September 30th – A Big Day for ABGA
Stewart Honored, Leete Stone Dedicated, Stone Statue Moved

Members of the Ancient Burying Ground Association, guests, and dignitaries gathered at the Gold Building, next to the graveyard, on September 30 for a triple celebration sponsored by United Technologies Corporations.

Former Hartford Fire Chief and City Councilman John B. Stewart, Jr. was honored as the 17th recipient of the Thomas Hooker Award. A replica of the lost headstone of colonial Connecticut Governor William Leete was dedicated (see story on page 2). And the statue of Thomas Hooker’s close associate, Samuel Stone, was on display next to the parcel on Main Street where it will soon be installed.

W. Harmon Leete of West Hartford led a group of Leete Family Association members in dedicating the replica of Governor William Leete’s lost headstone.

Reverend Samuel Stone was born in Hertford England where he was honored with a seven foot statue installed in the town’s center. The ABGA collaborated with Sister Cities International to have a second casting made for installation in the Ancient Burying Ground. A special committee is developing plans (see page 6) for the landscaping and design of the Main Street entrance where the statue will soon find its permanent home after spending the past year in the lobby of the Greater Hartford Arts Council’s Welcome Center. John Zito III placed the statue in the courtyard of the Gold Building where attendees of the evening’s event could get a close-up look. More photos of the night’s activities are on page 3.

John B. Stewart, Jr. Honored with 17th Thomas Hooker Award

The 2004 Thomas Hooker Award ceremony was a packed event, with the dedication of the new headstone for colonial Governor William Leete, the move of the statue of Samuel Stone, and the presentation of the award to Hartford native and outstanding citizen John Bradley Stewart, Jr.

Throughout his life, John Stewart has opened doors and created opportunities. His leadership while Chief of the Hartford Fire Department, and as the first African-American to hold that post in New England, has inspired many to excellence. Hartford's Fire Department is one of the busiest, and one of a very select few in the country to receive the top rating, achieved during Chief Stewart's tenure from 1980 to 1992, and maintained by our current Chief Charles Teale, who spoke of being motivated as a young man by John Stewart's leadership.

After retirement as Chief, John Stewart served on the Court of Common Council of the City of Hartford from 1995 to 1999, during which he was majority leader. He has been active with many local organizations, including the Urban League of Greater Hartford, the Salvation Army, the Blue Hills Neighborhood Revitalization Zone, and the Dr. John E. Rogers Cultural Center.
William Leete of Dodington, Cambridgeshire, England, was a founder of the Guilford colony in 1639 and was its Magistrate when it merged with the New Haven colony. He became Deputy Governor of the New Haven colony in 1658 and its Governor in 1661. Following the merger of the New Haven colony and the Connecticut colony in Hartford, William Leete became Deputy Governor of the combined Connecticut colony in 1669 and its Governor in 1676. He died in office in 1683.

Governor Leete was buried in the Ancient Burying Ground in Hartford and his headstone was carved by the famed Glastonbury Lady Carver, whose trademark was a mournful angel at the top of the stone. At an unknown time thereafter, the stone disappeared and was not rediscovered until 1830, when a large pile of dirt was removed from the Ancient Burying Ground and the stone was found underneath it. It disappeared again near the end of the nineteenth century, apparently cut from its base. Approximately four years ago, a photograph of the Leete headstone was found by ABGA president Ken Johnson while reading a history of the City of New Haven, and a decision was made to replicate it. A fundraising effort brought contributions from the Leete family and from the George A. and Grace L. Long and the Ensworth Charitable Foundations. The funds permitted the signing of a contract with Allen Williams of Blandford, Massachusetts, a specialist in replicating old headstones, and the purchase of a piece of brownstone from England that resembled but was much more durable than the original Portland brownstone.

The new stone was carved by Mr. Williams over this past summer, using the photograph and with reference to other stones by the Glastonbury Lady Carver. Using the background from the photograph and the numbering from an 1877 map of the cemetery, the exact site of the original headstone was determined and confirmed by finding a broken base at that spot. The replacement stone was installed in late September and was dedicated at a ceremony on September 30, at which Lieutenant Governor Kevin Sullivan presided.
Scenes from the September 30th Celebration

Anne Holcombe, Shep Holcombe, and Karen Will with Sam Stone.

David Rhinelander, Chairman of the Board of Antiquarian & Landmarks Society, makes a point to ABGA member Wilson Fande.

Hartford City Councilman Dr. Robert Painter addresses the gathering.

ABGA Chairman Shep Holcombe (l) and President Ken Johnson (r) present a Richard Welling print of the Ancient Burying Ground along with an official citation to Hooker Awardee John B Stewart while Lt Gov. Kevin Sullivan and former Hooker honoree Dollie McLean look on.

The first row of reserved seats were for (l to r) Mrs. John Stewart, Jr., Hooker honoree John B. Stewart, Jr., Connecticut Lt. Governor Kevin Sullivan, Harmon Leete, and Hartford City Councilman Robert Painter.

(l to r) Hartford’s current Fire Chief Charles Teale with Lt Governor Kevin Sullivan and former Chief John B. Stewart.

Photos by Jeff Sobiech
In Memory of William R. Peelle, 1921-2004

William R. Peelle, a good friend and longtime supporter of the Ancient Burying Ground Association, was an outstanding citizen of Hartford, moving here after serving in the Pacific in World War II.

He worked at his alma mater, Trinity College, in local corporations, and in non-profit consulting. At Trinity, he chaired the Committee on Coeducation, which opened the doors of the College to women. He offered his energy and experience to many area organizations, including Camp Courant, the Capital Area United Way, Watkinson School, and the Old State House.

The ABGA was proud to present William Peelle the Thomas Hooker Award for 1995, honoring him for his community service and dedication to the City of Hartford.

ABGA was fortunate to have had the oversight of William Peelle in directing the organization’s operations when he worked with Payne, Forrester and Olsson.

2004 Summer Tour Program

Five students from Hartford Magnet Middle School spent the summer conducting tours of the Ancient Burying Ground and learning about life in Hartford during the colonial era as part of the ABGA’s 17th Summer Tour Program.

Guided by program coordinator Heidi Scanlon, a Hartford Public Schools teacher, each student picked a person from those resting in the burying ground to research and compare to someone in a similar profession today.

The results of the research were presented in a special program at the Town and County Club on August 5. The program began with an impressive clapping drill, “Catch the Spirit,” by guides Arialda Fejzic and Phyllicia Ward. The students and their topics were:

• Tremaine Williams: Dr. Lemuel Hopkins, doctor.
• Michael Sisko: Ebenezer Watkins, newspaper publisher.
• Thao Nguyen: Barnabas Hinsdale, furniture maker.
• Arialda Fejzic: Moses Butler, tavern owner.
• Phyllicia Ward: Mary Betts, schoolteacher.

Volunteer Opportunities

The Ancient Burying Ground is a lovely downtown park, filled with glimpses of Hartford’s past and introductions to the art and culture and individual lives of 17th and 18th century Connecticut. The Ancient Burying Ground Association seeks to preserve and maintain this treasured historic site, and to support learning in connection with the cemetery’s art and history.

Volunteer opportunities include:

• Education
• Genealogical and historical research
• Gravestone preservation
• Newsletter writing and production

Please contact us at 228-1517, or abg_email@snet.net.

Summer Tour Program Supporters

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This spring Ruth Brown discovered that two brownstones in the Ancient Burying Ground have a small “B”, as seen here in the photo, carved at the base of the gravestone. Old gravestone carvers did sometimes sign their work, and often that signature would be found on the lower right corner of the stone. Sometimes one can find marks on the lower portion that would state the price or person or town to whom the stone would be delivered. Occasionally one can find an old gravestone with several marks or letters, sometimes even small drawings that sometimes reminds one of present doodling, on the lower portion of the gravestone that is usually not seen above ground, and these would be called “practice marks”. These B’s could be of this origin however they do not match the style of the lettering on the respective stones.

Ruth has shared this information with Dr. James Slater, author of the book, Colonial Gravestones of Eastern Connecticut and the Men Who Made Them, as well as others in this field of study, and as of yet no one has an answer for what the B’s may represent. It does not seem to relate to the known carver information or any restoration method used since 1970.

If any member has a response to this mystery we would surely like to hear from them.

Ruth Shapleigh Brown, New ABGA Representative

Ruth Shapleigh Brown started work this past summer as Representative for the ABGA. She is not a stranger to the Ancient Burying Ground or its members. Ruth has been an advocate for old burying grounds since before 1994 when she founded Connecticut Gravestone Network, a non-profit statewide organization for the protection and appreciation of these old historic places. Among her credits are her association with the international organization of the Association for Gravestone Studies; member since 1984 and past board member; Vice President and Event Planner for East Hartford’s Friends of Center Cemetery (which by the way is Hartford’s second colonial burying ground); committee member for Neighbors of Old South Burying Ground of Hartford. Ruthie, as she prefers to be called, has for years been traveling around the state doing tours, presentations and workshops on colonial carvers and basic conservation concerns. When not working at the Connecticut State Library, doing her own research, or working in a cemetery, she is also an active member of FOSA, Friends of the Office of the State Archeologist, an avid supporter of her efforts.

So far this year Ruth has arranged for four Ancient Burying Ground tours, one for the Association of Gravestone Studies as part of their annual conference and others for Trinity College and area Hartford Schools. Just last month Ruth met some visitors from Iowa, Talcott descendants coming to visit the Founders Monument. They were very pleased to go home with their own copy of the book and map of the cemetery.
A long-standing dream was realized last December when the City of Hartford received title to the plot of land next to the Gold Building. Originally part of the burying ground, in the nineteenth century the land was released by the city for private commercial development. The last building on the site housed the White Tower restaurant. Though the building was razed years ago, the land remained in private hands.

With the support of City Councilman Robert Painter and Mayor Eddie Perez, the land is now part of the Main Street entrance to the burying ground. Earlier this year Talcott Realty, the owner of the Gold Building, donated the land to the City. A committee, including city leaders, Sister Cities, and members of Center Church and the Arts and Heritage community, has been meeting to develop plans for the integration of the new parcel with the rest of the burying ground.

The ABGA enlisted internationally renowned landscape architect Rudy Favretti to design the plans that would integrate the new parcel and provide a site for the statue of the Rev. Samuel Stone. These plans, carefully supervised by landscape architect Genevra Goodwin, include the addition of a welcoming pathway into the ground from Main Street, the addition of lighting so the burying ground will be a jewel-like presence at night, and educational signage so all can learn about the history and the heritage of Hartford’s oldest landmark.

Save the Date!
The statue of Reverend Samuel Stone is due to be installed by press time for this issue of “Passages,” and the formal dedication will take place next April 28, when a group from Hertford, England will be here to celebrate with us. Karen Will of the Sister Cities group is coordinating the activities. If you would like to host a visitor or two from Sam Stone’s birthplace, please contact Karen at 232-5253.

Contact Us
For more information about the Ancient Burying Ground Association, or to make a contribution, please contact us.
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