

HISTORIC BURYING GROUNDS INITIATIVE NEWSLETTER

Preserving Boston's 16 Historic Burying Grounds



BOSTON PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT

MARTIN J. WALSH, MAYOR

SPRING 2017
EDITION 10

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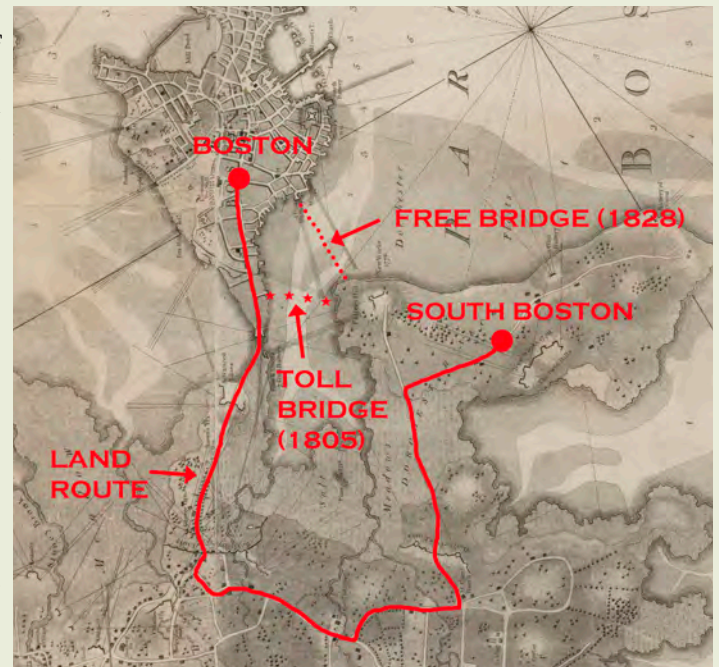
THE MANY BURYING GROUNDS OF SOUTH BOSTON

The need for new burial space in Boston in the early nineteenth century was pressing. The burying grounds in central Boston were completely full and attempts had been made to stop all new burials in some of these sites. There was much public debate about the safety of urban burials. The annexation of South

Boston, which used to be a part of Dorchester known as Dorchester Neck, provided a small relief valve for a growing town which was constrained by the Atlantic Ocean and the Charles River. In 1800 Boston had an area of just under 500 acres and a population of approximately 25,000 people. Starting from that point, the Boston population would dramatically increase. Both annexation of neighboring towns

and land-making activities would eventually increase the area within the city limits, providing space for additional large cemeteries in the mid-19th century. But for the first few decades of the 19th century South Boston was one of the few places in Boston where there was open land that was not marshy.

At the time of the annexation of South Boston in 1804, the area of the annexed peninsula was approximately 579 acres with a population of only 60 people,



Although South Boston was in close physical proximity to central Boston, it was difficult to access South Boston by land before the free bridge was built in 1828. Map reproduction courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library



Letter from the Director

My interest in the history of Hawes Burying Ground and Union Cemetery was piqued by the gravestone conservation project we did in these sites. Once I had delved into the subject matter I was amazed by what I found! It took me a while to understand that the original municipally owned South Boston burying ground was not Hawes Burying Ground but rather the long-forgotten South Boston Burial Ground. Studying the detailed 19th-century burial records, I figured out the confusing nomenclature that was used to designate the different burying grounds. Some burial records are categorized by district. What was called the South District in the 1820s and 1830s comprised the Central Burying Ground on Boston Common which was referred to as “Central,” South End Burying Ground (on Washington Street in Boston’s South End) which was referred to as the “South Ground,” St Augustine’s Cemetery which was referred to as “R+C,” the South Boston Burial Ground which was referred to “So. Bo.” with a tomb number, Hawes Burying Ground which was referred to as “Lower Ground,” the House of Industry tombs as “Farm,” St Matthew’s Church as “St Matthew’s,” and Union Cemetery as “Union.”

We will be doing more restoration work at Hawes Burying Ground and Union Cemetery this year. The brick piers on the Union Cemetery side need to be rebuilt, the gate requires repair, and the fence needs repainting. We will do some minor repairs on the tomb structure that bisects the two sites. The brick wall on the western edge of the sites will be rebuilt. Part of the wall runs directly behind the above-ground tombs, which have their roofs covered with soil and grass. The design is complicated by the fact that we do not know the exact configuration of the tombs. Do they run all the way to the wall? Does the wall which runs behind the tombs also serve as the back wall of the tombs or is there a second tomb wall too? As we can see from the tomb repair project at Bennington Street Cemetery, if the conditions inside are not what we assumed they would be, significant change orders will follow. In this case, we will have to dig test pits on top of the tombs to determine the configuration since it will significantly impact the design.



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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: *TOMB REPAIRS AT BENNINGTON STREET CEMETERY*

Bennington Street Cemetery is located in East Boston. It was established in 1838. There are two rows of above-ground tombs in the cemetery: a row of nine tombs on the west side of the site and a row of three tombs on the east side. The tombs are made of brick and have granite and bluestone roofs respectively. Both rows of tombs are built up against the perimeter wall to the site.

The renovation of the east tombs at Bennington Street Cemetery was originally planned in 2008 as part of a larger tomb repair project. We had the designing engineer draw up plans during the design phase which included both the west and east tombs at Bennington Street Cemetery, and we bid out the east tombs as an add alternate to the main project. After reviewing the construction bids, we decided that the costs were too high and we opted to repair only the west tombs. Inevitably the condition of the east tombs worsened during the intervening years. The cost of the alternate to repair the east tombs in 2009 ranged from \$62,900 to \$183,840. The cost for the same scope of work in 2016 ranged from \$86,900 to \$153,000. Since the contractor would have already had his equipment and crew on-site to repair the large tomb in the 2009 project, those bids did not include any costs for mobilization, whereas the 2016 bid would have included mobilization costs. Assuming 5 percent mobilization costs, that leaves us with an approximate rate of inflation of just under 4 percent, using the lowest cost bid for each project.



This is the east tomb structure before it was repaired. There are three individual tombs inside the structure. The doors have been bricked over. The trees behind the tombs ended up complicating the project greatly.

Although a design was produced in 2008 for the east tombs, the engineer revisited the design in 2016 in order to update it based on current conditions. The biggest challenge for the design was the inability to see inside the



Inside the tomb once the roofs slabs have been removed. Some areas have missing mortar or bricks. Notice the the large root which has grown diagonally cross the tomb wall and into the brick on the lower front wall. Also notice the numerous small roots on top of the tomb wall which grew between the different layers of brick and compromised the structural stability of this wall.

tombs to determine the conditions of the masonry. Since some bricks had fallen out of a few areas in the tombs' outer walls, the engineer was able to put a camera through those holes and take photos of the interior of the tombs, however she was not able to see into all of the tombs. Those pictures revealed some problem areas on the interior of the masonry but did not reveal the full extent of the deterioration.

Once we hired our contractor, the first part of the project was to remove the tomb roof. The tombs were covered with nine bluestone slabs. Six of the nine slabs were cracked. It was important to fully inspect the damaged slabs and determine what needed to be replaced early in the project

TOMB REPAIRS AT BENNINGTON STREET CEMETERY

because the lead time for quarried stone pieces can be quite long. We were able to repair and re-use one of the cracked stone slabs and had to order five new ones.

There was a lot of debris such as fallen bricks and mortar in the tombs. There was also a fair amount of trash, including a plastic tricycle, however there were no human remains. If human remains are found, our protocol is to carefully cover them with at least two feet of sand and then put plywood down on the sand. The sand protects the human remains so the contractor can work inside the tombs. If for some reason at a later date it was necessary to remove the sand, it would be easy to do so without harming the remains.

We knew that some areas of the walls required rebuilding and other areas required only repointing, but once we were able to access the interior of the tombs we found that the areas requiring both types of repairs were greater than we believed. One contributing factor was the growth of two small trees that had grown up between the back wall of the tombs and the perimeter wall of the site. The trees had grown into a chain-link fence that sat atop the perimeter wall. The fence had to be removed in order to cut down the tree. The



Upon closer inspection inside the tomb, it was discovered that the wall below the doorway on this tomb was unstable and had to be rebuilt.



The different layers of brick in this sidewall had separated and were no longer structurally sound. A special structural grout was used to fill these cavities.

root system of the trees were all entwined together and were much larger than we thought they would be. They ran under the stone roof slabs into the tombs. Some roots ran in between the layers of brick which broke the masonry bonds and rendered those areas of the wall structurally unstable.

The most unexpected problem was the fact that the stone roof slabs were not large enough to cover the entire tomb and they left part of the side walls exposed. This condition would be very detrimental to the stability of the structure. The slabs we ordered were the same dimensions as the slabs they were replacing, but the inadequate dimensions had been concealed by the large root structure running across the back of the tomb. The problem was discovered after the new stone roof slabs arrived and were placed atop the tombs. It was impossible to return the large slabs to the quarry and get new larger ones, so we had to come up with a workable solution. It was necessary to create a small overhang on the outside walls so they

TOMB REPAIRS AT BENNINGTON STREET CEMETERY



The new knee wall with bluestone cap is in the rear of the photo. The steel angle irons which support the gaps between the roof slabs are in the centre of the photo.

would be protected from water penetration. The stone roof slabs meet at, and are supported by, the interior tomb walls. Any solution had to guarantee adequate support for these slabs and protect the interior tomb walls too. After considering several ideas we decided to shift the slabs forward to create an overhang at the front wall and to build a low knee wall that extended up from the rear wall above the level of the roof slabs. We used thinner bluestone pieces as a capstone for the knee wall, which are readily available for landscaping and do not require a custom quarry order. Flashing was installed from the front of the knee wall over the roof slabs. In order to extend an overhang over the side walls, pieces from one of the unusable old bluestone slabs were mortared into a gap in the middle of the tomb. Steel angle irons were used to support the slabs which no longer joined together over the interior tomb walls. Finally, the roof slabs were covered with soil and grass seed, which was how they were originally designed.

One issue that is always in the forefront during preservation projects is the re-use of original materials. During this project we were confronted with several instances where it was not possible to use the original materials. For the roof slabs on the tombs, six out of the nine original slabs were cracked. We wondered if it was possible to repair and re-use some of these slabs. Since these slabs perform a structural function, making up the tomb roof, their structural integrity was of primary importance. Our engineer studied the cracked stone slabs closely. Given the length of the slabs and the limited support beneath them, he determined that only one of the broken

slabs could be repaired and re-used safely. Another area where the re-use of materials came into question was with the bricks in the tomb walls. The walls of the tombs had been repaired many times and the tomb entrances had been bricked up. The repairs and the doorway fills were made of bricks of different colors and dimensions. Some of the faces of the original bricks had spalled off. We decided to replace the bricks along the front wall and one of the side walls since there were not enough usable original bricks to complete these walls. The north wall uses the original bricks.



The tombs after the repair was completed (but before the grass seed grew in). The knee wall completely blends in with the original tomb wall.

Because of the limited view of the interior of the tombs during the design phase, we ended up with a number of change orders to the project during the construction phase. Most of the change order work was doing additional rebuilding and repointing. The cost to build the knee wall at the rear of the tomb was \$4,000. We did receive some credits on the change order too. The plans called for the contractor to cover the human remains with sand. Since there were no human remains, this task did not need to be done. Another credit was received for not repainting some old steel beams inside the tombs because they were too rusted to save. The credit amounted to \$4,000. The total amount of change orders was \$23,030.

THE MANY BURYING GROUNDS OF SOUTH BOSTON (continued from first page)

which more than doubled the size of the original Boston peninsula. The major problem with South Boston was that it was not easy to get to. In order to reach South Boston by land, one had to leave the Boston peninsula through the Boston neck, then cut through Roxbury and Dorchester, and then proceed to the north to reach South Boston. It was also possible to use a boat to cross the South Bay, the body of water between Boston and South Boston. The following year, in 1805, a toll bridge was built linking Boston Neck (at East Berkeley Street) with South Boston (Fourth Street Bridge). However, the bridge was too far away from the center of Boston to be convenient to travelers. A free bridge was built in 1828 which was much closer to the city center.

The annexation of South Boston was driven by a group of wealthy land speculators. William Tudor (buried in King's Chapel Burying Ground, see Historic Burying Grounds Initiative newsletter of 2016), Gardiner Greene, Jonathan Mason, and Harrison Gray Otis bought up land on Dorchester Neck and then petitioned the Boston town government to annex the peninsula. Although the annexation was strongly opposed by the residents of Dorchester, it was eventually approved by an act of the Massachusetts General Court in 1804. The annexation act of 1804 required proprietors of South Boston to "assign and set apart three lots of land on the same for pub-



This detail from an 1852 map of Boston shows the six different burying grounds established in South Boston from 1818-1842. Map reproduction courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library

lic use, namely, one lot for a public market place, one lot for a school house, and one lot for a burial ground, to the satisfaction and acceptance of the Selectmen of the Town of Boston.”

A consequence of the pressing need for additional burial space is seen in the creation of five burial spots in South Boston between 1818 and 1827, and the establishment of a sixth site in 1842. The first burial spot was opened in 1818 at Saint Matthew's Church, an Episcopal church that was on West Broadway near E Street. Eventually this burial place had 60 tombs underneath or nearby the church building. In 1820, the Town of Boston opened the South Boston Burial Ground on Dorchester Street. The following year Hawes Burying Ground officially opened on a plot of land on Emerson Street donated by the philanthropist John Hawes. St Augustine's Cemetery, the town's first Catholic cemetery, opened in 1822 on Dorchester Street also. The

THE MANY BURYING GROUNDS OF SOUTH BOSTON (continued from previous page)

“Farm” cemetery, located on lands owned by the City of Boston for City institutions such as the House of Industry and House of Correction, started burying residents from the House of Industry in tombs on the property in 1827. Finally Union Cemetery was given permission to act as a private cemetery by the City government in 1842. Of these six burial grounds, only three exist today and all are closed to burials.

The first burial ground to open in South Boston was Saint Matthew’s Cemetery. Burials were authorized in tombs underneath the church by the Boston Board of Health in 1818. A report from a committee of the Board

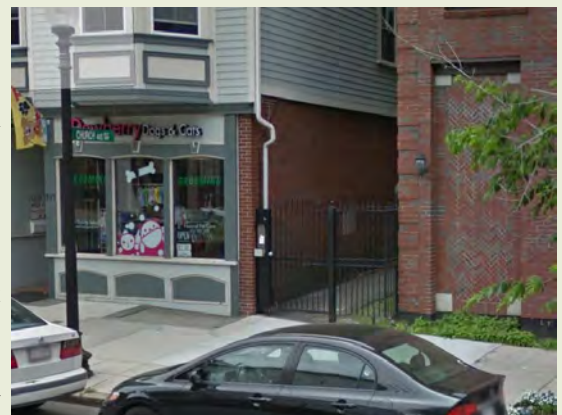


Saint Matthew’s Church on West Broadway.

of Health stated that “they had attended to the duty assigned to them, by viewing the situation and examining the tombs referred to, and taking into consideration the remote location of the chapel from the body of the town, and the faithful and secure manner in which the tombs are built...” It is interesting to compare this authorization to similar church petitions in 1822 and 1823. Approval was granted to two churches in central Boston: Saint Paul’s Church, another Episcopal church, and the Park Street Church, a Congregational church. Both requests were granted amidst much controversy. Mingled with fears of the spread of disease from decomposing bodies were undertones of early Puritan dislike for the Anglican church. The English tradition of churchyard burials was not accepted by the Puritans, who saw the tradition as elitist and contrary to some of their religious beliefs. Several months later the Methodist Episcopal Church on Bromfield Lane applied for permission to build crypts under their church. The request came after the inauguration of a new

mayor, John Quincy Adams (buried in the Granary Burying Ground), who was elected on a platform of public health and cleanliness. Mayor Adams was opposed to more in-town burials, believing them to be dangerous to public health, and denied the Bromfield Church’s petition.

There were numerous burials in the 60 tombs at Saint Matthew’s, however the church was sold in the early 1860s. Burials had already become infrequent prior to that date; the dilapidated nature of the cemetery was certainly a contributing factor. In 1863 the owner of a neighboring site petitioned City Council to discontinue the cemetery because it was a “nuisance” to public health. The Boston City Council concurred with this opinion. The City of Boston agreed to allocate land in Mount Hope Cemetery for the remains from the church and to reimburse Saint Matthew’s for \$600 of their expenses (which they claimed were much higher). However some tomb owners did not wish to relinquish their tombs and move the remains. Eventually City Council decided that all tombs had to be removed. In 1866 the City of Boston published notices in newspapers informing tomb owners that the Board of Health had been authorized to remove the remains from the Saint Matthew’s tombs to Mount Hope Cemetery or other cemeteries in the Boston area at the expense of the tomb owners. After all the remains were removed, the tombs were taken down. Several buildings have been built on this lot since the church was demolished. Today the only clue to the previous existence of Saint Matthew’s Church and Cemetery is a small private pedestrian way, once a path that ran along the southeasterly border of the church property, and now called “Church Avenue.”



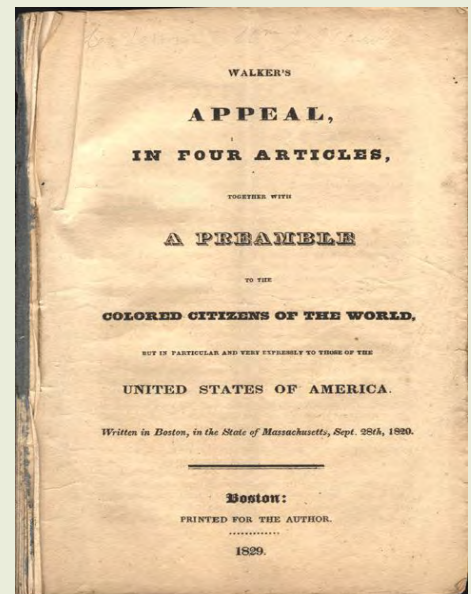
This private alley way named “Church Avenue” is the only remaining remnant of Saint Matthew’s Church.

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In 1820 the municipally owned South Boston Burial Ground opened. This site was the fulfillment of the 1804 annexation act which required that the proprietors of South Boston set aside land for a (public) burying ground. Although the annexation occurred in 1804, it was not until 1817 that the Boston Board of Health (in charge of managing burying grounds at that time) made a request to the Boston Selectmen to acquire land in South Boston for a burying ground as per the annexation act. This request started off a two-year-long process to come to an agreement between the Town of Boston and the property owners in South Boston regarding a suitable plot of land to be used for burials. Because the two sides could not reach an agreement, the Supreme Court of Massachusetts was forced to appoint three commissioners to interact with the various parties and select an appropriate location. The place that was eventually selected was a parcel on Dorchester Street, just northeast of the Dorchester-South Boston line and two blocks southwest of the future Saint Augustine's Cemetery, which opened in 1822. In 1820-21 the Town of Boston built 15 tombs in the South Boston Burial Ground at a cost of \$3,408, with the goal of selling them to the public. The sale of tombs was moderately successful at first. From City Council records, we can ascertain that the site must have been marketed by the Board of Health as an attractive burial site, with a plan detailing a future layout that appealed to buyers. The individual tombs sold for \$152 and attracted two of the most prominent individuals associated with South Boston: the well-known industrialist Cyrus Alger and the "Father of South Boston" Joseph Woodward, a large land owner who led the petition drive to annex South Boston. Additionally Winslow Lewis, a sea captain and lighthouse builder, bought a tomb in 1821 and paid an extra \$65 to have an iron fence put around it. Barzillai Homes, a fur trader, and Joel Thayer, a shoe dealer, also purchased tombs. In 1826 the City of Boston owned nine tombs in the cemetery and the other six were privately owned.

It is difficult to trace the earliest burials in this site. Only a few people were buried here in 1820. A group of seven people who died in a large fire on Broad Street were buried there in January 1821. At that point the records become a bit more detailed. Initially most of the small number of burials were in privately owned tombs. However starting in 1825 the City of Boston started burying deceased residents from the nearby House of Industry in City-owned tombs. The House of Industry was a municipal institution which opened in South Boston in 1823 and housed the "able-bodied poor" and also people convicted of minor crimes. This practice stopped once the House of Industry built its own tombs in 1827. In 1830 five of the city-owned tombs were full. There is some evidence of segregation of burials according to race in the tombs. Although no written directives have been found, in studying the burial records one can observe that many of the burials in tomb 13 were noted as "Colored." The influential African-American abolitionist David Walker was buried in this tomb in 1830.

The first sign of trouble occurred in 1826 when Cyrus Alger and Joseph Woodward sold their tombs back to the City. Other tomb owners followed suit in the following years complaining that the original plan for the burying ground had not been carried into effect. In 1830 the Burying Ground Committee confirmed the Superintendent of Burial Grounds' warning that the tombs, which were built merely a decade earlier, were in a dilapidated condition leaving them vulnerable to "midnight depredation," otherwise known as grave robbing. The Committee described the security measures they had taken to seal the tombs as being "cast iron [doors] covering over the curb stone at the entrance of the tombs, with an iron bar and padlock." This system was not enough to prevent



David Walker published his "Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World" in 1829. This strongly worded pamphlet called for the immediate end to slavery and was widely distributed in both the north and the south.

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medical students from stealing cadavers for medical research (assumedly). Grave robbing tapered off in the 1830s and 1840s due to a law which allowed physicians to perform dissections on unclaimed paupers' bodies. City Council approved the Committee's request for an appropriation of \$150 to devise a more secure doorway for two tombs, to be eventually expanded to all tombs. In 1831 it was reported by the Committee that upon closer inspection the tombs were found to be in worse case than originally believed and the authorized work was not carried out because it was feared that the work covered by the authorization would not fully address the problems and thus be wasted. The following year the Committee reported more bad news about the site:

"The Buryal Ground at South Boston has been discovered, sometimes since, to contain within a few feet of the surface a slate rock that extends nearly over the whole of the site. This rock when penetrated a few inches is found to be filled with water which renders it entirely unfit for the purpose of burying the dead. This ground must be abandoned and some other more suitable place in that part of the city located instead. There is however no immediate necessity of doing it, as they have another small ground in that neighborhood that will answer for present use."

It is unclear when the site was officially discontinued. The City of Boston Auditor's report from 5/1/1831-4/30/1832 stopped listing the City-owned tombs in South Boston Burial Ground in its property list even though it listed the site as being owned by the City. A few burials continued in tombs throughout the 1830s.

But after that it remained unused for decades. In 1861 a group of 90 people signed a petition requesting that the defunct burying ground land be converted to a public square. However after examining the conditions of the original land deed, the City decided that since the land was deeded to it for use as a burying ground, the land could only be used as a burying ground and



Hawes Burying Ground on Emerson Street.

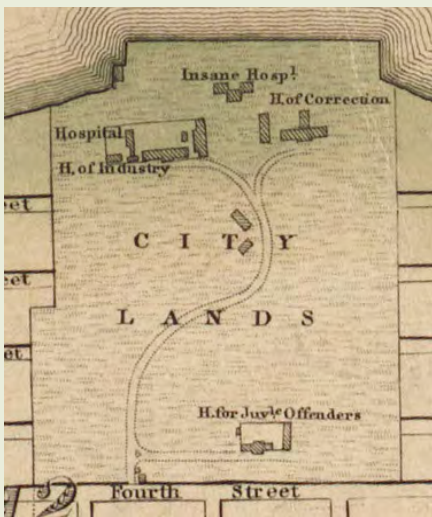
nothing else. It did not take the City long to reconsider its position. On June 4, 1862, the Boston Board of Land Commissioners offered the same property up for sale at a public auction. Josiah Dunham was the high bidder at \$600. Although the sale was approved by the mayor, the City never executed a deed and did not transfer the property. Josiah Dunham sued the City of Boston over this matter. The case eventually reached the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in 1866 where it was dismissed, ruling that the mayor approved a proposal only but did not sign a binding contract. In 1868 the land was given to the School Department to be used for a new grammar school. The Shurtleff School for Girls opened in 1869. The details of the removal of the tombs and the humans remains within are unknown.

The next burying ground to open was Hawes Burying Ground. The land for this site was donated by its namesake, John Hawes, to the residents of South Boston through a committee chosen by the residents in 1817. Although the site was not approved for use by the Board of Health until 1821, it was most likely used before that date. John Hawes was a long-time South Boston resident. He was born in Dorchester in 1741, but was raised by his grandfather on Dorchester Neck (previous name of South Boston) since the age of seven. He had a very limited education due to the fact that the town school was located off the peninsula in another part of Dorchester. John Hawes eventually became wealthy from farming in Dorchester. He returned to the

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peninsula in 1804 when it became South Boston. He was very devoted to the welfare of the community and established a church and also provided funds for a trust to establish a public school. The site is one-quarter acre and has seven tombs along the western edge (an eighth tomb may have been removed at some point). At least two of the tombs were owned by John DeLuce, a local resident and cordwainer, who became the first undertaker in South Boston. This situation of the local undertaker owning tombs in the local burying ground was a new trend that developed in the 19th century. People were free to pay to be buried in a regular grave in the site or purchase a tomb, if any remained. But Mr. DeLuce offered another service: he allowed people to be buried in the tombs he owned, presumably for a modest fee, and then collected his fee for undertaker services also. This must have been a profitable undertaking for Mr. DeLuce because in 1832, he bought a half part of nine newly constructed tombs at Saint Matthew's Church also. He died in 1844 and was buried in one of his own tombs in Hawes Burying Ground, as were his family members. It is interesting to see in the records that such a small site accommodated so many people of all socio-economic levels, all from the local South Boston community. Mr. DeLuce provided burial space for some impoverished residents of the House of Industry until the Farm Cemetery was established. Along with many working- and middle-class residents, some of the wealthiest members of the South Boston community were buried there including Joseph Woodward, David and John Williams, John Bird, and Romanus Emerson. The local nature of the burying ground was not enough to guarantee sufficient maintenance of the site. According to an article in the *Boston Daily Atlas* on March 14, 1851, the site had fallen into disrepair. Sometime between 1851 and 1873 the City of Boston took over ownership of Hawes Burying Ground.

The next burial site to open was Saint Augustine's Cemetery in 1822, a Roman Catholic cemetery that is still open for visitation although long closed to new burials. This site was the first Catholic cemetery in Boston and proved to be exceedingly popular. Since this is an extant private cemetery, I will not explore its history and pass on to the other cemeteries, which either were or have become publicly owned.



The City of Boston created several public welfare institutions in South Boston in the 1820s and 1830s. The House of Industry and the House of Reformation moved elsewhere in the 1850s. The Lunatic Asylum and House of Correction moved away in the 1890s.

The next burial site to open in South Boston was the "Farm Cemetery," which was located on the northwest edge of the property of the House of Industry. In January 1827 the Aldermen approved the use of three tombs that the House of Industry erected on their property for the burial of residents of the institution. The burial records show that there were at least five tombs, but it is unsure when the other two were built. Cost saving was most likely the impetus for building the tombs. According to an annual report from April 1827, a mere four months after the opening of the tombs, a savings of 25 percent had already been reported. Burials from the House of Employment and Reformation of Juvenile Offenders were also allowed in these tombs. The name of the burial site derives from the fact that there was an active farm at the House of Industry where the residents worked to grow their own food and to sell it to raise money for operation of the facility. For unknown reasons, the location of burials from the House of Industry ceased to be noted in the City's burial records around 1840. In any case, the South Boston site was discontinued when a new House of Industry was built on Deer Island in Boston Harbor in the early 1850s. The City sold all its property south of First Street after the House of Industry and the House of Reformation moved to Deer Island. Curiously, the detailed report entitled "The Removal of the House of Industry and

Other Public Institutions at South Boston to Deer Island," published in 1847, makes no mention of removal of the numerous human remains in the tombs. The Lunatic Asylum and the House of Corrections continued to operate on the remaining 15 acres of the City property until the 1890s.

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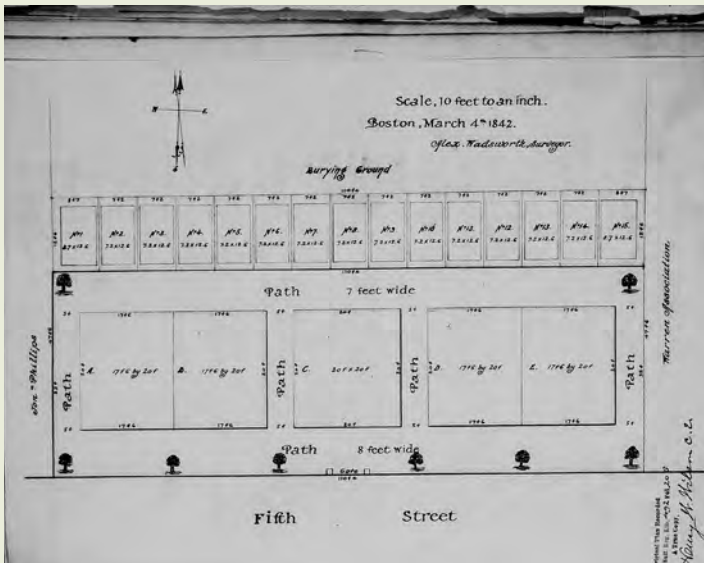
The final burial spot that was established in South Boston was Union Cemetery, which was authorized by Boston City Council in 1842. The site abuts Hawes Burying Ground on one side. Union Cemetery was privately owned by Adam Bent and Samuel Blake. Adam Bent was one of the original trustees of Hawes Burying Ground. Union Cemetery was planned differently than its neighbor, Hawes Burying Ground. It was laid out rectilinearly with lots and tombs before it was used. The site is extremely small, measuring only 5,240 square feet, or 0.12 acres. There are 15 granite tombs and five burial lots. The site was unlike older burying grounds in that people could own burial lots as well as tombs, like in modern cemeteries. In the old burying grounds people did not own burials lots. They paid the undertaker to dig the grave and bury the body. Only tomb owners owned their burial sites. In Union Cemetery the tombs sold for between \$150 and \$185 each. A burial lot sold for \$66. Certain restrictions applied to burial lots. Lot owners were allowed to build tombs but only if they were completely underground with no mound rising above ground level. Also “no monumental stones” could be raised over any grave without the approval of the majority of proprietors. It is unclear if “monumental stones” was meant to include



Old photo of Union Cemetery, date unknown.

all grave markers or only those of a larger, more unusual shape. The sales of tombs for Union Cemetery were recorded in the Suffolk County deeds. It appears that most of the purchasers of tombs were middle class. Their professions included copper worker, house wright, machinist, merchant, master mariner, and blacksmith. Union Cemetery also appealed to some of the most influential men in South Boston, including one of the original owners of both Hawes Burying Ground and Union Cemetery, Adam Bent; the wealthy industrialist Cyrus

Alger and his son; and Samuel Blake, a successful businessman and one of the original owners of the site. Union Cemetery remained privately owned until the 1930s. The first mention of Union Cemetery in a Boston Parks Department annual report was in 1930. The actual circumstances regarding the property transfer remain unknown.



This 1842 plan of Union Cemetery was filed with the Registry of Deeds when Adam Bent sold Samuel Blake the first cemetery lot.

For people who are familiar with South Boston, it is hard to imagine that this part of town contained six burying grounds at one point. It is also hard to imagine only 60 people living on this peninsula! In the first two centuries of existence of Boston, almost every one who had died there was buried in a cemetery within the city limits, mostly on the narrow Shawmut Peninsula. It was only until Mount Auburn Cemetery opened in 1832 that there began to be other “out-of-town” burial options. The fate of those buried within the city limits,

turned out to be somewhat insecure once garden and rural cemeteries became the norm and the aging burial grounds ceased to be maintained. Both entire burying grounds and portions of burying grounds have disappeared, with new buildings rising in their place. The lack of documentation related to the removal of tombs and humans remains is disturbing and raises many unsavory questions. We are nevertheless thankful that many of the burying grounds scattered throughout Boston have made it all the way to the 21st century.

GRAVE MARKER CONSERVATION IN HAWES BURYING GROUND AND UNION CEMETERY

In 2016 we undertook a gravestone conservation project in Hawes Burying Ground and Union Cemetery. A total of 15 grave markers were part of the project, with 11 stones from Hawes Burying Ground and four stones from Union Cemetery. In contrast with other grave marker conservation projects, none of the gravestones in this project were made of slate. Marble was a very popular choice for gravestones during the mid-19th century, the period from which these gravestones date. Unfortunately, marble did not stand up well against the New England climate, and many marble stones



A1: These fragments had no lettering visible on them because they were upside down

have become illegible. This is the case in these burying grounds and it has complicated conservation efforts. In these two small sites, there were many unmarked gravestone fragments. Some were broken-off pieces of headstones from parts of the stone with no epitaph. Some were parts of the epitaph but hard to read because the inscription had worn away. There were also parts of the bases of gravestones, which had become more pedestal-like in the 19th century, not just a piece of stone stuck in the ground but a headstone mounted on other pieces of stone. There were also many gravestones that had broken off right at ground level. With all these variations of gravestone parts with no lettering, it was difficult to see which pieces went together. The final difficulty was that for any grave



A.2: The two pieces of this tomb marker for Joseph Harris go together, but we were not able to find the third piece. Harris purchased tomb number 1 in 1821, but someone else purchased the tomb at some later point. The current name on the the tomb is Luther Russell, a glass manufacturer who died in 1851.

marker that had fallen down, we could not be sure where it had been originally placed. The photos show before and after images of the work for four different stones, identified in the captions as A, B, C, and D.

In spite of these difficulties we felt it was imperative to do something to improve the situation. For grave markers that had fallen over, we decided that we would reset the gravestone near where the stone was found, reasoning that it was better to risk placing the headstone in the wrong spot than to leave it on the ground, subject to further decay and possible breakage. We tried to match any headstones that had originally been mounted on a base with the spare bases around the sites. Also we tried to match any of the broken pieces with other broken pieces. Some of the pieces on the ground



A3: Since the ownership of tomb 1 changed, we had to choose a new spot to put the Harris tomb marker. We decided to place it against the back wall of the row of tombs dividing the two sites.

GRAVE MARKER CONSERVATION AT HAWES BURYING GROUND AND UNION CEMETERY



B.1: These two separate fragments in Union Cemetery are part of the same headstone.



B.2: The bottom piece was set into the ground and the two pieces were attached together.



C.1: There are two fragments in this photo. One with the label H-9 and one directly in front of it set in the ground with just the top edge showing.



B.3: The gaps along the crack were grouted with a special repair mortar.



C.2: We found four pieces to this headstone, but a large part, including the main epitaph and the underground base, are still missing.



C.3: Since this headstone was missing its original bottom end, a new concrete base was attached with pins. The large top part was also pinned to the piece beneath it. Although the epitaph is missing, at least the remaining parts of the headstone are not lying on the ground.



D.1: Conservators resetting a headstone which had fallen off its bases.

were partially covered by grass and had to be dug out of the ground to ascertain their size and degree of legibility. A few of the headstones were broken off right at ground level. In that case the conservator attached a concrete piece to the stone, elongating it so it could be reset in the ground. (The concrete part remains unseen underground.) Looking at before and after photos of grave-stones can help illustrate these conditions.

A TOUCHING STORY (for Dog Lovers and Sentimental Types)

While doing research for the articles in this edition of the newsletter, I came across a blurb of an article in the “Local Affairs” section of the newspaper the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, from January 22, 1859. Paragraphs in that section provided readers with a variety of local news items, such as the weekly statistics from the House of Correction, House of Industry, Lunatic Hospital, and the House of Reformation, broken down by gender and American citizenship; notice of an upcoming Burns Festival where 270 people would be able to appreciate, among other things, a Scotch haggis made in the house where Burns was born; and a warning about a German swindler who was passing bad checks. This article came up because I was doing a word search in the newspaper database using the word “burial.” Following you will find the article in its entirety.



This photo of King's Chapel Burying Ground was taken in 1903.

“A police officer pointed out a rare instance of canine affection today. A handsome Scotch terrier has for two or three weeks past watched beside a grave in King's Chapel burial ground, night and day without cessation, save only occasional intervals of short duration when obliged to absent himself in quest of food to prevent actual starvation. During the last severe snow storm the humane officer first discovered the dog at his devoted duty, and endeavored to call him away for the purpose of giving him shelter; but the faithful animal would not leave the sacred spot, and responded only in wailings deeper and more melancholy than those of the storm. Even the subsequent intense cold weather, with the thermometer at 14 degrees below zero, did not drive him from his guard, and he may still be seen daily at his post of watchfulness over the remains of some beloved human being whom he has enshrined in his affections. The sleepless interest manifested by this poor brute would seem to indicate that he cherishes some idea of the literal resurrection of his friend, and that he must be constantly watching for his coming.”



Scottish Terrier and faithful friend.

SITES INCLUDED IN THE HISTORIC BURYING GROUNDS INITIATIVE

Bennington Street Cemetery (1838)

Hawes Burying Ground (1821)

Bunker Hill Burying Ground (1807)

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 (1814)

Union Cemetery (1842)

Eliot Burying Ground (1633)

Walter Street Burying Ground (1723)

Granary Burying Ground (1660)

Westerly Burying Ground (1683)