



Funeral Consumers Alliance of Eastern Massachusetts

Promoting a consumer's right to choose dignified, meaningful and affordable after-death care.

Annual Newsletter

March 2018



2018 Year In Review

Ashlie Taylor

Greetings from your FCAEM Board! After reviewing our 2017 goals and activities, a general theme has emerged signaling new challenges and possibilities ahead.

Over the past year, FCAEM volunteers have been guest speakers at several organized events including the annual Hospice and Palliative Care Federation of Massachusetts Education Conference. Our Cape Cod volunteers have coordinated monthly *Death Cafes* and *Death Education* classes, as well as a joint *Living With Dying* program exploring topics of interest including Advance Directives and Green Burial.

Our Spring 2017 Annual Meeting and Speaker Series featured Josh Slocum, Executive Director of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance. He shared his broad scope of experience from the national perspective, describing the recent FCA report that found less than 25% of 150 nationally surveyed funeral homes included their prices online. As the funeral rule currently stands, funeral homes need only give price quotes by phone, or hand you a paper price list when you physically visit them in person. Considering we are now in the era of the internet, the FCA is lobbying the Federal Trade Commission to compel funeral homes to put their complete price lists online. Josh called on our membership to take a personal stake in this goal by reaching out to local funeral service providers during our survey process. His statement clarified that the national outcome is directly related to our local actions through personal engagement in our communities. The meeting and presentation were followed by a Death Cafe and refreshments.

While these events are crucial to promoting our educational mission, we are in need of administrative and organizational activity through greater volunteer involvement. Our organization needs support internally. To continue being relevant for the future as well as

fulfilling our membership responsibilities and organizational goals, the FCAEM is in dire need of increased volunteer support.

As President, I am placing an urgent call for interested members to step forward as nominees for the essential functions of President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Clerk. Nominees will be voted on at the 2018 Annual Meeting. **We are also seeking non-officer positions for our board** and others who would like to participate through officer support positions. If you have expertise in non-profit management, finance, legal work, or data management, we'd love to hear from you! Please get in touch if you have questions regarding position terms and responsibilities. I can be reached at fcaemass@gmail.com. FCAEM relies on dedicated members to carry on its work. Consider spending some of your time and energy participating in our community. You'll find a group of passionate people who share your interests! I look forward to seeing you at the Annual Meeting this Spring!



Save the Date



Annual Meeting and Speaker Series

Another Way: the intersection between natural burials and conservation

Saturday, April 21st 2018 from 2-4 pm

First Church, Harvard Square

11 Garden Street, Cambridge MA 02138

In honor of Earth Day, FCAEM is proud to host speakers from the Southeastern Massachusetts Pine Barrens Alliance presenting about their initiative to combine green burial with land conservation efforts locally in Plymouth, MA.

All are Welcome! Refreshments will be provided as well as time for questions and socializing.



Steelmantown Cemetery Trip Report

Jasmine Tanguay

In mid-October, a contingent of volunteers from the Eastern and Western Massachusetts FCA affiliates traveled to southern New Jersey to visit the Steelmantown Cemetery woodland burial preserve. Nestled in the Belleplains State Forest, the historic burial ground dates back to the 1700's. Steelmantown Cemetery's owner, Edward Bixby, opened the cemetery to the public for new natural burials in 2007.

Bixby handles about six burials a year and most of his business involves pre-arranging funeral services. Our group toured the meadow and trailside woodland burial plots, as well as the chapel and other structures on the property. He shared numerous insights about the practical and legal aspects of establishing and operating the cemetery, from observations about how long the soil mounded above natural caskets of various types takes to settle (interestingly, it is faster with pine than with wicker) to advice on managing zoning issues. Members of Green Burial Massachusetts and others interested in green burial grounds came away with a nuanced understanding of the ins and outs of conservation burial and green cemetery operation.

The trip was organized by Denise Stowell, a board member of the Plymouth-based Southeastern Massachusetts Pine Barrens Alliance (SEMPBA). Leaders of SEMPBA are currently working to explore the possibility of a green burial cemetery in the pine barrens of Plymouth, which is a globally rare eco region similar in many ways to the New Jersey Pine Barrens. Stowell has spoken with town officials about including green burials when the town develops new municipal cemetery grounds in West Plymouth. For SEMPBA and others in the group, the field trip served two important purposes: to see firsthand how the New Jersey Pine Barrens is promoted and protected and to understand how the green burial movement can contribute to conservation efforts. Members of the non-profit organization Connecticut Green Burial Grounds also participated in the tour and shared discussion about their experiences.

Stowell reported on the sentiments of the group: "We were all awed at the lovely cemetery that we came to see and felt right at home as the vegetation and land seemed very similar to that in Plymouth. We walked through the lovely mossy woodland paths and

stopped at numerous burial sites with simple engraved natural stones marking the spots of the buried there. We were able to see how long it takes for the land to naturally resettle and go back to its native state. I think we all felt confident that natural burials will be possible in Plymouth and quickly become an expected option in the near future."

SEMPBA organized a green burial symposium in Plymouth for February 8th in order to share lessons learned, answer questions, and have conversations about the different approaches to green burials and what the possibilities for Southeastern Massachusetts might be. As the event page states, "We are burying the 20th century conventions of death and dying in Massachusetts... Our goal of establishing natural cemeteries in this region and beyond can help preserve our precious lands for future generations as well as make available a meaningful and caring end of life experience."

The event featured several FCAEM members and volunteers presenting supporting talks and demos: Eva Moseley- "Why I want this for myself," Heather Massey- "Preparation and preservation of the dead for natural burial," Ruth Faas -"Shrouds and coffins /personalizing the burial container," and Maura and Madison White on using the mushroom burial suit and having to take their loved one to Maine for the green burial he wanted.

FCAEM will report on the outcomes of the event on our website. By bringing together those interested in a new natural burial option for the region, we are one step closer to making that ambition a reality.





News From Green Burial Massachusetts, Inc.

Eva Moseley

As reported in last year's newsletter, Green Burial Massachusetts, Inc. is now a separate non-profit organization, with 501(c)(3) status. Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust (MGLCT) is still helping us in our search for suitable land; Mount Grace staff are committed to the search, but so far parcels of land have been too expensive or include too much wetland, too steep hillsides, inadequate access, or too much ledge, with not enough soil (at least 3.5 feet) for burials. Another land trust in the Pioneer Valley, centered in Amherst, is also seeking land, in the area it covers.

As before, our aim is one or more entirely green burial grounds, which would be open to all (not just residents of a particular town, members of a certain faith, or any other limited group) and which would remain open space, allowing such recreation as hiking, bird watching, or other forms that are easy on the land. There are also "hybrid cemeteries," conventional ones that either set aside portions of land for green burials or, like Mount Auburn Cemetery in Watertown and Cambridge, place green graves among non-green ones.

While the land search continues, we board members of GBM, Inc. continue our educational work, again tabling at the winter conference of the Northeast Organic Farming Association, mingling at the annual Mass. Land Coalition Conference, and speaking at Councils on Aging and for other groups, in some cases planting seeds that may not sprout for a long time, as people for whom the idea is new make up their minds about it.

As reported last year, GBM has a logo, a brochure, and a web site; we now also, thanks to board member Candace Currie, have an online newsletter, soon to be quarterly. If you like the idea of a simple burial that treats the land kindly, send relevant news for the newsletter, and let us know about possible land, groups that would like to learn more about green burial, or people who might be willing and able to invest in land for this purpose. Here again is one of our favorite ways of summing up: "Our best last act may...be the simple act of using what remains of our physical existence to fertilize depleted soil, push up a tree, preserve a bit of wild from development and in the process perpetuate the natural cycle of life that supports those we leave behind" (Mark Harris, *Grave Matters* [Scribner, 2007], p. 186).



Direct Cremation Costs

Heather Massey

The cost of a direct cremation in eastern MA can vary considerably, depending on where you go to purchase this final disposition option. "Direct Cremation" refers to a specific service available for purchase from funeral homes and cremation services providers. The service entails removal of the remains from the place of death, storage until the cremation, arrangements made with a crematory for the cremation, transportation to and from the crematory, and the required paperwork /permits. The charge for this service generally includes the cost of the cremation itself, and the necessary Medical Examiners fee (all bodies cremated in MA must be viewed and cleared by a medical examiner, for which the state charges a \$100 fee). However, not all funeral homes and cremation services charge the same for this disposition option. Here in my hometown of Falmouth, the local funeral home charges a total \$3370 for this basic service, including the cremation container.

Some families have chosen to use out-of-town cremation services such as Casper Cremation and Boston Cremation, which charge \$1395 and \$1495 respectively, for the same service or Anderson-Bryant Funeral Home in Stoneham who will also travel to the Cape and charges \$1350 for a simple cremation. Others, choosing the legal DIY option, file the paperwork and obtain the necessary permits themselves, provide or acquire their own transportation and container, thereby paying only the Medical examiners fee and the actual \$250 fee of a cremation at Duxbury or Plymouth crematories.

Funeral consumers looking for direct cremation can shop around, choosing the price they want to pay for this basic service or choose to do much of it themselves, saving literally thousands of dollars in both instances. The FCAEM website has more detailed information on DIY options.

www.fcaemass.org/diyGuidance.shtml





Embalming: in history and today

Paula Chasan

The place of embalming in human history can be traced many thousands of years back. Among the earliest cultures to use embalming was the Chinchurro,, 5000-6000 BC, who lived in a desert area of present day Chile and Peru. Although the preservation of bodies after death was practiced by many cultures, including the Chinese during the Han dynasty, about 200 BC, the most detailed information about its place in the life of a culture comes from the Egyptian dynasties, starting from 3200 BC. Embalming is used to forestall decay of the body after death. The technique has included removing organs and blood, and then replacing with preservative fluids such as formaldehyde. In ancient times, alcohol and spices and oils were used.

For all of these ancient cultures, embalming had a spiritual purpose. Being able to forestall decomposition after death allowed these cultures to develop stories and practices to make sense out of death and to come to terms with it. The Egyptians envisioned an afterlife. But first the soul had to find its way. They believed that after death, the soul left the body. It remained after death, but in some confusion, and needed the body to be there for reorientation as it prepared for its journey to the afterlife. The practice of embalming /mummification had a deeply religious purpose in Egyptian culture and one must believe, in all the ancient cultures that practiced it.

Over the centuries, use of embalming fell away. Christianity, Islam and Judaism did not invest spiritual meaning to the preservation of the body after death. Burial was done quickly after death; there was no need for preservation.

The rise of science in Europe at the time of the Middle Ages and Renaissance led to the restoration of embalming as a practice, but not for spiritual purposes. It was instead used to assist physicians and scientists in their work to unlock the mysteries of the human body. Human bodies were needed; after death they were preserved by embalming, for dissection and study.

The scientific use of embalming continued into the 1700s and 1800s and efforts to improve the methods were made. Travel became more common at this period, and embalming made it possible for bodies to be preserved and brought home for burial when death occurred far from home.

In the 1800's, French scientists were experimenting with new arterial embalming methods. An American

physician, Dr. Thomas Holmes, studied these methods and came back to the United States at the time of the Civil War. President Lincoln was in deep grief at the death of his good friend, Col. Elmer Ellsworth, who died early in the war. Holmes convinced Lincoln to approve the use of embalming to preserve Col. Ellsworth's body. His body was brought north to lie in state at the White House, and then brought home to his family in Massachusetts for burial. President Lincoln then approved the use of embalming for all union soldiers. The physicians who did this brought their tents and equipment close to the battlefields. They mostly embalmed officers who died in the battles, because the families of officers were more likely to be able to afford it than the families of ordinary Union soldiers.


After the Civil War ended, there was no further need for embalming. People had returned to their homes, died in their communities, and were buried quickly. At this period as well, there were no religious or scientific needs to preserve a body.

But the country grew and changed over the next decades. In the late 1800's, along with many other new industries, the funeral industry was born. It may have gained impetus from the sales by physicians of embalming fluids, which had become a business in itself. Eventually a new role of Undertaker was created, to manage funerals, making embalming a central part of the new "traditional" funeral.

In the next decades the funeral industry grew and prospered but abuses grew along with it. Questionable business practices were used to sell what became increasingly expensive funerals, with items such as fancy caskets, huge flower displays, as well as embalming. Embalming was promoted as a way to create a comforting "life-like" image of the deceased, to replace the image of sickness and death. This came at a steep cost to the environment and to the pocketbook of grieving families. Embalming became such an established practice that many people came to believe that it was a necessary part of every funeral, and even required by law. (In no state is it required, except in very unusual circumstances.)

In 1963, Jessica Mitford's book, *The American Way of Death*, exposed the abuses of the funeral industry, and it had a major impact: there were already a few thousand memorial (Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4) societies; soon there were almost a million. She encouraged the formation of volunteer Memorial Societies to educate consumers about their choices and how to free themselves from the dominance of the funeral industry. Our own Memorial Society was formed just before Mitford's book was published. The national organizations and all the chapters changed their names to Funeral Consumers Alliance some years later (after some funeral directors called their businesses "memorial societies"). We FCAEM volunteers continue to work to "protect a consumer's right to choose a meaningful, dignified and affordable funeral." Embalming and other features of elaborate funerals run by funeral homes are still a part of the wider culture, but more and more people are educated to the choices they have, and are choosing "simple and affordable."



An Unexpected First in MA : GPL Pricing in Support of DIY Families

Heather Massey

In an unexpected and very welcome move, Boston Cremation of Malden announced this fall that they are the first in Mass. to institute a separate service and price on their General Price List (GPL) for families exercising their right to do as much of the necessary after-death work as they wish. Many "Do-it-yourself (DIY) families" want to hire a funeral service or funeral home for just the paperwork and/or transportation. We have worked with funeral homes that promised to provide just those services if asked, and they have; however, none that we are aware of thus far have actually created a GPL charge clearly stating just that service and the amount to be charged.

Boston Cremation's new GPL includes a line item called Services of Funeral Director and Staff for Entry and Completion of Paperwork within the Massachusetts Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS), thus providing just the online death registration and permits.

The fee is not low, at \$580, but it is a big step toward both transparency of funeral service charges and providing just the goods and services that a family wishes to purchase, as mandated by the Federal Trade Commission's funeral rule.



Funeral Price Survey Update


Ashlie Taylor

Every two years, the FCAEM undertakes our Funeral Price Survey in which we reach out to the majority of funeral providers within Eastern Massachusetts to gather cost comparison data; not a small task! This year, we prioritized brainstorming new strategies in which this process may become more effective, less labor intensive and more sensitive to the trends in consumer demands.

In light of this objective, through volunteer discussions and followup meetings, the **2017 Funeral Price Survey** took on a new look by placing the process in the hands of our membership. Over the summer we crafted a "Volunteer Survey Kit" providing all the tools an individual would need to approach a funeral home and report, via mail or online, their prices and relevant services. We have learned much in this process; however, the number of funeral homes reached was much less than anticipated. Here is the link to the full 2017 Volunteer Kit online.

<https://goo.gl/DqFY3B>
Feel free to download it for your own personal use, or print it and use it to add to our ongoing survey collection. Instructions are included in the packet.

We will be making another effort to encourage ongoing survey reporting of funeral homes within the Eastern Massachusetts region, but we need your help! Why not join us? If you are interested in participating in a committee focused on developing the Funeral Price Survey, please send an email to fcaemass@gmail.com and we will welcome you to our volunteer network.



FCAEM now has an Online Volunteer Group

Would you like to be included in email discussions about upcoming events, speaker requests and more regular volunteer and committee meetings? This forum is a place for communication amongst our organizing team of volunteers to get things done. It is in addition to our more general email list and has more activity and interaction. If you are interested in participating in this new online group – all you need is an email address! Send your email to fcaemass@gmail.com and I can add your information to our forum. Emails are periodic – no more than 5-10 per month and you can unsubscribe at any time.



FCAEM & FCAWM Unified Efforts

Heather Massey

FCAWM president Sandy Ward and I continued the intention and tradition of Massachusetts FCA affiliates attending one another's annual meetings to ensure both affiliates are represented, and to further good communication and mutual support between them.

Our joint outreach to the Massachusetts Councils on Aging and Senior Center Directors (MCOA) conference expanded this year. In addition to tabling in the Exhibit Hall for two days during their fall conference, we also provided an educational workshop for the first time. FCAEM "Roadshow" presenter Jasmine Tanguay joined me and Sandy Ward of FCAWM in presenting a workshop October 19 called "After Death Options and Choices." Many of the conferees who spoke with us in the Exhibit Hall were from central MA, in communities where neither of our FCA affiliates have active volunteers. We need to build up capacity for outreach and education in those areas.

The Massachusetts Hospice and Palliative Care Federation conference accepted two workshop proposals from us this year, our seventh year of presenting at this event. Judith Lorei of FCAWM and Green Burial Massachusetts (and former FCAEM vice-president) and I presented "Options in Natural Deathcare for Hospice Families." I also co-presented "Death Cafe: What It Is and How to Implement It" with fellow social worker/therapist and longtime educational collaborator, Elaine Morgalia.

A Martha's Vineyard community group invited Judith Lorei and me to present a program in their health and wellness series again this year. We offered a Green Burial/Natural Deathcare talk at the West Tisbury Library on March 19th. We also hosted a total of three Death Cafes on Martha's Vineyard last year.

Representatives from Green Burial MA and FCAEM/Natural Deathcare Collaborative were invited to attend the Southeastern Massachusetts Pine Barrens Association (SEMPBA) as the annual conference introduced for the first time the concept of land conservation by creating green burial cemeteries. The conference took place last winter at Cape Cod Community College. We had a table with coffins, spoke in a "fishbowl" round table discussion, and were interviewed for local television--all good results from our first involvement with this conservation group. Better still, this organization is devoting its entire 2018



Table with coffins at land conservation conference

conference in Plymouth to natural burial! (see Jasmine Tanguays article.)

Former FCAEM president Raya Gildor and fellow FCAEM volunteer Ruth Faas traveled to the Cape for our second year of presenting a DIY Death Care booth and display at the Cape Cod Makers Faire.

In May, the Town of Barnstable Structures & Grounds Cemetery Services presented their first "DYING TO KNOW! Planning the Last Chapter" event at the Barnstable Senior Center. FCAEM was invited to participate. Jasmine Tanguay and I tabled the event for 50 plus attendees, and provided two talks.

FCAEM volunteer Ruth Faas of Mourning Dove Studio arranged for the FCAEM Roadshow (or as we have come to fondly refer to it: "The End of the Road Show") to be invited to present at Newbury Court in Concord, for their October "Let's Talk About Death" series. Our program: "Options, Choices, and Resources for After Death Care " was comprised of four speakers and components: Paula Chasan, presenting for the first time on funeral history, FCAEM, and consumer rights; Eva Moseley, discussing green burial; Jasmine Tanguay presenting commemorative and memorial choices with meaningful and green options for same; and myself, on family/home/community based natural after-death care. Ruth Faas also accompanied us that day, with a display of shrouds and coffins. The entire program was filmed for community television and future replay for residents.





(Body) Donor Beware

Ashlie Taylor

Many people choose to donate their body to science after death. It can save funeral costs while also contributing to medical and scientific progress. However, as this choice becomes more popular it also has the ability to become more profitable for those industrious individuals setting up shop as “body brokers”, independent agencies or individuals that buy and sell cadavers or human body parts for non transplant purposes. Whole-body donation differs from organ and tissue donation. Whole body donations are used for purposes of private buyers such as: medical research and education, training, military development, and instrumentation design. Whole-body donations are not used for transplant purposes; instead, they are dissected and shipped piecemeal to fulfill orders on an international market.

Whole-body donation is generally available through three avenues, by medical universities, state or federal agencies such as the Department of Veterans Affairs Biorepository Brain Bank, or by non-transplant tissue banks, such as MedCure (www.medcure.org), Science Care (www.sciencecare.com), Research for Life(www.researchforlife.org), and United Tissue Network (www.unitedtissue.org). These latter third-party body brokers often form alliances with funeral homes, hospitals, nursing homes and hospices to market their services. They make their services preferable by offering significant savings through “free” cremation and transportation costs and often have “Guaranteed Donor Programs” where, unlike university programs, donors will not be rejected at the time of death. University Anatomical Gift programs can refuse a donor for any reason including autopsy, previous organ donation or removal, obesity, malnutrition, sepsis, hepatitis, etc...

This past October, international news outlet, Reuters Investigates, launched an expose on this mostly unregulated industry in the United States with some startling revelations. For example, “Reuters identified 62 funeral operators that have struck mutually beneficial business arrangements with brokers. The funeral homes provide brokers access to potential donors. In return, the brokers pay morticians referral fees, ranging from \$300 to \$1,430, according to broker ledgers and court records.” Lack of transparency is rampant. “One misconception promoted by some brokers is that it is

illegal to sell body parts and that people who distribute them may only be reimbursed for processing, shipping and other expenses. In most states, such laws only apply to transplant organs, such as hearts and kidneys, and to tissue, such as skin and bone. But in almost every state, these laws do not apply to whole cadavers or to parts, such as torsos, shoulders and heads. Reuters found that some brokers conflate rules for transplant organs with those for non-transplant body parts in order to create the impression that they do not profit from body donations.” In addition to sales, a broker is also able to lease the same body part repeatedly to different buyers. Often these brokers promise the return of a loved one with free dignified cremation not specifying that the remains may be incomplete or partial.

A person's property rights to his or her own body cease at death, yet there is no guarantee that your body will not become property for profit within the current system of whole-body donation. The demand for donations continues to outpace the availability of donors as international programs in the medical, military and related fields continue to expand. If you choose to donate to science, it is best to be informed about what that means. Your body could be quartered with a chainsaw, then shipped to a surgeons’ conference at the Ritz in Las Vegas and your cremated remains returned with your loved ones none the wiser.

Read the Reuters nine part series online at <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/section/usa-bodies/>

FCAEM is dedicated to educating consumers about their rights and options. The following list of university medical schools which have whole body donation programs is provided without endorsement or recommendation:

Tufts University School of Medicine, 617-956-6686
<http://medicine.tufts.edu/Education/Tufts-Anatomical-Gift-Program/>

Boston University School of Medicine, Department of Anatomy, 617-638-4245

University of Massachusetts Medical School, 508-856-2460
<http://www.umassmed.edu/anatomicalgiftprogram/index.aspx>

Harvard Medical School, Anatomical Gift Program, 617-432-1735
<http://agp.hms.harvard.edu/>

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Nominations

Ashlie Taylor

Seeking 2018 Nominations for Officers and Board Members

It's that time of year again! We are actively seeking nominations for our internal leadership board and executive committee. The following positions are available: President, Vice President, Clerk and Treasurer in addition to several volunteer board positions. We will hold nominations and voting at our annual meeting scheduled on April 21st. If you have interest or questions regarding the available positions, please contact fcaemass@gmail.com

Officer positions, roles, and responsibilities:

President: Presides over all meetings, handles administrative details for the smooth functioning of the organization. Prepares meeting agendas.

Vice President (2 positions): Acts in place of President in his/her/their absence and as supportive role for other officers and committees.

Clerk: Keep accurate records of all meetings for archive and publication.

Treasurer: Keep safely all monies and assets of the Society and disburse the same under the general direction of the Directors. Power to sign and endorse checks, submits complete statements of accounts at each Annual Meeting and submits accounts for audit when requested. Files needed non profit tax documents as required by state and federal law.

General Board Members assist in maintaining clarity in the organizations mission and vision, approve events and campaigns proposed by volunteers, assess organizational needs and support the executive officers in their roles when needed.