

History of Grove Street Cemetery

I. Introduction

While proceeding down Grove Street, the outside boundary of New Haven's "original nine squares," one encounters an open area in pleasant contrast with the commotion of a busy city and a large university: the Grove Street Cemetery, officially called the New Haven Burying Ground. Should one venture further down Grove Street he would find some view of the area possible through a wrought iron fence; further on, to the intersection of High Street, would place him in front of the massive Egyptian Revival Gates to the cemetery designed by Henry Austin.

Lured inside by the aura of tranquility sensed from without, the visitor finds immediately before him the Chapel designed according to the strictest tenets of Victorian decorum with its gilded butterfly which, to the Greeks, symbolized the flight of the soul. Behind the Chapel, and to either side, stretches the cemetery proper: its rigid grid of avenues and paths softened by well-groomed trees and shrubs, and named after such living things as Spruce, Sycamore, Myrtle and Ivy. The cemetery, established in 1796, is perhaps the oldest in the nation with this type of layout. For example, the famous Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, dates from 1831.

II. Establishment of the Cemetery

For the first one hundred-sixty odd years of her history, New Haven buried the dead in a common burying ground beneath and behind what is now Center Church on the Green. Efforts to improve conditions in the old cemetery gained important impetus after the yellow fever plague of 1794-5 when James Hillhouse and others searched for a solution to the unsightly clutter of the upper Green. Hillhouse is known to have considered two possible solutions to the problem: the first was a private cemetery for himself and his family, but discarded the idea for the resting place might not remain in his family; this led to the second alternative, a new public burying ground for the city.

Fortunately, there was such a site available in what was known as the "Second Quarter," bounded by what is now Prospect Street, Grove Street, but not extending beyond what is now High Street. The site was crossed by two roads, one since discontinued: a diagonal from High Street to the Plainfield Road and another then called the Second Quarter Road, later Pleasant Street and now Prospect Street.

Of some interest, and worthy of some consideration, are the old owners of the land and the uses to which it was put before it was acquired for a burying ground. One Nathan Mansfield had a farm on acreage owned by the Fitch Family. Captain John Mix (see number 3 below) and later his estate owned land between the two roads and Grove Street. Further north, James Hillhouse and James Dana owned land.

Hillhouse owned a small, triangular piece of the site acquired from Mansfield as early as 1791. After agitation for a new burying ground became acute in the mid-1790's, he bought a large part of the land between Prospect, Grove and the end of High Street in two equal purchases. Another acre was obtained from the Fitches. The remainder was acquired by means of a transfer of land between Hillhouse and the Mansfields. Thirty-two prominent citizens raised the funds to purchase the property, but it is unknown whether Hillhouse was their agent or whether his initiative caused the formation of the association.

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GROVE STREET

CEMETERY

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III. Early History

Thus, in September 1796, the southeasterly part of the Cemetery was established and laid out. Lots were sold, and where appropriate, donated to the City (for the poor and for deceased strangers), to Yale, to the various Protestant Ecclesiastical Societies and for "People of Color." It appeared that the venture was off to a good start, but within three years interest had cooled despite lowering the cost of a gravesite from five to three dollars. On assumption of the cemetery's debt, the unused portion of the cemetery was returned to James Hillhouse, exclusive of paths and alleyways, for him to sell and cover his expenditure. One former historian of Grove Street Cemetery felt Hillhouse was not successful in this venture.

By 1814, all the lots in the eastern part of the cemetery had been sold. In response to public distress, Hillhouse and a group of others purchased another tract of land west of the Plainfield Road, almost doubling the cemetery's size, from Henry Daggett. The Plainfield Road was discontinued and replaced by Ashmun Street; Lock Street and Prospect Place made a complete circuit of the burying ground possible.

Several years earlier, three new churches had been completed on the Green in sharp contrast to the cluttered appearance of the old burying ground which continued to deteriorate for the next decade. A study committee concluded that it would be less costly to move the old tombstones and level the Green than build a wall around the old cemetery. By 1821 the project was complete to the satisfaction of most of the populace.

Some time later, the question of an enclosure for the New Burying Ground arose due to the proclivity of wooden fences to rot. A total of \$14,000 was raised through donation and matching funds from the City. The success of this venture caused the idea of a mere fence to be discarded in favor of the familiar stone wall. Initial and quickly approved construction of the north wall was equally quickly followed by similar enclosures for the east and west sides. The problem of allowing some view of the grounds and yet erecting an adequate barrier was considered by such tasteful men as architect, Henry Austin and sculptor, Hezekiah Augur. They decided on the familiar wrought iron fence and the sandstone, Egyptian Revival style arch. Egyptian Revival was in vogue at that time and was considered sufficiently massive but without offense to denominational sensibilities. The gateway was dedicated with appropriate pomp and circumstance in July, 1845.

Besides the enclosure around the cemetery, there were several developments within the grounds between 1820 and 1850. Through the first two decades, the tiers between cemetery streets were extended as necessary. The original Potter's Field behind the present Chapel was sold off to individuals in exchange for another plot in the northwest corner. During this period, the northeast corner of the Cemetery was lost to the Farmington Canal. The closing of the Plainfield Road left the City with some irregular lots which was rectified when the Cemetery Proprietors deeded land to the City.

A two-fold sylvan beautification program was undertaken consisting of the removal of unwanted, wild cedars and the planting of trees and shrubs. Sponsors of the project were probably inspired by Biblical passages on tree-shaded tombs which were to be imitated but not equalled in splendor.

From 1870 to the present, time has been less compressed by feverish activity devoted to improvements. The Chapel, described above, was built in 1872. In 1877, land was ceded to the City for the completion of Canal Street. During the 1880's a major project was initiated: curbstones for the avenues and paths. A resolution for removal of stones from the Green placed on City plots was adopted relegating the colonial monuments to placement in alphabetical order along the north and west walls.

IV. The Cemetery as an Institution

To this point, discussion of Grove Street Cemetery has been directed at physical development of the grounds to the point where they are recognizable to the visitor in the late twentieth century. Before concluding, it is necessary to mention several less tangible but highly important aspects of institutional history: the corporate Charter and family plots.

Among the thirty-two subscribers who associated with James Hillhouse were prominent lawyers Simeon Baldwin, David Daggett, Pierpont Edwards, and Jonathan Ingersoll. These gentlemen soon had the venture organized and formally recognized by the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut as a corporation. Such action in 1797 makes Grove Street Cemetery one of the oldest corporations in the nation.

A further consequence of the enormous public interest generated by the construction of the wrought iron and sandstone enclosure during the 1840's was the assumption of the cemetery's care by the City of New Haven. During the 1870's the charter of the Burying Ground was changed again to make the cemetery trustee for perpetual care of gravesites. The estate of Mrs. Learned made the first such endowment, and the practice continues to this day.

As recounted above, Grove Street Cemetery was established because of the cluttered condition of the old Burying ground. This caused problems for families who wished to bury their dead with their ancestors. The Charter of Grove Street Cemetery makes it clear that consideration of family plots was highly important to the original subscribers. One of the first clauses of the Charter reads that the cemetery be "... better arranged for the accommodation of families..." This makes Grove Street Cemetery one of the oldest cemeteries, so organized, in the nation.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, a word is necessary about the people who chose Grove Street Cemetery as a final resting place and who have been neglected thus far in the narration. Their representatives of national stature or interest will be found enveloped in this history as their places of interment are surrounded by the wall and fence. Along with these famous people are brief summaries of their accomplishments and a tour for those who would care to see their monuments. With these representatives are many others, doubtless great in their own special way, who are too numerous to note, but to whom Grove Street Cemetery is a very special, indeed unique, monument.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

I. Grove Street Cemetery in Particular

Heddin, James, S. Civil and Military Records of Men Moved from the (New Haven) Green to Grove Street Cemetery, unpublished paper (New Haven, 1944), in the collection of the New Haven Colony Historical Society, 114 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Connecticut.

Stokes, Anson Phelps, *Memorials of Eminent Yale Men*, Yale University Press (New Haven, 1914), includes a chapter on eminent Yale Men in Grove Street Cemetery.

Townshend, Henry H., "The Grove Street Cemetery, a Paper Read before the New Haven Colony Historical Society October 27, 1947." In the Society's *Journal and Collection* (See Heddin, above).

II. Cemeteries in General

Ludwig, Allen J., *Graven Images, New England Stone Carving and its Symbols, 1630-1845*, Wesleyan University Press (Middletown, Connecticut, 1966).

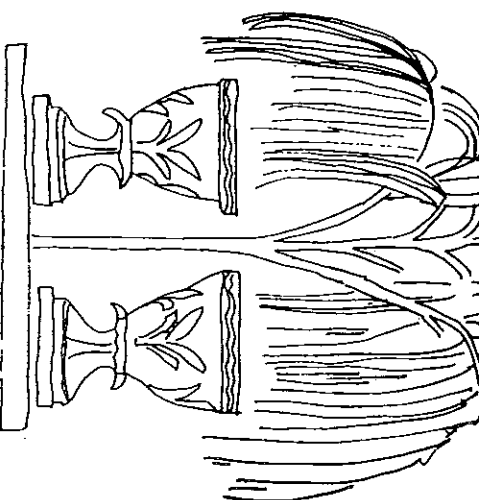
Osterweis, Rollin G., *Three Centuries of New Haven, 1638-1938*, Yale University Press (New Haven, 1953).

CREDITS

Funded and Researched by the Junior League of New Haven, Inc. in Cooperation with the Proprietors of the New Haven Burying Ground and Malcolm Munson, superintendent.

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A Chronicle of Eminent People in Grove Street Cemetery

1. **Yehudi Ashmun, 1794-1828.** Agent of the African Colonization Society which promoted the settlement of Blacks at Monrovia, Liberia.
2. **George E. Day, 1814-1905.** Yale professor of Divinity and Secretary of 2 Biblical Revision Committees.
3. **Dr. Timothy Mix, 1711-1779.** Colonial soldier. Died on a British Prison Ship.
4. **John Bassett, 1652-1714.** Captain of the trainband and Deputy to the General Court (Legislature) of Connecticut Colony.
5. **Daniel Lyman, 1718-1788.** Surveyor, Deputy to the General Court, Court Referee, Justice of the Peace and care-taker of the State's public records.
6. **Amos Beebe Eaton, 1806-1877.** Soldier, Veteran of 4 wars, attained the rank of Major General.
7. **Benjamin Silliman, 1779-1864.** Educator and pioneer in scientific education. Founder of the *American Journal of Science*.
8. **Jedediah Morse, 1761-1826.** "Father of American Geography," and Clergyman.
9. **David Humphreys, 1752-1818.** Aide de Camp to General Washington.
10. **Theodore Winthrop, 1828-1861.** Major United States Army. First New Haven victim of the Civil War.
11. **Noah Porter, 1811-1892.** Professor, Clergyman and President of Yale College, 1871-1886.
12. **Lyman Beecher, 1775-1863.** Clergyman, abolitionist and Father of Harriet Beecher Stowe.
13. **Eli Whitney, 1765-1825.** Inventor of the Cotton Gin and the system of standardized and interchangeable parts.
14. **Noah Webster, 1758-1843.** Lexicographer. Published his Dictionary and a spelling book.
15. **Eli Ives, 1779-1861.** Teacher and Professor of Medicine.
16. **Denison Olmstead, 1791-1859.** Professor of Medicine and Natural Philosophy. One of the first two to observe Halley's Comet in 1835.
17. **Ithiel Town, 1784-1844.** Architect and inventor of the lattice truss bridge.
18. **Arthur Twining Hadley, 1857-1930.** Dean of Yale Graduate School when women were first admitted. President of Yale University, 1899-1921.
19. **Leonard Bacon, 1802-1881.** Clergyman and anti-slavery man. Nearby is his sister, Delia, 1811-1859, originator of the Baconian Theory of the authorship of Shakespeare's plays.
20. **James Rowland Angell, 1869-1949.** President of Yale University 1921-1937. First President without a Yale degree upon election.
21. **James Brewster, 1788-1866.** Industrialist, Railroad Promoter and Philanthropist.
22. **West Wall.** Stones from the Upper Green placed here.
23. **Hubert Anson Newton, 1830-1896.** Meteorologist and Mathematician.
24. **Edward Gaylord Bourne, 1860-1908.** Historian and Educator. Leader in the American Historical Association.
25. **Samuel W. Johnson, 1839-1909.** Yale Professor and co-founder of the Agricultural Experiment Station Movement with William H. Brewer.
26. **North Wall.** Stones from the Upper Green placed here.
27. **Charles Goodyear, 1800-1860.** Inventor of vulcanized rubber.
28. **Henry H. Townsend, 1874-1953.** Proprietor and historian of Grove Street Cemetery, Antiquarian and Civic Figure.
29. **Jeremiah Everts, 1781-1831.** Scholar, Writer and Missionary Executive. Editor of the *Panoplist* and the *Missionary Herald*.
30. **Alfred Whitney Griswold, 1906-1963.** Historian and Educator. President of Yale University, 1950-1963.
31. **Charles Seymour, 1885-1963.** Educator and President of Yale University, 1937-1950.
32. **Theodore Dwight Woolsey, 1812-1889.** Educator and anti-slavery leader, President of Yale University, 1846-1871.
33. **Joseph Earl Sheffield, 1793-1882.** Merchant and founder of Sheffield Scientific School.
34. **Josiah Willard Gibbs, Sr. 1790-1861.** Professor at Yale Divinity School, 1824-1861.
35. **Josiah Willard Gibbs, Jr. 1839-1903.** Classical Scholar, Scientist, and the "Father of Thermodynamics."
36. **James A. Hoppin, 1820-1906.** Teacher and Professor of Religion at Art.
37. **Alexander C. Twining, 1801-1884.** Inventor of first practical artificial ice system.
38. **Elias Loomis, 1811-1889.** Mathematician and Astronomer.
39. **Ohniel C. Marsh, 1831-1899.** Paleontologist. Recognized for organization of the whole skeleton rather than individual bones.
40. **Timothy Dwight, 1829-1916.** Educator, Clergyman and President of Yale University, 1886-1899.
41. **Henry Austin, 1804-1891.** Architect. Designed gates of the cemetery as well as houses and public buildings.
42. **Alfred Howe Terry, 1827-1890.** Soldier, Major General, U.S. Army, Hero of Ft. Fisher near Wilmington, 1865. General George A. Custler's Commanding officer against the Sioux in 1876.
43. **Eli Whitney Blake, 1795-1866.** Manufacturer and inventor of the stone crusher. His brother, Philip, invented the corkscrew.
44. **Samuel Mansfield, 1717-1775.** Sheriff of New Haven — first time that office was mentioned.
45. **George Peck Fisher, 1827-1902.** Historian and Theologian.
46. **Benjamin Silliman, Jr. 1816-1885.** Yale Chemist and Geologist. First suggested some practical uses for petroleum.
47. **Aaron Skinner, 1800-1858.** Civic figure and supervisor of improvements to Grove Street Cemetery.
48. **William H. Brewer, 1828-1910.** Scientist. Influential in founding Yale Forestry School and co-founder of the 1st Agricultural Experiment Station with S. W. Johnson.
49. **Phineas Bradley, 1745-1797.** Soldier, Captain, commander of the artillery defending New Haven, July 5, 1779.
50. **James Kingsley, 1778-1852.** Professor of Hebrew, Greek and Ecclesiastical History at Yale.
51. **Amos Doolittle, 1754-1832.** Engraver of Revolutionary Scenes and Silversmith. "The Revolver of Connecticut."
52. **Naphtali Daggett, 1727-1780.** Clergyman, Educator and President *pro tempore* of Yale College 1766-1777.
53. **Henry Farnham, 1836-1917.** Prominent New Haven merchant and Philanthropist.
54. **Hezekiah Augur, 1791-1858.** Wood carver, Sculptor and Inventor.
55. **Leverett Candee, 1795-1863.** Industrialist. First practical use of Goodyear's vulcanization of rubber.
56. **Chauncey Goodrich, 1790-1860.** Yale Professor of Homiletics and Pastoral Charge.
57. **Theodore T. Munger, 1830-1910.** Distinguished Clergyman.
58. **Hiram Bingham, 1789-1869.** Pioneer Missionary to Hawaii, Clergyman.
59. **James Bishop, born England? -1691.** Served as Secretary, Lieutenant Governor and Deputy Governor of New Haven jurisdiction.
60. **David Daggett, 1764-1854.** Lawyer, Politician, Judge and Chief Justice of Connecticut Superior Court.
61. **Melancthon Taylor Woolsey, 1717-1758.** Soldier, and Colonel in Colonial Army.
62. **James Hillhouse, 1754-1832.** Attorney, Politician, Soldier and Civic Figure. Planted the elms, established Grove Street Cemetery. Nearby is his daughter, Mary Lucas, 1786-1871, a Philanthropist and able Businesswoman.
63. **Timothy Trowbridge, 1631-1734.** Merchant, Soldier and Politician.
64. **Leverett Hubbard, 1725-1795.** Soldier, Physician and Apothecary.
65. **Hon. Nathan Smith, 1770-1835.** U.S. Senator, Transportation Promoter and Civic Figure.
66. **David Wooster, 1711-1777.** Soldier, Major General, 7th in rank below Washington. Killed in Action.
67. **Nathan Whiting, 1724-1771.** Soldier, Colonel in the 7 Years' War.
68. **Thomas Clapp, 1700-1767.** Rector (President) of Yale College, 1740-1766.
69. **Jeremiah Day, 1773-1868.** Educator, President of Yale University, 1817-1845.
70. **Roger Sherman, 1721-1793.** Statesman. Signer of the 4 basic documents of the Republic; the Articles of Association, the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution.
71. **Roger Sherman Baldwin, 1793-1863.** Lawyer, U.S. Senator, and 32nd Governor of Connecticut.
72. **Nathan Beers, 1765-1861.** Paymaster to Connecticut troops in the Revolution.
73. **Andrew Hull Foote, 1806-1863.** Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy. Wounded on the Mississippi River, he died enroute to his next assignment the blockade of Charleston.
74. **Titus Street, 1766-1842.** Businessman and Civic Figure.
75. **Timothy Dwight, Sr. 1752-1817.** Scholar, President of Yale University, 1795-1817.
76. **Ezra Stiles, 1727-1795.** Scholar, Diarist, Clergyman and President of Yale College, 1778-1795.
77. **Theophilus Eaton, 1590-1657.** Co-leader of the expedition that founded New Haven and 1st Governor of New Haven.
78. **Martha Townsend, 1753-1797.** First interment in Grove Street Cemetery.
79. **Nathaniel Jocelyn, 1796-1881.** Engraver and Portrait Painter.

