

## **Some Jamestown Cemeteries *and the stories they tell***

By Mary Miner

Photographs by Rosemary Enright

Although archeologists and scholars have written at some length about Jamestown's Native American burial grounds, little has been written about the burial grounds established by the European settlers. A fine illustration of Jamestown's burial customs over the past 300 years can be found at the end of Cedar Lane where visitors can see examples of the three types of burial places found on the island:

- The Friends (or Quaker) Cemetery, a burial ground of a religious society
- The Hazard Cemetery, a plot set aside on a family farm, and
- Cedar Cemetery, a non-sectarian, community burial ground.

### **Building the Cemeteries**

For the first 50 years after Jamestown was settled all burials were in plots on family farms. Then, in 1710 the Jamestown Friends established a burial ground in the half-acre lot where their meetinghouse stood, on the lane that would later become Eldred Avenue. Burials there are thought to have been limited to Quakers. The Friends Burial Ground is our first cemetery associated with a religious group. The second, St. Mark Cemetery on East Shore Road, was not laid out until 1955.

The Town Cemetery at the Four Corners was established in 1710, when the village was platted. We are not sure whether it was established as a non-denominational alternative to the Friends Cemetery or simply to accommodate the families who lived along the Ferry Road, now Narragansett Avenue. The early burials here, and many of the later ones, were of people who lived on Narragansett Avenue. Certainly the house lots along the Ferry Road weren't appropriate for family

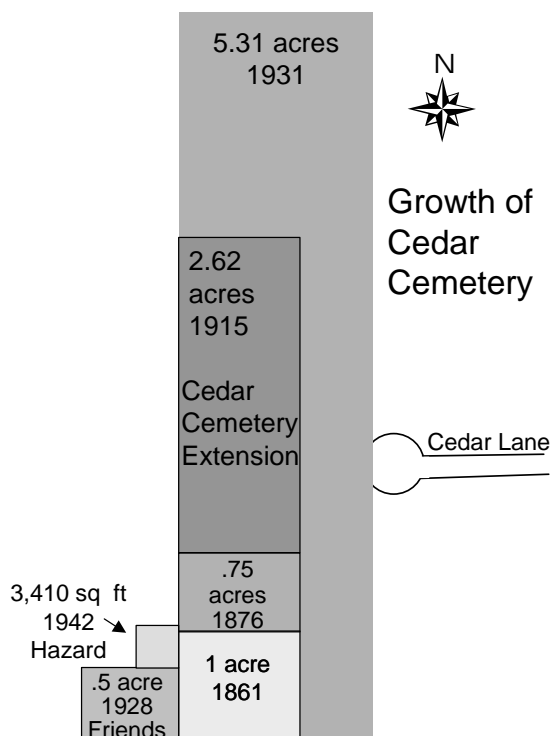
burials, so a neighborhood burial ground made good sense.

As time went by, more burial space was needed, and in 1861 Cedar Cemetery was established as a non-sectarian burial ground for the entire community. Cedar Cemetery's main avenue runs north from its original entrance on Eldred Avenue, which was known for many years as Cemetery Lane. The view past the old grave stones and mature trees along that main avenue has a charm that cannot be duplicated. We lost that vista when the new highway blocked the Eldred Avenue entrance. For some of us, it has been hard to get used to the new entrance on the west side, but it is gradually developing a charm of its own.



The old approach to Cedar Cemetery from Eldred Avenue leads through the older part of the cemetery to the newer graves.

There were 42 lots laid out on one acre of land in the original Cedar Cemetery. Fifteen years later 38 more lots were added on an additional ¾ of an acre. The site was treated as a real estate subdivision, and purchases were recorded in the Land Evidence books at the Town Hall. This meant that the lot owners had to take care of their own little pieces of real estate in the cemetery. However, it turned out that not all plots were kept tidy, and by 1893 things had gotten so far out of control that a group of concerned lot owners formed the not-for-profit Cedar Cemetery Company to restore some order to the grounds.



Under company management everything went along pretty well, and by 1915 almost all of the lots had been sold. At that time, John J. Watson Jr. donated about 2 ½ acres to the north, and in 1931 he gave about 5 ½ more acres along the east side and to the north to bring the cemetery to its present size.

Lots in Cedar Cemetery are no longer sold as pieces of real estate: deeds give the purchaser the right of interment only. The Company provides perpetual care and supervision.

There is no question that cemeteries need care and supervision. The town fathers recognized

this back in 1731 when they allowed John Martin to use the burying place at the Four Corners for grazing, an efficient way to control growth on the site. To protect the burial ground, he was not allowed to plow it or manure it. John Martin lived next door to the cemetery, and it made sense a few years later to appoint him caretaker and give him the authority to designate where graves could be dug.

We don't know about regulations for the Friends Cemetery, and we wonder whether it, too, was at first mowed by livestock. In any case, by 1928 the Friends Cemetery was hopelessly overgrown with bushes and poison ivy. The Jamestown Quakers had faded away, and the cemetery belonged to the Rhode Island Society of Friends. Since they were based in Providence and were not really in a position to care for the old cemetery, they thought it would be sensible to entrust its care to the adjoining Cedar Cemetery. They cleaned out the brush, graded the lot, (which may have removed evidence of early burials), and planted grass before turning it over to the care of Cedar Cemetery.

In 1942 the Hazard family made a similar arrangement with Cedar Cemetery for the care of their adjoining family plot. In this case, the burial ground was overgrown with rose bushes and other ornamental shrubs that had been planted by several generations of Hazards. Once again, the lot was cleared before it was turned over to Cedar Cemetery. In each case a small endowment was provided to help pay for perpetual care.

Cedar Cemetery has a good program for perpetual care. Mowing is done regularly, and pruning and raking as they are needed. All plantings are supervised by the Company in order to avoid the kinds of problems that were encountered in the Hazard and the Friends Cemeteries.

### The Friends Cemetery

Walking through the three cemeteries at Cedar Lane, we realize that each has its own characteristics dictated by the customs of the time. The Friends Cemetery, enclosed in a stone wall on the west side of Cedar, is a typical 18<sup>th</sup> century burial ground, with its stones set in

orderly rows with the graves on an east-west axis: heads to the west, feet to the east. Old records mention family rows, and some of these can still be identified.

The Quakers had certain guidelines for gravestones: they preferred unmarked stones, stones with just initials, or stones with simple inscriptions. If dates were used, they were expected to be proper Quaker dates. The Quakers abhorred reference to pagan gods in the names of months and days on conventional calendars, so they gave numbers to the months and days: January was First Month, Sunday was First Day, and so on.

There are some who feel that Jamestown's Quakers were renegades because they used "worldly" dates on their head stones and did not hesitate to hire Newport stonecutters to cut fashionable stones for them. If that's true, then there were renegades in Newport, too, because there are lots of elegant stones in Newport's Quaker cemeteries.

Curiously, we have found only three stones here that have properly formed Quaker dates, and they were cut in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century for some of the last of Jamestown's Quakers. The use of proper Quaker dates may have been a final statement of their faith. It is possible that there were earlier properly marked stones in the cemetery that have succumbed to the ravages of time and weather.

On a visit to the Friends Cemetery, one of the first stones that we see is inscribed with Quaker style dates. It marks the grave of George Washington Carr, 1807-1882, a staunch Quaker who resented having been named after a "military man." He was known as Temperance George to distinguish him from the two other George Carrs who lived on the island at that time: Handsome George and Carpenter George. Temperance George got even with his parents by naming two of his sons for founders of the Quaker faith. He was a farmer, and for almost 40 years he worked the ancient Greene farm and lived with his family in the quaint old farm house that still stands on Longfellow Road.

All of the burials here have headstones and footstones. The headstones are inscribed on the

west side, footstones on the east; if you can see the inscription you are not standing on the grave—afternoon sun provides the best light for reading headstones. The two rows of graves under the trees on the west side are probably the oldest ones here. They may have had the simplest kind of stones.

Not far away is the stone for little Hannah Burrill, who died in 1693 when she was only three months old. If she had lived she would probably have been a devout Quaker. Her grandparents were among the first Quakers in this country. They came to Rhode Island after they were cruelly treated in Boston: whipped, imprisoned, and finally banished. Hannah died before the cemetery was established, so this is a reburial. She may have been buried first on her Uncle Nicholas Carr's farm, the farm we know now as the Dutra farm on Weeden Lane.



Temperance George Carr's stone shows his date of birth in Quaker style as 2 month 23 and date of death as 7 month 14.



Hannah Burrill's stone, dated 1693, may have been recut.

Hannah's stone, so easy to read, may have been recut.

Abel Franklin is buried south of Hannah in the same row. He died in 1758 at the age of 68. A retired mariner, he owned the West Ferry in Jamestown and the South Ferry in Narragansett. His stone was cut by William Stevens, one of the second generation of the Newport family of stonecutters.



EC, for Edward Carr, is still easily read. HC, for his wife Hannah. on the far stone is almost obliterated.

In the next row to the east are two austere Quaker stones that just have initials: EC and HC, thought to refer to Edward Carr and his wife, Hannah. Born in 1689, Edward Carr was a grandson of Governor Caleb Carr. His farm was on the east shore, on the south side of Carr Lane, about two miles north of his grandfather's farm.

In the same row is Damaris Hazzard's stone, cut by John Bull of Newport. Damaris died in 1792, aged 11. She was the daughter of Captain Josiah Hazzard and granddaughter of Samuel Carr, Esq., 1721-1796. He had a good-sized farm in the southern part of what is now West Reach. His stone was cut by John Stevens III. These two stones may have violated Quaker tenets by describing the deceased's status in life: *Capt. Hazzard and Samuel Carr, Esq.*

At the north end of the next row to the east is the stone for Walter Rodman, *Physician*, 1719-1753. A Newporter, Dr. Rodman didn't live here very long. His farm ran between present day Frigate and Capstan Streets and was known as Strawberry Plain. William Stevens cut his stone.

Job Howland's table stone, several rows east of Dr. Rodman, would have been frowned on by some Quakers for being ostentatious. This stone may have been quite elegant when John Bull cut it, but, being horizontal, it has eroded more than the upright stones. Although hard to read, it is still remarkable for its size. Job Howland was the progenitor of a large Jamestown family. He farmed land on the east shore that was given to him by John Wilson, his father-in-law, and he is buried next to his in-laws. His son had a 140-acre farm on the south side of Narragansett Avenue; Howland Avenue ran across the center of it.

Nearby is the stone that John Bull cut for Captain John Eldred, 1712-1784. A retired mariner, the captain, too, was a son-in-law of John Wilson, and, like Job Howland, received farm land from Wilson on the east shore. Eldred Avenue ran along the north side of that farm. Captain Eldred also had a farm on the west shore. Famous for taking potshots at the British from his "one gun battery," he has been portrayed by some as a rustic farmer, but he appears to have been an educated man and was one of the early members of Newport's

Redwood Library. The local chapter of the DAR is named for him, and a DAR marker at his grave recognizes his patriotic service.

Captain Eldred had three young sons buried here: one died at six months, two at seven years. Happily, a daughter and three other sons survived him. Graves of young siblings are not uncommon in old cemeteries. There are five little Hulls in a row in Cedar Cemetery; they had three siblings who survived to adulthood. And in the Town Cemetery, Isaac Carr buried four infants and a four year old. He had two other children who survived.

While the names on the gravestones here identify past Jamestowners and remind us of facts and anecdotes about them, the stones themselves demonstrate the changing styles of gravestones and the varying skills of the stone cutters. Perhaps the best known local stonecutters were the Stevenses. John Stevens opened his shop in 1705, and it remained in the family until 1927. The work of four members of the family can be found in the Friends Cemetery.

There are two stones by John Stevens II back in Hannah Burrill's row. Young John learned from his father, developed some techniques of his own, and consistently cut nice designs and did careful lettering. He cut the stones for Patience Carr, age 22, and her sister Mary, age 24, who both died in 1760. Next to them is a third sister Avis, age 21, who died in 1761. Her stone appears to have been done by a different stonecutter.

John Stevens III continued the family tradition of superior stone cutting, cut fine letters and designs, and for a time did portraits at the tops of stones instead of the customary cherubs.

To the south of Dr. Rodman, on the stone for Thomas Carr, 1694-1776, there is a good example of one of John III's portraits. Surely the image here is of a man wearing an 18<sup>th</sup> century wig. Thomas Carr had a farm across the road from the cemetery; his house was near the corner of North Road and Eldred Avenue.

Philip Stevens represents the next generation of the family to cut stones in the Friends Burial Ground. He continued the family tradition of fine lettering, and, in tune with the times, he

started using marble for his stones and cutting motifs of urns and weeping willows instead of cherubs. Jane Fowler, 1764-1821, has a nice urn on her stone; Captain Henry Fowler, 1744-1829, her brother-in-law, has a weeping willow. Philip cut both of these stones. The Fowler stones are two rows east of Dr. Rodman.

Sally Knowles, 1778-1843, is buried seven rows east of the Fowlers. Philip Stevens charged \$13 for her headstone and footstone and 25 cents to get them to the ferry. From there it cost \$1.00 to cart the pair to the cemetery and set them up.

Down the hill a bit, five rows east of the Fowlers are two simple stones that Philip Stevens's sons cut for John T. Potter, 1782-1855, and his son Peleg, 1810-1849. The Potters lived on Taylor Point; Potter's Cove is named for their family.

The Stevens family is known to have cut 33 stones in the Friends Cemetery. The last of the family sold the business to John Howard Benson in 1927. Mr. Benson was a talented graphic artist. He had no experience with stone cutting and had to search out old stone cutters to learn how it was done. He continued the work of the Stevens Shop, using the old way of cutting stones—with chisel and hammer—and he brought a new elegance to the old craft. He was followed by his son John Howard Benson, Jr., known locally as Fud Benson. Fud Benson's work can be seen in Cedar Cemetery on the slate stones for Catharine and Sydney Wright. You can find them on the south side of the road that runs west from the shed.



Thomas Carr's stone is decorated with a portrait by John Stevens III.

In the third generation, Nicholas Benson has joined the family business. The Bensons appear to be continuing the Stevens tradition of learning from and developing on the previous generation's work with the chisel and hammer.

The clear space on the south side of the Friends Cemetery may be the site of unmarked graves. It was discovered when the Rhode Island Quakers had the cemetery cleared, and there was a suggestion at the time that it was the site of the first meetinghouse. However, it seems unlikely that this area was not allowed to be used for burials just because the meetinghouse had stood there for 24 years in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Dr. William Lincoln Bates, who died in 1932, is buried up the hill from the clear space. The owner of the Electropathic Sanatorium on Conanicus Avenue, Dr. Bates was an active member of the Society of Friends. He dressed very conservatively and preferred the traditional Quaker forms of address.



Lucy Hazard's grave is the oldest grave in the Hazard family cemetery.

The Friends Cemetery served the Jamestown Quaker community well in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. However there were only seven burials there in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the last one in 1962; and now it is not available for burials. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it has been the subject of some study, but it needs more interpretation.

### The Hazard Cemetery

There are five generations of Hazards buried in the Hazard Cemetery. Thomas Hazard established the burial ground on his farm when he buried his wife here, in 1807. A relative newcomer, he owned land on both sides of Eldred Avenue and lived in the old farmhouse that still stands on the south side of the road. Members of his family continued to live there for 150 years.

Enclosed in its own stone wall next to the Friends Cemetery, the Hazard Cemetery is a good example of a family burial ground. Its preservation is due to the fact that it was turned over to the Cedar Cemetery Company when the Hazard farm was sold and subdivided.

Many of the family burial grounds on our island were lost when family farms changed hands and burial grounds were no longer cared for. As a result, only five other family plots on Jamestown have survived: the Arnold and Cottrell cemeteries on Fort Getty Road, the Carr and Watson cemeteries on East Shore Road and the Tew cemetery on Rosemary Lane.

The Carr lot with its 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century stones, is well-marked and cared for by the Carr family. The site, however, is not as old as its gravestones, which were brought here in 1900 from an early Carr burial ground in Newport that was threatened with destruction. The Watson lot is just west of the Carr lot. The 19<sup>th</sup> century stones of the three Watson infants buried there can just barely be seen.

Somewhere in the Tew family burial ground, their locations unknown, are the graves of Azariah Tew, 1723-1765, and his four children. The children, none older than seven, died before their father; Avis, the youngest, was a little more than two at her death, in 1765. She died of a fever just three hours before her father, who

succumbed after seven months of consumption. Azariah and his little daughter were buried in one grave with Avis's coffin set on top of her father's. This sad story is recorded at unusual length in the Town Records. The Town Clerk wrote further that the double-deck burial was "an instance not to be found in the annals of this town and perhaps even rarely in any other corporation in this Colony."

Other family graves were moved from their original sites. The Arnold burial ground on Taylor Point, survived for 200 years on the farm where Oliver Arnold, his wife, and their grown son lived. The burial plot outlasted one change of ownership, but it was broken up in the 1880s, when the farm changed hands again. The Arnolds' remains and their stones were then moved to Cedar Cemetery. The Arnolds were the first family to live on Taylor Point. Their stones, among the oldest on the island, illustrate a change in fashion for grave stones. Oliver Sr., 1655-1697 has a death's head inscribed on his stone, a motif that was used often in the 1600s. There was a death's head also on the stone that the first John Stevens cut for young Oliver, 1694-1722. When Phebe, his mother, died in 1732, fashions had changed, and her stone was inscribed with a cherub.

### Cedar Cemetery

Cedar Cemetery is quite different from the Friends and Hazard Cemeteries. In the older cemeteries the graves are oriented according to religious belief, with the headstones inscribed on the west and the footstones on the east. In this cemetery the placement of stones is dictated by landscape design. Here we have avenues with graves on either side, and inscriptions facing the avenues. The gravestones have in a way become part of the landscape.

The design of the Cedar Cemetery grounds reflects mid-19<sup>th</sup> century attitudes. There are numerous clearly defined family plots, reminiscent of the burial lots on family farms, and the landscaping features plantings of trees



Oliver Arnold's stone is inscribed with a winged skull typical of the late 17th century.

and shrubs in keeping with the latest ideas for cemetery design.

It appears that after Cedar Cemetery was opened a number of family plots were vacated and the remains brought to Cedar. There are 48 known reburials here. When remains were relocated they may have been transported in the Town Hearse. We know that as early as 1830 the town had a Hearse and a Hearse House, and in 1886, the town bought a new Hearse and built a new Hearse House on West Street.

The stones and monuments here provide a clear record of the changes in cemetery fashions from 1861 to the present. In their new cemetery



John J. Watson Jr., who donated much of the land for Cedar Cemetery, is interred in an elaborate mausoleum.

Jamestowners followed the latest trends in gravestone styles. No longer bound by Quaker restraints, they chose stones that varied in size and decoration that had equally diverse inscriptions, simple or wordy, religious, or sentimental.

Many different stone cutters are represented in Cedar Cemetery, and many different cutting techniques. On Captain William Pemantel's stone, there is an example of the latest in stone cutting, a laser-cut drawing of the ferryboat *Governor Carr*. Captain Pemantel, 1919-2000, grew up in Jamestown and had a long career as a mariner; the first ferryboat that he worked on was the *Governor Carr*. Captain Pemantel's stone is in the new section, east of the second roadway, near a deciduous tree.

The mausoleum for John J. Watson Jr. is a really splendid example of art deco design. This is the John J. Watson, 1874-1939, who gave so much land to the cemetery. He is a fine example of a local boy who made good. The son of a local farmer, he graduated from Bryant College, worked for the Industrial Bank in Providence, and later on became associated with the firm that would become US Rubber. He retired at 36, bought a seat on the New York Stock Exchange, and became an investment broker. Mr. Watson lived in New York, summered at Thorncroft, his family's house on Narragansett Avenue, and he maintained the ancestral Watson farm that we know now as the Hodgkiss farm.

The Watson mausoleum is the most elegant memorial here. The simplest may be the one by



This concrete stone was built by her husband and children.

the road that runs along the south side of the cemetery. Made of cast concrete, it is imbedded with white pebbles to make the word, MOTHER. It is the work of a young man whose wife had died leaving him with four small

children. He couldn't afford to buy a gravestone, so he and the children made one.

Many more gravestones here must have poignant histories known only to family and friends. One wonders, for instance, about the life of Hannah Watson, 1830-1887, whose stone reads simply, "She hath done what she could."

The history of Cedar Cemetery is not hard to follow. The dates on its stones give clues to changes in styles over the generations, and they reveal subtle changes in the grounds. Presently, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with families widely dispersed, large family plots, are no longer in demand, and graves are more likely to be arranged in rows. We've seen cemetery standards change from religious to esthetic; now economics must be considered in setting the standards. Because of the rising costs of maintenance, plantings are restricted, and both the size and the placement of stones are regulated in order to make for the efficient use of power equipment.

Some of us value the Cedar Lane cemeteries as historical sites, others value them as serene places to remember departed family and friends; in either case they are an important part of Jamestown's heritage.

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