

Neighbors of Old South Burying Ground



Newsletter – Winter 2003

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Welcome to Hartford's Second Oldest Burying Ground, located on Maple Avenue in Hartford's South End neighborhood. Old South Burying Ground was established in 1800 and is the final resting place of several distinguished Hartford figures and people that help to tell the rich and varied history of Hartford's early years. This area was given to the city of Hartford by the Seymour family; for use as a burial ground when residents south of Little River required space as the Ancient Burial Ground in the center of town had become full. This land was purchased by the Seymour family in 1783 from the Benton family who were the first owners back in the 1700's.



City Manager Erdmann Visits Old South Burying Ground

Hartford City Manager Lee Erdmann paid a visit to Old South in August with Neighbors members Sue Lang, Ruth Shapleigh Brown and Byron Benton. It was a hot day and he held his coat over his shoulder as he walked through the burying ground, listening intently and learning about its history and efforts of the Neighbors committee to preserve the site.

Chief among the early goals of the Neighbors is the replacement of the chain link fencing that currently surrounds the cemetery. City Manager Erdmann was interested in the costs of replacing the chain link fence along Maple Avenue with an historic style ornamental one.



**City Manager Lee Erdmann , Sue Lang and
Ruth Shapleigh-Brown discussing fence.**

The Neighbors have set fence replacement as a priority goal, believing that it will raise the profile of the site and contribute to the improved appearance of Maple Avenue. Mr. Erdmann was told that preliminary cost estimates had been researched by Sue and Ruth and had been given to the Parks Department. The city installed the present chain link fence a few years ago to replace an iron fence that was quite graceful but in poor condition. Unfortunately, no decent pictures of the old fence have yet been found to aid in documenting the earlier appearance of the burying ground. Funds to support replacement of the fencing may be available from a cemeteries trust fund kept by the city and from streetscape improvement funds. Mr. Erdmann suggested that a plaque be installed at the cemetery listing the names of those buried there or possibly of the most significant burials.

During the tour it was explained to Mr. Erdmann that the large open areas have been examined via a ground penetrating radar study that was done in 2001 thanks to assistance from our State Archaeologist and a local engineering firm. (see page 4) Another concern discussed was that drug users and dealers alike have been known to frequent the area at night; this is substantiated by evidence found on the grounds and letters written to the police department by Shultas Place residents. The City Manager also found this disturbing, as the Fox Middle School is an adjacent neighbor and said he would be looking into the drug situation. After about 45 minutes in the hot August sun, he left with a good appreciation of the work being done and what is needed for the preservation of this historic burying ground. Our Neighbors committee members were pleased and appreciated the interest that Mr. Erdmann showed in our Old Burial Ground and look forward to working with him in future.

Mayor Eddie Perez Meets with Old South Committee

In July, Neighbors members Paul Shipman, Sue Lang and Ruth Shapleigh Brown met with Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez, City Manager Erdmann and Public Works Director, Bhupen Patel. The group discussed the history of the cemetery and the current status of efforts to preserve the site. The Mayor, Mr. Erdmann and Mr. Patel expressed their appreciation of the work done by the cemetery group. Paul outlined to Mayor Perez the relationship of the group and what had brought them together. Ruth gave Perez a timeline chart showing the steps that had been taken to bring the cemetery restoration this far and documentation to date with the city's previous interactions with the old burying ground. When Perez had to leave for another meeting the group talked more with Erdmann and Patel about the fence, restoration and repair of monuments and security. The City Manger requested a tour of Old South Burying Ground so that he could see first hand the condition of the Cemetery. (see front page).

Old South Has Markers For 12 Revolutionary War Veterans



**Barzillai Hudson Died July 31, 1823 Age 81
Ensign of Guard of Hartford Jail**

Old South Burying Ground offers much to historians. There are stories to be gleaned from its burials that reflect the social, political, cultural and health histories of our community. Hartford's revolutionary past is reflected in the burial of at least twelve Revolutionary War veterans in Old South.

One marker identifies the grave of Thomas Youngs Seymour, the most famous veteran who was the founder of the Cemetery itself. Called the "Beau Sabreur of Saratoga" in Sheldon's Light Dragoons, he was the founder of the Governor's Horse Guards and an original member of the Connecticut Society of the Cincinnati. He is shown mounted on his back charger on the left side of Trumbull's painting of the surrender of Burgoyne, which hangs in the Capitol rotunda in Hartford. Thomas Y. Seymour died in 1811.

Other veteran markers found in the Old South are for Grove Barnard, Elisha Bigelow, Jonathon Bull, Eleazer Carter, Joseph Ensign, John Hempsted, Brazillai Hudson, Levi Robbins Freeman, Zebulon Seymour and Stephen Skinner. Other records show that John and Dorus Barnard and Samuel Benton also served. During various times members of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) have taken an interest here but to date no documentation from the Daughters of the American Revolution has been found. We know in the 1890's the Ruth Wyllys

Chapter of the DAR in Hartford started documenting and making plans for the restoration of the Ancient Burial Ground on Main Street. To date no evidence has been found that any such action was taken on behalf of the Old South Burying Ground. A list found in the state library archives shows that someone had listed the veteran's stones – as they appeared prior to the intrusion of Benton Road Extension in 1899, at which time many graves were moved. Evidence of past sandstone repairs shows that repairs had been made in Old South years ago, but again to no clues have been found as to when this was done or by whom?

If anyone reading this has any information or photographs that could help us we would appreciate hearing from you.

First Mayor of Hartford,
Thomas Seymour, Esq.
Buried in Old South without a Gravestone?

Thomas Seymour was Mayor from 1784 until 1812 and died in 1829. His wife was Mary Ledyard, sister of gallant Colonel William Ledyard, "Hero of Fort Griswold". She died in 1807 and on her stone was carved "she was the pious escort of Thomas Seymour Esq." Inventory lists made near the end of the active use of the cemetery in the 1880's show no listing for the Mayor or a Thomas Seymour with a death date of 1829.

However George Dudley Seymour, a New Haven philanthropist and biographer of the Seymour family states in his book on the Seymour Family this direct quote ***"It seems strange that no memorial exists in Hartford of its first mayor, who held and adorned the office for twenty-eight years. It seems that the City of Hartford should erect some memorial to him"*** (pg. 566 of *"The Seymour Family"*).



The tall upright brown stone monument in the midst of Seymour graves with only the word "Seymour" inscribed on it might well have been intended as a memorial to him, but to date no document or other record has evidenced this fact. This present brownstone monument was probably erected between the time of 1840 and 1850.

Any information about this monument would be greatly appreciated by the Neighbors Committee.

South Congregational Church
Connections to
Old South Burying Ground

Old South Burying Ground and the South Congregational Church have ties dating to the earliest days of the cemetery. In 1799 a Committee of South Church members was appointed to acquire a burying ground place for the convenience of south end citizens. Thomas Youngs Seymour held a large amount of land in the south end of the city and in 1800 was prompted to sell four acres to the Town for a cemetery at the cost of \$400. There were already Benton family graves on the property, as Moses Benton was the previous owner, who had sold it to Seymour in 1783.

Thomas Youngs Seymour was the son of Colonel Thomas, first Mayor of Hartford. The Seymour family was among the first members of the Church and accordingly served on many church positions. Most of the 24 graves of the Seymour family are clustered around the "Seymour Monument". Mayor Thomas was a deacon from 1784 until 1812 and his son, Major Henry, was a member of the Committee of the Society, Clerk and Treasurer. Both men are buried at Old South Burying Ground.

About 80% of the burials were for South Church people. Of these about 67 were south Church members based on lists in Edwin Parker's *History of the Second Church of Christ in Hartford (1892)*. Probably 120 more can be added to this number by interpreting family relationships and their children's births and burials as also evidenced in the Barbour records. About 236 burials in all were made in the cemetery.

Reverend Abel Flint was the most prestigious member of South Church buried in the cemetery. He was ordained in the Church in 1791 and served until he died in 1824. His elaborate marble pedestal monument now has its top pieces lying on the ground. Information regarding his service is engraved on the west & north panels. His wife, Amelia Bissell Flint, who died in 1810, has her inscription on the south side of the monument.

Other prominent Church families names also have been memorialized with large monuments. Jonathan Bull Esq. died 1825 age 79 and Dr. Sylvester Wells who died 1837 at age 75. Bull family members were founders of the Church and Doctor Sylvester Wells was also a Committee of the Society member. Barzillai Hudson was Treasurer of the Church in 1798. He died in 1823 at age 82 and lies beside his second wife Hannah

Bunce Watson, this association through *her* made him publisher of The Courant. (see pg 5 for more on Hannah). Deacons Joshua Hempsted and Thomas Tilestone and their families are also interred at Old South Burying Ground.

Old South Gets a Sprucing up on The Mayor's Civic Pride Work Day



Volunteers from the City's Department of Housing and Community Development and the Treasurer's Office helped re-erect gravestones under the guidance of Neighbors member Ruth Shapleigh Brown. City employees Ken Schwarz and Sue Lang (also a Neighbors member) were project coordinators. Ruth Shapleigh Brown's work as Executive Director of the Connecticut Gravestone Network, a statewide preservation group, has given her much experience in the study and preservation of gravestones. We thank them all for pitching in.

Old South Burying Ground On State Register Of Historic Places

Old South Burying Ground is now listed on the State Register of Historic Places, through the efforts of noted Architectural Historian David F. Ransom. He noted the significance of Old South Burying Ground as the *second oldest municipal burying ground in the city*, with its period of use running through the 19th century. As Ransom's report states: "The roster of prominent families buried there informs the story of mercantile, military, publishing and international aspects of the town society. The cemetery is significant artistically because it contains good examples of gravestone design and carving from throughout the 19th century." Our sincere thanks to Mr. Ransom.

A GPR Survey Yields Information

Don Wilson and Nathan Jones of Fuss & O'Neil, Inc., Consulting Engineers from Manchester, CT performed a Ground Penetrating Radar survey of the cemetery in 2001, to aid the Neighbors in searching for potential unmarked gravesites in the large open areas of the cemetery. Many anomalies (variations in soil patterns) were detected. Following the completion of the study, Nick Bellantoni, State Archaeologist examined the results and conducted soil tests on certain promising areas. While most of the anomalies appear to be the result of shifted and re-deposited fill from surrounding development, and as

evidenced by town, the disturbances in 1900 for the construction of the Benton Road extension, which actually cut through the cemetery. One test area, however did disclose four distinct rectangles of contrasting soil, which Bellantoni identified as burial shafts. The rectangles are located in the northeast corner of the cemetery near Shultas Place where it is believed the original owners buried their Benton family members, in the orchard NE of the house.





Hannah Bunce Watson. Courtesy The Hartford Courant.

Colonial Heroine
Hannah Bunce Watson
First Female Publisher of Newspaper

Hannah Bunce, born in 1750, was daughter of the paper mill owners of what is now Manchester, Ct; hence she came by birthright into the paper printing business. Hannah Bunce Watson became an exceptional woman who overcame significant challenges when taking on her late husband's business; the Connecticut Courant, which during the days of the revolution was the most important media connection in the state.

Hannah Bunce married Ebenezer Watson, second publisher of The Connecticut Courant, now known as the Hartford Courant. In 1777, Ebenezer died of smallpox, leaving his widow Hannah with five young children to raise. Watson, at age 27, took over operation of the newspaper, along with a young employee named George Goodwin, making her one of the nation's earliest female publishers. Hannah Watson published The Courant, which at the time was the oldest and largest newspaper in the country, with a circulation of 8,000. It was the most important voice for pro-revolutionary forces in the colonies and was nearly put out of business when its supply of paper was cut off when a paper mill co-owned by Watson and Widow Sarah Ledyard burned mysteriously in early 1778. This being the second destruction of the paper mill by fire, these industrious ladies

petitioned the Connecticut Assembly to support rebuilding the mill and Connecticut had its first lottery to raise the funds to do so. Watson was able to save the paper without a single lost day of publication.

Watson is recognized for her achievements today by inclusion in both the Connecticut Journalism Hall of Fame and the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame. Watson married Barzillai Hudson in 1779. As her second husband he, subsequently became Publisher of The Courant. They are buried beside each other in Old South, and Hannah has a sandstone monument with an ornamental cameo urn and willow carving that is typical of the period and the only remaining in the burying ground today.

Think of Hannah Watson and Sarah Ledyard every time you reach for that morning Hartford Courant: if not for their brave actions to rebuild the paper mills and keep it going Connecticut would have one less claim to fame.

Information from the book by Susan Henry Work, *Widowhood and War: Hannah Bunce Watson, Connecticut Printer*

Old South Burying Ground –
Hartford's Second Burial Ground (post 1800).
Located at 400 Maple Ave, Hartford, CT.

Is not this history worth saving?

If you are interested in joining the Neighbors of Old South Burying Ground in their efforts, please contact us. We have our meetings every 1st Monday of the month, 5:30 pm, at the Jubilee House on Clifford St. in Hartford's south end. For more information you can contact us online at oldsouthbg@comcast.net or at the Connecticut Gravestone Network site www.ctgravestones.com and go to CT projects /Old South in Hartford.

Mailing address:

Neighbors of Old South Burying Ground
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Epitaph from a 2-year-old child's gravestone in Old South Burying Ground

*“Reluctant Nature grasps the brittle clay
And binds it to its breast
While Faith points upward to a glorious day
Where innocence is blest”*

Neighbors of Old South Burying Ground Inc.

A non-profit-corporation organized on May 7, 2001 to protect, preserve, restore and promote the Old South Burying Ground.

President: Paul Shipman: United Technology Corporation, Public Relations

Vice President: Sue Lang, retired City of Hartford Dept. of Housing & Community Development

Treasurer: Byron Benton, also Old South Cemetery Historian and Genealogist.

Advisory and Support:

Ruth Shapleigh-Brown: Connecticut Gravestone Network; Old Burial Ground Preservationist and Research.

Janet Wallace: South Congregational Church Historian; Professional Genealogist

Since summer of 2003 we have had several new members join us and we appreciate their interest and would like to thank them for helping with the compilation of this newsletter- Katherine Spada-Basto, Alyson Jasper and Charles A. Surko.

**Be a part
Of the
Next
Celebration!**



**Neighbors of Old South
c/o 231 North Main St.
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**Inside learn what the Mayor
and City Manager are doing to help protect
one of Hartford's Historic places.**