



# The Grove

*Celebrating 160 Years!*

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## **Birthday Celebration!**



On February 22nd, community members, board members and employees of Oak Grove Cemetery celebrated its 160th anniversary with a sprucing up! Coffee, danish, and other goodies were offered to the many friends of Oak Grove who gathered to clear the grounds. Thank you to everyone who helped!!



## **GREETINGS!**

Thank you for reading this issue of "The Grove"!

We want to keep in touch with the community and share information about what makes Oak Grove Cemetery so special.

Oak Grove is the oldest operating cemetery in Hammonton, founded February 22, 1860.



## Office Hours

*Office hours have been temporarily suspended in taking precautions against the spread of the coronavirus*

*Emails, phone messages and Facebook messages are checked frequently.*



## Oak Grove Staff

**Robyn Berenato**  
*Administrator  
Licensed Salesperson*

**Lou Santanello**  
*Groundskeeper*

**Joseph F. Berenato**  
*Seasonal Groundskeeper*

## The Salem Oak

Once upon a time, there was great forest that covered Salem County, NJ.



*Courtesy of visitsalemnj.com (2016)*

In 1675, under the branches of one of those trees, a Quaker named John Fenwick brokered a treaty with the local Lenni Lenape tribe. That tree would come to be known as the Salem Oak.

The tree stood within the boundaries of the Friends Burial Ground offering shade to the residents there (including Betsy Ross's father). It's the symbol of Salem Community College and a tangible piece of history that predated the founding of this country.

In 2016, it was determined that the Salem Oak was New Jersey's largest white oak tree. After standing for an estimated 500-600 years, it came down on the evening of June 6, 2019. Miraculously, none of the stones were damaged in the felled branches.

This past November, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) announced that every town

in New Jersey would be gifted a seedling from this mighty oak. After hearing this news from a town council meeting, I decided that Oak Grove Cemetery needed to "throw their hat into the ring" (as they say) in vying to be the chosen spot for the seedling.

Two weeks of furious reading, research, writing, erasing, and editing furnished a two page proposal for the Environmental Commission via Mr. Daniel Bachalis for consideration along with 5 other sites.

The proposal was reviewed and accepted. The recommendation of the Commission was taken to the Town of Hammonton Council meeting in April.

Presented by Mr. Jonathan Oliva to town council, Oak Grove Cemetery was voted to be the approved site of the Oak Grove seedling!

Although the project has been put on hold, the exact location of the tree is still being determined to ensure maximum growth potential.

Thank you to Mr. Bachalis and the entire Hammonton Environmental Commission, along with Mr. Oliva and town council for this honor.

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## Community Q & A

**Q:** It can be difficult to find information about some people who were buried in the late 1800s and early 1900s, but not others. What is the difference?

**A:** There are many reasons as to why this is, but I'll share one of the scenarios I have encountered researching cemeteries in Hammonton and the surrounding areas.

There was actually a time when you could simply bury your own loved one. Rural churches shared a single minister who preached on a schedule of churches. If someone passed away and it would be awhile before the minister came back, the family would bury them on their own and have services when the minister returned to town.

The time that elapsed could be a month or more. Therefore, some of these burials did not get recorded officially until months later. This leads to incorrect dates of death being recorded.

Stones, although much simpler, were still very expensive. It is not uncommon for dates of birth or death to be incorrect on the stone because this information would have been added so much later. In New Jersey, state reporting for birth, death and marriage didn't begin until 1848.

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## Meet a Resident - Mary Montgomery Passmore Watkis

Eighty-nine years ago today, we learned that Mrs. Mary Watkis passed at home on April 29, 1931. She was born October 9, 1854, but it could not be confirmed if she was born in the Hammonton area.

Her parents, Reverend William Passmore and Elizabeth M. Newell were married in Trenton in 1852. Mary was an only child (information that she had an older sister who died prior to her birth hasn't been confirmed), and lived a relatively quiet life in Mullica/Hammonton.

Her lineage is pretty impressive as her paternal grandfather, John Passmore, was the first mayor of Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

A recent reading by the Reverend titled "The Rascalities of High Railroad Officials" written in 1889 gave pause. On page 66, he states, "...That my daughter also did not often go away from home, and that she might, at any time, marry and go away to live somewhere else..."

Unbeknownst to everyone but the Reverend, this was unlikely to happen. Mary Passmore was quite enamoured with a scholarly gentlemen by the name of James Watkis from New York. For whatever reason, Rev. Passmore did not approve of the match and denied his blessing for Mary to marry him.

As such, she remained engaged for fifteen years, not daring to disobey her father. The Reverend passed away on January 9, 1896 and the couple married on February 4th of that same year. Mary's mother was still alive at the time, but it is not known whether or not she approved.

Not much is known of Mary during her married life. She lived on Central Ave with her husband and his partner, George Nicholson. There are many articles regarding Mr. Watkis and his community involvement alongside Mr. Nicholson. Yet none of them mentioned the woman who waited fifteen years to be his wife.

Census records also show that they did not have children, which is understandable due to Mary being a first time bride at the age of 41.

Mary was buried on May 2, 1931 without much fanfare. She is in an unmarked grave, next to her mother (who is also unmarked). She can be found about 6 feet from her father, has a massive stone topped with a cross.

A wedding which caused somewhat of a sensation at Hammonton occurred Tuesday night in the Episcopal Church, when J. E. Watkis and Miss Mary Passmore were married. The church was beautifully decorated, and there were many villagers present. The couple had been engaged to be married for fifteen years, but owing to the opposition on the part of Miss Passmore's father, the wedding did not occur before. Passmore died a few weeks ago, and then it was decided that the couple would be married. Mr. Watkis is a wealthy farmer. Miss Passmore's family are also well-to-do.

Morning Post, Thursday Feb 6, 1896 (Pg 1)

**MRS. MARY PASSMORE WATKIS**  
Hammonton, May 1.—Mrs. Mary Passmore Watkis, wife of J. E. Watkis, died Wednesday at her home on Central avenue. Private funeral services will be held on Saturday at the home.

Courier-Post, Friday May 1, 1931 (Pg 4)

518 RECORD AND BILL OF ITEMS FOR THE FUNERAL OF

Family No. 244  
Name of Deceased *Mrs. M. P. Watkis* With or Widow of *J. E. Watkis* Single or Wid.  *Wid.*  
Residence *Central Ave* City *Hammonton* State *N. J.* Date of Birth *Oct 9 1854* Age *76* Years *10* Months *10* Days *10* Married  *Y*  
Place of Birth *Delaware* Occupation *Farmer* Her Birthplace *Delaware*  
Maiden Name *Mary M. Passmore* Her Birthplace *Delaware*  
Name of Father *Wm. Passmore* Her Birthplace *Delaware*  
Maiden Name of Mother *Elizabeth M. Newell* Her Birthplace *Delaware*  
Cause of Death *Primary* *Stroke* Secondary *Stroke*  
Certifying Physician *G. P. Smith* Residence *Hammonton*  
Place of Burial *Central Ave* Cemetery *St. James* Put in the Diagram and mark location of every grave in it. And mark the burial with double dagger (†) if it is a double grave.  
Funeral Service at *St. James* Lot No. *152* Section No. *152*  
Place of Service *St. James* Grave No. *152*  
Date of Interment *May 2nd* Section *152*

Gasket or Coffin No. <i>152</i>	75.00	Caskets	
Shroud		Gloves	
Lining and Pillow Set No.		Bowers or Purpurs	
Handle		Hearse to <i>St. James</i>	10.00
Place <i>Mrs. M. P. Watkis 1854</i>	18.00	Removal	
Outside Box of Vials <i>None</i>		Automobile	
Burial Suit		Newspaper Notices	
Slippers			
Embalming <i>See Order</i>	30.00		
Washing and Dresting			
Shaving			
Services		Transportation Charges	
Use of Chair		Officiating Clergyman <i>Rev. Clipp</i>	1.68.00
Church Charges	20.00	Amount of Bill	
Cemetery Charges		Goods Ordered by	
Music	5.00	Bill Charged to	
Flowers	12.00		
DR. <i>Mrs. L. A. Clark</i>			
<i>1 Bal.</i>	58.00	<i>4/11/31</i>	<i>By check</i> 1.05.00
<i>10 35</i>	10.35	<i>4/17</i>	<i>en. change. Book</i> 1.00.00
<i>4/21-32 Balance</i>	47.65		

Interment details courtesy of Mike Carnesale

James (along with his partner, George) is marked in a grave about 12 feet away from the Passmore family, is if to forever acknowledge his father-in-law's dislike for him.