

Haddonfield Monthly Meeting
Memorial Service and Graveyard Committee
Information, Policies and Guidelines on
Green Burials
March, 2011

At Meeting for Business on February 9, 2011, following good order and after holding the matter over, the Monthly Meeting approved a minute adopting the following guidelines concerning “green burials” in the Haddonfield Monthly Meeting Graveyard, and authorized supervision of such burials by the Memorial Service and Graveyard Committee.

Background

There is no standard definition of “green burial”, also referred to as “natural burial”. Generally, the term refers to a burial designed to minimize impact on the environment and the use of energy resources. Typically, a green burial might include burial of remains that are not embalmed, with no burial vault, in a shroud or biodegradable casket made of wood, wicker, or cardboard in a “green cemetery”. Often, the use of machinery to transport the remains or open and close the grave would be avoided.

Similarly, there is no standard definition of “green cemetery”, nor any official state licensing of such cemeteries. Cemeteries that advertise as being green cemeteries may allow green burials only. They often feature only wooded or meadow-like landscapes and typically they will not allow burial vaults, traditional caskets or burial of cremated remains, and may prohibit traditional grave stones.

The question of which burial practices have the least environmental impact and are therefore “greenest” is complex and dependent on too many factors to make a general statement here. All practices have environmental plusses and minuses.

Legal Requirements

Certain legal requirements may affect an individual’s wishes with respect to green burial and a cemetery’s ability to accommodate green burials. These include:

1. In New Jersey, the disposition of human remains must be under the supervision of a licensed funeral director.
2. New Jersey law requires that human remains must be buried, cremated, embalmed or refrigerated within 48 hours after death.
3. New Jersey law does not require the use of a burial vault.
4. New Jersey law does not require embalming (except see 5. below).

5. With the exception of out-of-state retrieval by a funeral director, human remains must be embalmed in order to be transported into the state. Thus, if a person dies while traveling in distant state or another country, a burial without embalming may not be possible.

Health Issues

Under certain circumstances, human remains may pose a health threat to medical and mortuary staff and others who have direct contact with the remains, principally through exposure to fluid-borne infectious disease. Licensed funeral directors are required to take appropriate precautions to minimize this risk, including training, personal protection equipment and good hygiene practices. Mortuary service workers are subject to OSHA and state law requirements to ensure that human remains are handled in a safe manner and do not pose a health hazard to the workers or to the public. Those who are not involved in the direct handling the remains are not at risk. Once the remains are properly interred, any health risk is no longer present.

Existing Graveyard Policies

We do not promote our graveyard to potential customers who desire green burials. The graveyard's purpose is to serve the Haddonfield Monthly Meeting community. We have a longstanding practice of permitting vaults, full-casket burials and interment of embalmed or cremated remains and we require grave opening and closing by a professional who uses power machinery. We require grave markers made of granite and use power machinery to maintain the lawn and trees. We require burial vaults if a person is interred in a traditional casket in order to prevent sink-holes. For these reasons, our graveyard would probably not qualify under most published definitions as a "green cemetery".

Nonetheless, we strive to maintain our graveyard in harmony with the Quaker testimonies of simplicity and stewardship. We do not use chemical fertilizers and do not have paved-over areas. We require simple, unadorned grave stones. We do not sell plots or otherwise seek to profit from the graveyard. We do not place undue emphasis or expend scarce resources on embellishments or superficial improvements. We encourage use of the grounds by the school for the cultivation of the butterfly garden and other nature study endeavors. The Monthly Meeting community freely shares this quiet green space with the larger community. Thus, when these factors are considered, we believe that our graveyard, maintained in harmony with our Quaker faith and practice, is an environmentally friendly place.

Accommodations for Green Burials

Accommodations can be made for those seeking a green burial in accordance with the following rules:

1. All burials must be under the supervision of the Memorial Service and Graveyard Committee and a New Jersey licensed funeral director. The funeral director will be responsible for compliance with all applicable laws and regulations and for transporting and handling the remains in a safe and hygienic manner. The funeral director must supervise lowering the remains into the grave.
2. We will permit burial of un-embalmed remains without a vault as long as the grave is opened and closed by a professional grave-digging contractor approved by the Monthly Meeting and the grave is approximately seven (7) feet deep.
3. At all times when the remains are on Monthly Meeting property (including the graveyard) until the grave has been closed, the remains must be in a closed casket constructed of cardboard or wicker and without significant interior air-space. The use of a burial shroud only without a cardboard or wicker casket is not permitted. Ceremonies involving display of the remains in the Meeting House or on Monthly Meeting property are not permitted.
4. Burial must be in a designated plot on the graveyard map, and a granite stone marker in keeping with Monthly Meeting standards must be installed within one year of the interment.
5. Care should be taken to arrange the burial at a time when school is not in session.

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