

# **The Story of Historic Center Cemetery, East Hartford Connecticut:**



**From its Colonial-Era Origins through the Civil  
War**

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# Table of Contents

## Contents

<b>I. Introduction.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Audio Tour Map .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>II. The Podunks &amp; Other Tribes of the Massachusetts Bay &amp; Connecticut Colonies ..</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>III. Center Cemetery: Its Founding and Growth .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>IV. Our Puritan Heritage.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>V. Local Burial Customs .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>VI. Slavery as reflected in Center Cemetery .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>VII. Prominent Families in Center Cemetery: The Pitkins and Brownells.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>A. The Pitkins: The First Family of 18th Century Colonial Connecticut.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>B. The Brownells .....</b>	<b>27</b>



# I. Introduction

Center Cemetery in East Hartford is the second community burying place of the colonial Hartford colony. The history of the cemetery reflects the complex and complicated relations and interactions of Native Americans, African-Americans, and those of European descent from the very founding of the town through the Civil War era and beyond.

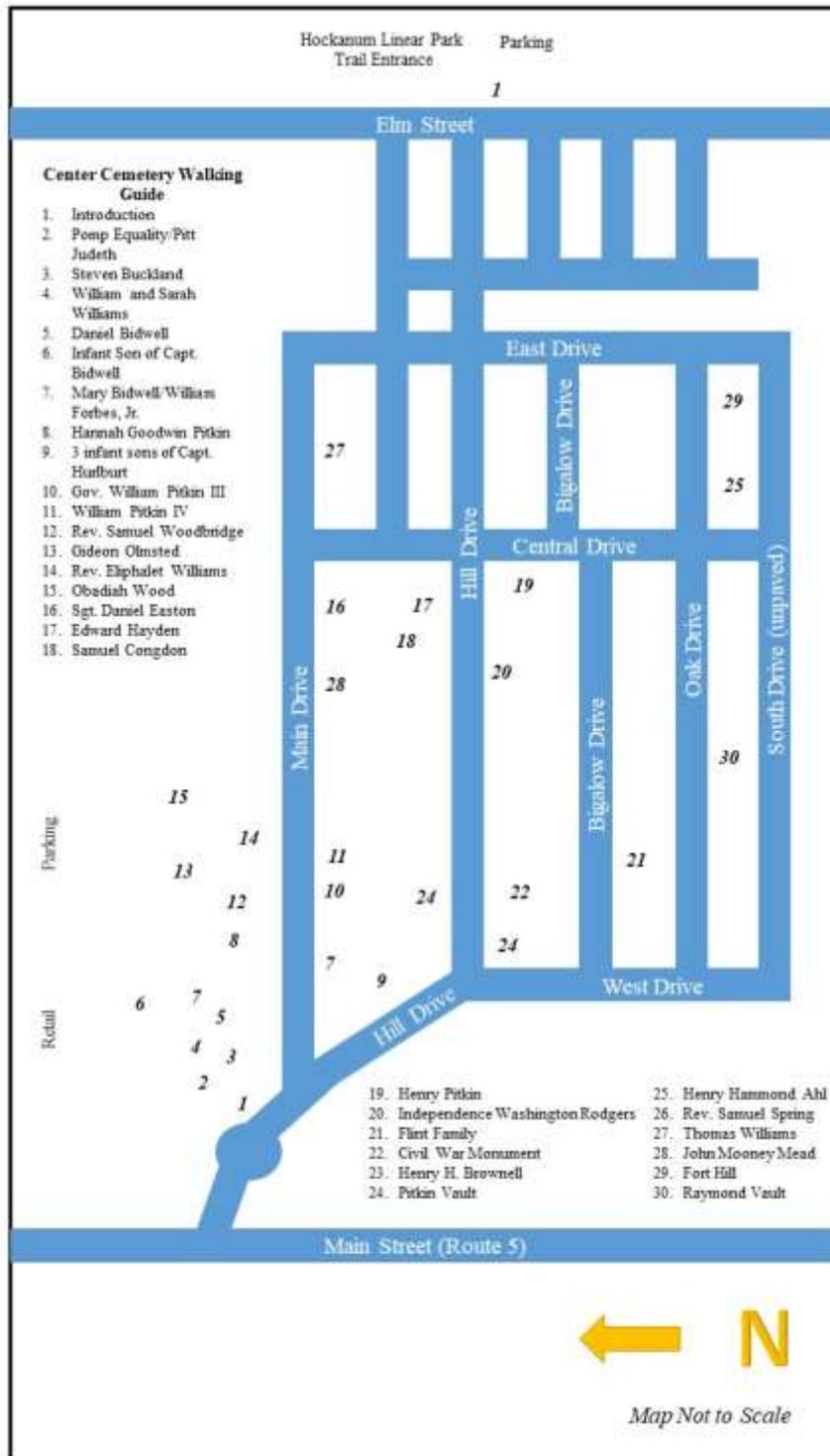
This document provides an overview of this history. It makes no claims to be complete or exhaustive. Rather, it is designed to give the reader an overview of the cemetery and its place in East Hartford history.

Names that appear in **bold face** refer to gravesites along the Center Cemetery walking tour. Visit <https://archive.org/details/center-cemetery-east-hartford-ct> for a full list of audio recordings about significant sites in Center Cemetery. Consult the map on the next page for exact locations.

Readers are encouraged to consult the sources at the end of each section for a more in-depth examination of the topics and persons discussed therein.

Please report any corrections or additional information to Jason Pannone, Head of Reference & Cultural Assets Manager, East Hartford (CT) Public Library, at [jpannone@easthartfordct.gov](mailto:jpannone@easthartfordct.gov).

# Audio Tour Map



## II. The Podunks & Other Tribes of the Massachusetts Bay & Connecticut Colonies

It is important to note that the history of Center Cemetery begins not with the early English settlers to what is now the metro Hartford region, but with the Native American tribe known as the Podunk.

The first settlers of East Hartford referred to the area south of the Hockanum River as “Hockanum,” but north of the river as “Podunk”. This area drew its name from one of the indigenous, small “River Tribes” occupying the now Greater Hartford area, for whom this had been their traditional summer lands. This group comprised just a small offshoot of the Algonquian language family of tribes<sup>1</sup>. The River Tribes spoke a variant of the Algonquian New England dialect. The Podunk and other River Tribes were all thought to be akin to the Mohegans of eastern Connecticut.

The Podunks (sometimes spelled “Podunck”) lived along the eastern side of the Connecticut River between the Scantic River on the north in South Windsor and the Hockanum, passing through East Hartford, on the south, calling the land on which they seasonally migrated *Nowashe*, “between the two rivers.”

*Podunk* is an Algonquian dialect word meaning “where you sink in mire.” The name is appropriate, given that their summer lodges were built on the higher ground along the boggy marshes and meadows of the Hockanum River heading inland from its mouth at the Connecticut River.

“Connecticut” is the English version of the Algonquian word *Quinnehtukqut*, meaning “long tidal river,” as the high and low tides of Long Island Sound could be felt as far upstream as the Enfield rapids. In its strong currents and eddies, the Podunks could fish eels and immense swarming schools of shad and salmon, and in its flood-enriched meadows grow corn, beans and squash. They also hunted deer and bear, the dried meat of which they ate during the winter months they spent deeper inland in the more sheltered and warmer valley brooks and deep forest recesses.

The highest point in what is now Center Cemetery sits above the marshlands along this part of the Hockanum River, the southern boundary of the Podunk tribal lands. This point was later called “Fort Hill” and was the site of a palisaded stronghold used by the Podunk for refuge and defense of attacks of the aggressive Pequots invading inland from their coastal villages. The point gives a clear line of sight down to the Connecticut River, which was helpful for spotting hostile invaders arriving from that direction.

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<sup>1</sup> Members of this linguistic group were located across the North American continent along the East Coast and Canada but also included Midwestern groups like the Miami, Illinois, Fox, Shawnee, and Potawatomi, and Plains tribes like the Blackfoot, Cheyenne, and Arapaho. (“Algonquian Languages,” 2022, *Telling Thanksgiving’s Story in a Vanishing American Language*, 2015)

In his book *East Hartford: Its History and Traditions* – a treasure of not only East Hartford history but a remarkable reflection of New England history published in 1879 – author **Joseph O. Goodwin** quotes a writer mentioning Podunk villages in the north end of the town meadows and another in the south end of the “Island” near the mouth of the Hockanum River<sup>2</sup>. The quotes state further there was knowledge of other villages within our current town borders, probably along the Hockanum on such sites as Fort Hill (mentioned above) and elsewhere.

In 1634 the Podunks along with the other River Tribes suffered severely from an infestation of smallpox. The disease was likely contracted from the Dutch traders active in the river valley before the arrival of the English settlers and who had a trading post located in Hartford at what is now called Dutch Point. Moreover, these tribes had recently been subdued by the powerful and aggressive Pequots, a branch of the Mohawks of the Hudson River area, who then demanded periodic tribute payments.

In desperation, the Podunk sachems sent a few tribal members led by Wanginnacut (perhaps a sachem himself) to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. These emissaries urged the English Puritans to also settle in the Connecticut River Valley as their allies against the Pequots.

Not long after the first struggling settlements in Windsor and Wethersfield, Reverend Thomas Hooker and his party traveled overland from Cambridge, Massachusetts to a major settlement on land purchased from the Saukiogs, one of the River Tribes. This settlement was for a short time called “Newtown” but soon renamed “Hartford.”

Relations between the Podunks, their native neighbors, and the English settlers quickly soured. Well into the 1700s all the small, various tribes of the region were gradually subjected to the laws and customs of the Massachusetts and Connecticut colonies. Many became Christianized, even if not always voluntarily, and officially designated “Praying Indians.” Under the philosophy of divide and conquer, the “Praying Indians” were encouraged to live separately from the rest of their tribe in new villages called “Praying Indian Towns.”

Unfortunately for these so-called “prudent and pious” Indians their acceptance of the Gospel produced agreements and guarantees with the English that lasted only as long as they were not an impediment to the hungry expansionist needs of the ever growing number of English settlers who surrounded them. Reflective of the thinking of the time, Rev. John Eliot of the Massachusetts Bay Colony thought one aspect of his missionary work with the Praying Indians was to get them out of the way “unto some remoter places, to teach them the fear of the Lord.”

In Hartford, including east of the river, Goodwin described how local magistrates described the indigenous people around them as uncivilized, uncouth and unworthy of respect and thereby restricted them in many humiliating ways such as forbidding them to trade with the English for arms, horses, boats, dogs and hard cider. Blacksmiths were forbidden to do any work for them and

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<sup>2</sup> This “island” may have been what later became known as “Pomp’s Island” (now eroded away) and owned by freed slave, **Pomp Equality** (1760 – 1824) – see section VI, below.

none but specially licensed traders were allowed to buy Podunk corn, beaver skins, venison or timber. They were forbidden to enter houses and if found wandering around the community after dark could be arrested or even shot if they resisted arrest. They could not harbor members of other tribes in their villages. They could not buy or sell land on their own. And in accordance to Puritan law, they could not hunt, fish, labor or play games on the Sabbath anywhere in English-controlled territory. They were, however, to some small extent protected by the magistrates from being exploited or illegally taken advantage of by any unscrupulous settlers.

Tensions between the Native peoples and the English intensified. Increasingly hostile relations between the Pequots and the English settlements along the Long Tidal River from Windsor to the new Saybrook Colony at its mouth led to the Puritans declaring war on the Pequots in 1637, during which the Pequots were quickly defeated. This greatly altered the status quo between the English settlers and the Indian tribes. For these indigenous tribes the pointed threat from one of their own was replaced by a more insidious one that would lead not so gradually and unrelentingly to essentially their marginalization to the point of near or actual extinction, as was certainly the case with the Podunks.

One last act of rebellion in the struggle between the indigenous tribes and the English settlers was the Narragansett War (also called King Philip's War). This war began in 1675 when Metacom (called "King Philip" by the English), chief of the Wampanoag of Massachusetts, united with the Narragansets of Rhode Island against the English settlers. Their defeat the following year removed forever any great threat to English hegemony in New England.

The Podunks themselves sent what is estimated to be about 60 some warriors, a big number for this small tribe, to join Metacom. With so few surviving to return, the war was a disaster for the Podunks, which as a tribe they never overcame.

According to Goodwin (in which he used DeForest's *History of the Indians of Connecticut* as a source), while there was recorded mention of Podunks living along the Hockanum River as late as 1745, they were gradually merging into the tribes in the western part of the colony, especially the Schaghticokes and, ironically, even the Pequots of New London to the extent that by the late 1750s they essentially ceased to exist as a tribe in their own right. That there remained isolated individual tribal remnants is evidenced by such as Goodwin's further reference to a town vote in 1793 authorizing payment to Dr. George Griswold for visiting and treating the wounds of a local Indian women.

Goodwin also reported that artifacts from various Podunk-associated sites were found over the years as farmers and builders uncovered these sites as they went about their business. However, these discoveries occurred before the rise of modern archaeological practices. While older works like Trumbull and Love (see "For further reading," below) give a general sense of the location of some of these sites, subsequent farming and buildings have likely obliterated any remains.

The whereabouts of the discovered artifacts are currently unknown. While there are not many surviving relics of Podunk material culture, Daley has done an excellent job of recording what he himself has found<sup>3</sup>. The East Hartford Public Library's collection holds only a few Native American artifacts dating from the late Archaic Period, approximately 3000-4000 years ago, made, presumably, by the ancestors of the Podunks and their neighbors.

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### III. Center Cemetery: Its Founding and Growth

The original lands of the Hartford settlement founded in the later 1630s extended six miles to the west of the Connecticut River and on the east side to the extent of including present day Bolton. Bolton was the first to break away as a separate town in 1720 and then East Hartford in 1783, from which Manchester broke away in 1823.

In the beginning decades, the founding families of Hartford buried their dead in a cemetery nearby their Congregational Church in what is now known as the Ancient Burying Ground in the heart of downtown Hartford.<sup>4</sup> For the population spreading to the east side of the swift-running river with its annual spring floods and freezing in the winter, the “Great Tidal River” increasingly became an inconvenient and logistical problem and they began to petition for a cemetery on their side.

Finally in April of 1709 Hartford voted to allow the residents east of the river to purchase one acre of land for that purpose from a Mr. John Pantry. In keeping with the thinking of the early Puritans who generally frowned on churchyard burials, which for them was a “papist practice,” Hartford’s second cemetery, then known as Center Burying Ground, was town-owned and not a churchyard of the nearby Congregational Church of Hartford’s Third Parish, whose congregation was recognized as a separate Ecclesiastical Society in 1699.<sup>5</sup>

This original acre, now the northwest corner of Center Cemetery, had its first known burial in 1711 for Thomas Trill, an old soldier of the Narragansett War, but his marker, if he had one, no longer exists. However, the one for his fellow veteran, Obadiah Wood, does. Dying in 1712 at the age of 64, his modest, but thick and solid brownstone marker, the oldest existing in the cemetery, is in remarkably good condition. The 1719 brownstone marker for Samuel Woodbridge who died when he was eight is the second-oldest marker.

One has to be curious about there being no stones in this seven year gap between the two, but from that point on the markers are ever more numerous. We can safely assume many markers were lost for any number of reasons: deterioration, wood that eventually rotted away, and loss through carelessness when the roads were put it. We need to also keep in mind that many people were buried without any marker (often the case with children), and while many were installed by family in later years, many were not.

During its incremental expansion, the cemetery acquired a pasture from the Goodwin family that contained what was called “Fort Hill,” the site of a Podunk stronghold used for refuge and defense

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<sup>4</sup> The original size of this graveyard has been greatly reduced over time by the demands of the growing city surrounding it.

<sup>5</sup> The current church building, an imposing Greek Revival church, was the third for the parish. Built in 1835, it has always been a prominent feature of downtown Main Street. Curiously now, but undoubtedly less so at the time so close to when church and town business were both still conducted within the same “meeting house,” the town paid part of the building costs of the new church on condition that town meetings and elections could be held in its basement.

of attacks of the aggressive Pequots invading inland from their coastal villages. This point was the highest ground above the marshlands along this part of the Hockanum River, the southern boundary of Podunk tribal lands. As stated Goodwin's history, "traces of such an enclosure still remain in Goodwin's pasture [unfortunately no longer] ... the steep hillside having been its defense and outlook on three sides, and an embankment and palisades upon the north."

Today this would be the southeast corner of the old section of the cemetery. This area "has been found rich in stone and flint relics," he went on to write. Town residents often found arrowheads and other artifacts during the digging of graves.<sup>6</sup>

The burying ground becoming unsightly with wild growth, the Ecclesiastical Society (the town's earliest governing body) hired one William Roberts in 1713 to cut it all down, and this, periodically performed, was basically the extent of any maintenance. In 1806 the cemetery was enlarged by the purchase of another acre, and with that a burying ground committee first had the cemetery finally fenced and then rented it out, as was common throughout New England, for the pasturing of only calves and sheep. These animals would keep down the growth of weeds and bushes and be too small to knock over or damage the tombstones. The picturesque tall columnar cedar trees contributing much atmospheric presence among the stones and obelisks in our early cemeteries exist today because they were too prickly for the animals to eat.

Later on the committee also arranged for the moving of many of the gravestones in the original acre to allow a road to be put in for access to the new lot. Access (now long gone) to the road itself was near the cemetery's northeast corner, and not as one would suppose from the Main Street entrance used today. Over time the cemetery was expanded further, mostly from land purchased from the neighboring Goodwin families, until it reached its current size of some 12 acres. With some 5,650 still existing stones (from 1712 to the present), the cemetery has long been sold out and burials now quite rare.

The early graves were densely spaced and without much attention or concern for orderly rows or grouping of families. However, it does appear that the 18<sup>th</sup>- and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century stones consistently faced east towards the sun rising in the morning sky, rising as would the souls of the just rise to heaven on Judgment Day.

In the later 1800s a coherent road grid was installed requiring a further and more extensive realignment of the gravestones in the older parts of the cemetery, including that of the 1712 marker of Obadiah Wood. As is evident, this was especially hard on the prestigious and very expensive table stones that once they were moved from their original footings or ground-slabs often became unstable and prone to leaning and eventual collapse. When regular mowing became common in cemeteries, including Center Cemetery, the footstones were dug up and often just discarded, but Center Cemetery was among the few lucky ones in that the footstones were mostly retained and set in back of the headstones. The markers placed in neat rows without the original placement of

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<sup>6</sup> This is no longer the case as this part of the cemetery had its last burial some time ago.

their footstones made lawn mowing quicker and more efficient. This is not only a good example of Yankee pragmatism, void of modern sentimentalism, but also of the staunch Calvinistic-based belief of the soul safely residing in God's house as predestined, and any concern for the "dust" of one's bodily remains was merely vanity.

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## IV. Our Puritan Heritage

The history of Center Cemetery is rooted deeply in the Puritan heritage of colonial New England. Much of the iconography found on the gravestones reflects this heritage and, as time draws on, a reaction against it. While an examination of who the Puritans were and what they believed is beyond the scope of this history, interested readers should consult the bibliography at the end of this section for further information.

In 1636 Reverend Thomas Hooker, a towering figure of colonial New England, and his party of congregants, about 100 men, women and children, plus some 160 head of cattle, traveled westward over land from Newtown (now Cambridge, Massachusetts) on the Charles River heading for land near the Dutch trading post on the Connecticut River. At first the settlement was called “Newtown,” after the place they had left, though only for a short while.

A big distance for the time, the separation between Cambridge and the new settlement allowed for more local control. Hooker was given authority to make laws for the new single-church (Congregational) Connecticut Colony, as was the case in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In 1638, before the General Court in the now renamed Hartford (in honor of cofounder Rev. Samuel Stone from Hertfordshire, England), Hooker memorably declared “...the choice of public magistrates belongs unto the people by God’s own allowance,” thereafter being hailed by historians as one of the founders of the American concept of democracy.

However, he was by no means a pure democrat in today’s terms, as Hooker was to the core a Puritan strictly adherent to Calvinistic doctrine. For him “the people” meant churchgoing, landowning Englishmen. This was meant to exclude their own women, plus the godless Native Americans, questionably human blacks (slaves), and the barely tolerable Dutch, Jews, and Quakers.

In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, most power was vested in only the clergymen and appointed magistrates, all among the proven “saints” who, according to Calvinistic doctrine, were spiritually “elected by God” and predestined to enter heaven. In the Connecticut colony, the more liberal Hooker thought the franchised consisted of all parish male members, which beyond only the saints included so-called “admitted inhabitants” and “freemen.” This point of view added to the gradual formation of an ideology for an eventual American nation grounded in a concern for the interests of the individual.

It was not all that radical of Hooker to broaden the base of the power structure, since it was decreed that everyone in the colony, formalized member or not, was required to attend both services of the Congregational Church each Sunday or suffer fines, public humiliation in the stocks or expulsion

to Rhode Island.<sup>7</sup> All the franchised voters, the freemen and Proprietors (landholders), were members of the Congregational Church, and thereby the holders of moral authority and protectors of social order.

Nonetheless, the magistrates of the colony did try to keep a semblance of separation between church and secular matters — probably made all the more difficult by dealing with both within the same “meeting house.” While to a lesser degree than found in the Providence Plantation, this did contribute to the gradual weakening of the feudal-like control of the Puritan churches. It was not, however, until 1818 that Connecticut’s new constitution “disestablished” Congregationalism as the state religion.

Like in all of New England, the settlement of the Connecticut Colony was based on the Puritan overlay of religion (the glory of God), secular politics, and trade — a self-governing commonwealth supported by the industry of trade and commerce and dedicated to the glory of God. For Connecticut the Great River was the heart of its commerce since it was in every way the great highway that made the growth of trade possible, with its tributaries and waterways being the secondary roads into the interior along which households and villages continually sprouted.

In the eyes of Rev. Hooker, a flourishing Connecticut Colony was to be for God’s glory a “Biblical Utopia.” He most likely died content in his accomplishments. There is probably no greater visual symbol of his ideals, of which Center Cemetery has so many extraordinary examples, than that of the soul or winged-head effigies so often carved with great creative imagination on the tympanums of the early colonial gravestones indicating the interred was among the elect with a soul predestined for flight to heaven. While near its end, the endurance of this Calvinistic utopian concept of Connecticut is indicated by the 1833 epitaph for Osmyn Pitkin: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his Saints.”

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<sup>7</sup> There the Providence Plantation was founded by Rev. Roger Williams who was definitely a radical thinker for his time. He argued for the separation of church and state, a profoundly liberating concept that to an even greater extent contributed to the principles of the American model of government.

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## V. Local Burial Customs

From the settlement days of the 1600s to well into the 1700s, the idea having coffins bouncing in the back of the stout, clumsy, springless carts moving along the deeply rutted dirt roads of the time was considered disrespectful. Therefore, the coffins were carried to the graveyard on stout biers borne on the shoulders of relays of volunteer men — the pallbearers.

For a long time this meant to the Burying Ground in Hartford which could entail up to several, difficult miles for a population expanding ever farther from the center, plus the difficult issues, depending on the season, that came with crossing the dangerous Great River for those on its east side. These logistical problems and basic costs often resulted in burial on the land of the family homestead, especially for children, indentured servants or itinerant workers.

The early hand-bier used to get the coffins to Center Burying Ground was a sturdy affair made from timber some 4 to 5 inches square, which in itself was a heavy load. On this was placed the deceased in a narrow wood coffin (plain or freshly painted). The deceased's name or initials were laid on the coffin lid in brass tacks or later metal letters when they became locally available for purchase in Mr. Henry Phelps' store<sup>8</sup>. All this plus a coffin covered with a heavy black cloth pall purchased by the Ecclesiastical Society in 1723 made for a heavy load for relays of four hardy volunteers each to bear the coffin on an arduous journey from home to grave.

In gratitude, there would be a table of refreshments for them at the house of the deceased, plus such tokens of gratitude as hard cider or rum, coin silver spoons, or “weed” (tobacco). However, the hard cider and rum were later banned after a temperance movement of the mid-1830s.

After the town's Congregational church got its first bell in 1835, it would be used to slowly toll out the age of the deceased. But the funeral sermon itself would have to wait to be given in church on the Sabbath following the burial with the bereaved family occupying the special mourner's pew.

Depending on the wealth and stature of the deceased, family members and important mourners would receive special gifts listed in the will. For example, according to Goodwin, one Dr. Kimball left gloves, beaver hats, and tobacco to certain named men, and scarfs and mourning hoods to their wives. Additionally and pointedly, he left a gold mourning ring to the illustrious Hannah Goodwin Pitkin (1637 – 1723), a granddame of the Connecticut Colony residing at the family seat on the east side of the river.

By the middle 1700s, with the innovation of lighter wheels, a special horse-drawn frame on wheels was created to receive a now lighter-made hand-bier with legs to take on the coffin which could be carried through a house door. Thus, this modified carriage with the driver sitting on the slats of the bier, was the town's first horse-drawn hearse. Later in the 1800s, in the dawning of the

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<sup>8</sup> In 1824 he was also appointed the cemetery's first sexton.

Victorian Age, a more elegant hearse was purchased with a roof and heavily fringed black curtains on its sides. It was housed in a special building in the cemetery near its new Main Street entrance. Paid for by donations, this was later replaced by the third and last town-owned, but still horse-drawn, hearse.

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## VI. Slavery as reflected in Center Cemetery

The reality of slavery in the North before the Civil War is a topic only now being fully reckoned with. Ownership of slaves of African and Native origin and descent was a reality even in East Hartford. The first US Census of 1790 indicate that 33 persons were held as slaves in East Hartford at that time.

Colonial cemeteries in larger towns and cities like Norwich, CT<sup>9</sup>, often set aside areas for burials of slaves, though sadly apart from their European masters at the back of the burying grounds. East Hartford likely had a similar section, though, over time and with the lack or loss of grave markers, only two marked graves of enslaved persons are known today.

Of East Hartford's known number of 33 slaves in 1790, Center Cemetery accounts for only two. At this time of history, a scarcity of money meant that funerals and gravestones were often prohibitively expensive. It is very likely that most slaves were buried wherever it was the most convenient and least costly, as would have been the case with so many others, regardless of race. For this same reason there could have been other slaves buried in the cemetery, but with no markers, or markers lost to the ravages of time.

Indeed, it is often remarked that Center Cemetery's only two marked graves for slaves, **Pit Judeth** (1743 – 1810) and **Pomp Equality** (1759 – 1824), are in the cemetery's first row. However, this was originally the last row of the cemetery, since, as mentioned above, in its earliest days the cemetery entrance was at the end of a lane off Main Street at the point of what is now the back-end corner of a parking lot for a Main Street retail store.

It is also possible the two gravestones were set off by themselves and later moved to this row of stones in the later 1800s when the previously haphazardly-placed stones were put in neat rows for easier mowing. At the same time the footstones were dug up and placed at the back of the headstones. Nonetheless, while they may not have been in the front, these two early black town residents were still buried, remarkably, among their white contemporaries.

Not long after becoming a state, Connecticut began to make a set of laws to deal legally with its population of slaves. In the 1790 census, the state had a population of 237,946 of which 2,764 were slaves (33 in East Hartford) and 2,808 free non-whites (Native Americans, African-Americans, mixed race). However, Connecticut soon began after the conclusion of the American Revolution to deal with its population of slaves with the following set of laws:

- 1784 — all slaves born in the state after March 1, 1784 were to be freed at age 25
- 1792 — all slaves 25 to 44 were freed; penalties were imposed on owners for not doing so
- 1797 — age of manumission lowered to age 21
- 1848 — total emancipation

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<sup>9</sup> <https://walknorwich.org/freedom-trail/>

Pit Judith would have died as a slave, being born before 1784 and thereafter too old to be freed. The law was written so as to ensure that nonproductive slaves (children or the elderly) were not set free with little ability to become other than public charges.

This was not the case with Pomp Equality, a slave of Daniel Pitkin who owned and ran a tavern on the ferry landing on the east bank of the river. Equality would have been freed in 1792 at the age of 32. Likely “Pomp” is short for the slave name Pompey (after the Roman general and statesman) and that he took on “Equality” as his surname upon gaining his freedom<sup>10</sup>.

No doubt with connections made during his years working in the riverside tavern, Equality subsequently owned and mastered his own schooner for shipping goods up and down the river.<sup>11</sup> He became an owner of a house and a small island (so-called “Pomp’s Island,” since eroded away) in the Connecticut River opposite the future site of the Colt Firearms Factory. This would explain why his heirs could afford a simple but still fashionable gravestone in a time when many people still not have markers of any sort.

Did Equality have family and, if so, where were they buried? There is likely a remarkable story about his life definitely deserving further investigation.

The story or even the gender of Pit Judeth is unknown, Pit could be the name of a male, or it could be the last name of Judeth Pit (a variation or misspelling of “Pitt”). “Pit(t)” could also be a shortening of “Pitkin,” a naming convention known from the time. In any case, the fine quality of this elegant gravestone indicates this person was held in high esteem by his or her owners.

There are stories here to be discovered and retold. Hopefully, further research by intrepid scholars will bring these stories to light that they may be once again heard.

### **For Further Reading:**

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<sup>10</sup> See Brown-Hinds, Inscoc, and “Slave Names and Naming in the Anglophone Atlantic” for more information on this practice.

<sup>11</sup> Working in shipping was an attractive option for persons of color during this time. Merchant ships and whalers were more democratic space where skin color meant nothing when the survival and success of any sailing venture depending on the cooperation and abilities of every crew member. See, for instance, Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, where the master harpooners are non-white: Queequeg is Polynesian; Tashtego is a Native American from Martha’s Vineyard; Daggoo is African; and Fedallah is a Parsee from India. In terms of rank and payout from a successful voyage, the four harpooners would have only Ahab, Starbuck, the first mate, and Stubb, the second mate, above them (Melville, 2009, Mancini, 2022). However, it is important to note that even on ships, racist practices still occurred, especially among the ordinary seamen. Black seamen often were housed in the worst quarters on the ship and served even worse food than their white shipmates. They may have been integral to a ship’s crew survival in the Age of Sail, but cultural mores and practices of the time still lingered aboard (Philbrick, 2001).

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## VII. Prominent Families in Center Cemetery: The Pitkins and Brownells

### A. The Pitkins: The First Family of 18th Century Colonial Connecticut

The Pitkin dynasty began with William Pitkin I, sometimes referred to as “William the Immigrant” by his descendants. Born near London, he left his native England and arrived in Hartford in 1659. Well-educated and trained as a lawyer, he quickly rose in prominence and influence becoming the king’s attorney for the Connecticut Colony. Around 1661 he married Hannah Goodwin (1637-1723/4) whose father, Ozias, one of the original settlers of Hartford and progenitor of another dynastic family of Connecticut.

William was later joined by his sister Martha, a beauty who was greatly sought after by many until she married Simon Wolcott, scion of another prominent founding family. There would not be two women in the colony held in greater esteem and deference than Hannah and Martha. The mother of a colonial governor, Martha was in total the ancestral mother of seven governors of this and other states. Hannah was the grandmother of the **Hon. William Pitkin III** (1693 – 1769) the last colonial governor.

William based his family and holdings on the east side of the Great River, but dying in 1694 as one the most important leaders both in Hartford and the colony, he was interred in Hartford’s only cemetery, the now Ancient Burying Ground. Hannah, however was among the early burials of Center Cemetery, Hartford’s second cemetery, with a grave having two markers: the original simple brownstone and a later one of white marble erected by a descendent in the 1800s designating her “The Ancestral Mother of All by that Name in America.”

William Pitkin II (1664 – 1723) like his father was educated as a lawyer and married equally well in Elizabeth, the daughter of Caleb Stanley, the scion of another prominent founding family. Besides being a prominent magistrate, he owned fulling mills on the Hockanum, plus a clothing shop. His brother Roger, was a captain of the first company organized on the east side of the river. William’s son Joseph became a colonel of the colony’s First Regiment and was a judge and assemblyman. His first wife was socially prominent, Mary Lord; his third wife was the widow of Gov. Jonathan Law of Milford.

His son, the **Hon. William Pitkin III**, was not only an astute and respected politician, but also a successful businessman and a colonel of the First Regiment. In 1754 he was both elected deputy colonial governor and appointed Chief Justice of the Superior Court. In 1766 he was elected, as it

turned out, to be Connecticut's last colonial governor. If he had not died in office he would have equaled the Revolutionary War fame of his successor, Deputy Governor Hon. Jonathan Trumbull.

The governor's son, **Hon. Col. William Pitkin IV** (1725 – 1789), was also a judge of the Superior Court and was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1784. Continuing with the Pitkin family tradition for entrepreneurial acumen in business, early in the Revolutionary War he was a partner with his brother George in what is believed to be this country's first gunpowder mill upstream on the Hockanum near what is now the border with Manchester. After the war he was a founder of the Pitkin Glass Works located in what is now Manchester, and later (1783) he obtained a state monopoly for the production of snuff.

The Pitkins were numerous, often well-educated, major landowners, successful business men, and well-connected through their marriages to other important families of the colony's power structure. They were not only Hartford's leading officeholders, but were dominant leaders in the colony as well. In addition to numerous terms in major town positions, on the colony level there were many terms of office in the General Assembly, and they served in such posts as treasurer, assistants to the governor and finally the office of governor itself., thus from 1701 to 1783 Pitkin family members filled 35% of all elective terms in Hartford for positions that ranged from the local to that of colony.

In addition to political offices, Pitkin family members of several generations, and with great success, owned and ran mills for the manufacturing of gunpowder, glass, fulling for homespun goods, sawing of timber, plus gristmills, forges, and state granted fourteen-year monopolies (tax-exempt) in iron splitting, and the manufacturing of snuff. From the east bank of the Connecticut River, securely based in the East Society, the Third Parish, the Town and County of Hartford, the Colony of Connecticut, there was no family in 18th-century Connecticut more politically powerful than that of the Pitkins, or in their parish that included present-day Manchester more influential or affluent. Through connections of marriage, business and politics their influence was statewide and beyond lasting well past the Civil War when the family began fading from prominence.

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## B. The Brownells

In the shadow of the Civil War Monument there is a row of erect marble slab markers, relatively plain and simply engraved for some of the Brownell family — a family of varied talents and remarkable accomplishments springing from a seemingly shared drive for self-expression and adventure.

Along with those of patriarch Dr. Pardon and his wife **Lucia Emilia DeWolf** (1796 – 1884), are the gravestones for two of their six children, and memorial markers for their sons Clarence and Edward. **Francis DeWolf** (1817 – 1833) and **Emilia DeWolf** (1823-1838) died in their teens, and one can only imagine what they might have contributed to the rich history of this family if they grew to adulthood.

After Pardon's death, Lucia traveled back and forth between homes in East Hartford and Bristol, RI, where she was born and where she died and, we believe, was buried. Her marker (sadly quite broken) is very likely a memorial stone and not a gravestone. The gravestones for Pardon and Henry were also broken in several large pieces left lying on the ground. Friends paid \$1500 so that they both now stand with their pieces fully supported by stainless steel framing custom-made by a

skilled metal worker. This method, free of glue, cement or pins, which are so problematic for marble, is a good example of non-damaging, reversible restoration.

**Dr. Pardon** (1788 – 1846) was born and raised in Rhode Island. Educated to be a physician, he practiced medicine in Providence until he moved with his family to East Hartford in 1824 where he lived for the remainder of his life. He was a naval surgeon on the privateer *Yankee*, which was fitted by his wife's family, the DeWolfs, during the War of 1812. Not only a prominent town physician, Pardon was also elected in 1839 to serve one term in the State House of Representatives., and in the same year the first of seven terms as Town Treasurer. He was one of the three original trustees of the successful and prestigious English and Classical School Association, the academy's building which, while transformed, still exists and houses, appropriately enough, today's Board of Education at Wells Hall.

An example of Pardon's more adventurous and entrepreneurial proclivities was his investment in the popular so-called "Silk Culture," a cottage industry that was rather profitable for about 70 years until the bottom fell out of its market around 1837. Pardon built a so-called "cocoonery" for silkworms in the attic of his house of which there is still surviving structural evidence in his still existing house (1191-1195 Main St.), built in 1833, but completely remodeled in 1922 and now occupied by Main Hardware. The normal shape of a hipped roof is strangely altered by a protruding roughly ten foot square "monitor" (a sort of boxy, enclosed Italianate cupola) which housed his silkworms that were fed fresh mulberry leaves daily. — leaves grown and harvested by nearby town residents. The silk threads of the cocoons produced by the larvae of these worms were spun off onto a common hand-reel and then shipped to a silk mill. In their first years, the silk mills of the Cheney Brothers in Manchester purchased this locally produced silk thread for the production of their fabrics.

**Henry Howard** (1820 – 1872) was born in Providence before his parents moved to East Hartford when he was four. After he graduated from Trinity College (then called Washington College) in 1841, he became a teacher in Mobile, Alabama for a year before returning to Connecticut to study law, being admitted to the bar in 1844.

Receiving a small inheritance, he gave up which for him was the boring practice of law to join his brother Clarence in literary pursuits, although Clarence was never more than a hack writer at best. Henry published his first book, *Poems*, in 1847 followed by two popular histories for subscribers, both published in 1863: *People's Book of Ancient and Modern History* and *The Discoverers, Pioneers, and Settlers of North and South America*. However, it was with the Civil War he truly found his voice resulting in a finer, albeit uneven, quality in his writing and the beginning of a distinguished career.

He wrote a stirring rhymed version of the "General Orders" issued by Admiral David Glasgow Farragut (1801 – 1870) from his flagship, *USS Hartford*, when heading a squadron of ships that took the city and port of New Orleans in 1862. Published in Hartford's *Evening Press*, the well-

received poem came to the attention of the Admiral who appointed Brownell as both an ensign and his private secretary.

Brownell was present at the naval battle of Mobile Bay, and after the war accompanied the Admiral on his European cruise. He produced a selected collection of his war poems in *Lyrics of a Day; or Newspaper Poetry by a Volunteer in the United States Service* (1864), followed by a popular revised version, *War-Lyrics and Other Poems*, published in 1866. Writing in the heat of battle, one could say in contemporary terms he was an “imbedded” reporter, and these narrative poems, his finest, reflected this immediacy.

In an appreciative essay, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. (1809 – 1894) dubbed Brownell “our battle laureate.” Among the most popular of the poets writing during the Civil War, his literary reputation was according to some critics comparable to that of his contemporary, John Greenleaf Whittier (1807 – 1892). Brownell’s Civil War poetry excelled that of Whittier’s, whose post-Civil War poetry exceeded that of Brownell’s.

Some selections from Henry Howard Brownell’s poems:

*The River-Fight* (lines 6-11)

Up the River of Death  
Sailed the Great Admiral.  
On our high poop-deck he stood  
And around him ranged the men  
Who have made their birthright good  
Of manhood, once and again, —

(lines 136-9)

But that we fought foul wrong to wreck,  
And to save the Land we loved so well,  
You might have deemed our long gun deck  
Two hundred feet of hell!

*The Sphinx* (lines 6-9)

Since what unnumbered year  
Hast thou kept watch and ward  
And o’er the buried Land of Fear  
So grimly held thy guard?

*The Burial of the Dane* (lines 18-20)

But watch and lookout are done;  
The Union Jack laid o'er him,  
How quiet he lies in the sun!

In *War-Lyrics and Other Poems*, can be found the lyrics for a popular contending version of a marching song about the infamous abolitionist, John Brown, titled "Words That Can Be Sung to the Hallelujah Chorus." The first stanza of is:

Old John Brown lies a-mouldering in the grave.  
Old John Brown lies slumbering in his grave —  
But John Brown's soul is marching with the brave,  
His soul is marching on.  
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!  
Glory, glory, Hallelujah,  
His soul is marching on.

**Clarence Melville** (1828 – 1862) the youngest child of Pardon and Lucia was born in East Hartford. As an adult, he began his career in 1856 when he served the first of two terms as Town Clerk. Bored with that, he unsuccessfully tried his hand at writing before leaving town for a life of travel, adventure and exploration.

Arriving in Cairo, Egypt in 1861 he stayed with the British Consul, J. Petherick, in Khartoum with whom he prepared an expedition to explore the head waters of the Upper White Nile. During this river boat journey he kept a journal later published as *Last Journal of Clarence Melville Brownell*. Beginning on January 2, 1862 his entries described the land, climate, wildlife and vegetation, along with inhabitants, tribes and settlements as he came across them in Sudan and the Nubian Desert.

Sadly, his last entry, only five months later, was on May 13, 1862 shortly after which he contacted a fatal fever and was buried where he died.

**Edward Rogerson** (1825 – 1889), after attending medical school in New Orleans, became in 1850 a physician like his father, setting up a practice in Louisiana. After his marriage to Pamela Laysard in 1853 he tried to combine his rural medical practice with raising cotton but with little success. He and Pamela had six children before becoming embroiled in a bitter separation that resulted in his returning east with his eldest son, Francis.

At the end of the Civil War settling at his mother's home in Bristol, RI. According to the 1880 census he was living in Hartford. However, like his brothers he also had a lust for travel and exploration as he died in 1889 in Bridgetown, Barbados while exploring the West Indies. His

marble memorial marker is also badly damaged. The 1910 census reveals that Pamela was still living in Louisiana with only one of her six children still alive.

**Charles DeWolf** (1822 -1909), a noted painter, was both the longest living and most successful, albeit a rather late bloomer, of Pardon and Lucia's children.

While he was born in Providence and died nearby in his mother's hometown of Bristol, he was brought up in East Hartford where his family moved to in 1824 when he was two and where he mostly lived for the next 36 years until he moved to New York in 1860.

Like his brother Henry, he studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1843, but also like Henry his heart wasn't in it. He took on various jobs in places like Liberty, Virginia in 1848 and Alexandria, Louisiana in 1850.

He tried his hand at writing like his brothers Henry and Clarence and in 1850 published a book he wrote, *The Indian Races of America*, before deciding to return to East Hartford and concentrate on painting for which he truly had talent. In Hartford he had the good fortune to study with two fine artists learning the skills that enabled him to have a career as a noted landscape painter. One teacher was Julian Busch (1821 – 1848), a respected, classically trained, landscape painter from Dresden, Germany, and the other Joseph Ropes (1812 – 1885), a highly regarded topographical draughtsman and author of artist manuals.

Still residing in East Harford, Charles set up his first studio in Hartford in 1857, the same year he painted the now iconic "The Connecticut Charter Oak", now owned by the Wadsworth Athenaeum. Beautifully painted with lively character and great presence, this mighty oak as imagined by Brownell lives up to its legendary place in state history.

In New York he met and, after her divorce, married Henrietta Angell Knowlton. When not on one of their numerous travels abroad as a busy artist in search of subject matter, from the Caribbean, to Europe, and as far as Egypt, he and his wife lived in his mother's hometown of Bristol keeping up, nonetheless, his family ties to East Hartford and the area. It is a likely possibility he was the one who arranged for the row of uniform marble markers in Center Cemetery commemorating most of his family members.

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