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► **James D. Latham** has been president of the Proprietors of Lowell Cemetery Board since 2010, and a member since 1978. He was formerly general counsel at the Sheraton Corp.

► **Lowell Cemetery**, Lowell, Massachusetts, was founded by a group of prominent Lowell citizens as a private, non-sectarian, nonprofit cemetery corporation. They bought land from Oliver M. Whipple to start the cemetery, which has acquired additional land over the years and now encompasses 85 acres. Whipple, for whom the new cremation garden is named, was the cemetery's first president, serving for 27 years.

► Modeled after Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the nation's first garden cemetery, Lowell Cemetery was dedicated on June 20, 1841, and is celebrating its 175th anniversary this year. The cemetery was included on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998. It includes almost 17,700 interments.

[www.lowellcemetery.com](http://www.lowellcemetery.com)

## CREMATION

How can you 'wow' cremation families while honoring the traditional landscape of a 175-year-old New England cemetery? That was the challenge facing the trustees of Lowell Cemetery.



**Speakers at the dedication for the O.M. Whipple Columbarium & Garden of Remembrance at Lowell Cemetery, from left, project architect William R. Walsh, Walsh Engineering Associates; Lowell Mayor Rodney M. Elliott; President of the Lowell Cemetery Board of Trustees James D. Latham; Congresswoman Nicki Tsongas; State Sen. Eileen M. Donoghue; and ICCFA Immediate Past President Fred Lappin, CCE, president and CEO of Sharon Memorial Park, Sharon, Massachusetts, and Knollwood Memorial Park, Canton, Massachusetts.**

# Adding a 'wow' cremation area that fits into a historic cemetery

**W**ith the unveiling of the O.M. Whipple Columbarium & Garden of Remembrance, Historic Lowell Cemetery has transformed itself from a cemetery with no dedicated cremation areas to a cemetery offering premier cremation memorialization.

Until recently, those who chose cremation were buried in lots that had been developed for traditional casketed interment. Lowell did allow two cremation urns to be buried per lot, but cremation interment basically was traditional burial.

Now, cremation families have an option specifically created for them, a section that combines cutting-edge inurnment in a unique curved-granite columbarium with design that fits into the historic grounds of a cemetery founded in 1841 and therefore celebrating its 175th anniversary this year.

Which is not to say cremation families

were not choosing interment at Lowell Cemetery previously. James Latham, president of the Lowell Cemetery Board since 2010, said cremation interments had been growing during the past 20 years, and for the last three years, about a third of the cemetery's burials had been of cremated remains. Many of those people were being interred in family plots or plots they had purchased years ago, possibly before deciding on cremation as a method of disposition.

The O.M. Whipple Columbarium and Garden of Remembrance was named for the cemetery's first president, from whom the land was purchased. The new cremation area covers about half an acre of the cemetery, which despite its age is not turning to cremation because it is running out of space for traditional burials, since about 20 acres of the 85-acre cemetery remain undeveloped. Rather, the cremation



PHOTOS ON THIS PAGE COURTESY OF EICKHOF COLUMBARIA

The columbarium installed by Eickhof Columbaria at Lowell Cemetery features Barre Grey granite niche fronts with a sanded finish. **Above**, one of the niche fronts has been removed to show visitors attending the dedication how urns fit into the double niches.



**Above and left**, additional views of the unique curved granite columbarium walls and the pavilion. The fact that the granite niche fronts were cut in a curved pattern to follow the exact radius of the curved columbarium walls makes them unique. In addition, the curved granite niche fronts were laid up in a running bond pattern providing a look compatible with other granite wall construction in the historic cemetery.

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It's a perfect spot for it; it's almost like it was made for it. It was an undeveloped area, right in the central part of the cemetery, on a hill overlooking the cemetery and close to the chapel and to the receiving tomb, which is architecturally interesting. It was absolutely perfect for what we had in mind. —James Latham



The garden section of the O.M. Whipple Columbarium & Garden of Remembrance includes seating, ground interment designed for cremated remains and a veterans memorial, the cemetery's first. Names and service information of those inurned in the columbarium can be inscribed on the granite in front of the flagpole.



At the dedication of the new cremation garden, Lowell Cemetery Board of Trustees members and staff, from left, Darren H. Sykes; Superintendent R. Brabrook Walsh; Sayon Soeun; George L. Duncan; F. Alex Wilson; Rosemary Noon; Board President James D. Latham; Ann Marie Page; Brian L. Chapman; Lewis T. Karabatsos; Board Vice President and Treasurer Robert S. Mckittrick; Mehmed Ali; and office manager Michael H. Lally. Behind them is the pavilion, which had not been completed.

garden was developed to offer cremation families something special.

The garden is located on a landscaped hill overlooking the rest of the grounds. "It's a perfect spot for it; it's almost like it was made for it," Latham said. "It was an undeveloped area, right in the central part of the cemetery, on a hill overlooking the cemetery and close to the chapel and to the receiving tomb, which is architecturally interesting. It was absolutely perfect for what we had in mind."

Discussion about developing a cremation garden began about five years before it was built, Latham said. In addition to "being mindful of our fiduciary responsibilities," the trustees had a number of requirements in mind, he said in his speech at the dedication:

- The project must fit in with the garden-style landscape.
- The project must blend in with the historic monumentation.
- The project must be of very high quality.
- The project must possess the "wow" factor.

"I'm pleased to say that the folks who have seen our project confirm that we have succeeded in all these objectives."

Niches are contained in three curved granite walls provided by Eickhof Columbaria, Crookston, Minnesota. At the end of one wall is a small water feature, a bronze, wide-mouthed spout that pours water onto a large stone. The water level is no more than a couple of inches.

"The sound of falling water is not especially loud, but it's an audio-visual feature that blends in with the area and helps set a contemplative atmosphere."

Steps from one level of the columbarium lead up to an open-air pavilion where services can be held. It was included partly as one of the features that would make the cremation garden and columbarium unique to the area yet not out of place in its historic surroundings. "The idea of having a pavilion just sort of evolved. I think our architect, Bill Walsh of Walsh Engineering Associates, had it as an option, and the board liked it. It's a very nice feature."

There is a memorial chapel on the

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**Above and below, the trifold brochure Lowell Cemetery is using to introduce cremation families to its new interment and inurnment option.**



cemetery grounds where services can be held in inclement weather. The chapel, built around the beginning of the 20th century, is made of granite, as is the columbarium, and has a slate roof, as does the pavilion. “Some of the roundness of the pavilion picks up some aspects of the chapel, which is down the hill from the columbarium.”

Though they were designing with 21st-century clients in mind, they were

very conscious of the cemetery’s historic landscape and determined not to simply drop a free-standing columbarium somewhere on the grounds, “like a post office box,” Latham said.

“We wanted the columbarium to blend in with the rest of the cemetery as much as possible, so we chose granite in addition to being conscious of wanting something that would be unique and tasteful and that

would be a credit to the cemetery and the community.”

Because of the curved walls, the niche covers are curved, as well. “They are done in a gradual radius so they fit with the curvature of the overall columbarium wall. It was quite tricky. If the niche covers had been flat, they would have projected shadows at various times during the day, and we didn’t want that.”

In addition to the approximately 980 double niches, there are spaces for in-ground burial of cremated remains. “They are not technically part of the columbarium; I guess you’d say they are part of the garden aspect of the project.”

Some of the spaces are close to a veterans memorial, the cemetery’s first. “The cemetery has been very conscious of the contributions of veterans, and has honored veterans at a ceremony that always takes place the weekend before Memorial Day and at a smaller event near Veterans Day in the fall.

“We thought including an area where veterans are recognized would perhaps make more veterans consider the columbarium, but we also simply wanted to have something that specifically recognized their service.”

The veterans area includes a flagpole and a plaque where veterans inurned in the columbarium will be recognized with the engraving of their name and service. This also solves the conundrum cemeterians often face when trying to balance the desire people have for personalization with aesthetic considerations.

“On the columbarium wall, we limit the engraving to the person’s name and dates, and we’re trying to keep the engraving consistent by using the same font. Many veterans want their memorials to include their military service, and we realized that in order to add that we were not going to be able to keep letters the same size to maintain the look we want for the columbarium.”

The veterans area solves the problem, providing a place where military service information can be recorded. The niche covers will include evidence of military service (a star) so that visitors know to walk over to the veterans area for further details.

### Sales and marketing

Lowell did not sell the columbarium preconstruction, but start selling niches in

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September, prior to final completion of the pavilion roof and a few punch-list items. The niche walls were in and people could see what the garden looked like.

Visitors to the cemetery's website can download a trifold brochure (see page 34) describing the columbarium, and the project has received favorable local press coverage.

The cemetery used a marketing consultant to help them pull together press kits and map out an advertising campaign leading up to a dedication ceremony in October. "And some of our trustees have been on local radio shows, and I believe one even appeared on local cable television."

Speakers at the dedication included Latham; Rep. Nicki Tsongas, widow of the late Sen. Paul Tsongas, who is buried at Lowell Cemetery; a state senator; Lowell's mayor; and ICCFA Immediate Past President Frederick Lappin, CCE.

At the dedication, Latham announced that materials were being gathered for a time capsule, which would include cemetery artifacts as well as photos of the day's events.

In addition to the public dedication ceremony, "We had a separate preview for



PHOTO COURTESY OF EICKHOF COLUMBARIA

**A view of the columbarium showing walls on two different levels of the sloping site, as well as the edge of the pavilion and the tent erected for the dedication.**

funeral directors in the area," Latham said. Massachusetts is a non-combo state, so there is no funeral home associated with the cemetery. That means the cemetery has to market its new memorialization option itself, both to funeral directors and to the public.

"The reaction has been quite positive. People are really quite surprised and almost astonished at how handsome it is. It's clearly not your typical columbarium, and we have been generating sales, absolutely." □