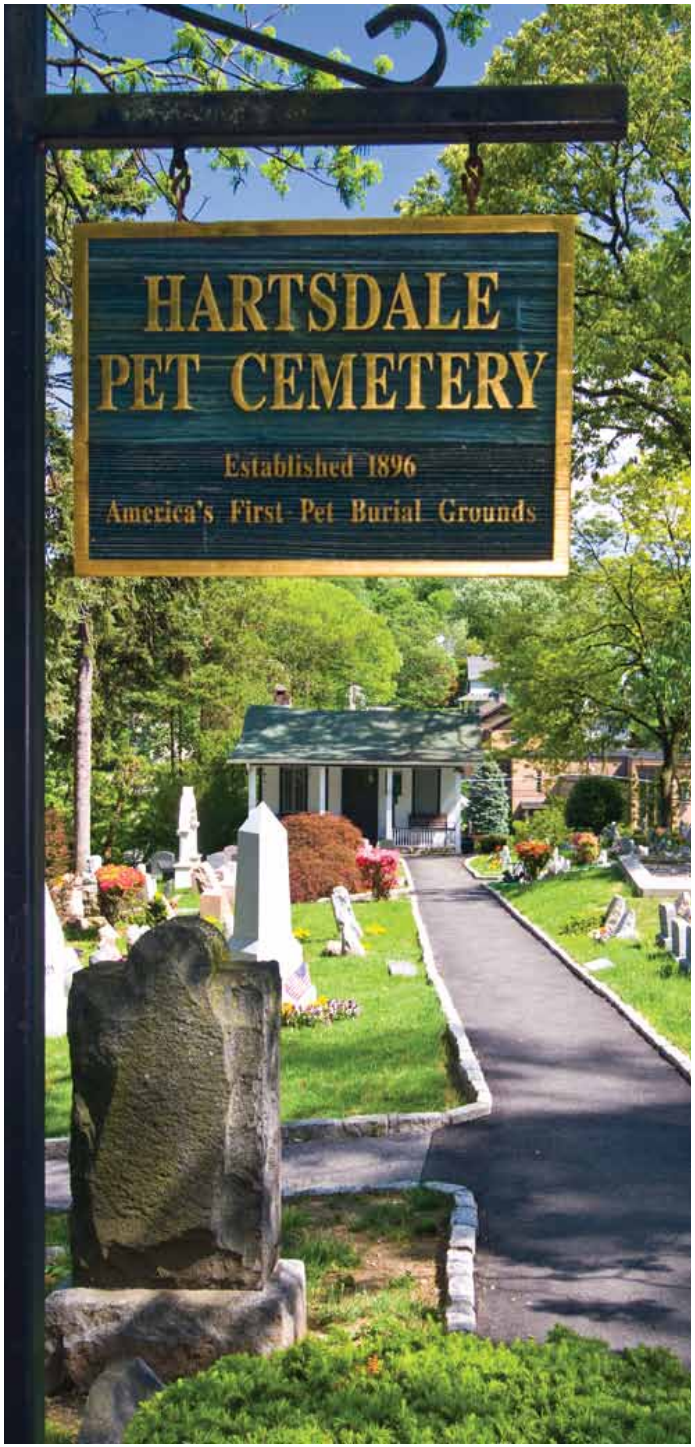
Hartsdale Canine Cemetery

HUMANE REMAINS

Many cemeteries are tailored to a specialized clientele. There are cemeteries that cater to departed members of specific faiths like Jews and Catholics. There are also cemeteries as well as cemetery plots within cemeteries that are reserved for members of clubs and secret societies, such as the Freemasons, Odd Fellows, Friars Club, and various actors' unions. The most specialized cemeteries are reserved for non-humans. There are over 600 pet cemeteries in the United States. The granddaddy of them all, The Hartsdale Canine Cemetery, is in Westchester County.



Hartsdale Canine Cemetery

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75 North Central Avenue
Hartsdale NY 10530
(914) 949-2583
www.petcem.com
41 1'17.33"N 73 47'49.81"W
(War Dog Memorial at center of cemetery)

One day in 1896, a distressed woman walked into the 120 West 25th Street office of veterinarian Dr. Samuel Johnson (Johnson was one of the early promoters of the ASPCA). The woman's dog had just died, and she didn't want to dispose of her beloved canine like so much garbage. She wanted her dog to have a proper burial. Dr. Johnson wasn't aware of any way to have a pet buried in one of New York's cemeteries, but he did tell the woman that she could bury her dog in his apple orchard not far away in the tiny hamlet of Hartsdale in Westchester County. Thus began the Hartsdale Canine Cemetery, America's first pet cemetery. Alas, the woman's name, the name of her dog, and the exact location of the grave were never recorded.

A short time later, Dr. Johnson was having a casual conversation with a newspaper reporter about the burial, and to Johnson's surprise, a few days after that a story about the burial of the woman's beloved dog appeared in print. Almost immediately, Dr. Samuel Johnson's veterinary office was flooded with requests from pet owners. Not long after, he carved out a three-acre area in his apple orchard as a burial ground for pets. Soon little headstones, wire fences, and elaborate floral arrangements were peppering the grounds. It all came to a climax in 1899 when a spaniel named Major was put to rest in a glass-topped satin-lined casket while mourners sang an expressive doxology. Since the pet cemetery hadn't been formalized, for the first few years grieving pet owners brought their deceased four-legged friends to Dr. Johnson's offices where they were fitted for a casket; then the pet owners would travel to Hartsdale (about a one-hour train ride) to attend the burial.

In 1905, the prestigious devoted a large amount of print to describing the cemetery and the epitaphs of the permanent residents. The paper did note that the name Hartsdale Canine Cemetery was a misnomer since a variety of animals, including cats, birds, and monkeys, had already taken up residence. Most noted among the non-canines was the grave of a cat named Mignon. The grave had its own enclosure: two perfectly pruned box shrubs and an impressive two- and one-half-foot high gravestone that read "Mignon Dearest and Best Beloved Friend of Ada Van Tassel of Billington, Died Sept. 27, 1900." Four years later, the reported that news of the pet cemetery was beginning to spread far and wide and that recently a deceased hound was shipped to the cemetery via rail from Kalamazoo. By 1913, there had been hundreds of interments, and the Hartsdale Canine Cemetery was formally incorporated. After

incorporation, word spread rapidly, and from 1914 to 1917, more animals were buried in the cemetery than the previous 18 years. In 1915, a Mrs. M. F. Walsh paid $23,000 ($400,000 today) for the land and a 50-ton Barre granite mausoleum, the cemetery's first mausoleum. Five members of the Walsh family's pet population are buried there. By 1920, over 3,000 four-legged friends called the cemetery home.

War Dog Memorial

Without a doubt the most significant event in the history of the Hartsdale Canine Cemetery occurred in 1923. It was the dedication of the War Dog Memorial. During World War I—

The Great War—The War to End all Wars—tens of thousands of military dogs were used for a variety of tasks, from pulling machine guns, to running telephone wire, to rescuing wounded men. Thousands of those dogs were killed. The United States did not have a formal canine program and relied on the British and French to supply dogs. Nevertheless, many soldiers came back from the war with harrowing tales of the services the dogs provided. In 1921, plot owners at Hartsdale mounted a campaign to raise $2,500 for a memorial to war dogs. A design competition was held and was won by Walter A. Buttendorf. His design depicted a German Shepherd perched high on a granite boulder, a helmet and canteen at its feet. The monument was sculpted by Robert Caterson, who had previously worked on a number of buildings in the New York area, including Grand Central Station. Caterson started with a 10-ton rough granite boulder he carved out from his Vermont quarry. The bronze statue depicts the shepherd with a Red Cross vest, alertly looking in the distance and tail straight. Look closely and you'll see that the helmet at the dog's feet is dented, indicating that the dog has found a wounded soldier. When the War Dog Memorial was officially dedicated in 1923, the event was attended by representatives of every nation that fought in the Great War. Eventually, the dog soldiers became known as the K-9 corps, and over 12,000 "dogs for defense" served in World War II. Over the years, there have been other memorial plaques placed at the base of the memorial, including one for the dogs who rescued victims from the rubble of the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. Curiously, when the Oklahoma City dogs could find no more bodies, they became depressed, so some of the rescue workers purposely buried themselves so the dogs could find them and experience the joy of doing what they were trained to do. Buried elsewhere in the cemetery is Sirius, the only dog to lose his life during the search-and-rescue effort following the World Trade Center terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

The Hartsdale Canine Cemetery, now five acres, is the final resting place for over 70,000 beloved pets. From perfectly preened pedigreed pups to mangy mutts, Hartsdale has room for them all. In 1917, the faithful dog of a coal yard night worker in White Plains, had gotten sick and died. The man just couldn't bear to "toss him in the street," which was the practice at the time. He contacted the cemetery, and after being told that a simple unadorned plot would cost $15, he boxed up his old friend and took him to the cemetery for burial. When he arrived at the cemetery, he saw all the beautiful monuments and proclaimed that no dog deserved a monument more than his did. The cemetery allowed him to purchase a $20 tombstone on the time payment plan for 50 cents a week. The tombstone simply reads "Bum; Ever Faithful; At Rest; December 10, 1916." Reportedly, the 2 x 3-foot plot was one of the best-tended in the cemetery. The coal yard worker's dog certainly isn't the only dog whose owner deemed him "top dog." Just ask Tony LaMura (see page ???)

Mausoleum

Hartsdale Canine Cemetery is home to America's first dog mausoleum. The 50-ton, 10 x 10-foot mausoleum was built in 1917 by Mrs. M. F. Walsh, the wife of a wealthy New Yorker. The land and mausoleum were purchased in 1915 for $23,000. The inscription reads, "My Little True-Love Hearts, Who Would Lick the Hand That Had No Food to Offer."

Dotty

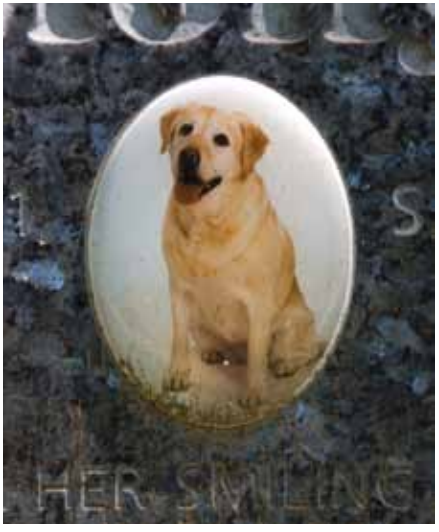
The oldest gravestone in the cemetery memorializes Dotty. It reads, "Dotty, Beloved pet of E. M. Dodge. Died Sept. 16th 1899 in her fourteenth year."

Metzie

The old saw goes that "a dog is man's best friend." A dog is loyal, obedient, and loves its master no matter what the circumstances. In the humanoid world, old friends may desert us and our reputations may be tarnished following an ill-considered action, but the dog doesn't care. Even in the most intolerable situations, the dog remains our friend. And in the case of Mrs. Reinhardt, her dog Metzie was her only friend.

Molly

Lovers of Labrador Retrievers know this look. With apologies to owners of other breeds, the Labrador Retriever has one of the sweetest dispositions. Molly's epitaph reads, "With her smiling soul and her appetite for life, she made our hearts sing and brought joy's light in all colors. We are blessed to love her and be part of her pack."



Grumpy

Before taking a tumble and breaking in two, the tombstone for Grumpy (August 4, 1913–September 20, 1926) was Hartsdale's tallest monument. His epitaph penned by his owners Emma and Henry Bizallion reads, "His sympathetic love and understanding enriched our lives. He waits for us."

Rini Rinty

Hartsdale contains a number of award-winning show dogs. Among the most interesting is Rini Rinty, who apparently had a gift for song. It's likely that Rini Rinty was named after Rin Tin Tin, a shell-shocked German Shepherd puppy found by American serviceman Lee Duncan in Lorraine, France, in World War I. Duncan brought the dog home with him to Los Angeles at war's end. He taught the dog a number of tricks, and through a twist of fate, the dog started appearing in movies. Rin Tin Tin appeared in a number of films until his death in 1932 and was then replaced by a succession of other dogs with the same name. In October 1954, he got his own show on ABC. ran until May 1959. On the show, the dog was often called Rinty for short. The first Rin Tin Tin has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Queenie

There are a number of highly individualized memorials at Hartsdale. Among the most interesting are a marble dog bed/basket and a granite doghouse for Queenie (1929–1944), "My shadow faithful till

the end"; and for Buster (1929–1942), "Our devoted pet who knew nothing but love."

Clarence

Hartsdale Canine Cemetery is home to a number of pets of celebrities. Among the celebrities who have chosen to bury their pets at Hartsdale are Gene Krupa, Joe Garagiola, Elizabeth Arden, Kate Smith, George Raft, Evelyn Nesbitt, and James S. Sherman (27th Vice President of the United States under William Howard Taft), James S. Sherman. One of the more recent arrivals is one of singer Mariah Carey's Jack Russell Terriers, Clarence (1979–1997). His epitaph reads "My eternal friend and guardian angel you'll always be a part of me forever. Love –M." Carey's pampered pooches often travel with her, sometimes chauffeured in a limousine, sometimes flying first class.

Jack and Peggy MacPherson

Some celebrity pet owners have chosen to be buried with their pets. While burial with a pet is technically illegal in human cemeteries, if people are cremated, they can spend eternity with their pet in a pet cemetery. Hartsdale buries the cremated remains of 5 to 10 people a year. The ashes of Jack MacPherson (1877–1962), whose television persona was the "Magic Chef," and Peggy MacPherson (1875–1949) reside in an urn perched atop a gravestone dedicated to their pets.

Princess Lwoff and Goldfleck

Not all pet owners choose to spend eternity with their beloved pets, but some try to be buried close by. Princess Elisabeth Vilma Lwoff-Parlaghy (April 15, 1863–August 28, 1923) was eccentric, to say the least. Elisabeth von Parlaghy was born in Hungary, where she became known as a portrait painter. In 1899, she married Russian Prince Lwoff, and though the couple divorced a few years later, she kept his name (and apparently a fair share of his riches). When the princess arrived in New York in 1908, she was reportedly accompanied by two attachés, two couriers, a footman, first and second butlers, first and second lady's maids, a cook, a valet, and a Swedish nurse. A great animal lover, she also arrived with an assortment of pets, including a small Pomeranian dog, an Angora cat, a guinea pig, an owl, two small alligators, and a bear. When the princess arrived at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, she was informed of their pet policy, which must not have included the assortment the princess possessed; but arrangements were made for her, her menagerie, and her attendants to stay at the Plaza Hotel. And there she stayed.

One day she visited the Ringling Brothers Circus and fell in love with a little lion cub. After some spirited negotiations with the Ringling Brothers and the Plaza, the little lion cub moved in. The princess originally named the cub General Sickles after a Civil War general's portrait she painted, but the it was eventually named Goldfleck. Alas, Goldfleck was not long for this world. Before he reached full adulthood, he became sick and died. Despite his rather abbreviated time in this realm, he did go out in style. Princess Elisabeth Vilma Lwoff-Parlaghy arranged for a formal wake and a tombstone with a flowery epitaph. It reads, "Beneath This Stone Is Buried The Beautiful Young Lion Goldfleck, Whose Death Is Sincerely Mourned By His Mistress Princess Lwoff-Parlaghy, New York 1912." The princess' gravestone (40 53'3.72"N 73 52'36.72"W) is a simple one at Woodlawn cemetery. It only reveals her death date since true princesses are forever young.

Irene and Vernon Castle and their pets

Among others who are buried at Woodlawn and have their pets buried at Hartsdale are Irene Castle (April 17, 1893–January 25, 1969) and Vernon Castle (2 May 1887-15 February 1918). The Castles were a popular dance duo from 1910 until 1918, when Vernon died in a military flight-training exercise. The couple were fashion icons and as well. As a dance team, they introduced a number of dances, such as the Castle Walk, Turkey Trot, Grizzly Bear, and a hands-free version of the Tango. They were also great animal lovers, and a number of their pets are buried around the Castle Monument, including their dog Zowie and her pet monkey, Rastus. After Vernon's death, she became a staunch animal-rights activist, eventually founding the Illinois animal shelter, Orphans of the Storm. Their monument (40 53'26.01"N 73 52'37.67"W) at Woodlawn Cemetery is named "At the End of Day." Near the end of her life, Irene Castle said in a magazine interview, "When I die, my gravestone is to say 'humanitarian' instead of 'dancer.' I put it in my will. Dancing was fun, and I needed the money, but Orphans of the Storm comes from the heart. It's more important."

Irene and Vernon Castle

Castle Pets

Dr. Samuel Johnson

Dr. Samuel Johnson, founder of the Hartsdale Canine Cemetery, is also buried at Woodlawn. His rusticated Classical Revival mausoleum (40 53'12.21"N 73 52'30.91"W), which was called L'Art Nouveau at the time, contains a number of members of Johnson's family but, curiously, not his wife.

Tiny

Ninja

Coochie

Duchess and Panda

Babe

Peggy and Carlo

Inky

Led Zeppelin