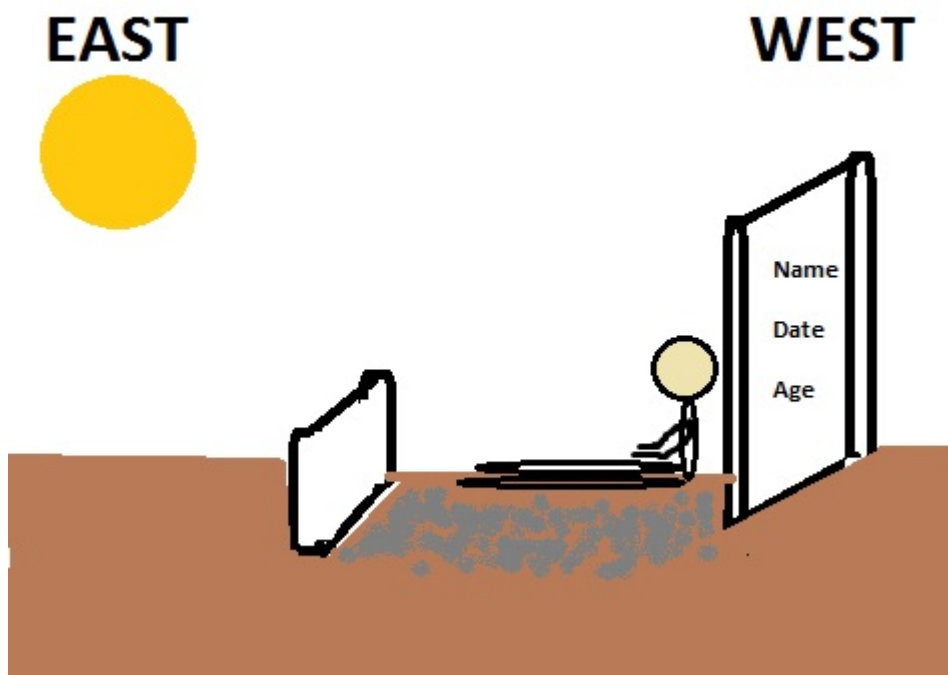


## PAXTON CENTER CEMETERY TOUR FOR THIRD GRADE STUDENTS

Basic history of Paxton's and cemetery's developments.

The number of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> C gravestones still existing today are probably in the hundreds of thousands, realizing that maybe as many have been lost to time and overgrowth with vegetation in small local cemeteries.

Is there a pattern to gravestone marker placement? The inscriptions on most old gravestones faces west. The foot stone faces east.



It has been said that this is so that at the cock's crow on the Day of Judgment, the dead would be resurrected to arise and face the dawning day. Also, to keep mourners from "stepping on the departed" when reading the inscriptions, writing on the headstone faced west and on the foot stone faced east.

Who were the gravestone markers? Gravestone carving was usually just a part time occupation for craftsmen or stone masons. While skills varied significant, some carvers became quite skilled and even signed their works using a name or initials, usually on stone that would lie beneath the surface of the grave. Rarely, the signature would be on the visible surface as occurs on several stones in Paxton Center Cemetery.

## What are some common characteristics of early markers:

### 1. Composition:



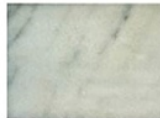
**FIELD STONE**



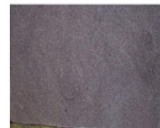
**SLATE**



**SANDSTONE**



**MARBLE**



**GRANITE**

---

Earliest markers used field stones from local quarries (17/18<sup>th</sup> C) and even long decomposed wooden markers.

Slate was the dominant stone used in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and early 19<sup>th</sup> C. The color of colonial markers generally ranged from almost black with shades of grey with occasional streaks of red, green, and blue.

Sandstone that was used consisted of a variety of colors and shades from dark brown and reddish brown to tan. While the slate markers were denser and better able to tolerate decades of freeze thawing, and tolerated more dramatic edging. The softer sandstone, however, allowed deeply carved reliefs. It was mostly obtained from the Connecticut River Valley.

White marble was used in the mid 19<sup>th</sup>CC and 20<sup>th</sup>C is the softest and easiest to carve, but unfortunately also the shortest surviving.

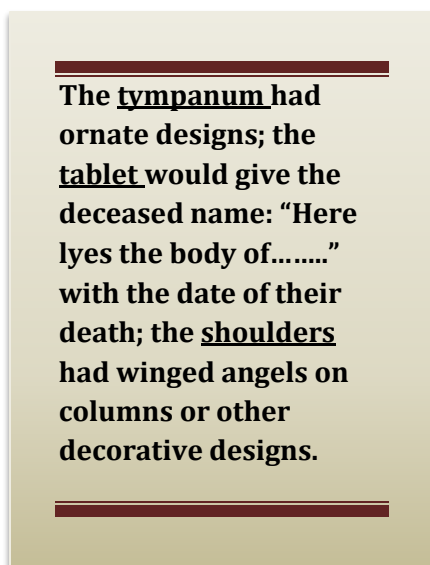
Hard polished granite used from the late 19<sup>th</sup> C to today has proven to be the most durable gravestone material. Early carvers did not frequently use this durable, difficult stone.

### 2. Size:

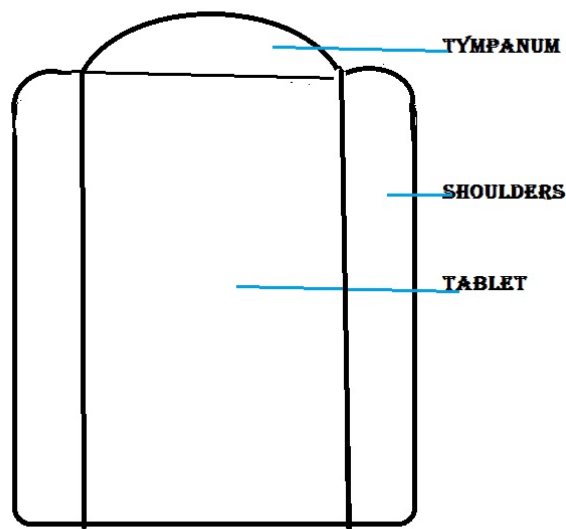
No specific height or width was dictated for the stone markers, but generally the more important the person, the larger the head and foot stones. The butt (inground) portion of the stone can be nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  the size above ground.. In many old cemeteries, the above ground stone is approximately 30".

### 3. Shape:

When you look at early cemeteries, the first thing you notice is that the gravestones mimic the headboard and footboard of a bed for the peaceful eternal rest of the individual. The footstones are usually significantly smaller than the headstones but may have some engraving on them.



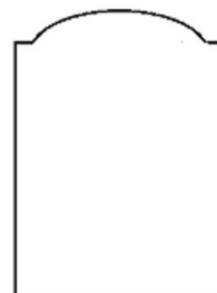
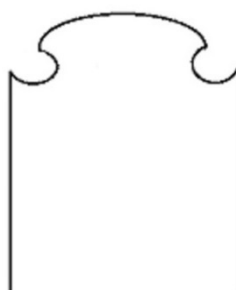
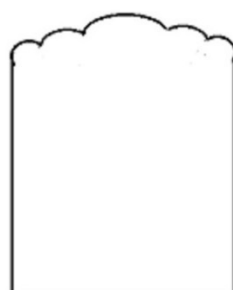
TRIPARTITE GRAVESTONE



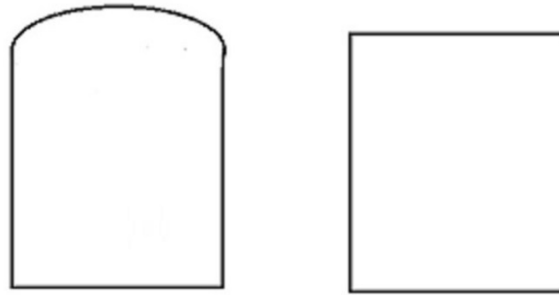
This basic tripartite (3 lobed) headstone was very popular in 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> C cemeteries.

The degree of complexity in design was based on both the carver's skill and the symbols that were determined by early Puritan views on thick squat markers to later neoclassical revival influences on taller more graceful designs. A more uniform shape meant the tablet was expanded to fill the shoulders. A rounded simple tympanum sits on a simple rectangle tablet.

Additional early gravestone shapes:



Additional Shapes



**MODERN 19TH CENTURY**

#### **4. Stone images:**

**Death-** Stern religious Puritan beliefs determined early gravestone imagery. Death was usually symbolized with skull as winged death heads, hour glasses, coffins, bones, etc.

**Winged faces-** Around the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> C there was an increase in more human sense of resurrection and everlasting life. Winged faces replaced the winged skulls, along with new motifs like the tree of life, angels, hearts, etc. The conversion of skulls to faces progressed with the presence of a mouth type marking.

**Individual images–** Certain more humanized images appeared to representative the individual especially in the case of ministers who were shown with wig and collar, an example may be found in the marker for Reverend Silas Biglow in our cemetery.

**Willows and urns –** Around the 18<sup>th</sup> C and early 19<sup>th</sup> C the influence of neoclassic art became apparent in the form of a classical urn and willows often enhanced with tassels, banners, drapes etc. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> C allegorical images were introduced such as lambs for children, doves, and praying hands carved on white marble headstones.

Decorative motifs also began to appear - spirals, vines, rosettes, flowers, etc.

Basic motifs and meanings:

**ANGEL**

Flying angel

: Rebirth

Trumpeting angel

: Call to the Resurrection

Weeping angel

: Grief

**ARROW:** Mortality

**BIRD:** Eternal life

In flight

**: Flight of the soul**

**Dove**

**: Purity, devotion**

**BREASTS/GOURDS/POMEGRANATES: The church, the ministry; the nourishment of the soul**

**: Death**

**COFFIN, PICK, SPADE, PALL: Mortality**

**CROWN: Glory of life after death**

**FIG, PINEAPPLE, OTHER FRUIT: Prosperity, eternal life**

**FLOWER: Frailty of life**

**Severed blossom**

**: Mortality**

**Garland**

**: Victory**

**HEART: Love, love of God, abode of the soul**

**HOUR GLASS: Inevitable passing of time (and life)**

**Winged**

**: Swift passage.**

**ROOSTER: Awakening, call to the Resurrection**

**SCYTHE: Death, divine harvest**

**SHELL: The Resurrection, life everlasting, life's pilgrimage**

**SKULL, BONES, SKELETON: Mortality**

**SUN SHINING, SUN RISING: Renewed life**

**TREE: Life. Cut down**

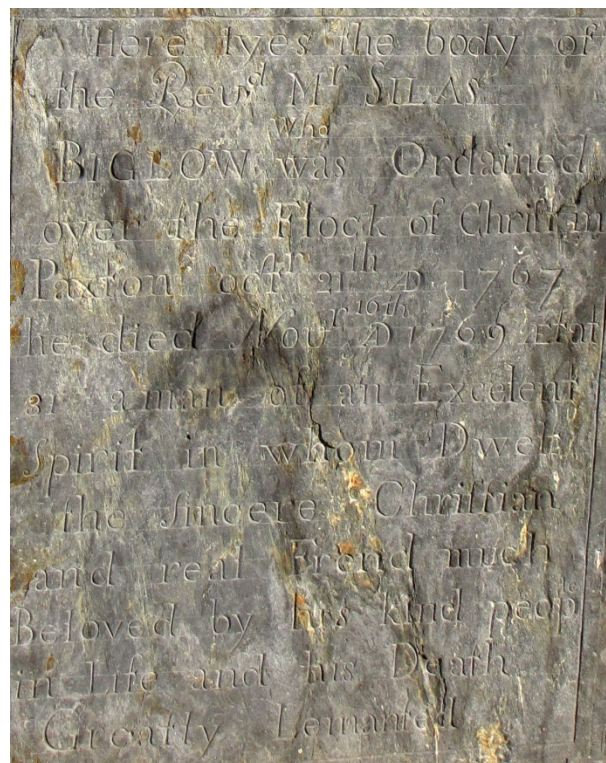
**: Mortality**

## **EXAMPLES OF UNIQUE HEADSTONES:**

- 1) The earliest gravestone in the cemetery is made of slate and was for the first minister, Reverend Silas Bigelow. Its intricacies have made it one of the most famous in New England and a subject of historical articles.**



Tympanum showing winged Reverend with bible at pulpit. Winged angels are atop the columned shoulders.



Tablet describing Rev. Bigelow's ordination and death after two years as minister.

2) Beautifully engraved white marble headstone for Civil War casualty, George Pierce (Peirce): Stone has an American flag, stars, and a replica rifle engraved on the top.



