

Almshouse Cemetery

In 2021, [West Newbury committed to preserving and recognizing the Almshouse Cemetery](#), where paupers were buried between about 1837 and the early 1900s. Long forgotten and unmarked but for a surrounding stone wall, the cemetery, located on the east side of [Poorhouse Lane trail](#) at the northernmost corner of the Town Forest, spent a century or so fading into the woods. Working with the Historical Commission, the [Department of Public Works](#) and Eagle Scout candidate Kade Dennis cleaned up the burial ground and erected a historic marker.

West Newbury's [Almshouse Cemetery](#), like that in [other towns in Massachusetts](#) and around the country, stands as the most permanent physical remnant of local institutionalized care for the poor, disabled, insane, sick in the 1800s. Our cemetery, likely dating from the Almshouse founding in 1837, is about 65' square; Town meeting directed that its surrounding stone wall be [built to a height of 5'](#). By tradition, those in the burial ground would be laid to rest [face up, east to west, with the head at the west](#), to best view Jesus' second coming from the east.

Consciously or not, almshouse graves, like the residents themselves, were perhaps designed to be forgotten. West Newbury paid to support "Poor Out of the Almshouse," who were likely to be buried in recognized and preserved cemeteries. Historians explained, "The unworthy poor were institutionalized, kept literally at the margins of town society, and [symbolically excluded at their death](#) by burial in a pauper's grave." Poorhouse cemeteries often contained [no gravestones](#) to identify those interred. In [Middleborough, MA](#), raw unmarked stones denoted some graves; in Gettysburg, PA, where the almshouse cemetery is well-preserved as part of the historic battlefields, some gravestones were erected and only inscribed ["unknown."](#)

[Construction excavators](#) and [committed historians](#) have led the way in rediscovering poorhouse graveyards. In [Uxbridge, MA](#), the almshouse burial ground was uncovered by the state Department of Public Works, which had spent years planning a highway through the site.

Thanks to [state law](#) requiring preservation of ancient burial grounds, a compromise required a full archeological study of the cemetery, with reburial of those exhumed.

The [Uxbridge study](#) provides insights into likely conditions of paupers' graves in West Newbury. Expediency was key: adult graves were dug to 4' and coffins were generally bought ready-made—so that when they were too narrow for the deceased, "the shoulders had to be 'shrugged' in order to make the corpse fit the coffin."

In Salem, MA, a [local historian](#) spearheaded efforts to recognize and commemorate those in the almshouse cemetery, now the site of a condo complex. [She noted](#), "The people that are buried there were less fortunate in life. They were often forgotten and, in death, they became unclaimed—but they deserve to be part of Salem's story. They're part of what made the city what it is." So too in West Newbury.

A lack of gravestones and scant records mean we will likely never know all who rest in West Newbury's Almshouse Cemetery. With available records (which often list no burial ground for any deceased, much less paupers, in West Newbury), [ten of the interred have been identified](#). Incomplete Almshouse records (ending in the 1870s) identify [another 24 who died there with no other known burial site and are presumed to be in the cemetery](#).

Most of those known or believed to rest in the cemetery arrived at the Almshouse debilitated by illness or old age. Some entered with their families when death was imminent, but many were largely alone in the world when they died. In several cases, two or three generations in a family died at the Almshouse and are recorded as or likely to have been buried there. Some were young children. A formerly enslaved woman who died at the Almshouse was also probably lain to rest there.

[Click here](#) for a Historical Commission video about the Almshouse Cemetery and its restoration.

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*Historical Commission at Alms house Cemetery
November 2020, before cleanup.*

Source: Historical Commission



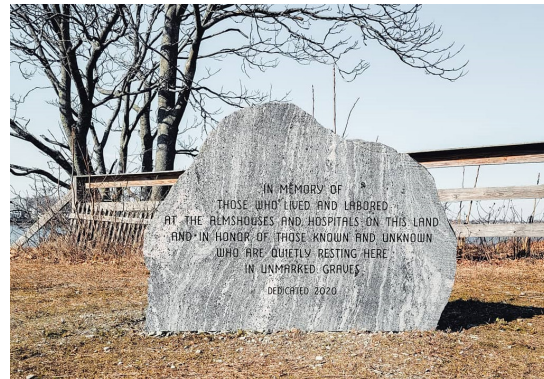
*Eagle Scout candidate Kade Dennis at the
June 2021, after cleanup.*

Source: Historical Commission

1 mover would acquiesce. It was voted, after
2 several unsuccessful attempts to amend, that
3 a stone wall five feet high be built around
4 the cemetery on the town farm, and it was
5 argued that a wall five feet would stand firmer
6 and be better bulidied than one four feet
7 high. While several persons were speaking
8 upon different subjects a voter enquired

Page 1 of The Newburyport Daily Herald,
published in Newburyport, Massachusetts
on Wednesday, March 23rd, 1881

Source: [Newburyport Daily Herald](#)



Salem Alms house Cemetery Memorial

Source: [History By the Sea Blog](#)

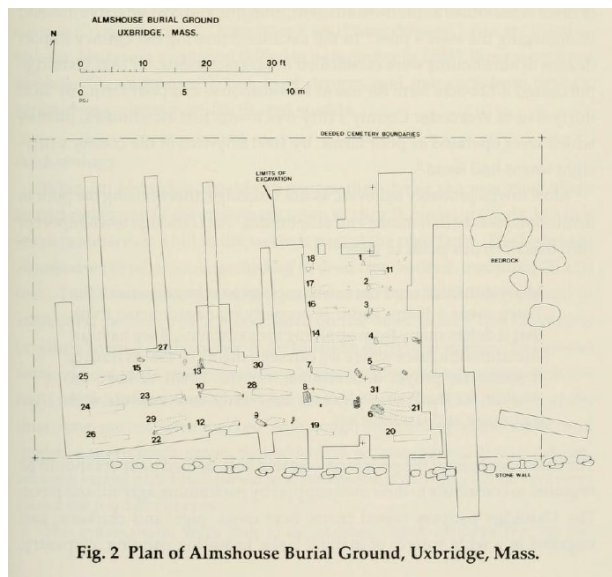


Fig. 2 Plan of Alms house Burial Ground, Uxbridge, Mass.

*Source: [Journal of the Association for Gravestone Studies](#),
[Ricardo J. Elia, Silent Stones in a Potters Field \(1992\)](#)*



*Alms house Cemetery in Rochester, NY, under
excavation after having encountered a bulldozer*

Source: [Poorhouse Cemetery, Rochester History Blog](#)

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Records for 10 individuals show an Almshouse burial. The list includes, in order of date of death:

Sarah Chase, widow of Nathan, died at the Almshouse on February 3, 1850. She was 98 years old. Almshouse Master Oliver Brown was her undertaker.

William Burrill, widower of Sarah who had died at the Almshouse in 1847, died there on December 2, 1855. He was about 92 years old. He had been a laborer, but became a pauper in the last decade or so of his life. The death registry says he is buried at the Almshouse Cemetery.

Widow Hannah England died of paralysis at the Almshouse at age 82 on January 10, 1857. She is buried at the Almshouse Cemetery, according to the register of deaths.

Gilman Tewksbury, a farmer with a wife and daughter, died of general debility at the Almshouse on March 26, 1859. He was 44 years old. The death registry identifies the Almshouse Cemetery as his burial place.

Miss Anna Woodman, 75, died of cancer at the Almshouse on June 23, 1859. According to the death register, she is buried at the Almshouse Cemetery.

Thomas Tewksbury, once a shoemaker, died of liver disease at the Almshouse on December 15, 1859, at age 68. Death records set Thomas Tewksbury's burial place as the Almshouse Cemetery.

Elizabeth M. Tewksbury, unmarried, died of consumption at the Almshouse on June 27, 1866 at age 44. She was the daughter of Thomas and sister of Gilman Tewksbury, both of whom died and were buried at the Almshouse in 1859. Almshouse Master Daniel P. Nelson was her undertaker.

Adolphus Sabine Noyes, 26, died at the Almshouse on July 23, 1866. A shoemaker, he died of heart disease. Daniel P. Nelson, the Almshouse Master, served as undertaker

Stephen Ordway, 78, died of old age on April 16, 1873 at the Almshouse. He had been a mariner. Rebekah Chase Ordway, who died at the Almshouse in 1849 was his mother; baby Adeline Ordway, who died at age 4½ months in 1842 at the Almshouse, was his granddaughter. His undertaker was Daniel P. Nelson, the Almshouse Master.

Daniel W. Bailey, unmarried and once a farmer, died at age 84 of epileptic convulsions at the Almshouse on July 3, 1879. West Newbury's 1881 Annual Town Report itemized an 1879 Almshouse expense of \$16 for a coffin and robe for his interment.

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The 24 remaining residents known to have died at the Almshouse with no other recorded burial place likely remain there, in the cemetery. The majority of these arrived at the Almshouse debilitated by illness or old age. Over half of them were 60 or older, mostly alone in the world, when they died. They are, in order of date of death:

Abigail Bailey, unmarried and in her 80s, entered the Almshouse on the day it opened. Three months later, on December 10, 1837, she became the first to die there.

George B. Rogers entered the Almshouse with his parents and older brother at the end of 1837. Within a month he died there on January 20, 1838. He was only 2 years old. His family later came and went frequently at the Almshouse.

Lydia Brewster, a single woman, died at the Almshouse on April 23, 1839. She was 64 years old.

Thomas Emery, age 51, died at the Almshouse on November 12, 1840, only a day after he was taken there.

Moses Clark died at age 66 at the Almshouse on March 26, 1841, 2 months after his arrival.

Prudence Bailey, a single woman whose name is the first in the Almshouse listing of residents, died on May 15, 1841. She was 93 years old.

With her mother 19-year-old mother **Adeline Ordway**, **baby Adeline Ordway** joined her aunt and young cousin at the Almshouse on December 16, 1841. She spent all but a month of her short life at the Almshouse, dying on April 2, 1842, at age 4 ½ months.

Robert Rollins, a laborer, contracted consumption. At age 47, he died at the Almshouse on March 14, 1845, roughly a month after he was admitted.

William Preble, an Englishman, entered the Almshouse with his wife and children on January 5, 1846. Less than 2 weeks later, on January 18, 1846, he died there of “exposure to cold” at age 32. His family left days later.

Aron Sargeant, 45, died of intemperance at the Almshouse on July 4, 1846.

Jonathan Stevens, designated a State Pauper, died at the Almshouse at age 82 on May 8, 1847.

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Sarah Burrill, 75, entered the Almshouse with her husband William on April 5, 1847, and died there on May 15, 1847.

Widow Rebekah Chase Ordway, age 86, died at the Almshouse on February 10, 1849. Her great-granddaughter was baby Adeline Ordway, who had died at the Almshouse in 1842.

Susan Rogers Gould, widow of Joseph, died at the Almshouse on October 27, 1857 at age 92.

Miss Hannah A. Ordway, 88, died of old age at the Almshouse on April 27, 1858. She had been a resident for just over a decade.

John Moulton, 77, died of diabetes at the Almshouse on August 3, 1863. He had been a laborer, a farmhand, and finally, a pauper.

William Gould, a shoemaker, died at age 63 on November 16, 1865, at the Almshouse. He had married Nancy Downer and was the son of Susan Rogers Gould, who had died at the Almshouse in 1857.

Adolphus Sabine Noyes, 26, died at the Almshouse on July 23, 1866. A shoemaker, he died of heart disease. Daniel P. Nelson, the Almshouse Master, served as undertaker.

William Noyes, 85, died of old age at the Almshouse on November 29, 1866. He spent his last five years at the Almshouse.

Miss Susan Gould died at age 42 at the Almshouse on May 14, 1868. She was the granddaughter of Susan Rogers Gould who had died at the Almshouse in 1857 and the daughter of William, who had died at the Almshouse in 1865.