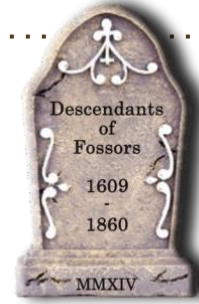


Rest in Peace



Newsletter of Descendants of Fossors, 1609-1860

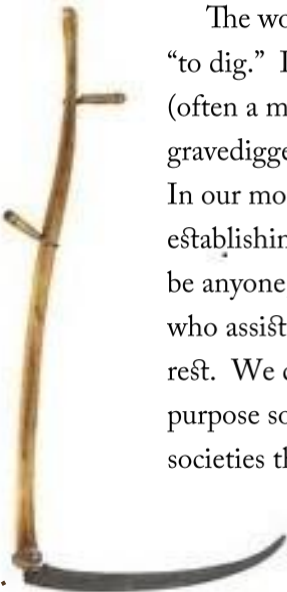
Issue 1 — August 2016

The Society's purpose

In the lineage society community, there are organizations that allow us the opportunity to recognize our ancestors for their military service, place of birth or settlement, community and civil service, descent from royalty and nobility, kinship to national leaders, occupations, and numerous other options. With all of these organizations, however, the primary focus is on the ancestor's birth or activities during one's life – be it time, location, descent – but very little focus is given to final arrangements. In fact, until now, there has never been an organization that specifically focused on the necessary circumstance of departure from life.

The Descendants of Fossors was created to recognize those ancestors who assisted in the arrangements necessary to assist families in dealing with the loss of their loved ones – gravediggers, stone masons, morticians and funeral directors, juries of inquest, those who donated land for public cemeteries, cemetery sextons, shroud-makers, and so forth. These individuals, then as now, performed a necessary role in every community, large or small. And while it is true we are focusing on an occupation of the living, the purpose of the occupation is assisting the living with the deceased. This makes the Society unique.

The word fossor derives from the Latin fodere, "to dig." In the early Christian church, a fossor (often a minor cleric) was a person employed as a gravedigger, and today that definition still stands. In our modern organization, for the purpose of establishing membership, we recognize a fossor to be anyone, male or female, other than the clergy, who assisted in the process of laying a person to rest. We do not recognize the clergy for our purpose solely because there are other lineage societies that specifically focus on that service.



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In This Issue

- The Society's Purpose
- Lightning Is Striking again, and again, and again!
- News from the Past
- From the Keeper of Epitaphs
- Grave Humor
- Biennial Meeting Notice

Lightning Is Striking again, and again, and again!

For safety's sake, we are told today, "When thunder roars, go indoors!" In colonial times the causes of thunder were still conjectured,¹ but the results of lightning to the settlers of New England were not theoretical but dangerous indeed. Where nowadays we are used to the common parlance of an "act of God," in the days of our ancestors the more personal "immediate hand of God" was used in the cases when houses, forts, ships, or people were struck by lightning, causing death and destruction. It was often a case for coroner's juries to be assembled to examine the body and determine the cause of death.

Marshfield in New Plymouth colony had an extraordinary occurrence of two lightning strikes affecting a common family, one in 1658 and the other in 1666. This made such an impression of the contemporary chroniclers that it appeared in multiple accounts of the time.

On 31 July 1658 while haying, John Phillips, Nathaniel Thomas and another man espied a storm and made for (and reached) Phillips' house. Years later Thomas wrote

The Clouds flying exceeding Low & thick soe that the heauens were much darkened Then in a moment came down (as it were) a great ball of fire with a Terrible crack of Thunder & fell Just before where the s^d Phillips sat, my eye then happening to be on him saw him once start on the stole [stool] he sat on & fell from thence dead on the hearth backward without any motion of life...I doe not remember there was any outward appearance of hurt vpon the body of the s^d Phillips, a young child being at that moment about three foot from s^d Phillips had noe harm.²

Morton, in his *Memoriall*, speaks of this more curtly and piously as "...it pleased God that by Thunder and Lightning on *John Philips of Marshfield*, in the jurisdiction of *New-Plimouth*, was suddenly slain."³

A coroner's inquest was convened. The members were Josias Winslow, Sr., John Bradford, Samuell Arnold, Thomas Doghead, John Russell, John Adams, Timothy Williamson, Abraham Jackson, Samuell Baker, Anthony Snow, Joseph Rose, and John Caruer [Carver]. They provided the results of their investigation on 4 August.

Wee find, that this psent day, John Phillips, Juni^r, came into his dwelling, lately knowne or called Mr Buckleyes house, in good health, as Goodwife Williamson afeirmeth, and sat vpon a stoole by the chimney, and by an immediate hand of God, manifested in thunder and lightening, the said John Phillipes came by his death.⁴

It is through inquest that another possible eyewitness (and wife of one of the jurors) was identified, Mary (Howland) Williamson.⁵



A scant eight years later on 23 June 1666, the “immediate hand of God” intervened again, this time at the house of John Phillips, Sr. A drought had stricken the New Plymouth colony, which held a Day of Humiliation to beseech God for relief. The day after, fourteen people were in the elder John Phillips’s house when “about the middle of the said day there arose in the north the most dismal black cloud, I [Samuel Arnold] think, that ever I saw.” The house was struck and Grace (—) (Holloway) Phillips [wife], Jeremiah Phillips [son], and William Shurtleff lay dead. With the tempest came a tornado, which uprooted trees but caused no other damage. Perhaps due to the number of eyewitness accounts, no coroner’s jury was required.⁶

As noted above in the case of John Phillips, Jr., there seemed to be nothing unusual to note on the body and nothing was reported. However, the third and last event to be covered exemplifies the requirements of the coroner’s jury to thoroughly strip, examine, and document anything unusual about the corpse.

On 15 June 1660, three sailors (Phillip Sliver, William Johnson, and James Pierce) making their way for Plymouth harbor to escape the weather were lost due to the low tide and fog. They found themselves north of town as a storm came up. Their shallop was hit by lightning, ending the life of Boston sailor Pierce. As soon as the body was recovered that day, a “corrowners enquest” was summoned. Members of the inquest were Gyles Rickard, James Cole, Samuell Hickes, Joseph Bradford, John Rickard, Samuell Sturtivant, John Morton, Thomas Lettice, John Moses, Job Almy, Arther Vernam, and Thomas Lucas. Their description of the corpse was that Pierce was:

...burnt on the right side downe to the calfe of his legg, as alsoe his shirt burnt on his stomach and other ptes of it, his wastcoate being lased close with a fishing line, and not burnt, saue only scorched in the inside next to his shirt...James Peirse, being on the fore cuddy of the said boate, was stroke ouerboard, and wee conceiue that, possibly falling suddenly into the water, it might hasten his end...⁷



A portion of Wood's map (1634) showing the towns of New Plymouth [N] and Green's Harbor (Marshfield) [M].



Rev. Samuel Arnold, Sr., of Marshfield and member of the John Phillips, Jr., inquest, passed to Rev. Increase Mather, the 1658 account (written years later by eye-witness Nathaniel Thomas) as well as an another firsthand account of the

1666 event. These were published along with other stories of lightning strikes in his *Remarkable Providences*. Reports from members of coroner juries, who documented what they saw, were used by Mather to “entertain” and inform. Entry and exit points of lightning, effects on clothing of the victims and household goods, sights and smells are described in exacting detail.

Unlike some ministers of the Gospel of today, the colonial divines, seeing that many of those struck by lightning were good and reverent Christians, avoided a *quid pro quo* stance at the death of the colonists by thunder and lightning. However, the Providence of God was always at the forefront. For example, after the 1666 events, Morton writes, “...foon after a day of Humiliation was obferved by fome Congregations , for the bleffing of Rain in the Drought....that fad ftroke by the Thunder and Lightning at *Marshfield* fell out : fo that we may fay with the Pfalmift unto the Lord, *By terrible things in Righteousnefs thou haft answered us, O God of our Salvation.*”⁸

Coroners’ juries continue to provide valuable historical as well as genealogical information. They are gruesome reading, however, as you read through a list of people frozen to death, children falling down wells, and out-and-out cruelty and murder.

— Sumner Gary Hunnewell

NOTES:

¹ See especially Increase Mather, *Remarkable Providences* (London: John Russell Smith, 1856), chapt. III, and Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Hartford, CT: Silas Andrus & Son, 1853), vol. II, bk. 6, chapt. III.

² Nathaniel Bradstreet Shurtleff, *Thunder & Lightning; and Deaths at Marshfield in 1658 & 1666* (Boston: privately printed, 1850), 18. Damage to the house included “many bricks of the chiney were beaten downe the principle Rafters split the battens & lining next the chiney in the camber broken, one of the maine pofts of the house into which the sumer was framed torn in to shiuers & great part of it caried seuerall rod from the house, the dore where the ball of fire came downe...out of the gert or sumer afores^d being a dry oake was peices wonderfully taken....”

³ Nathaniel Morton, *New=Englands Memoriall* (Boston: Club of Odd Volumes, 1903), 155.

⁴ Nathaniel Bradstreet Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England*, vol. 3 (Boston: Press of William White, 1855), 148.

⁵ *New England Historical & Genealogical Register*, 6 (1852): 347. Frank Farnsworth Stare, *Williamson and Cobb Families* (Hartford: n. p., 1896), 7.

⁶ *Memoriall*, *supra*, 178. *Thunder & Lightning*, *supra*, 14. This thin volume provides genealogical information about those victims of the storms of 1658 and 1666. William Shurtleff was the progenitor of the family in the United States and ancestor of Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, who also was the editor of the oversized, heavy, and indispensable *Plymouth Colony Records* and *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay*.

⁷ *Records*, *supra*, vol. 3:195-96.

⁸ *Memoriall*, *supra*, 180. Other attempts at ascertaining God’s displeasure through thunder and lightning can be found in *Magnalia*, *supra*, 2:372, 395, and *Memoriall*, *supra*, 178-79.



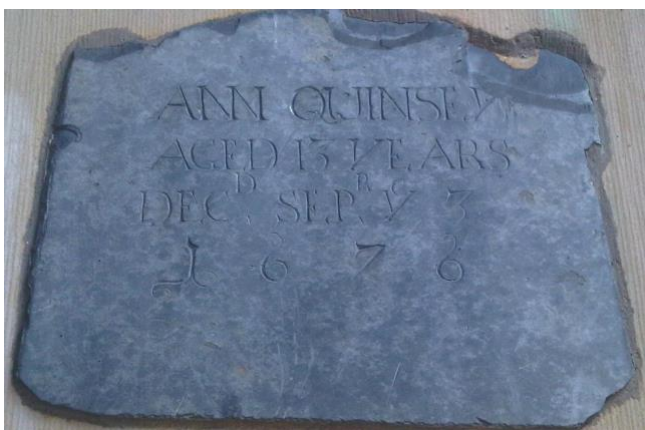
News from the Past

The Society [members of the Old South Church of Boston] had long had in its possession some old tombstones, probably from the Old, or King's Chapel, Burying Ground, but under what circumstances they came to it, or when, no one knows. In the autumn of 1850, as the workmen who were engaged in repairing the old meeting-house on Washington Street, were removing some bricks in the tower, they found it necessary to take out a flat stone over the place in the wall through which passed the connecting rod of the hands on the north dial of the clock. This stone proved to be a gravestone, bearing the name of Joshua Scottow, one of the founders of the Third, or Old South Church, who died in 1698. "How the stone came to be in so singular a place," says one of the daily papers of the time, "and at such an elevation, is unknown. Only the edge of it was visible in the wall. It was in the tower, back of the north dial, some fifty feet from the ground."



Two other stones were discovered at the same time, one in memory of Anna Quincy, who died in 1676, the other, of William Middleton, who died in 1699.

The gravestone of another of the original members of the Third Church, John Alden, was recently found to be at Randolph. It had been given to Ebenezer Alden, M.D., of that town, by Dr. Shurtleff, and Dr. Alden's heirs kindly presented it to the Old South Church and Society, to be used for memorial purposes. At a parish meeting last spring, it was determined to place the stones of the two founders, Joshua Scottow and John Alden, and of Anna Quincy, many of whose near relatives were members of the Church, in the portico of the



meeting-house on Boylston Street, and this has now been done. These stones are of Welsh slate, and are quaintly carved; they were evidently imported ready for use...The stone of William Middleton, whose name cannot be traced in connection with the history of the Church, has been sent as a loan to the valuable collection of the Bostonian Society in the Old State House. — *Old South Church (Third Church) Boston: Memorial Addresses, Sunday Evening, October 26, 1884* (Boston: Cupples, Upham & Co, 1885), 6-8.



From the Keeper of Epitaphs

- 001F - Jane Elizabeth Routt Power (Mrs.) - *Thomas Paine*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Nicholas Snow*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 002F - Patricia E. Sears Wasilik (Mrs. John R.) - *George Watson*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 003F - Melissa Harrison Fischer (Mrs. Jeffrey H.) - *Matthew Griswold*, Tombstone Carver (CT)
- 004F - Janet M Lewis Downing (Mrs. Calvin L.) - *William Blanding*, Coroner's Jury; *John Mills*, cemetery land (TN); *William Hopkins*, Gravedigger (MA)
- 005F - Alexander Bannerman - *Ralph Sprague*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Thomas Cornell*, Coroner's Jury (RI), *William Bunnell*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 006F - C. Annelies Smith Mouring (Mrs. Robert H. IV) - *Owen Owen*, Coroner (PA)
- 007F - L. Kathleen Deegan (Mrs. Michael) - *William Randolph*, Coroner (VA)
- 008F - Donna Parker (Ms.) - *Thomas Wood*, Coffin-maker (MA)
- 009F - Madeleine Jane Williams (Miss) - *Ralph Sprague*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 010F - John Hallberg Jones - *George Dyer*, Coroner's Jury; *Ralph Chapman*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 011C - Kevin Michael Smith - *Jonas Austin*, Coroner's Jury; *Ralph Chapman*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *William Hoskins*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Nicholas Phillips*, cemetery land; *John Purington*, Coroner's Jury (ME); *George Watson*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Thomas Wood*, Coffin-maker (MA); *Edward Barton*, Coroner's Jury (ME)
- 012C - Rachael Leah Cummings (Ms.) - *Jonas Austin*, Coroner's Jury
- 013C - Lorraine Gaston Ennis (Mrs. John M.) - *James Alexander Boykin*, cemetery land (TX)
- 014C - O. Marlene Rathbun Wilkinson (Mrs. Edward L.) - *Thomas Bell*, Executioner; *Thomas W. Marsh*, Coroner's Jury (NC)
- 015C - Margaret Mary Russell (Ms.) - *John White*, Coroner's Jury (CT); *Matthew Griswold, Sr.*, Tombstone Carver
- 016C - David Lawrence Grinnell - *William Hopkins*, Gravedigger; *Robert Barker*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *William Bassett*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Francis Cooke*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Experience Mitchell*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *George Partridge*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Stephen Tracy*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Adam Mott*, Coroner's Jury (RI); *Henry Samson*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Thomas Bonney*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *William Pabodie*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Samuel Seabury*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Nicholas Phillips*, cemetery land; *Thomas Clifton*, cemetery land; *Peleg Slocum*, cemetery land; *William Collier*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *John Joyce*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *John Wickes*, Coroner's Jury (RI); *Samuel Sanford*, Coroner's Jury (RI); *John Johnson*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Joshua Pratt*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 017C - Nancy Smith Ackerman (Mrs. Eugene B.) - *Thomas French*, Coroner's Jury (MA)



- 018C - Katherine Maureen Deegan (Ms.) - *William Randolph*, Coroner (VA)
- 019C - Kelly Darrin Fitzpatrick - *Experience Mitchell*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *John Washburn, Sr.*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 020C - Grace Elizabeth Bliss Smith (Mrs. Russell T. M.) - *John Read*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 021C - Arlene Mae Crisman Robertson (Ms. William J.) - *Henry Rowley*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 022C - Marilyn Alice Mast Long (Mrs. Melvin D.) - *Joshua Pratt*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 023C - Maurene Gayle Mast Coan (Mrs. Thomas D., Jr.) - *Joshua Pratt*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 024C - Jonathan Walker Cain - *Thomas Godwin*, Coroner (VA)
- 025C - Patricia Ann Scott Williams (Mrs.) *John Smith*, Coroner (VA)
- 026C - Christy Lee Chevront Crigler (Mrs. Norris W., Jr.) - *Samuel Sommerville*, cemetery land
- 027C - Anne Bernadette Caussin Henninger (Mrs. Thomas N.) - *William Baulston*, Coroner's Jury (RI)
- 028C - Linda Anne Sperry Mizell (Mrs. Carl D.) - *Thomas Tuttle*, Gravedigger (CT) [double descent]
- 029C - M. Kathryn Thompson Carey (Mrs. Roger L.) - *John Mills*, cemetery land (TN)
- 030C - Sandra Lee Hendrick Staley (Mrs.) - *Christopher Clark*, Coroner (VA)
- 031C - Harold Douglas Ford - *Evan Lewis*, cemetery land (PA); *Henry Wood*, Coroner's Jury (VA)
- 032C - Leslie Joan Steuben (Miss) - *Peter Tallman*, Coroner's Jury (RI)
- 033C - D. Weston Darby - *William Collier*, Coroner; *George Partridge*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Stephen Tracy*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Humphrey Turner*, Coroner's Jury (MA); *Christopher Wadsworth*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 034C - Thomas George St. Aubin - *Jacob Grose*, Coffin-maker (OH)
- 035C - Leslie Kay Reynolds (Miss) - *Stephen St. John*, Coroner (IL)
- 036C - Linda Carol Walker (Ms.) - *Thomas French*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 037C - David William Medeiros - *Henry Cobb*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 038C - Larry Dan Jordan - *Ezechias Rhodes*, Coffin-maker (VA)
- 039C - Lowry Rush Watkins, Jr. - *William Randolph*, Coroner (VA)
- 040C - Sumner Gary Hunnewell - *Samuel Arnold, Sr.*, Coroner's Jury (MA)
- 041C - Nancy Ellen Ivie Stringfellow (Mrs. David J.) - *John Walker*, Gravedigger (VA)
- 042C - Linda Kay Vanderberg White (Mrs. David N.) - *William Comstock*, Gravedigger (CT)

—Patricia Wasilik



Grave Humor

What would John Steinbeck say if he were alive today?

...muffled pounding...

“Let me out! Let me out!”



The best dressed men belong to the Descendants of the Fossors

Save the date!

The Descendants of the Fossors biennial meeting.

11 April 2017

Luncheon at the Scottish Rite Temple

2800 16th St. NW

Washington, D. C.



Rest in Peace, the newsletter of the Descendants of the Fossors, is edited by

Articles within the scope of the Society are gratefully accepted.

Officers

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First Deputy Coroner

Melissa Fischer

Second Deputy Coroner

Alexander Bannerman

Stone Engraver

Jan Downing

Justice of the Inquisition

Annelies Mouring

Caretaker

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