

Early pioneers key to mystery plots

In death, man is rumored to join his amputated arm

By June W. Kennedy
Eagle correspondent

The following address was given by James J. Fahey in July of 1972 at the dedication of the Old Pioneer Burying Ground located at the corner of Old Lowell and Carlisle roads. It reflects his thoughts as to whom he believed was buried in this "mystery" cemetery.

The text was located on a temporary plaque at the site of the cemetery: "Here lie buried members of Parker, Corey and related families — Old Pioneer Burying Ground." Old Lowell Road, next to this burying ground, dates back to 1659.

"The oldest deeds to this land were written during the reigns of Queen Anne and King George III of Great Britain. The first Parker who came to America was Abraham Parker. He arrived at Massachusetts Bay Colony from Wiltshire, England, in 1645.

"He first went to Woburn and then settled in Chelmsford in 1653 when Westford was part of that town. This area in Westford is now known as Parker Village [also known as Parkerville].

"The first Coreys landed at Massachusetts in 1630. At Salem, Mass., in 1692, Martha Corey was falsely accused of being a witch and she was

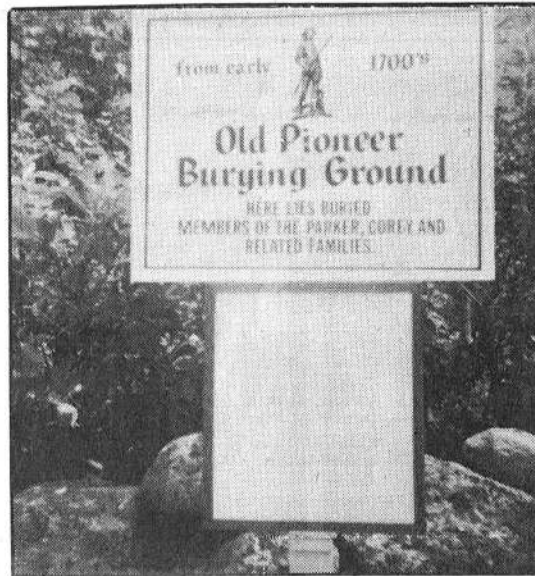


Photo courtesy Elwin Bagley

A temporary marker was erected on the early burying ground at the corner of Old Lowell and Carlisle roads in July 1972.

hung. Her husband, Giles Corey, was pressed to death for refusing to testify. "They stripped the old man, laid him on a public street and piled rocks on him until the life was crushed out of him."

"Thomas Corey settled in Chelmsford in 1665. His wife Abigail, called 'School dame Corey,' was the first teacher in what is now Carlisle.

"When Westford became a town in 1729, Aaron Parker was very active in the affairs of the community. He had a daughter, Lucy, born in 1725 who married Stephen Corey. The Parkers and Coreys owned this land from 1653 to 1868.

"It has been said that there are 22 people buried here, some of whom died at the same time and were given a mass burial. The reason is not known. Some say that British soldiers were buried here at the time of the Revolution.

"Tradition has it that an arm is buried here. The arm was amputated on the kitchen table at the home of Homer Chandonait, and later the owner of the arm was buried with it. Shoes for the soldiers of the Revolutionary War were made at the Chandonait house which was 238 Concord Road.

"This burying ground was named and honored for the first time on July 4, 1972. The ground was blessed, the flag was raised, and the Westford Minutemen fired their muskets. The pioneers who lived and died here deserve respect and appreciation for their courage and their stern struggle for life in a wilderness with only Indians for neighbors. Their great faith in God carried them through."

Whether it be a home burial plot, a burial plot for soldiers or Indians, it is appropriate that respect be shown by way of a formal dedication of this "mystery" cemetery.

June W. Kennedy is a Westford resident and author of "Westford Recollections", a series of historical vignettes and photos.