

**Local Historic Property Report
for
Bradford-Marcy Cemetery
Center Road
Woodstock, CT**



Prepared by the Bradford-Marcy Cemetery Study Committee

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**Submitted
to
Selectmen of Woodstock, CT
29 January 2018
Amended 23 February 2018**

Introduction

The Bradford-Marcy Cemetery is an historic cemetery now owned and overseen by the Town of Woodstock. It measures approximately 0.9 acres in area, and is situated on the north side of Center Road approximately 350 feet east of the intersection of Center Road with Brickyard Road. The Woodstock Historic Properties Commission proposes to designate the cemetery as a Local Historic Property. Research and documentation of the cemetery and its markers was supported by a grant in 2015 from the CT State Historic Preservation Commission under the Certified Local Government Historic Preservation Enhancement Grant Program. As a result of this project a webpage was created on the Town of Woodstock website which contains information about the history of the cemetery and access to an online database that allows visitors to search the database of the decedents in the cemeteries and their grave markers (<http://www.townofwoodstock.com/index.php/cemeteries/bradford-marcy-cemetery.html>). The following is a report prepared by the Bradford-Marcy Cemetery Historic Property Study Committee under the auspices of the Woodstock Historic Properties Commission.

Designation of the Bradford-Marcy Cemetery as a local historic property is being undertaken to provide the cemetery with an additional layer of protection – an amendment to an existing Town of Woodstock Local Historic Properties Ordinance – to ensure the preservation of this historic cemetery. In Connecticut, the creation and administration of a Local Historic District (LHD) or Local Historic Property (LHP) is authorized by Connecticut General Statutes (CGS), Section 7-147a-k (for LHD) and Section 7-147p-y (for LHP), as amended.

The Selectmen of the Town of Woodstock, at their meeting on March 2, 2017, appointed the members of the Historic Properties Commission to serve as the Bradford-Marcy Cemetery Historic Property Study Committee as a step in the nomination of the Bradford-Marcy Cemetery as a Local Historic Property.

History of the Bradford-Marcy Cemetery

The Bradford-Marcy Cemetery is probably the least documented of the nine public or multi-family Euro-American burial grounds established in present Woodstock, Connecticut, between 1686 and 1906. Although no land records confirm ownership or transfer of the 0.9-acre cemetery parcel on Center Road in the village of West Woodstock (Figure 1) before the late 20th century, the cemetery was almost certainly associated with the First Baptist Church which had a meeting house and a parsonage (both no longer extant) a short distance away on Bradford Corner Road (Figure 2). Evidence for the connection includes correspondence sent to town selectmen in 2008 and the fact that a number of church deacons and their family members identified in Richard Bayles's 1889 *History of Windham County, Connecticut*, are buried in the cemetery. The Bradford and Marcy families, many of whom were church members, owned land including or adjacent to the cemetery parcel. In the late 18th- and early 19th century the land on which the cemetery was created was owned by Carpenter Bradford, who was a member of the First Baptist Church. Carpenter Bradford died in December 10, 1817, and is buried in the cemetery. Over the next century members of the Bradford family supported cemetery development without formal transfer of title to the church; in his 1929 will, Henry M. Bradford left a bequest of \$500 to care for the cemetery. It is not known when the cemetery acquired its present name. An 1883 map identifies the lot as the North Cemetery, perhaps in contrast to the

South Cemetery (now known as Barlow Cemetery) which had no church affiliation, located about a mile to the southwest.

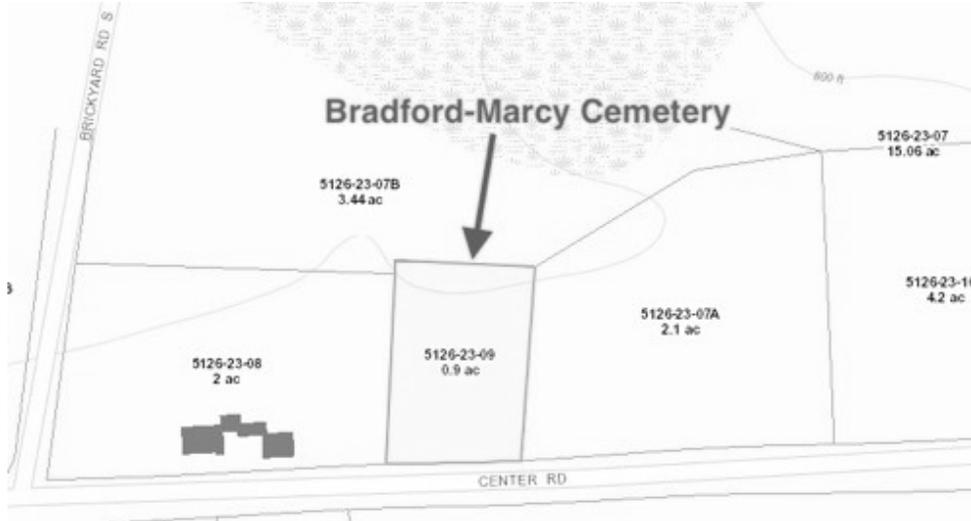


Figure 1. Location of Bradford-Marcy Cemetery, Woodstock Assessor's Office. The property immediately to the west (left) of the cemetery contains the former Lois Bannister house, designated a Local Historic Property in 2000.

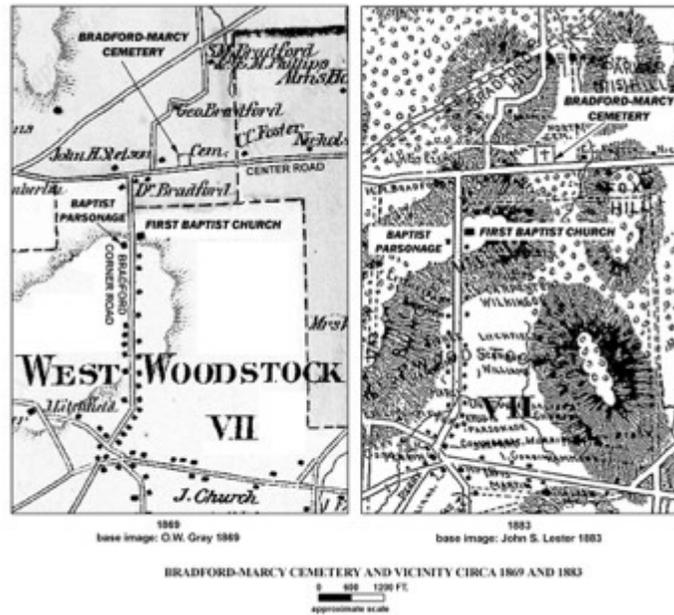


Figure 2. Historic maps indicating location of the Bradford-Marcy Cemetery, First Baptist Church, and parsonage.

The First Baptist Church was organized in 1766 and grew somewhat erratically into the first quarter of the 19th century in an era of religious turmoil (Figure 3). Membership reached 110 in 1825 and climbed to nearly 200 by the early 1840s. It was during this period of growth that a new meetinghouse and parsonage were constructed.

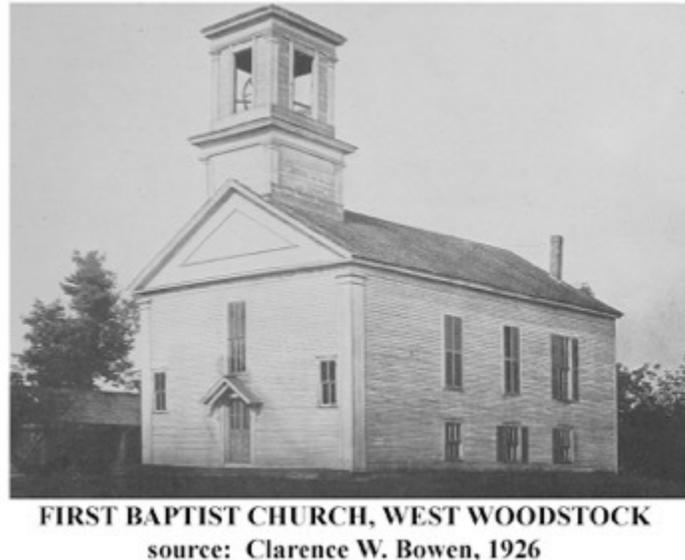


Figure 3. First Baptist Church, West Woodstock, Connecticut. The church was erected in the late 1820s or early 1830s, and demolished during the mid-20th century.

The cemetery was also likely established in response to the rapid growth of church membership. First referred to as a burying ground in an 1816 deed for an adjacent parcel, the cemetery was in use by 1809 when three small children were interred there. Headstone inscription data for more than 2000 Connecticut cemeteries was assembled in the early 1930s by W.P.A historians working under the direction of Charles R. Hale (now known as the Charles R. Hale Collection of Connecticut Cemetery Inscriptions - <http://www.hale-collection.com/>). The entry for the Bradford-Marcy Cemetery indicates approximately 300 people were buried here during the 19th century.

West Woodstock lost much of its population in the two decades after the Civil War, as local industries closed in the face of floods, fires, and lack of rail connections; by the end of the 19th century, the First Baptist Church and a number of other congregations in Woodstock were in decline. The First Baptist Church disbanded at an unknown date in the first half of the 20th century, a fact perhaps reflected by the burial of only twenty-four people at the cemetery between 1900 and 1935. The meeting house and parsonage have since been removed.

Like most of Woodstock's other church-associated cemeteries, Bradford-Marcy Cemetery management was transferred to a corporation run by people with personal connections to the burials. Established in 1935, Bradford-Marcy Cemetery, Inc., maintained the grounds with only two additional burials until a gradual decline in the number of relatives of decedents made further private management very difficult. The last corporate officer died in 1973 and in 1975

the Town of Woodstock established the Bradford-Marcy Cemetery Committee to continue maintenance with remaining corporation funds. A small permanent trust fund for maintenance was established in 1989 under the will of Richard C. Noren, who had been involved with the corporation and became the cemetery’s last decedent.

The cemetery reflects the transition in attitudes towards death and burial among Euro-American New Englanders after the late 18th century. Until that period, death was regarded as a divinely-ordained fate common to all, and the terms “burying grounds” or “graveyards” designating places of burial indicate less emphasis on eternity than on finality, with graves oriented east-west and commonly marked with fieldstones (unmarked, unfinished stones) and carved tablet-style headstones. As death for Christian Euro-Americans became viewed as more of a reward and a beginning of eternal life, a “cemetery” (from the Greek κοιμητήριον: sleeping place) denoted a place of rest, and was often a planned landscape.

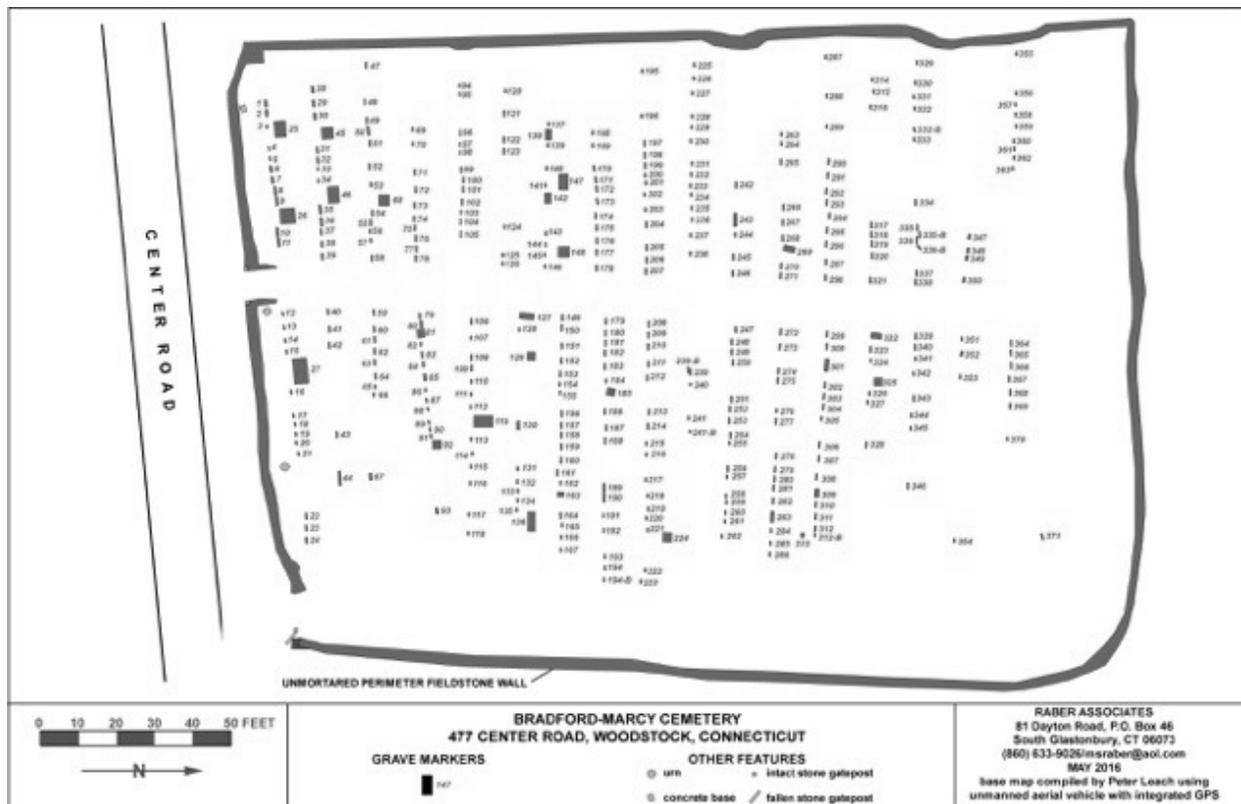


Figure 4. Plan of the Bradford-Marcy Cemetery. Prepared by Raber Associates with assistance of an aerial drone survey.

The relatively small Bradford-Marcy Cemetery was established south of a wetland, on a low hill with steep slopes on the east side and northeast corner. Assuming the headstones are largely in original positions, the earliest graves indicate the central 12-foot-wide corridor between the east and west cemetery sections was planned from initial cemetery use (Figures 4 and 5). In addition, there may also have been a similar east-west open corridor crossing the central portion of the cemetery. Graves are oriented north-south, with many originally having headstone and footstone markers.



Figure 5. View of the Bradford-Marcy Cemetery, looking north through the central entry gate and along the central corridor. Bradford family graves are clustered around the tall obelisk at the left of the gate, while Marcy family graves are clustered around the large block monument to the right of the gate. Photograph by Thomas Chace.

All of the approximately 125 surviving footstones appear to have been moved to other locations in the cemetery to facilitate grass-mowing with modern mowing equipment (Figure 7). A number of footstones were relocated to what was the central east-west passage, to the outer edges of several of the rows of markers, and to the northwest corner at the rear of the cemetery.

Most of the earliest graves are on the highest ground near the central corridor, with later burials arranged in rows on either side of the corridor. There are no enclosed family groupings, but markers for many of the approximately fifty families represented in the cemetery are arrayed in adjacent positions in one or more rows. Markers for the Bradford and Marcy families occupy prominent places at the south or front side of the cemetery, anchored by some of the large markers noted below (Figures 5 and 6).

Defining features of the cemetery include the dry-laid stone walls surrounding the rectangular cemetery parcel (Figures 5, 6, 7, and 8). On the west, north, and east the walls are about two- to three-feet in height; on the south side along Center Road the stone wall forms a retaining wall for the property grounds. Two openings are found in this south wall; the west opening has a two-leaf cast iron gate that opens onto the central, twelve-foot-wide pathway through the cemetery; at the east end of the south wall there is a second gateway that opens onto a cart path that runs northward along the east wall of the cemetery. Three large stone urns are situated just inside the