

## Genealogist pieces together forgotten life

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The mausoleum at Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Harwich holding the remains of Ida Chase has been boarded up after someone broke in and opened her casket.

Cape Cod Times

By **Susan Milton**  
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HARWICH — No one in town seems to know of Ida Chase, the woman whose casket was opened after vandals broke into her family's 97-year-old mausoleum in Mount Pleasant Cemetery on South Street earlier this month.

Buried nearby is her husband, George, who built the granite and marble structure for her in 1914, according to cemetery administrator Robbin Kelley.

The mystery of the couple's past intrigued and moved genealogist Liesa Healy-Miller, who spent 30 to 40 hours this month to place Ida and her family in the history of Harwich.

"It's important for the public to know this wasn't a nameless, faceless skeleton but a living breathing person from a rich seafaring family who contributed much to the Cape," the Framingham researcher said.

Since the police didn't know of any living descendants, Healy-Miller wanted to look for them.

"A grave desecration is always shocking," she said. "I think the living descendants deserve to know what happened to their ancestor, even if they never knew her or knew of her."

After more than 20 years as a producer for local and national television, and work as an investigative reporter, Healy-Miller started doing genealogy as a hobby. "I absolutely love it," she said.

For the Chase family, she pored through Census, marriage, birth and death records in the state archives and the New England Historical Society and found obituaries to put relatives on the right branch of the family tree.

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"To do genealogy well, you have to dig down to the sources, get down to the original birth records," she said. "You can't rely on other people's family trees online."

As it turns out, George and Ida Chase had no direct descendants, Healy-Miller learned. The only potential descendant, Ida, was born and died on the same day in 1882, according to Kelley. Unusually, there were no birth or death records for the infant, Healy-Miller said. Interred with the couple are George's younger sisters, Lettice and Helena Chase.

The closest relatives that Healy-Miller could find are a great-great nephew and great-great niece, descended from Ida's sister, Mary, who married Nehemiah Kelley. At least one of their descendants is buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

Healy-Miller also wanted to find out whether George Chase was related to the more-famous Caleb Chase of West Harwich, the co-founder of the nationally known Chase & Sanborn coffee brand. His iconic image still beams from the coffee can labels. He was buried in Pine Grove Cemetery in West Harwich.

Locally, Caleb Chase's name lingers as the man who donated the land and building for the Chase Free Library. Every year, the Caleb Chase Fund, started by \$10,000 bequests to Harwich and Dennis, continues to help the poor in those towns.

George and Caleb Chase are related, according to Healy-Miller's research, distantly by blood and closely by time and circumstances. "If I can coin a phrase," she said, "Caleb is George's step great-uncle."

George's grandfather, Jonathan, and Caleb shared a father, Job Chase, who married twice and sired 17 children in his 89 years of life. Caleb was Job's son by second wife Phoebe Winslow. Jonathan was Job's son by Polly Eldredge, and he had a son, also named Jonathan, who was just four years older than Caleb.

Caleb and Jonathan, George's father, probably went to school together, Robbin Kelley suspects. Since Jonathan died when George was just 10 years old, she speculates that Caleb became a father figure to George, who worked and lived in Boston during a successful career and spent summers in Harwich.

George and Ida Chase moved to Boston shortly after they married in 1877. He worked as an agent for steamships and tow boats, according to Census records. He obviously did well, given their lifestyle and the style of the mausoleum alone. Its interior is covered by the same marble used on the exterior of the existing town hall, which was originally a bank. The bank and mausoleum were both built in 1914 by the same builder, Kelley said.

Ida Chase died at 57 in 1913 of chronic kidney disease — not a pleasant way to go. She was interred for a year in Harwich Port, with Baby Ida, then both were moved into the mausoleum. George Chase remarried and died in 1926 of cirrhosis of the liver. Chase's second wife, Rosella, decided to be buried with her family off-Cape rather than share the mausoleum with Ida.

Rosella Chase's descendants are the surviving heirs, Kelley said, adding, "Nobody else really has a claim."

The police are still investigating the break-in, which was discovered Oct. 3 by young people who saw the mausoleum's open doors. "We never get any vandalism," said Kelley, the cemetery's administrator since 2004, adding she has checked and found no police records of previous acts of vandalism at the Chase mausoleum.

The police suspect the vandals were searching for jewelry, but they don't know whether there was any in Ida Chase's casket. An anonymous donor last week offered a \$1,000 reward for information that leads to a conviction in the case.

The intruders only opened Ida Chase's vault and coffin, Kelley said, and none of her bones appear to be missing.

Kelley is sure more than one person was involved in shifting the tomb's heavy and massive marble and granite because "it took three of our guys to put it back together. The granite pieces themselves are very heavy."

The break-in and desecration has shocked Harwich residents "and people are still pretty upset," Kelley said. "It takes some kind of person to actually go into somebody's grave."

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**Patty Brown**

This is an outrage! I feel it really doesn't matter if there is any living descendants! Its just wrong period! Hope they catch who ever did this and they get whats deserved.

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**Liesa Healy-Miller**

Patty, I agree with you completely. It's horrible. While there are no direct descendants, there are distant descendants of both the Chase and Young families.

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**Chic Pollock**

Just a suggestion. I noticed the square and compasses emblem on the mausoleum. I'm sure he was



a member of Pilgrim Masonic Lodge in Harwich and they most likely would have some information about him in their archives. Back in those days, when a lodge member passed away a committee was formed to write a resolution which would be saved in the records. I learned a great deal about one of my ancestors in this manner.

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**Liesa Healy-Miller**

As the genealogist who researched the Chases, I just want to add one fact that I did not clearly state to the reporter, Susan Milton. George's second wife, Rosella, was 56 years old when they married - so they would not have had any children.

Therefore, there are no living direct descendants of George Chase.

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