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Dead Men/Women Do Tell Tales

Connie Koppelman

PRIVATE BURYING grounds and individual gravestones dot the landscape of Long Island. Many have their origins in the colonial period; few date past 1865. Over the centuries, the elements have taken their toll, to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the type of stone, depth of engraving and position in the burying ground. As families died out, new land owners made new uses for countless gravestones by incorporating them into house foundations and steps. More recently, vandalism has contributed to their deterioration. Those gravestones that remain, nevertheless, are the artifacts, the material culture evidence of a way of life: living with death literally in the living-room or parlor and the dead actually in the back yard.

For historians, gravestones are often the only evidence that someone once existed in time and place. Descendants, many generations and often miles removed, no longer remember, never knew or heard about their ancestors. The fading messages from the past do not have the immediacy or impact they once held for kin and community. In some cases there are no descendants, near or far, high infant mortality, among other causes, having cut short the line of descent. If the de-

ceased left no will, was landless or without issue, the possibility for research is limited.

The accumulations of a lifetime, relegated to the attic by one generation, often find their way to the scrap heap in the next. Only chance sometimes saves a letter or a diary for posterity and these, more likely than not, once belonged to the famous or infamous. If the deceased was a married female, her maiden name is usually lost, unless it was incorporated into her epitaph. Lucky is the researcher who finds other written evidence to confirm the sketchy weathered words left by the engraver's hammer.

With only the gravestones as clues, the dead nevertheless have some information to reveal about their individual lives and the culture of their time. Taken cumulatively, the history of a family and a community emerges from a family burying ground. The vital statistics of several generations, transcribed from gravestone inscriptions, are the foundation or microcosm of the demography of the larger community.

The following is a study of one burying ground of several families related through marriage showing the extent and limits of research dependent on public records rather than private papers.

The Smith/Rudyard family burying ground, located on the property of the Museums at Stony Brook, was part of the Smith family homestead for most of the 18th and 19th centuries. As was the custom of the time, the burying ground was situated on an incline, not too far from the road or the main house. The bodies were buried feet facing east and the rising sun, the symbol of resurrection. When gravestones were erected, the writing faced west on the headstones and east on the footstones.[1]

Initialed field stones were often used to mark graves, but none in this burying ground bear initials, nor have they ever been recorded as markers. If wooden markers were erected, they have long since disintegrated along with the remains in the graves they identified.

Since quarried stone is not natural to Long Island, it had to be imported. Brownstone and white marble could be ordered from New Jersey or Connecticut or, early in the 19th century, from agents on Long Island. Gravestones arrived pre-carved, or itinerant carvers engraved them in situ. By mid-century there were several monument establishments on Long Island.

Most of the thirty gravestones in the Smith/Rudyard burying ground c1796-1865, are of white marble, except for the earliest ones of brownstone. Although eight different shapes can be identified, representing the stylistic changes over time, the actual stones are not unique. Comparable examples can be found in local cemeteries. Except for one gravestone decorated with a small flower, the symbol of resurrection, no other embellishments were added. Vital statistics and an occasional poem complete the design on each stone. The cost of a simple gravestone in 1865, the year of the last burial in the graveyard, was $11, including delivery and placement. As advertised, partial payment in produce was generally accepted.

In the largely agricultural and still relatively self-contained community of Stony Brook, people were not attracted to the rural cemetery movement, which created large cemeteries such as Green-Wood, where families bought plots c1830 on. Care of the dead was considered a community responsibility, as is evidenced by a list, found in the Smithtown Library, dated March 1830.[2] Forty-nine men contributed a total of $12.25 toward the purchase and hemming of a two-and-one-half yard piece of cloth to be used at funerals. These were people who abided by old traditions; there were no undertakers, funeral directors, caskets or hearses. Women members of the family prepared the body for burial, which took place within a day or two of death. A local cabinetmaker or carpenter produced the coffin, while friends and relatives took turns sitting in the parlor with the corpse. The sexton took charge of gravesite arrangements, and members of the community were pallbearers. The bereaved had the consolation of the proximity of the deceased a short distance from the house.[3]

There are thirty-two persons known to be buried in the Smith/Rudyard plot (see accompanying chart); all but one can be traced through marriage ties to Smiths and Rudyards. Some confusion arises from the frequent repetition of given names, e.g. John (1), John (2), John (3)[4], and the prevalence of the surname Smith. In 18th and 19th century Brookhaven there were descendants of Bull Smith, Tangier Smith and Arthur Smith. Researching marriages between them and within each Smith line makes detective work of genealogy.

The progenitors of the Smiths and Rudyards who settled in Stony Brook came originally from England. Although they never knew each other, the men were both Quakers. This was a relatively new faith founded by George Fox in 1647. Thomas Rudyard (1) was one of the twelve proprietors of East New Jersey where many Quakers settled. He was a lawyer and Deputy Governor under Governor Robert Barclay, 1682-1684. Later he moved to New York where his son John (2) died c1726. The third generation settled in Smithtown and Stony Brook.

Unlike Thomas Rudyard, Arthur Smith (1) the Quaker of Southold, Long Island, suffered for his faith. He was tried for his beliefs in 1659, at New Haven, Connecticut. He was found guilty, whipped and put under bond of L50 for his good behavior. He sold his home lot in Southold that same year and moved with his family to Setauket, the original settlement of the Town of Brookhaven; it was then under the jurisdiction of the somewhat more lenient Hartford, Connecticut. Arthur Smith's home lot was on the east bank of the mill stream; remnants of the first Smith family burying ground can still be found there.[5]

According to Brookhaven Town Records, the Stony Brook property on which the Smith/Rudyard burying ground is located was first surveyed in 1704 by John

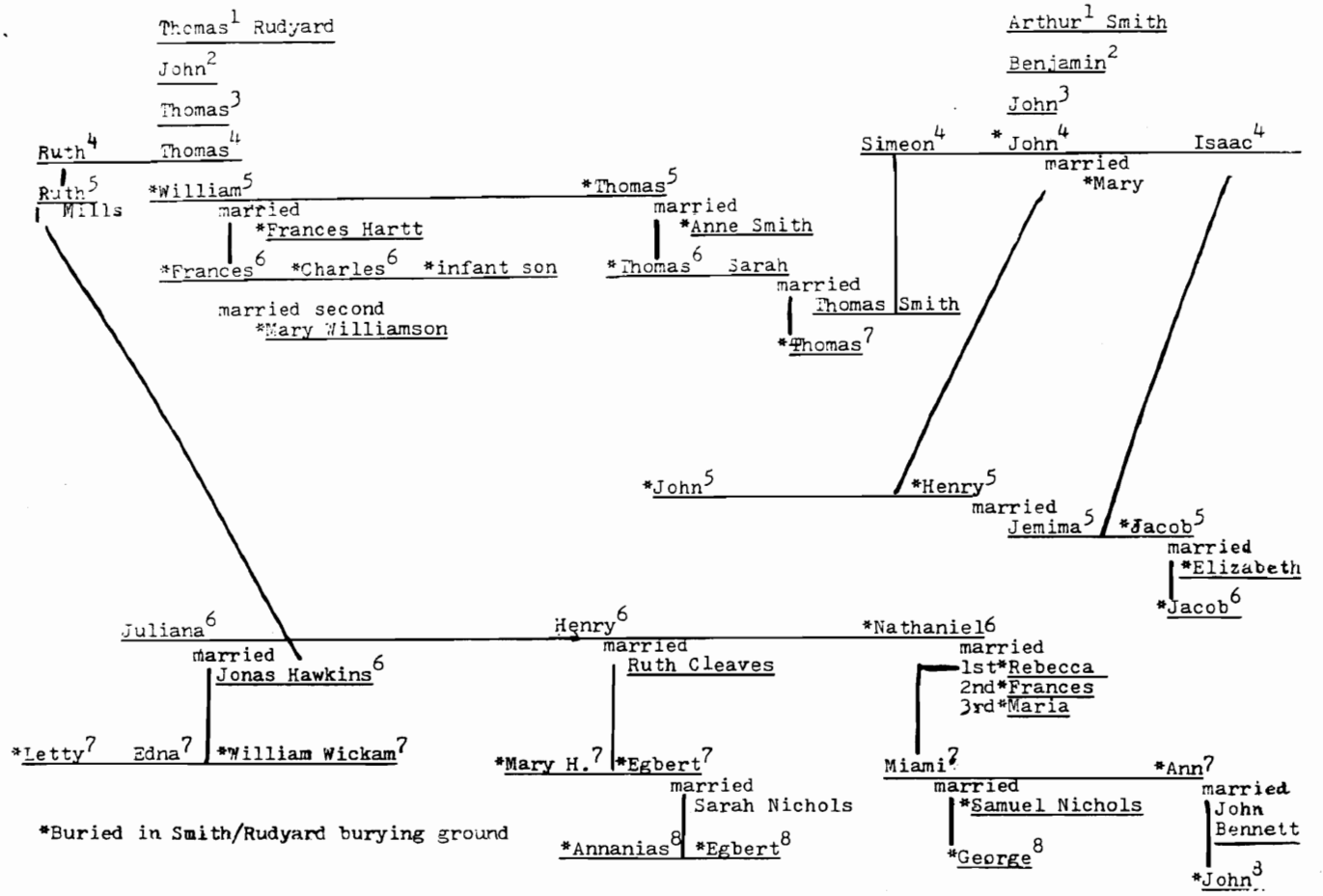

Chart showing 31 family members buried in the graveyard.

Smith (3), the grandson of Arthur. The property had originally been given to Benjamin (2), Arthur's son, as part of his father's share as a freeholder in the expanding town of Brookhaven. Benjamin did not settle there and it is not known how long John remained in Stony Brook or where he is buried. What is certain is his purchase of land in Islip, in 1740, from known Quakers.[6]

Aside from this isolated association with Quakers, the religious inclinations of the first few generations of Rudyards and Smiths in Brookhaven is undocumented.[7] There is, nonetheless, a distinct possibility that the Quaker tradition, in both families, permeated the relationship that resulted in marriages between members of both families and ended in the sharing of a burying ground, even though later generations of Rudyards were Presbyterians and Smiths followed the Episcopalian faith. Like many other 18th century Quakers seeking acceptance in the mainstream, they modified and were modified by changing religious practices and attitudes.

After 1740, when John (3) probably moved to Islip with some of his family (who became the nucleus of the Islip branch of the Arthur Smith line), John (4) lived and farmed on the family homestead in Stony Brook. It was during his lifetime that the land was set aside for the family burying ground. The earliest marked grave is that of "JS and MS".[8] By tradition these are said to be John Smith (4) and his wife Mary. John (4), born c1712, probably died first and an initialled field stone or boulder marked his grave in the center of the burying ground. Mary was still alive in 1805, because her son John (5) left her a bequest of $60 in a will he wrote that year, shortly before he died a bachelor at the age of 50.

We know John (5) had a sister Rachel because the money was to go to her if "mother" didn't use it in her lifetime. Most wills located for this family, dated prior to 1885, stipulate a small amount of cash for the women heirs, and land, buildings and personal property for the men heirs. In his will John (5) assigned his property to his brother Henry (5) and his nephews Henry (6) Philip (6) and Nathaniel (6). Although Philip's parentage and lifespan are undocumented, we can determine from other wills and deeds that Henry (6) and Nathaniel (6) were sons of Henry (5) and Jemima Platt Smith (5); they were first cousins.

Jemima Platt Smith (5) and Jacob Smith were sister and brother. Jacob and his wife Elizabeth and their son Jacob are buried in the family plot.

Henry (5), and Jemima (5) also had two daughters: Ruth (6) and Juliana (6); neither is buried in the family plot. Juliana (6) was married to Jonas (6) Hawkins whose grandmother (4) was a Rudyard. Jonas (6) and Juliana (6) had three children; two are buried in the burying ground: Letty (7) and William Wickam Hawkins (7).

Henry (5), Henry (6) and Nathaniel (6) farmed the family homestead. Nathaniel was quite prosperous, adding substantially to his holdings. He and his first wife (he outlived three wives), their daughter Ann and her son John are buried in the family plot. Altogether they had seven children. Five were still living when Nathaniel died and each received a legacy. His daughter Miami Kirk, who was married for the second time and living in Kings County, received $100. She is buried elsewhere. Like her father, she married three times and was long-lived, 1822-1899. Her first husband, Samuel W. Nichols was a boatman in Smithtown. He and their child George (8) are buried in the family plot. All four of Nathaniel's sons received a portion of land; George, the youngest, who was a merchant and farmed the land with his father, received the largest portion of the family homestead. Nathaniel's sons married local women, but at the time of their father's death in 1865 only two remained in Stony Brook with their families.

Henry (6), Nathaniel's brother, was less fortunate; he died at age 44 in an asylum. He and his wife Ruth Cleaves had two children; Mary H. Terrell (7) and Egbert (7). After Henry (6), their father, died in 1834, Egbert (7) inherited the family farm. In 1839 he married Sarah Jane Nichols of Smithtown. Her brother Samuel W., mentioned above, lived in Smithtown; her brother Henry Jarvis, a bricklayer, lived across the road; another brother, Capt. Joseph Brewster, also lived in Stony Brook.

The availability of land through purchase and inheritance, made this pattern of nuclear families possible. Except for short periods when widowed mothers lived with their siblings, or vice versa, the extended family of nostalgic memory never existed in large numbers. In the 19th century, fewer strangers were present in country households, e.g. servants, the mentally ill, apprentices, but not fewer extended kin who were never present in significant numbers even in colonial times, as historians had previously assumed.

In 1840, Egbert (7) was reported in the census as head of household for the first time; his occupation was agriculture. During the next decade, Egbert sold a piece of the family homestead to his sister Mary H. In 1850, Egbert entered the national census as a hotel keeper. Perhaps farming was no longer feasible for him, since his epitaph tells us he was sick for a long time. When he died two years later, Egbert left his portion of the family homestead to Sarah Jane and their four living sons, all under the age of twelve. Two others had died as infants.

Sarah Jane expanded the family boarding house into the Stony Brook Hotel that was a landmark for the rest of the century. Her sons participated in activities related with the Hotel, including entertainment and tending bar. One son died a bachelor at age 31; three sons married and moved to near-by communities to raise their own families. One son spent time as a blockade runner during the Civil War. Sarah Jane and one of her sons died of kidney disease, a common diagnosis of the time. They and many of their descendants are buried in the churchyard of the Saint James Episcopal Church.

Soon after Sarah Jane's death in 1885, a new board fence was erected around the family burying ground and the property, along with the Hotel, was sold out of the family. Today a small portion of the Hotel forms a part of the Carriage Museum on the property of the Museums at Stony Brook.

When Stony Brook was primarily an agricultural community, barter was more prevalent than cash as a medium of exchange. Land was the real source of security and the symbolic source of status. The Rudyards, like the Smiths, had a family homestead. In the

CHRONOLOGICAL BY DATE OF DEATH

NAME	BIRTH	DEATH	DEATH AGE	MARRIAGE AGE	PARENTS NAMES MOTHER	FATHER	TIMES MARRIED	# OF CHILDREN	CHILDREN WHO LIVED TO AGE 21	AGE AT 1ST. CHILD	AGE AT LAST CHILD
JS and MS (4) JS	c1712	?	?	?	John	Smith	?	3	3		
Frances Rudyard (6)	1795	1796	9 mos.	--	Hartt	Rudyard	--	--	--	--	--
Frances Rudyard (5)	1775	1799	24 yrs.	19	Howell	Hartt	1	3	1*	20	24
Infant Son (6)	1799	1799	0	--	Hartt	Rudyard	--	--	--	--	--
John Smith (5)	1753	1805	52 yrs.	--	?	Smith^{A}	0	--	--	--	--
Letty Hawkins (7)	1806	1806	6 mos.	--	Smith^{A}	Hawkins	--	--	--	--	--
Ann Rudyard (5)	1771	1813	42 yrs.	?	?	Smith$^{B?}$	1	3	2@	?	31
Thomas Rudyard (5)	1767	1817	50 yrs.	?	Smith$^{B?}$	Rudyard	1	3	2@	?	35
Jacob Smith (4)	1774	1818	44 yrs.	?	Platt	Smith^{A}	1	1?	1	?	39
Thomas S. Rudyard (6)	1802	1821	19 yrs.		Smith^{A}	Rudyard	--	--	--	--	--
Henry Smith (5)	1762	1823	61 yrs.	22	Smith?	Smith^{A}	1	5	4	23	30
Thomas R. Smith (7)	1821	1823	2 yrs.	--	Rudyard	Smith^{A}		--	--	--	--
Charles H. Rudyard (6)	1797	1829	32 yrs.	--	Hartt	Rudyard	0	--	--	--	--
George Farrington	1812	1832	20 yrs.	--	?	?	--	--	--	--	--
Rebecca H. Smith	1795	1835	39 yrs.	18	?	Hallock	1	7	5+	18	34
Frances W. Smith	1795	1839	44 yrs.	41	?	Ward	1	0	--	--	--
William W. Hawkins (7)	1809	1840	30 yrs.	--	Smith^{A}	Hawkins	0	--	--	--	--
Annaissias Smith (8)	1842	1842	1 day	--	Nichols	Smith^{A}	--	--	--	--	--
Ann Bennett (7)	1824	1842	18 yrs.	18	Hallock	Smith^{A}	1	1	0	18	18
George B. Nichols (8)	1842	1842	1 mos.	--	Smith^{A}	Nichols	--	--	--	--	--
Egbert Smith (8)	1843	1843	1 week	--	Nichols	Smith^{A}	--	--	--	--	--
John Bennett (8)	1842	1843	9 mos.	--	Smith^{A}	Bennett		--	--	--	--
Jacob Smith (6)	1813	1844	31 yrs.	--	?	Smith^{A}	?	--	--	--	--
William Rudyard (5)	1765	1845	80 yrs.	29,40	Smith$^{B?}$	Rudyard	2	10	7*	30	52
Maria S. Smith	1793	1846	53 yrs.	49		Smith$^{A?}$	1	0	--	--	--
Elizabeth Smith	1778	1849	71 yrs.	?	?	?	1	1?	1	35	35
Egbert Smith (7)	1817	1852	34 yrs.	21	Cleaves	Smith^{A}	1	6	4	23	33
Samuel W. Nichols	1816	1855	39 yrs.	?	Smith$^{B?}$	Nichols	1	3	1	26	33
Mary H. Terrell (7)	1822	1856	34 yrs.	?	Cleaves	Smith^{A}	1	?	?	?	?
Mary W. Rudyard	1782	1858	76 yrs.	23		Williamson	1	7	6*	25	35
Nathaniel Smith (6)	1792	1865	73 yrs.	21,?,50	Smith^{A}	Smith^{A}	3	7	5+	21	37

@,+,* Indicate married couple
A Arthur Smith Line
B Bull Smith Line
(#'s) Denotes generation in America

Chart arranged chronologically by date of death.

fourth generation, Thomas Rudyard (4) borrowed on his property which was located across from the Stony Brook mill stream on the east side of the road going into town. Daniel Smith (of the Bull Smith line), his father-in-law, covered the loan. When he died in 1792, Daniel left the house and land, which had originally belonged to Thomas (4), to his grandson, William Rudyard (5). William (5) was more successful than his father in maintaining and adding to the family property, as were his sons William (6) and James (6).[9]

William (5) married twice: first Frances Hartt; second Mary Williamson. Frances was the daughter of the Rev. Joshua Hartt, a minister from Smithtown who became famous for his resistance to the English during the Revolution. Frances and William had three children. Frances died in childbirth and is buried with her infant son. William's second wife Mary was from Southampton, although several members of her family lived in Stony Brook. William (5) and Mary had seven children. Frances, William (5), their three children and Mary are buried in the family plot. Thomas (5), William's brother, his wife Ann Smith, their son Thomas (6) and their grandson Thomas (7) are also buried there. Other members of the family and later generations are interred in the churchyard of the First Presbyterian Church in Setauket, where fourth, fifth and sixth generation Rudyards were active members. The surname Rudyard does not appear in Suffolk County today.

The Rev. Zachariah Green kept detailed records of church affairs for sixty years from 1797 on: births, deaths, baptisms, marriages. William Sydney Mount painted the Rev. Green's portrait several times. Mount's lifespan, 1807-1868, almost parallels the death dates of the gravestones in the Smith/Rudyard burying ground, 1796-1865. This means that he probably knew 25 of these people. Unfortunately, he did not paint any of their portraits, not even his first cousin William Wichham Hawkins. Mount did paint William's sister Edna in a double portrait with her husband, the actor Thomas Hadaway. He also painted the portrait of James Rudyard (6) c1833, the son of William (5) and Mary Williamson Rudyard (see reproduction). Mount did not identify the sitters in his numerous genre paintings. Some of those dancers, farmers and fishermen could be members of the Smith and Rudyard families.

Although Mount does not give us a visual portrait of these people, he does mention the Stony Brook Hotel several times in his extensive diaries and drafts of correspondence. According to Mount, the Hotel was often the scene of gay festivities and Democratic Party activities. It was also the local inn where patrons stayed when Mount painted their portraits.

What can we learn from these types of incomplete details? They are just a part of the total picture of land distribution and occupational studies. From the standpoint of specific information about the individuals, in most

cases, we do not know the cause of death; we probably will never know how they looked or what they thought about each other, their community or their times. We have no photographs, no diaries and no letters, only a few wills.

Census records prior to 1850 tell us little more than numbers of persons living in a household and the name of the head of that household. After 1850 the record includes names and financial information, but its accuracy has often been questioned. For the purposes of this paper census data is useful for only 5 of the 32 persons who were still alive in 1850, although several children beyond the scope of this report lived into the 20th century.

The gravestones, however, have a twofold message: first, they help us form a picture of life expectancy and marriage patterns in the first half of the 19th century; second, the poetic additions on some of the gravestones lead beyond the grave to the changing attitudes of the living toward death and mourning.

The accompanying chart, arranged chronologically according to date of death, shows an amazing variety of life and death statistics. Eight of the thirty-two died before the age of one. One infant died at birth and was buried with its mother. One infant survived only a few months beyond its mother's death at age eighteen. Two youths did not reach their majority. Of the twenty males and twelve females, only eight males and three females lived beyond age forty.

There is a dearth of systematic research on 19th century American mortality which makes it difficult to compare the above with national statistics. We know infant and maternal mortality was high; if a child survived the first few years, life expectancy increased. Fertility rates dropped during the century, but each family usually had more children than families have today and they could expect to lose at least one child. Infant deaths under one year were higher than at any later age. According to the historical statistics of the U.S., in 1789, the life expectancy at birth for males was 34.5, for females it was 36.5. At age 20 life expectancy was 54.2 for males and 54.3 for females. At age 40 life expectancy rose to 65.2 for males and 66.9 for females. If one lived to age 60, life expectancy was 74.8 for males and 76.1 for females.

In the Smith/Rudyard burying ground there is one couple who sustained a marriage of 40 years. She was his second wife, seventeen years his junior at marriage, and remained a widow for thirteen years after his death. Statistics for age at marriage are incomplete, but marriages for Smiths seem to occur earlier than for Rudyards. This could possibly have been the result of the financial difficulties the family encountered in the fourth generation, as discussed earlier.

Three men remained bachelors, one man married three times and one man married twice. All who married had at least one child, most had three, and one fathered ten children, three by his first wife and seven by his second. Most had their last child some time in their 30's. On the chronological chart under "Parents Names," a pattern of inbreeding emerges from the frequent repetition of family surnames. Since the list does not include surviving mates buried elsewhere, it does not reflect their second and third marriages which was the usual pattern.

Beyond these findings, the gravestones offer another dimension in their epitaphs. The earlier ones are traditional, the later ones are sentimental and individualistic. Taken chronologically, they represent a changing world view from shortly after the American Revolution to the end of the Civil War. Most of the epitaphs include the words, "In memory of," a subtle difference from earlier generations' use of "Here lies the body of," which implies a separation of the body and the soul. Only two epitaphs give warnings from the grave, a custom more prevalent during the colonial period.

(1829)

Here the wicked cease from
troublings and the weary
are at rest.

(1832)

Stay hasty youth and view my tomb
and think hard of years to come
Your bodies made of brittle clay
will quickly fall and drop away
What though I died in blooming prime
It was the Lord's appointed time.

(1842)

Lament me not, as you pass by
As you are now, so once was I
As I am now, so you must be
Prepare for death and follow me

The later dated gravestones signal changes that show attitudes of the living which emphasized individualized, personalized inscriptions.

(1849)

Enclosed within this narrow bed
My mother lies at rest
To me the memory of her grave
Shall be forever blest.

(1852)

Afflictions sore long time I bore
Physicians were in vein (sic)
till death gave ease and God did
please.

(1865)

Farewell my child and partner dear
if aught on earth could keep me here
t'would be my love for you
But Jesus calls my soul away
Jesus forbids my longer stay
My dearest friends adieu.

Contrary to the popular saying, dead men/women do tell tales that go beyond their vital statistics of being and nothingness. The gravestones and the few remaining public documents help to clarify life in a particular time and place. They give us another view of the world William Sydney Mount painted and referred to as "The mugs of Long Island yeomanry."

Endnotes

[1]By contemporary standards the writing appears to be on the back of the headstones and the footstones are often mistaken for children's headstones. This common English and colonial custom changed with the rural cemetery movement in the 19th century. Practical considerations of rural and church graveyards often made E/W axis layouts impossible.

[2]Misc. Papers, Setauket and Stony Brook, Richard H. Handley Collection The Long Island Room, The Smithtown Library.

[3]For an in depth discussion of this topic see *A Time To Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America.* Museums at Stony Brook, 1980.

[4]Numbers in brackets represent generations in America.

[5]Alvin Smith, *Descendants of Arthur Smith The Quaker of Southold and Setauket, N. Y. Islip Town Branch of Bayshore, N. Y. 1975.*

[6]Brookhaven Town Records, Book B, p238; Deed Liber B, p194-196; p262.

[7]Osborn Shaw, "Some Smith Quakers," *Long Island Forum,* Vol. 13 (April 1950) p 72-74.

[8]The lack of vital statistics on the gravestone of JS and MS doesn't necessarily mean that these were unknown to their contemporaries, but rather that the tradition of initialling field stones was being followed; Will Liber B p335.

[9]Will Liber A p392; Deed Liber 37 p393, 394, 395.

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