

Cemetery Walk

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NOTES:

This tour is designed for the Central Connecticut Health District, which covers the towns of Berlin, Newington, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield. They organize district-wide walking competitions as a way of encouraging district residents to be physically active.

Town walks are another means of encouraging people to be active in our district.

The tour has two target audiences, a weekday audience that is typically composed of retired people, and a weekend audience composed of younger people who work during the week. It is expected to last 2 hours.

This outline can be cherry-picked to create shorter tours for events like tours for school children. We hope that as you learn new things about our history you will add them to the tour.

Tour starts by the flag pole

Starting here makes parking easy and senior people don't have as far to walk to the start.

There are two loops from here; a north loop and a south loop. They're meant to start at the oldest part of the cemetery and proceed, following the progression of additions to the cemetery, to provide a chronological tour.

Opening remarks:

Why tour a cemetery? History, stories, and genealogy, but mostly stories. History is about people and their stories. Many of these are fascinating.

The cemetery provides a map of the town's history in that for the most part, there is a pattern from the older graves in the cemetery to the newer ones:

- a. The oldest graves are in the part of the cemetery by the flagpole, originally known as Cole's Hill.

You'll notice that often the same family names repeat. Most of the early families who settled in Stepney (Rocky Hill) came from Wethersfield. These families were the driving force in the town until the turn of the 20th century.

- b. Many of the people who shaped the 18th and 19th century in Rocky Hill are buried in the center part of the cemetery which expanded to the southeast.
- c. 1847 & 1848 the cemetery was expanded to the north and northwest to its current northern boundaries.

- d. People of the turn of the twentieth century and the twenty-first century are in the south part of the cemetery. The advent of the trolley, manufacturing, and the quarry brought changes the demographics of the town. In the mid-19th century Irish names started to show up. In the early years of the 20th century, Italian names appeared (there are a large number of Italian names in the southeast central part of the cemetery.) Highways, like the Silas Deane, opened the town up to commuters and Interstate 91 fundamentally changed the town from a farming community to a suburb.
- e. If you cross the road, the graves are fairly new. Some of the surnames are Jafari, Bartosiak, Bielsclad, and Saccente. This hints at the evolution, growth, and diversity of the town's makeup.

Loop #1: The north part of the cemetery

STOP	TALKING POINTS
01 - The Cairn and flagpole	<p>Legend had it that this was put here as a tribute to soldiers; probably from WWI. John Serra and Bob Herron spent a great deal of time trying to prove or refute this.</p> <p>Recently we discovered a document in an obscure corner of the Department of Parks and Recreation (<i>Charles Holmes: Rocky Hill Cemetery: Past and Present</i>) that says this was the site of a small building which housed a horse-drawn hearse and tools used for upkeep of the cemetery (i.e. the tomb of the unknown tool shed).</p> <p>The lesson is, If you don't work at preserving your history, you may end up misinterpreting it. You may even lose it.</p> <p>The flagpole was erected in 1968 to honor Rocky Hill veterans.</p>
02 - Baby Deming	<p>IN 1720 there were 23 people in Stepney Parish (Rocky Hill). This was considered a sufficient population to justify a cemetery in Rocky Hill.</p> <p>You see two dates, 1730 and 1731, as the date the cemetery opened. Before 1750, the Julian calendar, which had the year start on March 25, was used; after 1750, the Gregorian calendar, which had the year starting on January 1st, was used. The cemetery opened on January 29, 1730/31 depending on the calendar you use.</p> <p>Baby Deming was the first person buried at Center Cemetery (1731). She died at birth and wasn't given a name.</p> <p>There was no permanent doctor in town at this time. Medical care typically involved having a book such as "English Physician", "Every Man His Own Physician" or "Domestic Physician" in the house which contained a few primitive treatments. If you were lucky there might be a midwife or bonesetter available.</p> <p>Her parents were Benjamin & Mary Deming, They buried her where they could look out the window and see her grave. The Deming house still exists at the corner of Pratt Street & Dividend Road.</p> <p>The stone contains an angel's face, saying that an angel is buried here. Others have fingers pointing to heaven, where the deceased had gone. There was an art to the carvings grave stones that is being lost as air pollution deteriorates the stones.</p>
03 - Dr. Aaron Hosford	<p>He was the first professional medical practitioner in Rocky Hill. He practiced for over 30 years. He charged 16 cents a visit.</p>

	<p>Dr. Hosford was an improvement over a time of books, midwives, and bonesetters, but his cures might still involve bleeding, bee-stings, leeches, and extremes of heat and cold.</p>
04 – Rev. Chapin	<p>The first Ministers of the Rocky Hill Congregational Church were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rev. Daniel Russell – 37 years • Rev. Barrage Merriam – 11 years • Rev. John Lewis – 19 years • Rev. Calvin Chapin – 54 years <p>Dr. Chapin was a fife player in Revolution (his stone is behind the large monument.) He was active in the community, e.g. libraries, etc.) His house still exists at the corner of Chapin Ave. and Elm St.</p>
05 - Robbins Crypt	<p>The bodies are on shelves, not in not coffins.</p> <p>About 1999, kids vandalized crypt. The police chief found 20 skeletons dressed in perfectly preserved clothes.</p> <p>Esq. John Robbins owned the Cumberland Inn on Old Main Street. His son Jacob owned the house next door with the big white columns.</p> <p>Squire John seems to have been a real S.O.B. He beat his kids and supported price-gouging on corn in the State Assembly; he was a slave holder and one of the most power men in Connecticut at the time.</p> <p>Esq. John’s first wife was Martha Williams, a relative of Elias Williams, who was also a slaveholder.</p> <p>His neighbor was William Griswold, Squire John’s neighbor and another slave holder.</p>
06 - William Griswold	<p>He was a ship’s captain and shipbuilder. He owned the shipyard which built the brigantine Minerva in Rocky Hill. It was the first ship commissioned to the Connecticut Navy during the Revolution.</p> <p>The Minerva is purported to be the ship on the Rocky Hill Town Seal.</p> <p>Captain Griswold brought four slaves back with him from one of his voyages and was one of several wealthy families along Old Main St. who owned slaves.</p> <p>Note that just northeast of this headstone is a memorial to Albert Griswold, the educator for whom Griswold Middle School is named.</p>
07 - Levaughn family	<p>Several members of the LeVaughn family served in the Civil War. The family made a huge sacrifice.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roland Levaughn was a First Sergeant who was captured at Plymouth, NC April 1864 and died at Charleston, SC in Sept. 1864. • William O. LeVaughn was also a first Sergeant. He was also captured in April 1864 and died at Andersonville prison Sept. 1864. • Donald Levaughn was a Private. Sept. 1862. He was wounded at Antietam.
08 – Edward Bulkeley	<p>He was a Captain in the Civil War.</p> <p>His tombstone is a table tombstone. It is called a Wolve Stone. The story is that the slab of stone under the table was intended to keep wolves and other animals from digging the body up.</p> <p>When church services lasted all day, the Bulkeleys would have lunch at the “table” during the mid-day church break.</p> <p>Gershom Bulkeley opened a grist mill at Dividend Pond in 1678. It was the first manufacturing concern in Rocky Hill.</p> <p>For many years, the Bulkeley family owned the land from Main St to Dividend Park along Dividend Road.</p> <p>The flagpole on the green is the Bulkeley flagpole, dedicated in 1917 by Joseph Bulkeley, one of the Bulkeley descendants.</p>
09 - Jarvis Blinn	<p>He was a Captain in the Connecticut Volunteers. He was one of several Rocky Hill soldiers who was killed at the battle of Antietam (shot through the throat).</p> <p>Two other men named Blinn, who were Civil War soldiers, are buried in the cemetery. We passed their graves on the way to William Griswold’s. Both are buried east of William Griswold’s stone.</p> <p>Wadsworth Blinn was from Middletown and John S. Blinn was from Wethersfield. It was not unusual for extended families to show up along the river from Wethersfield, down the river to Middletown.</p>
10 - Elizur Belden	<p>There are several Civil War veterans buried in this part of the cemetery. In 1860 the U.S. Census showed 247 families living in Rocky Hill. 103 men served as soldiers in the Civil War. Given that most of the families in Rocky Hill were interrelated at the time, it is unlikely that any family remained untouched by the war.</p> <p>Elizur was a veteran of the Civil War and kept an extensive diary. The Beldens were one of several families that came to Rocky Hill from Wethersfield.</p>

	The Beldens have a long history as farmers, fishermen, sailors, and shipbuilders.
10 - Boardman family	As you approach the flagpole at the end of this loop, you come upon several Boardman Headstones. Samuel Boardman was the first white person to settle in Rocky Hill in 1649. He is probably buried at the Old Burial Ground in Wethersfield as were most of the early settlers of Rocky Hill. The metal Boardman memorial is one of two in the cemetery. It was probably made at the foundry or Billings & Spencer Drop Forge.
Q& A rest stop	We-re back at the flagpole.

Loop #2

STOP	TALKING POINTS
11 - Seven Heroes Stones	<p>These are markers: the soldiers are buried overseas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antonio Campilio¹ • Ellis Beck² • Frank Bennino³ • Horace Bennino • Armond Chapron⁴ • Richard Dexter⁵ • Albert Goss⁶ • Henry Maxham⁷. <p>Notice that several of the surnames are Italian. Many Italians came to Rocky Hill, most of them from Carvara, Pescara, Abruzzi, Italy, which was a coal mining district in Italy, to work in the quarry. Many sent for relatives who</p>

¹ Antonio Campilio was the only Rocky Hill soldier killed on the battlefield in WWI, although several were wounded and later died of their wounds.

² Ellis Beck was killed in action in France. He was a star athlete at Uconn. He had two brothers in the Army: Lt. Robert Beck of the tank corps, and William Beck with a motorized infantry division.

³ Both Bennino brothers were killed in France in 1944. Horace was killed in action in early August and a few weeks later Frank was killed in a motor vehicle accident. Their father, Nunzio Bennino was a veteran of WWI.

⁴ Armond Chapron was killed in action in Germany in May of 1945.

⁵ Richard Dexter was a turret gunner on a B25. He was killed in action over Corsica in 1944.

⁶ Albert Goss was a Marine. He was reported killed in action at Eniwetok Island, Sept, 14, 1944.

⁷ Staff Sergeant Henry Maxham was a much-decorated gunner on a B17. He was killed over Germany in 1945.

	took jobs in the quarry, the foundry, and on farms.
12 – The Italian Corner	<p>On the southeast corner of the center portion of the cemetery are the graves of several Italians.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just south of the road in the middle part of the cemetery is a section devoted to the DeJohn family. Angelo DeJohn was a soldier during WWI. He was one of the people who came here from Carvara. The Dejohn's became prominent real estate developers in the mid-20th century. • Massimio DeBernardino was another Italian from Carvara who served in the Army in WWI. He was a victim of poison gas. He died of the gassing in 1935. • While he was being gassed, an article appeared in the Hartford Courant which listed men who were evading the draft. Mr. Bernardino's name was erroneously included on it.
<i>13 - Find Florence Grant</i>	
14 - Dr. Rufus Griswold	Dr. Griswold was a respected Rocky Hill physician and historian. His notes provided information on Rocky Hill to Henry Stiles for his book <i>History of Ancient Wethersfield</i> .
15 - Capt. Charles Smith	<p>He was a ferry captain in New London.</p> <p>People named Smith operated three ferries on the Connecticut River, the Rocky Hill/Glastonbury Ferry, the Pratt-Smith ferry between Wethersfield and Glastonbury, and the Hartford/Glastonbury ferry. It is unclear if all these Smiths were related.</p> <p>Captain Smith was a ferry captain in New London. The legend is that he</p>

	<p>was a drinker who fell into a hatch in a drunken stupor and died.</p> <p>The tombstone was provided by the Woodsmen of America insurance company and was probably purchased from the Sears Roebuck Company.</p>
<p>16 - George B. Chandler</p>	<p>He was Compensation Commissioner of Connecticut and adjudicated work-related claims in the early 20th century.</p> <p>He performed a role which was, essentially, propaganda commissioner for the State of Connecticut. during WWI.</p> <p>His daughter worked for him, then joined the Army as a nurse. There is anecdotal evidence that she wrote several articles for Collier's Magazine under the name, Ruth Chandler Moore.</p> <p>Morris Alling, Minister of the Rocky Hill Congregational Church served under him and oversaw the Four Minute Men talks, quick patriotic speeches delivered by prominent state people in theaters while sets were being struck or reels were being changed.</p>
<p>17 - Mosers: Oran & David</p>	<p>Dr. Oran Moser came to Rocky Hill in 1903. He was an archetypical country doctor as was his son.</p> <p>He made house calls rather than having office hours. In the early years, he had had a bicycle, a sleigh, and sometimes used snowshoes to get to an isolated house. He responded to accidents at the quarry, and the foundry, child births, and all other medical emergencies. He also made calls at the Veteran's home and set up a small park between his house and the liquor store on the Silas Deane Highway where the veterans could drink in safety and where he could counsel them about their health.</p>

	<p>Dr. Oran Moser's son, David, became the town doctor after serving in WWII. He was active in the town and was first Mayor of Rocky Hill.</p>
<p>18 - Beldens: Elwood, Cora, Walter</p>	<p>Remember Elizur Belden, the Civil War veteran from the far north corner of the cemetery? These were his relatives.</p> <p>Elwood W. Belden operated a general store in the center of town, had a small farm, and ran a shad fishing business as well. He was active in town affairs and held several offices.</p> <p>In 1921 a fire, which started in Elwood Belden's store destroyed much of the center district of Rocky Hill.</p> <p>.</p> <p>Cora Belden was active in several war support offices during WWI and seems to have been a real doer. She took the office of Town Treasurer when her husband died in office. The Cora Belden library is named for her not because she was a librarian, but because she was so instrumental in making it a success. Ruth Warner Brooks in her memoir, <i>My memories of Rocky Hill</i> says nobody would have called Mrs. Belden 'Cora' and that she (Ruth) cringed at the thought.</p> <p>Elwood and Cora Belden's son Walter served in the Army in WWI.</p>
<p>19 - Susan Weber</p>	<p>Susan Weber was a passenger on the Titanic She was moving to Rocky Hill to help her brother raise his children.</p> <p>After the ship hit the iceberg, she was roused from her stateroom in her nightgown and slippers. She was loaded into a lifeboat but the lowering lines snagged. The boat was six stories over the water and two crewman had to cut the lines simultaneously to make the boat drop the six stories without</p>

	<p>dumping. Thankfully, the boat held together and nobody in the boat died.</p> <p>Susan's lifeboat floated in the freezing cold for several hours before the passengers were picked up by the Carpathia. She was brought to New York where her brother found her several days later.</p> <p>NOTE: We're approaching the finale of the tour. This story should be told with lots of drama, the size of the ship, the distance of the drop, the coldness, the nastiness of not having a bath or change of clothes for six days.</p> <p>For example: describe the length of the ship (880 ft.) as starting from Myers Drive, on the far side of Dividend Road, across Main St. There are trees south of the cemetery that are about three stories high. Six stories is twice as tall as the tallest of these trees.</p>
20 - Ashwell/Churchill	<p>The Ashwell House is still standing northwest on the Corner of Chapin and Elm. The next house on the west is the Churchill house.</p> <p>The Churchill farm was located across Elm St. from Ashwell, behind the old houses.</p> <p>Ashwell Street is named for Deacon Ashwell of the Congregational Church. He was Town Assessor, Justice of the Peace, and a farmer. When he died in 1919, he was the oldest surviving veteran of the Civil War.</p>
21 - Second Tabletop	<p>We think this is Capt. Iphriam Goodman, who died Feb. 1739. The inscription is illegible.</p> <p>How do we rescue these reminders of our past?</p>
22 - The Valley Hotel	<p>The Valley Hotel was at the corner of Main Street and Grimes Road. Main Street was part of the Saybrook</p>

	Turnpike and the Valley Hotel was one of the first hotels in Rocky Hill after you crossed the border from Cromwell. In 1886-1896 The town library was located at the Bulkeley House, the former Valley Hotel.
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	Also known as the Goodrich House and the Rocky Hill Hotel
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Wrap-up

The working slogan of the Rocky Hill Historical Society is, “The friendly little museum in the center of town.” The slogan could easily be extended to cover the whole town as, “The friendly little town in the center of the state.” That is our goal.

Thanks for coming; tell your friends; volunteer at your local Historical Society.