NORTH BURIAL GROUND

HALLOWEEN

A self-guided exploration into North Burial Ground's spookiest stories, history, and places!

FALL 2021

HOW TO HAUNT ALONG

This time of year is perfect for cemetery exploration-the light filtered through the colorful leaves-the cooler days-the knowledge that Halloween is right around the corner…..

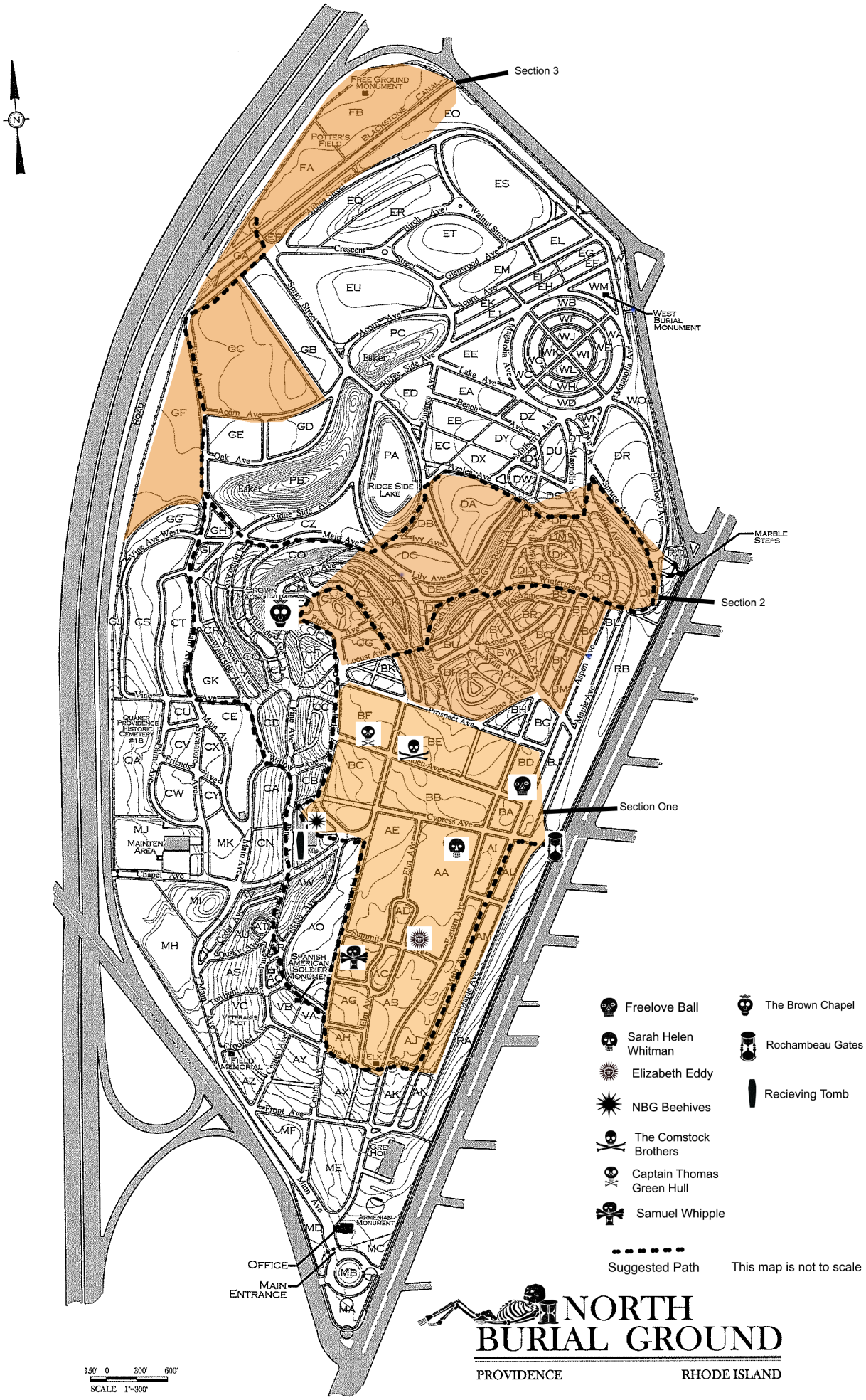
Many cultures believe the veil between the worlds of the living and the worlds of the dead are thin this time of year. Join us on a happy haunting of NBG's paths and rows as we explore the final resting place of over 100,00 people!

This self-guided “tour” will introduce you to some of NBG’s stories, early history, dramatic landmarks, notable “residents.” We'll teach you a little bit about cemeteries and give you the tools to explore the cemetery with your eyes open for all the spooky details that give cemeteries their association with the macabre.

Allow yourself about 3 hours to complete the tour. We close at 4pm, and final car entry is 3:45pm.

This booklet is your exploration guide. The tour trail is designed so you can walk the whole route, but you can also drive between sections to park and explore. Structure your tour however you want, and consider the route more of a friendly suggestion. There are photo challenges along the way, if you choose to accept them. If you complete the photo challenges and post them to social media tag us on Instagram @pvdnortburialground or use the hashtag #HalloweenAtNBG

NBG is an active cemetery. Please remain mindful of the people who are here mourning their loved ones while you explore.



NORTH BURIAL GROUND

PROVIDENCE RHODE ISLAND

PREPARED FOR:
PROVIDENCE PARKS DEPARTMENT
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

PREPARED BY:
Bradford

October 2004

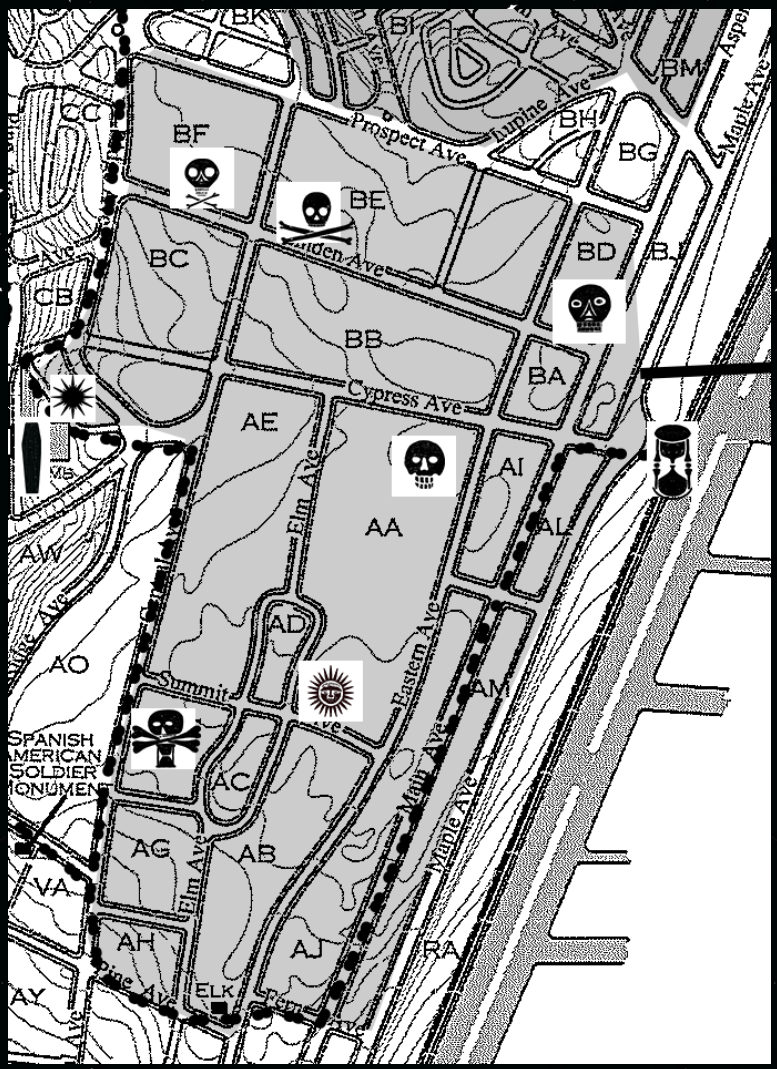
When North Burial Ground was put into use, there wasn't a formal gate around the cemetery. Where Rochambeau Street meets the cemetery has served as an entry point for the cemetery since its inception. It's a good place to begin your spooky exploration.

Back in 1700 this land had few neighbors. On the outskirts of Providence, with sandy soil, and rolling topography, the land was considered "bad" for farming and building, but ok for a new common and cemetery. So, It was June 10, 1700 on a Monday when the Providence Town assembly adopted the following resolution:

Where as it hath this day been proposed that some Convenient percell of land may be stated to lie in Comon Continually to be for the use of military affaires for training of souldiers & ctr; & also to a place to be for the use of Buireing of the dead & many of the purchassers & Proprietors of ye lands of this Towne of Providence being now met together & Haveing Considered the matter doe apprehend it to be a suitable motion & Convenient the same to propogate: And for as much as it hath hitherto been omitted when it might (happely) been with more convenience Effected, yet now well weighing the motion & finding that there is a nesessitye of the performing of the same; And if longer Omitted the more inconveniencye Will appear; It is therefore by these presents Ordered detirmined & Agreed And by these presents doe hereby order detirmine and Agree that all those Comon lands lying between the land belonging to Archibald Walker, whereon he Now dwelleth & Southward to brooke which Runneth out of Samuell Whipple Sn'r his land whereon he now dwelleth & Eastward with the Highway & westward & norwestard with Moshosick River shall perpetually lie in Comon for the uses aforesaid & for other publick uses as the Towne shall see cause not damneifieing what is fore promised; And that a burying place be bounded out of said Tract of land in the place & what quantity three men which the Town sall make choyce of, shall appoint, And if any appropriated landes within the boundes afore specified be at any time layd downe to Comon it shall continually in Comon Remaine & not be appropriated to any person. Any former act, order of Clause therenin to the Contrarey hereof Notwithstanding.

Section One encompasses some of the oldest parts of the burying ground. In its early history, this land served more than one purpose-military training, animal pound, whipping post, and stocks-so when you stand in North Burial Ground, you're not just walking through history because of the people buried here. You're also walking through a true "comon" where a lot of 17th and 18th century civic life took place.

SECTION ONE


BK
BI
BM
CC
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Prospect Ave
BH
BG
Maple Ave
BE
BC
BD
CB
BB
BA
Cypress Ave
AE
AI
Elm Ave
AA
AL
AW
AD
AO
Summit
Eastern Ave
AM
SPANISH AMERICAN SOLDIER MONUMENT
AC
Main Ave
Maple Ave
AG
AB
VA
Elm Ave
AH
AJ
RA
AY
ELK

Freelove Mitchell Ball and Elijah Ball: Freelove Mitchell Ball's story is one of the most tragic ones in NBG. Freelove died in 1836 of "stabs inflicted by a knife." Her husband Elijah was convicted of her muder after a brief deliberation (some stories say 10 minutes, and some say 20), Elijah Ball was sentenced to death. Later, he was granted clemency and his sentence was commuted to life in prison. He lived the rest of his life in the state prison, and died in 1849. Upon his death, Elijah was buried in the family plot next to Freelove. As if the end of her life wasn't sad enough, even Freelove's afterlife would be forever tied to the man who murdered her. Her stone reads "Oh tis a trying thing to be bereft of life/By the vile hand of him who called her wife/And those who read may thus infer from hence/That this rash act sprang from Intemperence"

Death's Head: Death's head iconography has its roots with the Puritans of the 16th century. A skull and crossbones or a simple skull were common on Puritan graves, representing the reality of the body's decay after death that is inevitable for all people. Later the motif evolved to a winged skull, and eventually a human or cherubic face with wings. These "soul effigies" represented the hope for eternal life and a softening of the Puritan view of the afterlife. Puritan culture was also heavy on conformity-but headstones were an opportunity for families to memorialize their loved one as an individual.

Challenge: Take photos of three distinct death's head gravestones. Try to find ones that are as different from each other as possible!

Vampires: There are no confirmed vampire burials or exhumations at North Burial Ground, but in the late 1800s vampire superstitions and ritual practices to banish vampires swept through New England. The story of Mercy Brown, who lived and died in Exeter is Rhode Island's most famous vampire tale. Mercy's family members died of tuberculosis, one-by-one, and her neighbors were convinced that a vampire must have been stalking the Brown family. Her father consented to an exhumation of his wife and two daughters. During Mercy's exhumation they discovered that her heart still had blood in it, and declared that Mercy must be the vampire causing her younger brother's Edwin's consumption to get worse. They removed Mercy's heart and liver, burned them, and fed the ashes to Edwin. He died less than two months later.

The truth is that in the 1890s germ-theory, (the understanding that infectious illnesses were caused by bacteria or viruses) was just beginning to take hold in the more rural parts of Rhode Island. Sure, in Newport or Providence there were fewer vampire exhumations, but the same conditions that led the people of Exeter to exhume Mercy Brown existed in the big city. Tuberculosis or "consumption" left its victims thin, pale, with flushed cheeks, dilated pupils, and a bloody cough. TB could be asymptomatic until the very end of the disease when it rapidly accelerated, which meant the infected person spread the disease through their family without knowing it. This gave the impression that death was following particular people-and maybe they were being haunted by vampires.

Elizabeth Eddy was not a vampire, in fact, her death from "consumption" occurred about 100 years before the Rhode Island vampire panic. She was married to Samuel Eddy who served as Rhode Island's Secretary of State, and was a US Representative. Her gravestone, which describes her cause of death as consumption, and highlights that tuberculosis touched every class of person in Rhode Island, and that it was a source of fear and anxiety for more than a century.

Sarah Helen Whitman: The original goth-girl, Sarah Helen Whitman adorned herself with a coffin pendant around her neck and dressed in dark shawls and veils that often blew off of her in the streets of Providence as she wandered deep in thought. She was a writer, poet, critic, and Spiritualist. She hosted and attended seances throughout her life (even attending Providence's first recorded seance in 1850, describing it as "not successful"). There's no wonder why she attracted the attention of America's godfather of goth and master of horror, Edgar Allan Poe. The two had a turbulent courtship and engagement here in Providence in the autumn of 1848. Because of the disapproval of Helen's family and friends, the wedding was called off just days before it was supposed to take place. Poe died less than a year later, and Helen spent the rest of her life defending his reputation and protecting his legacy. When Helen died in 1878, she requested that no stone be placed above her remains, and that only the green earth mark her final resting place. Her executors did not think it appropriate to let Providence's beloved poetess repose in an unmarked grave, so they compromised with this suitable tablet to honor her.

Challenge: Record a video reading this Sarah Helen Whitman poem (or just your favorite section) in your best poetry voice.

Resergemus

By Sarah Helen Whitman in response to Poe's untimely death

I mourn thee not: no words can tell
The solemn calm that tranced my breast
When I first knew the soul had past
From earth to its eternal rest;

For doubt and darkness, o'er thy head,
Forever waved their Condor wings;
And in their murky shadows bred
Forms of unutterable things;

And all around thy silent hearth,
The glory that once blushed and bloomed
Was but a dim-remembered dream
Of "the old time entombed."

Those melancholy eyes that seemed
To look beyond all time, or, turned
On eyes they loved, so softly beamed —
How few their mystic language learned.
How few could read their depths, or know
The proud, high heart that dwelt alone
In gorgeous palaces of woe,
Like Eblis on his burning throne.

For ah! no human heart could brook
That darkness of thy doom to share,
And not a living eye could look
Unscathed upon thy dread despair

I mourn thee not: life had no lore
Thy soul in morphean dews to steep,
Love's lost nepenthe to restore,
Or bid the avenging sorrow sleep.

Yet, while the night of life shall last,
While the slow stars above me roll,
In the heart's solitudes I keep
A solemn vigil for thy soul.

I tread dim cloistral aisles, where all
Beneath are solemn-sounding graves;
While o'er the oriel, like a pall,
A dark, funereal shadow waves.

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There, kneeling by a lampless shrine,
Alone amid a place of tombs,
My erring spirit pleads for thine
Till light along the orient blooms.

Oh, when thy faults are all forgiven,
The vigil of my life outwrought
In some calm altitude of heaven —
The dream of thy prophetic thought —

Forever near thee, soul in soul,
Near thee forever, yet how far,
May our lives reach love's perfect goal
In the high order of thy star!

Fraternal/Sororal Organizations: Community organizations and clubs-whether religious, occupation-based, or just for fun-played an important role in life, but they also helped out their members in death. Some social clubs provide funds for burials and you'll see insignias from these organizations on member's headstones. The Freemasons (a square and compass with a G in the center); The Woodmen of the World or WOW (a seal with a tree in the center, or headstone carved like a tree); The Independent Order of Oddfellows or the IOOF (a three link chain or all seeing-eye); The Knights of Pythias (the initials F.C.B. for Friendship, Charity, and Benevolence). At NBG we have other examples of these kinds of organizations like the Benevolent Protective Order of Elks who own Elk's Rest, a group burial lot for their membership.

Challenge: Get a picture of two different fraternal order insignias. Bonus Challenge: Take a selfie with NBG's Elk. (Please don't climb on the Elk).

Samuel Whipple (1645-1710): Samuel Whipple was the first recorded person buried in NBG. He was likely born in England, but there isn't much known about his early life. He was one of the earliest residents in Providence and died with many children and a good amount of wealth. His home was known as the "oldest home in Providence" until it was torn down in 1900. Burial practices when Samuel Whipple was buried were a lot different than they are today. Bodies weren't buried with coffins, instead they were wrapped in a simple shroud and placed in the earth. Many people were buried at home or if they were buried in a burying ground there were few regulations or rules about where or how folks were interred. Whipple was buried by a young man named Epinetus Ballou-indicating that the NBG lands were truly becoming a formal cemetery.

Challenge: Graves from the 18th century were laid out to face East-West to rise up on judgement day. Does that hold true for Whipple's grave or the graves around him? Use the compass on your phone (or your tour map) to test the theory.

The Comstock Brothers and Captain Hull: Rhode Island is the Ocean State and since our historical economy was tied to the sea there are many people with headstones in North Burial Ground whose bodies found their final resting place at sea. You'll meet Jesse Comstock who died in Long Island Sound when the steamboat Lexington caught on fire near the Huntington Lighthouse, where 150 people died on Jan. 13, 1840. Fourteen years later, William Comstock, Jesse's brother, perished at sea on the steamship Arctic when it collided with the steamship Yesta. It went down in 5 hours, killing 300 people.

Challenge: Navigate away from the Comstocks and set your sextant for section BF. In this section you'll find a tall monument to Captain Thomas Green Hull. Unlike many of the headstones for people lost at sea, Captain Hull's body is actually here. When you read the epitaph, you'll understand why:

Transcription: "Left New York for Baltimore 21 Dec 1864. On 30 Dec he was found, lashed to the mast of his sunken and ill fated vessel"

Decay: In many ways, cemeteries are meant to last forever-we care for graves in perpetuity-but decay is a natural part of the world around us. Stones fall over or foundations break; hurricanes and wind cause downed trees; moss, lichen, and fungi grow wherever they can take hold. Maintaining a cemetery is a lot of work, and even though we try to manage the ever present symptoms of decay, NBG has been exposed to the elements for 321 years. Don't despair though---cemeterians, historians, and archaeologists can learn a lot from how the cemetery decays and we use information to make plans for preservation.

Challenge: Take your most artistic photo of a decay in the cemetery: moss or lichen a stone; a broken stone; fungus on one of the trees; fallen leaves; whatever you think highlights how interesting decay can be.

Telling the Bees: Bees have associations with death in many cultures, but in New England there was a tradition to "tell the bees" when a beekeeper or family member passed away. Poet John Greenleaf Whittier described this tradition in his 1858 poem "Telling the Bees" which he wrote to document this particular folkway that was already fading. The tradition varied all around New England, but usually included draping the hive with black mourning crepe, and singing or whispering to the bees that a loved one died.

Just the same as a month before,—
The house and the trees,
The barn's brown gable, the vine by the door,—
Nothing changed but the hives of bees.

Before them, under the garden wall,
Forward and back,
Went drearily singing the chore-girl small,
Draping each hive with a shred of black.

Trembling, I listened: the summer sun
Had the chill of snow;
For I knew she was telling the bees of one
Gone on the journey we all must go!

Then I said to myself, "My Mary weeps
For the dead to-day:
Haply her blind old grandsire sleeps
The fret and the pain of his age away."

But her dog whined low; on the doorway sill,
With his cane to his chin,
The old man sat; and the chore-girl still
Sung to the bees stealing out and in.

And the song she was singing ever since
In my ear sounds on:—
"Stay at home, pretty bees, fly not hence!
Mistress Mary is dead and gone!"

Challenge: Take a picture of North Burial Ground's two beehives. We're not sure if the bees are currently in residence, but share any news you need to share with them-just in case.

SECTION TWO


Ridge Side Lake
Main Ave
Ivy Ave
Lily Ave
Locust Ave
Prospect
Lupine Ave
Aspen Ave
Maple Ave
Spruce Ave
Hemlock Ave
Marble Steps
Section 2

Section Two: As the 19th and early 20th century ushered in changes in science, technology, spirituality, and the social order, these shifts were reflected in gravestones and cemetery design. This section of your exploration takes you through the areas where those changes start to be apparent. Wind your way from the Brown Chapel and Mausoleum to the Marble stairs and pay close attention to the gravestones and monuments. Section Two is all about details, so keep your eyes peeled.

Victorians and the Good Death: In this section, we want you to take your time and take a close look, so instead of highlighting individuals this section will focus on themes from history, especially the Victorian and Edwardian Eras (1830s-1910s) and cemetery symbolism.

When her beloved husband Prince Albert passed away at the young age of 42, to say Queen Victoria was devastated would be an understatement. She entered into a mourning period that would last for the remainder of her life and reign - 40 years. The monarchy had great influence on setting trends in English and American societies, and Victoria's reverence for mourning and the death-culture it bore was no different. Memento mori was de rigueur and people were eager to oblige. From acceptable mourning time frames to appropriate clothing fabrics, colors, accessories, stationery - death touched it all.

Many of Providence's prominent families flourished during the Victorian Period-in America, the later decades of the Victorian period were sometimes referred to as the Gilded Age-when industrialists like the Vanderbilts, Astors, and Carnegies ruled society. Representing Providence's leaders, in NBG you'll find the Brown family, Jabez Gorham, an industrialist and manufacturer who brought the jewelry industry to Providence, and Cyrus Butler a merchant and developer who built the Providence Arcade.

***Challenge*: During the Gilded Age there was a vast difference between the lives of the wealthy and the poor. Monuments and headstones capture that difference spectacularly. Take a picture of the most elaborate monument you see in Section 2. Contrast that with a photo of a less ostentatious monument.**

Please join us as we travel back to the mid-to-late 1800's and explore Victorian mourning culture. Maybe you can identify some traditions that we still practice today. And remember...explore at your own risk-There is a magnetism to this part of the cemetery, and many visitors report unsettling feelings when they visit this area.

***Challenge*: Take a detail photo of the Brown Chapel or the Brown family lot. Pair your detail shot with a larger picture of the chapel from your favorite angle.**

HEADSTONE ICONOGRAPHY SCAVENGER HUNT

Use the next two pages to complete as many of these challenges as possible!

FIND AND PHOTOGRAPH:

- [ ] One of each symbol
- [ ] One floral wreath and one made of leaves
- [ ] A view that shows three obelisks
- [ ] The most elaborate urn you can find
- [ ] A tomb with a long epitaph
- [ ] The tallest monument or headstone
- [ ] The most recent winged cherub
- [ ] Three different hand configurations
- [ ] Five different botanical images
- [ ] Multiple symbols on one stone
- [ ] A headstone that seems out of place
- [ ] Two of the same symbol not listed here

Victorian Headstone Imagery: Just like we do today, Victorians followed trends that influenced their burial behavior. Some of these were more serious-changes in religious beliefs toward a more personal relationship with religious practice-the idea that middle class men and women lived in “separate spheres,” where a woman’s most important sphere was her home-the increasing isolation of the nuclear family- but some of these trends tended to the macabre, occult, and downright spooky. With increased globalization the Victorians were obsessed with the symbols, magic, and gods of Antiquity (especially the antiquity of Greece, Rome, and Egypt). There is no better example of Victorian “Egyptomania” than mummy unwrapping parties, where a mummy transported from Egypt was slowly unwrapped for the “education” of the onlookers. From Greek and Roman gravestone decorations, to Egyptian influenced tombs and obelisks, the Victorian obession with antiquity is on display at NBG. Read on to learn more about death in the 19th Century.

Lamb
Symbolizes purity and innocence; Almost always marks the grave of an infant or young child

Willow
Associated with Persephone, the Greek goddess of the underworld; immortality of the soul, and grief

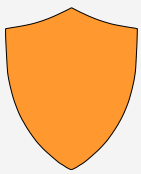
Willow & Urn
Symbolizes the soul's journey from Earth to the spirit world

Dove
A biblical symbol representing innocence, resurrection, and peace; a dove ascending can represent the departed soul's ferrying into Heaven

Lyre
Associated with Apollo, the Greek god of music and poetry; a broken string represents a mortal life that has ended; often found on the gravestones of poets or musicians

Urn
An allusion to ancient Greek cremation; a symbol of mourning; a draped urn symbolizes the veil between the living and the dead

Wreath
A symbol of eternity; The plants and flowers in the wreath have unique, personal meanings to the deceased



Shield
Faith, Protection, and Defense of the Spirit

Hands
Pointing up: Ascension to heaven
Holding Flowers: Frailty of life and grief
Clasped: Leaving a loved one behind. Often depicted on graves of spouses

Wheat
Immortality and resurrection; Longevity, marking the grave of an elderly person

Broken Pillar
A life cut short; the deceased died young or was the victim of a murder

Sun
A new dawn in the afterlife or the sun setting on a life well-lived

Angel
A divine being or messenger of God, indicates that the deceased was religious; hope that the soul will be in Heaven

Winged Cherub
The soul of the deceased, the Winged Cherub Head evolved from the earliest gravestone iconography from the 18th and 19th centuries

Obelisk
Egyptian inspired; rays of the sun shining on the deceased; eternal life

Flowers
Bouquet: Grief
Added to a Cross: The Holy Spirit
Unopened Bud: A life cut-short or a young person
Poppy: Sleep and rest
Lily: Resurrection
Rose: Youth and love

Cross
A symbol of Christianity; The deceased was a religious Christian
Celtic Cross: The circle symbolizes eternal life and the knotwork represents resurrection and eternal life

Anchor
Naval service or seamanship; Christianity

Victorians and Spiritualism: Spiritualism was a movement that became widely popular in the 1840's when three young sisters from upstate New York named Maggie, Kate, and Leah Fox, claimed they could communicate with the dead. Victorian people soon acquired a fervent desire to hear from their deceased loved ones, and the movement took off from there. It wasn't long before mediums were welcomed into homes across America for families to partake in the uncanny ritual. The movement traveled as far as England, where Queen Victoria herself frequented séance tables. Other notables who believed in Spiritualism and attended séances included Abraham Lincoln, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, William Lloyd Garrison, Mark Twain, and Franklin D. Roosevelt (to name a few). You might remember previously in the tour that North Burial Ground's own Sarah Helen Whitman was a major proponent of Spiritualism, and even dabbled in mediumship herself. Most mediums were female because they were considered to have a better predisposition for spiritual perfectibility, making them superior communicators with the dead. At a typical séance in the 19th century, you might hear rapping on the walls or table, objects and furniture would levitate, and if you were lucky, an apparition would appear before your very eyes! By the end of the century, skeptics began tearing the movement apart, and folks were catching on to the tricks and illusions performed by the mediums. It also didn't help that one of the Fox sisters (a leading figure in the practice) came out and said it was all a fraud from beginning to end. Spiritualism is still very relevant today, and practiced by many people throughout the world, just in a different capacity. Today's definition of Spiritualism is "those who believe in a continued future existence, and that people who have passed on into the spirit-world can and do communicate with us." Who's to say it's probable or improbable to communicate with souls departed from this mortal realm? It's never too late to break out the ole' Ouija board and answer this question for yourself!

Challenge: Find a headstone that hints at spiritualist themes. A shroud or veil, an epitaph that highlights transcendence, or an open book are all symbols that are sometimes associated with the spiritualist movement.

Victorian Mourning Attire: Full mourning included the garb we may recognize as "traditional" mourning clothes for that time period - black dresses with an overlay of crepe, a material made of silk, wool, or a combination of both. Crepe had a lusterless, dull appearance, and a crinkled look. It rumpled easily, showed dust, was heavy, smelly, and was notoriously difficult to clean. Worst of all, crape was saturated with toxic chemicals including arsenic. The dyes would run if the wearer encountered rain or humidity and the material often left purple stains on the skin which required more chemicals to remove. Flakes of dye would shed from the fabrics and could be aspirated into the lungs or introduced into the eyes. The arsenic used in the dye would sometimes be absorbed into the skin and cause blood poisoning. Sometimes, the mourning wear actually killed the mourner. The mourning veil could cause skin irritation, acne, rashes, respiratory distress, blindness, and sometimes worse. A veil was traditionally six feet long, made of two or more layers of crepe and attached to a bonnet worn on the head. All of this obviously made it difficult for the wearer to see and breathe, but the sensory deprivation certainly contributed to an already downcast mindset.

Victorian Mourning Attire (continued): Over garments and veils were dangerous enough, but underwear contained danger, too. Cage crinolines were in vogue during the Victorian era. These caged petticoats gave a woman's skirt a fuller appearance. The structure of the cage was constructed using various materials including horsehair, whale baleen, or even steel. Women could be poked or even stabbed by their crinoline. They also posed a tripping hazard and could get caught under carriage wheels. Another danger, fire, caused a considerable amount of injuries and deaths. The crinoline fad was not just for high-society ladies - women of all classes wore them, even while they worked, cooked, cleaned, etc. Many a Victorian woman lost her life via “death by crinoline”. The mourning attire of Victorian men consisted of a black crepe band around their hat or arm and black gloves. Children were not expected to wear mourning attire but sometimes wore white, which was, in contrast to black for adults, the signature mourning color for the death of a child. Mourning clothes were discarded after the full mourning period concluded. Victorians believed that it was bad luck to retain these items in the household. Societal standing determined the extent of mourning expenditure, so saving for death related expenses was commonplace, even for the lower classes. The working class strived to keep up with the upper echelon of society, spending money they didn’t have for mourning-related extravagances they didn't need.

Victorian Women and the Burden of Mourning: Victorian widows were expected to remain in “deep” or “full” mourning” for at least one year, but two years or more was the acceptable norm. To avoid scandal, widows were isolated from society for out of respect for their departed husbands. In stark contrast, Victorian men were not beholden to such oppressive mourning guidelines. Widowers were expected to mourn for approximately three months and could remarry after six. This also took into consideration the need for a “new” mother to look after the widower’s children.

“Correct” mourning was an anxiety provoking matter for women who were also expected to face their own deaths with grace, wisdom and acceptance of God’s will. Women even handcrafted their own death shrouds which they included in their bridal trousseau. Death of mothers during or after childbirth was commonplace so women came prepared for this likely event.

Challenge: Find the grave of woman who died between 1830-1870 with an epitaph. What does the epitaph emphasize about her?

The Resurrectionists: Rapid advances in medical science during the Victorian period fueled the need for cadavers for medical school. However, procuring cadavers was easier said than done. The Resurrectionists” came up with a solution - dig up the bodies from recent burials and sell them to the medical schools. Sometimes the students even took this matter into their own hands. To guard against all of this, cemeteries began employing nightly guards to keep watch for anything out of the ordinary, which might also include a live person buried by mistake (see: “saved by the bell”). To circumvent this, Resurrectionists went to poorer areas where there were no funds for cemetery security and where there would be less chance that they would be noticed. At NBG a few measures were taken to protect our "residents" from enterprising thieves. For ordinary folks, the practice of lining a grave with bricks was an important safety measure. For the more wealthy, family tombs and mausoleums allowed security and control to remain in the hands of the family members. Many families kept tomb keys within the family. Even the NBG superintendent was not allowed to hold a key....just in case.

Post-Mortem Photography: Photographs were expensive, so for many they were only taken to record major life events of which death was included. Sometimes an opportunity for a photograph never presented itself, which was the case in the deaths of young children and infants. The post-mortem photograph was sometimes the only photograph taken of an individual and in order to create the illusion of life in these subjects, sometimes they were posed as if they were indeed alive. Children were most often positioned to look as if they were sleeping and some photographers would even paint irises onto the photographed eyelids of deceased persons. These post-mortem photos, which many of us would find morbid and unsettling, were displayed in the home alongside photos of the living.

Challenge: Find a headstone that includes a representation of the deceased. This can be a personalized cherub, a carving of a child or a portrait or something else. 

The Marble Steps: It is a beautiful fall day in Providence. The year is 1900 and Providence is the place to be---a bustling commercial center and booming jewelry industry, with a growing population, electric street cars, a sewer system, and all the benefits of Gilded Age philanthropy abound in the capitol city. The new State House is just being constructed, and with the leftover marble North Burial Ground gets a new grand entrance. You're there to visit the shining marble steps and enjoy a picnic and stroll walk through the cemetery. You're one of many groups today on this beautiful Sunday, enjoying the maturing landscaping and design elements that were introduced in the 1830s to make the Burial Ground a place for recreation and to reflect the planned wilderness and rural atmosphere of other city parks. You hear laughter and music coming from the pavilion and meet up with your friends. While you're not a member of Providence's uppercrust, a stroll through North Burial Ground in your best day clothes is a perfect way to imagine wandering through a rural estate and take a break from the bustling, crowded world of your everyday life.

This section of NBG represents two major developments in cemetery planning. The rural cemetery movement of the mid-nineteenth century and the garden-lawn cemetery movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Though different in their approaches, both movements reflected a desire for the cemetery to be a greenspace, event venue and a lively place for visitors and mourners alike. The Victorians were interested in death, elaborate mourning rituals, and talking about and considering death and the afterlife. Cemeteries as a place of beauty and recreation were a part of that social attitude toward death and the dead.

Challenge: Take a picture of yourself on the marble steps. Be creative (but careful) with your pose. Bonus points if you happen to be in Victorian clothes. 

Section Two of your tour ends here at the Marble Steps. Section Three is the Freegrounds which are a long walk from here. The suggested pathway takes you through some of the garden cemetery portions of NBG, past the pond, which was originally a fountain, but is now a small slice of wildlife habitat. There are many early 20th century graves on your path to the Freegrounds which show the development of headstone trends that are present in contemporary burials. There are also sections of those contemporary burials in this part of the cemetery, so please be conscious of people who are visiting their loved ones.

SECTION THREE

The Freeground: Some of the most haunting but sacred spaces here at North Burial Ground are our Freegrounds. NBG has always maintained a Freeground, though its location has changed over time. At NBG the original 18th century Freeground section was racially and culturally integrated. Enslaved people, Free Black men and women, white, and Native people were all buried together. As the cemetery expanded the Freegrounds went by other names like, “Potter’s Field,” “Stranger’s Vale” and they were segregated by race. There are three main sections of the Freeground, Potter’s Field, accessed by a bridge over the canal, and the segregated Freeground, separated by River Ave.

In the Freegrounds are the remains of ordinary people, some of whom lived on the margins of society, and many who died unexpected or violent deaths. There are few headstones in the Freeground, so we’ve put up markers to represent the stories we’re sharing in the guide. There are no challenges. Simply stay a while and visit with these folks whose lives were full, complex, and significant, even if they couldn’t afford a formal burial.

Perkins the Hermit and Thomas Hoyle: (Most of) Thomas Hoyle’s body is buried in Swan Point Cemetery, but in 1867 the “leggs of Thomas Hoyle” were buried in the foot of grave 442 in the “Strangers Vale” freeground. Thomas didn’t pass away until 1874. We have many unassociated limbs at NBG, but what makes the final resting place of Mr. Hoyle’s “leggs” really interesting is their neighbor. Hoyle’s legs share grave 442 with a man known only as “Perkins the Hermit” who died in 1865 and was interred in 1866. We don’t know much about Perkins the hermit. He died when he was “about 70” and had no address other than “On the Sand Bank North of Federal Hill”

Mysterious Women: Emma Simpson died at age 32 in 1904. We don’t know much about Emma, except for one note in our records, “Woman claimed by two husbands, died in car barn.” A car barn is where trolley cars were stored, but there was no other information about Emma and her two husbands. Catherine Case was 40 years old on December 17th, 1903 when she “Dropped dead on the State House steps.” Her residence was unknown

The Dangers of Progress: There are a number of deaths recorded in the freeground that illustrate the dangers of changing transportation, traffic patterns, and technologies that put people in peril. In 1900 Andrew M. Cleary, 25 was “killed on the railroad.” Similarly, John Henry Johnson, age 60 was also killed on the railroad in 1901. An unknown man was found dead on top of a railroad car on June 24, 1902. He was around 26 years old. On Oct 3. 1922, James Mckenna, 35 was “found dead on Woonsocket car line near 1196 Charles Street.” Charles Ladoux was struck by a freight car in 1911. Fred Durham, aged 52 in 1920 is not buried in the Freeground (he can be found in the Spanish American War Veteran plot, which is not on the tour, but you’re welcome to visit), but his story perfectly illustrates the risks of life with all the new modes of conveyance in the early 20th century. Mr. Durham was “killed by elevator in the Turk’s Head Building”

Cemetery Deaths: It’s not unusual to find dead people in a cemetery, but usually you know where they came from.This isn’t always the case. In 1908 an unknown man was found in Pocasset Cemetery. Adulf E. Anderson, age 61 was “killed at Swan Point Cemetery” in 1921. Even North Burial Ground isn’t exempt from the discovery of the unexpected dead. In 1900, Samuel B. Hatch was around 60 years old when he was found in the pond here at NBG.

The Canal: Our section of the Blackstone canal is a reminder of the historical use of the rivers in Providence. There is another, darker testament to the power of the Providence River in the Freeground. NBG’s books rarely state the cause of death, but sometimes in the place of the final residence of the deceased there is a note that reads, “Found in the Providence River” or “Drowned in the Providence River.” From 1898 to 1922 there were 40 people interred in the freeground that were recorded with this note. Some of the deceased are named: John H. Parry; William H. Shelly; George Emmet; John Thomas; Joseph Kollon; Charles Bunler; Edward Carlisle; Alexander Grazitt; Alexander Wright; Robert Stevens; John Landeline; Joseph Clark but many of them are unnamed. Some may have been victims of crime, but many were dockworkers, barge crewmen or other tradesmen that worked closely with the river. The deaths are a tragic reminder of how much of a presence the river had in the lives of the ordinary citizens of Providence.

As you leave the Freegrounds to travel to the final stop on our tour, we return again to the Victorian and Edwardian eras. The pathway towards the Receiving Tomb passes through more Victorian-era graves, and the tomb itself is a testament to Victorian mourning sensibilities.

The Victorian Funeral: In Victorian times, people usually died at home and remained there until burial, on average about four days later. The body was prepared by the family to the best of their ability and the funeral was held in the home. Superstition governed many Victorian post-mortem practices. Clocks were stopped at the time of death. Windows and mirrors were covered and remained so until after the burial. This was to prevent the spirit of the departed from becoming "trapped" in a looking-glass. Family photographs were placed face-down to prevent a living relative from becoming "possessed". The dead were always carried out feet first, to prevent the deceased from "looking back" and targeting Death's next victim.

Crepe makes yet another appearance, as soon after death, a ribbon or sash made of the material was hung on the door to signal that there has been a death in the household. Black for adults, white for children. The body was washed, dressed and placed on a cooling board or ice to slow decomposition. Another macabre practice was that the dead were not to be left alone, even overnight to quell the justified Victorian anxiety that the dead were really not dead but in a comatose state. At this time, the definitive proof of death was signs of decay and until those were displayed by the corpse, the body would not be interred. A family member or friend would sit vigil over the body in case it came back to life, which as you can imagine would be quite the undertaking (pun intended!).

Once true death was confirmed and the funeral concluded, the body was then ready for interment. Social standing determined what happened next. For the well off, a beautiful glass hearse transported the deceased to the cemetery, pulled by horses bedecked with black ostrich plumes upon their head. Carriages for the family followed. Other mourners and "mutes", individuals paid to participate in the procession, followed on foot. The deceased was placed in a stately tomb or family mausoleum or perhaps in a burial plot with an ornate tombstone honoring them. For the lower classes, this event looked vastly different. For those who could not afford a hearse or carriage, family members carried the coffin from the home to the cemetery where there was no impressive burial tomb waiting for their loved one. If the family could afford a plot and a stone they were fortunate because otherwise their beloved departed would be placed in the Freeground.

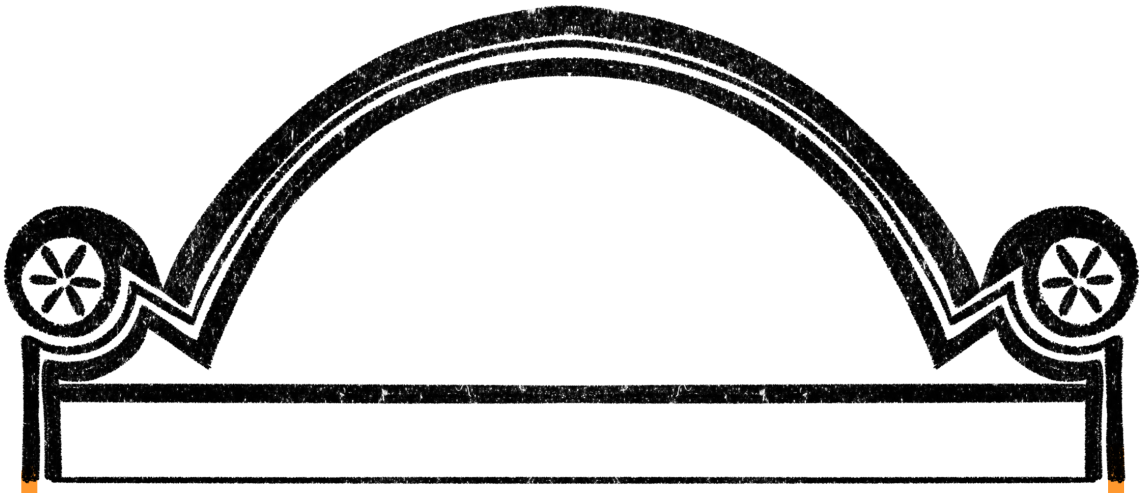
Victorians are sometimes referred to as "the cult of death" but after learning about their practices and beliefs where death is concerned, it's not as much a celebration of but an acceptance and an inability to sanitize or distance themselves. This may get lost in the pageantry surrounding their practices but their message to us is simple and eternally important - MEMENTO MORI - remember you too must die.

The Receiving Tomb: Take yourself back in time to 1903 when this beautiful, fashionable Beaux-Arts style marble tomb was in use. Imagine arriving for a burial to see a horse-drawn hearse. It's a cold winter's day with snow drifts on the ground and you can see the steam rising from the horses' nostrils. Everyone you know is dressed head-to-toe in black and they watch as your loved one's casket is placed in the tomb for a visitation. When you enter, the tomb seems warm and inviting compared to the weather outside. There are flowers and a fire in the fireplace where you can say your final goodbyes. Beyond the visiting room, illuminated by large skylights, are floor to ceiling rows of niches, large enough to hold the bodies of many people. Your loved one already has a burial plot purchased, but the ground is too frozen to bury them now. They will have to wait for spring.

When the receiving tomb was operating at its best, the deceased were held for a few months before being interred at NBG or even at other cemeteries. Unfortunately, when the tomb officially closed in the 1970s NBG staff discovered bodies in the tomb that had sat since the earliest part of the 20th century. In 1979 these bodies were finally interred or released to descendants for burial in another cemetery. Today the tomb is in need of repairs, but remains one of the most architecturally and historically interesting parts of NBG.

Challenge: Take a picture of yourself or a group picture of your tour friends in front of the receiving tomb!

We've reached the official end of our tour. You can cut back toward the Rochambeau Gates to leave on North Main, or you can head out through the main gates of the cemetery. We hope you learned something new and discovered something or someone in North Burial Ground that intrigued you or sparked your imagination. Come back any time, and of course, you're welcome to join us for eternity, if you wish. You know what they say about cemeteries.----"People are just dying to get in."



Challenge: Use the space above to design your own headstone and epitaph. How do you want to be remembered?

Thank you for joining us this Halloween! Follow us on Instagram @pvdnorthburialground for updates, information, and future programs.

We have to extend a special thank you to Levi Leland and Andrea Connell for their research, writing, and enthusiasm, and to NBG staff member Rose Martinez for all her NBG knowledge!

Levi, our expert on Sarah Helen Whitman and Providence's culture at the time of Sarah and Poe can be found at his website edgarallanpoeri.com

Andrea, our Victoriana expert can be found on Instagram @n0treallyaphotographer

HAPPY HALLOWEEN!

FROM ALL OF US AT NBG