



## West Cemetery History

In 1727-28, during a lull in the French and Indian Wars, the British colonial settlers of the Hadley plantation began to build homes in their East District. In 1730, Hadley Town Meeting authorized a new burying ground for these settlers. The one-acre lot took its name—West Cemetery—from “the West Street” within which the cemetery was created. The West Street was one of two, 40 rod (660 foot) wide north-south highways established in a 1703 Hadley land division. Amherst’s early meetinghouses, village center commons, cemeteries, and other shared public uses would all be placed in these highways.

**1730-1769** – At first, West Cemetery was an open, unfenced meadow without roads or paths. Graves were not plotted, but simply dug where there was room as people died. Burials faced east and headstones faced west. Most graves were unmarked or had impermanent wooden markers. Permanent markers were of local stone—granite, schist, and sandstone. African Americans, Native Americans, and other people of color were buried together in a separate section of the cemetery at the southeast corner. The cemetery was kept open by the pasturing of livestock.

**1770-1832** – The burying ground acquired fixed boundaries during this period. Slate became a popular headstone material and funeral plantings using native species were introduced. Land for the North and South Amherst cemeteries was purchased in 1818.

**1833-1868** – The Town expanded the cemetery to the east and west, purchased the access road to North Pleasant Street (the West Highway), and fenced the area. Family plots began to be fenced or coped with stone, and marble became the predominant headstone material. In 1854, the Town laid out the first cemetery road. The next year, the Town Tomb was erected for the “free use of the town,” serving as temporary storage for bodies prior to burial, especially in winter. In 1858, Edward Dickinson arranged for an ornamental iron fence to enclose the Dickinson family plot.

**1870-1906** – Individuals and families were required to take deeds and pay for grave plots for the first time. West Cemetery doubled in size, and its roadway was extended to a new entrance on Triangle Street. Granite became a popular headstone material, and ornamental funeral trees and plantings were added.

**1907-2005** – The Gaylord Gate (1908) was built at the original burying ground entrance, and the Burnham Gate (1954) on Triangle Street became the new main entrance. More ornamental plantings were added, including a Camperdown Elm at the gravesite of William Smith Clark. Most plantings have since been lost to disease and neglect, and not replaced. The Community History Mural was completed in 2005.

**Source:** West Cemetery Preservation Plan, Denig Design Associates (Martha Lyon, consultant), 1999.

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HELP ENSURE A FUTURE FOR AMHERST’S PAST!  
YOUR DONATIONS CAN HELP MAINTAIN THE AMHERST COMMUNITY HISTORY MURAL, OR HELP PRESERVE AND RESTORE AMHERST’S HISTORIC CEMETERIES.

Make checks payable to “TOWN OF AMHERST, WEST CEMETERY MURAL” (for mural maintenance) or, “TOWN OF AMHERST, [WEST/NORTH/SOUTH] CEMETERY IMPROVEMENTS” (for improvements to specific cemeteries) and mail/deliver them to:

AMHERST HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
c/o Amherst Planning Department  
Town Hall, 4 Boltwood Ave.  
Amherst, MA, 01002.

Cemetery funds are organized by the Amherst Historical Commission for each cemetery and for the Amherst Community History Mural. All gifts and donations for these public purposes are tax-deductible. Contact the Amherst Planning Dept. (413) 259-3040 or [planning@amherstma.gov](mailto:planning@amherstma.gov) for information.



## A Guide to the Amherst Community History Mural

at the West Cemetery  
Amherst, Massachusetts

*She dwelleth in the Ground –  
Where Daffodils – abide –  
Her Maker – Her Metropolis –  
The Universe – Her Maid –  
- Emily Dickinson*



In January 1730, the town meeting of the British colonial plantation at Hadley voted to grant the settlers of its East District “liberty for a burying place.” Set in the ancient (1703) West Highway, the burying ground became known as the West Cemetery. Amherst was created as a separate colonial parish in 1759 and named for General Jeffery Amherst, a British hero of the French and Indian Wars. West Cemetery was expanded in 1833, and again in 1870. Amherst’s oldest burying ground retains some of the town center’s original unchanged landscape, recognizable to the early colonial settlers who lie here next to farmers, millworkers, servants, soldiers, professors, and poets.

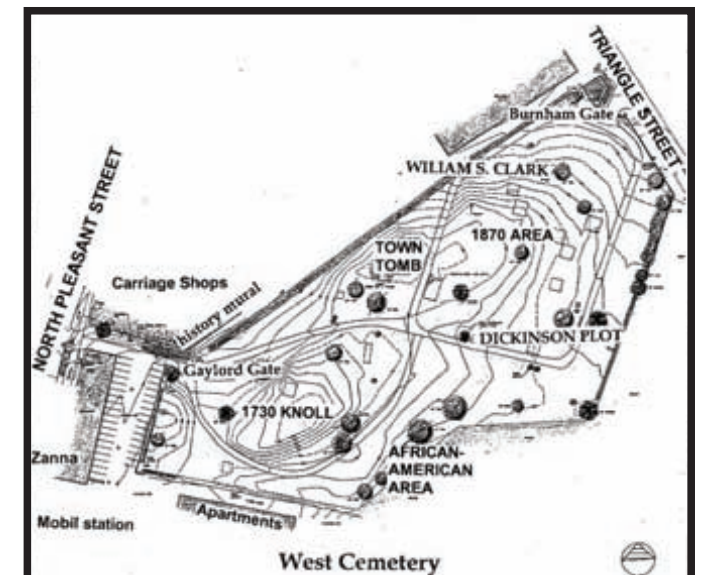
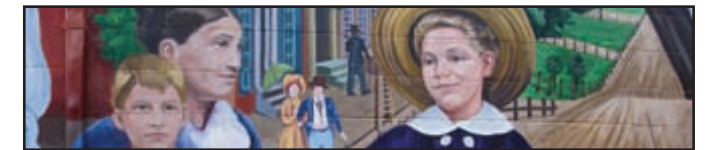
During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the cemetery suffered from neglect, years of environmental damage, uncontrolled foot traffic, vandalism, and inappropriate use. In 1998, Historic Massachusetts named West Cemetery one of Massachusetts’ “Ten Most Endangered Historic Resources.” By 2000, the Historical Commission had succeeded in getting Amherst’s ancient burying ground listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



After several incidents of vandalism in the 1990s, the Amherst Historical Commission undertook and completed the 1999 West Cemetery Preservation Plan. The Plan established a multi-year program of restoration, resulting in new perimeter fencing and restoration of the historic Gaylord and Burnham gates, as well as new signs and lighting. During installation of the fencing, a row of infested hemlocks was removed, exposing the adjacent commercial buildings.

The Commission decided to pursue a community history mural, to frame the cemetery and help the buildings blend into the landscape. Following a community participation process in 2002-2003, muralist David Fichter completed designs for the Amherst Community History Mural overlooking West Cemetery. Individuals, businesses and organizations generously funded the mural, and installation began in fall 2004.

The Amherst Community History Mural is designed to increase understanding of this ancient burying ground and build support for its restoration. The mural provides historical interpretation and enhances the cemetery as a public open space.



West Cemetery is located in downtown Amherst, between North Pleasant and Triangle Streets. Pedestrians can enter from either end. Vehicle access is from Triangle Street only. No parking is permitted in the burying ground except during funerals.

## Who's On the Mural

Those depicted on the Amherst Community History Mural were chosen based on citizen recommendations and represent the full sweep of Amherst's history as a settled community. Those who are buried in West Cemetery are indicated with a symbol (♣). From left to right, the mural is divided into the following aspects of Amherst's community life:

### FARMING

**Farm Children** – North of Mount Norwottuck, young Marjorie Atkins Elliott and a friend carry a basket of apples.

**Howard Atkins** (ladder, 1912-1997) – 20<sup>th</sup> century South Amherst orchardist and popular community leader who started the Atkins Farm Country Market.



**John Dimitro Waskiewicz** (1903-1989) & **Joseph George Waskiewicz** (1905-1995) – Brothers and 20<sup>th</sup> century North Amherst farmers whose father, Dimitro Waskiewicz, emigrated from Poland and bought a farm on Meadow Street in 1909. The family operates the farm today.



**Robert Stiles** (on right, 1906-1986) – Orchardist and dairy farmer Bob Stiles was born in the West Street house that now serves as the Admissions Office for Hampshire College. The 250-acre Stiles family farm was purchased as the site for the new college in 1965.

**Farm boy on branch** – Since 1728, generations of Amherst children have grown up and worked on local farms.

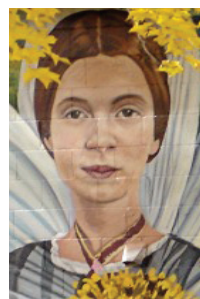
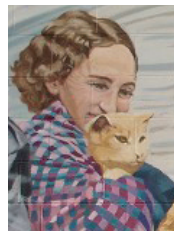
### LITERATURE



**Robert Frost** (seated, 1874-1963) – US Poet Laureate (1958-59) and four-time Pulitzer Prize winner Robert Frost moved to Amherst in 1917. Frost taught on and off at Amherst College until his death in 1963.

**Robert Francis** (standing, 1901-1987) – Friend of Robert Frost and master of the lyrical short poem, Francis lived in monastic simplicity at "Fort Juniper," a small cabin a mile upstream of the Factory Hollow (Puffer's Pond) waterfall.

**Emily Dickinson** ♣(1830-1886) & **Lavinia Dickinson** ♣ (with cat, 1833-1899) – Amherst's most famous citizen and an internationally revered poet. Emily's private torrent of words was published after her death. Her younger sister Lavinia managed the Homestead after their parents died.



**Eugene Field** (head on hand, 1850-1895) – A journalist and children's poet, Field spent the latter part of his childhood in Amherst. Author of "Little Boy Blue," "Winken, Blinken, and Nod," and other children's poems.



**Lilian Garis** (writing, 1872-1954) – Pioneering woman journalist, suffragette, and author of the Bobbsey Twins books. Her husband, Howard Garis, wrote the Uncle Wiggily series.



**Ray Stannard Baker** (tending bees, 1870-1946) – An early muckraking journalist, Baker wrote a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Woodrow Wilson. As David Grayson he wrote about his gardening and beekeeping on Sunset Avenue.

**Helen Hunt Jackson** (1830-1885) – Amherst native and contemporary of Emily Dickinson, Jackson authored nature and travel stories of the West, as well as the popular novel *Ramona* which highlighted the plight of Native Americans.

### DOMESTIC LIFE

From a photograph of a Dickinson family outing, set in front of the Phenix Hall [sic] in the town center, looking east along Main Street to the Dickinson Homestead and the Pelham Hills.

**Mabel Loomis Todd** (1856-1932) – A widely-traveled and active social leader, Todd was the first editor of Emily Dickinson's poetry (and mistress of Emily's older brother, Austin Dickinson).



**William Clark** – Dickinson family friend (not Col. William S. Clark; see below).

**Susan Gilbert Dickinson** (1830-1913) & **"Gib" Dickinson** (1875-1883) – Wife of Austin Dickinson (Emily's brother) and their young son. Gib's death at age 8 of typhoid fever was a severe blow to family and friends.



**Bradford Hitchcock** – Dickinson family friend.

**Edward "Ned" Dickinson** (1861-1898) – Older son of Austin and Sue Dickinson.

**Martha "Mattie" Dickinson** (later Bianchi, 1866-1943) – Austin and Sue Dickinson's daughter. Novelist and editor of her Aunt Emily's work.

**David Todd** (1855-1939) – A distinguished Amherst College professor of astronomy, Todd believed that "canals" on Mars were artifacts of civilization, and conducted high-elevation balloon experiments to detect Martian radio signals. His wife Mabel gave lectures titled, "A Message from Mars."

### EDUCATION & the MILITARY



**Edward Dickinson** ♣(seated, 1803-1874) – Amherst College treasurer, lawyer, legislator, and pivotal civic leader, Edward Dickinson helped to bring the railroad to Amherst. Father of Emily Dickinson.

**Noah Webster** (standing, 1758-1843) – Childhood education and literacy advocate. While living in Amherst (1812-1822), Webster completed most of his *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, was a state legislator, and helped found both Amherst Academy and Amherst College.

**Col. William Smith Clark** ♣ (in uniform, 1826-1886) – Early Amherst College professor, Civil War hero, pioneering agronomist and educator. Founder and third President of Mass. Agricultural College (now UMass). Founder and first President of Sapporo University in Hokkaido.

**Sanford Jackson** (1831-1863, based on a recruiting poster) – An Amherst member of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry—the first all-black Civil War regiment. Husband of Angeline Palmer (see Henry Jackson, below). Nearly 30 black soldiers enlisted on Amherst's behalf. Sanford, his brother Jarvis, and two others gave their "last full measure of devotion" to freedom.



**Lt. Frazar Stearns** ♣ (background, in uniform, 1840-1862) – Well-loved young son of Amherst College President William Augustus Stearns and close friend of the Dickinson family. Frazar's death at the battle of Newbern while serving as Col. Clark's adjutant sent shock waves through the community.

**Henry Jackson** ♣ (foreground, 1817-1902) – Popular local teamster, and probable conductor on local Underground Railroad routes, Jackson traveled up and down the Valley from Springfield to Vermont. He was a central figure in the 1840 rescue of Angeline Palmer, a young black servant girl whose Belchertown employers planned to take her south and sell her. Forcibly "abducted" by Henry and two other men, Angeline was transported to Colrain, where she grew up in safety.

**Anna Reed Goodwin** ♣ (seated, 1869-1943) – Anna Goodwin, known as "Ma" to many Mass. State College students, ran the Colonial Inn for 28 years. Husband Moses Goodwin ran a bicycle and locksmith shop. They were active in the AME Zion Church's music program with daughters Amy, Olive, and Ruth. The church was re-named the Goodwin Memorial AME Zion Church in 1967.

**Levi Stockbridge** (far rear, with shovel, 1820-1904) – North Hadley native and Scientific Agriculture pioneer, Stockbridge was the first farm manager, agricultural instructor, and fourth President of "Mass Aggie," and namesake for the Stockbridge School of Agriculture. He also served as a state legislator.

### INDUSTRY & ECONOMIC LIFE



**Martha J. Thomas/Thompson** ♣ (seated, 1834-1894), & **William Newport** (paper boy, 1855-?) – Residents of a tight-knit African-American neighborhood on Northampton Road—now the Westside National Historic Register District.

*On the trolley:*

**Orra White Hitchcock** W (1796-1863) & **Edward Hitchcock** W (1793-1864) Both seated, rear trolley - Scientist, educator and minister, Edward Hitchcock served as principal of Deerfield Academy and president of Amherst College. Orra illustrated many of Edward's lectures and books.

**Dick Hamilton** (1896-1985) & **Luella Hamilton** (1898-1978) Both seated, mid-trolley – Dick was owner of the Socony College Town Service Centre and leader of "Dick Hamilton's Orchestra," popular in the 1930s-40s. Luella was secretary for the Amherst Assessor's office for many years.

**General Ebenezer Mattoon, Jr.** ♣ (1755-1843) & **Mary Dickinson Mattoon** ♣ (1758-1835) Both standing, front of trolley – Grandson of a 17<sup>th</sup> century Scottish soldier, Ebenezer was a Revolutionary War hero, leading early citizen, Justice of the Peace, and High Sheriff of Hampshire County. The Amherst chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) is named for Mary.

**Walter Dickinson Cows** (standing inside trolley, 1852-1928) – Patriarch of an early (1738) North Amherst family involved in farming (crops and dairy). Cows was the founder of the W.D. Cows company, a forestry and millworking businesses critical to Amherst's housing and development. The W.D. Cows sawmill and lumber company in North Amherst is the oldest continuously-operating business in Amherst.



**Stephen Perry Puffer, Sr.** (trolley conductor, 1890-1975) – Member of a prominent North Amherst family, local trolley conductor and Amherst's highway department superintendent (1929-1955), Puffer was a contractor in the 1930s construction of nearby Quabbin Reservoir. His son, Stephen P. Puffer, Jr. carried on the family contracting business.

**"Peanut John" Musante** (1848-1904) & **Candida Musante** (18??-1924) – First-generation Italian immigrants, the Musantes moved to Amherst in 1882. They worked as fruit and nut vendors from a sidewalk stand along Merchant's Row on South Pleasant Street and a wagon at Amherst College. Candida continued to operate the stand for 20 years after John died.



**Burnett Hat Factory Girls** (foreground) – Irish women workers at the Burnett Hat factory, one of two successful straw and palm leaf hat factories operated near the Amherst Railroad Depot. In the 1870s Amherst was "the hatmaking center of the nation." Immigrant Irish men and women constituted a large part of the laboring, factory, and service workforce in 19<sup>th</sup> century Amherst.

**Henry M. Hills** ♣ (rear, standing, 1833-1896) – Son of factory founder Leonard Hills, Henry was the founder and president of the Hills Company located east of the railroad tracks. Along with Col. W.S. Clark, Hills was instrumental in bringing the Massachusetts Agricultural College to Amherst, and helped to organize local lighting, water, and gas companies.

*Rearground – Amherst House Hotel balcony, left to right.*

**Reverend David Parsons** ♣ (1712-1781) – Minister of Amherst's first church—the Church of Christ in Hadley's Third Precinct (later the First Congregational Church of Amherst) and a staunch Loyalist during the Revolutionary War. Reverend Parsons and his son, Dr. David Parsons, preached from Amherst's principal pulpit for 70 years.



**Dr. Peter Merzbach** (1907-1997) – Arriving in Amherst during World War II, German native Peter Merzbach found himself the only doctor in town (the others being away in the military). He opened a general practice and served as Amherst College's physician. After the war, Dr. Merzbach opened an obstetrical practice, delivering over 10,000 babies during his career (many of whom were named Peter).



**Robert Gilbert "Gil" Roberts** ♣ (1896-2002) – World-traveled jazz musician, renowned banjo player and member of the Blue Ribbon Syncopators, Gil Roberts played with Louis Armstrong and accompanied Josephine Baker. He played locally with the New Black Eagle Jazz Band and Blue Horizon Jazz Band. Member of a longstanding Amherst family of blended African-American and Native-American (Montauk) ancestry.

**Harlan Fiske Stone** (1872-1946) – A New Hampshire farm boy expelled from the Scientific Agriculture program at Mass Aggie for leading other students in pranks, Stone instead attended Amherst College, graduated in 1894 and went into law. Appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1925 by fellow Amherst College alumnus President Calvin Coolidge, and elevated to Chief Justice in 1941 by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

**Charles "Professor Charley" J. Thompson** ♣ (1820-1906) – A long-time employee of the Stearns family, Charles Thompson was hired as a maintenance worker when William Augustus Stearns became President of Amherst College. It was Charles Thompson who retrieved and cared for the body of Lt. Frazar Stearns after the battle of Newbern, stood vigil with Frazar's body in Johnson Chapel, and saw that Frazar's sword (now owned by the Amherst History Museum) was hidden from his grieving father.

