

SIGNATURE GALLERY

ed your letter, state  
bedding and cloths  
Seaman, must be ad  
the United States, to a  
rel.  
bia and obedt Servt  
John Quincy

An Autograph collection that once belonged to Maria Mitchell and her father includes many well-knowns.

PAGE 20

# THE ARTS

A CREATIVE HOLIDAY

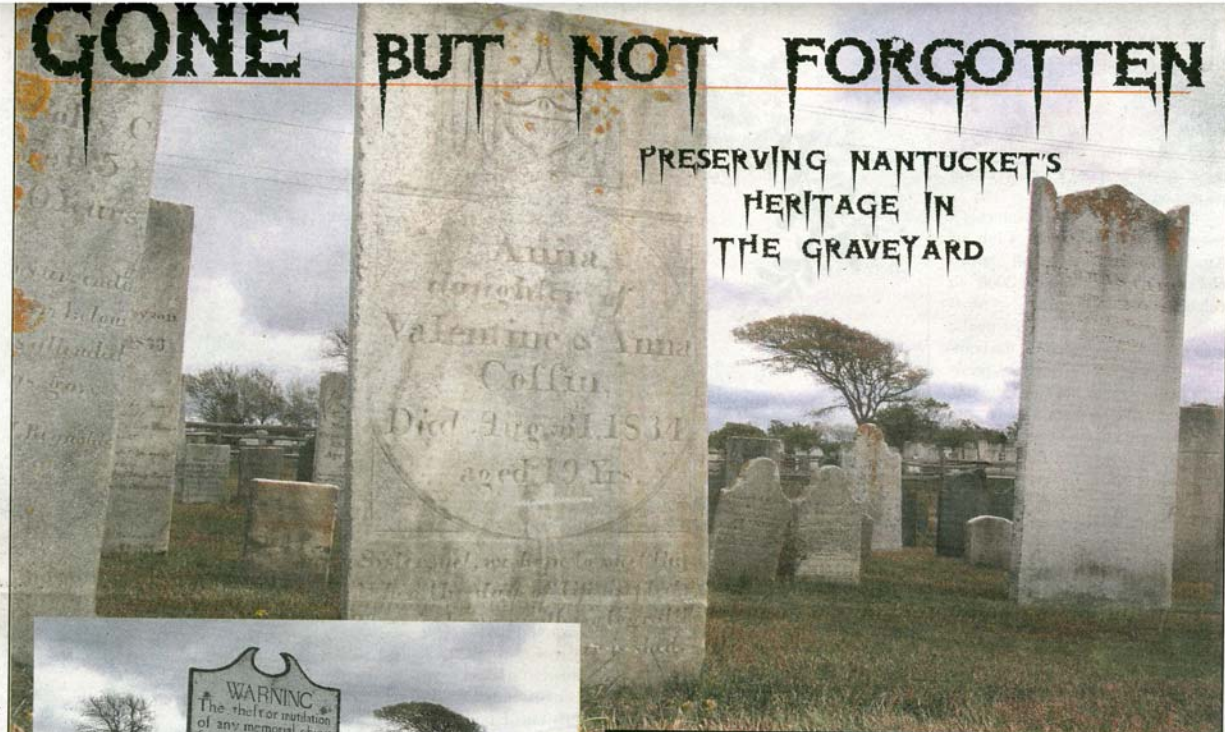


Kids, parents get artistic at pumpkin carving and painting party

PAGE 19

## GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

### PRESERVING NANTUCKET'S HERITAGE IN THE GRAVEYARD



PHOTOS BY PANOS KAKAVIATOS/The Independent

By PANOS KAKAVIATOS • INDEPENDENT ARTS EDITOR

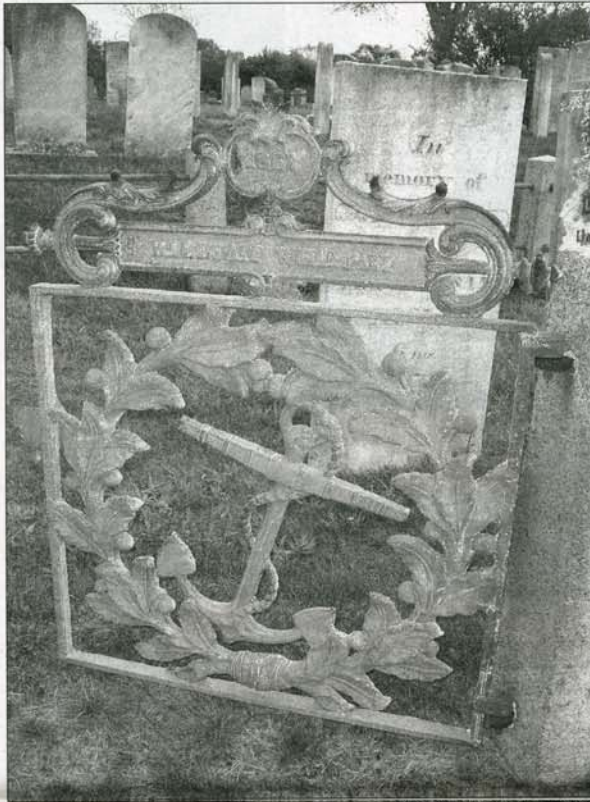
**M**ark Twain once said, "Let us endeavor to live that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry."

Many Nantucketers lived up to that quote, from hardworking whalers like William Whippey, buried in the New North Cemetery on New Lane to inventors, like Francis Wright Davis, who invented power steering, buried at Prospect Hill Cemetery off of Hummock Pond Road.

For the past year and a half, The Nantucket Historical Association (NHA) has been busy completing a user-friendly online database of all tombstones from its 13 cemeteries, in order to preserve the heritage of these and other dead Nantucketers.

See *TOMBSTONES*, page 22

# ARTS



PAÑOS KAKAVIATOS/The Independent

Seaman William Whippey's tombstone at the New North Cemetery on New Lane.

## TOMBSTONES

Continued from page 17

"Lots of communities consider them [tombstones] to be historical documents, artistic monuments and essential sources of genealogical information, so when I came here about a year and a half ago, I set out to make a cemetery inscription project for all of the island's cemeteries," said Georgen Gilliam, NHA Curator of Library and Archives.

"There was a real need because of the many calls the NHA had been receiving from genealogists," added.

Some Nantucket tombstones, dating from the early 18th century are considered works of art, with various inscriptions and symbols, like arrows, meaning the darts of death, or urns, classical symbols of sorrow and mourning.

But on Nantucket, quite a few include anchors, not only a Christian symbol of hope and strong faith, but also evidently associated with the island's great whaling past...

### A COOPERATIVE EFFORT

The NHA's online cemetery inscription project is being completed with the help of the Preservation Institute, Barbara White's Middle School and other research volunteers.

Students from the Preservation

Institute have been filling out information sheets for tombstones in the Old North Cemetery," Gilliam explained, while Barbara White, several other teachers and many students have also helped out."

Indeed not only are digital images of tombstones required for the project, information sheets for each tombstone contain the full text on each monument, what kind of stone was used to make it, a sketched illustration of it, its current condition (from mint to broken), the motif, if any, and even its orientation (facing north or south, for example).

"The next step is restoration and conservation," Gilliam said. "Which is why we have to have a very accurate record of all the tombstones."

### USER-FRIENDLY DATABASE

An added benefit to the system is its user-friendly approach to finding people buried on island.

"We have the best inscription system in the country," Gilliam said unabashedly.

"If you look at all the other projects around the country, you just get more basic information, and you can't even look up a name by individual graveyard," she said.

The Nantucket search engine does allow one to do a name search, which covers all 13 cemeteries at once, as

## COMMON SYMBOLS

Here are some common symbols found in burying grounds:

### BUTTERFLY

The resurrection; in the folklore of many cultures, the butterfly is the incarnation of a man's soul.

### CIRCLE

Eternity; a favorite motif of decorative ironwork and integral feature of the Celtic cross.

### CLOCK

Passage of time, mortality

### CYPRESS TREE

Deep mourning; the cross of the crucifixion was allegedly constructed in part of Cypress. Once felled, a cypress never grows again.

### DOVE

Holy spirit, soul at peace

### FLOWERS

Life, cycle of life/death, brevity of earthly existence

### GRAPES, GRAPEVINES

Christ, the spiritual sustenance of the church, the promise of abundance in the next life

### HANDS

Concord - farewell; a symbol of fortitude in Ancient Egypt and of fidelity in Rome. The male and female clasping hands often seen on family graves represent the everlasting union of husband and wife.

### OBELISK

Eternal life; the ancient Egyptian sun-worshipping symbol, they were erected in pairs before temple portals. The base is one-tenth of the height and the apex sheathed in copper, a design feature echoed on many Victorian monuments.

### TORCH

Immortality; when inverted, the torch denotes life extinguished.

Source: *Sexton's Book of Tales*

## GRAVEYARD ART

For more morbidly minded artists, one website worth examining is called "Tomb with a View," (<http://members.aol.com/TombView>) which explains how to properly carry out "gravestone rubbings" while fully respecting the integrity of a given tombstone. The first step is to obtain permission for doing such art, which is the practice of using various materials to obtain the relief impression of lettering, carving, or designs from a gravestone. According to the website, "Rubbings create a useful record of family information and funerary symbolism. Sometimes a rubbing becomes the only permanent reproduction of gravestones that deteriorate over time or because of vandalism. Because making rubbings has become popular among genealogists and folklorists, knowing the correct way to handle the materials and stones is the best way to learn from and preserve them for future generations to enjoy."

opposed to other systems, which are classified by individual graveyard.

### A CALL FOR RESPECT

Gilliam is upset that during Halloween, some people have defaced or knocked down tombstones.

"Last year, some tombstones at the Prospect Hill cemetery were vandalized the night before Halloween," she said. "I guess they think its just

Halloween hi jinks, but such vandalism is a crime."

Particular attention has been paid to the island's Native American burial grounds, the records of which are hidden.

"Records of such burial sites are hidden because too many people turn to looting artifacts that may be found and selling them," Gilliam said.

Indeed, the nature of looting such artifacts presents enforcement difficulties, according to Robert Hicks, a Virginia-based law enforcement specialist who has often dealt with the looting of Native American burial grounds.

"Once unearthed, artifacts are difficult to link to a looted site," he said.

The only marked Native American burial ground on island, known as the Miacomet Indian Burial Ground, lies on Surfside Road, and is fenced and in plain view.

So if anyone tries to take any grave goods onto the market, they would more likely be seen and hopefully captured for prosecution under state law, according to Brona Simon, a Massachusetts state archeologist.

For further information on Nantucket's tombstone legacy, contact the Nantucket Historical Association at 228-1894, or check out their website at <http://www.nha.org/libcemeteryproject.htm>. ■