The Old Cemetery

East Haven, CT
River Street

250 Main Street
Mail to The Old Cemetery
East Haven, CT

Make Checks payable to The Old Cemetery
continuing maintenance and repairs.
accepts donations of any size for
The Old Cemetery Board Fund.

Land Surveyed June 13, 1707

1707 - 2007
Celebrating
300 Years

The Old Cemetery
in Washington, DC
Registered as a National Historic Place

petitioned for restoration.

There are approximately 200
grounds and graves, with many and raise money for
Cemetery Board continues to meet
This committee known as The Old

The Old Cemetery
of the grounds and graves, oversee the care and preservation
Council appointed a board to
In 1998 East Haven Town

sandstone
symbol of life or human
death, eternity, sorrow, life
When, where: Guilford
Win, defeat: Death, sorrow
Prime: defeat, death.
Tree,厂 broken: Y
tree, fallen: natural
The tree: Paha, tree, the tree of
Sheaves of wheat, Time, the
Mournings
Earth, the Roman, symbol for
crescent, sorrow, death,
soul from mortal man
Small, shelled: Right of the
depth, down, the church
Ship: The church
Earthly experience
Handshakes: Perpetual to
depart over anything
Gardens, Mother
Chest, steeping: Victorian
heaven
Artists' maze: Some right to
Arts: Marigolds

designs. These are some
the symbols sowed on the
cement. You may wonder about
as you walk through the Old
For several years after the settlement of East Haven the inhabitants were compelled to carry their dead to New Haven and inter them in the ancient burying ground that was situated on what is now called the upper Green behind the Center Church. It was an arduous trip, especially during poor weather.

Therefore, on 13th June, 1707, it was “agreed to sequester a piece of land for a burying place on the south side of the pond on the Forthill so called, as much as may be spared from highways and watering cattle.” Thus began The Old Cemetery in East Haven, Connecticut, first called the “Burying Ground.”

The oldest stone in the Burying Ground found bears the date of 1712. It is doubtful if there are any earlier dates.

Very little attention was given to the burying ground for many years until people began to let their cattle feed in it. In 1777 a vote was taken that a committee of Jacob Bradley, Samuel Shepherd and Joseph Hemingway take care of it and that no horses or cattle were to graze on the land. Only geese, sheep and calves were allowed to feed there.

A hearse house, which stood on the northwest corner of the Burying Ground housed a hearse used for funerals. However, the undertaker for East Haven for a number of years was from North Haven. In order to save travel, he always came a few hours before the funeral with his own hearse bearing the casket. This custom allowed the old town hearse to disappear and the hearse-house to fall to decay and be swept away with other refuse.

The Burying Ground was a free burial place, and after another period of fifty-two years, it was very evident that “what was everybody’s business was nobody’s.” It was in a very sad state, overrun with sumac and other bushes, briars, and rank weeds of all kinds. The fences were old, broken and in places there were none at all, and not infrequently cattle were seen within its precincts. Everyone deplored the situation, but no one took the initiative to remedy the state of affairs.

In 1849, a society was formed by some young ladies, and it was decided that the Burying Ground was the most needy object in East Haven. Jeremiah B. Davidson handed out a new crisp five-dollar bill to start them off. The membership fee was 25 cents; the fine for inexcusable absence from meetings was 10 cents. This society of young ladies successfully canvassed the entire town for money and hired Asahel Bradley to clean up the grounds and build fences.

The next year Reverend D. W. Havens of the Congregational Church, not to be outdone by the women, organized the men to build a gateway to adorn the Burying Ground and complete the fence.

Formally known as The Burying Ground, in 1868 the Burying Ground took on the name of “Old Cemetery.” In October 5, 1868 it was voted that the sum of $50 be appropriated from the town treasury to be used for the removal of brush, etc.

In most cemeteries there are many quaint and striking epitaphs on stones. One which has attracted much attention, is that of Mr. Edmund Bradley with its seven outlined faces representing three pairs of twins and the eldest born:

“See death removes the eldest son
Just as the family’s begun
And three pair of twins in a short space
To quicken them in the Christian race.”

Children of Edmund and Lydia Bradley

Of interest are some of the old mourning superstitions:

- If the deceased had lived a good life, flowers should bloom on his grave; if he had been evil, weeds would grow.
- Funeral attendees did not wear anything new to a funeral, especially shoes.
- It was bad luck to meet a funeral procession head on. If you saw one approaching you were to turn around.
- If a person saw thirteen white horses at the same time, s/he would soon be carried in a hearse.
- You were to stop the clock in a death room or you would have bad luck.
- It was bad luck to lock the door of your home after a funeral procession had left the house.
- If rain fell on a corpse, the deceased would go to heaven.
- If you heard a clap of thunder following a burial, it indicated the soul of the departed had reached heaven.