East Barre. As the question came up about funding the vault project, the vote turned out to be a unanimous "yes." The aforementioned original colored sketch showed a brick structure trimmed out with granite. The voters had another vision in mind and opted to build the vault out of granite, the material that had meant so much to the town over the years and had brought much prosperity to the area. Dr. E. H. Bailey made the motion to utilize granite and the motion passed without a single negative vote. Oh ... one more thing; the voters specified the project should be a union job.

The proposed facility would be large enough to host forty or fifty occupants and the cost to build the structure estimated at around \$6,000. The price tag would come with a tax rate of an additional seven cents on the dollar out of a total tax rate of \$3.62. Voters authorized the selectmen and the cemetery commissioners to move forward with a contract.

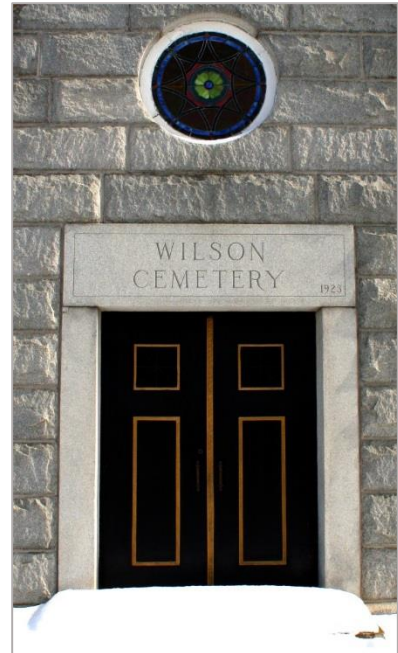
It can be assumed the towns in Vermont did not bury the deceased during the winter, back before they had heavy duty equipment that could break through the ground frost. A winter waiting room would be necessary for storage as it would be difficult for a family to store a coffin or casket at home until the cemeteries opened up. In our more modern times, cremation urns can be stored at home and there are other commercial options available for caskets and coffins. On April 23rd, 1923, the Barre Daily Times ran a news note that addressed the issue of sharing space in a vault as not every cemetery had one. The Times noted there had been ten bodies stored in the vault at the Cherry Hill Cemetery in Bethel that year, but only two of them would be interred in that particular cemetery. The news note also stated they had buried fewer people that winter due to the extra depth of snow making it more difficult to find the proper grave location as well as creating extra problems in having to shovel suitable roads into the cemetery. Yet another article had suggested the Wilson vault would replace the one at Elmwood Cemetery in Barre City.

Armed with the permission of the voters and having a definite plan in mind and on paper for the vault, the project appeared in the newspaper for several days as an ad, "Notice to Contractors." Cemetery commission chair Wilbur F. Shepard put the project out to bid. He asked for sealed proposals to build the vault and stated plans and specifications could be reviewed at the office of E. H. Nerney, the town clerk. The bids had to be in before May 12, 1923 at ten a.m. Shepard reserved the right for the commission to reject any and all bids. The Barre Town report for the year ending February 1, 1924 showed the town paid the Barre Daily Times a sum of \$3.15 for the bid advertisements.

The Wilson vault sits on a portion of the grounds purchased in 1888 from Phineas Thompson as an addition to the original cemetery. Although not written in the style of a more modern deed description, the parcel Thompson sold lay adjacent to the Wilson Cemetery, so-called, and to the west. The deed referenced what are now Quarry Hill Road and the Websterville Road. That land eventually became Sections A through E of Wilson Cemetery. Deed Book 25, Page 66 contains the warranty deed for the property, the town paid Thompson \$324 for the two acre parcel on 18 Aug 1888. Phineas' daughter, Helen Thompson Cutler, inherited land from her father, some adjacent to the parcel he had previously sold to the town for the cemetery. In 1921, the administrator of Helen's estate sold some of her land to the town to be used for the cemetery, her parcel became Sections G and Main. The Thompsons and the Cutlers are buried in Wilson's Old Yard 4 section.

No plans could be found, so how do we tell what the taxpayers got for their money? The outside is easy enough, a little time spent inside with a camera and a tape measure can answer some of the other questions. Overall, the outside of the building is about 19 feet wide and 25 foot deep. The granite blocks measure approximately 70 inches long by 14 inches tall. The gable ends of the structure are finished off with granite covered with metal, the main roof is made up of slate, and the eaves trimmed with wood.

Once you get inside the double steel doors, the dimensions are 17 feet wide and 23 feet deep. With that in mind, and the fact the inside is lined with common brick, the granite blocks on the outside may be about 9 inches in width. Running from front to back, there is a "ceiling"

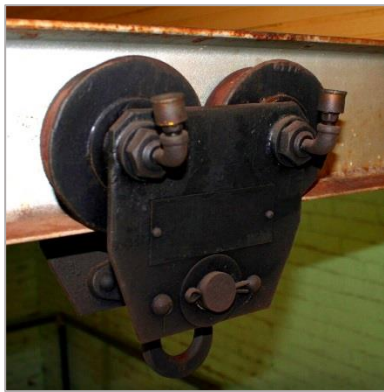


Entrance to the winter waiting room, in 2023, with its welcome mat made out of snow.



covered with bead board, 33 inches wide on each side, and 11 feet 8 inches above the floor. These two areas act as shoulders for the ceiling that then arches up from each side into a vaulted ceiling, also covered with bead board. There are two stabilizer rods spanning the arch at the shoulders to help hold things together. The gable walls on the ends each holds a stained glass window. The bottom point of the 36 inch round windows is about ten and a half feet above the concrete floor and the arched portion of the ceiling reaches 16 feet 8 inches from the floor.

As you enter the structure, you will find a pipe rack on each side of the door, these two are joined together at the top a bit higher up than the height of the door. Each side has a rack that runs five feet into the building, and 5 feet 10 inches parallel to the front wall. Other than bolts into the floor, the racks are free standing and made out of black steel pipe joined together with threading fittings. There is no way to tell if the pipe racks are part of the original construction.



Looking back towards the entry door, the 33 inch wide shoulder at the ceiling can be seen as well as the arched ceiling. The stabilizer rod spans the interior.

The next feature inside the vault is an overhead crane. Set on 2 x 6s, there is an overhead steel "I" beam with a flange of 3-1/4 inches and a total height of 6-1/4 inches. Stamped in a few locations on the web is the word "Bethlehem" so we know where the steel came from. This beam spans the entire width of the room, from left to right as you stand in the doorway. The old crane had a head with four, steel wheels. There are abandoned pipe fittings on the crane head suggesting hydraulics – maybe. At the bottom of the head, below the beam, is a fold down eye-hook to attach some kind of a strap to. Again, this may or may not be original.

At the far end of the room is another pipe rack, this one offset from the back wall by two feet. It spans the entire room and in addition to floor mounts, the pipes dead end into 2 x 6s attached to the brick. In days gone by, a heavy, green curtain hung from a heavy curtain rod. Remnants of the curtain still remain, but there are many holes in it. The green curtain matches the green paint used throughout the room. The ceiling, including the arch, has been painted beige. Although there is no heating or electrical, there is a floor drain in the far left corner.

There are two, stained glass windows in the structure, the most colorful and ornate located at the main entrance. The other is set in the back wall and the center square opens up to provide a bit of ventilation. An inspection of the glass above the door did not reveal any information about who created it. The center features a four petal green flower surrounded by an eight-point blue star. At the 12 – 3 – 6 – 9 o'clock positions, there are red diamonds, and in the other four positions there are pink or purple flower buds. So far, the window seems to be in reasonable condition, but the frame is showing its age. The window shown here at the right is above the entry doorway.



The window at the rear is much more plain and shown here with the center square open for ventilation. On the outside of the window is an ornate metal scrollwork apparently made to discourage the entry of birds into the open window and a closer inspection reveals some “chicken wire” over the opening as well.

The contract to build the vault went to a Barre City contractor, A. B. Lane. A search at Barre Town for the 100-year old details of construction did not turn up any residual plans and specs. A. B. Lane, lived in Barre City and had work crews on many jobs throughout the region. His company did work for private businesses such as stores, and public buildings as well. When Adolph Buch Lane filled out his World War 1 draft card, he listed his occupation as a self-employed contractor and builder in Barre, and gave his address as 38 Highland Avenue. The 1920 census had much the same information, the family living in the Lane household included A. B., his wife Carrie, three sons, a daughter, and Carrie’s parents, William and Laura Glidden. Not much information could be found concerning Lane’s company, but the 1924 Barre directory listed him as president of the Nelson Lumber Company and the Crystal Spring Water Company, and gave his home address on Highland Avenue. Lane did not advertise in the business section of the 1924 directory nor many of the subsequent years, either. A sample ad could be found in the 1940 directory when he purchased a quarter page ad which read, “A. B. LANE, General Contractor, 38 Highland Ave., Tel. 167, Barre, VT.”



As mentioned above, the cost of the granite vault had been set at \$6,000. Without the old contract documents, it is not possible to see the amount Lane actually bid the job for. We do, however, know what he got paid to do the job as the town report of 1924 also had a listing of cemetery expenses for labor and materials for work done in Wilson Cemetery, including money paid for the vault. Lane received three separate orders drawn on the cemetery account for his work. Unfortunately, the orders shown in the report do not have dates associated with the entries. Lane first received \$1,000, then \$2,000, and finally another \$2,000. Town Clerk Nerney made an entry in another section of the report showing a donation by Charles Wilson of \$1,000, to be applied to the vault construction, the donation made on July 19th, 1923. The final order made out to A. B. Lane can be found in the report for the year ending February 2, 1925 when Lane received \$850. The remark accompanying the amount identified it as the “balance of the Vault contract.”

Sometimes, when you read a document that includes the names of some of the major players involved, it can be interesting to know what happened to them. With that in mind, four of the people closely associated with the vault and/or its construction, are here, starring in:

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO ...?

The Local Contractor:

A. B. Lane: Local contractor, was born in 1877 and raised in Barre. Lane graduated from Dartmouth College in 1901 and began working with his father in the contracting business. Some of his work in Barre includes Lincoln School, the Masonic Temple, and granite sheds; in other locations, he worked on an armory and a residence hall at Norwich University, an addition to the State House, and a bridge between Williston and Essex. Lane also gave back to the community and took an active interest in young people and their education. He had a great interest in the welfare of those who worked for him. His educational pursuits included his service as a trustee for the Goddard Seminary and the Dartmouth alumni association. Lane also served as a trustee for the Universalist Church in Barre. A. B. Lane died in March of 1942 and the Lane and Glidden families are still together sharing a family plot and family headstone in the Elmwood Cemetery in Barre.

The Barre Town Clerk:

Eugene H. Nerney: Mr. Nerney passed away on March 12, 1945 in Barre Town. An interesting item from the index card that recorded his passing, under contributing causes, showed he died "Due to Over Work, Found dead in Town Clerk's Office." Born in Moretown in 1879, Nerney came to Graniteville where he worked in a store. He eventually purchased the Websterville General Store. His building also housed the post office, the town clerk's office, and his apartment. Nerney died in his office and the post mistress found him when opening the post office for the day. As he died in the late winter, Mr. Nerney had the opportunity to use the facilities at the Wilson Winter Waiting Room. None of the articles about him included the location of his burial, but as a former treasurer of the St. Sylvester Cemetery and a member of that church, he is probably buried near the large cross at that cemetery's entrance. Mr. Nerney never married but may have relatives also buried nearby in St. Sylvester Cemetery.

The Cemetery Commission Chair:

Wilbur F. Shepard: Born in Barre in 1848, Shepard became a lifelong public servant. He owned a farm in Barre Town but also served as an officer of the law, as a deputy sheriff, and the overseer of the poor. His obituary did not mention the cemetery commission. Towards the end of his life, he moved out to California to be with his son. In September of 1924, Mrs. Shepard received a call for her to go to California as Wilbur had become ill. He passed away on January 30, 1925, but rather than coming back to the Wilson Winter Waiting Room he had played a major part in creating and where it was undoubtedly cold, Wilbur went into a vault in Whittier, California to await his burial. Mr. Shepard arrived back in Barre on May 29, 1925 and was buried at Wilson Cemetery in his parent's lot in the Old Yard 3 section. His grave is in the Hiram Shepard lot along with a stone for his wife, Ida Witham, and another for his son, John B. Shepard. Nearby is Ida Wood, Wilbur's first wife.

The First to Wait:

John Gall: In the December 27, 1923 Barre Daily Times, an article reported that John Gall had not been feeling well for a few weeks and nothing had changed when he retired for the night on the 26th. However, at about 1 a.m. on the 27th, Mr. Gall became critically ill and passed away a half hour later. Officials listed the cause of death as a heart attack. Born in Scotland circa 1861, Gall came to Barre around 1888 and worked in the granite industry for some 35 years, and at one time, as a co-owner of the old Excelsior Quarry. Gall had been traveling in Canada a few weeks before his death, but had returned to Barre due to his ill health. He left behind a wife, Jeanette (Saint) Gall, and a son Charles Gall, living in Ohio.

The Barre Daily Times described the funeral of John Gall of Websterville in its January 2, 1924 edition. Gall had his funeral in the home where he had lived. That Sunday afternoon, the event filled the house with his many friends and relatives as well as delegations from the fraternal organizations he belonged to. As a respected quarryman, his funeral brought superintendents from a number of quarries in the area. At the conclusion of the funeral, the delegations from the various fraternal organizations escorted Mr. Gall to Wilson Cemetery where *"the body was placed in the new vault at the Wilson Cemetery, the first one to be placed there."* What the funeral notice didn't mention, however, the Gall family plot is in Elmwood Cemetery in Barre City. Isn't that where the vault the newspaper suggested the Wilson vault would replace is located? Gall probably went to the Wilson vault as he had his funeral and his home in Websterville, and it was easier to get him there in the winter.

Acknowledgements: special thanks to Town Clerk Tina Lunt and former Town Clerk Donna Keltly for their sifting down through the town records in search of references to the vault and its construction. Thanks to sexton Dwight Coffrin, who knew a guy who knew a guy that could get me inside the vault without my having to, you know ..., first.

Photo page

Outside The Winter Waiting Room; 100 years later.



Above: two other winter views and a detail of the roof of the building. The gable ends are finished off with similar sized granite blocks but with the smooth, steeled finish. There is metal on this granite, the roof is slate, and the molding trim is painted wood.

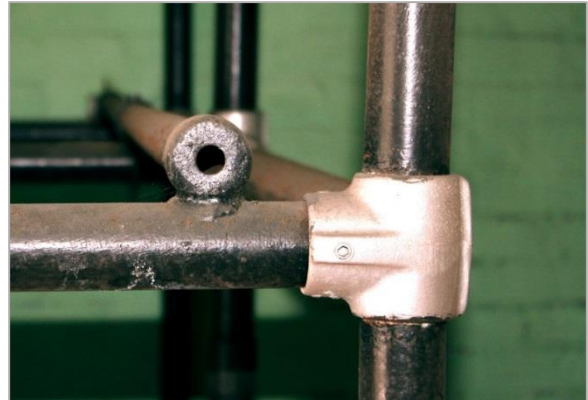


Above: the other three seasons of the Waiting Room; the rear in the spring, and the front in the summer and in the fall.

Photo page
The Rack Systems.



Above: This style of pipe rack is on both sides of the entry door but the two are joined together at the top just above the height of the door. The racks are offset from the wall to ensure the caskets are properly supported at both ends.



Above: The pipe racks at the entry door appear "newer" than the one on the back wall and have a different style of joinery holding the pipes together. The Allen screw was patented in 1910, so that's no help to date the work, but the connector pieces suggest something newer than what might be found in the 20s.



Above: at the back wall, there is another pipe rack system, this one may be a bit older than those at the front door. Offset from the back wall, the pipes dead end into 2 x 6s attached to the interior brick work at the sides. The rack is made of the same one inch or so threaded black steel pipe. Upper right: a detail photo of a two piece pipe connection that clamps around the lower pipe and allows for two perpendicular pipes to lay on top. Lower right: a detail photo of the bottom of the rack section with the two piece connector laying on the floor and including the perpendicular piping. The threading of the steel pipe is clearly visible, but there is no indication whether the vertical piping is connected into the floor or is free standing.

