

A History of Wenham Cemeteries



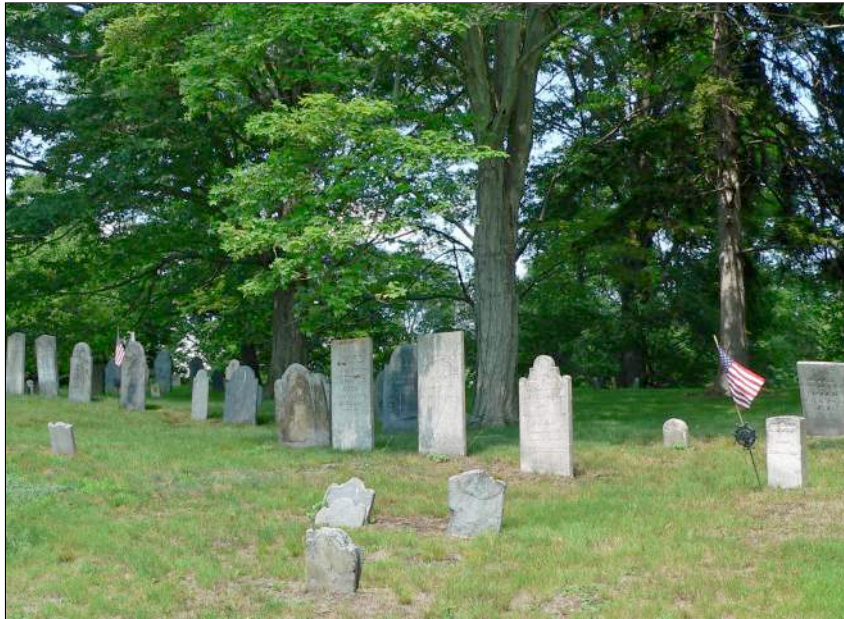
Wenham Cemetery dates back to the very earliest period of the puritans.
Photo Bing.com/maps

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Jack E. Hauck



Small knoll near main road, from Wenham to Beverly, likely was donated as a burial place, during early settlement of Enon. Photo J. Hauck, 2009

WENHAM CEMETERIES

Like so many New England towns, Wenham has a cemetery that dates back to the very earliest period of the puritans, who came to this country. But, this is not the only cemetery, in this small town of just over 4,000 residents.

How many cemeteries are there in Wenham?

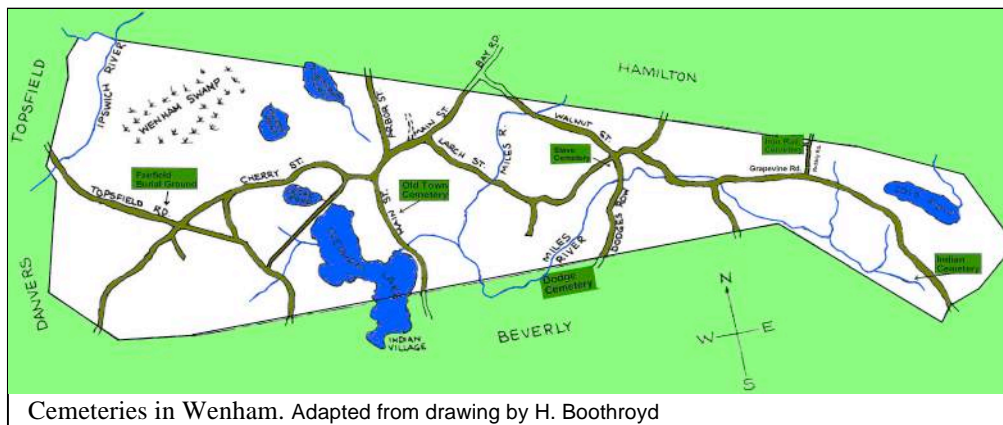
There are three, and possibly some others may have once existed.

- 1) On Main Street, there is the historic first town cemetery.
- 2) At the Iron Rail property, off of Rubbly Rd., there is the most recently established second town cemetery.
- 3) On William Fairfield Drive, there is a small, private and closed burial ground, left by William⁽³⁾ Fairfield, for his descendants.

On Dodge's Row, Beverly, just across the Wenham town line, there is another private cemetery, used almost exclusively by Wenham's Dodge family. It, too, is now closed.

Tradition holds that there once was a slave burial ground, at Wenham Neck, behind the old Baptist Church. It is said that seven black slaves are buried there; however, there are no records, in support of any burials.

In 1746, the town voted to grant the inhabitants of the East part of the town, Land for burying ground on what is called the Wyatt Land, providing they fenced the site. ¹¹



Off of Grapevine Road, an Indian burial site once was at the end of Boulder Lane, near Gordon College. The graves were moved to an undetermined site, in the 1920s.¹

It is probable that the local Indians also had a burial site somewhere in Wenham Lake area, possibly where the Wenham Country Club now is, but there are no records that indicate where this may have been.

Still another burial ground, a private one, is sometimes mentioned near Pleasant Pond. But, here too, there is no evidence to support the existence of such a burial ground.

Early Burial Ground

For the first fifty years of the Wenham's history, little is known of the places of burial, of the early colonists. The first mention of a town burying ground, is in the 1681 Town Records:¹

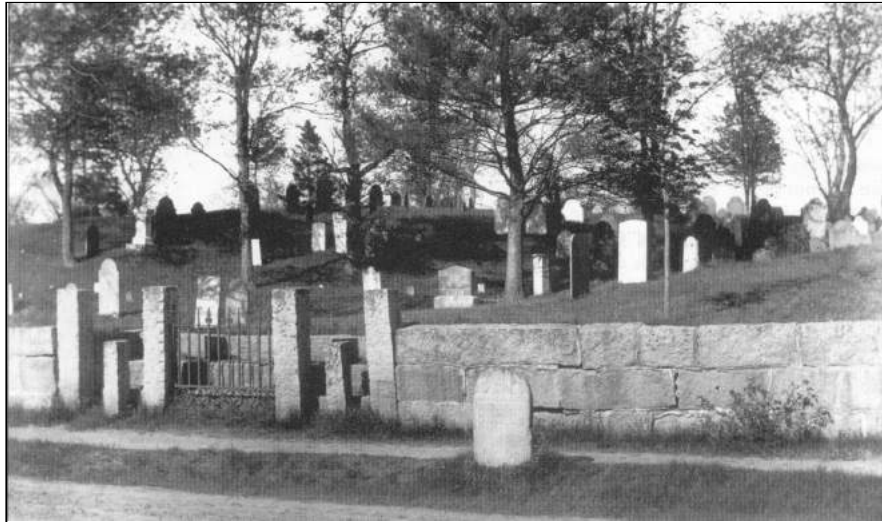
"To give Isaac Hull permission to fence his land, taking in the burial place, upon condition that, if the town see cause to fence their burial place, the said Hull shall make one half of it, ye fence between the said burying place and his land."

The first mention of a grave digger is in 1694. The selectmen appointed John Severett as grave digger for the coming year.¹²

The small knoll near the main road, from Wenham to Beverly, was probably donated as a burial place, during the early settlement of Enon (*later renamed Wenham*). The quiet stillness of the area, the peacefulness of the expansive neighboring fields and hills, and the then clear view of the tranquil great pond, united to make the spot almost the ideal rural burial-ground.

John Gott's stone (1761) has this inscription:

*Behold all you who do Pass by
As you are now, so once was I
As I am now, so you must be
Prepare for Death and follow me.*



Old Burial Grounds, on Main Street. Stone outside walls is not a burial stone, but a mile marker. Photo courtesy Wenham Museum

The first recorded funeral of a Wenham resident was on Oct. 15, 1658. It was for Ephraim Geare, the son of Dea. William and Trypheatn Geare.¹⁴ Obviously, there had been earlier burials, but they were not recorded in church records.

The oldest recorded stone was identified in 1882 by Wellington Pool. It was the tombstone of Sarah (Skipper) Fairfield. "This shelled off from an old grave stone located on the top of the hill [of Wenham Cemetery] in the 'Old Yard' bearing the following inscription, viz: - In memory of Sarah Fairfield, wife to Walter Fairfield, decd. Decr ye 18th 1710 in ye 71st year of her age."¹³ Unfortunately, this headstone could not be identified in 2012.

The burial stones of the 17th century were simple slate stones: the earliest slate was Welsh, which was later replaced by American slate. Since the slate slabs were only two inches thick, in course of years, most fell, flaked and broke, and were lost.

In 1882, Wellington Pool copied the inscriptions in the burying-ground. He found the fragment of a stone bearing the date of 1686. The oldest stone now readable, in part, is dated 1706, marking the grave of Sarah Fairfield, Wife of Walter² Fairfield. One of the oldest readable burial stones is that of Thomas Ffisk, who died in 1723.¹


In 1750, the townspeople decided to establish the boundaries of the burial ground: "*they applied themselves unto the town book, for some record or grant, made unto the town, but they could find none, neither by inquiry from old residents.*"¹


Since it was impossible to get an understandable account of the, it was then referred back and forth between committees, for two years. In June


1752, the boundaries were settled, and the part, which is called the "old cemetery" -- the little knoll by the roadside -- was enclosed by a fence, "*four feet high, from the surface of the earth.*"¹


The fence was completed in 1755. The herbage enclosed became a town asset, and for the next twenty years was rented, first for grazing of sheep and horses, and later confined to sheep, at a yearly rental of five shillings and four pence. Various residents were chosen "*to improve the burying-place --- by the pasturing of their sheep.*"¹


The cemetery has some excellent examples of the stone carving skill, of the 18th century. Many, if not most, of the stones have an angel's head.


 Ruth White's stone (1713) has a smiling angel, with geometric designs.


 Sara Friend's stone (1763) has an angel, with prominent teeth.


 Bethiah Friend (1765), who died at ten years, has an angel with wings and design along the sides.


 Deacon John Friend's stone (1785) bears "memento mori," and a pleasant-faced angel, with wings.

 Dr. Tyler Porter's stone (1789) has an angel with very realistic hair.


 Mrs. Mary Cue's stone (1795) has an angel and geometric designs carved on each side.

 The stone for the grave of Samuel Seeden (1730) has a skull and crossbones, a "death's head."

 Epitaphs were rare, in the very early years: however, detailed genealogical data were common.

 Later stones were inscribed with biblical and poetic verses, such as on the stone of Mary Tarbox (1792):

*"The sweet remembrance of the just
Shall flourish while they sleep in dust."*

 The grave of the Reverend Joseph Gerrish (1720), third minister of the Church, has a horizontal slab of sandstone. In 1785, the town voted to repair the monument over his grave. Reverend Gerrish was pastor of the church, for nearly fifty years. This act, on the part of the town, showed that his memory was still revered, and his labors not forgotten. The stone has just a simple inscription, without a biblical quote.

*Rev. Joseph Gerrish
Born at Newbury
Mar. 23, 1650
Graduated at Harvard College 1669
Ordained at Wenham
Jan. 12, 1674
Died in the Pastoral Office
Jan. 6, 1720*



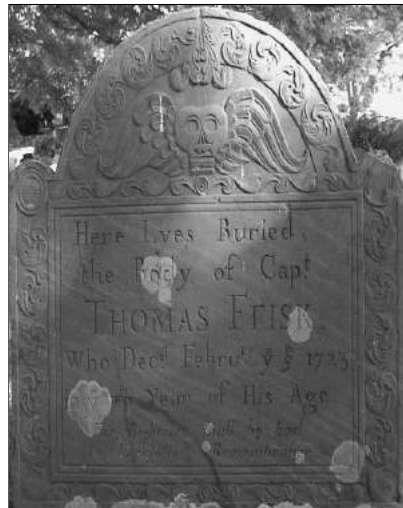
Prominent burial stone, is the Riggs monument, with large standing angel.
Photo J. Hauck, 2009



Burial tomb of Uzziel Dodge faces toward Great Pond.
Photo J. Hauck, 2009



Mile marker, on Main Street, often was thought to be a grave stone.
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum



Elaborate stone carving marks grave of Thomas Fisk.
Photo J. Hauck, 2009



During 1700s and 1800s, town maintained a hearse service. Wellington Pool was the hearse driver. Photo courtesy Wenham Museum

On the very edge of the Wenham cemetery, there is a tomb with its door looking toward the lake, and the site of "Pond John's" former home. Buried here is John's brother, Uzziel, a reputed man of action, who it is said wanted the door of his tomb, so placed, that he might watch over his brother's dilatory life. In return for this, "Pond John" wrote this epitaph:³

*Here lies the body of Uzziel Dodge
In life he dodged all good and little evil,
But in death he could not dodge the devil.*

Town authorities, however, took exception to this somewhat unkindly outburst and had it to be erased.³

The reason that the tomb faces toward Wenham Lake is there is a covenant belonging to the 62 Main St. property, "*reserving the right for the heirs of Uzziel Dodge to pass to Uzziel's tomb as the occasion requires it.*" There is a separate entrance in the wall of the cemetery abutting this property that leads to the tomb.⁹

In 1978, when the 1827 tomb was opened for restoration work, twelve coffins were found. Only three had identifications: Mary A. Dodge (*no date*), Nancy D. Swan (*died 1890*), and Samuel A. Dodge (*died 1901*). Four of the caskets were for children.⁶

There are several other old tombs in the cemetery. All, however, are now empty.



Revolutionary War Monument, at the front of the old section of the Main Street cemetery. Photo J. Hauck, 2009

The red-brick building, at the left of the entrance to the old cemetery grounds, was used to keep corpses that could not be buried, when the ground, during winter, was frozen.

There are burial stones for the earliest of the Wenham families, such as the Dodges, Fiskes, Friends, Kilhams, Porters, and Tarboxes. Many stones have deteriorated greatly and their inscriptions cannot be read.

There is a tragic story of the deaths of one family. The Gotts, a prominent early family, have a number of stones. These include five smaller stones, which mark the graves of their children, who died in a diphtheria epidemic, in 1737, thus wiping out the entire family of John and Martha.³

At the north end of the hill, is "ministers' row." The graves include those of Robert Ward, Joseph Swain, Joseph Gerrish, John Warren, Rufus Anderson, and Daniel Mansfield.

In the 1700s and 1800s, the town operated a horse-drawn hearse service. On the town common, across from the meeting house, there was a hearse barn. Church services would be held at the meeting house, followed by interment at the cemetery.

As the procession made its way to the cemetery, "the church bell, to the call of which he had so faithfully responded for many years, tolled the sad story of his departure."³



Police memorial dedicated in 1969.
Photo J. Hauck, 2009

The first milestone, still standing this side of Boston, is in the Wenham cemetery wall. It was moved there, from the street side, about 1971, to protect it from vehicular damage.³ It is dated 1710 and gives the mileage to Ipswich as 7, and 20 to Boston, and has a Bible verse Job 30, 23:

"I know that thou wilt bring me to death and to the house appointed for all living."

The town paid \$100 to have the stone moved, unaware that on Mar. 10, 1902, at the Annual Town

Meeting, \$2 was authorized to move it. Seems the DPW just got around to doing the job.¹⁷

Because it originally stood outside the cemetery, an apocrypha story arose that it was the grave stone of a sinner, who was not allowed to be buried inside the cemetery.

In 1941, a committee of the Historical Society made a plan and index to this old burial ground. There is no accurate record of how many burial sites are in the Main Street Cemetery. Stones are missing from many plots.

Around 1840, in an effort to preserve old head stones, some stones were braced with iron splints. These stones deteriorated in the areas that were in contact with the iron splints.¹⁵

Several memorial monuments are in the Main Street cemetery:

The *Veterans of the American Revolution Memorial* was established in 1981. Each year, on Memorial Day, the town holds a special veterans remembrance service, at the Main Street Cemetery, in honor of veterans who died in all conflicts and wars.

The Veterans Memorial, at the center of the Wenham cemetery, has an upright cannon barrel, surrounded by four cannon ball mounds. Those who gave their lives and the many more to die in subsequent wars are remembered every year, on November 11th, at the eleventh hour.



Firemen's memorial dedicated 1970.
Photo J. Hauck, 2009



Iron Rail cemetery has room for about 500 burial sites and 100 cremation plots Photo J. Hauck, 2009

The Police Memorial was established in 1969. On the back of the stone are the names of deceased police officers.

The Firemen's Memorial was dedicated Jun. 14, 1970.

In 1980, the town expanded the Main Street cemetery, with the acquisition of three quarters of an acre, on the south side. Frederick Batchelder sold the property to the town to provide space for eight hundred more burial plots.¹⁰

Wenham has a Cemetery Commission, which has three elected members, each serving for 3-years. The Wenham Highway Department maintains the Main Street Cemetery, property, which now covers seven acres.

Iron Rail Cemetery

In 1976, the town gave a portion of the recently acquired Iron Rail property to be a cemetery.¹⁶ The town gave the Cemetery Commission control of the "orchard section," of the property. An access road was developed. The Iron Rail Cemetery site, which covers 9.5 acres, has room for about five hundred burial sites and a hundred cremation plots.



Iron Rail Cemetery entrance. Photo H-W Patch, 2009



Fairfield cemetery. near the center of the William Fairfield Dr. community.
Photo J. Hauck, 2009

In 1980, when the Main Street cemetery was expanded, Robert Hanson, Cemetery Superintendent, predicted that the added burial space should last the town's needs for over twenty-five years.¹⁰

Hanson's estimate was right. In 2006, there were no new plots remaining, at the Main Street cemetery.

The first burial, at the site, was that of Joseph Lovejoy, in February 2006. The family also purchased ten more plots.

Dodge family members owned the Iron Rail Property for over two hundred years, starting back in the early 1600s. Around 1638, the Salem selectmen granted eighty acres to Richard¹ Dodge. The land, at the time, was part of Salem. Richard¹, who had arrived in Massachusetts, in 1629, from Somersetshire, England, built a home on the property.⁴

In 1974, the Town of Wenham acquired the Iron Rail property (79.531 acres). The name "Iron Rail" comes from an iron rail fence that once was at the front of a house originally built by John⁵ Dodge. The fence was removed to provide metal, as part of support efforts for WWI.



Dodge cemetery, on Dodge's Row, Beverly, just across the Wenham town line.
Photo J. Hauck, 2010

Dodge's Row cemetery

While the Dodge Cemetery is in Beverly, it has always been considered as a Wenham burial site, along as those to be buried were Dodge ancestors.

The original Dodge burial ground was the gift of Edward⁽²⁾ Dodge, in 1731, from his inheritance from his father, Richard⁽¹⁾.⁴ There is evidence that the plot had been used for burial purposes, some years previous to the conveyance, since there are stones dated 1704 and 1705, and several others before the date of the deed.

The original deed included an agreement, signed by nineteen of the neighbors, children or relatives of Edward⁽²⁾ Dodge, whereby they would provide proper fencing and a gate, and maintain both.⁴

In December 1812, the Dodge cemetery was enlarged. Sylvester Wilkins and others, heirs of Asa⁽⁴⁾ Dodge, sold eighty-five poles (*thirty-nine yards*) of land, to expand the site.

In June 1815, they also sold a strip 1-rod wide (*about two yards*), beginning at the street (*Dodges Row*), as a path to access the cemetery.⁴

Today, Dodge cemetery is behind 262 Dodges Row.

In reclaiming the old part of the family cemetery, Louis Dodge carried out the bequest of his father, William P. Dodge. In the underbrush, Louis Dodge found many pieces of slate and stone. The pieces were re-assembled, the inscriptions and lettering recut, and the stones were placed in their proper locations.

In removing a large tree stump, an ordinary field stone, marked April 19, 1704, was found, lodged among the roots of the stump.

From Louis Dodge's combined knowledge of his family genealogy and the cemetery, he identified the piece as the footstone of the grave of Hannah Dodge, who died Apr. 19, 1704, at the age of five.

Other missing stones, which were "borrowed," were tracked-down, returned and reset, where they had originally stood. In all, Louis Dodge identified and reset thirty-nine stones, in the old cemetery.¹

Fairfield Burial Ground

In about the center of the William Fairfield Dr. community, you will find an old, small cemetery, the Fairfield Burial Ground. It is no longer in use.

William⁽³⁾ Fairfield lived (1662 to 1742) on an 80-acre farm, which he inherited from his father, Walter⁽²⁾, who inherited the property from his father, John⁽¹⁾. John⁽¹⁾ Fairfield, received the property, in a grant, from the Town of Salem, in December 1639.¹

In 1685, William⁽³⁾ Fairfield married Esther (*surname unknown*). Their first child, William⁽⁴⁾, died seven days after birth, in 1691. He was buried, on the little knoll, which Fairfield set apart as a family cemetery.¹

In 1722/3, Esther Fairfield died. She was buried in the center of a square piece, two poles on each side, which established the boundary to the burying site. After the death of Esther, William married Rebecca Gott (*no children*).¹

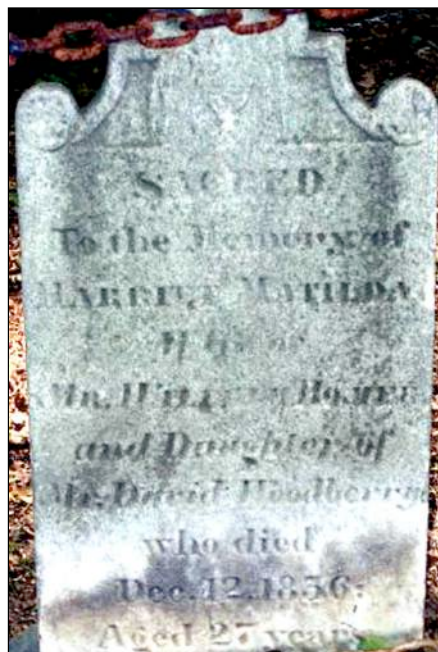
From 1732, until his death in 1742, William³ represented Wenham, in the General Court. During the session of 1741, he was Speaker of the House of Representatives.¹

In his will, William³ Fairfield set aside the burial site, stating: "*always reserving my burial place, free from any gift, grant, bargain or alienation, whatsoever, and I do hereby except and reserve to my own use and the use of my family in common, even to all descending from me, either male or female, that shall see cause to bury their dead in said burying place forever.*"¹

Today, there are about twenty stones at the Fairfield site, but only ten remain legible. The last burial was in 1856: Harriet Matilda (*Woodberry*) Bomer.⁵ There also is a tomb on the grounds. It has the name "Fairfields," but there are no record of who was interred in it.

The burial stone of William Fairfield, one of Wenham's most distinguished citizens, is inscribed:

*"Here lies y^e body
of the Honorable William Fairfield, Esq.
Sometime Speaker of the
House of Representatives*



Harriet (*Woodberry*) Bomer was last person buried at Fairfield Cemetery. Photo J. Hauck, 2009

*and for many years
a Deacon of y^e church in Wenham
and Representative for said Town
who died Dec 18th, 1742
in y^e 81st year of his age."*

A Dec. 29, 1982 Beverly-Peabody Times article said there were forty-two stones in the cemetery, most of which marked the graves of Fairfields.⁵ The estate later changed hands and was bought subsequently by the Woodburys and finally the Tuckers. The cemetery was deeded to the Town of Wenham. The Tucker estate was subdivided, to build the William Fairfield Drive homes, which began in 1971.

After the death of William Fairfield, the burial ground, passed through many owners. However, in the 1861 deed of George Kimball transferring the property to Elisha Forme, there is no mention of the burial ground boundary.¹

Over the years, the site was neglected. The little knoll became overgrown. In 1941, the Wenham Historical Association cleaned the site, mended and reset stones and rebuilt and sealed the tomb.³

Some 40 years later, Boy Scout David Dodge, of Troop 28, undertook the restoration of the Fairfield Burial Ground, as his Eagle Scout project. He and twelve fellow scouts cleared brush, and solicited funds to restore part of the chain link fence around the plot, and for the purchase of a sign to identify the site. David is the grandson of former Wenham Selectman, A. Winslow Dodge. The Fairfield and Dodge surnames joined back in 1699, when Walter Fairfield's 11th child, Prudence (*b. Apr. 18, 1680*) married Lieut. William Dodge.⁵

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- 8 - Where memories are laid to rest: Public invited to visit new Wenham cemetery, Natalie Miller, Hamilton-Wenham Chronicle, Oct. 30, 2008.
- 9 - Historic District Study, 62 Main St., 1971
- 10 - Wenham Cemetery to have 800 new plots, Hamilton-Wenham Chronicle, Aug. 6, 1980.
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- 12 - Wenham Town Records, Mar. 28, 1694.
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- 14 - Wenham First Church Records, Oct. 15, 1658
- 15 - No stone left unsurveyed as couple presses on, Hamilton-Wenham Chronicle, Jul. 3, 1990.
- 16 - Wenham cemetery gets new digs at Iron Rail, Hamilton-Wenham Chronicle, Mar. 24, 1976.
- 17 - Expensive, Hamilton-Wenham Chronicle, ??, ??, 1971.
- 18 - Wenham to restore ancient burial site, Hamilton-Wenham Chronicle, May 10, 1975.

NOTE: *Wellington Pool wrote a complete record of the people buried in Wenham's cemetery, up to 1882. The Essex Institute published his articles on the inscriptions on gravestones in the Wenham cemetery and on the Dodge burial ground.*

In 1943, Mrs. Ethel Wentworth and Mrs. J. Harrington, 1943 prepared an Index and Plan of the Old Burying Ground.

In 1975, Shirley and Harold Boothroyd compiled a photographic and written record of virtually all of the burial plots and the markers, in the old section, of the cemetery.

Also, there is a web site - www.gravematter.com/cem-ma-wenham.asp - that shows 267 memorial stones.

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