

and tone of epitaphs became more sentimental and hopeful, reflecting on the joy of the promised afterlife. The gravestone now served both as a memorial to the departed and a promise of eternal life for those who merited it.

As the century progressed, gravestone iconography became more elaborate and varied. A broken column might indicate the death of the head of a family, while little carved lambs marked the graves of children. Angels symbolized rebirth, and clasped hands a final but temporary farewell. A rose in full bloom meant that death in the prime of life, while a broken stemmed flower symbolized a young life cut off prematurely. A single hand pointing upward shows the pathway to heaven.

K. Nathan and Richard Hale – c 1795
Carver: Amasa Loomis

John Loomis's son Amasa abandoned the family style in favor of the newer designs made popular by the Mannings of Mansfield, CT. The Nathan Hale cenotaph (a memorial stone with no burial present) was commissioned by Nathan's father nearly 20 years after his death. This large marker also commemorates the death of Nathan's brother, Richard, and it is thought that Richard's baby daughters are actually buried in this grave.

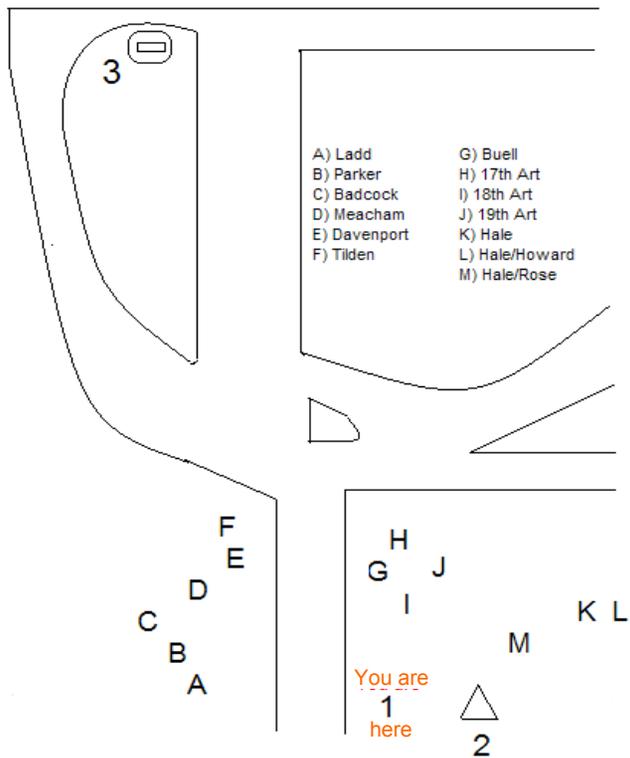
L. Joanna Hale Howard Family Plot

One of the most poignant sites in this yard is the family plot of Joanna, sister of Nathan Hale, her husband Nathan Howard, and their 7 young children. Death at birth or by the age of 5 years was all too common, and the Howards had only 2 who survived to adulthood. Their feelings are captured in the epitaph on one of the little stones, which reads: "Behold fond parents as you pass. Learn how your fondest hopes are grass."

M. Elizabeth Hale Rose Taylor
Carver: Manning Family

The Mannings were the dominant carvers throughout the 2nd half of the 18th century. Some of their designs were extremely skilled and elaborate, as demonstrated by the stone of Elizabeth Hale Rose Taylor, sister of Nathan Hale. The fact that she is buried in the plot of her first husband suggests that his family paid for her burial and grave marker.

Map of Tour Stops



1. You are here (cemetery information sign)
2. Nathan Hale Monument
3. Contemplation area

The Coventry Cemetery Commission expresses its appreciation to Linda Pagliuco, who provided the information contained in this brochure; Ryan's Memorial Fund (www.RyansFund.com), who donated the funds for the Nathan Hale Cemetery sign; Edmondson's Farm, who supplied the plantings for the contemplation area; and the Village Improvement Society, Ellington Memorials, and Coventry-Pietras Funeral Home who donated the bench for the contemplation area.

Coventry Cemetery Commission

***Self-Guided
Walking Tour***



Nathan Hale Monument

Nathan Hale Cemetery

***Established 1718
Lake Street, Coventry, Connecticut***

History of Nathan Hale Cemetery

This early 18th century cemetery is situated on seven acres on the shore of Lake Wamgumbaug. Headstones date from as early as 1718. Earlier stones may exist, but are unreadable due to “spalling” or weathering. The 18th century stones are located in the two long sections that border the driveway, from the entrance to the point where the drive branches. The great majority are composed of granite schist, much of which was quarried at nearby Bolton Notch.

Most of the stones face west, which was common in the northeast, and thought to serve the religious function of allowing the deceased to sit up in the grave to face east upon the day of judgment. When most of these stones were erected, they were accompanied by footstones, placed at the foot of the grave. Sadly, nearly all of the footstones have been removed, and only four remain in their original place.

As you begin your tour, review the enclosed map, and look for markers near each point of interest with the letter corresponding to the entry below.

A. Ladd – Typical 18th Century Grave

The typical grave throughout this century resembled a bed, with a headstone, facing away from the head of the coffin, and a smaller footstone, facing the opposite direction. Sadly, most footstones were removed with the mechanization of grass mowing to allow better access for the machinery. The graves of servants, slaves, and those who could not afford gravestones, which were costly, were generally not marked. Despite the many markers seen today, probably more graves were unmarked than marked.

B. James Parker – 1781

Loomis Family Carvers / Jonathan Loomis

The Loomis family resided on nearby Silver Street, so it is not surprising that there is a large concentration of their work here. They also took over ownership of the Bolton quarry from Gershom Bartlett. Jonathan Loomis, his son, John, and his grandson, Amasa, formed this carving “dynasty.”

The gravestone of James Parker is representative of Jonathan’s work, which is characterized by oval faces with long, thin noses, “closed” eyes, slightly smiling mouths, and 3-lobed crowns. You will see examples of the work of John (F. Tilden) and Amasa (K. Hale) later in the tour.

C. Badcock – Another 18th Century Grave

Carver: Obediah Wheeler

The Badcock gravestone is another example of an 18th century headstone and footstone.

D. Esther Meacham – 1751

Carver: Gershom Bartlett

Esther Meacham, wife of the First Church minister who is buried next to her, has one of the most fascinating stories in town, which is recounted in full on her gravestone. Her marker is a prime example of the work of Bolton carver Gershom Bartlett, who was owner of the granite quarry that still operates in Bolton Notch. Most of the stones in town cemeteries likely came from there. Bartlett’s style rarely varied, and he is known today as the “hook and eye man,” because the eyes and nose on the face resemble the clothing fastener. There are numerous examples of Bartlett’s whimsical work located here.

Ester was captured with her family in the Indian raid in Deerfield, MA in 1704. Be sure to read Esther’s gravestone to learn more.

E. Humphrey Davenport – 1750

Carver: Benjamin Collins

Carved by Benjamin Collins of Columbia, this stone is a good example of the artistic craftsmanship often seen on the gravestones of local residents who could afford the best, as prices were set both by design intricacy and amount of lettering. Unfortunately, Collins’s shallow cut lettering now suffers from weathering erosion.

Nathan Hale Cemetery contains only six examples of his work, and the Davenport marker is the only bluestone in this yard. It is signed at the bottom (B. Collins), perhaps as a form of advertising.

F. John C. Tilden – 1790

Carver: John Loomis

Jonathan’s only son, John Loomis, adopted a style similar to his father’s but added some features of his own, such as hook shaped hair, daisies, and use of “the” in place of “ye.” The stones of John C. Tilden and Lucy Strong are good representatives of his work.

G. Oldest Stone in Coventry Cemeteries –

Hannah Buell 1718

Norwich Ovoid Carver

Hannah was the wife of one of the original settlers of Coventry, Peter Buell, whose name also appears on this stone. Crudely shaped into a semicircle, this stone is the only example in town of the work of the Norwich Ovoid Carver, an early craftsman whose name remains unknown. Note how the words, “OF” and “WAS” are divided.

H. 17th Century Gravestone Art

The earliest New England gravestones were carved with brief inscriptions, noting name, birth and death dates, and sometimes age, with no imagery at all. The Puritans did not advocate using religious symbols, and the earliest decorative motif to come into common use was the “death’s head,” or skull. Often wings and/or crossed bones were added, perhaps to symbolize the pairing of physical death with spiritual resurrection. The purpose of the message was to prompt passers by to meditate upon mortality and the fleeting nature of life. By the time Coventry was settled, the death’s head image was falling into disfavor.

Though Hannah Buell’s stone is early 18th century, its style typifies 17th century gravestones.

I. 18th Century Gravestone Art

In the first half of this century, with life growing less grim, the emphasis on contemplating mortality remained, the skull motif evolving into a more comforting image, that of the “soul effigy,” or cherub. The face filled out, with lifelike features and elaborate wings and crowns, symbolizing the soul’s flight to heaven. By the 1760’s, there were countless variations, and this icon dominated gravestone art for the entire century.

J. 19th Century Gravestone Art

With independence, attitudes and philosophies in the new nation changed, with neo-classical ideas coming to the forefront. The art and architecture of ancient Rome and Greece were greatly admired, and the urn and willow became the most popular gravestone motif. The willow, an ancient symbol of mourning, is usually shown bending over an urn, used by the Romans to hold the ashes of the dead. At the same time, the language