

Help Update the Hale Collection and Learn about the Interesting History of Connecticut

by Gene Gumbs, Godfrey Memorial Library Volunteer

When I signed on to join Ed Laput, former Godfrey Memorial Library Board Member, and his merry volunteer band of brothers and sisters in his effort to catalogue and photograph every cemetery in the State of Connecticut, little did I know that the project was about to become an obsession and a quest to find out more about some of the names I found on the stones. It's a daunting task Ed has undertaken – there are more than 2300 cemeteries in Connecticut – but, if you're a student of history and genealogy like I am, it's also a fascinating and exciting look into the past. It's also a journey of mysteries and puzzles – some of which I find myself taking time to look into a little more.

A case in point. . . . Buried in Brewster Cemetery in Preston is Jonathan Brewster, son of William Brewster who came to America in 1621 on the Mayflower. In fact, Jonathan was supposed to be on the Mayflower but stayed in Holland with his sick wife who later died. He joined his father in Plymouth a few months later, making the trip west on the ship *Fortune*. He married again while in Massachusetts and came to Connecticut in 1649, settling in New London where he died in 1659.

Another interesting inscription sent me scouring the Internet for answers. On the base of an obelisk in Colonel Ledyard Cemetery in Groton is this inscription: "The body of Capt. John Seeley Æ42 rests here who with his wife Cordelia Æ36 & son Mighil Æ14, drowned Oct. 23, 1856." After my initial thoughts of sadness for the tragic end for this family I started wondering what actually happened. Could it have been an accident on the Thames River? Perhaps parents trying to rescue a drowning son in a swimming mishap. Did it happen in the State? After a little digging I discovered it happened off Turks Island in a shipwreck. Captain Seeley was trading salt between New England and the islands when his ship went down in the shoals off the island.

We have also run into times where headstones and graves show up in places they're not supposed to be. Jared Covey's headstone rests in the basement of the library in Burlington, CT. The only problem is that Jared is supposed to be buried in the Seventh Day Baptist Cemetery in town. Covey, who died in 1804, actually helped build the Seventh Day Meeting House with his sons. He actually deeded the land for the cemetery from his private property. So the question remains – is he actually buried where the library now stands? Or was his headstone removed from the Seventh Day Cemetery to the library?

Ed and I stumbled on another stumper when we were in Montville. We were in a remote spot in the woods on top of a hill taking pictures of what remained of the Spicer Cemetery. When Charles Hale surveyed the cemetery in the early 1930's he noted just four burials – all named

Spicer – dating from 1839-1887. The only problem is that we found the headstone of Anna Bolles lying on the ground. How did that headstone get there? Is she actually buried there or did some prankster remove her headstone from elsewhere and transport it up a 500-foot hill to a stonewall-enclosed family cemetery? Could Hale have just missed her stone 80 years ago?

Unfortunately, I have yet to unravel the mystery. There was indeed an Anna Bolles who died in 1830 listed in local obituaries in the Montville area but Hale did not register an Anna Bolles in any of the nearly 50 cemeteries in the town.

To date, the Ed Laput Cemetery project has cataloged and photographed more than 730 cemeteries. There are more than 160,000 photos and 230,000 names in the database! The Godfrey Scholar⁺ gives anyone complete access to the collection, as well as dozens of other genealogical databases, and it is growing daily. It is an invaluable resource for anyone looking to trace their family roots.

If you'd like to get involved with the Laput Cemetery Project we need people who can type information into spreadsheets, rename digital photos, and help us find the abandoned and remote burial grounds throughout the state of Connecticut. If you love history and mystery this is the volunteer project for you!

To volunteer, contact us at 860-346-4375

