

# Collaboration Saves Blake Cemetery

The New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR) was made aware in May in 2020 that erosion along the banks of the Upper Ammonoosuc River has undermined and cut into Blake Cemetery. Our NHDHR staff visited the cemetery, observed the erosion, and collaborated with the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department's dive team to recover coffin hardware and grave markers from within the river below.



In the weeks that followed, the NHDHR and the New Hampshire Department of Justice's Charitable Trusts Division advised Town of Stark Officials of their statutory duty to maintain Blake Cemetery under RSA 289:4. The NHDHR also offered technical assistance to the Stark Board of Selectman and the Town Cemetery Board of Trustees.

During several discussions with Town Officials, it was made clear that the NHDHR prefers human remains be preserved in place whenever possible. However, when preservation in place is not possible, as was the case with the Blake Cemetery, it is recommended that a professional archaeologist specializing in human remains recovery be contracted to carefully map and excavate the human remains and all associated grave goods and markers. In such cases, the professional archaeologist will hold the remains and associated grave goods and markers in a secure location until a new burial location is identified in consultation with the local authorities and the NHDHR.



Based on the guidance provided by the NHDHR, Town of Stark Officials appropriated funds and hired Independent Archaeological Consulting, LLC (IAC) and Bryant Funeral Homes. The Town also identified a suitable section in the Emerson Road Cemetery, not far from the Blake Cemetery, in which the recovered remains and grave goods could be reburied.

In late September, IAC began the process of carefully mapping and excavating the human remains and associated grave goods and markers at Blake Cemetery. Our NHDHR staff were onsite for one week of the burial recovery process to observe, assist, and gain hands on experience working with a burial recovery specialist. The burial recovery project has proceeded very smoothly to date and is anticipated to be complete by the middle of October 2020.

The project has been an exemplary example of cooperation among state agencies, local authorities, and privately owned organizations. The NHDHR is thankful to all those who collaborated to ensure the burial recovery was one that respected and honored those that were originally laid to rest in the Blake Cemetery.