

Historic Cemetery Advisory  
Commission  
2024 Annual Report

PSNC-  
Gary  
Ruff/



The commission met eleven (11) times in 2024.

Attendance at meetings:

Lew Keen (11)

Jean Quinn (6)

Penny Fitch (5)

Bob Conway (8)

Jimmy Lappin (9)

Elliott Caldwell (10)

Deborah Peart (9)

NHS-Bert Lippincott (8)

RIBHS- Theresa Stokes/Keith Stokes (8)

Barbara Shea (5)

Scott Wheeler (6)

Steve Marino (4)

Sue Garman (2)

Capt. Kevin Moreira (1)

Zachary Russell (3)

Pam Kelley (1)

Dr. Heather Rockwell (1)

Giles Eyre (1)

Barry Fitch (1)

Activities/accomplishments in 2024

Stonework/sitework

- 102 stones, 1 monument, and 6 box tombs were treated this year.
  - Beyond the Gravestone (the official stone workers for the city) treated 91 stones and one monument
    - 20 slate stones in the Common Burying Ground
    - 1 monument in the Common Burying Ground
    - 12 marble stones in the Common Burying Ground
    - 9 marble and granite stones in the Braman Cemetery
    - 50 marble and granite stones in the Old City Cemetery
  - 6 box tombs were treated in the Clifton Burial site by Hall Masonry
- Stonework by Beyond the Gravestone was masterfully accomplished. The city is fortunate to have them working in Newport.
- Hall masonry has done a very nice job for the city on all the box tombs in Clifton.
- GLA Preservation Plan funded the planting of two cherry trees between the Common Burying Ground and Island Cemetery and treated eleven (11) slate stones in God's Little Acre
- Two footstones that had been lying in the Common Burying Ground were installed in their proper place in the Friends burial site by Zach Russell and Frank Amaral (Island Cemetery).
- The commission recommended the removal of chain-link fencing along the edge of the Clifton burial site. City workers accomplished it in October.

Community engagement

- Volunteers from Embrace Home Mortgage spent their community service day for the 5th time in the Common Burying Ground. They cleaned marble gravestones and ledger stones on box tombs.
- A core of five volunteers spent Saturdays in the Common Burying Ground painting rusted iron work and cleaning gravestones.
- The commission developed interpretive signage that was installed:

The Common Burying Ground  
God's Little Acre  
Braman Cemetery/ Old City Cemetery (North  
Burial Ground)

Coddington Burial Ground  
Clifton Burial Ground  
Coggeshall Burial Ground

The Society of Friends Burial Ground  
Island Cemetery

- a. Drafts of the signs were exhibited at the Newport library May through September.
  - b. Most of the project funding was provided by Discover Newport.
  - c. Discover Newport and the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society provided graphic design input.
  - d. The signs arrived in October and installation was completed in November.
  - e. Images of some of the signs are included below.
4. Tours were offered to the public at the Arnold Burying Ground and the Common Burying Ground as part of the Rhode Island Historical Cemeteries Awareness and Preservation Weeks.
  5. Lectures were presented at the Edward King house on colonial burial sites and stone carvers and Gilded Age graves in Newport.
  6. The commission supported tours and programs offered by other organizations including Trinity Church, Historic Music of Newport, Museum of Newport's Irish History, and Island Cemetery.
  7. The Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, provided funds to repair the sign at God's Little Acre. City staff restored the sign.
  8. The commission worked on guidelines for burial requests in city owned sites. See attached.
  9. The commission approved a request from the NPD for installation of a Flock camera on Farewell Street at the Braman Cemetery.

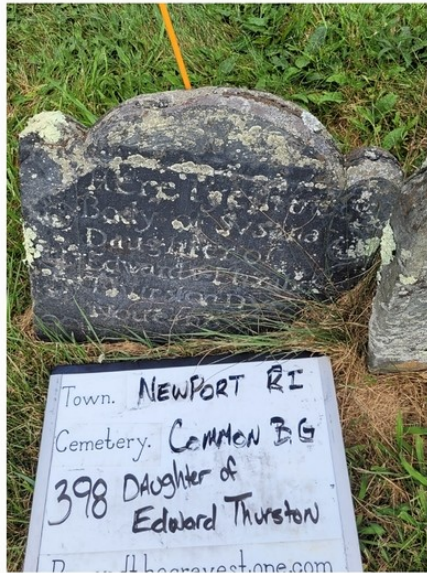
*We are very pleased to be part of the team that maintains our historic burial sites. Very little could be accomplished without the support of City Council and the efforts of city staff.*

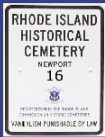
*A sample of stones treated this year*





**Holt Obelisk**





# Coggeshall Burial Ground

established circa 1647



This burial site was created for the Coggeshall family who were one of the nine families that founded Newport in 1639.

There are 50 burials in this site and there are 36 stone markers.

The stone for John Coggeshall, who died in 1647, is the oldest carved stone in the state and inspired Newport stone carver John Stevens. It is believed the stone was cut in 1684 when John's wife died.

Coggeshall was the first president of the colony under the patent obtained in 1643 by Roger Williams.

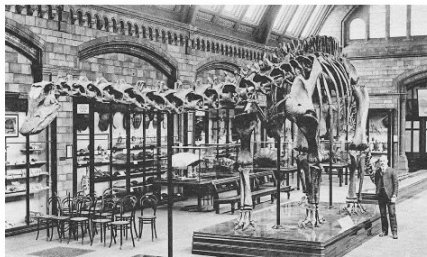
Notable graves include Abraham Redwood, library founder, and Benjamin Ellery, brother to a signer of the Declaration of Independence, William Ellery.

The gate and walls were added to the site in 1854 by Russell Coggeshall, who earned his money in the whaling industry. He died and was buried here in 1864.



John Coggeshall (1591-1647)

Arthur Sterry Coggeshall (1873-1958, 8th generation) was a prominent American paleontologist and museologist. His work is found mostly in New York City, Pittsburgh, and Santa Barbara.



Arthur Coggeshall with a 1905 dinosaur replica he created in London

Information presented by the  
Newport Historic Cemetery Advisory Commission

Among the family members buried here are three men named John Coggeshall:

**John Coggeshall (1591-1647)** is the first with this name buried here. **Major John Coggeshall (1619-1708)** was the son of John Coggeshall.

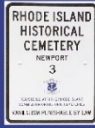
He served in the militia and in government.

**Captain John Coggeshall (1756-1827)** was the great-great-grandson of John Coggeshall. He was removed from membership in the Quaker Meeting for his participation in the American Revolution.

**Russell Coggeshall (1788-1864)** was the son of Capt. John Coggeshall. He paid for the obelisk in the center of the site, the stone wall, and entrance gate. He also left \$50,000 to the aged poor of Newport.



**Abraham Redwood's** grave is the box tomb the arrow points to near the back wall of the site. The library he built with others in Newport was one of the first in America.



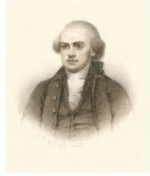
# Common Burying Ground

established circa 1665



## Notable graves include:

**William Ellery (1727-1820)**  
William Ellery was a Son of Liberty and Harvard-educated lawyer who signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776 as one of the delegates from Rhode Island to the Second Continental Congress.



**James (1697-1735) and Ann (1691-1763) Franklin**  
James Franklin was the official printer for Rhode Island. After his death, his wife, Ann, became the official printer for the colony. The family started publishing the Newport Mercury in 1758. James was the older brother of Benjamin Franklin. The Franklin press is on display at the Museum of the Newport Historical Society.



**Ida Lewis (1842-1911)**  
Ida Lewis was the lighthouse keeper of Lime Rock for 39 years. She was credited with saving at least 18 lives but she likely saved 36. People came to Newport to meet her and among them was President Grant.



**Dr. Harriet Rice (1866-1958)**  
Dr. Rice was an outstanding student at Rogers High School. She was the first African American to graduate from Wellesley College (1887). She treated wounded soldiers in France during WWI and was honored by the French government for her work. For a time, Dr. Rice treated patients at her home on Spring Street.

The Common Burying Ground was established in 1665 to provide a final resting place for everyone in Newport. The land was given to the city by John Clarke.

People of all religions were welcomed here, as were the wealthiest to the poorest individuals.

85% of Colonial burials in Newport were in this site.

The slate gravestones are uniform in their text and ornamentation.

The site covers 10.2 acres and contains the remains of more than eight thousand people.

It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

God's Little Acre, the northern section, has the largest collection of Colonial gravestones for African-heritage people in the country.

Scan for more information.



Presented by the Newport Historic Cemetery Advisory Commission.

## Newport Gravestone Carvers

**John Stevens (1645-1736)**  
Stevens started carving stones in Newport in 1705. Generations of his family carved the majority of the stones in Newport, and their work can be found all along the Atlantic Coast.



John Stevens stone carved by his son, William Stevens.



carved by John Bull

**John Bull (1734-1808)**

Bull learned to carve stone in the Stevens Shop, and his early work is in that style. He developed his own designs and created unique stones.

**John Howard Benson (1901-1956)**

Benson bought the Stevens Shop on Thames Street in 1927 and revived the stone-cutting business. He was a sculptor, calligrapher, and educator. His son, John Evert Benson, and grandson Nicholas Benson continued the work in the shop, elevating it to national prominence.



SAFE AREA OF FRAME - 34.5" X 22.5"



## **Guide to new burials in city owned sites**

The city of Newport does not sell burial lots but, at times, people who have previously purchased lots contact the city to make arrangements for burials.

This guide explains the procedure for new burials in a city owned site.

1. Contact- If someone believes a person has the right to be buried in a city owned burial site, contact should be made with Scott Wheeler, the Superintendent of Parks, Grounds and Forestry (swheeler@cityofnewport.com); 401-845-5802.
2. Proof of ownership needs to be established. Any document owned by the person or family is important as very few city records exist. Knowledge of who is buried in family plots and years of death are helpful in locating the correct location. Local funeral homes may be good sources of information. Island Cemetery is another place burial information can be found.
3. Proof of relationship of the deceased to adjacent internments of family members is needed.
4. Site evaluation is required by the city to confirm the location and the availability to add a burial and a qualified funeral director to evaluate the proposed burial site.
5. Full body or cremains burials approval will be dependent on available space.
6. No harm can come to stones or graves adjacent to the proposed burial site.
7. All work must be professionally conducted by an insured burial company.
8. Site work must be approved and coordinated with the Superintendent of Parks, Grounds and Forestry.
9. Following approved burials, graves must be graded with approved topsoil.
10. Approximately one year after burial, the contractor for the burial will inspect the site for settlement and install loam and seed as needed.
11. Any grave monument must be approved by the staff and the commission prior to installation.
12. Requests for burials require time to be reviewed by staff and the commission.