

About the Phipps Street Burying Ground

- Where:**
- On a little hill at the corner of Phipps and Lawrence Streets in Charlestown.
 - Originally bordered by marshy flats and an estuary of the Charles River.
 - Until the mid-1800s, "the tide used to wash a beach on the west and south sides of the ground."

- When:**
- Probably begun in the 1630s just after the town was settled.
 - One of five 17th century burying grounds in Boston.

Why it's important:

- It's the **oldest real estate** in Charlestown: the rest of the town burned to the ground during the Battle of Bunker Hill.
- It features 300 years of truly outstanding **funerary art and iconography**: perhaps the finest in the US.
- Unlike other 17th century burying grounds, the stones aren't laid out in long rows but are grouped in little **rectangular family plots**.
- Most of the stones are in their **original positions**: many early burying grounds were "rearranged" in the 19th century to make their headstones and footstones line up in tidy rows.
- Many of the stones were carved by the **Lamson family** of stonecarvers, whose work is found all over New England.

Who's here:

- Possibly **John Harvard**, who died in 1638 and left half his estate and his entire 300-book library to a new little college in Cambridge. We don't know where he's buried, but the granite obelisk in the center of the cemetery – erected by Harvard College in 1828 – commemorates him.
- **Maud Russell**, who died in 1652 and is memorialized by the oldest extant gravestone in the burying ground.

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- **Thomas Beecher**, one of the first settlers of Massachusetts Bay Colony.
- Soldiers who fought in **King Phillips War** in 1675 and 76.
- **Phineas Pratt**, who was born in 1599 and died in 1689 at the ripe old age of 90.
- **Captain Timothy Philipps**, first sheriff of Middlesex County
- **Grace Parker**, owner of an early Charlestown pottery.
- **Nathaniel Gorham**, who signed the Constitution and was president of the Continental Congress.
- **Prince Bradstreet**, “an honest man of color.”
- Generations of **Frothinghams, Hurds, Harvards, Phipps, Russells** and **Hunnewells**, all old Charlestown families.

About the gravestones:

Gravestones in the 1600s are simple markers with little decorative carving and brief epitaphs that focus on mortality and the fleeting nature of life. Some stones feature **death’s heads** (stylized skulls with wings and crossed bones), winged hourglasses, coffins, and carved side panels with flowers, fruit, foliage, imps and dragons.

Gravestones in the 1700s feature both **death’s heads** and a new image: **winged cherubs**, or soul effigies, with fleshy faces, lifelike eyes and upturned mouths, symbolizing the soul’s flight to heaven. A few **“portrait stones”** contain realistic images of people. But because many of the “portraits” are almost identical, they probably don’t depict the deceased.

Gravestones in the 1900s echo **neoclassical** art. Important images are the **willow**, a classical symbol of mourning, and the **urn**, where Imperial Romans stored the ashes of their ancestors. There are bigger, more imposing monuments, too: columns, pediments and obelisks like John Harvard’s memorial. The epitaphs are less foreboding and focus more on resurrection and the afterlife.

Many thanks

*to Kelly Thomas of the Boston Parks Department Burying Ground Initiative
and Charlestown historians Carol Bratley and Judy McDonough
for their help in compiling this fact sheet.*

Any errors are ours, not theirs!