

Comptes rendus

James A. Slater, *The Colonial Burying Grounds of Eastern Connecticut and the Men Who Made Them*

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James A. Slater. *The Colonial Burying Grounds of Eastern Connecticut and the Men Who Made Them*. Vol. XXI of *Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, July 1987. Photographs by Daniel and Jessie Lie Farber. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, Shoe String Press, Inc., 1987. 326 pp. Cloth US\$65, ISBN 0-20802-160-4.

This long-awaited publication by one of the most respected gravestone scholars of New England derives its title from the classic 1927 study *Gravestones of Early New England and the Men Who Made Them 1653-1800* by Harriet Merrifield Forbes.¹ Dr. Slater has dedicated his book to the memory of Mrs. Forbes, and to the memory of Ernest Caulfield, whose pioneering work in the study of Connecticut gravestones was published in twelve installments in the *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* between 1951 and 1967.² Slater mentions in his introduction that the Society allowed him custody of Dr. Caulfield's unpublished manuscripts and papers, without which "this work could not have been accomplished." Certainly this is the most comprehensive publication on Connecticut gravestone carvers and burial grounds yet available.

As the title suggests, this is really two books in one. The first part is on the gravestone carvers. In 1976, Slater explained why it is important in material culture studies to accurately identify the work of individual carvers: "Unless this is accomplished problems of cultural relationships, dominance and spread of ideas, interpretations of symbols and origins and diffusions of style are likely to contain serious errors and/or misinterpretations. . . . Further it seems to me that it can be very misleading to attempt to interpret cultural flow by analyzing changes in motifs in individual cemeteries as advocated by Deetz and others without at the same time considering how many individual carvers are

involved and where they have come from."³ In *The Colonial Burying Grounds of Eastern Connecticut*, Slater follows through on his earlier paper by looking first at the individual carvers, and then quantifying the various carvers' works in each cemetery.

In part I, "The Carvers," Slater has looked at eighteenth-century gravestones east of the Connecticut River and found they fall into four major categories: red and brown sandstones from the Connecticut River Valley; granite-schist "gray" stones from the inland heart of eastern Connecticut; slate stones from Boston and adjacent towns in eastern Massachusetts; and slate stones from Newport, Rhode Island, and adjacent areas in the Narragansett River Basin. The individual carvers are then presented in their respective categories, determined by the kind of material with which they primarily worked. This alone is an enormous contribution to the field of gravestone studies. The work of thirty-five different carvers is discussed in the section "Eastern Connecticut Granite Carvers," with such endearing identifications as "Ashford's Charlie Brown Carver," "The Bozrah Devil Carver" or "Bolton Pudgy Matron Carver." In all of Caulfield's published works, fewer carvers were identified than in this first section of Slater's book.

Part II of the book is devoted to the burying grounds. More than two hundred eighteenth-century graveyards in sixty communities are discussed, presented alphabetically from Andover to Woodstock. There is a brief history of each town, and very specific directions for finding each burying ground. Under each town there is also a numerical tally of stones by identified carvers, sorted by burying grounds within the town. Thus we can see at a glance that, for example, there are 104 stones attributed to John Huntington in the Old Trumbull Burying Ground and only 33 in the

Goshen Hill Burying Ground, both in Lebanon, Connecticut. Referring back to Huntington in the carver section, we can further discover his period of productivity, numerical distribution of his stones in other communities, a brief analysis of his carving influences, names of his competitors and an illustration or drawing of a typical stone cross-referenced to other illustrations of his work in the book. My one criticism is that Slater has continued Dr. Caulfield's irritating habit of not using footnotes, but of including "references" after relevant sections of text, leaving the reader to guess which source matches which fact.

Yet *The Colonial Burying Grounds of Eastern Connecticut* is much more than graphs and maps—it is very readable whether or not you are familiar with the material. To continue the example of Lebanon, Slater observes,

One must be insensitive indeed if he or she can sit unmoved in the Old Trumbull Burying Ground in Lebanon very late on a summer afternoon when, as if by magic, the whole graveyard of dark lichen-clad stones suddenly lights up as the dying sun strikes the stone faces and one is suddenly confronted by an army of staring almond eyes and uplifted wings. It is then the graveyard comes alive as it has every sunny evening for nearly two hundred and fifty years. It is then that you can feel the peculiar genius of the old carvers as no photograph or rubbing, however beautiful, can ever do.⁴

This book has the added bonus of illustrations from photographs made by Daniel and Jessie Lie Farber. The Farbers are the foremost gravestone photographers in North America, having pioneered the mirror method of stone photography.⁵ They use only natural light, so that the texture of the stone is caught with all its marks and flaws. Their work is represented in many major collections. Although the photos are well placed to illustrate the text, I wish there were more of them, particularly to show the evolution of each carver's work.

There are a few Connecticut-carved grave-stones in Canada. In Nova Scotia, two that have been identified are the Jonathan Crowell stone at Liverpool (sandstone, 1776) carved by John Isham of East Haddam, and the Dan Webster stone at Chipman's Corner, Kings County (sandstone, 1783) signed by Chester Kimball of New London. At Prescott, Ontario, is the Amos Wright stone (marble, 1796) carved by the Connecticut born and trained Zerubbabel Collins. (This stone was used to illustrate the cover of *Material History Bulletin* 24.) Collins moved to Shaftsbury, Vermont, in 1778 where he continued to carve for his market in Connecticut and elsewhere, using Vermont marble. Undoubtedly, with the aid of Slater's book, more Connecticut-carved stones, evidence of cultural flow, can now be verified in this country.

NOTES

1. A revised edition (1987) of *Gravestones of Early New England and the Men Who Made Them* is available through the Centre for Thanatology Research, 391 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11217-1701 for US\$21.95 + US\$1.50 postage and handling.
2. After Dr. Caulfield's death, Peter Benes, and later James Slater, continued his articles, from his notes, so that four more installments have been printed to date in the Connecticut Historical Society *Bulletin*.
3. James A. Slater, "Principles and Methods for the Study of the Work of Individual Carvers," *Puritan Gravestone Art, Proceedings of the Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife* vol. I, 1976, p. 9.
4. Clearly, this is much more than a cemetery guide book, such as Andrew Kull's *New England Cemeteries, A Collector's Guide* (Brattleboro Vt.: Stephen Greene Press, 1975), which lists 57 interesting cemeteries in 48 communities for all of Connecticut. Kull was producing a guide book for all of New England, and included nineteenth-century cemeteries as well. Slater's emphasis is on the colonial period in eastern Connecticut.
5. For more on the mirror method of gravestone photography, see F. Joanne Baker and Daniel Farber, "Recording Cemetery Data," *Markers I*, Association for Gravestone Studies, 1979-80, pp. 108-17. Also, Daniel Farber, "The Use of a Mirror in Gravestone Photography," *AGS Newsletter* 10, no. 3, Summer 1986, p. 21.