

Welcome to the Self-Guided Tour of the

East Norwalk Historical Cemetery

Please take this packet with you as you stroll around this Ancient Burial Ground containing some of Norwalk's First Settlers, Brave Soldiers, Religious Leaders, Notable Individuals and Generations of Plain Citizen of Norwalk, Connecticut.

There is a lot going on here, and a lot of history to be preserved. Please show proper respect and watch your step on the uneven ground.

The first thing you may notice is a number of tipped or broken stones:

While from time to time there have been occasional acts of vandalism, much of what you see is the result of natural settling, overgrown trees and shrubs, and the effects of the environment on ancient stone. Rest assured that work is underway, through the efforts of the Third Taxing District Commission (TTD) and the East Norwalk Historical Cemetery Association (ENHCA), to right, repair, preserve and maintain these monuments. We are working with experts in the specialized field of Gravestone Preservation to allow these markers to last for generations to come. Also be aware that much of the unevenness of the ground is the result of early burial practices. Unlike modern concrete vaults, as caskets and remains returned to the earth, the soil settled above them leaving uneven ground. Some Cemetery Preservationists believed that the ground should remain as is.

Something else that stands out is the American Flags in numerous stones:

These flags honor the contribution of the many brave soldiers who have served our country, (some before this was a country) from "Indian" battles down through many wars and conflicts since, including The Revolution and the Civil War. See if you can identify which conflict the soldier served in. Maybe you can figure it out by the inscription or by comparing dates on stones to war dates.

There is a monument under the large American Flag at the North end of park:

The "Founder's Stone" honors the 31 persons who were recorded as the pioneering settlers of our fair city in 1649. Maybe you recognize the names as streets or landmarks in modern Norwalk. Perhaps you can trace your own ancestry back to some of these Early Americans.

What is the large “Table”? It marks the remains of Governor Thomas Fitch:

This notable Norwalker served as Governor of the Connecticut Colony from 1754 until 1763. Later he returned to Norwalk and his law practice until his death in 1774. His law office was moved to the Mill Hill Historic Park from its location on East Avenue, near Hendricks. At one time there was a similar monument marking the grave of Captain Joseph St. John. Its disappearance was a mystery although a portion of it was found in 1893.

Do you know the “Legend of Yankee Doodle”? He is here too.

Just east of his father, the Governor, you will find a large monument commemorating the legend and final resting place of Colonel Thomas Fitch, who after his sister “stuck a feather in his cap,” went on to serve honorably in the French and Indian War, and the Ticonderoga and Crown Point Campaigns, and the American Revolution.

There are a number of other notable individuals and religious leaders here as well:

Can you find the Reverend Thomas Hanford, first Minister of the colony, or later Ministers, Rev. Stephen Buckingham, or Rev. Moses Dickenson, a tutor at the Yale College? Maybe you can find the daughter of the first Mayor of New York City. Or look around for the tragic epitaphs for William Remson, killed on the local train tracks or A J Carter who drowned in the nearby Mill Pond. Can you find the Unknown Civil War Soldier?

There are some interesting designs on some of the headstones, what do they mean?

Some seem obvious such as a lamb representing the grave of a child or an anchor representing a seafaring history. We have attached a listing of common meanings of graven images taken from a website. See if you can find examples of any of the images visible within this Cemetery. Please refrain from “rubbing” as many of the stones are ancient and very delicate. In the future we will offer alternative ways to reproduce these images.

In all, how many people rest here?

There were burials on these grounds before formal stone markers were popularly available and some reference in the ancient records of multiple burials, particularly in the only vault (Raymond), which is said to contain the remains of as many as 26 family members. There is a modern accounting underway, but approximately 1100 names have been compiled.

How long have there been burials here?

The East Norwalk Historical Cemetery is believed to be the oldest in Norwalk and probably that of the surrounding towns, several of which were formerly part of Norwalk. One of the first burials marked by a legible stone would be that of Rev. Hanford, 1693. However the first recorded death among the pioneers would be that of Richard Seymour, recorded as 1655, who is almost surely buried hereabout. There are still occasional crematory burials of individuals who can clearly demonstrate a lineage to those already interred herein. The original plots were given as part of the original land grants to the earliest settlers and were handed down generation to generation over these three hundred fifty some odd years, therefore formal deeds do not exist.

Who is responsible for the Cemetery?

It can be assumed that early graves were originally cared for by family members. In 1843 an organization known as the Down Town Cemetery Association was formed to care for, and conduct all the business of the Cemetery. In 1933 the name was changed to the East Norwalk Cemetery Association. The dwindling number of donations to the perpetual care fund led to an agreement in 1941 whereby the Third Taxing District supplemented funds for maintenance of the grounds and in 1966 took deed to the land to better secure insurance protection. Also at the time, the word "Historical" was formally added to the name of the ENHCA. To this day TTD provides for the perpetual care of the grounds while the Cemetery business is still conducted by the volunteer board members of the ENHCA, many of whom are direct descendants of those whom they look after.

If you would like more information:

There have been a number of books published about the Cemetery. We have attached the preface pages from two of them, "A Complete Copy of the Inscriptions found on the Monuments, Headstones, &c in the Oldest Cemetery in Norwalk CT" (David H. VanHoosear; The Standard Association, Printers; 1895) and "Records of the East Norwalk Historical Cemetery of CT" (Harold Secor-Martin; Self Published by TTD; 1971).

Keep an eye out for the ENHCA website coming in the near future. Check in to the ENIA website at <http://www.eastnorwalklibrary.org> for a future link to it.

The information for this packet was respectfully compiled by East Norwalk resident and ENHCA President Christopher Burr Sr. and is accurate to the best of his ability. cdburr@snet.net Submitted May 30th, 2005

PREFACE I

From "A Complete Copy of the Inscriptions found on the Monuments, Headstones, & c in the Oldest Cemetery in Norwalk CT" (David H. VanHoosear; The Standard Association, Printers; 1895)

The Cemetery from which this copy was taken is situated at East Norwalk in the old village where the first settlement was made, home lots laid out, and a few rods South-east of the site of the first Church, which was on the North corner of East Avenue and Fort Point Road. The Cemetery is triangular in shape, bounded on all sides by highways and enclosed by a picket fence. There are many graves seen which are unmarked by headstones, and very many more of the early ancestors remains were deposited in this burial place, of which no mark or tradition is left. Here rests one of our Colonial Governors, (Gov. Thomas Fitch) No. 230. Probably the first minister Rev. Thomas Hanford is buried here, (tradition says near the headstone of his son Thomas,) where is seen a "flat brown Stone" the inscription is wholly obliterated. The second minister Rev. Stephen Buckingham, (No. 209) and third minister Rev. Moses Dickenson (No. 234) a tutor of Yale Collage. Buckingham StJohn (No.20), a son of the 1st pastor Rev. Jedeiah Buckingham. Two deacons; one of the 1st church.

Five militia Capt, one militia Col., a Rev. Soldier, a Col., two Capt., and seven soldiers in late war who have inscribed stones, a Master of Arts, M.D., an eminent Dentist, and many whose title has never been chiseled on the stone marking their grave.

The yard contains but one vault; (The Raymond.) In summer the flowers placed in this cemetery by descendants of deceased friends show that the memory of the dead here are not forgotten. It is well cared for. May this interest continue, and the forefathers be allowed to rest and remain where they are. The object of the undertaking is to preserve definite memory of these early ancestors of Norwalk.

"He is a public benefactor who gathers together from the crumbling monuments and preserves in printed form the memorials erected by their contemporaries over the early fathers of the country"
[N.L. Collamer, Wash. D.C.]

The reader may say where are our Earliest Ancestors? To this the answer must be within the above enclosure. It is true over fifty years had passed after the settlement of the town before the first inscribed headstone appears, yet we have no record yet found, no tradition still kept or known of, or evidence of the existence of any other. This was for the first church in the heart of the ancient settlement. Imported stones were costly, and in a few graveyards, stones from the field were selected, with the initials and year of death roughly chiseled upon them. A number appear in Stratfield Cemetery (now Bridgeport, Conn.), before 1700, the earliest 1688 and one in Fairfield 1687. No well inscribed stone appear in either of these before 1700. From

the above facts we are led to believe this is the first cemetery in Norwalk.

Each stone is given a number commencing on the South side, and is copied in six sections between parallel lines from East to West so the small numbers are stones on the south part of the yard and so Northward.

PREFACE II

From "Records of the East Norwalk Historical Cemetery of CT" (Harold Secor-Martin; Self Published by TTD; 1971)

If it has not been for the Great Swamp Flight there would be some question as to when Norwalk with its Ancient Burial Ground would have come into being. The flight had been won by the English. Some of the Indians escaped to the West, with Roger Ludlow and some of his men in hot pursuit. They chased them a few miles, crossing two rivers, these later being known as the Saugatuck and the Norwalk. The land that lay between them was quickly noticed and highly admired by Roger Ludlow, who was so impressed by its beauty and possibilities on that July day in 1637 that he returned in three years, buying this land from the Indians, which became known as Norwalk.

Immediately plans were laid to have a settlement planted here, thru the proper negotiations with the law represented at Hartford. The appointment of thirty families took place, who were to be known as the planters or the original settlers. They arrived at Norwalk in the spring of 1651. This group had been preceded by Nathaniel Ely and Richard Olmstead a year earlier for the purpose of making a clearing and a temporary shelter for these eager and hearty brave souls.

These folks had agreed upon certain stipulations. They were to be given four acres per settler, which was to be his free grant for the adventure and which he agreed to develop. The four-acre lots were surveyed and ran from the south lower end of what was termed Town Street (East Ave.) at the Cove (Mill Pond). These bordered the street for approximately a quarter mile to the hill, later known as Earl's. These lots were laid out narrow frontage on Town Street, oblong shaped, bringing the settler's homes close together. They also agreed to build a meeting house and appoint a minister. At the south end of Town Street they set aside a piece of land which was to be their Burial Ground. The Burial Ground, being completely surrounded by their home sites, provided protection from marauding Indians and wandering wild animals.

Like the land grants, the burial ground plots were granted to the settlers and thus have come down through these many years to their inheriting descendants. It is for this reason that there are no deeds.

In the year 1843 the organization known as the Down Town Cemetery Association was formed, which cared for and conducted all affairs connected with the cemetery. In 1933 the organization's name was changed to the East Norwalk Cemetery Association Inc.

In 1941 the Third Taxing District agreed to help financially with the maintenance of the cemetery. In 1966 the title to this Old Historic Cemetery was transferred by the East Norwalk Cemetery Association Inc. to the Third Taxing District. This transfer has made possible many improvements in the beauty of this Historical Burial Ground.

This first cemetery of Norwalk is the resting place of our founding fathers and families. Commercial stones were not to be had in those early years, and if field stones had been used as markers, they have long since disappeared. The grave of the Rev. Thomas Hanford, first minister of the settlers in 1652, is plainly identified, dated 1693. Richard Seymour's death in 1655 was believed to be the first to take place among the pioneers. There can be no doubt that others passed away from that early rugged life and with true Puritan reverence were laid to rest here.

The Honorable Governor Thomas Fitch of colonial fame, his son Col. Thomas Fitch Jr., outstanding military leader known also as Yankee Doodle, are buried here. Soldiers who took part in defending the lives of their brethren from Indian Wars down through the many periods of later wars are also buried here. There is the stone dedicated to "The Unknown Veteran" erected shortly after the Civil War. There are followers of the sea and professional life of note along with Mr. Plain Citizen, who, thru honest labor and participation, presents the life blood of any government.

This is an Ancient Historical Cemetery and all this information brings the reader to that part for which this is issued, the listing of the names of those available, together with the epitaphs inscribed on their stones, to be known for posterity.

Graven Images

Taken From <http://olivetreegenealogy.com/misc/grave.shtml>

The following list was compiled from several different sources. I welcome additions.

There are a few of many motifs found on gravestones with some of the commonly held interpretations of their symbolism.

Don't forget to visit [Grave Symbols](#) – my list of various initials for lodges and organizations, often found on gravestones.

Anchor/Ships - Hope or Seafaring profession

Angel, Flying - Rebirth; Resurrection

Angel, Weeping – Grief and Mourning

Arch – Victory in death

Arrow – Mortality

Bird – Eternal life

Bird, Flying – Resurrection

Book – Representation of a holy book: i.e. the Bible

A pair of Holy Books on Mormon (LDS) headstones indicates the Bible and Book of Mormon

Three Holy Books on Mormon headstones indicates the Bible of Mormon, and Doctrine & Covenants – all of which are scripture to the LDS Church

Breasts (Gourds, Pomegranates) – Nourishment of the soul; the church

Bouquets/Flowers – Condolences, grief, sorrow

Broken Ring - Family Circle Severed

Buds/Rosebud – Morning of Life of Renewal of Life

Bugles- Resurrection and the Military

Butterfly – Short-lived – Early Death

Candle being Snuffed - Time, mortality

Cherub – Angelic

Coffin, Father Time, Picks/Shovels, Darts – Mortality

Columns and Doors – Heavenly entrance

Corn – Ripe Old Age

Cross – Emblem of Faith

Crossed Swords - High-ranking military person

Crown - Glory of life after death

Cup of Chalice – The Sacraments

Dove – Purity; Devotion

Dove, Flying – Resurrection

Drapes – Mourning; Mortality

Flame or Light – Life; Resurrection

Flower – Fragility of life

Flower, Severed Stem - Shortened life

Flying Birds – Flight of the soul

Fruits – Eternal plenty

Full-Blown Rose – Prime of life

Garland or Wreath – Victory in death

Grim Reaper – Death personified

Hand, Pointing Up - Pathway to heaven; Heavenly reward

Hands, Clapsed – The goodbyes said at death

Handshakes – Farewell

Harp – Praise to the Maker

Heart – Love; Love of God; Abode of the soul; Morality

Horns – The Resurrection

Hourglass – Passing of time

Hourglass, Flying – Time Flies

Imps – Mortality

Ivy – Friendship and Immortality

Lamb – Innocence

Laurel – Fame or Victory

Lily or Lily of Valley – Emblem of Innocence and Purity

Lion – Courage; The Lion of Judah

Morning Glory – Beginning of Life

Oak Leaves and Acorn – Maturity, Ripe Old Age

Open Book/ Bible – Deceased Teacher, Minister, etc.

Pall – Mortality

Palm Branch – Signifies Victory and Rejoicing

Pick – Death; Mortality

Poppy – Sleep

Portals – Passageway to eternal journey

Rod or Staff - Comfort for the bereaved

Rooster – Awakening; Resurrection

Roses – Brevity of earthly existence

Scythe – Death; The divine harvest

Seashell – Resurrection; Life everlasting; Life's pilgrimage

Sheaf of Wheat – Ripe for Harvest, Divine Harvest, Time

Skull – Mortality

Skull/ Crossed Bones – Death

Skeleton – Life's brevity

Snake (Tail in Mouth) – Everlasting life in heaven

Spade – Mortality; Death

Stars and Stripes Around Eagle – Eternal Vigilance, Liberty

Sun Rising – Life everlasting

Sun Shining – Life everlasting

Sun Setting - Death

Thistle – Scottish descent

Tombs – Mortality

Torch Inverted – Life Extinct

Tree – Life

Tree Sprouting – Life everlasting

Severed Branch – Mortality

Tree Stump – Life interrupted

Tree Trunk – Brevity of life

Tree Trunk Leaning – Short interrupted life

Trumpeters – Heralds of the Resurrection

Urn - Immortality (ancient Egyptian belief that life would be restored in the future through the vital organs placed in the urn).

Urn with / Wreath or Crepe – Mourning

Urn with Blaze – Undying Friendship

Weeping Willow Tree – Mourning; Grief; Nature's lament

Willows – Earthly Sorrow

Winged Face – Effigy of the deceased soul; the soul; the soul in flight

Winged Skull – Flight of the soul from mortal man

Wreath – Victory

Wreath on Skull – Victory of death over life

Wheat Strands or Sheaves – The divine harvest

Disclaimer: Although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information on The Olive Tree Genealogy pages, all transcriptions are subject to human error, and researchers should always check the original source of any list.