



ANCIENT
BURYING
GROUND
ASSOCIATION

PASSAGES

Preserving A History Carved in Stone

President's Message

The Ancient Burying Ground Association continues to have a very busy and productive year. Our conservation and programming efforts are paying off with incredible interest and support from the public.

The care of the gravestones is an ongoing, never-ending process requiring constant evaluation and attention. Many of our historic gravestones are nearly 375 years old and each year brings another challenge to address. The main initiative for the ABGA this year is affectionately referred to as the "Leaners Project." Read more in the Update below.

We have dedicated \$20,000



Ty Tryon

towards this project and our goal is to raise \$10,000, with over \$1,700 already contributed. The ABGA also raised \$1,620 as a first-time participant in the Travelers Championship Birdies for Charity program, sponsored by Webster Bank, last spring.

Please consider donating to the Leaners Project today! For donation information see page 3.

The ABGA's educational outreach programs continue to expand, attracting visitors from throughout New England, the United States, and abroad. This fall we will offer Guided Tours during the week and a CT Freedom Trail tour. October features a series of tours and lectures on the 17th century witch trials in Hartford and Connecticut. Look for listings on pages 7 and 8. In addition to sharing the history and stories from the ABG, these recurring programs

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Preservation Update

To straighten and repair the Leaners, the ABGA is fortunate to have the expertise of Jonathan Appell and his family-owned business, Atlas Preservation. Over the years, he has developed specialized knowledge and training to enhance his ability to conserve the older and more fragile gravestones. Currently Jon performs specialized projects and also conducts workshops nationally in collaboration with towns, states, historical societies, and cemeteries.

The work began this past summer and Appell and his team had soon straightened several of the 59 head and footstones for the Leaners Project. Orange flags indicated the

stones in need of repair. The team brought in a tripod made of wood with a hitch to raise the heavy and often delicate stones. The clay soil in



The James Currie stone had been broken and replanted. With the creation of a new base, the whole inscription will be visible, showing the verse that has been hidden below ground.

the ABG is always a challenge. Many of these leaning stones need proper drainage, so materials are added to stabilize the stone.

The ABGA thanks the supporters who chose to "Adopt-a-Stone." Thanks to their support, the following stones have been sponsored: Thomas Ensign, Timothy Stanly, Capt. John Talcott, and Abigail Whiting. The Stanly gravestone is the oldest known stone in the ABG. His epitaph reads simply:

HERE
LYETH THE BODY OF
TIMOTHY STANLY
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE
APRIL 1648
AGED 45

In Remembrance of Bill Hosley

Everyone at the Ancient Burying Ground Association (ABGA) was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Bill Hosley on July 2. Bill was a passionate and dedicated supporter of the ABGA whose contributions stretched back to our earliest days. Alongside Shep Holcombe, Bill undertook a comprehensive survey of the memorials in the Ancient Burying Ground, laying the foundation for our preservation efforts. Their work was chronicled in the book *By Their Markers Ye Shall Know Them*.

Over the years, Bill remained an unwavering advocate for our mission—delivering lectures, writing articles, and actively promoting our programs. His love for historic cemeteries was profound, and he visited them often, seeing in them not just the past, but a source of inspiration for the present.

In 2005, he founded Terra Firma Northeast, a consulting practice focused on preservation, education, strategic planning, marketing, and exhibition development for museums and communities. This was a natural extension of his belief that history and tangible connections to the past could spark civic engagement and a stronger sense of community for people from all walks of life.

Bill was truly a force of nature—energetic, curious, and deeply generous. A voracious reader and a quick thinker, he sought always to make the world better. As a speaker, he was both enthusiastic and engaging; as a mentor, he was warm and encouraging to countless individuals and organizations.

William Newell Hosley Jr. graduated



ed from Middlebury College in 1977 and earned his master's degree from the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture in 1980. As a curator at the Wadsworth Atheneum from 1980 to 1997, he organized numerous exhibitions and authored several books, including *The Great River: Art and Society of the Connecticut Valley* (1985), and *Colt: The Making of an American Legend* (1996), along with dozens of articles.

Bill's impact extended far beyond the ABG. He led Connecticut Landmarks and its network of historic house museums from 1997 to 2004 and later served as Executive Director of the New Haven Museum from 2006 to 2009. He became nationally known as a historian, preservationist, writer, and photographer.



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Bill Hosley is survived by his wife of 40 years, Christine Ermenc, their daughter Abigail, son Benjamin, and brother Charles. We extend our deepest condolences to them, and to all of Bill's family, friends, and colleagues.

His legacy will continue to inspire our work and the broader community of those who cherish history.

President's Message

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contribute important financial support to the ABGA's mission.

I am also proud of the achievements of the Board of Directors and the successful conclusion of a Strategic Plan funded in part by CT Humanities. The Board, Director,

and volunteers worked to create a 3-year plan that focuses on measurable steps that will strengthen and grow the ABGA.

Thank You

Ty Tryon, President, Ancient Burying Ground Association

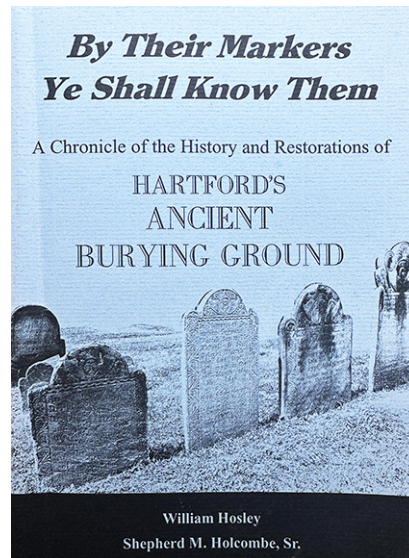
Bill Hosley and The Blue Book

By Christine Jewell

In 1994, the Ancient Burying Ground Association published a comprehensive overview of the history and ongoing renovation work in the Ancient Burying Ground. The book is titled *By Their Markers Ye Shall Know Them: A Chronicle of the History and Restorations of Hartford's Ancient Burying Ground*.

The main text was written by William Hosley and the introduction, epitaphs, and map were contributed by Shepherd M. Holcombe, Sr. It's frequently referred to as "the Blue Book," or "Hosley's book." Its content includes high quality research, history, genealogy, and restoration resources. I have it near my desk and use it constantly for research and reference.

In his forward to *By Their Markers*, Bill wrote that he was "pleased and honored to be involved in a program of such importance." At the time, he



was Curator of American Decorative Arts at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford. He was also a founding member of the Association for Gravestone Studies. The ABGA was honored to have his contributions as a passionate person who appreciated the importance and value of Puritan art, gravestone studies, and historic preservation. Hosley's scholarship

and lasting enthusiasm for cemeteries lives on in this book.

The Blue Book is extremely valuable for its epitaph transcriptions, which provide complete details on gravestones that have since washed away from the elements. I consult the book for information on social media, posting epitaphs and stories of the people buried in the Ancient Burying Ground, along with photos from the database on the ABGA website.

This project was accompanied by an extensive and successful fundraising campaign to conduct important scholarly research as well as hands-on restorations. Many thanks are owed to Board Chairman Shepherd M. Holcombe, Sr., the Board, sponsors, donors, volunteers, and contractors who made this happen. The book is available for purchase online, or you can become a member at the \$100 level and above and receive a free copy.

Adopt A Stone

The Ancient Burying Ground Association holds as its primary purpose the conservation of the gravestones in Hartford, Connecticut's oldest-surviving colonial site. Our current priority is the repair and resetting of head and footstones, with a current list of 59 markers for the "Leaners Project." (see page one)

The total estimate for this project will be close to \$20,000 and the ABGA would like to raise \$10,000 towards this very difficult and labor-intensive work.

You can help with this project by adopting a grave marker! Each stone will cost an average of \$350 to repair and stabilize. A full list of the leaning markers is available on our web-



Jonathan Appell of Atlas Preservation sets the leaners straight.

site: ancientburyingground.com/support/donate. Choose a stone from the list, or donate to the overall project, in any amount! If you'd rather not select a name, or if support for one stone exceeds what is needed,

gifts will be used for the entire project.

Donations by check are accepted through the U.S. mail: Ancient Burying Ground Association

P.O. Box 347

Hartford, CT 06141-0347

Or click on the QR code



Ancient Family Tragedies and the Rh Factor

By Molly Gilmore

In New England's ancient burial grounds, visitors often wonder at the number of infant deaths recorded on the headstones found within these cemeteries.

Generally, these deaths are attributed to infectious diseases such as diphtheria, smallpox, measles, scarlet fever, and dysentery. However, sometimes subtle patterns on these stones emerge: multiple clusters of infants buried beneath the same family name, all having died within weeks or months of birth.

While 17th and 18th century parents were often forced to accept infant death as a tragic fact of life, research suggests that a modern medical explanation—the Rh factor—may help illuminate the stories behind the sorrow etched in these stones.

The Rh Factor Explained

The Rh factor (Rhesus factor) is a protein found on red blood cells. Most people are Rh-positive, but about 15% of people of Northern European ancestry are Rh-negative. When a Rh-negative mother conceives a child with a Rh-positive father, her immune system may recognize the baby's blood cells as foreign and produce antibodies against them. While this usually doesn't affect the mother's first pregnancy, in subsequent pregnancies, these antibodies can cross the placenta and destroy the red blood cells of the fetus. This leads to severe anemia, jaundice, and death—a condition now known as hemolytic disease of the newborn (HDN).

Prior to the 20th century, the consequences of Rh incompatibility and HDN were tragic, with no preventative or therapeutic measures available. Affected pregnancies often resulted in stillbirths or neonatal deaths due to severe anemia and jaundice in the newborn. For Rh-negative mothers in early America, this meant Rh disease would have been an invisible and relentless killer of their children.

A Hartford Family's Experience

On November 21, 1748, John Skinner Jr. and Mary Lord Whiting were married in Hartford.

During their 23-year marriage, the couple seems to have produced eleven children. However, according to the epitaph on Mary's headstone, ten of their children were buried next to her, all of whom died soon after birth.

"Here Lies Interred ye Body of Mrs. Mary wife of Mr. John Skinner, Junr., who Departed this Life May ye 23d A.D. 1772 in ye 42nd Year of her Age with 10 of her Children by her Side who all Died Soon After they ware Born"

In fact, records from the 1700s reveal multiple infants of John and Mary dying within short spans of time, with only the first child surviving—Elizabeth Skinner born in 1751. This timeline aligns with what is now recognized as



Rh sensitization in pregnancy. Mary's immune system likely developed antibodies against Rh-positive blood following the birth of Elizabeth. Tragically, her body attacked the red blood cells of her subsequent babies leading to anemia, jaundice, and death.

Why It Matters

In Puritan New England, repeated infant death often carried stigma. Mothers were often thought to be cursed, sinful, or divinely punished. This new perspective restores their dignity—and perhaps offers a kind of posthumous justice.

Understanding the likely presence of Rh incompatibility among Hartford's founding families helps us view their suffering not as mysterious or moral failings (as many believed in the 17th century), but as the tragic result of a genetic mismatch that medicine had yet to name.

A Call to Remember

As burial maps and genealogical records are studied more closely, Hartford's Ancient Burying Ground becomes not just a cemetery, but a repository of hidden medical history. The story of the Skinner family is just one thread in a broader tapestry of misunderstood loss.

Today, the ABGA honors these families not just with preservation, but with insight—and with our promise to keep seeking the truth behind the stones.

Sources: please see on next page

Marshalling the Colony

By Molly Gilmore

Just a few headstones north of the Main Street entrance to the Ancient Burying Ground, there is a stone that memorializes one of the most polarizing figures in the early settlement of Hartford.

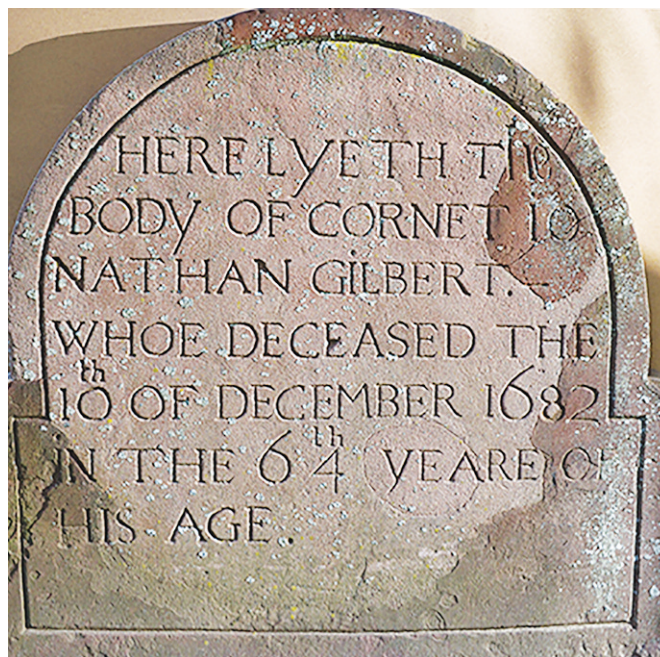
As the Marshal of the Colony from 1646 to 1675, Jonathan Gilbert was a man simultaneously feared and revered. In this role, his responsibilities included:

- Executing the sentences and orders of the courts, including capital punishments;
- Serving warrants and writs, arresting and conveying prisoners, and coordinating his duties with Hartford's jailer, Daniel Garrett;
- Securing and administering estates under the direction of the courts when a convicted person's goods had to be inventoried, debts settled, fines paid, or dependents placed; and
- Keeping the peace and assisting the Colony's militia in his role as Cornet.

In Hartford, Gilbert directly exercised the powers and duties of the hangman – the only mode of execution recognized in the colony at the time. In 1654, this may have meant that he would have played a hand in the execution of his brother Thomas's wife Lydia Gilbert for witchcraft. What we know for certain is that he carried out the January 1663 executions for witchcraft of Mary Barnes, Rebecca Greensmith, and her husband Nathaniel Greensmith.

Another young woman convicted of witchcraft that year – Judith Varlet – narrowly escaped execution thanks to the swift intervention of her brother-in-law, New Amsterdam Director-General Peter Stuyvesant.

The earliest mention of Gilbert in Hartford's records involves his marriage on January 29, 1645/6, to Mary White, the daughter of one of Hartford's original proprietors.



Following Mary's death from childbirth in 1649, Gilbert remarried Mary Wells in 1650, with whom he had at least eight more children. Their marriage appears to have been a very lucrative partnership. Together, the couple accumulated vast wealth through property grants totaling over 1300 acres, profitable innkeeping operations in at least two locations, and various other gainful activities. In Gilbert's will dated September 10, 1682, his estate is recorded as worth £2484-17-09, an extraordinary amount for the time.

Jonathan Gilbert lived a remarkable life at a pivotal time. His gravestone identifies him simply as "Cornet Jonathan Gilbert," an acknowledgement of his militia rank. However, it was as the Marshal that he played his most consequential role in Hartford. Gilbert was not a judge or an accuser. He was the blunt force of colonial justice: enforcing the court's rulings, overseeing the jail, arranging the gallows, settling estates, and placing orphaned children in respectable homes.

Sources Rh Factor

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5. Family timelines and mapping data compiled from ABGA headstone transcriptions and town birth/death registries and town.

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1. *A Digest of the Early Connecticut Probate Records*. Compiled by Charles William Manwaring. Hartford, Conn.: R. S. Peck & Co., 1904.
2. *Dutch Colonial Administrative Correspondence*. New York State Archives online. <https://tinyurl.com/45ypdjdk> Accessed 9/16/25.
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6. Trumbull, J. Hammond, 1821-1897, ed. *The Memorial History of Hartford County, Connecticut, 1633-1884*. Boston: E. L. Osgood, 1886.

Stone Stories: Discovering Literary Legacies in the ABG



By Kate Dimancescu

As autumn begins in earnest, ushering in a season marked by boundless enthusiasm for leaf peeping excursions, apple picking, enjoying cider donuts, and late afternoons or early evening interludes spent curled up with a good book beside a roaring fire, there is also renewed interest in visiting and exploring historic sites with connections to noteworthy and in some cases darker chapters of New England's past. Welcome to a season when the people who were laid to rest in the Ancient Burying Ground (ABG) find themselves in the spotlight.

The focus of this piece is both literary and historical in nature, as meaningful connections to the past are fostered by knowledge imparted by the ABG and the ABGA. Every October, the ABGA presents programs and guided tours focused on Witchcraft Trials in Connecticut. It would have been an engaging experience to go on a witchcraft trials tour in the ABG when I was a child visiting Hartford to spend time with my paternal grandparents. My first impressions and general awareness of witchcraft trials in Connecticut came from *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* by Elizabeth George Speare, which is a 20th century work of historical fiction that found its way onto my literary radar in middle school. Prior to reading this novel, I was well acquainted with Salem's witchcraft trials, whose roots may be found in present-day Danvers, Massachusetts, once known as Salem Village, an easy day trip from my home. The legacies of those dark times were also conveyed in another literary context via *The House of the Seven Gables* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose stories were told to my friends and me during childhood

visits to Salem. Apparently, he chose to change the spelling of his last name so as to distance himself from a forebear, who was a judge during the Salem witchcraft trials.

Witchcraft trials occurring far earlier in present-day Connecticut were simply not a subject discussed when New England history was presented in middle school. I did not learn more about Connecticut's witchcraft trials and Hartford's early colonial history until I began writing about and researching my 17th century maternal forebears in Connecticut, some of whom were buried in the ABG. I was also fascinated to learn that the historic Buttolph-Williams house in nearby Wethersfield had been a source of inspiration for Speare when she was writing her novel.

Given the centuries of burials in the ABG, and the corresponding lives and legacies of so many Hartford residents interred there, perhaps an author, poet, or even a musician may be moved this autumn to pen a piece or even lyrics based upon a story they hear during a tour or by an epitaph they read. It is worth noting, when pondering potential creative inspiration that may spontaneously occur in the midst of a cemetery visit, that Charles Dickens found literary inspiration for the name of his character "Ebenezer Scrooge" in an Edinburgh, Scotland burial ground. During an evening walk in 1841, he happened to spot a headstone bearing the name and epitaph of "Ebenezer Lennox Scroggie."

As one ponders the possibilities of what fertile thoughts a stroll or tour in the ABG this autumn might inspire, it is worth considering that the burial ground's current size does not reflect its former size; it was once larger. Over time, portions of the burying ground were sold and buildings erected, which caused graves to be unearthed and revealed. This knowledge, coupled with the tragic reality that some of the individuals buried there were drowning victims, often conjures up in my own imagination macabre visions from William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. It is the scene when Hamlet witnesses a gravedigger singing as he goes about preparing hallowed ground for Ophelia's burial after her death due to drowning. In due course the gravedigger happens upon the skull of Yorick, who was the court jester for Hamlet's father. It is both strange and fascinating to think that these very scenes were crafted in the imagina-

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ABGA Fall Lectures and Guided Tours

Guided Tours

Paranoia: The Witchcraft Trials in CT

Sat, Oct 18: 10:30am & 12:00pm

Sat, Oct 25: 10:30am

Members: \$10; Non-Members: \$15; Future Members: \$25+ per person

Hear the stories, gossip, and intrigue of the people connected to the 17th century witchcraft panic in the Ancient Burying Ground in downtown Hartford, CT. Meet the magistrates, lawyers, townspeople, and clergy who were involved.

The Ancient Burying Ground is the location of fourteen men who had connections to the Connecticut witchcraft trials, including magistrates and those who served in the church and government.

Lectures

I. Justice Meets Myth & Magic:

The Witchcraft Trials in CT

Wed, October 22 | Dinner & Talk: 5pm | \$20

Location: Central CT State Univ.

Presented by ABGA Director Christine Jewell, learn how the witchcraft trials emerged in CT in the 1600s. Find out how the colonists brought a belief in witchcraft from Europe. Enjoy a lively presentation on colonial history and its influence on our culture today. *In partnership with CCSU / Scholars for Life*

II. Justice Meets Myth & Magic

Wed, October 29 | 6pm | Virtual Lecture

Members: Free; Non-Members: \$15; Future Members: \$25 per person

Register online: ancientburyingground.com



Stone Stories

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tion of Shakespeare and then performed onstage during the lifetimes of some of the individuals who were born and raised in England and then emigrated to New England, eventually being buried in what is now known as the Ancient Burying Ground. To place this into a larger literary, theatrical, and historical context which connects to the ABG, Shakespeare's audiences probably first witnessed the graveyard scene from *Hamlet* about forty years before the first burials in the ABG occurred. Down the centuries, one wonders what workers and passers-by thought as they found themselves – just as Hamlet and the gravedigger – staring at the skeletal remains of those who predeceased them.

Personally, the Ancient Burying Ground and some of its headstones served as sources of inspiration for my own literary endeavors starting in April 2011, when I first visited the burial ground with my father, who was a graduate of the Hartford Public High School. As he parked his car on Main Street, my father told me that his

alma mater was a successor to the Hartford Grammar School established by Reverend Thomas Hooker in 1638. My father briefly relayed how Hooker and a group of courageous men, women, and children walked through the wilderness from what is now Cambridge, Massachusetts to establish Hartford. Having been in Cambridge several days prior, and knowing that my maternal forebears Dorothy (Bird) Lord, her husband Thomas Lord, and members of their family had been amongst the members of Hooker's group, made these historical insights especially meaningful. My father and I walked around the burial ground searching for ancestral headstones and names on the Founders Monument. At the time, I had no clue that the forebears of mine laid to rest in the ABG also counted among their literary descendants author L. Frank Baum, who first wrote captivating timeless stories about Dorothy and the magical land of Oz, and author and humorist David Sedaris. Knowing these fellow authors and I have ancestral connections to the ABG gives me great pride, as does knowing that the ABGA continues to inform and educate members of the public and descendants of those buried there centuries after its establishment.



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Spend the day in Hartford to explore the fascinating history of colonial witchcraft trials.

Paranoia: Guided Tour

in the Ancient Burying Ground

Saturday, Oct 25 | 10:30am

Members: \$10; Non-Members: \$15

Lecture @the Old State House

Meet the Parsons:

Witchcraft in Early Springfield, MA

Saturday, October 25 | 2pm | Free, RSVP

*In partnership with the Springfield Museums &
Connecticut's Old State House, Hartford*

Register online ancientburyingground.com

