

CHAPTER XVIII.

BURIAL GROUNDS.

Cemetery on the Common.

The old cemetery on the Common is the only one in Waitsfield that was from the beginning under town control. As elsewhere noted the Common was acquired by gift and purchase, and on September 6, 1796, the town raised money "to Chop over the Public Yard," and a year later the vote to clear this patch of forest was renewed.

A section on the westerly side was at once devoted to the uses of a burial ground, and the oldest tombstone bears date March 19, 1797, although it is not improbable that interments were made at a slightly earlier date.

Not until 1807 was formal action taken relative to this burial ground. The permission given to the Congregational Society to erect its meeting-house on the Common and the consequent necessity of fixing its location, led to the appointment of a committee in March of that year to "stake out the burying ground," and it was actually surveyed as follows:

Beginning at a Stake 11 Rods from the Southwest corner of the Common; thence Running 20 rods Northerly on the westerly Line of said Common to a Stake; thence Easterly eight Rods parrallel with the Northerly Line of said Common, thence southerly parrallel with the Westerly Line of said Common 20 rods, thence westerly to the first Mentioned Bounds.

Bissell Phelps, } Committee.
Aaron Minor, }

Waitsfield, 30 April 1807.

The meeting-house was constructed a little to the south-east of the cemetery, there being room between for a line of horse-sheds and an ample passageway. In later years, after the demolition of the meeting-house, all this land was incorporated into the cemetery, and is now largely taken up.

The elder Roderick Richardson, whose store stood at the northerly corner of the Common, and had slightly encroached upon the town property, was very desirous of obtaining a narrow strip across the north end. In 1807 he made an offer that was liberal, but attached a condition that the money be expended in clearing and fencing the cemetery, and the town refused. In fact, little was done to better its condition, and so rough and unkempt was it that in September, 1810, General Benjamin Wait, Col. Elias Taylor, and Capt. Bissell Phelps were chosen to enlist volunteers to level the Common and to act as a committee of arrangements, but the work was by no means completed, for in 1814 another committee was chosen to "plan and level the burying-grounds," and again in 1817 the selectmen were instructed to seed it down and repair the fence, which by 1822 had fallen into such disrepair that subscriptions were by vote of the town solicited to renew it, and this method failing, a tax was voted for the purpose in the following year. Indeed, the only attention paid to this spot for nearly a century consisted in an occasional renewal of the fences.

Here were buried most of the early fathers of the town, but the removal of the business and religious centre to the village on the river accentuated the lack of interest in this cemetery until it fell into a deplorable state of neglect, from which it has happily been rescued by an efficient Cemetery Commission chosen for the first time in 1904.

Meadow Cemetery.

The little cemetery located in the meadows northerly of the village was the second in point of age. It stands upon a mound or hillock that is supposed to mark closely the site of General Wait's first house, and was started as his family burial ground, although other neighboring families were soon allowed to acquire rights in it; it was until 1882 exclusively controlled by the lot owners. In 1863 the town voted to procure title to the various cemeteries in town if possible, but it was not until May 13, 1882, that Roderick Richardson and Lewis R. Joslin, as trustees for the proprietors, deeded this one to the town, it being the last to come within general control.

Methodist or Irasville Cemetery.

This cemetery was started as the churchyard of the Methodist denomination. On January 16, 1847, Rufus Barret deeded to the stewards of the Society a parcel of land lying in lot 138, on the flat northeasterly of the meeting-house and parsonage. Its convenient location led to its use by many families resident in the southerly part of Fayston, and the ground soon ceased to be closely identified with one denomination. Nothing was done by the town looking to acquiring title under the vote of 1863 until after the removal of this church to the village, but in 1872 it was voted to take control if the Society could give good title, and soon after this the transfer was made. Lots were rapidly taken up, and in 1877 and again in 1897 it was found necessary to enlarge the grounds by purchase of adjoining property.

Village Cemetery.

In January, 1845, Orson Skinner, Samuel Chipman, Artemas Brown, Hiram Joslin and Elijah Wyatt Bisbee, as building committee of the second Congregational Meeting-house, took title to six acres of land on the edge of the terrace south of the village. That portion of the land which lay in the rear of the meeting-house was at once devoted by them to the purposes of a cemetery. An undivided fractional portion of this cemetery was conveyed to the Congregational Society in 1856, but the remainder became vested in the town on February 27, 1864, by deed of such of the trustees as had not already conveyed to the Society. In 1875 the meeting-house was demolished, and the Society conveyed the site and yard to the town upon condition that it be kept forever as "an open frontage for the cemetery," and that no burials ever be made in any part of it except a strip twenty feet in width on the south end, and upon further condition that it never be sold for the purpose of erecting buildings thereon. Other parcels have been added from time to time, and the natural beauty of the spot, together with the public spirited interest of many citizens to see that it is well cared for, make it at this time well nigh a model country cemetery, while through this awakened interest, wisely fostered by the Cemetery Commission, a fund for its perpetual care is growing in a manner that augurs well for its future.

In 1906, it appearing that a large number of Revolutionary soldiers were buried in the town, many of them in unmarked graves, a movement was started for the erection of a fitting memorial to them. A great feldspar boulder of some eight or ten tons weight was taken from its resting place on a neighboring hillside and erected upon the lawn in front of this cemetery. In a panel cut in one face was set a bronze tablet, 27 x 36 inches in size, bearing this inscription:

IN MEMORY OF THE
SOLDIERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION
WHO LIE BURIED
WITHIN THE BORDERS OF THIS TOWN.

Samuel Barnard	General Benjamin Wait	
Abijah Brown	Gaius Hitchcock	Beriah Sherman
Nathaniel Brown	Joseph Joslin	Amasa Skinner
Doud Bushnell	Jesse Mix	Jared Skinner
Moses Chase	William Newcomb	Salah Smith
Caleb Colton	Joseph Osgood	Elias Taylor
Thomas Green	Jonathan Palmer	Daniel Taylor
Joseph Hamilton	Bissell Phelps	Ezra Wait
Ezekiel Hawley	Samuel Pike	Jeduthan Wait
John Heaton	Phineas Rider	William Wait
	Salma Rider	John Wells

ERECTED 1906.