

Connecticut  
State Register of Historic Places  
Old South Cemetery, Hartford

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Old South Cemetery

Other Names: Old Cemetery, South Cemetery, South Burying Ground, Old South Burying Ground, Old South Yard

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 400 Maple Avenue

City/Town: Hartford Vicinity: Barry Square, South End

State: CT County: Hartford Zip Code: 06106

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property	Category of Property
Private: <u>  </u>	Building(s): <u>  </u>
Public-local: <u>x</u>	District: <u>  </u>
Public-State: <u>  </u>	Site: <u>x</u>
Public-Federal: <u>  </u>	Structure: <u>  </u>
	Object: <u>x</u>

4. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Funerary Sub: Cemetery

Current: Funerary Sub: Cemetery

## 5. DESCRIPTION

### Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Old South Cemetery is a trapezoidal-shaped flat parcel of 2.53 acres located in the South End of Hartford on the east side of Maple Avenue between Shultas Place and Benton Street. It is 1-1/3 miles south of the center of downtown and one block north of Barry Square. (Figures 1, 2) The surrounding neighborhood is largely residential with the exceptions of Michael D. Fox Elementary School<sup>1</sup> across Benton Street to the south and the Institute of Living hospital across Maple Avenue to the west. The approximately 180 19th-century gravestones in the cemetery exhibit typical funereal designs in brownstone from early in the century and in marble from later in the century. Much of the land is not covered with monuments, making the cemetery an oasis of open space in the surrounding dense urban setting. (Photographs 1, 2, 3, 4)

The majority of monuments are clustered in two zones each identified as "area of abundant gravestones" on the Ground-Penetrating Radar survey map, Figure 12. One of the two zones is centrally located in the cemetery; the other is to the south, near Benton Street. Two adjacent family plots located in the central zone are, or were, enclosed by fences made of brownstone posts connected by iron bars. (Photograph 5) The westerly of the two is dominated by the Bull monument, which consists of a marble pedestal encased in a brownstone frame surmounted by a brownstone pyramid. (Photograph 6) The west side of the cube is incised with the words: (Photograph 7)

In memory of  
Jonathan Bull Esq.  
Son of  
Dr. Jonathan Bull &  
Mrs. Hannah Bull  
He was born Nov. 5, 1746  
and died Oct. 5, 1825<sup>2</sup>

The brownstone tablet for Walter Robbins, marking the first interment after the cemetery was duly opened, is in place, in part. (Photograph 8) The full inscription recorded by Starr reads::

In memory of  
Walter, Son of  
Mr. Levi Robbins, Jr. &  
Mrs. Abigail; Robbins  
who died

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<sup>1</sup>Formerly Bulkeley High School.

<sup>2</sup>Inscriptions are taken from Starr's 1880 transcript, since they are not always readable on the stones.

Oct. 5, 1801  
aged 10 months

Starr noted when he recorded the lettering that the design of the monument included a winged cherub. A similar stone now lying flat carries the inscription: (Photograph 9)

In memory of  
Mrs. Anna Jones  
wife of Isaac Jones  
who died May 13, 1803  
Age 34

An unusually plain, for the times, brownstone monument with only a simple incised border was erected in memory of John Stavely: (Photograph 10)

Mr. John Stavely  
was born in Lincoln  
shire England Nov. 11 AD1773  
& died in Hartford  
Connecticut.  
Oct. 6 AD1800  
*The journey of life is short*

The stone for Mrs. Ann Saxelby is one of many now flat on the ground, in fact, partially embedded. (Photograph 11) In all likelihood, other stones are concealed by earth, their presence unknown.

Mrs. Hannah Hudson is remembered with two stones, for reasons unknown. One is brownstone carved with embellishment at the top which includes the urn-and-willow motif popular in the 19th century, and therefore not often found in brownstone, the favored material of the 18th century. (Photographs 12, 13)

In Memory of  
Mrs. HANNAH HUDSON  
the wife of  
BARZILLAI HUDSON  
who departed this life  
September 16, 1807  
in the 58th year  
of her age

The marble version of her stone, now flat on the ground, is much simpler in shape and design but with similar inscription. (Photograph 14) The stone for her husband, Barzillai Hudson, also is marble, with lettering that has largely lost its sharpness and legibility. (Photograph 15) The Hudson stones are located adjacent to Benton Street.

The cemetery had at least three table stones (two brownstone, one marble), consisting of flat slab elevated and supported by posts or small columns, or by solid sides. The top slab for Miss Marie Louise Angelique Raphel, in part, is now on the ground, and badly deteriorated. (Photograph 16) Some of the lettering still can be made out: (Photograph 17)

In memory of  
Miss Marie Louise Angelique Raphel,  
a native of Marseilles  
who died Mar 20 1806 in the  
41st year of her age.

En memoire de Mademmoiselle Marie  
Louise Angelique Raphel native de  
Marseilles decedee le 20 Mars 1806  
agee de 41 ans

Another example of a marble block with pyramidal top, now separated in pieces, is found in the Reverend Abel Flint family memorial. (Photograph 18) The lettering on the north side of the block, in a custom often followed with ministers, gives an extended account of Flint's career:

Dr. Flint was a distinguished scholar, active, and laborious in the discharge of his various duties. In the early operations of the Miss[ionary] and Bible societies, and other religious institutions of the State he performed an important part.

To the benevolence of the Christians; he united urbanity and dignity of manners. Having devoted his life to the service of the Church, and the people of his charge, He rests from his labors in the hope of a blessed IMMORTALITY.

His wife is remembered by the south side of the block with an inscription that reads in part: (Photograph 19)

MRS. AMELIA FLINT  
*wife of the*  
Rev. Abel Flint  
*and daughter of*  
Col. Hezekiah Bissell  
*of Windsor*  
*died Jan. 19, 1810*

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*aged 44.*

The radar map (Figure 12) indicates an "area of apparent disturbed material" toward the back of the cemetery which, in the opinion of David A. Poirier, Ph D, Staff Archaeologist of the Connecticut Historical Commission, suggests the presence of a number of unmarked graves of provenance unknown.

In general, apparently much of the cemetery, to the northeast, north, and northwest, has never been used, for reasons unknown. Many of the existing stones have been moved (see History), and remaining stones are in poor states of repair and maintenance, spalled, standing at awkward angles, fallen over, or perhaps obscured by earth.

The name of the cemetery has shown no uniformity over the years. Atlases and newspaper references exhibit a variety of names, including Old Cemetery, South Cemetery, South Burying Ground, Old South Burying Ground, and Old South Yard. Old South Cemetery appears on the current USGS map (Figure 1) and Metropolitan District Commission map (Figure 2) and is therefore adopted for the name of the resource in this documentation.

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## 6. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable Criteria:    A  B  C  D

Significant Person(s): See History

Architect/Builder: \_\_\_\_\_

### State Significance of Property and Justify Criteria Noted Above.

#### Summary

Old South Cemetery is significant historically because it is the second oldest municipal burying ground in Hartford, its period of use running through the 19th century. Most interments occurred during the years 1801-1878. The roster of prominent families buried there informs the story of the mercantile, military, publishing, and international aspects of Hartford's society. The cemetery is significant artistically because it contains good examples of gravestone design and carving from throughout the 19th century.

#### History

The history of Old South Cemetery is derived from a variety of sources<sup>3</sup> which taken together give a reasonably clear understanding of its character, but the sources do provide details in disagreement with one another.

Initially, the land now occupied by the cemetery was part of the farm owned by Andrew Benton<sup>4</sup> (1620-1683), hence the name of the street which forms the southern boundary of the graveyard. After Andrew Benton settled in Hartford in 1660, he bought his farmland from the Town of Hartford, which had confiscated it from Nathaniel Greensmith.<sup>5</sup> The property first passed to Andrew's son Samuel, then to Moses Benton in 1746, and to his sons Daniel and Moses, Jr., in 1755. Ursula Benton, the daughter of Daniel and Prudence (Seymour) Benton, who died as an infant on November 13, 1773, was buried in the family orchard, thus becoming the first (unmarked) interment within the present cemetery grounds.

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<sup>3</sup>See Bibliography.

<sup>4</sup>Andrew Benton was a founding member of nearby South (Second) Congregational Church.

<sup>5</sup>Greensmith was hanged as a witch in 1663. (Benton, p.1.)

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After Daniel and Moses, Jr., sold the farm in 1783 to Thomas Y. Seymour<sup>6</sup> (1757-1811), participant in the battle of Saratoga and the surrender of General John Burgoyne<sup>7</sup>, Seymour continued to permit Benton family members to be buried there. The first marked gravestones were those for Ebenezer and his wife, Elizabeth Benton, who were interred in 1790 and 1791. When Hannah Barnard died on March 12, 1800, she became the first person to be buried in Old South after it was laid out as a cemetery, but nine months before the city assumed ownership. Williams Robbins, who died at age 10 months in October 1801, was the first interment in the municipal cemetery.

The parcel acquired by the Town of Hartford from Thomas Y. Seymour on December 15, 1800;<sup>8</sup> included the orchard where burials had been made. The conveyance was described as being to the "inhabitants of the Town of Hartford and their committee, John Cantwell, David Olcott, John Dodd, and Elisha Mix," for \$400, of a four-acre piece of land "lately laid out and opened [as a cemetery] situated on the turnpike Hartford to New Haven" bordered west by the turnpike, south by Asa Francis' lane, east by land of Jeremiah Wadsworth, Esq., in part, and in part by land of Hezekiah Wyllys.<sup>9</sup>

The last burial in the cemetery was that of Thomas Y. Seymour's daughter, Martha, on December 2, 1878, according to Martin, but the *Courant* in 1973 reported the last burial, identity unknown, was made in 1910.<sup>10</sup>

In writing about the establishment of the cemetery in his Hartford County history, Burpee states that in 1800 "Old South Yard" on Maple Avenue was bought for the use of two (unidentified) churches. In view of the number of its members buried there, it is likely that one of the two was South (Second) Congregational Church, which was conveniently located nearby, much closer to Old South Cemetery than to Old North Cemetery. While Old North Cemetery<sup>11</sup> is far better known and larger than Old South Cemetery, land was first acquired for Old North in 1807, eight years later than Seymour's sale to the town of the site for Old South in 1800, thereby establishing Old South's status as the city's second oldest municipal cemetery, second after the 1640 Ancient Burying Ground<sup>12</sup> at Main and Gold Streets.

Administration and maintenance of Old South Cemetery from 1800 to 1910 were in the hands of the City of Hartford's Board of Selectmen, a group separate from the Board of Common Council and the Parks Department, perhaps being a remnant of Hartford's organizational structure as a town. Little is

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<sup>6</sup>Thomas Y. Seymour served in the Revolutionary War with Sheldon's Light Dragoons. He was admitted to the bar in 1780, held the position of State's attorney from 1796-1806, became active in the Anti-Slavery Society in 1791, and was an organizer of the Governor's Horse Guard. He was buried in Old South Cemetery in 1811.

<sup>7</sup>In John Trumbull's painting of the "Surrender of Burgoyne" Captain Seymour is represented in the foreground mounted on a black charger.

<sup>8</sup>Hartford Land Records, volume 23, page 101, December 17, 1800.

<sup>9</sup>The north boundary is not mentioned.

<sup>10</sup>*The Hartford Courant*, May 7, 1973, 25:1.

<sup>11</sup>Listed in the National Register of Historic Places on August 6, 1998.

<sup>12</sup>Listed in the National Register of Historic Places on December 5, 1972.

known about the responsibilities and duties of the Selectmen, but they seem to have performed a variety of activities, one of which was overseeing elections, in addition to administering the cemetery.

The earliest available maps showing the cemetery are two plates in the Hartford city atlas of 1869. Plate 21 depicts an irregular quadrilateral, presumably the four acres sold to the city by Thomas Seymour, into which Benton Street dead-ends. (Figure 3) The fact that the site is labeled "Old Cemetery" on the map suggests that as early as 1869 it already was not a primary burial ground. Plate 25, drawn by Seth Marsh, Hartford's leading civil engineer of the time, perhaps delineates the site more accurately, and identifies surrounding parcels and their owners. (Figure 4)

The state of Connecticut 1893 atlas shows Benton Street extended through to Maple Street, already impinging on the cemetery, which it calls the "Old South Cemetery." (Figure 5) This first intrusion, perhaps reducing the size of the cemetery, is referred to by Close, who says that Benton Street from Wethersfield Avenue to South Cemetery was accepted by the city on September 11, 1888, but actually was "opened around south end of Cemetery to Maple Avenue,"<sup>13</sup> apparently ca. 1888. The map suggests that rather than simply going around the south end of the cemetery, the new roadway consumed some of the burial ground, as verified by the 1896 Hartford city atlas. (Figure 6) Benton Street was extended west from Maple Avenue to Webster Street in 1899, as shown on the map filed on May 4, 1895, by Elizabeth A. Barnard. (Figure 7) The 1899/1900 layout "through the Burying Ground," pursuant to authority granted by Special Act of the General Assembly, replaced a portion of the south section with the roadway and cut off an isolated section south of the roadway. The cleared, detached section of the cemetery south of Benton Street, measuring 40' x 400', was sold for \$1,000.00.<sup>14</sup>

Expenses associated with these changes are spelled out in the *Municipal Register* for 1901, including the cost of removing 115 remains at \$311.00. The gravestones also were removed and reset. Elsewhere the *Register* reports appropriations related to the project at \$250.00 for removing bodies, \$514.50 for curb and gutter, and \$226.32 for walks at south and north sides. An iron fence was erected the following year, which probably was the deteriorated iron fence removed in 1999 for a cyclone fence replacement. This change led to the founding of a group which is working to maintain and care for the cemetery into the future (see below).

The taking of the southern section of the cemetery for the benefit of Benton Street was recorded in the press at the time. The *Courant* for May 5, 1900, reported issuance of 148 permits for disinterment and removal (*vs.* 115 quoted above). Family members could take over the procedure if desired; otherwise, remains were "buried in spots selected by the Committee," presumably elsewhere in the cemetery. The article does list the 148 names, which included individuals from prominent Old South Cemetery families such as Clapp, Barnard (dozen or more), Seymour, Hills, Hempstead, and Hannah and Barzillai Hudson.

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<sup>13</sup>Close, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup>*Register*, committee report, March 24, 1902.



The *Courant's* retrospective account of May 7, 1973, says that 66 bodies (as opposed to 115 or 148<sup>15</sup>) were removed and buried elsewhere for the 1900 improvement of Benton Street. In 1908 the City of Hartford Parks Department took over maintenance of the cemetery, but "no plot plan was ever turned over to the Parks Department."<sup>16</sup> This circumstance explains the lack of burial records at the Parks Department for Old South Cemetery. The department maintains excellent records, for example, for Old North Cemetery.

The Hartford city atlas of 1909, reflecting these alterations, shows the present configuration of the grounds, and uses the name Old South Burying Ground. (Figure 8) Measurements are given on the 1920 Hartford city atlas plate, 158.3 feet along Shultas Place and 375.1 feet on Benton Street, which are the same measurements shown on the current City Engineer's map. (Figure 9)

The first of three lists of inscriptions on the gravestones in the cemetery is that of Starr, in 1880. He records inscriptions for 233 names on 207 stones. The second, in 1884, by Charles Towneley Martin (d. 1916), a Benton/Lathrop descendant, mentions 203 graves, 15 without markers. Martin states that the first interment was in 1771, that of a girl named Lathrop who was a Benton family relative.<sup>17</sup> In the third census conducted by Charles R. Hale in 1936, about 250 names were recorded, presumably including the 148 re-interments of 1900. An unknown factor in these calculations is the number of unmarked graves. There is consistency in that the total in each case was in the 200-250 range, meaning that the 148 removals of 1900 were on the order of two-thirds of all interments. Straightening out the Benton Street line at the south border of the cemetery caused a major disturbance of the interments.

Members of well-known Hartford families found in the cemetery include 24 Seymours, 23 Barnards, 11 Bulls, four Ensigns, and Hannah and Barzillai Hudson. Relatives of the Reverend Benjamin Boardman, fourth minister of South Congregational Church, are buried there, as is the Reverend Abel Flint, D.D. (1788-1825), fifth South Church minister, who was pastor from 1791 to 1824.<sup>18</sup> Twelve Revolutionary War veterans (19 according to another record) are in Old South and 20 from the War of 1812.

Hannah [Bunce] Watson (1749-1807) was the widow of Ebenezer Watson, member of South Congregational Church and owner of *The Hartford Courant* from 1770 to his death in 1777. In the period following his demise, Hannah, his widow, was in charge and actively managed the newspaper and its accompanying print shop, with the help of a journeyman printer, George Goodwin, for two years. Then, in 1779, she married her next-door neighbor, Barzillai Hudson (1741-1823), also a member of South Congregational Church, who entered into the partnership of Hudson & Goodwin with the long-time shop

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<sup>15</sup>Since the 1900 newspaper article lists 148 names, that may be the correct figure.

<sup>16</sup>Unidentified newspaper clipping dated May 5, 1900, in Hartford Public Library Reference Department Scrapbook.

<sup>17</sup>Martin indicates that the cemetery was already in poor condition in 1885.

<sup>18</sup>The Reverend Dr. Flint served as Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the Connecticut Missionary Society for 24 years.

overseer. The partnership continued to publish *The Hartford Courant*, America's oldest continuously published newspaper, and the works of others, including Noah Webster, who started as a *Courant* reporter in 1780 before the firm published his grammar (Figure 10), at Webster's expense, in 1783. Hannah and Barzillai Hudson are buried about halfway back from Maple Avenue on the side of the cemetery next to Benton Street. Hannah, for whatever reason, has two headstones.

The international character of Hartford's population, a concomitant of the city's great West Indian trade, is borne out by the presence in the cemetery of four members of the prominent trading family of probable French origin, the Chenevards, John, John M., Mary J., and William. Also, there are at least three other people of French heritage, the Raphels: Miss Marie Louise Angelique Raphel, a native of Marseilles who died in 1806 at age 41 and is memorialized by a brownstone table monument indicating prestige and wealth; Tontienne Raphel (1761-1840), a native of Marseilles; and Frances Louise, daughter of D'Ortique and Frances Raphel, age one year and eight months. The Lincolnshire birthplace of John Stavelly is indicative of the English background of many people in the city, while reference on one stone to "died at sea" reinforces the seagoing vocation of Hartford traders. Social conditions that prevailed at the time are represented by the many infant burials and by the section possibly devoted to interment of slaves. Wars are recalled by the veterans' graves. In all, the cemetery is a three-dimensional exhibit of the breadth of Hartford 19th-century history.

Essentially, burials in Old South stopped in the 1870s. The reason for cessation is not clear. The establishment less than two miles to the south in the 1860s of Cedar Hill Cemetery, a large burying ground designed in the fashionable rural cemetery mode, may have had an influence, but for whatever reason, Old South Cemetery was little used after the 1850s and effectively became unused from the 1870s, even though well over half the area was vacant.

Old South Cemetery is now benefiting from care by the recently incorporated organization called Neighbors of the Old South Burying Ground, as reported by the *New York Times* on September 26, 2000.<sup>19</sup> (Figure 11). Its future is also protected by the General Statutes of Connecticut, specifically § 19a-315a, Use of ancient burial place, which provides for control by the Probate Court of changes to such sites, and § 19a-315b, Protection of grave markers, which establishes strict Probate Court controls over alterations/removals of monuments.

## Monuments

While many of the gravestones in Old South Cemetery are deteriorated and in need of care, they do exhibit the spectrum of development in funerary materials and design associated with the 19th century. The material of choice changed from brownstone to marble, while design evolved from winged cherubs and elaborate carving to little or no elaboration, save for the urn and willow. These changes in funerary

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<sup>19</sup>The *Times* inaccurately referred to the group as Friends of the Old South Burying Ground.

art reflected development in Christian theology from emphasis on the hardships of entering heaven to celebration of life of the deceased. Old South Cemetery makes a concise and useful statement of the changing times articulated by revisions in religious thought and the associated or consequent progression through time in memorial stones.

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\_\_\_\_\_ "A Verbatim Copy of all [*sic*] Inscriptions in the South Burying Ground on Maple Avenue, Hartford, Conn. Taken July 1880 By Burgiss P. Starr, and by him given to Charles J. Hoadley Esq., and is now in the possession of the Park Dept." Alphabetical list, at Connecticut Historical Society Library.

*Town and County Atlas of the State of Connecticut.* Boston: D.H. Hurd & Co., 1893, Plate 47.

## 8. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 2.53

### Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary is shown on city map 209. (Figure 10)

### Boundary Justification:

The boundary encircles the cemetery as its size was determined in 1899.

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