



ANCIENT  
BURYING  
GROUND  
ASSOCIATION

# PASSAGES

*Preserving A History Carved in Stone*



The artwork of Cora Marshall appears on the website and gives faces to those for whom there are no portraits, with depictions based on descriptions in newspapers and other documents.

## *Uncovering Their History:*

### **African and Native Americans Buried in the ABG, 1640-1815**

#### *New research and website launched with fall events*

The Ancient Burying Ground Association commissioned a cutting edge, scholarly research study in 2019 which has documented over 300 individuals of color buried in Hartford's Ancient Burying Ground between 1640 and 1815, and an additional 200 likely buried there. That research is now found on an easy-to-use website that contains a database including free and enslaved members of the black community and a small number of Native American individuals. The new website will help scholars as well as family historians, genealogists, and descendants to establish information on gender, age, skills, trades, family connections, and residences ~ information that can be used to better understand African and Native American lives in early Hartford.

Sponsored by the Ancient Burying Ground Association, the new website was launched at the annual Thomas Hooker Lecture with a free public presentation by Project Director Dr. Katherine Hermes at the Hartford History Center of the Hartford Public Library. Over 110 people attended, and questions and comments following the talk showed the audience's enthusiasm.

"We knew that there were many African Americans

and Native Americans buried in the burying ground, including five Black Governors, but we also knew that there was a need for fine-grained, scholarly research to reveal their stories and make the information available to the public," says Ty Tryon, President of the Ancient Burying Ground Association. "We were very happy to receive partial funding from the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office. That allowed us to commission Dr. Katherine Hermes, Central Connecticut State University, and her team to comb through the Connecticut Colony's earliest records to discover names and connections." Land records, court records, newspaper accounts, and probate files ~ many handwritten ~ were all consulted to build profiles of black individuals and families as well as the families who enslaved them.

This exciting project carried the research into the emerging field of "digital humanities." Dr. Hermes explains, "We created a website with details on nearly 500 people, whose profiles are organized as individual listings that act as virtual headstones. The team added public family trees on Ancestry.com to make it easy for users to link to their family tree and we developed a computer program called RelationshipTree to make connections that went beyond the familial such as enslaved-enslaver, friendship, will-and-beneficiary and more."

**Continued on page 3**

# President's Letter

The year 2019 has been a very busy and remarkable year for the Ancient Burying Ground Association.

Gravestone conservation is an ongoing, never-ending process. Many of the gravestones in the Ancient Burying ground are now reaching 375 years in age. Ironically, many of the oldest examples are in the best condition despite their age. Our 2019 conservation projects focused on markers of significance that were overdue for attention: the replication of the James Richards (d.1680) tomb, the use of an innovative method to repair a bas-relief coat-of-arms on the Governor George Wyllys (d.1648) tomb, and the restoration of a rare sarcophagus for the Caldwell (d.1736) and McLean (d. 1742) children.

The summer of 2019 was a very successful season for our thematic tours. This year's topics included American Revolutionary War Veterans, Connecticut Connections, and the Hartford witch trials. The Hartford witch trial tour attracted visitors from as far away as New Jersey and New Hampshire, with an attendance of over 80 visitors. Due to the success of this tour, a repeat talk and tour on the Hartford witch trials, along with a memorial service, was held in October.

Very dear to my heart is our recently completed project, "Uncovering Their



History: African, African American and Native American Burials in the Ancient Burying Ground 1640 - 1815." We received a matching grant from the State Historic Preservation Office to support this scholarly study, led by Dr. Katherine Hermes. This remarkable project is a model for other historic initiatives around the state, and was the topic for our annual Thomas Hooker Lecture on September 12, when Dr. Hermes spoke to a full room. The Hartford History Center at the Hartford Public Library hosted the event, as well as workshops, and an exhibition on the history of the ABG.

The Ancient Burying Ground Association is made up of a dedicated team of volunteers. Please help us with our educational outreach initiatives and the ongoing gravestone conservation with a generous contribution.

Thank you  
Ty Tryon, President

## Welcome New Board Members

This November the ABGA Board of Directors enthusiastically welcomed three new members. All three have BA's in History from Central Connecticut State University.

**Emily Cahill** interned as a Research Assistant at the Old State House, and now works in Hartford.

**Tavvia Jefferson** was on the CCSU team that worked on the African American project, contributing pivotal

research at the State Library. She was born and grew up in the greater Hartford area.

**Kory Mills** interned with Mary Donohue at *Connecticut Explored* when he was at CCSU as an undergrad. He then earned a Masters in Public Administration from UCONN, and now works in the City of Hartford's Budgeting Office.



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## Contact Us

For more information about the Ancient Burying Ground Association, or to make a contribution, please contact us.

Telephone: (860) 337-1640

Email: [contact@](mailto:contact@theancientburyingground.org)

[theancientburyingground.org](http://theancientburyingground.org)

PO Box 347, Hartford, CT 06140

[www.theancientburyingground.org](http://www.theancientburyingground.org)

Gifts of securities may be made through: Fidelity Investments

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# Restoration of Caldwell and McLean Children Sarcophagus

This very rare, diminutive sarcophagus is a one-of-a-kind marker in the Ancient Burying Ground. It marks the grave of Mary Caldwell, d. 1736 age 2 years and 2 months, and Allen McLean, d. 1742 age 4. This brownstone grave marker has seen earlier restoration efforts and as often happens with earlier repairs, they tend to fail, as seen here with the “Dutchman” repair at the base. The surface on the top was separating from the fabric, compromising much



of the lettering of the epitaph. The missing surface areas have been infilled with appropriate “sympathetic” cementitious material and the

loose footing is now securely attached. The missing lettering on the top surface has been re-carved by hand following the style of the original.

## Uncovering Their History

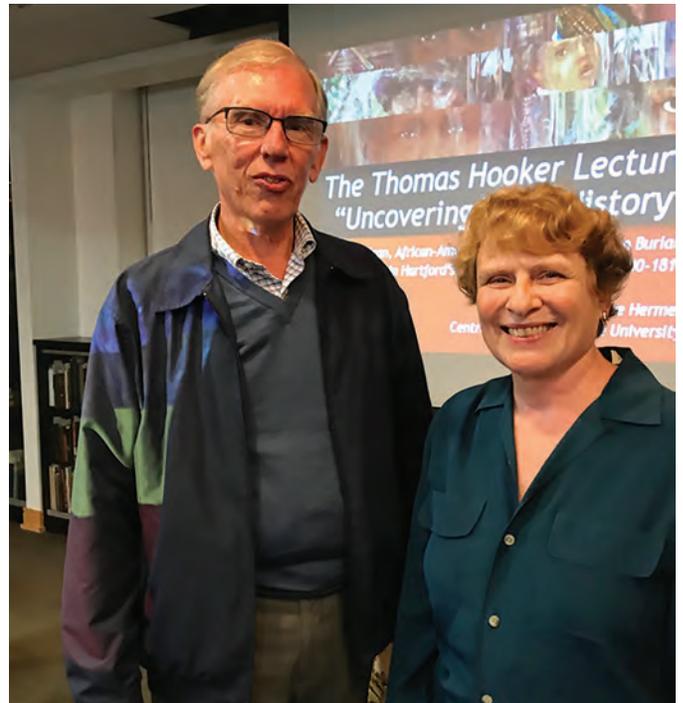
Continued from page 1

These evocative stories, as well as narratives about individual families, are found on the new website, [www.africanburialsct.org](http://www.africanburialsct.org).

The Hartford History Center partnered with the ABGA for the Thomas Hooker Lecture and a follow-up workshop, “Researching Hartford’s Early Black Community,” which offered detailed information on how to use original source material in Hartford’s libraries and historical records. To accompany these presentations, the Hartford History Center displayed an exhibit during September and October, “Uncovering the Ancient Burying Ground,” with photographs and documents highlighting the Ancient Burying Ground as a historic site in Hartford. All events were free and open to the public.

The Ancient Burying Ground Association would like to thank all the organizations that helped make this research possible and introduce it to a wide audience: the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office of the Department of Economic and Community Development, the Hartford History Center at the Hartford Public Library, the William and Alice Mortensen Foundation, and Connecticut Humanities.

This project has generated much interest, and Dr. Hermes has been asked to present her research at several other locations. She was interviewed on a radio station out of Philadelphia, presented to the Connecticut League of History Organizations, and led a discussion at the Old State House. The project was also featured in a



Dr. Katherine Hermes with Connecticut State Librarian Kendall Wiggin.

six page article in *Connecticut Explored*, a magazine of Connecticut history, on the podcast “Grating the Nutmeg,” and in the *Hartford Courant*.

This remarkable, multifaceted project is significant as it is more than a genealogical and historical study. In addition to a thorough final report, an interactive website with links to RelationshipTree and Ancestry.com make the history available to all. The website solicits input, and we have already received information that can be added to the database and profiles. This digital presentation encourages community engagement and learning about early Hartford history.

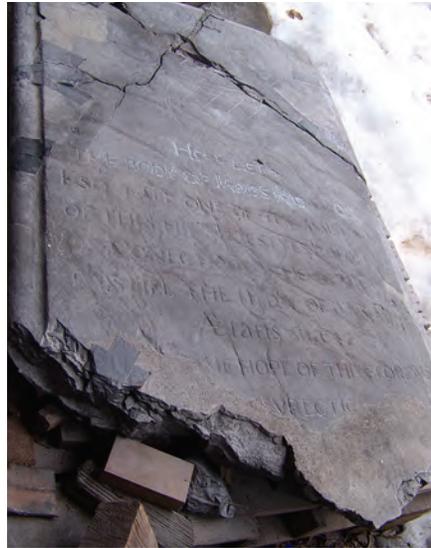
# Hon. James Richards, Esq.

*Conservation articles and photos*  
by Ty Tryon

Who was James Richards, Esq. to have one of the largest of the early tombs in the Ancient Burying Ground?

The ancestors of James Richards came from nobility in the region of Somerset in Wales, England. Richards is a Welsh name with wide representation in noble families, as books of heraldry depict at least seventeen distinct coats of arms for the Richards families. James Richards is documented as being in Boston in 1652, when he took the freeman's oath at age 21. In 1662/63 he settled in Hartford, Connecticut. In 1663 he was chosen townsman for the south side of Little River (Hog River aka Park River). Richards was accepted into the community as a gentleman of rank, and for seventeen years he built his commercial businesses and was active in public service. In October of 1664 he was admitted as freeman, and at the same General Court was chosen as an assistant for the colony. In 1665 he was styled as Lieutenant and became a member of the House of Magistrates. In 1672 he was chosen by Connecticut as a commissioner of the United Colonies, to assist Governor John Winthrop in Plymouth for the purpose of securing a permanent union of the New England Colonies.

James Richards married Sarah Gibbons, daughter of William Gibbons, Esq. of Hartford; between them they had eleven children, according to the records of births



*The Richards slab in fragments*

and deaths in the Richards family bible. Richards was a successful merchant and traded extensively in real estate. At the time of his death in 1680, his estate was valued at £ 7,930, an amazing accumulation of wealth and assets for colonial times.\* His real estate holdings included land and buildings in England, a farm in Nawbuck, CT (east of Wethersfield), housing and land in New London, and 10 acres of land in Rocky Hill. The Rev. Simon Bradstreet of New London noted in his journal that, "Mr. James Richards, one of ye magistrates of this Colony, died June 9, 1680, aged 50, or something less. He was a man of good parts and a good justice, and will be much missed, especially at this time..... His grave is near Rev. Thomas Hooker and other worthies." In his will, he bequeathed much of his estate, which consisted of lands and buildings, to his living children and £700 to his unborn child.

In the *Genealogical Register of the*



*The new replication*

*Descendants of Several Ancient Puritans, Vol III*, published 1861, the author Rev. Abner Morse, A.M. makes a detailed observation of the James Richards tomb. "His tabular monument, one of the largest in the ancient cemetery at Hartford, and originally the most splendid, consists of a mineral that does not appear in New England. It may prove to be from a quarry of the old red sandstone which underlays nearly the entire county of Somerset, (England)." The writer goes on to indicate that much of the surface of the tabular monument has eroded away "in 180 years... removed by atmospheric agency and that fifty years more, the arms and inscription will be obliterated." The writer continues with the following: "Will some noble hand interfere, re-chisel them...?" Please read the accompanying account of the replication of the James Richards tomb, 158 years later, funded by the Ancient Burying Ground Association.

\* To put the size of the Richards inventoried estate in context, the combined mean personal wealth and real estate of all 17th century inventories of adult men in Connecticut expressed in "country pay" was £274. Country pay medium usually was paid out in agricultural product like corn. Beaver was the second in value only to precious metals and furnished as "equivalent for cash." Source Princeton University Press, *The Distribution of Property in the Seventeenth Century*, 1985.

# James Richards Tomb Replication

I joined the ABGA 14 years ago and began pursuing my passion for the conservation and restoration of the historic grave markers in the Ancient Burying Ground, some now over 370 years old. Each fall I would walk the ABG to make an assessment of work to be considered for the following year. There was one box tomb that I always gravitated towards every time I visited the ABG. A box tomb is an above-ground marker made of stone blocks or bricks topped with a single massive slab of stone.

This particular box tomb was in a terrible state of advanced deterioration and had obviously been repaired many times over the centuries. I suspect, based on the size of the old failed repairs, that a tree may have fallen on it. Open cracks in the monument allowed water, the enemy of historic gravestone conservation, to enter into the box foundation itself, and frequent freeze-thaw cycles over several centuries caused extensive damage. The Richards monument was also suffering from the effects of acid rain, which over centuries dissolves soft stone, rendering many markers in the Ancient Burying Ground illegible. However, we knew that this once-majestic monument marked the grave of James Richards, Esq., who died in 1680, as documented in the book, *By Their Markers Ye Shall Know Them*, by William Hosley and Shepherd M. Holcombe, Sr.: “Here lieth the body of James Richards, Esq. late one of the Assistants of his majestyes colony of Connecticut who departed this life the 11th day of June 1680 AETATIS SUAE 47.”

At the top of this tomb, above the epithet, were faint lines that indicated something had been carved there, but due to acid rain, was undis-



Randall Nelson shaping bull nose edge

cernible. One day many years ago, I brought chalk with me and traced the remaining faint lines to see if they would reveal anything. Well, the first reveal was a helmet of a knight. Further chalk lines revealed a shield with cross-hatching, then even more tracing showed the embellishment that is found in heraldry, or family crests. Lo and behold, the chalk lines ultimately revealed the faint outline of a large coat-of-arms for the Richards family. This is quite remarkable: to have a large coat-of-arms on a grave marker for this time period denotes that this person was someone of nobility and significance in the Hartford Colony.

The scope of advanced deterioration and multiple failed repairs made repairing the massive slab out of the question. The Grounds Committee decided to consult with Randall Nelson, an architectural restoration professional who has worked with the ABGA for many years. The size of the stone slab presented logistical problems: 1. Where could we obtain a suitable stone to replicate the original stone fabric, and if found, 2. How would we get it into the ABG and maneuver it about

the grounds without damaging other grave markers?

Randall Nelson went right to work to locate a suitable stone slab, and found a quarry in Vermont that had a large piece of the right material set aside since the 1930's. The quarry estimated that the slab weighed 1,500 lbs. Randall also researched the intricate details on the Richards crest, and by gently scraping away a thin layer of black concrete, he exposed much of the crest's delicate details. Randall was able to procure a book published in 1866 called *Elements of Heraldry*, which included an illustration of the coat-of-arms for the Richards family of Hartford. From this illustration, and from the details slowly being discovered from the original stone, Randall was able to make a life-size rendering of the complete coat-of-arms. Now the hard work began. During the winter, in an unheated studio, Randall began hand-shaping the stone slab, creating a “bull nose” molding around the perimeter. A full size, to scale, layout was created and the lettering and coat-of-arms images were transferred to the now-polished stone. Randall then commenced to hand letter the epithet and carve the coat-of-arms.

As I mentioned earlier, the logistics of bringing the finished stone slab into the ABG and then maneuvering around standing gravestones were of significant concern. Randall consulted with a colleague, Ed DePeau, who fabricated a custom, heavy-duty dolly made out of spare tractor parts. It was designed to move our large slab of stone around very tight turns and travel well over uneven ground.

The dolly was not powered and required Randall and Ed to maneuver the 1,500 lbs. by hand. The next

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## Missing Persons

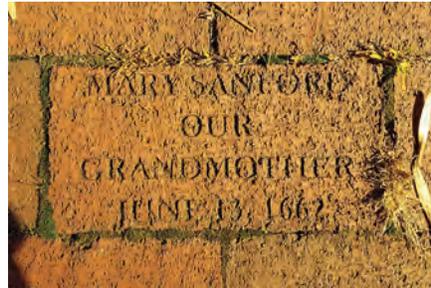
By Molly Gilmore

The Ancient Burying Ground in Hartford is said to be the final resting place of approximately 6,000 people—all of whom lived and died in the surrounding area from around 1640 to the early 1800s.

During that period, it has been asserted that “anyone who died in town, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnic background, economic status or religious faith, was interred here.”

Unfortunately, that statement is somewhat misleading. For there are at least four people who were denied the privilege of being buried amongst their kith and kin, and perhaps more whose names are now lost to history.

Near the Ancient Burying Ground’s Main Street entrance, there is a simple brick that bears this inscription: “MARY BARNES HANGED 1662/3 FOR WITCHCRAFT,” and another



that reads: “MARY SANFORD OUR GRANDMOTHER JUNE 13, 1662.” The other two people executed during Hartford’s Witch Panic of 1662—Rebecca and Nathaniel Greensmith—have no such markers. (There is also a brick donated in memory of Alse Young of Windsor, hanged in 1647.)

So what happened to the bodies of these people? People who were the spouses, neighbors, and relatives of Hartford’s founders, magistrates, and ministers?

One unsubstantiated rumor has it that their bodies were transported down to the South Meadow by horse cart, where they were either buried or left alone to the devices of nature. Another rumor has it that the bodies were dumped in a location unnamed and unknown.

This year the Ancient Burying Ground Association hosted a tour of the cemetery, led by retired Trinity College professor Dr. Richard Ross, that acknowledged the connections between the accusers who are buried there and the accused who are not. On October 26, a memorial service was held for the Witch Panic’s victims and their many descendants.

Righting the wrongs of the past cannot be done without acknowledging that they happened. The Ancient Burying Ground continues to be a place where people can wander among the stones, and ponder what the lives of those long gone and missing have to teach us about ourselves and the world today.

## James Richards

Continued from page 5

logistical challenge was how to transfer the large slab from the cart to the box tomb foundation. Randall and Ed built scaffolding to transfer the  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton monument from the cart to the awaiting base. With delicate adjustments, the finished monument was secured in place with a bed of mortar to prevent water from entering underneath.

This project was over a year in the planning and execution, and was the most significant conservation and replication project that the Ancient Burying Ground Association has undertaken since the mid-1980’s. Despite the many challenges, the final result is spectacular. Please come and visit the ABG and pause for a few minutes by this remarkable monument to a remarkable man.

## Family Crest on the Wyllys Monument

This large tomb\* was erected by descendants in 1899 to memorialize thirteen members of the Wyllys family. The restoration of the bas-relief family crest on the west end was the last work to be done in the recent conservation efforts on this marker. The missing sections were created with a technique called “in-situ, hand modelled restoration,” using color-matched patching cement. This sculpting-in-place technique was executed by Randall Nelson.



\*The use of the word “tomb” here and in the James Richards article, and “sarcophagus” for the children’s marker, does not imply that there are bodies within the stone structures, but rather refers to the style or shape of the monuments.

## Summer Tours

The summer themed tours of the ABG were continued for a second year, with three tours. On May 18th, Ruth Shapleigh-Brown, Director of the Connecticut Gravestone Network, led a tour on “Colonial Connecticut Connections,” about Hartford individuals and how they played a part in Connecticut’s colonial life. Although their names are on gravestones in the Ancient Burying Ground of Hartford, they were also residents of other towns throughout our state, and their contributions were invaluable to the times.

### FREE Summer Guided Tours!



photo: Carol Highsmith

On July 13th, Ruth gave an encore presentation of last year’s “Veterans of the American Revolution.” She noted the role Hartford played as a safe and central location, where leaders came together to make decisions and plan the future of a growing land of freedom for all. Research on the ABG revolutionary veterans is ongoing, and anyone with information or interest in this area is welcome to join us. The ABGA thanks the Society of the Cincinnati in Connecticut for funding the research for this talk and the brochure now available in print from the ABGA and also on our website.

On August 3rd, “In the Shadow of the Great Hartford Witch Hunt” was presented by Dr. Richard Ross, who spoke on the background history of Hartford’s witch hunt and gave a tour of the gravemarkers of individuals who had connections to those trials. This tour was held on a perfect day and drew a large audience of over 75 people; and Dr. Ross’s book, *Before Salem: Witch Hunting in the Connecticut River Valley 1647-1663*, was sold out by the end of the tour.



Dr. Richard Ross, former Head Librarian and retired Professor Emeritus of Trinity College, gives presentation on the history of Hartford’s witch hunt.

## Witch Memorial and Talk

As caretakers of Hartford’s only colonial site, members of the ABGA have seen a wide interest in the subject of witches, those individuals who were accused and many found guilty and given the death penalty. We also learned of the ongoing efforts in Connecticut to recognize these individuals. So in response, Ruth Shapleigh-Brown and the Reverend Rochelle A. Stackhouse asked Dr. Richard Ross to offer his talk again, held in the meeting house of Center Church. Reverend Stackhouse added to the program by holding a memorial service for those prosecuted, ending with a procession to Center Church’s Memorial Garden, where participants placed stones in a cairn to honor those who were denied burial in the Ancient Burying Ground. Many families appreciated this opportunity to honor and remember their ancestors. Lastly, Dr. Ross offered another walk about the burying ground, sharing his knowledge of individuals’ roles in this mayhem of history. Questions and conversations during the day led many of us to concede that a large part of trying to understand this era meant also understanding a digest of issues of the day that contributed to these accusatory attitudes. The conflicts of changing loyalties, political and religious, compounded by conflicting charters and land claims, added to constant distress that made for some very turbulent times.



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*Ancient Burying Ground in May*



*James Richards stone in motion*

## Keep in Touch with the ABGA

We are working to refresh our mailing list, to be sure we're reaching everyone who is interested in learning about the burying ground and supporting our conservation and educational programs.

Online option: We also now have an email list, and are sending our newsletters, annual appeal, and occasional notices of special events, tours, and talks. If you

would like to hear from us via email, please send your address to: [contact@theancientburyingground.org](mailto:contact@theancientburyingground.org).

In addition, donations can now be made electronically with a debit or credit card, or PayPal account, by using this link: <https://bit.ly/2yiSHeT>.

Stay in touch! We have a great history to explore and conserve.