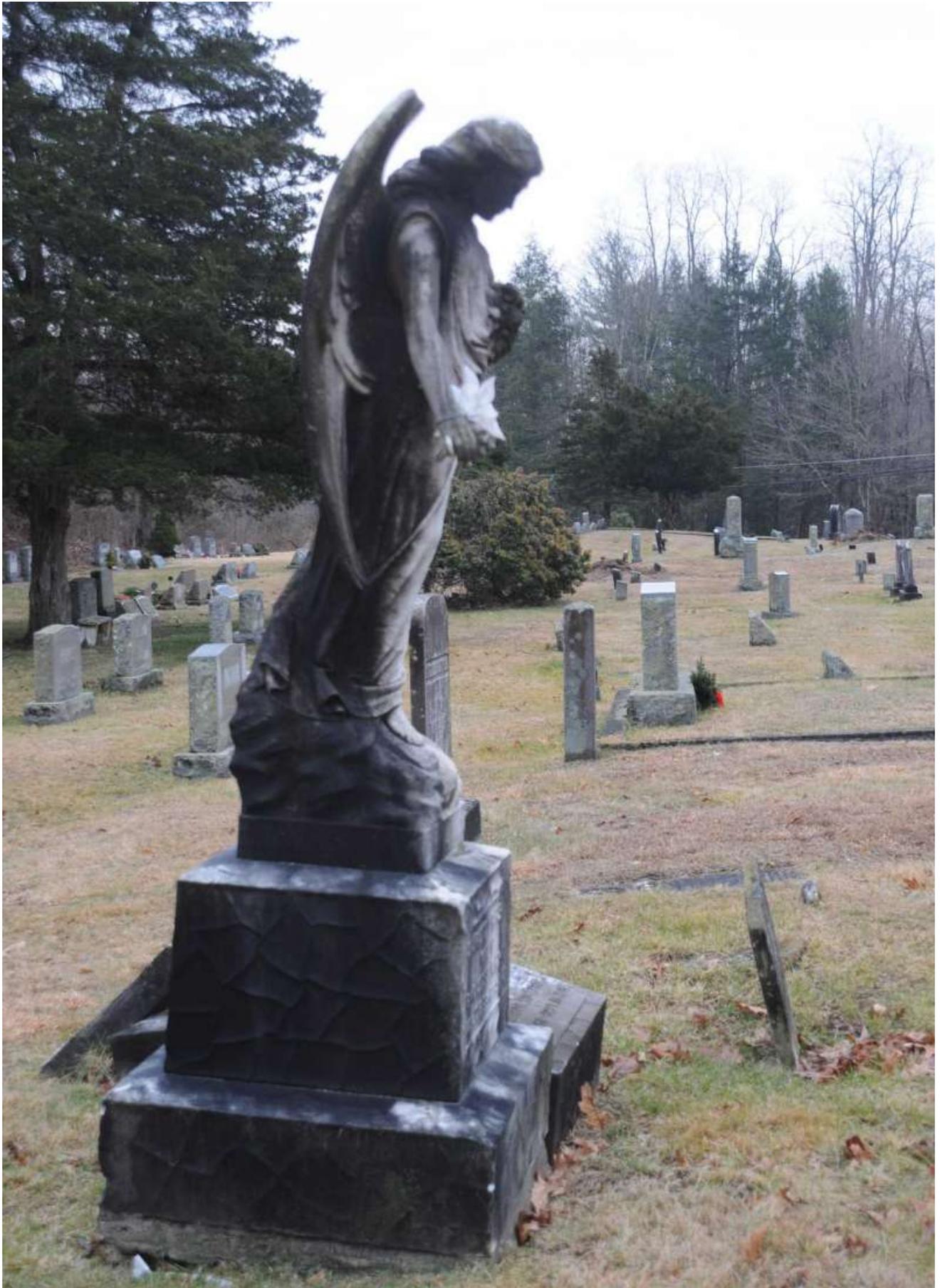


# Ridgefield makes progress toward gaining ownership of Branchville Cemetery

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Old stones and statues mark the graves at Branchville Cemetery. The town is working to gain title to the graveyard, which dates to the mid 1800s.  
Macklin Reid / Hearst Connecticut Media

The peaceful rest of Branchville Cemetery's residents seems likely to continue under the benevolent care of the Town of Ridgefield, with town officials making progress near the end of 2019 toward gaining title to the graveyard — which has been home to the deceased for more than a century, but has been without an interested local owner for several years now.

"We're just waiting for the attorney to get the paperwork done," First Selectman Rudy Marconi told The Press.

Once the acquisition is complete, being the owner of Branchville Cemetery will have "no cost to the town, other than what we pay for maintenance," Marconi said in a late December interview.

Attorney Joy Maini of Cohen and Wolfe PC, the town's law firm, is handling the matter for the town. Marconi said the law firm is now working with a family member believed to have legal authority to transfer the property.

"It's a distant relative of the owners of the cemetery, who has no interest in it whatsoever," Marconi said.

There's a fairly elaborate process to go through to, involving a probate proceeding.

"We're working our way through the transfer of the cemetery," Marconi said. "...It's proceeding through it's legal channels."

The town has been working to gain title to the cemetery for a couple of years, since there was a change in ownership of the Bouton Funeral Home in Georgetown.

The Bouton family had long owned and cared for the graveyard, but when the funeral home changed hands a few years back the new owners didn't want the cemetery.

After complaints from people who were troubled by the lack of regular grass-mowing and other maintenance, the town began doing maintenance and also started looking into the question of ownership.

## **Beers, Boughtons**

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"The cemetery dates back to the mid 1800s," Graveyard Committee chairman Jeff Lundberg told The Press. "It was owned by the Beers family up until the late 1800s when it was sold to a Mr. Bouton who ran a funeral home in Georgetown and ownership still resides with the family. The town has tracked a family member in Texas and offered to take over ownership.

“The Boutons maintained the yard up till a new owner bought the funeral home a few years ago,” Lundberg continued. “They opted not to maintain it, so it fell into a rather unsightly situation, which is when Rudy started getting complaints from town citizens.

At that point, Marconi passed the project on to the Graveyard Committee which has taken over “ownership” of the property.

“Besides general mowing, we have taken down a few dangerous trees, removed brush and other services to bring the yard to standards of our other town-owned yards,” Lundberg explained.

Lundberg didn’t think the graveyard had much value from there being no more available plots to sell, but he said it had history — and numerous residents — worthy of respect and the town’s care.

“We will not be selling plots there as we believe the yard is fully purchased,” he said. “There are a number of veterans buried there, plus relatives of the early Ridgefield settlers and a number of people of Swedish heritage. They were hired in Sweden to immigrate and work at the Georgetown wire factory. They had a reputation of being good workers, attended church and did not complain.”

Marconi generally agreed, but seemed to think the question of salable plots is worthy of more study.

“There’s more research there, that needs to be done,” Marconi said. “The thinking is: yes, but few, if any.”