

Family Graveyards of Rye and the Creation of Central Cemetery

Until the late 1800's family members were buried in graveyards on their farmsteads. A few were also buried behind the Congregational Church in the town center in the early to mid-1800's. These family burial plots often included a large monument, granite posts, a metal railing and sometimes had an entrance gate. In the Rye Historical Society Town Museum stands a fine example of a Victorian entry gate that was rescued from a graveyard on West Road. Most commonly, these graveyards had simple head stones, sometimes foot stones and some simple, unmarked field stones. Several of these graveyards were found off the road.

During Victorian times, many of these graveyards could be seen along the roadways. Citizens complained that they did not want reminders of the dead and the selectmen agreed that it could be a bit depressing. The Wedgwood graveyard on Lang Road has a substantial stone and cement wall completely surrounding the graves, which must have been put up to appease Victorian Rye after the last of the Wedgwood's was buried there in the early 1880's.

Because of a growing population and people being squeamish about death, a new Central Cemetery was established off Central Road behind the Congregational Church in 1893. Families were urged to remove the remains of their ancestors to newly purchased plots at the Central Cemetery. However, over sixty families refused to do so. The number of roadside graves was reduced but several remained visible along the roadways. People had the option of bringing any monuments and markers from the graveyards, but many simply abandoned those stones and had new ones created. One such abandoned headstone on Harbor Road was that of Charles Goss, age 24, who died in 1859. Sometime after 1893 his headstone was taken by the neighboring Brown family on the corner of Harbor and Locke and used as a step to enter their house. The Sherman family discovered this was a marker when they turned it over. They then donated it to the Rye Historical Society where it can be viewed today outside the Town Museum.

The Town of Rye purchased the six acres of land for the Central Cemetery from the Locke family for \$840 in 1893, as well as \$600 for a vault. Cemetery trustees were voted in, a hearse was bought and a garage built on site. The town laid out 314 lots and the cemetery began to fill up. In town reports from the early 1900's, there are complaints from the cemetery superintendent that many plots were left with trash. Apparently, the old-world tradition of having graveside parties with the ancestors, which continues today in Russia and other parts of the world, was alive and well in Rye at that time.

In 1901, cemetery trustees reported that 232 of the original 314 lots had been sold. The trustees also predicted that old graveyards would be abandoned and that many new lots remained for purchase. They also were looking at the graveyard immediately behind the church, which they eventually acquired. In 1920, the town reported there was \$3,800 in trust funds, most to pay for maintenance for cemetery plots.

The cemetery trustees were again irate in the town report of 1938 about the trash being left at many of the plots. Partying with the departed had a long tradition in Rye. That year the town bought the Bartlett Field in order to expand the Central Cemetery. The Parsons family at One Central Road donated the field just beyond Rye Town Hall for a town green, perhaps one of the most picturesque in New England with the cemetery, church, town hall, One Central Road and the former Garland Tavern for a background. The

town erected the stone wall separating the green from the road. The cemetery also planted seventeen maples in a row as a memorial to Edward Dodd, further enhancing the beauty of the landscape. By this time the graveyard in back of the church had become part of the Central Cemetery and plots left in that area were sold to people throughout the 20th century.

In 1976, Louise Tallman of the new Rye Historical Society identified most of the family graveyards and the Rye Historical Society made it a project to begin restoring damaged stones and cleaning up the sites. The committee included Louise and Charles Tallman, Jessie Herlihy, John Sarni and Bonnie Goodwin. This committee worked into the 1980's before disbanding due to lack of volunteers.

1976 was also the year that one of the most memorable events occurred on the town green, which had been donated by the Parsons family in 1938. The huge Bi-Centennial parade ended at the green with speeches, music, a volley by the militia and a general feeling of euphoria in the celebration of the town and the nation.

In the 1980's the cemetery laid out the new section behind the superintendent's building that stretched to the town woods and planted trees on either side of the new central drive. The Central Cemetery was now complete. Records of family plot locations are at the cemetery, library and town museum.

In 1989, the town defeated by one vote a proposal to build a new police station on town-owned land adjacent to the cemetery just beyond town hall. This historic, razor thin victory over the desecration of the Central Cemetery was later celebrated, even by some who voted for it.

In 2010, Louise Tallman provided notes for all of the historic graveyards and Mike Mittelman took photos. The Rye Historical Society compiled these documents into two three-ring binders for public viewing at the museum.

In 2012, a new state law made it clear that historic family graveyards are not private property and cannot be disturbed. Access to any graveyard that is not on a public road must be secured from the adjacent home owner. Care of the graveyards is the responsibility of descendants, abutters or others who want to adopt a graveyard. The Select Board turned management of caretaking the graveyards over to the Rye Heritage Commission. The Commission put out a legal notice so all descendants could come forward. One member of the Brackett family did respond and he is caring for the burial site on Brackett Road on the edge of the marsh. A handful of others have adopted graveyards but the large majority of them have not been officially adopted as of 2020.

These graveyards need to be cared for. If you are interested in adopting a graveyard, please get in touch with the Rye Heritage Commission, Town Hall, 10 Central Rd, Rye, NH 03870

In 2020, Rye Heritage Commission chair, Phil Walsh, digitized the two binders for ease of public access and they were added to the websites of the historical society and the town of Rye.

Alex Herlihy
FEB. 2020

BURIAL GROUND	LOCATION	CUSTODIAN	CONDITION
1. Beebe	Star Island	Isles of Shoals Corporation	good
2. Berry	Opposite 130 Central Road		Well maintained
3. Brackett "Massacre" Burial Ground,	Opposite 605 Bracket. Rd.	Thomas O'Neil, descendent	good
4. Brown	West Road and off West Road		
5. Caswell	Star Island	Isles of Shoals Corporation	Excellent
6. Caswell	Off Washington, rear of 117 Washington Rd		
7. Dalton	Garland Road		
8. Dow	139 Parsons Road		Cannot find in the thicket
9. Dow	Opposite 1159 Washington Road		Needs tree surgeon, chain repair, Stone cleaning and Stones to be righted
10. Foss	Washington Road		Well mowed; stones need cleaning
11. Foye	181 Brackett Road		Obelisk needs cleaning
12. Garland	Off Washington		
13. Jenness	Cable Road		
14. Lang	Washington Road		
15. Locke	Off Harbor Road		
16. Locke/Downing	190 Locke Road		Good condition, needs maintenance; great plaque of Hannah Philbrick Kimball
17. Locke	Off Brackett Road		
18. Locke	Old Beach Road		
19. Marden	Off Wallis Road		
20. Marden	Off West Road		
21. Nason single marker	Washington Road		
22. Odiorne	Off Brackett		
23. Odiorne	Odiorne Park; rear of 505	Daughters of the Revolution	Sign needs repair, fallen

	Ocean Boulevard		stones
24. Old Burial Ground, Tuck Monument	Star Island	Isles of Shoals Corporation	
25. Philbrick	Off Cable		
26. Philbrick	Church Road	St Andrews	Well maintained
27. Remick	Brackett Road		
28. Salter/Rand	651 Wallis Road		Needs trees pulled, trees trimmed, stones need clearing
29. Seavey	Off Brackett Road		
30. Seavey	Off Pioneer Road		
31. Seavey	Off Sagamore Road		
32. Sleeper	West and off West		
33. South Road Cemetery	434 South Road		Need seedlings pulled, broken stones, stones need cleaning GOOD CANDIDATE FOR PROJECT
34. Trefethen, a single marker	Washington Rd		
35. Tucker	Off Elwyn		
36. Tucker	Off Washington		
37. Varrell	Sagamore Road		
38. Wallis	500 Brackett Road		Good condition, stones need cleaning
39. Webster	Off Long John		
40. Wedgwood	Lang Road		

Various unmarked fieldstones exist off Central, Grove, Sagamore, Wallis, Washington, Park Ridge and Odiorne

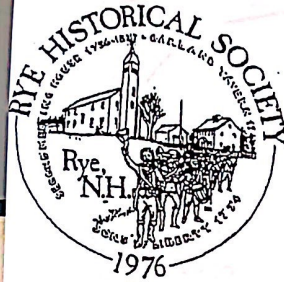
#0 TUCK MONUMENT - STARR ISLAND

1. Beebe, Star Island
- 2. Berry, Central Road, opposite #130
- 3. Brackett Massacre Burial Ground, Brackett Rd. opp. #605
- 4. Brown, West Road, opposite #333
5. Brown, off West Road, rear of #144 *Return*
6. Caswell, Star Island
- 7. Caswell, off Washington Rd., rear of 117 -
- 8. Central Cemetery, Central Road

The only active public cemetery in Rye.

- 9. Dalton, Garland Road, opposite #121 - ?
- 10. Dow, Parsons Road, near #139
- 11. Dow, Washington Road, opposite #1159
- 12. Fieldstone, off Central Road, rear of #176
13. Fieldstone, Grove Road, corner of Washington
- 14. Fieldstone, off Sagamore Road, #296
- 15. Fieldstone, off Sagamore Road, rear of 301
- 16. Fieldstone, Rock Orchard Lane, off Wallis Road
- 17. Fieldstone, off Wallis Road, #588
- 18. Fieldstone, Wallis Road, #161
- 19. Fieldstone, Washington Road, next to #221 -
- 20. Fieldstone, Washington Road, opposite end Long John Road
- 21. Fieldstone, Washington Road, rear of #320 -
- 22. Fieldstone, off Washington Road, rear of 659
- 23. Foss, Washington Road, west of #25
- 24. Foye, Brackett Road, near 181 *Across from*
- 25. Garland, off Washington Road, rear of #1151 -
- 26. Jenness, Cable Road, rear of 125
- 27. Lang, Washington Road, #832 -
- 28. Locke, off Harbor Road, rear of #14
- 29. Locke, Locke Road, west of #166
- 30. Locke, off Locke Road, rear of 305 305
- 31. Locke, off Brackett Road, rear of 571
- 32. Marden, off Wallis Road, rear of #218
- 33. Marden, West Road, rear of #51 81
- 34. Nason, Washington Road, near #410 -
- 35. Odiorne, off Brackett Road, rear of #233
- 36. Odiorne, off Ocean Boulevard, rear of #505
- 37. Old Burying Ground, Star Island
- 38. Locke, Old Beach Road, corner Locke (Fieldstones)
- 39. Philbrick, off Cable Road, rear of #32 (fragments only)
- 40. Philbrick, Church Road, at St-Andrews-By-The-Sea
- 41. Philbrick, off Cable Road, rear of #62
- 42. Remick, Brackett Road, rear of #405?
- 43. Salter, Wallis Road, near #651
- 44. Seavey, off Brackett Road, rear of #20
- 45. Seavey, off Pioneer Road, rear of #220 -
- 46. Seavey, off Sagamore Road, rear of #510
- 47. Sleeper, off West Road, rear of #245
- 48. Sleeper, West Road, north of #333
- 49. South Road Cemetery, near #434
- 50. Trefethen, Washington Road, near #333 -
51. Tucker, off Elwyn Road, near Portsmouth line
- 52. Tucker, off Washington Road, rear of #257
- 53. Varrell, Sagamore Road, near #300
- 54. Wallis, Brackett Road, near #500
55. Webster, off Long John Road, near #591
- 56. Wedgwood, Lang Road, near #19
- 57. Fieldstone, Park Ridge Avenue, rear of #28
- 58. Rye Historical Society, Town Hall & Library
- 59. Fieldstone, Odiorne Park at Gage house site

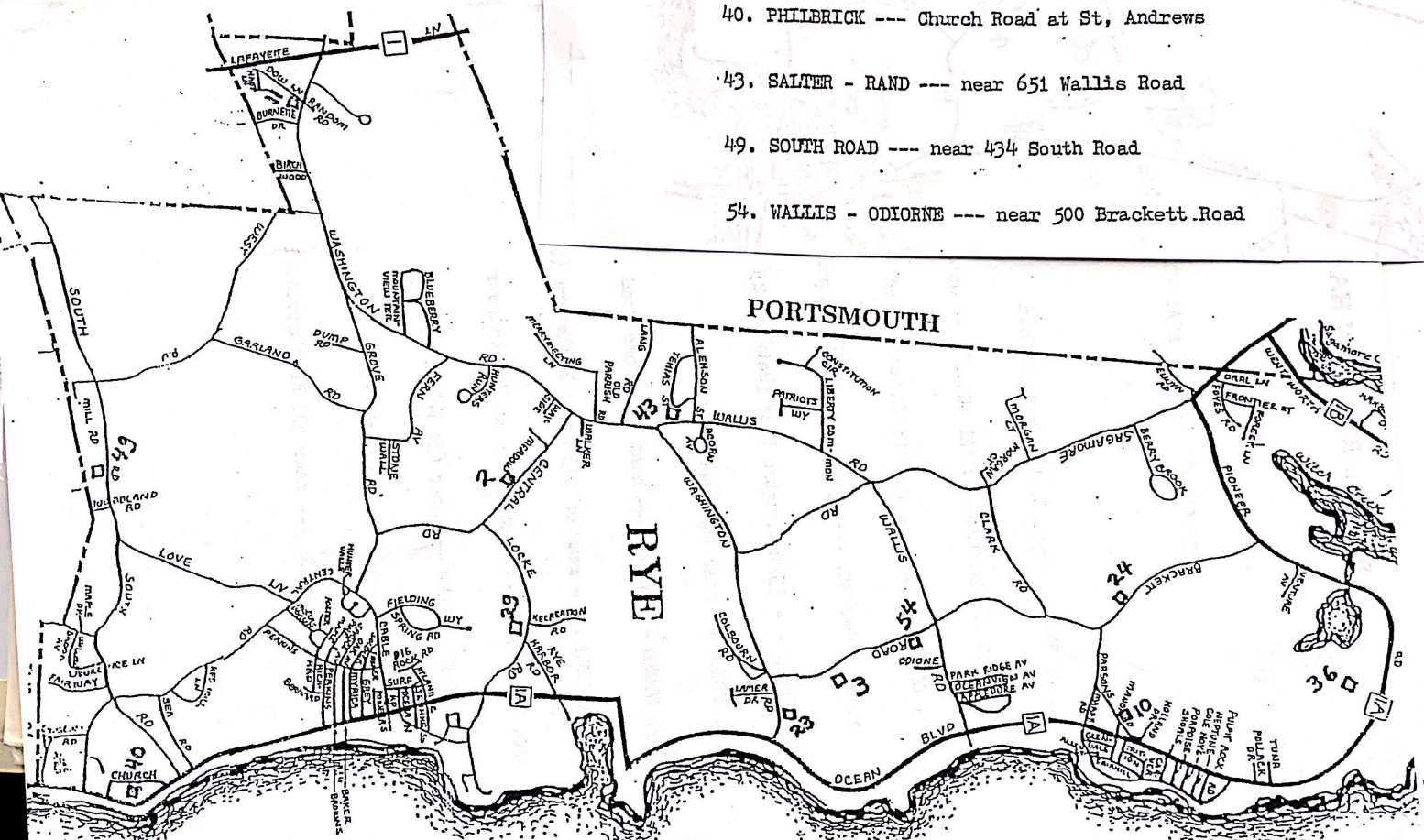
GRAVE-
YARDS
OF
RYE,
NH



BOX 583, RYE, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03870

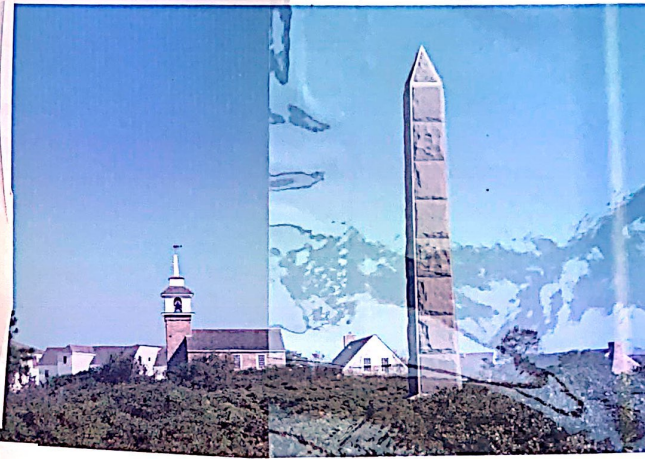
12 SELECTED GRAVEYARDS
SELF-GUIDING TOUR OF ROADSIDE FAMILY GRAVEYARDS OF RYE
(Total of 60+)

2. BERRY --- opposite 130 Central Road
3. BRACKETT MASSACRE BURIAL GROUND --- opposite 605 Brackett Road
10. DOW MONUMENT --- near 139 Parsons Road
11. DOW MONUMENT --- opposite 1159 Washington Road
23. FOSS --- 35 Washington Road (between 25 & 45)
24. FOYE --- near 181 Brackett Road
29. LOCKE - DOWNING --- near 190 Locke Road
36. ODIORNE --- rear of 505 Ocean Boulevard (park near barn)
40. PHILBRICK --- Church Road at St. Andrews
43. SALTER - RAND --- near 651 Wallis Road
49. SOUTH ROAD --- near 434 South Road
54. WALLIS - ODIORNE --- near 500 Brackett Road



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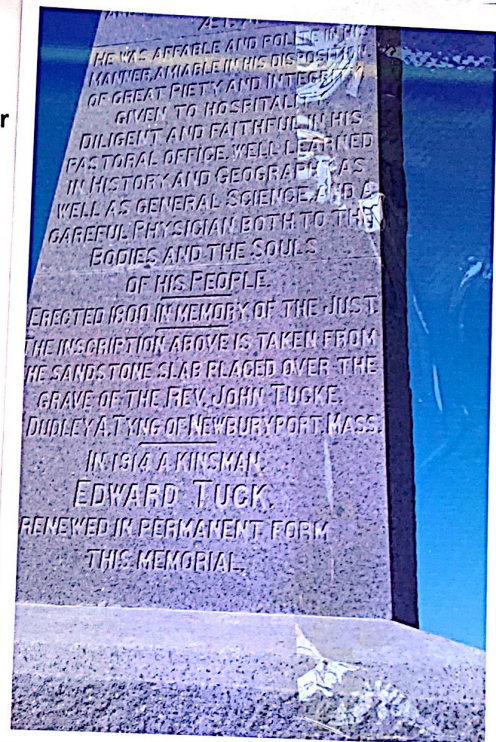
This monument is the tallest gravestone in New Hampshire. It is 46 feet tall. Rev. Tuck served as the first Minister of the church for the Town of Gosport on Star Island. Another Minister, Rev. Stevens has a similar table style marker. An early photo shows these 2 stones. A Tuck descendant felt there should be a more fitting monument for John Tuck. The tall granite pillar was constructed. This replaced the table style marker, so we can say this is a genuine gravestone. There are photos of the construction of the monument. These photos are available at the Library of the New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, NH.



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This single marble gravestone is near the side wall not far from the road.

TUCK MONUMENT, Star Island.



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1

BEEBE GRAVESTONES, Star Island.



These gravestones are for the three young daughters of Rev. George Beebe who served as one of the ministers of the Gosport Church. The markers are located a ways beyond the Tuck Monument.



#2

BERRY GRAVEYARD, Opposite 130 Central Road.



Berry Families lived in the fine large house up the hill from the site. The restoration team was allowed to make simple improvements as long as no trees were cut. It is now kept in good condition by the home owner.



#2



3

BRACKETT MASSACRE BURIAL GROUND

Opposite 605 Brackett Road.



It was September 29, 1691 that 11 residents of Rye were killed by the Indians. A Militia unit buried the victims on Anthony Brackett's land. The markers were pairs of simple fieldstones. Shrubs concealed the pattern. After the bushes were cut, the markers were set upright to form a single row. The site is registered as an important historic site.

