

FORM E – BURIAL GROUND

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Map 12 Parcel 356	Boston North	STN.1	STN.800
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Town: Stoneham

Place (*neighborhood or village*): NA

Photograph



Locus Map



Address or Location: Pleasant Street & Oriental Court

Name: Old Burying Ground

Ownership: Public Private

Approximate Number of Stones: 491

Earliest Death Date: 1728

Latest Death Date: 1924

Landscape Architect: NA

Condition: Good-Fair

Acreage: 1.09

Setting: Located in a urban area surrounded by residential housing (single and multi-family) on the north, east and west sides, and light industrial uses on the south side. Pleasant Street edges the northern boundary, and Oriental Court rims the east boundary. Residential back yards abut the western edge, and asphalt parking lots border the south edge.

Recorded by: Martha H. Lyon

Organization: Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture, LLC for the Stoneham Historical Commission

Date: May 2012.

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

INVENTORY FORM E CONTINUATION SHEET

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. (Property was listed on the National Register in 1984)
If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.

VISUAL/DESIGN ASSESSMENT

Describe landscape features, gravestone materials, designs, motifs, and symbols that are either common. Note any known carvers.

The Stoneham Old Burying Ground lies on 1.09 acres near the geographic center of the Town, on the southwest corner of Pleasant Street and Oriental Court and at the southern terminus of William Street. Its urban context consists of residential properties on three sides (north, east and west), with a light industrial operation on the south side. Pleasant Street abuts the north side and Oriental Court borders the east. On the south and west are the back yards of residences and the light industrial facilities. The Burying Ground's edge is continuous, and defined by cut mortared stone retaining walls on the north and east sides, with chain link fencing topping the wall, and continuing around the west and south sides.

Visitors enter the Burying Ground through a break in the north wall, up a concrete step, and through a wrought iron single-leaf gate. Once inside the property, they must walk across the turf-covered lawns, as the Burying Ground contains no defined pathways. Topography is highest on the north, west and south sides, dipping gently toward the center and east to a low point along the eastern edge. Most of the slopes are gentle enough (5% or less) for physically abled persons to navigate.

The Old Burying Ground contains several very old oak trees, located near the northern end, along with many less mature maples, clustered largely along the western half. Other species mixed in with the maples include white pine and larch. At the ground level, the landscape contains many perennial ground covers, including *Sedum*, *Ajuga*, and *Stachys*, in addition to the turf. The Burying Ground contains no shrubs.

Many of the Old Burying Ground's built features date to its first 200 years. Constructed in the Pleasant Street wall are three tombs - one public receiving tomb and two private tombs. The Hill tomb, at the western end of the wall, stands approximately five feet high and measures approximately eight feet wide across its granite façade. A central door, made of wood in a five-panel tongue and groove style, is flanked by sets of 24" wide x 36" high granite panels and a single granite lintel rests above the door and façade panels. "JAMES HILL FAMILY TOMB. 1836." is inscribed in the lintel. To the left (east) of the Hill tomb is the Town receiving tomb. This structure, as well as the Peter Green Jr. tomb (located to the left of the Town receiving tomb), is constructed of granite, with two courses of blocks flanking a center door, topped by a single granite lintel. The entire structure stands approximately 6' high and 6' wide, and four-panel steel door marks the center entrance. The Peter Green Jr., tomb matches the receiving tomb in design, materials and construction, except for its door, which is constructed of steel with the figure of an angel/goddess Nike in bas relief centered on the door. The words, "PETER GREEN, Jr. " also appear in bas relief above the angel/goddess Nike, with "1855" in bas relief below the angel/goddess Nike.

Inside the Old Burying Ground are nearly 500 head and foot stones arranged largely in rows of individual graves. The oldest markers are constructed of slate, and have been intricately carved by known artisans, including the Lamson shop (Charlestown), Isaac Newton Stone (Harvard), Isaac Fletcher (Lawrence), David Nichols (Lowell) and Bolduc & White (Lawrence). Images on the stones include winged skulls, winged cherubs, weeping willow branches, and draped pedestaled urns. Later markers (dating to the mid and late 19th century) are constructed of marble and display Victorian era imagery. The Old Burying Ground contains three family plots, including that of the Hay family, which retains its

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perimeter iron pipe rail fencing. Several of the tympanum areas of the slate markers were covered, in the late 1930s and 1940s, with copper caps that obscure the gravestones' shapes.

The overall condition of Stoneham's Old Burying Ground is good to fair. While several stones are in need of conservation treatment, many others remain in stable condition, and the property has not been vandalized. At its worst, the landscape appears tired – its mature trees show signs of decay, its chain link perimeter fence needs a coat of paint, its steel gate displays bent pickets, and graffiti mars the north wall. Yet because the Town has maintained a lock on the gate, only responsible visitors have been able to enter, and this has kept destruction to a minimum.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Explain religious affiliations, major period of use, and evaluate historical association of this burial ground with the community.

The Old Burying Ground was established in 1726 in conjunction with the founding of the town. As early as 1645, European settlers came to what was then known as "Charlestown End" to set up farms. By 1724, approximately 250 individuals lived in Charlestown End, but continued to attend meeting houses in Charlestown and South Reading (to the north, now Wakefield). In the following year, 54 men petitioned the General Court when Charlestown would not allow the area to be set off as a separate town. The request was granted, and the township of Stoneham was established. By 1726, the Town had acquired $\frac{1}{4}$ acre for a burying ground from James Hay lying "on the plain near a bridge on the West side of it by a Steep Hill in said Hay's land." The first-legally recorded burial took place in 1728, although claims have been made that at least one earlier burial took place (this has not been recorded in Stoneham's vital records). In its first 30 years, the Town interred thirty known individuals in the Old Burying Ground, and in 1758, they enlarged the site by $\frac{3}{4}$ acre through a generous donation from the same James Hay. The property has remained this size ever since.

The Old Burying Ground remained Stoneham's only public place of interment until the 1840s, and as a result, the majority of interments took place during the Burying Ground's first 120 years. During this time, the work of local gravestone carvers, including the Lamson family of Charlestown, Isaac Newton Stone of Harvard, Isaac Fletcher of Lawrence, David Nichols of Lowell and Bolduc & White of Lawrence appeared on the stones. Stoneham's first and fifth ministers were interred in the Burying Ground in this early period. The Rev. James Osgood was called from Salem to serve in 1728 and remained until his death in 1746, and Rev. John H. Sevens was called from Methuen in 1795 and served for 32 years. In addition, the Old Burying Ground holds the remains of many of Stoneham's founding families, including Gould, Green, Hay, Richardson, Bucknam, Bryant, Vinton, Hill and Lynde, accounting for 55% of the headstones.¹ Several prominent features were also added to the property during this period, including a cut stone retaining wall (1835), a public receiving tomb (ca. 1845), and two private tombs (1836 Hill tomb and 1855 Green tomb), all located along Pleasant Street at the northern edge of the Burying Ground. The east side wall, along Oriental Court, likely appeared in the 1860s when the road was laid out. Both walls were rebuilt in the beginning of the 20th century.

By 1850, Stoneham's population, which had previously numbered in the 100s, reached 2085. Larger-scale industries had emerged, including a large shoe manufacturing operation, attracting a growing workforce. With the opening of the William Street Cemetery in 1844, and the Lindenwood Cemetery in 1861, use of the Old Burying Ground slowed significantly. The last interment, the burial of Stoneham librarian Sarah Lynde, took place in 1924. During the late 19th century and 20th centuries, the Town continued to maintain the Burying Ground, capping many of the delaminating slate stones in the 1940s and 1950s, and erecting a chain link fence around the entire property in

¹Silas Dean, in his 1870 A Brief History of the Town of Stoneham, Mass. From its First Settlement to the Year 1843, stated that several "negro servants" were buried on the east side of the yard, but no town records have been found that document this claim.

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1937. By the end of the 20th century, care of the property had become limited to mowing and leaf removal, and many of the stones had deteriorated, were leaning or had broken.

In 1942, the Veterans Graves Registration Project of the Works Progress Administration came to Stoneham, and its workers prepared a map of the Old Burying Ground, identifying the location of veterans. Three fought in the French and Indian War, 31 in the Revolutionary War, three in the War of 1812, and two in the Civil War (one of which was an army nurse). Fourteen of the Revolutionary War soldiers are listed in the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, and two have significant histories. Captain Samuel Sprague led a company of Stoneham men to Lexington, reaching there in time to intercept and pursue the British on their retreat from Concord. Sprague also served as Stoneham's representative to the Provincial Congress in 1775. Major William Wilson was a fifer who served in the 19th Continental Regiment (later the 2nd Connecticut Regiment) along with Captain Nathan Hale. In his 1818 pension request, Wilson stated that he volunteered to stay with General Washington for six weeks at the close of 1776. Wilson's headstone inscription reads, "A tried friend to his country and a Patriot of the Revolution."

The Old Burying Ground has been the subject of study for at least one scholar of early American folk art. In 1967, Harvard anthropologist James Deetz, PhD visited the site and wrote an article (*Death's Head, Cherub, Urn and Willow*) describing the stylistic changes of headstone symbols over a 100 year + period. It was originally published in Natural History, Volume 76 (3), 1967.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES**Books**

- Dean, Silas, A Brief History of Stoneham, Mass., from its first settlement to the year 1843. Stoneham, MA: Sentinel Press, 1870.
- Essex Institute, The, Vital Records of Stoneham, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849. Salem, MA: The Essex Institute, 1918.
- Harriman, Joanne B., Stoneham (Images of America Series). Columbia, SC: Arcadia Publishing Co.,
- Stevens, William B., Esq., History of Stoneham, Massachusetts with Biographical Sketches of Many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men. Stoneham, MA: F. L. & W. E. Whittier, 1891.
- Zellie, Carole & Martha Coons, Stoneham, Massachusetts: A Shoe Town. Stoneham, MA: Stoneham Historical Commission, 1981.

Maps & Plans (arranged chronologically)

1794. "A Plan of the Town of Stoneham." Luther Richardson (Mass. Archives Plan #1196; Stoneham Historical Society collection)
1830. "Plan of the Town of Stoneham in the County of Middlesex," 1830. Surveyed by John G. Bates in September 1830. (Mass. Archives Plan #2040)
1844. "Stoneham Cemetery, As laid out by a committee of the Town," 1844. Thayer & Co., Lithographers, Boston (Map was traced in 1936 by Leroy E. Ross from the original)
1858. Map of Stoneham. Robert Gerry, 1858. (Map was traced in 1936 by Leroy E. Ross from the original)
1875. "Stoneham," Beers Atlas of Middlesex County, Massachusetts. F. W. Beers & Company, 1875.
1875. "Stoneham." Author unknown, 1875 (stored in the Town of Stoneham vault, Town Hall).
1889. "Stoneham," Walker Atlas of Middlesex County, Massachusetts. George H. Walker & Co., 1889.

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1896. "Record Plan, Stoneham Sewerage System, Pleasant Street." B. R. Felton, Engineer, 1896.
1930. "Zoning Map, Stoneham, Massachusetts." Morse & Dickinson Engineers, Boston, MA, 1930.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES (continued)**Maps & Plans (continued)**

1942. "Pleasant Street Cemetery," Veterans Graves Registration, W. P. A. Project 165.1.14.284 (Sections 1 and 2). Drafted by Dr. H. R. Rock, 1942.

Public Documents

Town of Stoneham Annual Reports, 1821- present.

Town of Stoneham Records, 1725- 1790.

Massachusetts Historical Commission, Form B - Buildings for 2 Pine Street (#267), 31 Pleasant Street (#200), and 5 Oriental Court (#201), all 1979.

Massachusetts Historical Commission, Form E - Burial Grounds, Form 800, "Old Burying Ground," 1979.

Stoneham Department of Public Works Files.