



City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division

Guide to the Historic Burying Grounds burial permits and orders

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This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit

Repository: City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division
Title: Historic Burying Grounds burial permits and orders
Collection No.: 4414.001
Dates: 1876-1948 with gaps
Quantity: 3.0 Cubic feet

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Historical note

Boston's historic cemeteries are important examples of the City's early landscape, linking contemporary Boston with a rich historical legacy. The City of Boston has sixteen historic burying grounds. These sites range in date from 1630 to 1841. Gravestones, tomb markers and monuments honor the many founding members of the community including Revolutionary War heroes, and men and women of national and international fame.

Three burying grounds -Granary, King's Chapel and Copp's Hill- are located along Boston's Freedom Trail and attract thousands of visitors annually. Eight historic burying grounds are listed on the National Register of Historic Places; two sites, Central and Walter Street, are National Historic Landmarks; two sites, Central and Dorchester North, are designated Boston Landmarks; the Granary lies within the Beacon Hill Architectural District; the South End Burying Ground is located within the South End Landmark District; and the Eliot (Eustis Street) Burying Ground lies within the Eustis Street Architectural Conservation District.

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Scope and Contents note

This series contains the burial permit and orders of 13 of the Historic Burying Grounds from 1876-1948 with gaps. The burying grounds include Phipps Street, Dorchester North, Dorchester South, Bennington Street, Central, Copp's Hill, Granary, King's Chapel, Westerly, Eliot, South End, Walter Street, and Bunker Hill.

The burial and permit records do not all have the same information because they do not all have the same origin. Each person buried was given a permit. However, the permit came from the city or town in which the person died. For example, if someone in Newton died and was to be buried in Boston, a record would come from the Clerk of Newton. Some towns used a local board of health to send the record rather than a clerk. This record would then be kept and stored by the City of Boston. The information contained in the record would vary from town to town. It usually included such information as the name of the deceased, cause of death, age at death, and place of death. Starting in June of 1888, these started coming from the Boston Board of Health rather than from the City Registrar's Office.

Toward the end of 1897, these records started to contain two documents. One document contained the permit from the Office of the Board of Health. The second document contained the official agreement between the person requesting burial (usually a family member of the deceased) and the Superintendent of the Cemetery. Both of these records are contained in the books. Overtime, these records became more detailed and started to contain more information. Cremation records may also be scattered throughout this collection. Knowing the death date of the deceased will make these easier to locate.

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Related Material

Cemetery Division microfilm (Collection #4410.008)

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Series I: Bennington Street Burying Ground, 1893-1948 with gaps

The Bennington Street Cemetery is one of the earliest planned open spaces in the East Boston community. Founded in 1838, its physical layout and gravemarkers reflect the growth and diversity that has characterized East Boston. The landfill projects of the 1830s and the shipping-

associated industries attracted countless laborers to this area. The gravestones and monuments represent their numbers and ethnic backgrounds. Immigrant groups represented here were from Germany, Norway, Ireland, England, Scotland, and New Brunswick. One of the exceptional features of this cemetery is the number of epitaphs inscribed in a foreign language. For example, of all the legible stones, eleven have inscriptions written in German. In addition to detailing the growth of the immigrant community, the markers also recount the process of nation-building and the role East Bostonians played in it. Local participation in the Civil War is illustrated by the thirty-seven marble markers commemorating members of the Massachusetts Infantry, Navy, Cavalry, and Artillery. In addition, there is one free-standing G.A.R. Post 23 monument and two headstones commemorating World War I veterans. The Bennington Street Cemetery has also served the East Boston community as an outdoor gathering place. By the late nineteenth century, there were only a few originally intended open spaces still in existence in East Boston. On a given Sunday afternoon, people would gather in the nicely shaded landscape of the Bennington Street Cemetery to picnic with their families, pay respects to loved ones, and enjoy the ocean breezes which came directly off the Harbor.

Source: [Historic Burying Grounds Initiative](#)

Box	
2	1893-1894
2	1895
2	1896-1897
2	1897-1898
2	1899-1900
2	1901-1903
2	1904-1906
2	1907-1911
2	1912-1917
3	1918-1924
3	1925-1932
2	1934-1948

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Series II: Bunker Hill Burying Ground, 1912-1916

Bunker Hill Burying Ground is Charlestown's second municipal burial place (the first was established on Phipps Street in 1630). The property lies on the site crossed by British fortifications during the Battle of Bunker Hill. It was founded in response to Charlestown's rapid renaissance after the Revolutionary War. The town formally purchased the parcel in 1807, although it may have been used for burials as early as 1801. The burying ground was originally intended for the use of the Charlestown poor, however the presence of individual gravemarkers indicates that persons of greater means were also buried here. The burying ground covered approximately 2.5 acres at its founding and extended on its north side to the Mystic River. A portion of the site was lost when the Prescott School was built in 1857, although there is no record of whether graves were disturbed during its construction.

The predominance of marble gravestones in this site reflects nineteenth-century funerary practices. The pathway system with complementary landscaping also dates from this period and was inspired by the Rural Cemetery Movement. In this style of cemetery design emphasis was placed on

creating a garden-like setting with winding pathways and numerous plantings where people could pay respects to the deceased and also enjoy the natural setting.

Source: [Historic Burying Grounds Initiative](#)

Box

- 3 1912-1916
- 2 1934-1948

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Series III: Central Burying Ground, 1876-1948 with gaps

Dating from 1756, Central Burying Ground is located on Boston Common on Boylston Street near Tremont Street. It was established to alleviate overcrowding at King's Chapel, Copp's Hill and Granary Burying Grounds. Acquired from Andrew Oliver, Jr., the site was formerly a portion of Colonel Fitch's pasture at the bottom of the Common. Bostonians considered this burial ground the least desirable because it was the farthest from the market center of the town. It contains the graves of: British common soldiers who died in combat or of disease during the Revolution, foreigners who died while in Boston, American patriots from the battle of Bunker Hill and the Boston Tea Party; painter Gilbert Stuart, and composer William Billings. In the 1820s Mayor Josiah Quincy attempted to close the burying ground to extend the tree-lined mall on the Common. The 1826 ordinance on the burial of the dead closed the burying ground, banning the opening or digging of new graves and the building of additional tombs. The ban was rescinded in 1836 to permit construction of more tombs. The same year, Mayor Armstrong's administration cut a swath off the corner, eliminating a row of tombs and extending Boylston Street to connect with Tremont Street. The large free-standing tomb structure, "The Dell", along the west edge of the burying ground houses the remains of the graves disturbed by street construction. Additionally a large grave in the northwest part of the site contains human remains unearthed during subway construction in 1895.

Source: [Historic Burying Grounds Initiative](#)

Box

- 2 1876-1910
- 3 1912-1917
- 3 1918-1924
- 2 1934-1948

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Series IV: Copp's Hill, 1876-1948 with gaps

Originally called North Burying Ground, Copp's Hill was the second place of interment on the Boston peninsula and was laid out in 1659. The area acquired its present name through its association with William Copp, a shoemaker and early settler who lived near today's Prince Street. During the Revolution, the burying ground's prominent location overlooking the harbor gave it strategic military importance. At its southwest side the British established their North Battery and an earthworks from which they directed the shelling of Bunker Hill and ultimately the torching of Charlestown. Legend has it that British troops used gravestones for target practice. Many have

interpreted the round scars of the Captain Daniel Malcolm gravemarker as the result of musketballs shot at close range. Used continually as a burying ground through the 1850s, Copp's Hill is the final resting place of over 10,000 people. The Mather tomb contains the remains of the prominent ministerial family. Also interred here are Edmund Hartt, the builder of the USS Constitution; Robert Newman, who placed the lanterns at Christ Church on the eve of Paul Revere's famous ride; and Prince Hall, anti-slavery activist, Revolutionary War soldier, and founder of the black Masonic Order. By the time of the Revolutionary War, more than 1,000 free blacks and slaves were buried at Copp's Hill. In addition, thousands of artisans and tradesmen are buried here. The gravemarkers and their epitaphs reflect the nature of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century economy of the North End.

Source: [Historic Burying Grounds Initiative](#)

Box	
3	1876-1911
3	1912-1917
3	1919-1922
2	1934-1948

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Series V: Dorchester North Burying Ground, 1890-1948

The Dorchester North Burying Ground is Dorchester's earliest remaining landmark. It is the burial place of some of Dorchester's most prominent founding citizens. It is also one of seven seventeenth-century burying grounds in Boston. First laid out in 1634, it is the final resting place of two colonial governors William Stoughton, who was also Chief Justice during the Salem witch trials of 1692; and William Tailer. It also contains the graves of John Foster; the first printer in Boston; minister Richard Mather; 40 unknown Revolutionary War soldiers; and three African-American slaves. Dorchester North Burying Ground is unusual because it contains examples of funerary sculpture from the seventeenth, eighteen, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, resulting in a very interesting mix of colors, shapes and sizes. There are many fine examples of early slate gravestone art here, one of which has been removed to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. For the first two hundred years of its existence, Dorchester North functioned without embellishment of trees or floral arrangements, with fences erected periodically to keep out cattle and other animals. In 1834, Samuel Downer, who participated in creating Mount Auburn Cemetery, designed the landscaping for this cemetery. He created a system of pathways and avenues named after prominent Dorchester families. Over 400 shade trees and rare specimen trees were planted and a large number of shrubs and floral displays were also set out. Downer's efforts resulted in an arboretum-like atmosphere in this burying ground.

Source: [Historic Burying Grounds Initiative](#)

Box	
2	1890-1900
3	1901-1911
3	1912-1917
3	1918-1924
2	1925-1934
2	1934-1948

Series VI: Dorchester South Burying Ground, 1884-1948 with gaps

Located in the Lower Mills area of Dorchester, this cemetery was opened in 1814 to alleviate overcrowding in Dorchester North Burying Ground due to the town's rapid expansion in the early nineteenth century. The founding of the cemetery occurred on the eve of the Rural Cemetery Movement. Edmund Baker, of the famous chocolate firm in Lower Mills, headed the committee that purchased the cemetery property. Although the land was part of Dorchester, it was in a sparsely populated area. In 1835 the burial ground committee began to make site improvements characteristic of the new garden-style cemeteries such as ordered burial lots, winding carriageways, and numerous plantings. Samuel Downer, a prominent businessman and horticulturist who participated in creating Mount Auburn, designed the landscaping of this cemetery as well as Dorchester North Burying Ground, beautifying the grounds with ornamental trees, shrubbery and flowers and creating a botanical-park atmosphere. Local residents were highly supportive of this undertaking, even donating funds and plants to the cemetery. The majority of the gravemarkers found in this site are made of marble and granite, as is typical of the nineteenth century. An unusual feature of this cemetery is the significant number of monuments it contains. Many Dorchester residents are interred here, as is Henry L. Pierce, mayor of Boston and benefactor of Harvard College.

Source: [Historic Burying Grounds Initiative](#)

Box

2	1884-1897
2	1898-1911
3	1912-1917
3	1918-1924
2	1934-1948

Series VII: Eliot Burying Ground, 1897-1908

Dating from 1630, Eliot Burying Ground (formerly known as Old Roxbury Burying Ground and Eustis Street Burying Ground) is the oldest burying ground in Roxbury and one of the three oldest of Boston's historic burying grounds with the first interment made in 1633. This burying ground was the site of the Roxbury Neck fortifications. At the time of the siege of Boston, American colonists built a redoubt in 1775 to defend the road to Dorchester and the entrance to the town of Roxbury. It extended from Eustis Street across Washington Street, and was called the Burying Ground Redoubt. Interments ceased here in 1854 except those made in family tombs. In 1857 the town built the external wall and gate and made landscaping improvements, including pathways and trees. Near the Eustis Street entrance is the Dudley family tomb for early Colonial governors. Buried there are Governor Thomas Dudley [1653], Governor Joseph Dudley [1720], Chief Justice Paul Dudley [1752] and Colonel William Dudley [1743]. The Dudley tomb is covered with an oval marble slab which took the place of the original plate of pewter that was cut out by American soldiers of the Roxbury camp during the siege of Boston and made into bullets. The Minister's or Parish Tomb contains the site's namesake, John Eliot, apostle to the Indians [1690], and five later ministers of the First Church of Roxbury. Benjamin Thompson, schoolmaster and physician [1714], is also buried there as well as generations of early Roxbury families.

Source: [Historic Burying Grounds Initiative](#)

Box

2 1897-1908

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Series VIII: Granary Burying Ground, 1912-1948 with gaps

The Granary Burying Ground was established in 1660. Town officials set aside for burials part of what was then the Boston Common to help alleviate overcrowding in the near-by King's Chapel Burying Ground. The Granary Burying Ground took its present name in 1737 when a granary, a small building used to store grain, was moved to the site presently occupied by the Park Street Church. All interments ceased at the Granary in 1880. The Granary Burying Grounds contains approximately 2,345 gravestones and tombs, although it is estimated that 5,000 people are buried at this site. The grave markers are predominantly slate, with a few in greenstone or marble. The gravestones' original haphazard configuration was rearranged into straighter rows over the years to accommodate both nineteenth-century aesthetics and the modern lawnmower. During the mid-nineteenth century, many landscaping projects were undertaken in the Granary, including the installation of pedestrian walkways and the planting of shade trees and shrubbery. The remains of thousands of Boston citizens and notables lie within the walls of the Granary. Along with Massachusetts governors, mayors and clergymen, visitors will find the graves of three signers of the Declaration of Independence: Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and Robert Treat Paine; Peter Faneuil, benefactor of the famed downtown Boston landmark; patriot and craftsman Paul Revere; James Otis, Revolutionary orator and lawyer; and five victims of the Boston Massacre. Near the center of the ground, a 25-foot-tall obelisk commemorates the tomb of Benjamin Franklin's parents.

Source: [Historic Burying Grounds Initiative](#)

Box

3 1912-1917
 3 1922-1924
 2 1934-1948

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Series IX: King's Chapel, 1878-1948 with gaps

Founded in 1630 at the time of the settlement of Boston, King's Chapel is Boston Proper's oldest burying place. Like the majority of Boston's burying grounds, it has always been under municipal control, not affiliated with any church. The site is said to be part of Isaac Johnson's estate, an esteemed early settler. In 1668 Royal Governor Andros seized a portion of this property to construct the town's first Anglican church, King's Chapel, which was built in 1688. The earliest graves and tombs were scattered randomly throughout the grounds, with no formal pathways. In the early nineteenth century, landscaped cemeteries outside cities became the public parks of their times and efforts were taken to beautify urban burying grounds. Pedestrian footpaths, an ornamental cast iron fence and various plantings were all installed to enhance visitors' experience in King's Chapel Burying Grounds. Efforts went so far as to rearrange the gravestones in straight rows, frequently not corresponding to the body buried underneath. Tradition holds that the first

interment in King's Chapel Burying Ground was that of the former owner of the property, Isaac Johnson, in 1630. Notables buried here include Massachusetts' first governor, John Winthrop; William Dawes, Paul Revere's compatriot on his ride to Lexington in 1775; the Reverend John Cotton, a powerful religious leader in seventeenth-century Boston; Hezekiah Usher, the colonies' first printer and publisher; and Mary Chilton, who many believe was the first woman to step off the Mayflower.

Source: [Historic Burying Grounds Initiative](#)

Box

2	1878-1908
3	1913-1916
3	1920-1922
2	1934-1948

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Series X: Phipps Burying Ground, 1882-1948

The Phipps Street Burying Ground is one Boston's seven seventeenth-century burying grounds. Just after settlement, Charlestown's founding fathers designated the land, later known as the Phipps Street Burying Ground, as the town burying place. The site was originally bordered on the south and west by marshy flats, and an estuary of the Charles River washed up on the rear side of the hill. Years of land filling and urban-renewal activities have dramatically altered the landscape surrounding this site. Among the earliest burials were soldiers who fought in King Phillips War. In addition to the general citizenry, many contributors to the growth of our nation are also buried here, including John Harvard, whose library of 300 volumes was donated to the start a college at Cambridge; Nathaniel Gorham, a signer of the Constitution and president of the Continental Congress; and Thomas Beecher, one of the first settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Some of the most influential Charlestown families, including the Frothinghams, Hurds, Harvards, Phipps, Russells, and Hunnewells, were laid to rest here. In the nineteenth century, many of Boston's earliest burying grounds underwent major "re-arranging campaigns," efforts which straightened gravestones into rows and aligned head and footstones. These campaigns were done in an effort to conform to nineteenth-century beliefs on the beautification of open spaces. The Phipps Street Burying Ground is highly unique in that the gravestones have remained in their original configuration. Another highly unique features is that Charlestown families were buried in small rectangular plots.

Source: [Historic Burying Grounds Initiative](#)

Box

1	1882-1886
1	1887-1889
1	1890-1892
1	1893-1894
1	1895-1897
1	1898-1899
1	1900-1904
2	1904-1911
3	1912-1917

3	1919-1924
2	1934-1948

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Series XI: South End Burying Ground, 1876-1916 with gaps

When the South End Burying Ground was opened in 1810, it was located on the narrow strip of marshland, Roxbury Neck, which connected the peninsula of Boston to the mainland. The gallows stood at the east edge of the burying ground, near the tidewaters of South Boston Bay, leading to the persistent myth that primarily hanged pirates and other criminal were buried here. In fact, it is difficult to know exactly who is buried here. In the nineteenth century, people of modest means had recorded, but unmarked graves. They could not afford elaborate headstones or other types of monumentation. While there are only 20 grave markers, records indicate that over 11,000 are buried at this site. Successive filling of the marshy site permitted burials in several tiers. It has been reported that South End Burying Ground contains the graves of paupers from the Alms House and inmates from the House of Industry. Mostly, though, this site is known as a working man's burying ground, where families paid a small fee to the City for burials.

Source: [Historic Burying Grounds Initiative](#)

Box	
2	1876-1906
3	1912-1916

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Series XII: Walter Street Burying Ground, 1899

When the town of Roxbury was first settled in 1630, the First Church of Christ was established and the Eustis Street Burying Ground was used for burials. As Roxbury grew, it became difficult for church members in the outlying areas of town to get to church, so in 1711 these people received permission to establish a Second Church of Christ in their area. This church stood on Peter's Hill, and behind it to the south, the church burying ground was created. By 1733 the use of the church was discontinued and a new Second Church was built in West Roxbury. Although the burying ground still remains, the church and parsonage have long been demolished. Now called the Walter Street Burying Ground, this site is located on what is today known as Peter's Hill, within the Arnold Arboretum. This 0.81-acre burying ground contains the graves of early settlers and a single large tomb for Revolutionary soldiers. These soldiers were stationed at the nearby Loring-Greenough House, which was later converted into a hospital when many of the men became ill from smallpox. The soldiers were buried in the house's garden. In 1867 their remains were moved to Walter Street Burying Ground for a proper burial. During the widening of Walter Street in 1902, the remains of 28 bodies were discovered and subsequently transferred to Mount Hope Cemetery.

Source: [Historic Burying Grounds Initiative](#)

Box	
2	1899

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Series XIII: Westerly Burying Ground, 1897-1948 with gaps

West Roxbury was originally part of the Town of Roxbury, founded contemporaneously with Boston in 1630. The town's first burial place was today's Eliot Burying Ground, near the present-day Dudley Square. This was a far distance to go for the inhabitants of West Roxbury and in 1683 the town selectmen voted to establish a local burying place, now known as Westerly Burying Ground. A conflict between the rural and more urbanized parts of the town led to the split of West Roxbury from Roxbury proper in 1851. West Roxbury became an official part of the City of Boston in 1874. Westerly Burying Ground served as this community's burial place well into the nineteenth century. The oldest graves contain many of the town's earliest and most prominent families. Eight Revolutionary War veterans and fifteen Civil War veterans are also interred here. The site is significant for its large collection of three centuries of funerary art. One-third of its extant gravestones date from the eighteenth century; almost half date from the nineteenth century and only about twenty bear twentieth-century dates. Another distinguishing feature of Westerly Burying Ground is the number of individual mound tombs found here. Mound tombs at other burying grounds are typically larger, built to contain a number of bodies.

Source: [Historic Burying Grounds Initiative](#)

Box

2	1897-1911
3	1912-1917
3	1918-1924
2	1934-1948

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