



Sign Post

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Carving Through Our Past

By John Holmy, Town Historian

There is a lot of history to be discovered in our local cemeteries. Coventry has some old cemeteries that predate the Revolutionary War. The Nathan Hale Cemetery, Grant Hill Cemetery, and the South Street Cemetery all have excellent examples of stones carved by local Eastern Connecticut carvers from our earliest history. In these burying grounds, you can see the evolution of the stones.



Hannah Buell, oldest stone (1718) in the Nathan Hale Cemetery, crudely lettered and unadorned

During Puritan times into the early 1800's, gravestones were adorned with soul effigies winging their way to heaven.



Left: Soul effigy carved by Gershom Bartlett, one of the most prolific 18th century carvers

Below: Typical willow and urn motif stone



Following the Revolutionary War, our newly independent country identified with the values of ancient Greek democracy and republican Rome. Soul effigies were replaced by the willow and urn motif.

Later in the 19th century, gravestones evolved into simple marble slabs for both more humble and imposing monuments for wealthier members of society. Coventry's mill owners are well represented in the Nathan Hale Cemetery.

Silk mill owner James Morgan, who was also the choir director of the First Congregational Church for 69 years, is buried there, as is box manufacturer Addison Kingsbury. John Boynton, really the first person to bring industrial mills to Coventry, has a very modest monument



James Morgan, Silk Mill Owner



John Boynton, resembles a humble footstone

These are just a few examples of the many mill owners in Coventry's past. (Cont'd on page 2)



*Happy Holidays from
the Coventry Historical Society*

Mark Your Calendars

Dec 5	Christmas in the Village; Holiday Party
Jan 13	Executive Board Mtg 630 pm Strong Porter
Jan 20	Native American-Coventry history & artifacts 7 pm Strong Porter
Feb 10	Executive Board Mtg 630 pm Strong Porter
Feb 17	Tour of Palmer-Seagraves House 7 pm 179 Cooper Lane
Mar 10	Executive Board Mtg 7 pm Strong Porter
Mar 17	Stew & Story (tales of Caprilands) 7 pm (details to come)
Apr 14	Executive Board Mtg 7 pm Strong Porter

(Cont'd from page 1) Many communities in early times had a local stone carver. Sometimes carving became a family business with generation succeeding generation as stone carvers. Local carvers of note include the Loomis family of Coventry and the Collins family of Columbia.

Coventry's own stone carving family included three generations of the Loomis family, Jonathan, John, and Amasa Loomis. All are buried in South Street Cemetery, which is the premier place to see the work of Jonathan and John Loomis.



Beautiful Jonathan Loomis stone



Humphrey Davenport Stone, Nathan Hale Cemetery, is an important stone because it is signed by Benjamin Collins

The Grant Hill Cemetery has many stones carved by Amasa Loomis, both soul effigies and of the willow and urn motif.



A stone by Amasa Loomis, carved in the Manning style, unlike the style of his father and grandfather, Jonathan and John Loomis

Mary Strong Stone by Julius Collins displays apparent influence on the Loomis family



"The Colonial Burying Grounds of Eastern Connecticut and the Men Who Made Them", written by James Slater, is an excellent guide to our local cemeteries. I feel Slater dealt a little harshly with our Loomis carvers, however. His opinion is that they were influenced by others like the Collins family and Gershom Bartlett and were not original. When I look at the stones carved by Jonathan and John Loomis, I see beauty, peace, and serenity representing the kind of restful repose I hope I enjoy someday.

Gershom Bartlett of Bolton, whose brother owned the quarry at Bolton Notch, was one of the most prolific stone carvers. His stones can be found all over eastern Connecticut. Bolton Notch was once known as Quarryville, and many of the gravestones in our local cemeteries are carved on stone from there. Jonathan Loomis was part owner of the Bolton Notch quarry.

The Mannings of Windham were the dominant stone carving family in eastern Connecticut in the latter part



A typical Manning stone; many other carvers imitated the Manning style

of the 18th century. Their influence is obvious in the work of other contemporary carvers like Aaron Haskins and Amasa Loomis.

Sources:

[Benjamin Collins & Family](#) by Joan M. Hill, 2021, for the Columbia Historical Society

[The Colonial Burying Grounds of Eastern Connecticut and the Men Who Made Them](#) by James A. Slater, 1987, The Connecticut Academy of Arts & Sciences

[The History of Coventry, Connecticut](#) by Bill Jobbagy, 2007, Coventry Historical Society

An Aaron Haskins stone carved in the Manning style



Upcoming Events

We are pleased to announce the following upcoming events.

- **Jan 20 7pm Strong Porter Museum - Free** Native American history and artifacts. Learn about the connection between Native Americans and the Coventry area. Guests welcome to bring artifacts to share.
- **Feb 17 7pm 179 Cooper Lane - Free** Tour the Palmer-Seagraves House and learn the interesting history of this house where the original house is on the second floor.
- **Mar 17 7pm Stew & Story (details to come)** Tales and lore of Caprilands and world-renowned herbalist Adelma Simmons from those who knew and worked with her during Caprilands' glory days.

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

For the latest information about any meeting or program changes watch your email or our Facebook page [facebook.com/coventryhistory/](https://www.facebook.com/coventryhistory/).

Find Us Online & On Facebook

Make sure to visit and Like our Facebook page [facebook.com/coventryhistory/](https://www.facebook.com/coventryhistory/) and website ctcoventryhistoricalsociety.org for lots of articles and information about Coventry's past, photos of items of historical interest, and occasional opportunities to offer an opinion about a "Whatsit" that's come our way.

Farm-to-Table, Lecture & Tour

Our first ever Farm-to-Table Caprilands' inspired luncheon was a great success on Sunday August 29. Guests arrived to dulcimer music provided by Joyce Knowlton and Caprilands wine punch,



perusing our silent auction items, raffle baskets, and herbs and scented perennials for sale. A five course luncheon complete with cocktails (who knew there was such a thing as smoked whisky?)

included herbed breads, canapés, salad, consommé, scallops, pork belly, and dessert, prepared lovingly by



Blue Honey Group, a small team of local farmers and chefs who volunteered their time. Following lunch, a lecture highlighted tales of Caprilands and



Adelma Simmons, providing interesting tales and tidbits about the legendary herb farm and herbalist. A tour of the Strong Porter Museum's Caprilands display rounded out the afternoon. With such a favorable response, we are considering a similar event next summer, so stay tuned!



Archives Corner

By Sue Way

In this issue of the Sign Post we would like to remember three long-time active members of CHS and cheerful volunteers at many of our events, Clara (Smith) Hutt and Ron and Shirley (Wright) Edmondson who died this year. And we'd like to thank their children for seeing that the Coventry antiques their parents had set aside for CHS got to us.

Clara (Smith) Hutt (1921-2021) was born in Manchester, but her mother, Amy (Loomis) Smith, was born in Coventry in the home of her parents, C. Irving and Ruth (Johnson) Loomis. This is the house directly across the street from the Second Congregational Church. Clara spent her summers here and loved to talk about those days. At some point her family moved to Coventry, living in a house where Key Bank stands today. She married John Hutt, also a Manchester native, and they built their house on Broadway and raised their two children there. When Clara's cousin, June Loomis, died in 1987 she left the Loomis House to the Porter Library, which was first located there and later moved to the Community House across the street. June's mother and grandmother had been librarians for the Porter Library. Many items in the house went to Clara, who has now passed some of these items on to us.



One very interesting piece is a gentleman's deerskin travel trunk. These came into use as travel by carriage and stagecoach became more possible in Connecticut during the last half of the 1700s. They continued to be made and used through the mid 1800s. The trunk we've been



given is in very good condition, still retaining much of the deer's winter fur. This trunk has a lining which was not typical until after 1800, so we believe this was made between 1800 and 1850. Tracing Clara's ancestors back 5 generations on the Loomis branch, we find Samuel Loomis and his family living on Silver Street. He died in 1858 at age 68. His father, Lieutenant Daniel Loomis, died in 1841 at age 83. Either of these men might have owned this trunk.

C. Irving Loomis' parents were S. Noble and Louise (Freeman) Loomis and his grandfathers were Samuel Loomis and James O. Freeman. James O. and Caroline (Storrs) Freeman came to Coventry from Mansfield and were the first of this family to own this house. James' father Edmund Freeman died in 1868 aged 86 and is another member of the family who might have owned the trunk. It was stored safely in the Loomis house attic for many years and will become part of our new textiles exhibit in the second floor bedroom at the Strong Porter museum.

Shirley (Wright) Edmondson Ron and Shirley were always happy to share their knowledge and were great story tellers. Ron took a particular interest in the history of the Second Congregational Church, and Shirley loved to share her family's story of life in Coventry. Her parents, Myrton and Alice (Knight) Wright, and her grandparents, John E. and Fanny (Rose) Wright, lived in the house at 1801 Boston Turnpike. Her great-grandparents, John E. and Martha (Chamberlain) Wright, lived in the house that later became Caprilands on Silver Street and are seen in this photo of the house with their son John about 1880. (Cont'd on Page 5)



(Cont'd from Page 4) Shirley has given us, among other things, old photos of both houses, a braided chair cover made by grandmother Fanny, a ruby glass collection that belonged to her mother Alice, a great home-made crank bellows that hung by the



fire, and two Victorian-era silk quilts made by

great-grandmother Ida Long Rose who was born in 1848 and died in 1914. These were usually small

sentimental quilts made from pieces of clothing that represent cherished family



memories that were used as "throws" or display pieces. America's first successful silk production took place in Mansfield, and silk was successfully made in Coventry and of course at the Cheney Mills in Manchester, so it is possible that some of the pieces in these quilts were made locally.

Many of these pieces will find their way into our displays, including our new textiles exhibit at Strong Porter, and have inspired us to plan a quilt show for the spring. Do you have an interesting quilt to display? Please contact Sue Way at 860-712-4278 for details.

In Remembrance

CHS would like to take this opportunity to express our sadness at the passing in 2021 of Angela Bowen, Ellie D'Annolfo, Ron Edmondson and Shirley Edmondson, Clara Hutt, and John Lacek.

Supporting CHS With a Legacy Gift

Estate planning helps you protect the people and causes that are important to you. Please consider leaving a legacy gift to CHS as part of your estate plan. Your support will help sustain our research and programs for generations to come.

Strong Porter Museum

Visit our Caprilands Display at Strong Porter

Strong Porter Museum has a Caprilands display devoted to the life and legend of Adelma Grenier

Simmons and her famous herb farm. The Museum is open Sundays 11-3. Tours on alternate days

may be possible. Email info@ctcoventryhistoricalsociety.org to schedule an appointment.



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Mary Miller

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