

**THE GRAVES OF MYLES
STANDISH AND
OTHER PILGRIMS; PP.
1-34 (NOT COMPLETE)**

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THE GRAVES

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MYLES STANDISH

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BY REV. E. J. V. HUIGINN.

ROONVILLE, N. Y.
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1892.



A. Captain's Hill, the site of Standish monument. B. Mrs. Thomas Chandler's. C. Morton's Hole. D. George Frank Ryder's. E. Graveyard where Standish is buried. G. Bayley's Corner, to the west of which is Fernando Wadsworth's. H. Hall's Corner. K. Harden Hill. L. Present graveyard, in use since 1783, A. D. M. Mill Brook, on the road to Duck Hill and Marshfield.

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The Graves of Myles Standish and Other Pilgrims.

BY REV. E. J. V. HUITGINN.

CHAPTER I.

Writers of fiction and writers of history have said that the grave of Myles Standish, the famous Captain of Plymouth, is unknown and must forever remain unknown. This we might believe, if we knew that the writers alluded to had examined all the evidence in existence about the matter. But it is certain they did not do so, and now for the first time evidence will be produced that will place the identity of the grave of Standish beyond all possibility of dispute. This evidence is taken from the town records of Duxbury and from other ancient documents, from a thorough examination of the places referred to in these documents, and from living witnesses of memorials of the Captain's grave.

It is acknowledged on all hands that Standish died in 1656 and that he was buried in Duxbury. He died on the 3d of October, "a man full of years and honored by his generation." Secretary Nathaniel Morton, who died on the 29th of June, 1885, in the seventy-third year of his age, records of Standish, that "he growing very ancient became sick of the stone or Strangullion, whereof after his suffering of much dolorous pain, he fell asleep in the Lord and was honorably buried at Duxbury." This is universally admitted, that Standish was buried in Duxbury, and this is in accordance with his will which reads, "My will is that out of my whole estate my funeral charges to be taken out and my body to be buried in a decent manner, and if I die in Duxburrow, my body to be laid as near as conveniently may be to my two dear daughters, Lora Standish, my daughter, and Mary Standish, my daughter-in-law."

Tradition is at one with history in saying that Standish is buried in Duxbury.

The question is, Where is his grave in Duxbury?

Mr. Justin Winsor reflects the uncertainty of those who make superficial searches and trust too much to conject-

ure and supposition. In his History of Duxbury, Winsor says, "No stone marks the resting place of his ashes and we must seek in vain the place where reposes what was mortal of the immortal Standish. He was probably, however, buried on his farm, or perhaps in the old burying ground in that vicinity at Harden Hill."

Mr. Winsor's suppositions concerning the burial place of Standish and the early Pilgrims in Duxbury are without the least foundation. When speaking of the death of the Rev. Ralph Partridge, the first minister of Duxbury, Mr. Winsor says that he was "probably interred in the first burial place of the town which was a knoll in the south-eastern part at Harden Hill, as it is called. If any stones were ever placed here they have since been destroyed by the ravages of time or otherwise as none at the present time exist. Probably, however, none were erected, in hopes of concealing from the Indians their loss by death, and consequent weakness; or in the earliest periods the difficulty of procuring stones from England was so great that few if any could have been placed here.

"This was probably used as a place of sepulture for about sixty years and here were doubtless buried most of the founders of the town and church. Here probably rest the remains of Standish, Alden, Collier, Partridge and others, whose memory we delight to cherish but whose graves must forever remain unknown.

"We have the most positive evidence that there was a burying-ground here. Some years ago while a sloop was building in this vicinity, there were found the bones of a female and an infant buried together. About the close of the century a small sloop grounded on the marsh near by in a severe gale, and a party of workmen proceeded to get her off. While here they discovered in the bank lately washed by the sea, the appearance of a coffin, and on closer examination they perceived the nails, though all were in a very decayed

state. On the shore beneath there were found three skulls and several bones, apparently of the thigh. The teeth in one were perfect and in one there were two. On one there was some light sandy hair. The bank here was washed away some twenty feet within fifty years. Some, however, incline to the belief that this was an Indian yard, but the fact that it was near the first church and other considerations influence me to believe that it was an English burial place. There were, fifty or seventy years ago, traditional reports that there was a burying-ground a short distance to the west of the Methodist Episcopal church, and Esquire Sprague, when plowing, used always on that account to leave undisturbed this portion. Major Alden was accustomed to observe that he believed John Alden, the Pilgrim, was buried here and that this was the first burying-ground, and the one at Harden Hill cliff was an Indian one. *However, there is no positive evidence on this point either way.*

"Mr. Partridge preached in a very small building in the south-eastern part of the town near the water, and tradition now marks its site. This building probably stood for about seventy years and in it preached the first three pastors of the church."

We have quoted all this from Mr. Winsor's History of Duxbury to show how inaccurate was his information, and how many conjectures and possibilities he adopted to explain his theory that Standish was buried on Harden Hill, or on his own farm. You will remark that Mr. Winsor at times says "probably" Standish was buried on his farm or "perhaps" on Harden Hill, and again says, "probably he was buried on Harden Hill, and finally says the first church was near Harden Hill, and therefore there was a burying-ground there and an English one at that. Mr. Winsor's facts and conjectures were hastily gathered when he was a young man on his vacation in Duxbury. He had, at that time, no training in antiquarian or archaeological researches or he would have seen that in his own book he has the most convincing evidence to prove that all these conjectures are groundless as to the site of the old church and the old graveyard in Duxbury.

Harden Hill lies on the south-westerly coast of Duxbury Bay, north of the creek known as Simmons' Creek, and opposite or nearly opposite the home of Mr. Ira Chandler, who lives on the Nook road. Harden Hill is at present occupied by Mr. William Freeman (whose place is owned by Mr. Theodore Freeman), Mr. Edgar Smith, Mr. Edward Marsh, Mr. Gamaliel Wadsworth, and Mr. Calvin Smith. The very situation of this hill would show that

the early settlers never would have selected it for the site of a church or for a graveyard. It was removed from every settler in the town. There was no public road to it; in all the records of public roads there is no mention of a road to Harden Hill, nor is there the least reference to a meeting-house there. Now if the meeting-house were there, there would be a public highway to it, for the meeting-house was used for all town's meetings as well as for church purposes. There was no highway to Harden Hill; there is no reference in the deeds and records of the farms in that vicinity to a meeting-house as a boundary. The hill was altogether remote from the centre of population. The Nook people, in order to reach the meeting-house, would have to cross the marshes lying around at the back of Mr. Sylvanus Sampson's, or they would have to go around by some public way. There is no public way mentioned in any of the deeds of farms or in any of the bounds of farms recorded for those early times. Besides, the names of the settlers whose farms are recorded as lying around the first meeting-house all lived round Hall's Corner, near what is known as the old cemetery on the road between Hall's Corner and Bayley's Corner. To place a meeting-house on a hill remote from all the settlers in all parts of the town would be an absurdity too great to lay to the sense of the distinguished men who founded Duxbury and established a church here. All the settlers about the place known as Powder Point, and in all the northern part of the town around John Alden's homestead and around Mill Brook and Duck Hill, would object to putting a meeting-house in such an out-of-the-way place.

As to the supposed graveyard at Harden Hill, there are no traces of any public graveyard there. Excavations were made on the hill by several people, and there was not a trace of a graveyard, a common graveyard. According to Mr. Winsor, Harden Hill was used as a graveyard by the people of Duxbury for sixty years at least. That is, it was used as a graveyard until about 1690, A. D. Now there are public records that a large number of people died in Duxbury before that time. Besides, the Wadsworth records state that eighty-four persons had died in Duxbury up to 1688, A. D. Now it would be impossible to bury such a number of people in a graveyard on Harden Hill and at this date find no trace of such a number of graves. Again, it would be impossible for such a graveyard to be washed away by the sea and the people of the town not to know it and to take care to keep their dead from being washed into the sea. This is all the more evident when you consider that the people of Duxbury were always a sea-far-

ing people having at least the ordinary reverence for their dead. It would have been impossible for the sea to encroach year after year on their shore without their knowledge, and, having that knowledge, is it either probable or possible that the early settlers would take no steps to keep their dead from being carried into the bay?

Every week the people were at their divine service; over and over again they carried their dead there; frequently they must have visited the graves of their former friends; their town-meetings were held in the meeting-house, and all public business was transacted in it; for all these reasons and many others that will suggest themselves, the people of Duxbury would have had many and ample opportunities for observing the destruction of their graveyard by the tides, and such destruction could not have taken place without their knowledge of it. But there is no tradition of such destruction. It must be borne in mind that this destruction should have taken place between 1656, when Standish was buried, and 1665. The graveyard was in existence when Standish was buried in 1656, and the records are complete since 1665. Had the graveyard been washed away since this time, some record of it would be left in history or in tradition.

The assumption that the graveyard was washed away was forced on the defenders of the Harden Hill theory, because no trace of a graveyard is found there now, and they justly feel that the absence of an entire public graveyard must be accounted for in some way.

Mr. Bradford made extensive excavations and searches on Harden Hill for traces of a graveyard. Mr. Bradford was assisted by his brother, and after a diligent search, digging several feet deep and exploring, as sextons know how to explore for graves, they could not find one trace of a graveyard on Harden Hill.

As to the bones that were found on Harden Hill, the belief was that they were Indian bones, until Mr. Justin Winsor stated in his book that they were Caucasian bones, from the fact that this supposed graveyard "was near the first church." That it was not near the first church is absolutely certain, even according to Mr. Winsor's facts. The foundation for his supposition is gone and the supposition vanishes.

It is not necessary that we should account for the bones found on Harden Hill, for they do not in any sense correspond with what history, tradition, and Standish's own will require to prove that they were the bones of the Standish family. However, there are many ways of accounting for these bones. They may have been Indian bones. They may have been the bones

of some shipwrecked people; they may have been the bones of people who for some reason were buried on their own farm. The most likely thing of all is that they were the bones of the several people who were executed in the town during its early years.

The bones found were the skeletons of a woman and a child buried with her, "three skulls and several bones apparently of the thigh. The teeth in one were perfect, and in one there were two. On one there was some light sandy hair." The woman and the child may have been Alice Bushup (the wife of Richard Bushup who lived with Love Brewster), and her child. They were married in 1644, and she was hanged in 1648 for the murder of her child. The other skulls were probably of the other persons who at various times were put to death or were buried apart for special reasons. There are records of three or four early executions. The swamp-encircled sand-hill would have been a retired place in which to bury such people.

That these bones could not have been the remains of the Standish family is evident. Neither Lora nor Mary Standish was buried with a child. These two young women were buried near each other. The Captain was buried near them. All agree that they were buried in the graveyard attached to the church. Those who would bury the Captain at Harden Hill, or on the farm of Mrs. Thomas Chandler, claim that the first church was in one or the other place respectively. On Harden Hill no two young women were found near an old man. No two remarkable pyramidal stones were found marking the place. No tradition in the oldest families supported the notion that there ever were a graveyard and a church on Harden Hill. There never was a public road leading to Harden Hill, and the public roads all led to the meeting-house. There never was any town-land on Harden Hill. The church, and the pound, and the stocks, were always placed on the town-land and in a convenient place on the highways. The farms bounded with reference to the old church and the town-land are all located near Hall's Corner and towards Bayley's Corner around the old cemetery in that vicinity.

All the evidence in the case is opposed to the supposition that Harden Hill was the site of the first church and graveyard. Even if we granted Mr. Justin Winsor's hypothesis that the bones found on Harden Hill were Caucasian bones, this would not prove that the first church was there; and even if the first church was there, this would not prove that Standish was buried on Harden Hill, as long as the traditions of the town prove that he was buried elsewhere. We shall again refer to Mr. Winsor's great mistake in locating the meeting-house on Harden Hill, and out of

his own book we shall prove his mistake.

It might be well to say that the remnants of a coffin found on the water-front at Harden Hill would not prove that the bones were not Indian bones. There were many praying or Christian Indians in the colony, and they would have learned how to bury their dead in coffins. We might ask, too, where were the slaves, formerly owned in the town, buried?

The nature of the soil where the remnants of the coffin were found would make the wood and nails decay rapidly, so that even a coffin recently buried would soon give signs of having been buried for a great number of years.

CHAPTER II.

It would hardly be necessary to say much more about Mr. Winsor's theory that Harden Hill was the site of the first church and churchyard, and consequently the burial place of Standish, if others were not misled by Mr. Winsor's authority, and if some were not even prejudiced enough to maintain what Mr. Winsor himself does not maintain, that Mr. Winsor's authority is final on this question of the grave of Myles Standish.

Had Mr. Winsor adverted to what he has on page 138 of his "History of Duxbury," he would not have adopted the Harden Hill theory, nor would so many people have been led astray by his authority. Speaking of the parsonage given to Mr. Wiswall in 1694, Mr. Winsor says: "In 1694, we find the first mention of a parsonage when a committee was appointed to give Mr. W. a deed of the town's house, and the land he now lives on. At this time the town granted him half ye meadow called Rouse's meadow, yt belonged to ye ministry, to him and his heirs forever, and ye use of yt whole his lifetime." The house above named was built by the Rev. John Holmes, on land he purchased of John Sprague, and was situated west of the road leading from the meeting-house into the Nook or Capt. Standish's point, containing about five or eight acres. The house was afterward sold by Major William Bradford, who married the widow of Mr. Holmes, to the town."

From the location of this house built by Mr. Holmes, it was easy for Mr. Winsor to perceive that this house lying west of the road leading from the meeting-house into the Nook, the meeting-house could not have been on Harden Hill. To reach the Nook from a supposed meeting-house on Harden Hill you would have to go west until you met the road leading from the mill at Mill Brook to the Nook. The main road would be from the Nook to the mill, and a road running at right angles, or

nearly so, would lead from this main road to the supposed meeting-house on Harden Hill. This latter would be the meeting-house road proper, for the one from the Nook to the mill was known as the road from the Nook to the mill. As a matter of fact the meeting-house was on the western side of this main road, and so this road was also called the road from the meeting-house to the mill, and the road from the meeting-house to the Nook. It took its designation indiscriminately from the three important places on it, the Nook, the meeting-house, and the mill. A farm west of the road leading from the meeting-house to the Nook, could not be at Harden Hill, nor could it be at Mrs. Thomas Chandler's farm as we shall see. Here then Mr. Winsor had proof that his conjecture, that for seventy years the first church was on Harden Hill, was wrong.

On the same page of his History of Duxbury, 183, Mr. Winsor continues directly after the words quoted: "At the same time they gave him (Mr. Wiswall) one half of Bump's meadow, and the old pasture bounded north-east by the before mentioned house lot, N. west by Mr. Ralph Thacher's homestead; south-west by Morton's Hole marsh; and south-east by Thomas Bony's." It will be seen, then, that the homestead of Rev. John Holmes given by the town to Mr. Wiswall was the north-east boundary of this other piece of land given to Mr. Wiswall, which was bounded on the south-west by Morton's Hole marsh. By looking at the map of the town Mr. Winsor could have at once determined where Rev. Mr. Wiswall's home was, where Rev. Mr. Holmes' home was, and where the Rev. Mr. Partridge's home was. The three are mentioned in this paragraph giving the boundaries of this piece of land given to Mr. Wiswall. From the position of the marsh at Morton's Hole, and from the location of the two pieces of land given to Mr. Wiswall, one the Holmes homestead, and the reference to the road from the meeting-house into the Nook as the eastern boundary of the above homestead, we can easily show that the meeting-house was not on Harden Hill, nor could it have been on Mrs. Thomas Chandler's farm. The evidence all proves that it was at the present old cemetery between Hall's and Bayley's Corners.

Mr. Ralph Thacher, whose name is mentioned in the last boundaries, was the grandson of Rev. Ralph Partridge, and occupied the homestead of his grandfather, which came to him through his mother, a daughter of Mr. Partridge. Here we see the homes of the first three ministers, Partridge, Holmes and Wiswall, almost beside the old cemetery, between Hall's and Bayley's Corners; Partridge's was adjoining the cemetery.

CHAPTER III.

Before proving conclusively the location of the first meeting-house and graveyard to have been at the present old cemetery north of Morton's Hole marsh, on the road between Hall's Corner and Bayley's Corner, we shall consider the theory advanced by some that the old meeting-house lay on the point of land lying west of Morton's Hole, on or near what is now the farm of Mrs. Thomas Chandler, and that Myles Standish was buried there.

In order to reach this point or tongue of land stretching into the bay west of Morton's Hole, you should have highways from the different parts of the town leading to this place. But in all the records of the town from the earliest times there is not a hint of a highway into this tongue of land. In fact it would be absurd to suppose that Standish and the founders of the town would have built their meeting-house, in such an out-of-the-way place. Standish, Brewster and those who lived in the Nook would have to come up to Hall's Corner and then pass westward in order to get around the marsh that lay all round Morton's Hole, and then pass westward of the Goodwin (now Saunders) house to the south to reach the meeting-house, and this in all kinds of weather. To imagine such a thing when the roads were bad, and when the bay came farther north than it does at present, when the whole valley lying around Morton's Hole was swamp, and marsh, and bog, and when quite a large creek flowed down through the gorge beside the first bridge on what is known as the New Road or Border Street—to imagine, I say, such a location for the meeting-house as on that tongue of land west of Morton's Hole, is to imagine that Standish, Brewster, Alden, and the other prudent men who settled the town were doing their best to make church-going as hard and as difficult as possible for themselves and for all concerned. Then all the people in the north end of the town, in fact, in all the town, (we have already spoken of the Nook), would have to trudge their weary ways over bad roads and around swamps to the most southerly point of land in the town to reach their meeting-house. Would it not be more in accordance with reason to suppose that all the inhabitants of the town would vote to place the meeting-house in a central, accessible place? Why should they select the most inaccessible places and the most inconvenient?

It has been said that the swamp or marsh around Morton's Hole did not in former times extend so far southwardly as at present; in other words, that the bay came in farther towards the north. Mr. Herbert Peterson, the present owner of the land in

this marsh, says that he distinctly remembers when the marsh's edge was nearly one hundred feet farther north than it is at present, and Mr. Peterson is a young man. This, too, is borne out by the fact that quite a large creek called Morton's Hole Creek ran into the bay at this point. The bed of the creek is still plainly visible and the waters of the bay went up the creek to quite a distance; just as at Eagle's Nest creek and Blue-fish river. That this was so is evidenced by the fact that in 1839 A. D., by order of the town a "weir" was to be set at Morton's Hole. This fact in itself proves that there was quite a creek, which was known as Morton's Hole Creek, flowing into the bay from the north, the head of which creek is still plainly traceable. Taking all these things into consideration, and the swampy, boggy nature of the land around the Hole even to this day, we know that the arable and pasture land must have been less than it is today in this vicinity. These facts will be of the greatest interest when we keep them in memory in connection with the grants of land and the boundaries of farms and highways at and near Morton's Hole.

As has been said there was not a highway leading into this tongue of land, now owned by Mrs. Thomas Chandler, from any part of the town. Had Mr. Winsor adverted to what he wrote on page 188, he could have saved a great deal of confusion, and if those who would locate the first meeting-house on Mrs. Chandler's farm would but attend to the geography of the town, and the records of highways, farms, and town's lands, they would be saved the mistake of trying to prove an impossible thing.

We have already seen that the Rev. Mr. Holmes built his house on land bought of John Sprague, and we have seen the location of that land with reference to Morton's Hole and the road leading from the meeting-house into the Nook. A road leading from Chandler's farm to the Nook could, not by any possibility be the boundary for a farm lying northeast of Morton's Hole marsh.

The Chandler farm is west of Morton's Hole, and no highway ever ran to and from Chandler's place. How could a farm lying northeast of Morton's Hole be bounded on its eastern side by a supposed road running from a point west of Morton's Hole to a point of land due east of Morton's Hole? It is well to bear in mind that Mr. Holmes came to Duxbury in 1658, and bought the land from Sprague and built his home thereon.

The location of the Sprague farm will also prove that the road from the meeting-house into the Nook could not be a road running from the Chandler farm. The Sprague homestead and farm lay between