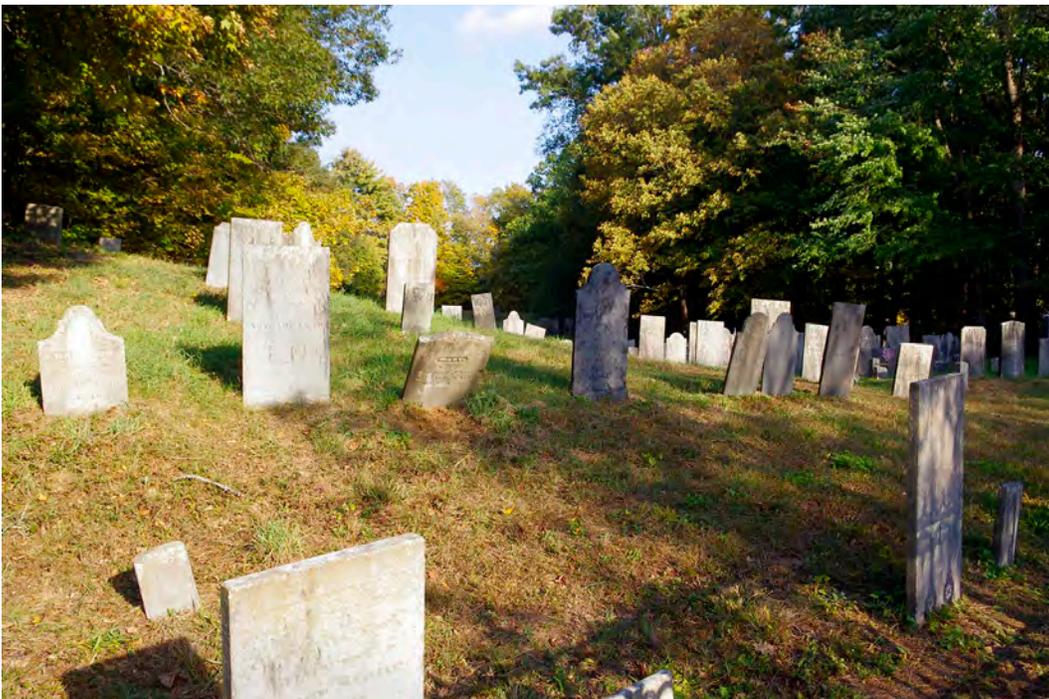


Old Village Hill Cemetery Tour: Selected Individuals and Their Families

Eric W. Weber, 2013



Planned as a walking tour, rained out twice and finally delivered as an illustrated indoor talk



67 Jesse Wild (1732-1805) came from Braintree, MA (as did many of Williamsburg's earliest families) in 1763, and sold the land for this cemetery to the town in 1771 or 1772. Its purchase was one of the town's first official acts. Jesse lived on the high, level ground (and may have built the oldest part of the house) where Myra Ilson now lives, across from the big cemetery just up the hill. His original property (Three Mile Addition Lot #33) extended from the back (east) end of this cemetery west across Route 9 and the West Branch and partway up Gere Hill, and from the south line of this cemetery north to the woods line above the big cemetery and the Ilson property. He owned two grist mills, one on the site of the present Williamsburg Blacksmiths shop and one elsewhere, and a sawmill in Searsville, and was involved in many commercial activities here from 1763 until 1805. Most of his children moved away, and the Wild surname soon disappeared from town.



96-97 John Williams (1728-1802) and Rhoda (Crowell) Williams (1731/2-1814) came from Taunton, Chatham and Middleboro to Williamsburg in 1773. In 1776 John and his son John Jr. bought all of Three Mile Addition Lot #15, a tract of 156 acres straddling what are now Nash Hill Road and Ice Road. That land remained in Williams hands for 137 years. John and Rhoda were the ancestors of a large and successful Williams family here, though theirs wasn't the one for which the town was named — that was an older and more patrician Williams family of Hatfield, also responsible for Williams College. John and Rhoda's children included brothers Abner and Gross, who were responsible for much of the commercial development of Williamsburg village in the early 1800s. Gross took over the Williams House when Abner died and had a large farm adjoining it. The driveway he built past his daughter Arabella's house to his cider mill, distillery, tin shop and ashery became Williams Street, later part of Route 9. Brother Joseph ran the old Williams farm on Ice Road and passed it down to his youngest son Prescott, who had a highly successful orchard there until his death in 1910. Prescott was a local historian and a great collector of stories. Many of his recollections were printed in his cousin Henry Gere's *Hampshire Gazette*, and later appeared in Phyllis Baker Deming's history of Williamsburg.



135 Dr. Francis Mantor (~1763-1805) was born in Tisbury, Martha's Vineyard. His parents moved in 1777 to Ashfield, where Francis was married in 1791. After his father's death in 1797 he came here and bought Dr. Luther Cary's house on North Main St. and his medical practice. Health and luck soon deserted him, and in desperate financial straits after a court judgment against him, he surrendered first his land and then his house, literally a room at a time, to his creditors. He died in 1805 at the age of only 42. The cause of his death was listed as scoliosis, suggesting that in his last years he was not only overwhelmed with debt, but disabled from carrying on his medical practice and perhaps grotesquely and painfully deformed. His destitute widow fled Williamsburg with their five children and joined her brothers in upstate New York.



155-156 John Miller (1712-1792) and Martha (Root) Miller (~1718-1805). John is often said to have been the first settler of Williamsburg in 1735, but in fact he still lived in Northampton in 1771, by which time many other families lived here. Miller owned land, hunted, trapped wolves and may have cleared some farmland here before 1771, but the Warrens of Hatfield and Haydenville have a stronger claim as the first residents, settling on Mountain Street between 1750 and 1760. John Miller had 900 acres along the southerly edge of town in the area of present-day Haydenville, extending westward beyond South Street. Several of his sons and grandsons occupied parts of that land later. His own home after he moved here was the farm at the top of Walpole Road, near the hill named for his family, overlooking Haydenville.



193-194 Elisha Hubbard (1758-1843) and his wife Hannah (White) Hubbard (1759-1824) moved west from Hatfield in 1788 to what is now the Loud farm on Briar Hill Road, and they may have built the saltbox farmhouse that still stands on it. About 1793 they moved into the village, then just beginning to develop where the center is now. In 1796 Elisha built the brick store that soon became the Hampshire House inn and tavern, run by Elisha and his Hubbard descendants until 1851. It is now the Florence Savings Bank. Elisha was at various times a Justice of the Peace, Town Clerk, Treasurer, Selectman, State Representative, and frequent committeeman in various town affairs.



206-208 John (1773-1843) and Eunice (Porter) Graves (1782-1880) and their triplets. John and Eunice, from Hatfield, bought from Mark Warner IV the core of what is now Mass. Audubon's Graves Farm in 1803. It remained in the family nearly 200 years and was hugely expanded by their descendants. The last three children born to John and Eunice were the only set of triplets whose births have ever been recorded in Williamsburg, and like most multiple births of that era, they all died within two hours. At the age of nearly 70, John wishfully agreed to pay an itinerant healer to cure him of cancer for \$35. The quack failed, of course, and in a few months John was dead. His endlessly demanding and disapproving widow lived on and on in her son Erastus's house until she was 98. She made her daughter-in-law Elizabeth Strong Graves miserable for 36 of the 38 years of her married life, as we know from Elizabeth's surviving letters.



268 Ashbel Bartlett (~1798/9-1832, ae. 34). His death, recorded by the Town Clerk as a “suicide by insanity,” was brought on by his father’s refusal to give permission for his marriage to Lucretia Jones. A year and a day after Ashbel killed himself, Lucretia married his younger brother Simeon. It is not recorded that the father made any objection then.

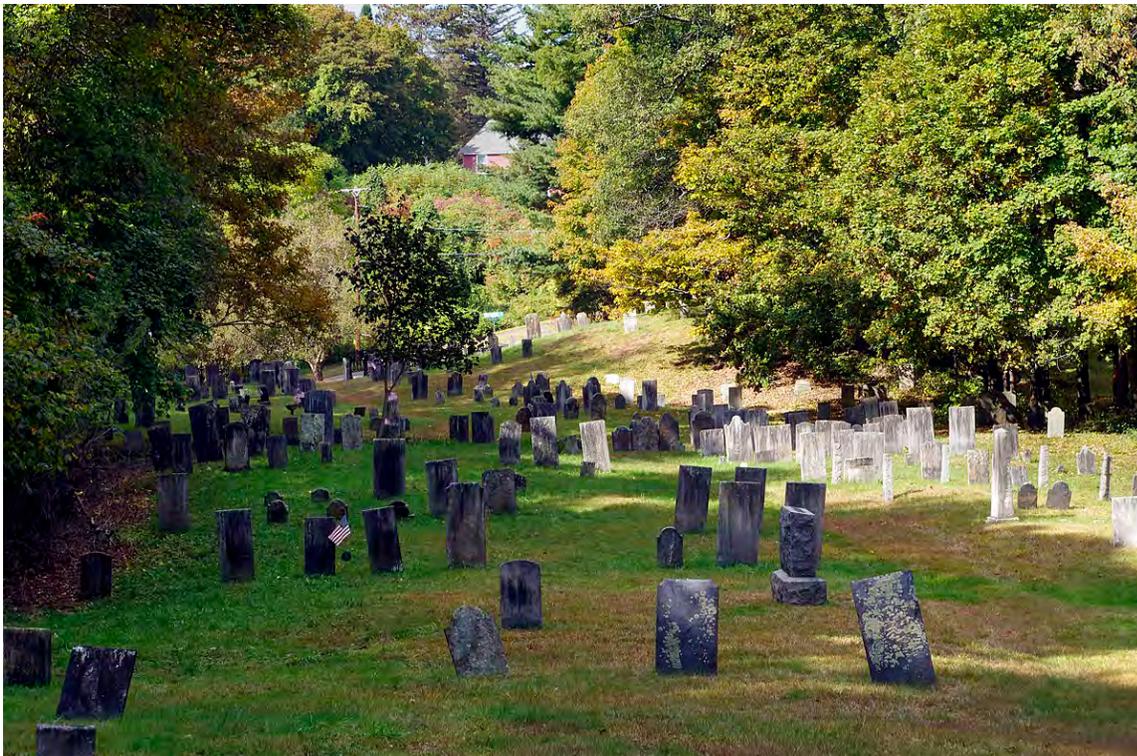




271 William Alfred Bodman. The inscription on this stone reads, “Died at mouth [of] Rio Grand, Mexico July 8, 1847, aged 1 year & 5 days.” It seems likely that his father was an officer in the Mexican War then underway, and had his family with him as was common for officers of that era. Willie, who was very likely buried in Texas, shares this stone with an infant brother who was born and died here in Williamsburg after the war. The Bodmans from Hatfield were among Williamsburg’s most influential families in its first century, controlling over 500 acres including what is now the entire center of Williamsburg village. This cemetery’s iron fence was given by brothers Lewis and Luther Bodman in honor of their family. Lewis sold his woolen mill on the site of today’s Williamsburg Pharmacy to Henry James before the Mill River Disaster, and invested so heavily in bringing the railroad to Williamsburg that he was effectively bankrupted when the flood washed its industrial customers away and left it without their expected business. Luther became a wealthy Northampton banker. His Italianate mansion on Elm Street remained in the family until after his daughter Clara’s death in 1951, when the property passed to Smith College and the house was razed to make way for the Helen Hills Hills Chapel.



The Bodman gate at the cemetery entrance



View west from center of cemetery



230-232 Josiah Hayden (1733-1810), his wife Ruhamah (Thayer) Hayden (1735-1817), and their son Cotton Hayden (1763-1843) were among Williamsburg's earliest settlers, coming here from Braintree in 1763. Josiah served in the Revolution, and at one time he owned the property that was more recently Athena Warren's, just above the large cemetery. He later lived on the farm at the corner of Lawton Hill and Hyde Hill Roads that was last occupied by Ray Lawton. The very early house there may have been built for the Haydens about 1774, when Josiah purchased the land with a saw mill and water privilege from his cousin Jesse Wild. The house was taken down about 2002 for partial reconstruction in Whately. Josiah conveyed that farm to his son Josiah Jr. in 1794. Another son, Cotton, bought the house across Lawton Hill Road from it, now Amanda Emerson's. Cotton's wife Sally (Miller) bore more children than any other woman in Williamsburg's history: 20 of them over a span of more than 27 years. One was stillborn, five others died at less than a year, one at 3, two at 17 and 18, and eleven grew to adulthood and were married. Another son of Josiah and Ruhamah, Daniel Hayden, bought the Miller/Fairfield sawmill and with his brother David, built a small cotton mill in 1809 on what is now the site of the Brassworks and ran it profitably during the War of 1812. When it failed in 1818 they moved to Waterbury, CT. In 1823 the mill was taken over by their nephew Joel Hayden and his brother-in-law, James Congdon, and in the decades that followed Joel and his brother Josiah built a thriving industrial village bearing the family name.



279 Thaddeus Bartlett (1807-1884). A farmer and an uncle to Ashbel, he lived in Skinnerville where the Village Green ice cream stand is now. His house was swept hundreds of feet east and substantially destroyed in the Mill River Disaster. As the wall of water came into sight at the upper end of the village, 67-year-old Thaddeus climbed a tree outside the house and clung there throughout the flood, bellowing hymns above the rushing water and debris. We would say it was the tree and good luck that saved him, but he probably credited the hymns. Interestingly, not one victim of the disaster is known to be buried in this cemetery.



325 Caleb A. Johnson (~1824-Jan. 1, 1850), “drowned.” A small inscription at the bottom of this stone reads, “His body was found in Fort River, Hadley, and his death was very mysterious.” The Johnson family came to Williamsburg in 1789 from Willington, CT by way of Hadley. Here they lived high on Cary Hill or Walnut Hill, north of Ice Road and west of the top of Nash Hill, somewhere on the “Johnson road” that is mentioned in several old deeds and that can still be followed through the woods, though it has been disused for well over a hundred years. I’ve looked for a cellarhole along it but failed to find any. The family moved down from there to Haydenville early in the 1800s. How young Caleb met his death in Hadley remains a mystery.



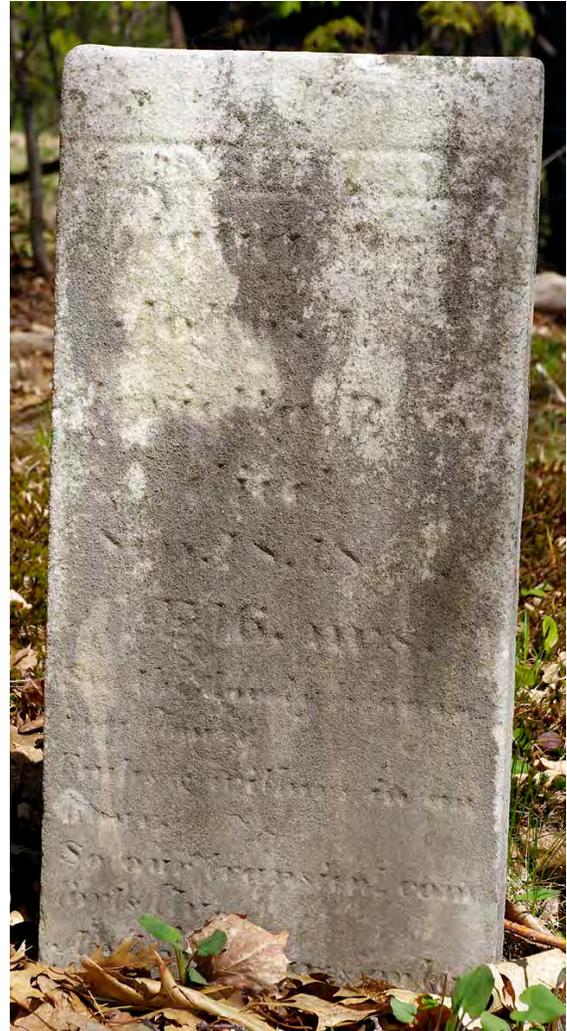
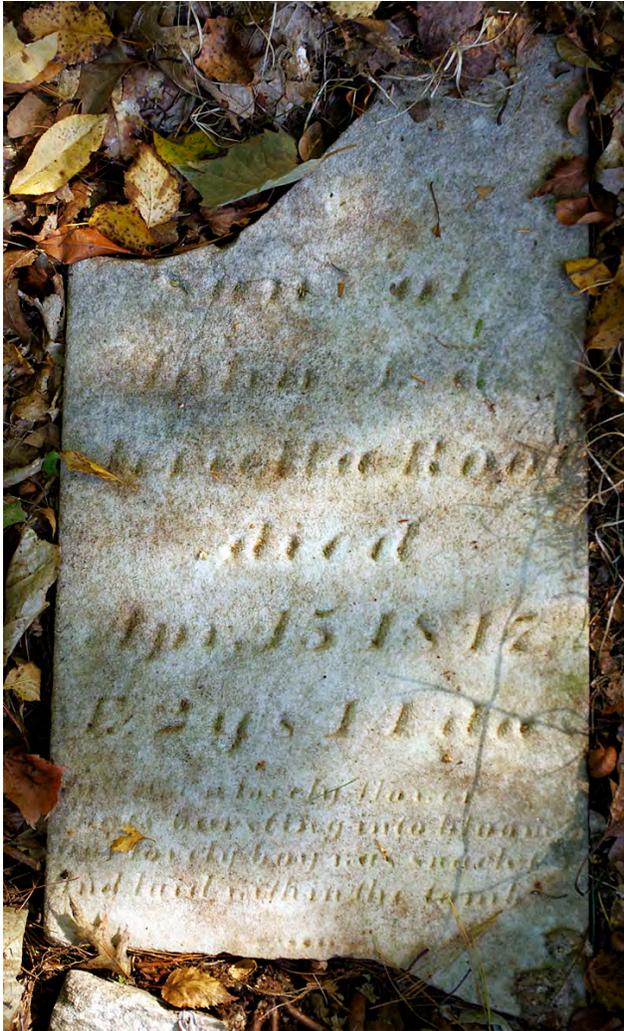
Marks of the carver's chisel on the rough back of a stone



360 Ann Luthera “Thera” Ludden (1828-1914) was one of the last members of the very large Ludden family to bear that surname in Williamsburg. She never married. Her grandfather Benjamin Ludden and five of his siblings came here from Braintree in the 1770s. Benjamin owned a 400-acre farm on Petticoat and Battlecock Hills on the west edge of town. A large granite Ludden monument (#347) was erected by later descendants in memory of this family, many of whose graves may now be unmarked. Thera Ludden’s 1914 death date is the most recent one that appears on any surviving stone in this cemetery, and she may have been the last person buried here. There are no surviving burial records for this cemetery, so that can’t be verified, and there’s no way of knowing how many unmarked graves there are or who is buried in them. Many broken and fallen stones have been removed through the years.



410 Dr. Elijah Paine (1724-1814) and Mary (White) Paine (1729-1804). Elijah came as a young man from Pomfret, CT to Hatfield, where he met his wife. They had nine children in Hatfield between 1753 and 1770. By 1773 he was Williamsburg's Town Clerk, living on Village Hill opposite the first meetinghouse. In 1776 he started building the present MacLeod house at 16 Old Goshen Road, where he lived for the rest of his life. His surviving account book for 1785-98, now at Meekins Library, shows that in addition to being one of the first physicians here, he was a tavern keeper, farmer and multifaceted businessman, doing a brisk barter-based trade with his neighbors in almost every commodity and service then in use, from farm produce and timber to teamstering and liquor, medical care and manual labor.



463-4 Thomas and Henrietta Root. These little stones in the far NE corner of the cemetery represent the first and third children of John A. and Arrietta (Hill) Root who died very young. At least nine and possibly eleven of their twelve known children died in infancy or early childhood, a record of crushingly repeated heartbreak that is unmatched in any other Williamsburg family. The parents both lived to ripe old ages. They and most of their other children are buried in the Haydenville Cemetery, where a family monument repeats these two children's names. Only one daughter in the family is known to have lived past the age of eight.



452 John Nash (1736-1773) and Martha (Graves) Nash (1736-1794) monument. John Nash was more directly responsible than anyone else for the establishment of Williamsburg as a district distinct from Hatfield in 1771, leading to its recognition as a town in 1775. Nash came here in 1766 from Hatfield, was chosen one of Williamsburg's first three Selectmen and Assessors, and was the district's first Clerk and Treasurer from 1771 until his untimely death two years later, during a visit to his relatives in Hatfield. He is buried in Hatfield, but Williamsburg's many Nash descendants erected this modern granite monument in his memory and that of his wife Martha. Four of Martha's Graves brothers were early settlers along South Street, and during her long widowhood she was a teacher in Williamsburg schools, including the Nash Hill schoolhouse that now belongs to the Historical Society. John and his brother Elisha lived near the top of Nash Hill, which was named after them and their families. John owned more land in town than anyone else in the first tax valuation (John Miller's 900 acres were mostly not in Wmsb. then). He was one of the first 30 members of the church here, and he arranged with 19-year-old Timothy Dwight, who later became president of Yale, to preach to Williamsburg's congregation at its first meeting, years before there was a meetinghouse to preach in. John's parents, Thomas and Martha (Little) Nash, came to live in Williamsburg with their sons in 1766 and are buried beside this monument (stones #450 and 451).



419 Jacob Robinson (1700-1794) and his second wife Deborah (Wollen) Luce Roberson (1726/7–1777, ae. 50) came from Tisbury to Williamsburg soon after 1770, among the first of about two dozen Martha's Vineyard families to resettle here between then and 1800. Jacob had been a carpenter in Tisbury, but may have retired from that when he came here. On December 9, 1776 he was one of five men named to Williamsburg's revolutionary Committee of Correspondence — the only mention of him in Town Meeting records. He was then 76 years old, so it's no wonder he didn't take a more active part in the affairs of the town, despite having held many public offices in Tisbury from 1730 through 1770. His son Jacob Jr. lived in South Hadley, where Jacob Sr. died at the very advanced age of 93. He was brought back here for burial beside Deborah, and Jacob Jr. had this elegant double stone — the cemetery's most ornate — made in their memory.



433-436 Three of Joel Hayden's children. Brothers Joel and Josiah Hayden, whose business successes built Haydenville and put it on the map, were just starting out, and Haydenville was little more than a nameless cluster of houses, when Joel buried these infant children — his second, fourth and seventh — between 1827 and 1833. Josiah also buried one here in 1833. By 1847, when their father died, the brothers had bought up most of what is now Haydenville and provided land for a new cemetery on High Street. Many Haydens have been buried in that cemetery, but the four little ones here were left behind. Maybe their parents just couldn't bear to disturb them.



482 Clarissa (Warner) Curtis (1813-1846, ae. 32), wife of Tyler Curtis. I identified this badly broken stone as Clarissa's from the death date on it, which appears in town records, and its association with the name "Tyler" on the stone. The nearest other stones to it (though not very near) are members of Clarissa's immediate Warner family. There is no record that the couple had any children born in Williamsburg, and there's no gravestone for Tyler. They may have lived in Hawley after marrying. He was born in Heath, was found by the 1850 census in Hawley, and in 1860 and 1870 was living in Racine, WI, where his death was recorded in 1877.

Cemeteries all over the East are full of the graves of young wives like Clarissa, lost in their teens, twenties and early thirties to childbirth complications and diseases like consumption for which no cures were known, and of their young children, killed by measles, scarlet fever, whooping cough, choking, burns, accidental poisoning or suffocation, drowning in wells and millponds, horse kicks and falling trees. Many of these people and their gravestones are lost and forgotten now by descendants whose great-grandparents pushed west, seeking brighter futures in places that weren't haunted by memories of lost loved ones. I take a lot of pleasure in introducing modern-day visitors to the resting places and homes and stories of their ancestors here in Williamsburg, as generous people elsewhere have often done for me.



The Jonathan Warner Jr. family's stones, slowly being propelled by frost heaves and gravity down a steep slope toward the back yard of their former home on North Main Street.