

Revolutionary Cemetery Symbolizes An And Relatives, Helping Westfield



The marker for John Davis, who died in 1760 at the age of 30.

By SONIA V. OWCHARI AND MICHELLE H. LePOIDEVIN

Located across from The Presbyterian Church in Westfield, The Revolutionary Cemetery on Mountain Avenue has invited quiet reflection amidst its statuesque evergreen trees and iron fence.

The final resting place of many generations of Westfielders, the cemetery remains cherished today because it serves as a reminder of residents' heritage and a focal point for reminiscing about Westfield's past and present.

Dating back to Colonial times, the cemetery's land was acquired in the early 1720s as a portion of "parsonage land." Nearly all of the plots were sold on an individual

basis until just before 1860, when family plots of four or more graves became available for sale.

Legend indicates that grazing privileges were granted by the church for farmers' sheep and calves. The evergreens were placed over a century ago, and the iron fence which trims Mountain Avenue was erected prior to 1940. A wooden fence had been placed there before that time.

While the old cemetery symbolizes a point of reference for individuals to trace and research their genealogy, what about others who were laid to rest in this peaceful patch of land? What was their personal history?

What did they contribute to the settlement of Westfield when it was a rural area with horse-drawn carriages, as depicted in a mural inside in the Westfield Municipal Building?

There are 1,158 known burials in the cemetery, according to historical researcher Herbert A. Halsey, based on an article written by Ralph Jones of the Westfield Historical Society. Individuals interred there

include the early Presbyterian parishioners of Westfield, Cranford, Scotch Plains, Fanwood and Mountainside.

Throughout New England, such burial grounds were preserved as part of the community's heritage. Although Westfield has become a modern suburban town, there is a band of history which runs through it, with names such as Baker, Cory,

died on July 27, 1792, stirs up an interesting tale. Mrs. Frazee was apparently involved in a skirmish with British General Charles Cornwallis during the American Revolution when she refused to give him some of her baked bread.

In the newer portion of the burial ground, a connecting archway between two stones marks the resting place of two young women who



Michelle H. LePoidevin for This Is Westfield

A HAVEN IN ALL SEASONS...Though this picture of The Revolutionary Cemetery in Westfield was taken after a blanket of snow fell upon it, the burial spot has served as a haven for quiet reflection for many visitors and relatives.

Crane, Downer, French, Marsh, Miller and Scudder carried down from the community's Colonial era. The grave of Noah Miller, who passed away in 1730, when he was just six weeks old, is reportedly the oldest grave in the cemetery.

Another noted burial plot, that of Elizabeth "Aunt Betty" Frazee, who drowned. They were Rebecca, the 32-year-old wife of William Harry Rogers, and 16-year-old Emma Jane Mott.

In 1698, the Scudder family, led by John Scudder, 3rd, left Newton, Long Island and settled in Westfield. John Scudder is the founder of one of Westfield's greatest landowning

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The headstone of Andrew Cory who died on March 26, 1807 at the age of 33.

families.

Mr. Scudder died in 1738 at the age of 64. He bequeathed 10 pounds to The Presbyterian Church in Westfield and his brother, Richard Scudder, was the forefather of the Scudder family in Trenton.

Captain John Scudder, 4th, (1700-1777), was a generous benefactor to The Presbyterian Church in Westfield, which granted him several acres. Colonel John Scudder, 5th, (1739-1814) had two wives, Sarah Davis and Zipporah Clark, during his lifetime. Noted for "bravery and meritorious service" during his career with the Continental Army, he advanced to the ranks of Captain and then Colonel.

Colonel Scudder's land holdings were said to stretch from Elmer Street to Gallows Hill Road. There are at least seven John Scudders buried in the cemetery.

A Revolutionary soldier,

Ephraim Scudder (1743-1788), the brother of the Colonel, settled in the vicinity of where Central Avenue is located today, near the Lehigh Valley tracks.

Ephraim Scudder, the father of two sons, Amos and Smith Scudder, was a member of the jury which convicted James Morgan for the murder of the Reverend James Caldwell. Mr. Morgan is reportedly buried in an unmarked grave in the northwest part of the cemetery.

Connecticut-born Samuel Downer (1723-1824), who is also interred at the cemetery, had moved to Elizabethtown by 1750. After his house and forge were torched by the British, Samuel relocated his business to Jerusalem Road in Westfield, where he crafted plows, scythes and axes. Samuel lived to the age of 101 years, seven months and 22 days.

Downer, 2nd, (1760-1846) joined Captain Pierson's militia company at the age of 16 as a drummer boy. At 19, he enlisted in Captain Scudder's company, Second Regular Volunteers, Essex County.

Marking the burial places of fallen soldiers and beloved residents has often been an ornate process. Some of the most interesting epitaphs and quotations have represented the personalities and beliefs of those left behind.

"Ye Sons of Man, a feeble race, Expos'd to ev'ry Snare, Come, Make the Lord your Dwelling Place, and try and trust his care," reads Samuel Hetfield's stone. Mr. Hetfield died in 1871.

The grave of Benjamin Scudder, who died in 1708, is marked with the epitaph, "Remember me as you pass by, As you are Now, so once was I, As I am now, so you must be, Prepare for death and follow me."

The majority of those interred in the cemetery are buried with their feet pointing east, signifying the commencement of the day or of life. However, the custom eventu-

ally faded.

A more modern day tradition of placing colored flags on specific graves has come to pass as part of a program in which historical tours of the cemetery are offered for curious visitors yearning to learn about the past.

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The headstone of Elizabeth Frazee.

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