

HISTORIC BURYING GROUNDS INITIATIVE NEWSLETTER

Preserving Boston's 16 Historic Burying Grounds



BOSTON PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT

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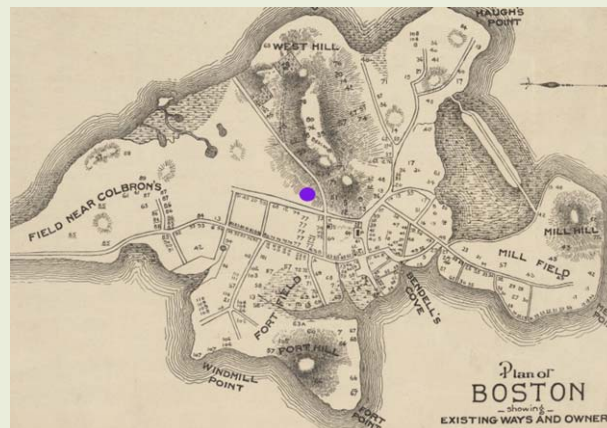
Table of Contents

- 1 Granary Landscaping
History: Gloomy Corner to
High-Rent District
 - 2 Letter from the Director
 - 3 Field Notes: Granary
Burying Ground Landscape
Rehabilitation
 - 5 Granary Landscaping
History continued
 - 10 Interview: Mimi La Camera,
President, Freedom Trail
Foundation
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GRANARY LANDSCAPING HISTORY: Gloomy Corner to High-Rent District

Graveyards can be fascinating. If one can look past the obvious morbid associations, there is much to be learned. Frequently the most interesting facet is the story of the people who are buried there, whether for genealogical interests or for historical interests. For others the beauty and uniqueness of gravestone carving never fails to delight. Another angle one can approach a burying ground from is the history of the landscaping. This line of inquiry reveals both details about the development of the site as well as insights into the daily lives of Bostonians in the 1600s -1900s. Since I am currently involved in a project working on the landscaping of the Granary Burying Ground, it seems germane to look at how this site physically became what it is now.

When the Granary Burying Ground opened in 1660, there were approximately 3,000 people living in Boston. Two burying grounds existed at that point: King's Chapel Burying Ground, established in 1630 and located one block from the Granary site; and Copp's Hill Burying Ground, opened in 1659 and located in the present-day North End, which was on the other side of town then. In 1660 the population was great enough to require the opening of a third burial spot, which was called the South Ground or the Common Ground then, and



The purple dot shows the future site of the Granary—in the center of the peninsula, but at the edge of town in 1640.
Map reproduction courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library

which was called the South Ground or the Common Ground then, and

(continued on page 5)



Letter from the Director

The Granary Burying Ground is perhaps the most well-known burying ground in the Historic Burying Grounds Initiative. This is likely due to the fact that some of the most famous names in American history are buried here. Notables such as Paul Revere, John Hancock and Samuel Adams ensure a steady flow of visitors to this site. It is estimated that nearly one million visitors come to this burying ground every year!

People have been coming to pay their respects to the heroes of the American Revolution for quite some time. Originally access to the burying ground by the general public was only allowed during burials. In the 1850s, the Granary was unlocked on Sunday afternoons to allow people to visit the site. Tourism guidebooks from the latter half of the nineteenth century indicate that the Granary could be visited with permission from the superintendent. By 1913 the dirt trails in the site had been replaced by concrete tiles, corresponding to a period in which tourism in American cities was increasing.

One can only guess whether cemetery managers of that time period imagined the great increase in tourism that would occur in the future. It is thrilling to think that so many people are interested in American history and in visiting an original seventeenth-century site! However the site's infrastructure cannot accommodate such heavy usage, and the landscaping has suffered. That is why we are proceeding with a construction project to rehabilitate the landscape at the Granary Burying Ground. We received a \$125,000 grant from the Freedom Trail Foundation for this construction project and are excited to begin work!

My feature articles in this edition deal with the history of the landscaping of the Granary and more specific details about the construction project. I think these site improvements will make a big difference both for those who visit and also for the general streetscape along Tremont Street.

Kelly Thomas



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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

HISTORIC LANDSCAPE REHABILITATION IN THE GRANARY BURYING GROUND

The Granary Burying Ground is a popular site on Boston's Freedom Trail. It is estimated that approximately one million visitors pass through its Egyptian Revival-style gates annually to pay tribute to ancestors and well-known names from American history. In fact it seems like increasing numbers of people are interested in visiting this site.

Wear and tear from so many feet walking through the site had become evident to everyone, including the Freedom Trail Foundation. The organization chose the Granary as a recipient for its first grant from its Preservation Trust Fund. The first part of the \$125,000 grant was to hire a landscape architect to study the problem and propose a solution to this dilemma.



A worn-down spot by Sam Adams' grave.

occurred in the larger context of a cemetery: there are approximately 2,345 grave markers and an estimated 6,000 bodies in the two-acre site. This makes any construction very difficult. How can the site accommodate all its visitors without moving headstones, disturbing graves or paving over the burying ground? To make matters more complicated there is no parking at the site, no water or electricity



Example of erosion and damaged edging along pathway.

and the widest gate a construction vehicle could get through has a 5-foot opening. There are rows of headstones everywhere with little room to maneuver.

After studying the site, Victor Walker came up with the following game plan:

- 1) Provide several paved areas as stopping points or queuing areas for tour groups.
- 2) Widen front pathways from 4 feet to 6 feet.
- 3) Reconfigure circulation system between the Otis and Hancock monuments so it is less circuitous.
- 4) Install a new 4-foot pathway in the rear of site to provide outlet for congestion around the Revere tomb.
- 5) Install post-and-chain fencing along the pathways to keep people on the walkways.
- 6) Prune trees in the site to allow more sun to reach the grass.
- 7) Clean out the catch basins in the front of the site.

The Parks Department hired Walker-Kluesing Design Group, a local landscape architecture firm with significant experience in historic burying grounds. Victor Walker, the principal landscape architect, encountered muddy areas, frequent bare patches of earth, walkways losing pavers and edging, erosion along pathways and on sloping areas and poor grass growth in certain sections. These landscaping issues

Although the scope of the project was straightforward, some of the details were more complicated when it came to drawing up construction documents. The most difficult item was the post-and-chain fencing. We need nearly 1,600 linear feet of post and chain. Typically the Boston Parks Department uses steel fencing in this application. We researched the cost of steel fencing and came up with a very large figure: \$100,000, which was more than we had initially realized. However it seemed



Previous projects have failed to make grass grow in this area.

pointless to spend money restoring the landscape if we could not keep the foot traffic on the pathways. By substituting aluminum post and chain, we were able to get the estimated cost down to \$80,000.

The next problem with the post and chain was the method of installation. After a review of our preliminary plans and specifications by the Massachusetts Historical Commission we were notified that the post holes were too deep and would have to be hand dug by an archaeologist in order to protect the site's underground archaeological resources. This was another blow to our ballooning budget. Thankfully we were able to come up with a satisfactory Plan B! Instead of putting the posts in a hole in the ground, Victor designed a system of 6-inch-deep concrete grade beams, 3 3/8 inches below the surface. The posts would be grouted into holes in the concrete beam. The depth of the excavation would be less than the pathways so

we would not need to use an archaeologist. By estimation, this construction method would save \$30,000 over the other method, without any risk of disturbing archaeological deposits.

One of the goals of the project is to grow grass in areas where it has previously had troubles growing. We have had these areas professionally seeded several times in the past decade but the grass has never taken. Seventy percent of the trees in this site are Lindens. These trees create dense shade and have surface feeder roots making it very difficult to grow grass on them. Tree pruning is part of this project and it is hoped that this would allow additional sunlight to reach the grass in dark areas, encouraging it to grow. Soil testing by the University of Massachusetts revealed that the soil was



Erosion, compacted soil and poor drainage create muddy areas.

slightly acidic and would benefit from an application of dolomitic lime. A specific recommendation for fertilizer was made too.

The project was put out for public bidding in early March 2011. When the results were in, we accepted our low-bid contractor, who came with good references. The bids ranged from \$266,117-\$496,100. Construction started in May 2011 and will last about three months. In the next issue I will be able to include "after" photos of the site and details about the construction.

GRANARY LANDSCAPING HISTORY *(continued from front page)*

became known as the Granary Burying Ground in the 1790s. The new burial ground was located south of King's Chapel Burying Ground (which was called the "Old Burying Ground" at that time) and was both on the edge of the Boston Common and Boston town. The current Park Street did not exist at that time and there was nothing to separate the new burying ground from the common land. At the edge of the Common was the Charles River estuary, with mud flats and water covering what are now the Public Garden, Beacon Hill Flats and the Back Bay. This was public land and the town selectmen sought to use it in ways that would benefit the people of Boston.

In a meeting on September 5, 1660, the Boston Selectmen decided to close King's Chapel Burying Ground for burials and to open a new burial site. At that same meeting it was also decided that an almshouse to help the poor should be erected on the common ground. When the almshouse was built in 1662, the almshouse and its land formed the burying ground's border on the southwest corner. Along the south side, where Park Street would one day exist, the Boston Common stretched into the site, separated only by a fence. Common Street (now called Tremont Street) ran along the east side of the burial ground. The animal pound, with its collection of stray farm animals, occupied part of the northeast side of the site. A few private houses and land completed the rectangle of the burial ground, from the animal pound back to the almshouse. That footprint is remarkably similar to the site's current configuration.

More public buildings were to be built around the burying ground. In 1721 the town erected a bridewell,



A map from 1743 shows the almshouse, the workhouse, the bridewell and the town granary next to the burying ground. Map reproduction courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library

a facility which served as both a prison and an insane asylum, next to the almshouse. In order to secure a steady store of grain, the town also built a granary, the burying ground's namesake, next to the bridewell in 1729. The granary was moved to the current location of the Park Street Church right next to the burying ground in 1737 in order to accommodate the construction of a workhouse. The workhouse was a two-storey, 140-foot-long brick building used to detain vagrant and dissolute individuals. The almshouse and the bridewell were also made of brick, with the almshouse being the larger of the two. There are accounts of children living in the almshouse sticking

their arms through the fence to ask money of passers-by. When Park Street was established in 1737/38, forming the south side of the Granary Burying Ground, this area at the edge of town was very gloomy. In the meantime, private houses were being built on the Beacon Street side of the site.

Fencing has always been an important factor in the site layout and was frequently mentioned in the Town and Selectmen's Records. A fence was erected around the new burying ground in 1665. Perhaps

GRANARY LANDSCAPING HISTORY (continued)

one of the reasons was to keep out roaming livestock. The town records from 1680 mentions keeping the burying grounds' fences well repaired so "noe Cattle be suffred to feed in them." The townspeople were permitted to graze a limited number of cattle and sheep on the Common and had to pay the cowkeeper a fee per animal. Perhaps the town government saw an income opportunity when in 1678 they decided to lease out the burying ground to John Woodmansey for 21 years, provided he kept the fence in good repair. At times the site was also used to corral the town bulls at night; a bull house was erected in the northeast corner of the burying ground for this purpose. The practice of using or leasing the burying grounds for pasturage continued until the American Revolution. In addition to frequent references in town records for people to repair wooden perimeter fences, a system of brick walls began to take shape. Tomb builders around the perimeter of the site had to extend the brick wall from the previous tomb. There were two entrances to the site on Tremont Street, the north and south gate. Abutting property owners had built gates into the site from their properties, but the Selectmen ordered those gates closed on several occasions. They also tried to crack down on problems that are familiar to us today, such as littering, as evidenced in the Selectmen's Record of August 30, 1708, when it was "Ordered that Thomas Battles...be warned to forbear to Cast Trash out of his Land into ye burying place."

The faintest beginnings of beautification of the Granary occurred when trees were ordered planted along all burying grounds in 1712. Fifty years later, Captain Adino Paddock and John Ballard continued this



The Paddock elms in front of the Granary Burying Ground, in a drawing from the 1850s from *Gleason's Pictorial* magazine. You can see the Granary fence in the background.

effort by planting a row of fourteen elms in front of the Granary in 1762. These elms were imported from England as saplings and were grown in a nursery in Milton until they were planted by the burying ground. Captain Paddock cared for them himself until the Revolution came; he was a Tory and left town to reside in Canada. Eleven of the great elms were still living when they were cut down in 1873. In spite of the beauty of the elms, inside the burying ground remained devoid of any trees until circa 1830.

Up until the early 1800s, most of the development in the Granary was of a practical nature, determining the size of the site and installing physical structures such as fences, walls and underground tombs. At that time, there was much public discussion about the salubrity of urban burials. The burying grounds were completely full and many family tombs had fallen into disrepair or collapse. These concerns would be

GRANARY LANDSCAPING HISTORY (continued)

echoed in the establishment of garden cemeteries on the outskirts of town such as Mount Auburn Cemetery. Although burials in the Granary would continue throughout the nineteenth century, their number dwindled off considerably with only the occasional tomb burial occurring. Also, as America approached its 50th birthday, a desire to create public monuments and commemorate important events and persons in American history was burgeoning. Wealthy Americans started forming associations and contributing money towards projects such as the Bunker Hill Monument.

During this same period, the types of buildings surrounding the burying ground were changing. Along Park Street where the almshouse, workhouse, bridewell, granary and animal pound once stood, new residences were being built. Wealthy families such as the Warrens and the Quincys now had backyards

over-looking the desolate-looking Granary Burying Ground. On the other side of the site, at the corner of Tremont and Beacon Street, the Tremont House Hotel was built in 1829, designed by the well-known architect Isaiah Rogers. It was the first hotel in the country to feature indoor plumbing and was considered



A painting by James Bennett, ca 1830s, showing the Granary's new neighbor, the Tremont House. In the background is the old Granary wall, before the new entrance and fence were added in 1840.

very fashionable and luxurious. The Boston Athenaeum completed the construction of its present day building, located at the rear of the Granary, in 1847. It was one of the largest libraries in the country and the most important cultural institution in Boston.

Considering its neighbors, it is not surprising that starting in the mid-1820s the Granary benefitted from several campaigns of public subscription, ushering in projects of a dramatic visual nature which still define the site today. The first addition was the monument to Benjamin Franklin's parents. The large monument in the center of the site was built in 1827, designed by the architect Solomon Willard. A stone-laying ceremony took place on June 15, 1827, accompanied by speeches and celebration. Shrubs were planted at the base of the monument. An appeal to public subscription also raised funds to plant trees inside the site. The most notable change to the site was the construction of an entrance gate and ornamental fence along Tremont Street. An 1836 note from the Superintendent of Burial Grounds said: "the gate of the Granary Burial Ground is in bad order, unfit to be repaired. I recommend that an iron gate be made to replace the wooden one." Another public subscription paid for half of the ornamental

GRANARY LANDSCAPING HISTORY (continued)

gate and fence that still form the entrance to the site. Originally the plan was for the city to pay for one-quarter of the cost with the public paying for the rest. However, it proved impossible to raise the three-quarters of the cost, so the city of Boston then agreed to pay for half of the project with the public paying for the other half. The granite used in the project was taken from the same quarry as the stone used to build the Bunker Hill Monument. In 1851 the *Boston Daily Atlas* reported that “the Granary Burial Ground has recently been much improved by the removal of dead tress and under brush, laying out ornamental paths.” This period also saw the most controversial landscaping development in the Granary: the rearrangement of headstones. It is not clear when these rearrangements (unfortunately there were



Granary gates, front fence and wall from photo, date unknown.

several) occurred, but it is quite probable the first rearrangement took place during the improvements from 1827-1840. There has been speculation about the reasons for such an action, but the most likely seems to be an attempt to impose order and symmetry, design aspects which were considered desirable at that time.

In spite of the landscaping improvements and the construction of elegant homes nearby, there was still much physical decay visible in the site. In the essay “Reminiscences of Park Street,” the author Collins Warren, M.D.¹, a descendant of famous General Joseph Warren who died at the Battle of Bunker Hill, writes about growing up in the mid-nineteenth century in a house that abutted the Granary Burying Ground. In describing the old site he says:

Many of these tablets were already showing signs of extreme age, and the loosened brick-work of crumbling walls furnished temptation to youthful curiosity. But a wholesome respect for, not to say fear of, their gruesome contents, restrained tendencies to juvenile vandalism. Governor Gardner, who at one time occupied the house, Number Seven Park Street, once told the writer that a tomb in the rear of this lot had greatly excited the curiosity of members of his family by showing signs of collapse in one of its walls, sufficient to expose the contents. The final tumbling in of a few loose bricks, perhaps aided in their fall by inquisitive hands, disclosed a skull still covered with luxurious flaxen tresses. The excitement caused by this discovery induced him to examine into the history of the former inhabitants of this last resting-place. Investigation led to the somewhat startling discovery that a beautiful young lady who had died of smallpox had found here an untimely grave....

At the end of the nineteenth century another change was occurring in the neighborhood. The tony dwelling places were one by one becoming offices for business such as the Warren Institution for Savings and the Houghton Mifflin company. The street car lines ran up and down Tremont Street with much

¹ J. Collins Warren, MD, “Reminiscences of Park Street,” in *Old Park Street and Its Vicinity*, Robert Means Lawrence (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1922), 103-4.

GRANARY LANDSCAPING HISTORY (continued)

congestion in front of the Granary. In 1894 the Tremont House Hotel was torn down with a new eleven-storey office building taking its place. The importance of mercantile development was seen by the unsuccessful proposal by the Board of Health of the City of Boston to sell the burying ground land for commercial development and move the bodies to suburban cemeteries. The controversy generated by this proposal resulted in the 1880 state law which prohibited any municipality in Massachusetts from using land which had been a burial ground for more than 100 years for any other purpose.

In 1897 a Cemetery Department was created in the Boston city government which took over the ownership of the burial grounds from the Board of Health. By this time, almost all burial activity was



Trolley traffic was heavy in front of the Granary Burying Ground before the subway was installed in 1895.

taking place in the three municipally owned, garden-style cemeteries in the outlying areas of the city. In regards to the historic sites, the Cemetery Department geared its activities towards repair and preservation work, recognizing the touristic interest in these places. The Parks and Recreation Department took over the Cemetery Department in 1920. Maintenance and repair of the features in the site unfortunately declined over the 20th century. Around the nation's bicentennial, a group of concerned, preservation-minded citizens started looking into ways to help restore the neglected burying grounds.

Their efforts resulted in the creation of the Historic Burying Grounds Initiative in the Boston Parks and Recreation Department in 1985. Since that time, the Parks Department has spent over \$1,000,000 in preservation and repair projects in the Granary Burying Ground, including both grave marker conservation and landscaping projects. The current project is in direct response to the high amount of visitation in the site.

The transformation from a part-time cow pasture at the scruffy edge of town to a site visited annually by one million people with neighboring buildings worth millions of dollars is indeed a dramatic one. We are proud to be the owners of such a historic site and thrilled that many original features have survived over 350 years of existence and can still be visited by an interested public. In many ways the landscaping history of this interesting place illustrates the expression "the more things change, the more they stay the same."

INTERVIEW

WITH MIMI LA CAMERA, PRESIDENT, FREEDOM TRAIL FOUNDATION

HBGI: What is the Freedom Trail Foundation?

Mimi: The Freedom Trail Foundation was founded in 1964, and is the official non-profit umbrella organization responsible for assisting in the promotion and preservation of Boston's 16 Freedom Trail sites. The Foundation's mission is to ensure these irreplaceable touchstones to our past remain as vibrant reminders of the vision, courage and hope upon which America was built. We partner with the 16 Freedom Trail sites to: enhance the understanding and appreciation of Boston's seminal role in American history, create experiences to draw visitors to Boston and preserve the inspiring touchstones that link us to our heritage.



Mimi La Camera, President of the Freedom Trail Foundation.

HBGI: What is Freedom Trail Preservation Fund?

Mimi: The Preservation Fund supports preservation, rehabilitation, restoration and capital projects for official Freedom Trail sites. These projects help avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse effects of the elements and man-made wear and tear on these precious 17th and 18th century sites and enhance the visitor experience of those sites.

HBGI: Why did you choose the Granary Burying Ground for your first grant?

Mimi: The Boston Parks & Recreation Department had let it be known that there was a need for historic landscape renovation of the Granary. We initially funded a grant to study what needed to be done. When the Department submitted the results of that study, the Board decided that the FTF would fund this project first. We have worked very closely with the Boston Parks & Recreation Department and are thrilled to have them be our first "partner."

HBGI: What are the criteria for selecting a project for this grant?

Mimi: Grants are available for Freedom Trail sites. Award recommendation will be based on merit and the broader impact of the project to achieve the Freedom Trail Foundation mission.

- Grants may not be used for salaries, wages or overhead
- Renewal of previous grants will be considered based on accomplishment

INTERVIEW continued

- Distribution of funds for a specific grant: requests for all funds must be accompanied by paid invoices associated with the project, unless otherwise allowed in writing by the Preservation Fund Committee
- Freedom Trail Foundation logo must appear on all grant recipient print materials, web site and social media
- A grant application which provides for matching funds will be considered more favorably.

HBGI: Tell me about the app you are developing for the Granary Burying Ground?

Mimi: We are working on a smart phone application that would enable visitors to “point” to a headstone and see who is buried in that spot. There will be a 500-word biography of the “top 100” or most famous people of the 6,000 people buried there. The app will work on image recognition, a QR code and military GPS to help the visitor know where they are in the Granary and access the historic information.

HBGI: Have you always been interested in history?

Mimi: Yes, I was a history major in college and taught history for a short time as well.

HBGI: What drew you to your job at the Freedom Trail Foundation?

Mimi: I had been on the Board and was really interested in reviving the Foundation and adding some new energy to the Trail itself. I had a marketing development and management background and it was a good fit to take over the Foundation and introduce new programming. The staff at the Foundation is really terrific – everyone is amazingly capable and very interested in history! They really make the place run like a clock and have added so much to the Freedom Trail experience. I’m thrilled to be working with them

SITES INCLUDED IN THE HISTORIC BURYING GROUNDS INITIATIVE

Bennington Street Cemetery (1838)

Hawes Burying Ground (1816)

Bunker Hill Burying Ground (1816)

King’s Chapel Burying Ground (1630)

Central Burying Ground (1754)

Market Street Burying Ground (1764)

Copp’s Hill Burying Ground (1659)

Phipps Street Burying Ground (1630)

Dorchester North Burying Ground (1633)

South End Burying Ground (1810)

Dorchester South Burying Ground (1810)

Union Cemetery (1841)

Eliot Burying Ground (1630)

Walter Street Burying Ground (1711)

Granary Burying Ground (1660)

Westerly Burying Ground (1683)