

Dublin Historical Society

DUBLIN, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03444 • FOUNDED 1920

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CARING FOR THE DEAD: TOMBS, HEARSES AND THEIR HOUSES

Since Dublin's "hearse house" was a topic of discussion at the 2017 Dublin Town Meeting, it seems timely to look at the changing layout of the burying ground, the hearse houses, and two of the hearses which were once housed in them. The first indication that the research wouldn't be straightforward came when consulting the 1906 map of Dublin; the hearse house is shown near the lake on Cemetery Cove, not at its current location.

EARLY 19TH CENTURY

At first glance one could presume that the hearse house has stood in its current location on Old Common Road since 1814. Dublin's first meetinghouse would have stood 100 yards to its east and presumably the entrance to the cemetery on the south side of Old Common Road would have been nearby. However, further research in town records shows that the entrance to the cemetery and with it the location of the hearse house have changed three times.



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The Hearse House (left) in its current location. Its doors have been relocated, moved from the side facing the road. Next to it (right) is the new storage building

The first volume of clerk's records has been lost, so the first mention of a hearse house appears in the March 1806 town meeting warrant. Article 16 stated, "to see if the town will build a herse [sic] to carry the dead upon and provide a place to keep the same." The minutes from that meeting read, "That the selectmen provide a herse [sic] for the convenience [sic] of carrying the dead." The vote does not address where the hearse would be housed.

Decisions weren't executed quickly in this period of town history as evidenced by the decade-long series of votes regarding whether and where to build a second meetinghouse. Unfortunately, the town's set of treasurer's records have a gap between 1783 and 1809, so it is impossible to verify when and by whom that hearse was built.

There must have been a hearse by 1814 because

2018 MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

It's that time of year again. Please use the enclosed envelope to send us your membership dues for 2018. As dues and additional contributions cover the majority of our operating expenses, we appreciate your support in preserving Dublin's history.

treasurer records show that on July 2, Joshua Greenwood received "twenty dollars in part for building a House for the accomodation [sic] of the Hearse." The following spring Greenwood would receive "seven dollars in full" from the town, the final accounting for the hearse house construction.

THE BURYING GROUND

The town appointed a sexton, someone to administer the burying ground, at town meeting each year. Josephus Snow once held that position and his bills submitted annually to the selectman survive from 1837 until 1842. In March 1837 he charged for digging each grave - from fifty cents for a child to \$2.00 for an adult, in all \$18.50. The charges also included \$7.00 per year for "ringing the bell" and in some years compensation for supplying the firewood for town meetings held in the brick town house.

Town meeting addressed multiple cemetery issues in 1837. They voted to instruct the selectmen to enlarge the burying ground and approved the warrant article "... to appropriate a sum of money to build a tomb in which to deposite [sic] the corpses of those persons who may die during the winter season..." and further chose a committee of two along with the sexton to "locate a spot and supervise the building of a tomb."

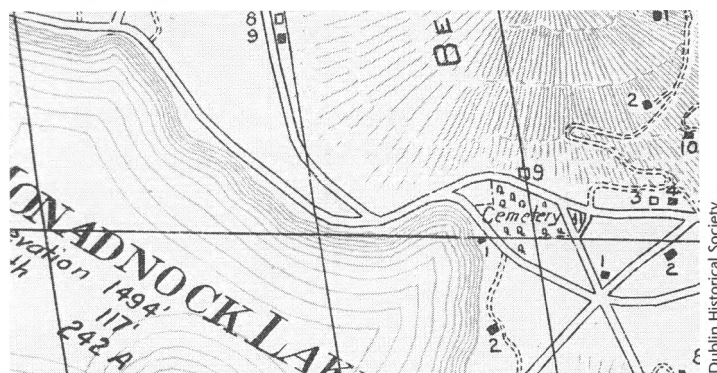
Then as now the cemetery closed when the frost penetrated too deep to prepare graves. Records are silent on where the bodies were stored in winter before the building of the receiving vault or tomb. However, Dublin burial records show that 11 residents had died between December 21, 1836 and March 10, 1837, many more than the average of two or three for the season. The sudden surfeit of corpses may have spurred the town to construct the tomb.



This photograph from The New Hampshire Sunday News shows the town tomb on October 17, 1971, a month before the bulldozers dismantled it in order to widen the shoulders of Route 101 around Cemetery Cove. The stones visible today are only one course deep.

The committee chose to build it into the hillside on the southwest corner of the burying ground, the face of which can still be seen on the inside curve of Route 101 around Dublin Lake's Cemetery Cove. The tomb's location seems to have prompted the town to relocate the hearse house, as evidenced by the town meeting vote in March of 1840 "that the selectmen be directed to purchase such additions to the burying ground as they may think proper, and take measures to enclose the same with a suitable fence, and, that they also remove the Hearse house to the southwest part of the burying ground."

Josephus Snow received \$18.67 for "building 28



Inset of 1906 map of Dublin showing cemetery location showing Old Common Road on the north side and what is now Route 101 on the southwest side. Number 9 denotes the former location of the first meetinghouse. Number 1 next to the lake shore is the location of the hearse house. Number 11 in the small triangle denotes the Town Pound.

rods of wall to enclose the burying ground" in July of 1840, but the hearse house would not be moved until after a town meeting vote on August 16, 1841 when the selectmen were "instructed to remove the Hearse house to a spot near the southwest corner of the burying ground... that they also take such measures in relation to making an entrance into the burying ground at that place...". Evidence of its being moved can be verified, since the hearse house was mentioned as a bound of one of the highway districts until 1843.

SECOND HEARSE HOUSE

This is where the story gets confusing. In the warrant from March 12, 1843 Article 11 asks "to see if the town will take measures to build a Hearse house and to remove the Gate of the Grave Yard to the south west corner of the yard..." If the former hearse house was moved to the site in 1841, why did they need to build another one? The gate and the gateposts installed in 1826 and 1827 would have

been moved from somewhere on the north side of the cemetery to a new entrance west of the tomb as shown on old maps.

The selectmen did take steps to enlarge the graveyard on the southwest side when they bought land in October of 1844 from the Unitarian minister, Levi Leonard. The deed describes two parcels, one on the northeasterly side of the road east of the tomb and another "on the west side of said road nearly opposite the tomb sufficiently large to build a Hearsehouse on".

Subsequently, the town paid Samuel Allison to build that hearse house. In March of 1845 he received \$44.36 "for building a hearse house for the town and for bridge plank & putting them on the bridge." Other contemporary town debits for bridge planks average \$5.00, so the hearse house probably cost around \$40.00. No doubt, that is the present day building, moved to its current site north of Old Common Road.

A 1929 deed between the Town of Dublin and the Dublin Lake Club signals the final relocation of the burying ground entrance. A parcel further east of the tomb was transferred with the stipulation the premises only be used for cemetery purposes and that the town erect "a suitable wall and entrance gateway." Most interesting, however, is the further stipulation the town "shall forever maintain the hearse house in its present location on the southerly side of the highway." It references the 1885 deed between two individuals, so it appears that the hearse house had stood on private property for at least 45 years. But when was it moved? Selectmen's minutes do not exist between 1933 and 1975 to shine light on the question.



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Wheeled and winter hearses on display at the 1841 Schoolhouse Museum after being reassembled in 1983.



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The 1872 wheeled hearse being rolled out from the basement of the town hall in 1983.

HEARSES

Hearses are mentioned at four different times in town records. The first is the vote in 1806 to provide a hearse, probably constructed by a local carriage smith. The next reference to purchasing a hearse occurs in November of 1848 when the selectmen reimburse Snow's successor as sexton, Ebenezer Greenwood, \$6.00 for time and expenses in getting the new hearse. Unfortunately, no details can be found about the cost or the builder/manufacturer.

In the Victorian era funerary rites became elaborate as did the hearses. Voters at the March 1870 town meeting agreed to procure a new hearse and correspondence with A. Tolman & Co. carriage manufacturers in Worcester the following June survives. Included in the correspondence was a catalog of available models, the simplest, at the cost of \$450, sported "glass of double thick crystal", inside curtains of "good black broad cloth with silver fringe and tassels", "black walnut floor for the coffin with silver plated pins", and carpets on the floorboard among other details. Tolman would furnish runners for winter use for an additional \$50.

One of the two surviving horse-drawn hearses which now belongs to the Dublin Historical Society is similar but not an exact match to the example in the Tolman catalog. Local blacksmith Washington Proctor seemed to have acted as agent for the town. He was paid \$450.00 on October 11, 1872 "to pay for a hearse", but from whom remains a mystery.

Apparently, the town chose to buy a dedicated winter hearse instead of swapping the wheels for sleigh runners, because three months later Proctor was reimbursed \$85 by the town "to pay for a hearse to use in the winter season" and \$12 "for services & expenses in procuring a hearse and for

cover for the same". This humble carriage with no decorative details save the applied molding in a gothic arch pattern is the second hearse owned by DHS.

FINAL "HEARSE HOUSES"

Presumably, the hearses fell out of use in the early 20th century as automobiles replaced horse-drawn conveyances. Given no information, it must be presumed that the hearses were stored in the 1844 structure until the fire engines were moved from the basement of the Dublin Town Hall to the new fire station in 1963. The hearses were probably relocated into the vacated space at that time.

There they would stay until 1983 when they were loaned to DHS. The hearses were disassembled enough to fit through an opening made in the side wall of the 1841 Schoolhouse Museum and reassembled inside for display. In 1994 the town transferred ownership of the hearses to DHS.

It seems quite fitting that the final improbable houses for the hearses, the 1882 town hall and the 1841 Schoolhouse, were both built in the era of horsepower.

~Lisa Foote

200TH ANNIVERSARY OF THOREAU'S BIRTH

Henry David Thoreau knew the slopes of Mount Monadnock having camped and hiked on it at least four times. Hiking through Dublin in 1852 on a trip over the mountain, he started in Peterborough and reached Troy in time to catch the three p.m. train back to Concord, MA. J. Parker Huber recently recreated the walk: 17 miles in 10 ½ hours.

In celebration of this milestone year the Concord Museum and the Morgan Library and Museum have collaborated on the exhibit "This Ever New Self, Thoreau and His Journal", an exhibit bringing together personal items including the desk owned by Thoreau in the Concord Museum collection with journals, manuscripts, letters and books from the Morgan Library and Museum's collection.

The exhibit is on view at the Concord Museum through January 21, 2018.

IN MEMORIAM

The society reports with great sorrow the recent loss of

Louisa Clark Spencer

Alice Hammond

David E. Howe

We extend our condolences to their families

NOTE CARD FUNDRAISER

Boxes of 10 note cards with color reproductions of 5 Abbott Thayer paintings are available for \$10.00 per box. Please fill out the enclosed order form, compute the shipping costs and return it in the dues envelope. Feel free to write one check for both dues and cards.

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