

HISTORIC BURYING GROUNDS INITIATIVE NEWSLETTER

Preserving Boston's 16 Historic Burying Grounds



BOSTON PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT

KIM JANEY, MAYOR

FALL 2021

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HISTORY OF CENTRAL BURYING GROUND

Central Burying Ground is located on the Boylston Street side of the Boston Common. It was opened in response to overcrowding at the other three burying grounds in Boston. It is also one of four burying grounds that suffered disfiguring alterations during the 19th century. Central, Market Street, South End, and Walter Street Burying Grounds were all disturbed by the widening of the street running along their perimeter. South End Burying Ground lost even more land through the erection of private buildings on burying ground land. However Central Burying Ground was disfigured twice to conform to changing needs of modernity and the public good.

110 years after the founding of Boston, the town's three burial sites, King's Chapel, Granary, and Copp's Hill Burying Grounds, were getting perilously full. On March 10, 1740, a group of several gravediggers presented a petition to the town selectmen complaining that the burying grounds were so full they had to bury people four-bodies deep and it was difficult to avoid disturbing previously buried corpses. They asked the selectmen to recommend a solution to the problem. From this point, it was not until sixteen years later, in 1756, that land was actually purchased for a new burying ground.



An aerial view of Central Burying Ground on the edge of Boston Common, next to Boylston Street.

(continued on page 6)



Letter from the Director

I was working from home from the middle of March 2020 until July 6, 2021, when we returned full time to the office. Sometimes it was nice to be able to work in my pajamas at home without having to make myself presentable. It was also nice to get back to the office and see colleagues and consultants I had not seen for months.

The first article is about the history of Central Burying Ground. Many people are surprised to learn that a burying ground exists on Boston Common. It is interesting to see how the use of the Common and the public's attitudes toward the Common have changed over the centuries. There are approximately 465 headstones and 141 tombs in the site, but there are many more burials than headstones and each tomb contains multiple burials. Although only a guess, I would imagine that there were at least 2,500 people buried there. The second article reports on the successful gravestone conservation project undertaken at Copp's Hill Burying Ground, which was partially funded by the Community Preservation Act. We currently have another gravestone conservation project going on at Eliot Burying Ground which is partially funded by the George B. Henderson Foundation. A third conservation project will start this year at Copp's Hill again, partly funded by the Community Preservation Act again. We are thankful for the funding! The third article examines the life of Andrew Russell, a Black man who lived in Cambridge and Charlestown around the turn of the 19th century. Inspired by his rare headstone, I look into documentary evidence from his life. Finally the last short article has some fun photographs of current non-human denizens of the burying grounds. In my files I also have some rather gory images of a hawk dining on a pigeon in Eliot Burying Ground, but think the pictures in this newsletter are much happier!

I wish all my readers the best of health!



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Historic Burying Grounds Initiative

Our mission is the comprehensive restoration, on-going conservation and heritage interpretation of Boston's historic burying grounds.

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FIELD NOTES: *COPP'S HILL BURYING GROUND GRAVESTONE CONSERVATION*

In 2017 Boston residents voted to approve the Community Preservation Act (CPA), a program funded by the addition of a one percent property tax surcharge that gives grants to organizations for work in housing, open space, and historic preservation. In 2018 HBGI received \$104,400 from the first round of CPA grants for gravestone conservation at Copp's Hill Burying Ground. HBGI added \$162,600 to the project.

At the time Copp's Hill Burying Ground was established in 1659, King's Chapel Burying Ground was the only burial spot in Boston Proper. Other early sites such as Phipps Street Burying Ground and Eliot Burying Ground were outside of Boston town limits at that time. There are approximate 2,230 grave markers in this 2.04 acre site.

The first step in choosing the gravestones to receive conservation work is to survey the gravestones. When



A view of gravestones in Section G at Copp's Hill Burying Ground before conservation and resetting.

planning for a gravestone conservation project, there is rarely enough funding to undertake conservation on every stone that requires it, particularly in a site with over 2,000 markers. It is often more feasible to accomplish the work in phases, which is the method we decided on for Copp's Hill. There are 11 sections of varying sizes at

Copp's Hill. We started the survey in section G, to the right side of the entrance. After surveying six sections it became obvious that there were too many grave markers requiring treatment to be done in one project. The first project was capped at four sections for a total of 133 headstones.

Since most of the problems on gravestones occur over and over again, diagnosing the problems on an individual stone is not difficult. However every stone must be inspected at close range; since the stones are low to the ground, this entails either crawling along the rows of gravestones or a lot of bending over! The details of each stone must be recorded, including the location number, the first and last names, and the date of death. There are sometimes multiple stones with the same name and without date of death identifying the stones later can be tricky. The problems present on each stone are also noted. It is impossible to see problems occurring on the



Some headstones at Copp's Hill Burying Ground are set very close to each other in tight clumps.

underground section of the stone without digging them up, so sometimes an educated guess must be made about required treatments. Several photos of the stone must be taken including a full frontal view and close-ups of problem areas. If the stone is misplaced from its assigned spot or is only a fragment of the stone, that stone must

COPP'S HILL BURYING GROUND GRAVESTONE CONSERVATION

be photographed with other legible adjacent stones in order to be able to find the fragment later.

Since the Boston Parks and Recreation Department is part of the municipal government, we use a public bidding protocol to hire a conservator. To prepare the bidding documents, all of the data from the survey is put into a spreadsheet. An additional column is added specifying the conservation procedures required for each gravestone. Each photo file must be labeled with the location number of the gravestone. All of this information is provided on a thumbdrive to potential bidders so they can evaluate the work. There is one pre-bid meeting on site so any potential bidders can inspect the site and



The two gravestones in the foreground were missing the bottom part of the headstone. The conservator added extensions made of concrete to lengthen the headstone so the full epitaph could be above ground.

the work and ask the project manager any questions they may have. We are required to accept the lowest qualified bidder on the job. After the price bids are received the references of the lowest price bidder are verified and if they are found to be suitable we accept the bid.

The headstones at Copp's Hill are set close together, sometimes in tight clumps comprising a mix of stones requiring conservation work, intact stones, and stones tilting at angles. It was impossible for the conservator to just unearth one stone for conservation without having to unearth and reset the other stones. For this reason, we established a budget for resetting headstones not re-

quiring conservation work. Many gravestone fragments were unearthed during this project, some of which were able to be reattached to the main gravestone and others which went into storage in the fragment collection.

Since they are made of the same material, usually slate, gravestones display similar problems and patterns in decay. The geological formation of slate causes it to cleave or separate into layers, both thick and thin. This is seen when gravestones split into vertical layers, weakening



Above: The gravestone of Mrs. Ann Kiley before being conserved.
Below: The two parts are glued together with an epoxy adhesive and clamped together while the epoxy cures.

the stone and making it easier to break. The same mechanism is at work when fine layers near the surface of the stone flake off, a condition called delamination. This serious condition can cause the loss of the epitaph on the gravestone.

Another common problem is breakage of the stone into pieces, whether through a natural process, being hit by an object such as a falling limb, or vandalism. Frequently

COPP'S HILL BURYING GROUND GRAVESTONE CONSERVATION

the stone breaks near the point where the epitaph ends and the stone goes into the ground. This results in grave markers lying on the ground after falling or else being reset with half of the epitaph underground. Sometimes gravestones are missing pieces. This can be a piece on the top of the gravestone, such as a part of the carving or the top of the epitaph. It can also be lower in the stone, creating a structural weak point in the stone and necessitating work to fill the void, so the stone is able to stand in a vertical position.



Conservators resetting a headstone that had conservation treatment.

Work conditions are difficult at Copp's Hill. The only access to the site is by stairs. Water, electricity, and bathrooms are not available. It is possible to park a vehicle in a park across the street, but not inside the site or right in front of it. These barriers to access and lack of facilities increase the total cost of the work, since the conservator must find ways to overcome the difficulties. Many stones are worked on inside the conservator's

studio. This solves some problems but the conservator must move the heavy and fragile gravestones out of the burying ground, down the stairs and across the street into the car, and then drive them to the studio. Work for this project was done both in studio and on site. The original cost of the conservation work was \$207,400. We increased the contract amount by \$59,600 because of unforeseen circumstances due to gravestone fragments being dug up while unearthing headstones, additional conservation work, and additional resetting of gravestones. This project commenced in December 2018 and finished in August 2020. Detailed treatment reports and



This after photo shows rows of headstones which have been conserved and/or reset.

before, during, and after photographs were submitted as part of the documentary requirements for this contract.

At the completion of this project, seven more sections of this burying ground still needed gravestone conservation and resetting. HBGI applied for a second CPA grant at the end of 2020 and was awarded another \$100,000 to continue this project in three more sections. The estimated budget for the project includes the conservation of 123 headstones and resetting of 331 headstones. A site survey has been completed but the bidding documents must be prepared. It is estimated that the new conservation project will go out to bid this winter.

HISTORY OF CENTRAL BURYING GROUND (continued from first page)

In 1748, after several additional requests and petitions in town meetings for a new burying ground, the selectmen appointed a committee to research a suitable parcel of land at the south end of town. At that time the south end of Boston was only a little tail to the larger central town, so there was not much land to choose from. The selectmen wanted to avoid taking any land from the Common, which was used for public grazing and military training. The committee recommended a privately owned lot at the southeast end of the Common, near where modern-day Tremont and Boylston streets intersect. They also recommended that a road be laid out between the proposed burying ground and the abutting property, which would have required using a small amount of the Common land. This proposal was debated at town meeting and not accepted, perhaps because it reduced public grazing land.

A new urgent call for additional burial space was voiced again in town meeting in May 1754 by many people living in the south end of Boston. Once again they complained, in a more graphic manner, that "...it is scarcely possible for the sexton to dig a Grave as it ought to be Dug, but what they must necessarily disturb the Ashes of two or three or more, and it is very often the Case that fresh Corps are dug up, that have not been long interr'd, which sight is scarcely decent...." These people also complained that it was a long way to carry the dead in



In this 1743 map of Boston the three burying grounds operating at the time are outlined with a red rectangle. The area outlined with a perforated red line on the left side of the map is the south end of town where residents hoped a new burying ground would be established. During this period, the Boston peninsula was surrounded by water. Map reproduction courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library

order to reach the other burying grounds. Based on this testimony another committee was pulled together to look for an appropriate parcel of land for a new burial spot. It is worth noting that a smallpox epidemic broke out in 1752 between the first and second public request for a new burying ground. In addition to the regular deaths in Boston, gravediggers had to bury an additional 514 people in three crowded burying grounds.

The new committee managed to convince Andrew Oliver, Jr., who owned pasture land adjacent to the Common, to sell his property to the town, for use as a new burying ground. The town negotiators and Mr. Oliver agreed on the price of 200 pounds (very roughly \$30,000 today) for this parcel. The sale did not take place until two years later in September 1756.

The site was declared ready to accept burials on November, 27, 1756. Before this could take place, a gate was placed in the site (presumably previously fenced) and a dedicated sexton, John Ransted, was appointed by

HISTORY OF CENTRAL BURYING GROUND (continued from previous page)



The gravestone of Elizabeth Ransted, who died in 1755, commemorates possibly the oldest burial in Central Burying Ground.

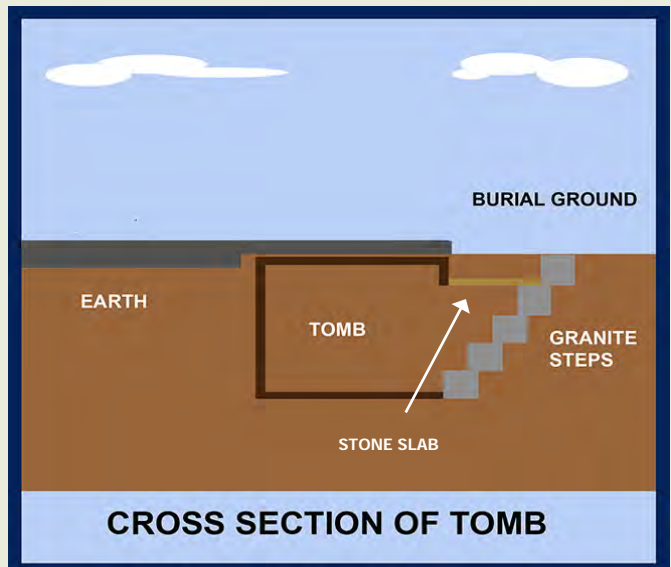
the selectmen to make burials in the site. Only certain people (sextons) were allowed to conduct burials in the burying grounds and they were always chosen by the selectmen. The following spring, Mr. Ransted was also allowed to rent the burying ground land for pasturage for his animals at the rate of four pounds per year.

Presumably the in-ground burials started soon after the site was officially opened. Curiously the oldest existing gravestone is for Elizabeth Ransted who died June 27, 1755, a year and a half before the site opened. The headstone also sadly states that her six children were buried with her. One possibility is that she was initially buried elsewhere but then reinterred to be with her children when they died (after the burying ground was opened). Elizabeth's husband was most likely John Ransted, the sexton of Central Burying Ground. The next oldest gravestone is for Benjamin Frobisher, an infant of one year, who died October 4, 1761.

to the room which held the burials. A stone slab that could be opened and closed as needed was placed on top of the staircase to close the hole in the ground. Tomb burials are different than in-ground graves where a grave digger would be paid to dig a hole in the ground to bury the deceased. In a tomb burial the gravedigger was paid to open up the tomb and carry the body into it. The first record in the selectmen's minutes of a request to build a tomb in Central Burying Ground was in February 1766 by David Wheeler. Curiously the meeting minutes state that Mr. Wheeler could build his tomb next to the tomb of Thomas Trott, however there are no records of Mr. Trott requesting permission to build a tomb. Obviously there are many burials that happened in this burying ground for which there are no records.

People who wanted to build an underground tomb for their family had to petition the town selectmen. Tombs are underground masonry crypts designed to hold multiple burials. A staircase led from the surface level down

The regulations concerning burials were decided by the town selectmen. Since Central Burying Ground was established as a result of the filling up of two of the three burying grounds in Boston, some of the regular burials which had been taking place in the older sites were transferred to Central Burying Ground. In July 1771 the sexton for the Almshouse, located directly next to the Granary Burying Ground, was granted permission to make burials in Central Burying Ground because the Granary and King's Chapel



This sketch shows a cross section of an underground tomb. The bodies are placed underground in the large tomb area. The tomb is accessed by the stairway that descends from the ground level. To close the tomb, a stone slab is laid over the stairs.

HISTORY OF CENTRAL BURYING GROUND (continued from previous page)

Burying Grounds were too full. He also would be allowed to bury “strangers” (people who died in Boston from out of town with no family connections). In July 1779, Dr. Isaac Foster, Director General of Hospitals, was granted authorization to bury there soldiers and prisoners who died in the Continental Hospital (military).



These wall tombs were built around 1800. The burial crypts extend back into the Boston Common (underground).

For the burying grounds, as well as for the town of Boston, the years at the end of the 18th century were a transition between the old colonial way of doing things and the new ways of an organized city (Boston became a city in 1822) in the young American republic. For a good part of the 18th century the population of Boston experienced very little growth, rising from 17,000 in 1740 to 18,329 fifty years later in 1790. At this point Boston began to experience considerable population growth, growing to 33,787 in 1810 and 61,392 in 1830. The surge in people had ramifications in the burying grounds through an increased need for burial space and altered demands for usage of public lands.

Grounds due to the overcrowded conditions of the grounds. This committee consulted with physicians in Boston, who advised the committee that “the Health of the inhabitants is in danger from the crowded state of these Grounds, & the exhalations which must frequently arise from opening Graves therein.” The committee also recommended expanding Central Burying Ground to the west. Although the Granary and King’s Chapel Burying Grounds were not closed and Central Burying Ground was not expanded, there was a large increase in the number of tomb requests in Central Burying Ground that went before the selectmen. As a result tombs were built along the entire perimeter of the site. Also many more gravestones exist for the period 1796-1809 than for other periods. The new tombs on the southern edge of the site extended out to the edge of Frog Lane (soon to become Boylston Street). They were so popular that a second row of tombs running parallel to the first row was added. The rear edge of the tombs closest to the street was bounded by a ten-foot brick wall containing tomb markers that indicated the owners of the tombs below. The large above-ground double row of tombs that is currently standing in the western part of the site did not exist then.

In November 1795 a committee appointed at town meeting recommended the closure of Granary and King’s Chapel Burying

In September 1804, after two incidents of previously interred bodies being disturbed during new burials at Copp’s Hill and Central Burying Grounds, the Selectmen’s attention was once again drawn to the crowded state of these sites. In both these cases, the gravedigger had dug up a perfectly sound coffin and dispersed the remains of the bodies found within them. The Selectmen ordered inspections of Central and Copp’s Hill Burying Grounds to determine if there was enough space to continue with burials. They determined that there was enough space in both these sites provided that the burial spot was carefully chosen. Upon investigation it was found that the same gravedigger was responsible for the both incidents. In his defense the gravedigger stated that “he had been much pressed for time & could not begin to dig in another place after he had found the spot he had chosen was occupied.” The Selectmen decided to revoke his license as a gravedigger and funeral porter.

HISTORY OF CENTRAL BURYING GROUND (continued from previous page)

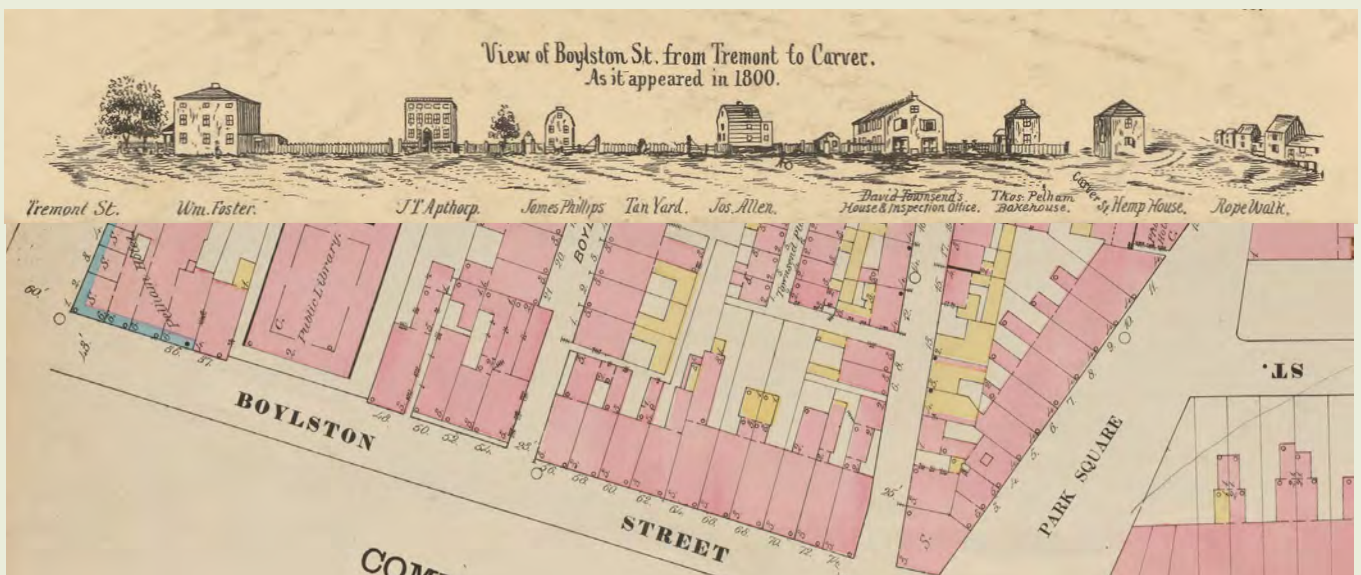


This watercolor drawing of Boston Common from 1768 shows the different uses of the large public park next to the newly opened Central Burying Ground: animals grazing, military troops training, and people promenading in the Tremont Street Mall (bottom of image).

More concerns about overcrowded grounds and the unhealthiness of in-town burials continued to be raised in town and selectmen's meetings over the next decade. In 1810 the Board of Public Health assumed control over the burying grounds, ushering in new regulations in an attempt to impose order and higher standards on interments and funerals. New requirements for recording deaths and burials were also enacted. The same year a new burying ground opened on Boston Neck (now Washington Street in the South End).

Increasing population density in central Boston led to increasing traffic on the local roads which had been laid out to deal with the population of a smaller town. At the same time local residents began looking to public spaces like the Boston Common not for grazing of livestock but for enjoying nature and recreating. The Tremont Street Mall, made up of three long rows of trees, had been slowly planted on the Tremont Street side of the Common between 1725 and 1784. The Beacon Street Mall and the Charles Street

Increasing population density in central Boston led to increasing traffic on the local roads which had been laid out to deal with the population of a smaller town.



This split image shows two views of the side of Boylston Street across from Central Burying Ground. The top image depicts a street view of the buildings that existed in 1800. Carver Street (which does not exist today) was located directly to the east of the present-day Charles Street. The Public Garden did not exist at this time. The banks of the Charles River lie just to the right of the rope walk in this view. The lower image is an excerpt from an 1870 insurance map showing the dramatic change in building density.

HISTORY OF CENTRAL BURYING GROUND (continued from previous page)

Mall were laid out in 1816 and 1824, respectively. In 1835 Mayor Theodore Lyman noted in an address to City Council that the wooden fence around the Common was in poor condition and needed to be replaced. The City decided that it was desirable to “upgrade” the Common and wanted to replace the delapidated fence with a stylish, ornamental cast-iron fence. Such a fence was costly and a fund-raising campaign was started to collect large donations from the wealthy citizens that lived across the street from the Common.

The Boylston Street side of the Common had several factors complicating a simple straight-line fence installation. Boylston Street was narrower than it is today and was not straight. Two rows of tombs jutted out to the edge of the street with a 10-foot brick wall at the outer edge of the tombs. Business owners wanted a wider, straight road for more efficient transportation and the wealthy residents who lived across the street from the burying ground complained the wall was blocking their view. If a fence were installed around that configuration, it would take space away from an already narrow street. However, the owners of the tombs in the way of the fence did not want to disturb their dead and lose their burial rights. Starting in 1836, the fence was erected on Beacon, Park, Tremont, and part of Boylston Streets up to the burying ground.

In the mean time the City government approached individual tomb owners and offered them three possibilities in exchange for giving up their tomb: a lot at the new and fashionable Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, a new tomb in the row of granite tombs the city was building at the west end of the burying ground with continued burial rights, or \$150. Many tomb owners chose to have the remains moved to the new tombs within Central Burying Ground. The tombs of those who opted for the cash payment were sealed with the crypt remaining intact and the remains left inside them. The tombs where the remains were removed were dismantled. Two tomb owners, Samuel May and Thomas Holland, held out against the City, refusing to give up their burial rights. Mr. May eventually accepted the deal after being subject to public pressure but Mr. Holland continued to hold out. According to a letter written in 1894 by Samuel McCleary to the Secretary of the Boston Transit Commission, Mr. Holland was noted for his “imperious obstinacy.” After the Mayor suggested that his tomb be hermetically closed without disturbing its contents, Mr. Holland said he “would stand at the door of this tomb with a drawn sword before it should be closed, or the bones of his ancestors removed!” Eventually, in 1837, Mr. Holland accepted the offer of a new tomb within the grounds and 69 tombs were officially “discontinued.”



The long masonry structure above is the tomb structure for the reinterred remains from the tombs removed from Boylston Street in order to install the Boylston Street Mall.

Boylston Street was then widened, the cast-iron fence going around the Common was extended in a straight line along the street, and two rows of trees were planted. This landscaping created a walking mall where Bostonians could promenade on a wide pathway between the trees. A double row of 60 above-ground tombs was erected in the western section of the site to replace the the defunct crypts. Each side had 30 tombs and

HISTORY OF CENTRAL BURYING GROUND (continued from previous page)

the end tombs were double width. The end tomb at the north end of the structure was owned by the City of Boston to use for burial of the indigent. The tombs were built of granite block, with sandstone capstones and cast iron, hinged, tomb doors. Grass covered the top of the tomb structure. Soils removed from the area from the construction of tombs served as fill for construction of the malls on the Common and Charles Street.

After the Common fencing was completed, the residents who lived across the street from Central Burying Ground began to notice that the burying ground looked forlorn and old fashioned, not up to the new standards set by Mount Auburn Cemetery which strove to create a naturalistic setting where urban dwellers could



This photo from April 1895 shows the beginning of excavations for the subway in front of Central Burying Ground. The discontinued underground brick tombs are seen in the excavated areas. A crowd of people is gathered outside the fence watching the work.

mourn their dead and escape the city. According to the the minutes of the Boston Aldermen, “A number of gentleman owners of tombs in Central BG and dwelling houses adjacent to the same are willing to subscribe liberally for the purpose of erecting a handsome iron fence around said grounds provided the City will pay a part of the expenses and ornament it with a variety of trees.” Private donors contributed \$1,850 to this project. The fence around the burying ground was erected in 1839 and in 1840 the extraordinary quantity of 172 trees and 186 shrubs were planted. As a reference, there are 19 trees standing in the burying ground today. This fence around the burying ground is still standing although the section of the Common fence on Boylston Street in front of the burying ground was removed sometime in the 20th century.

The dead rested tranquilly in Central Burying Ground for the next 45 years until new technology in the form of the subway disturbed the peaceful site. The first subway in the nation ran along Boylston Street in front of Central Burying Ground, right under the Boylston Street Mall. In order to accommodate the subterranean tunnel, any remaining tombs from the double row running under the Mall needed to be removed. Excavations

HISTORY OF CENTRAL BURYING GROUND (continued from previous page)

started at the end of 1894. Realizing that human remains would be unearthed, the contractor, Jones & Meeham, hired Dr. Samuel Green, a librarian at the Massachusetts Historical Society, to be in charge of insuring the respectful reinterment of the bones. An undertaker was hired to perform the reinterments. The number of human remains found was much greater than originally anticipated. Work crews dug a hole in the burying ground to accommodate the found human remains, which were placed in small boxes. The hole had to



This headstone marks the mass grave for the remains that were disinterred from Boylston Street during the installation of the subway tunnel.

be enlarged when more bodies were discovered. Bodies were found in various conditions: inside undisturbed tombs, outside of tombs laid flat, outside of tombs in piles, and scattered about. In a report on the care of human remains, Dr. Green explained that some tombs had been found partially collapsed, with masonry debris and human remains inside. He stated "It was evident such tombs had been used for the reception of bones that had been disturbed in the surrounding ground when the mall was built." There are several newspaper accounts of tomb owners approaching workmen on site, asking them to spare the

tomb and leave their ancestors' remains, to be allowed to take their ancestors' remains with them, or in one case, to keep the story of the discovery of their ancestors' remains out of the newspapers. Bostonians were both fascinated and repulsed by the subway works and the unearthing of so many bones. Crowds gathered for hours every day in order to observe the work. In total, it was estimated that 90 bodies were taken from undisturbed tombs and 820 bodies were discovered in other circumstances. A gravestone was put up to mark the spot of the mass grave of the displaced.

The installation of the subway was the last disfiguring event to happen at Central Burying Ground. The above ground tomb structure started to suffer from structural problems in the 20th century. A tomb stabilization project costing \$12,000 took place in 1985. Ten years later a multi-year full-scale restoration project costing \$450,000 took place. The tomb is currently in good condition now and other preservation projects continue to take place in the site.



By 1994 the granite blocks in the large tomb structure were pushed outwards and collapsed, leaving tombs open to the public.

STORIES BEHIND THE STONES: WHO WAS ANDREW RUSSELL?

In section Q in Phipps Street Burying Ground there is one large headstone with this epitaph: In Memory of/Mr. Andrew Russell/A man of color/who died Janry 29, 1814/Aetat. 27. It is uncommon to see the race of the deceased inscribed on the gravestone. It is also rare to find gravestones for Black Bostonians. By doing some genealogical research on Andrew Russell it is possible to find out some interesting things about him.

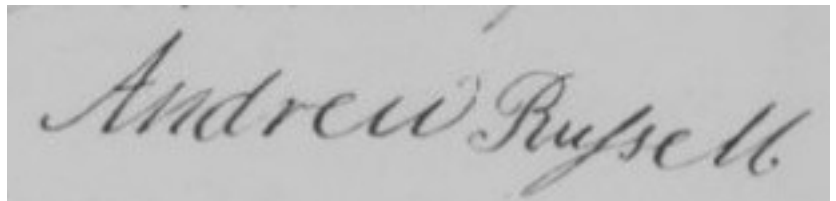


Andrew Russell's gravestone in Phipps Street Burying Ground. It was carved by Caleb Lamson, who was part of the well-known gravestone-carving family.

A legal guardian was usually assigned to a minor who owned some financial assets, since minors were not legally able to manage them. The age of majority in Massachusetts at that time was 21. The probate papers indicate that Andrew Russell, age 19, chose his guardian, petitioning the judge to accept Mr. Lee to fill the position. The 1805 will of Jane Lee, the sister-in-law to Benjamin Lee, elucidates this relationship. Her will states that Andrew Russell was the “negro servant now in my family.” She left to him two shares in the United States Bank valued at \$500 each. She left this same gift to many people in her will. In 1808, when Andrew turned 21, probate documents show that Benjamin Lee fulfilled his fiduciary duties and returned to Andrew Russell two shares from the United States Bank, dividends on the shares totaling \$79.10, and two shares of the Boston Bank worth \$223.10 (together).

In a probate document from 1806, Andrew Russell is identified as the son of Domingo Russell, a Black man who lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The 1790 federal census lists Domingo Russell as the head of house living in a household with two “free white males, of 16 years and upwards” and four “all other free people” (according to census terms). Possibly one of those people was Andrew. His mother Rhoda died in 1800, and several sibilings died over a span of a couple decades. In 1806 his father Russell died at the age of 70 from “consumption” or tuberculosis, leaving Andrew an orphan. Sadly this elevated mortality rate was not unusual for this time period.

After the death of his father, the probate records also show that Andrew Russell obtained a legal guardian, Benjamin Lee, who lived in Cambridge at that time.

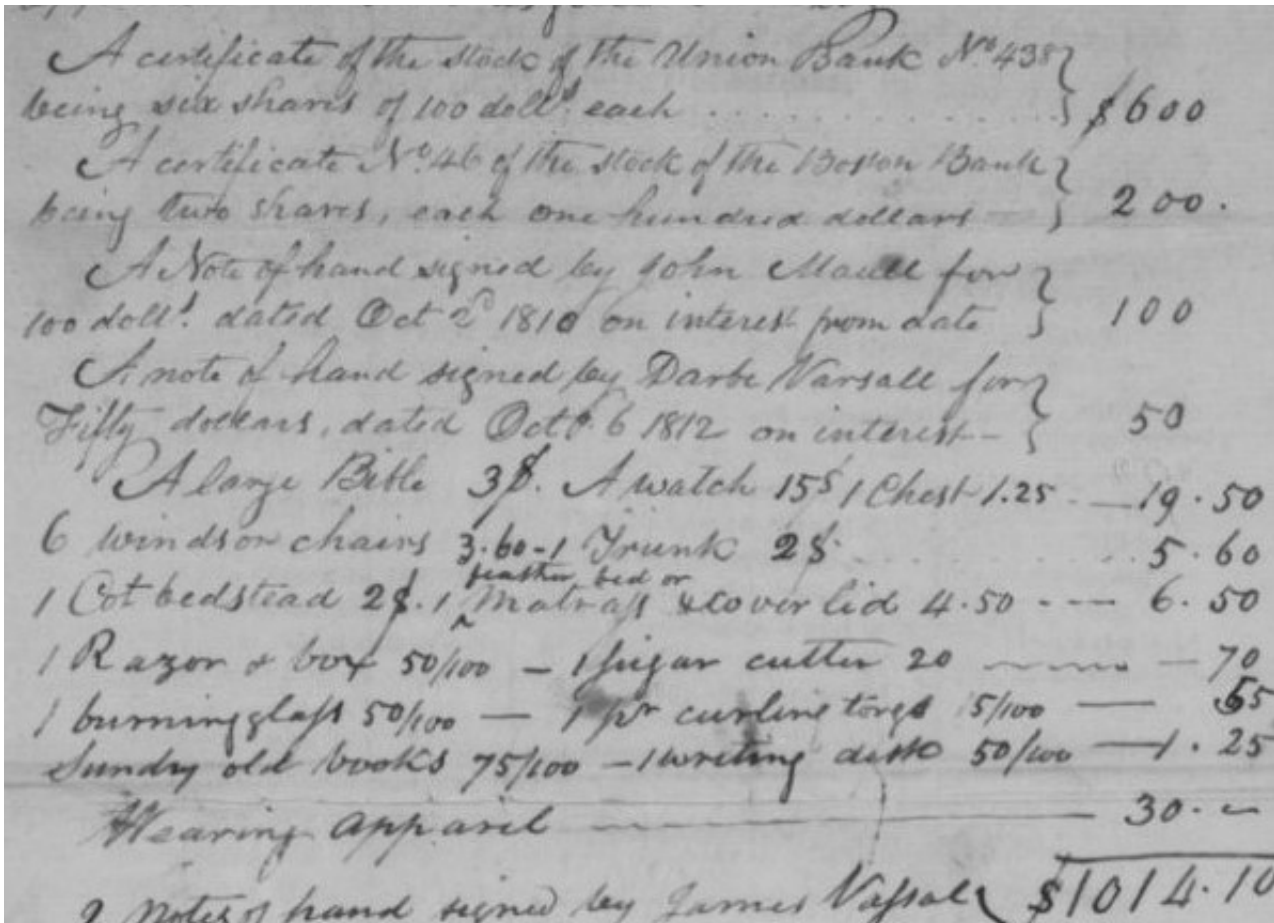


The signature of Andrew Russell from a document acknowledging receipt of assets from Benjamin Lee, his guardian, after Russell turned 21.

Andrew Russell died in early 1814 at the age of 27. At that time he lived in Charlestown (annexed to Boston in 1874) and worked as a laborer. He wrote his will on January 17, 1814, and died twelve days later on January 29, 1814, of un-

WHO WAS ANDREW RUSSELL? (CONT.)

known causes. His total estate was valued at \$1,056.10 and included six shares of stock from the Union Bank valued at \$600, two shares of stock from the Boston Bank valued at \$200, \$150 worth of promissory notes from people he lent money to, and \$64.50 worth of household goods and personal effects. He divided his estate between seven people, six of whom were women. He cashed out the Union Bank shares to be able pay the expenses associated with closing his estate but kept the shares from Boston Bank and gave them to Mrs. Candis Spring, the widow of Mr. John Spring,



An excerpt from the probate documents for Andrew Russell, dated Feb. 10, 1814, with an itemized list of his estate.

who lived in Boston. (Candace Spring died in 1833 and was buried in the South End Burying Ground.) Two of his gifts were interest-bearing promissory notes.

In addition to his bequests, his probate documents also give us an interesting view of the costs associated with death at that time. Of his total estate of \$1,056.47, there were costs debited against the estate of \$194.37. Perhaps the most pertinent information for this article is the cost of \$10 for the cost of two gravestones, at the request of Andrew Russell, from Caleb Lamson, part of the well-known gravestone-carving family. Unfortunately only one of the gravestones survived; presumably the footstone was lost. The top of the large headstone has broken off so we cannot see the design at the top. Luckily all of the epitaph remains. Other specific cemetery-related costs were \$8.50 for the construction of a coffin, and another \$8.50 to pay the grave digger.

LAST LOOK: HAWES AND COPP'S HILL BURYING GROUNDS



Rabbit and birds in Hawes Burying Ground. Photo by Steve O'Brien.

These delightful photos remind us that humans, whether living or deceased, are not the only users of the historic burying grounds. Birds, squirrels, rabbits, cats, rats, and even fishers have all been spotted in Boston's historic burying grounds. Hawks live in and hunt from the large trees. The photo on the left was taken several months ago at Hawes Burying Ground in South Boston and shows some local "residents." Rabbits have returned to Copp's Hill Burying Ground in the North End after many years of absence as seen in the photo below taken in July 2020.



Lazy rabbit in Cops Hill Burying Ground. Photo by Tom Schiavoni.

SITES INCLUDED IN THE HISTORIC BURYING GROUNDS INITIATIVE

Bennington Street Cemetery (1838)

Bunker Hill Burying Ground (1816)

Central Burying Ground (1754)

Copp's Hill Burying Ground (1659)

Dorchester North Burying Ground (1633)

Dorchester South Burying Ground (1810)

Eliot Burying Ground (1630)

Granary Burying Ground (1660)

Hawes Burying Ground (1816)

King's Chapel Burying Ground (1630)

Market Street Burying Ground (1764)

Phipps Street Burying Ground (1630)

South End Burying Ground (1810)

Union Cemetery (1841)

Walter Street Burying Ground (1711)

Westerly Burying Ground (1683)