

TOWN NEWS

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SECTION

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History Lives In Tended Cemeteries

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COLCHESTER — At 81 years old, Israel Liverant has a ready answer for those who ask if he's lived in town all his life.

"Not yet."

The answer is appropriate for a man who has an abiding interest in Colchester's history and the people who lived — and died

— here. As the town celebrates its 300th anniversary, interest is growing in some of the most visible reminders of those who have gone before: Colchester's historic

cemeteries.

Liverant, who became the first president of the local historical society 40 years ago, said preserving the cemeteries and learning about them is important.

"If you disregard your past, you don't have much future," he said.

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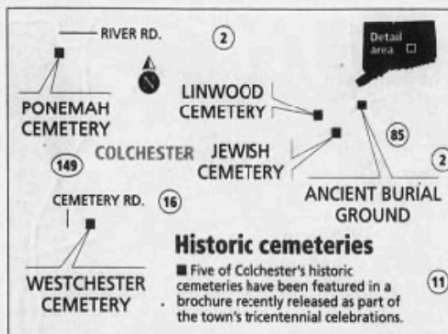


COLCHESTER

"It's important to remember the 'then' people. Those were the people who built what we now enjoy."

Those people may have been prominent or wealthy with names still remembered today, such as Pierpont Bacon, who was one of the town's founders and donated money for the original Bacon Academy. He is buried in the Ancient Burial Grounds, located next to the Colchester Federated Church, across from the town green.

But they also may have been



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people with little or no social standing at the time whose names were soon forgotten despite what they did for the town, such as slaves who labored to build the

prestigious Bacon Academy.

Many of them also were buried at the Ancient Burial Grounds, which dates back to the early 1700s. The graves of about 70 such

individuals — slaves, Indians and poor whites — were discovered in the cemetery in 1996 by local historian Abraham Abdul Haqq.

Haqq, working with a group of middle school children, found the simply marked graves under inches of dirt and grass, victims of neglect and erosion on the hillside cemetery.

The Rev. Erica Wimberly, pastor of the Colchester Federated Church, said it is valuable to remember the role played by all of Colchester's ancestors.

"In a very concrete way, it keeps us honest about who we are as a community, what mistakes we've made and what we've done well," she said. "It's only from that honesty that truly significant change can be made."

Concern for local historic cemeteries got a boost in the early 1990s, when a relative of John Bulkeley,

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Schedule of events

■ Colchester will be celebrating its tricentennial with a series of events that concludes with a grand ball, parade and fireworks on the weekend of Oct. 10 and 11. Here is a list of upcoming events:

Sunday, July 5: There will be a family day on the town green from noon to 8 p.m., during which old-fashioned games will be played, including baseball and croquet. There will also be a doll carriage/tricycle parade and two concerts.

Saturday, July 25: The Historical Society Craft Show and Muster takes place on the town green. There is a \$2 admission to the craft show; the muster is free.

Saturday, Aug. 8: There will be a history tour from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., followed by a Founder's Day ceremony at 2:30 p.m. at the Ancient Burial Grounds. A dinner and dance for Bacon Academy alumni is scheduled at 5 p.m. at the Ramada Inn in Norwich. Tickets are \$30.

Sunday, Aug. 9: A Fun Road Race will start at 2 p.m., from the old Bacon Academy to the new Bacon Academy. Prior to the race, there will be an art exhibit at 11 a.m. on the town green, with artwork by Colchester students. A concert on the town green follows at 6 p.m.

Sunday, Aug. 23: Colchester celebrates its heritage at 6 p.m. on the town green. The festival includes music, a brief historical narrative, dances and skits. The rain location is the new Bacon Academy.

Sunday, Aug. 30: The Roberts Brothers Circus will perform from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the recreation complex. Advance tickets are \$6 for adults, \$4 for children. At the gate, tickets will cost \$8 for adults and \$5 for children.

Sunday, Sept. 13: A vintage fashion show and luncheon is scheduled at the St. Andrew's Church on Norwich Avenue. Models will range from children to senior citizens and will wear clothing from colonial times to present. The luncheon costs \$6 per person, and reservations are required. Call 537-3911.

Saturday, Oct. 10: A grand ball will be held in the gym of the new Bacon Academy. Guests may wear clothing from the colonial era or modern times. Dinner will be served and there will be a live band. The price will be announced.

Sunday, Oct. 11: A tricentennial parade will be held at 1 p.m., featuring fife and drum corps, marching bands, bagpipe bands, horse and carriages and antique cars. After the parade, there will be a farm market/country store on the town green and demonstrations by the Mohegan Indians.

At dusk, a fireworks show will take place at the parks and recreation field off Hebron Avenue. The rain date is Oct. 12.

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the town's first minister, visited the Ancient Burial Grounds and was dismayed at its condition. The cemetery had become overgrown with knee-high grass, poison ivy and fallen branches.

A letter from Peter Bulkeley to the local paper and his \$5,000 contribution prompted a renovation project. The Colchester Historical Society, local businesses and individuals also donated money to clean the cemetery, replace the weed-covered chain-link fence with a stone post and wooden-rail fence and purchase a wrought-iron gate, which will be dedicated in August.

"The town got to work and rolled up its sleeves," Liverant said. "It's beautiful now."

The town also formed a cemetery tours committee, which recently released a brochure containing maps and information about the Ancient Burial Grounds and Linwood, Westchester, Ponemah and the Jewish cemeteries. Volunteers with the group conducted tours and did gravestone rubbings in May.

Sylvina von Plachecki said additional tours may be scheduled if there is enough interest. The brochure is available in the town clerk's office at town hall, 127 Norwich Ave.

The brochure includes the history of the cemeteries and a short glossary of the meaning of various images than can be found on gravestones.