



THE OLD BURYING GROUND...



is the oldest burial ground in Bedford. It dates to 1681, when 22 settlers from Stamford purchased the town from Indian Sachems, including Chief Katonah.

Bedford's settlers laid out their town in the typical New England colonial style, with a meetinghouse, small plots for houses, shared grazing areas for animals, fields for planting crops, and this non-denominational community burial ground.

In colonial times, death was an ever-present part of life. Families cared for the sick and dying at home. Death was not something that happened just to the elderly; many families experienced the loss of babies, children, and parents at young ages. Early villages like Bedford put their burial ground right in the center of town so that deceased family members would be nearby.

The earliest settlers of Bedford believed that after you died your soul went either to heaven or to hell. The Old Burying Ground is on a hillside and faces east. Bodies were buried between a headstone and a footstone, and the hope was that one's soul would rise at dawn on Judgment Day, facing the sun in the East, and ascend into heaven.



1. ISRAEL LYON

Israel Lyon was a “joiner”- a woodworker who would have made doors, windows, shutters and cupboards for homes and shops.

He married Abigail Husted at age 20; over a span of about 24 years, they had 11 children. They lived a mile and a half south of Bedford on the “road to White Plains” (present day Route 22).

Lyon was Supervisor for the Town of Bedford from 1778 to 1781, during the time of the Revolutionary War. On July 11, 1779 the Lyon house and most of the village of Bedford was burned by some 400 British and Hessian cavalymen led by Samuel Birch. This is referred to in history books as “The Burning of Bedford”.

Lyon was a member of the 2nd Regiment of the Westchester County Militia, as were several of his sons. Abigail & Israel Lyon both lived long lives. Abigail died in 1815 at the age of 81, and Israel died on the 28th of December in 1816 at the age of 82.



Israel Lyon's Stone

2. THOMAS WOOLSEY

This fieldstone is the oldest legible inscribed headstone in the Old Burying Ground today. It reads: 1742 - Lie - Deceased - ThomAs - Woolsey - BORne in - The yea - Re 1655

If you can do the math, you will discover that he lived to age 87! He was born in New York, his parents had come from England.



Thomas Woolsey's Stone

3. BENJAMIN HAYS

Benjamin Hays and two of his brothers, David and Michael, were the earliest Jewish residents in Northern Westchester. Their grandfather had emigrated from Holland to New York in the early 1700's. By 1760 Benjamin was the publican at a tavern in Bedford, located at the intersection of present day Routes 121 and 22. Some years later, Benjamin's brother David followed him to Bedford and opened a store and supply business here (the building still stands at 37 Pound Ridge

Road). David Hays and his wife Esther (Hetty) had ten children, and maintained the traditions of their Jewish faith throughout their lifetime. Benjamin's wife's name was Ziporah, and they had no children. It is thought that Benjamin and Ziporah converted to Christianity in 1802.

All three Hays brothers were active in the Patriot cause, and both Benjamin and David were members of the 2nd Regiment of the Westchester County Militia. On July 2, 1779, the tavern that Hays operated (but did not own) was burned by Banastre Tarleton. The tavern was a known hotbed of Patriot support, even though the owner of the property was a Loyalist.

Just a week later, on July 11 1779, David Hays' house and store were set afire during “The Burning of Bedford.” His wife and young children were rescued by their slaves.

The burnt tavern was rebuilt by its owner in a new location, across from David Hay's store and house where it still stands today at 50 Pound Ridge Rd. Benjamin Hays acquired the rebuilt tavern through forfeiture in 1805. (After the war, Loyalists in Bedford were kicked out of town, their property seized and auctioned off).

Benjamin and Ziporah ran their tavern business for a total of 55 years. Benjamin died in 1816, outliving both his brothers. His will freed the two slaves that he owned and left them with provisions. Benjamin's wife Ziporah, died a year later and is buried next to her husband.



Benjamin Hays's Stone

4. IRA BOUTON

b. 9 February 1765, d. 12 Oct 1826 at age 61 years 8 months and 3 days. This was a common way to list the age of the deceased on gravestones, showing numbers of years, months and days that a person lived.

Ira Bouton was, at age 17, a member of the Coast Guard Militia in Connecticut that guarded Norwalk, and when he settled in Bedford he joined the 2nd Regiment of the Westchester militia. His stone was repaired and cleaned in 2015.



Ira Bouton's Stone



There are about 20 men buried in the Old Burying Ground who fought in the Revolutionary War, and all their headstones have recently been marked with bronze star markers and flags.

5. SARAH McDONALD FLEMING

Sarah was the only daughter of Colonel Lewis McDonald who came to America in 1723 from Scotland. He settled in Bedford around 1740.

Sarah married John Holmes in 1752 at the age of 18, and they soon had a son and a daughter. Sadly, John died just four years later, leaving Sarah a widow with the two small children. In 1762, Sarah married for the second time to Dr. Peter Fleming. Together they had 6 more daughters.



Sarah Fleming's Stone

Many Bedford families had divided loyalties during the War of Independence. Among members of Sarah's family, her father and one brother were staunch patriots. Sarah's brother Lewis Jr. and her first husband's brother were loyal to England. Even Sarah's own son, Lewis Holmes, was a loyalist.

Sarah and Peter Fleming supported the Patriot cause for independence. Written histories from the "Burning of Bedford" tell us that when the Fleming's house was torched by British troops, Sarah extinguished flames three times on that July night, despite threats of being shot at for her "insolence".

The Fleming home that Sarah saved is the oldest section of the building known today as the Bedford Post; situated north of the village on present day Route 121, known then and now as the Old Post Road.

Sarah McDonald Fleming died on June 18 in 1817 at the age of 83. The first verse on Sarah's tombstone reads: *In the cold region of the grave - I cheerfully my body gave - Not doubting at the resurrection day - It will a celestial form portray...*

6. NEHEMIAH LOUNSBERY

You can see from the stone's inscription or epitaph that Nehemiah Lounsbury was born in Stamford CT in 1717. He moved to Bedford around 1740 and built a house on Guard Hill Rd, which still stands today. He married and had eleven children. The Lounsberys gave up their house to the Patriot forces to use as a headquarters. The home's location gave the road its name - "Guard Hill". Military tribunals were held in the house, and the guilty Loyalists were hung from the limb of a nearby oak tree.

Things to look for on a gravestone are the iconography (the carved pictures and decoration) and the epitaph (the words). This stone has a winged soul effigy, which represents hope that the person buried here will go to heaven. Not many people could read back in colonial times, so gravestones were made to be very visual.

The epitaph reads: *In Memory of - Nehemiah Lounsbury - born at Stamford in the state - of Connecticut AD 1717 - and died Sept 26 - AD 1790 - in the 73rd year of his age - Death is a debt - To nature due - Which I have paid - And so must you.*



Nehemiah Lounsbury's Stone

7. JASTES WHEELER

This fieldstone is among the oldest in the Old Burying Ground. Note the primitive iconography- a primitive face and two crude stars. This stone is thought to have been carved by Peter Barker, a traveling craftsman who worked in this area of New York and Southern New England. The fieldstone itself may have been quarried from the rocky outcropping on the hill behind the cemetery.

The stone, barely legible, reads: *In Memory - of Jastes Whe - ler He Died AD - 1750 - Aged 74 year*



Jastes Wheeler's Stone

8. MARY WARD

Here is another winged soul effigy. On the back of the stone the carver has signed his name "Zuricher S.C." - SC standing for Stone Carver- this is an early example of advertising. John Zuricher was New York City's most prolific gravestone carver.

This reddish stone is called sandstone and was probably quarried in NJ.

The epitaph reads: *In Memory of - Mary the Wif (illegible) - Ward who departed this Life - April the 18 1776 in the 74 - Year of Her Age - Behold and See as you Pass By - As you are Now so Once Was I - As I am Now, you Soon Will Be - Prepare For Death and Follow Me*



Mary Ward's Stone



9. HENRY STEBBINS SMITH AND MARY SMITH

William Jay, son of the first Chief Justice John Jay, wrote of a terrible accident in his diary entry for Wednesday June 24, 1818-

"I heard this afternoon that Phillip Smith's house in Bedford was this morning burned down & that several of his own children and one of Mr. Canfield's were greatly injured."

Two of the Smith children died as a result of the accident; Mary, age 6, and her brother Henry, who was 16 years old.

Mary's stone reads: *Mary daughter of Phillip & Sally Smith Died in her 6 year on Wednesday June 24 1818, by an awful explosion of powder which took place on the morning of the same.*

The explosion was caused by a spark to several barrels of gunpowder recently delivered to Smith's store, most likely also the family's home.

Mary's brother Henry died two weeks after the accident from his injuries. His headstone reads: *Henry Stebbins - Son of Phillip & - Sally Smith - Died July 18, 1818 - In his 16 year - He was suddenly called from time to - Eternity by an awful explosion of - Powder and departed in good hope of - A joyous resurrection*



Henry Smith's Stone



Mary Smith's Stone

10. JACOB BROWN

Here is another winged soul effigy. The shape of the stone is called tripartate and looks similar to the headboard of a bed, representing the final resting place of the deceased. This stone is also carved by John Zuricher. The epitaph reads: *Here Lyes The Body of - Jacob Brown th Son of Thomas - Brown Who Was Born - September The 12 Day - 1735 Deceased May th 14 - Day 1760*



Jacob Brown's Stone

11. ISAAC CANFIELD

Isaac was the third child to die in the gunpowder explosion. His epitaph reads: *Isaac L son of - Amos & Theodocia Canfield - Died June 24, 1818, by the - Explosion of Gunpowder - Aged 13 years 1 mo & 17 days - Ah death couldst thou not spare - This youthful bloom - But summons him so early to the tomb - The lovely youth his parents hope is gone - The beauteous flower is nipped before its bloom*



Isaac Canfield's Stone

12. WILLIAM DUSENBERRE (1728-1761)

This tombstone reads: *Here lies the Body of - William Dusenberre - of North Castel who was - Born ye 27 Day of Sepr - 1728 & Departed this Life - ye 22 Day of Febry 1761 - in ye 33 Year of his age.*

Again, we see a winged soul or cherub effigy. Notice the "long s" in the words "Dusenberry" and "North Castle". This is basically a fancy "s" that resembles an "f" without the line crossing it. Note how the months are abbreviated. Because the carver was paid by the letter, and space was limited on a headstone, lots of abbreviations were used. "YE" is an abbreviation for "THE". This stone is thought to have been carved by Uzal Ward of Newark NJ. This stone, some 250 years old, was badly damaged from erosion and acid rain. It was stabilized and repaired with a color-matched mortar by a professional gravestone restorer in 2014. It should last now for at least another 100 years.



William Dusenberre's Stone

13. ELKANAH HOLMES

This is the box tomb of Reverend Elkanah Holmes, born in NH in 1744. He joined the British army at age 16, and saw action in the French & Indian War as a young man. He was reassigned to the Royal Navy and sent to the West Indies, including the siege of Havana, where he managed to survive an epidemic of yellow fever that killed over 4500 men. He returned to New York and married his first wife, Deborah McDonald. Holmes was baptized as an adult (in the



Baptist tradition) and subsequently served as a chaplain and a soldier in a NJ regiment during the Revolutionary War.

Elkanah Holmes is listed living in Bedford in the Census of 1790. In the early 1800's, Rev. Holmes and his second wife Eleanor travelled to a very remote area of western New York where they established the first Baptist missionary outpost and worked amongst the Oneida Indians of the region, including the Seneca, Onondaga and Cayuga tribes.



*Reverend Elkanah
Holmes's Stone*

After his second wife died, Rev. Holmes married a third time, to Catharine Bingham. They fled and survived the burning of Buffalo by the British during the War of 1812. At about age 75 he and Catherine moved back to Bedford. Reverend Holmes continued to preach, mostly in nearby destitute churches. He died here in Bedford at age 89 in the year 1832. His wife Catherine is buried next to him; her grave has an upright headstone and footstone.

14. PHEBE WHEELER.

We have no information about Phebe Wheeler's history or how she came to be buried in Bedford. Unfortunately, it is very hard to trace genealogical information on colonial women because they weren't listed by name in early censuses, and they generally did not own property or sign deeds or contracts. One clue from the gravestone says her husband was Ebenezer Wheeler, but he is not buried here, nor are any other relatives. She most likely died in childbirth or of disease. The sun or star on her sandstone marker represents heaven.



Phebe Wheeler's Stone

Slaves, poor people, and those thought to be "mentally deficient" were typically buried off and away in a south west corner of the burying ground, the least favorable location.

