

Town Seeks To Shield Indian Sites

By Gina Gentile

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Four old Indian burial grounds in Amityville may soon get protection from garbage dumping, deterioration and misuse through local landmark designation, Babylon town officials said yesterday.

The town planning board held a hearing last night to designate two of the four sacred Indian burial sites in Amityville as "Local Historic Landmarks." The other two sites will be proposed for landmark status later.

"We want to clean them up but leave them in their natural state by restoring broken heads [on tombstones], having signs put up designating the area, listing the names of the people buried there, and re-dedicating it to the families," Babylon Historic Preservation Commission member McKinley Banks, himself an Indian, said yesterday.

The sites, dating back to the 1800s, were once owned by Indians who would bury family members on the land. Over generations, the grounds have been left neglected due to families moving away or newer generations not caring about them, Banks said.

The town wants the sites marked as historic so that they can receive a state grant to fix up the grounds. The sites have been vandalized and weathered, and need attention, Babylon Town Historian Madeline Fitzpatrick said.

The two grounds currently up for landmark status are the Brewster and Green-Bunn burial grounds on Bethpage Road. The other two sites are Miller-Squire burial ground on Glen Head Road and Brewster Cemetery on Brewster Road.

"The Native Americans have sacred grounds and people are dumping on them, and that is a no-no," Banks said. He has family buried in the Green-Bunn burial grounds and his wife has family in Miller-Squires.

Banks had grown up aware of the burial sites and has seen them deteriorate, and decided to do something about it. "I asked the town for help to clean up and designate the area, and to find out who was buried there," Banks said.

The Green-Bunn burial site has 18 bodies buried there, according to Fitzpatrick. Three graves have been located at the Brewster burial site, and more may be discovered, she said.

Some of those buried have been identified by the headstones that remain. Charlie Carr, Sidney Brewster and Florence Brewster still have their headstones in place at the Brewster burial ground. A Bunn baby who died in infancy in 1918 has the only remaining headstone at the Green-Bunn burial ground.

"Any information we can get on the people who have or might have been buried there would be appreciated. We want to make a memorial plaque listing them," Fitzpatrick said.

Banks said there shouldn't be a problem naming three of the sites as landmarks, although he said that some residents living near the Brewster cemetery feel that the sites should be left the way they are.

The people who live near the Miller-Squires burial ground are "planting on the land, using it for garbage, and building up fences on it," Banks said. If nothing is done to restore and preserve the sites, they will eventually be ruined by vandals or will deteriorate, he said.

The town board is expected to take up the landmark designation matter next Tuesday.