

Old Colonial Cemetery

Metuchen, New Jersey

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HIS 394
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December 18, 2018**

Project Overview:

Hidden along Main Street in Metuchen New Jersey, it would be easy to walk by the worn-down wooden staircase that leads to the Old Colonial Cemetery. Once you reach the top, a small patio outfitted with benches and a plaque commemorating the Old Metuchen Meeting house greet you. Directly to the left is a broken fence, the result of vandals who sneak it at night to knock over headstones. Just beyond this area, many headstones lie face down due to vandalism, including that of Abigail Bloodgood, whose inscription reads “Sweet is the scene when virtue dies/When sinks a righteous soul to rest/Tis but a transfer to the skies/To dwell forever with the blest.” To the right is the New Jersey Transit station that brings thousands of passengers past the cemetery everyday, unaware of lasting remnants of American history right outside their window.

The cemetery has unfortunately fallen into disrepair for many reasons over its four centuries of existence. In a 1954 article from the *Metuchen Recorder*, volunteer work by a group called the Kiwanis Club put in time and effort to maintain the cemetery, since there was insufficient funding for the First Presbyterian Church to do so.¹ Around this time, an overpass was built for the train station, forcing the cemetery onto an embankment that has been washing away and putting headstones in danger of tumbling down the side. This also marked the construction of the wooden steps that lead from Main Street up into the graveyard. In 1974 difficulty in maintaining two cemeteries forced The First Presbyterian Church to sell the Old Colonial Cemetery to the Borough of Metuchen for \$1.² The graveyard was already overgrown

¹ Gladys Lippincott, "Historic Ghosts Surround Workers at Cemetery," *Metuchen Recorder*, March 25, 1954, 1, accessed December 6, 2018.

² Rich Desimone and Betsey Robin Schwartz, *Old Colonial Cemetery of Metuchen*, comp. Bill Smith (Metuchen, NJ: Metuchen Centennial Commission, 2000), 11.

and some headstones were damaged when William Smith, co-chair of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society Cemetery Committee, took over the momentous task of cleaning up the cemetery in 1999.³ It was under his direction that aluminum fences along the north and west sides of the cemetery were installed, broken branches and fallen leaves were cleaned up and a Boy Scout Troop came in to build the patio and coat the headstones with waterproof sealer.⁴ These renovations were made in 2008, and ten years later, efforts to keep the cemetery in tact are still underway, thanks to the dedication of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society.

In the summer of 2016, I began volunteering at the Old Colonial Cemetery in Metuchen, New Jersey, only fifteen minutes away from my own home town. I was given a project by a Board Member of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society that tasked me with figuring out the systematic organization of the cemetery as recorded by a man named F.J. Sortore in 1931. Sortore created a ledger of every person in the graveyard and compiled information from birth date and death date, to the material used to make the headstone, information on patriotic action and military service during the Revolutionary War , and even inscriptions from when most of the headstones were still legible. For every headstone, Sortore gave a number from one to 496, each corresponding to a person who was buried there. This information has become essential to the preservation of the cemetery's history, as many headstones have faded away or been destroyed over time and can no longer offer historical insight into the past.

Cemeteries are physical embodiments of history. Much like monuments, memorials and museums, cemeteries exist in a physical landscape that allows people to interact with history in a way reading textbooks cannot replicate. Historians can gain insight into a certain place or time

³ Jay Bodas, "Graveyard Rich with Colonial History," *Edison-Metuchen Sentinel*, January 2, 2008.

⁴ Bodas, "Graveyard Rich with Colonial History."

by researching how communities buried their dead, and how they memorialized their lives through inscriptions and art on the headstone. For example, gravestone art during this time had many common motifs that are represented in the Old Colonial Cemetery. The most frequent artistic motif is the soul effigy, which represents an image of the spirit of the deceased.⁵ One of the more legible carvings of this motif can be found on the headstone of Isaac Monday (274). The second most common motif is the willow, which represents sorrow or weeping from grief.⁶ For example, John L. Reckless (123) has a beautiful carving of a willow tree on his headstone. Other motifs such as flowers, urns, birds, and even the deceased's initials can also be found around the cemetery, although they are few and far between.⁷

Cemeteries can of course, also offer information into the health of a community. For example, infant mortality was an extremely unfortunate cause of death among populations during the time the Old Colonial Cemetery was being used, and seventy-seven of the 512 people buried there are children who did not make it to age ten. Of these seventy-seven young children, twenty-six never celebrated a first birthday. However, if a child was lucky enough to make it past these difficult few years, their chances of living a long life increased, as the average age of death in this cemetery was 44 years. Some people even lived well into their 90s, including Rachael Vanderhoven (283) and Rachael Campbell (455) who both lived to be 92, Levi Mundy (206) who lived to be 94, and Hannah Demunn (288), who lived to be 96!

What started as a simple volunteer assignment to keep me occupied over the summer has quickly turned into a research project that is now coming to fruition with the publication of my

⁵ Janice Kohl Sarapin, *Old Burial Grounds of New Jersey: A Guide*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 28.

⁶ Sarapin, *Old Burial Grounds of New Jersey*, 28.

⁷ See Figures One through Eight at the end to see all the aforementioned headstones and motifs

research at the Old Colonial Cemetery. I hope that in bringing attention to the cemetery's fascinating history and evolution over time, more efforts will be made towards the preservation of the graveyard. This cemetery is the final resting place of almost five hundred people, including sixty Revolutionary War veterans and patriots, and I feel that it deserves to be treated and looked after as much as any modern day cemetery. Additionally, I hope that this project will bring renewed interest in local history. This sentiment is especially rich in Metuchen, as former resident Ezra Mundy Hunt wrote in 1871, "It seems proper that what is authentic, interesting and valuable should be gathered in such form as to be available to those who come after us and serve to gratify that laudable inclination which most individuals and communities have to recall and perpetrate the historic associations of the vicinity in which their lot is cast."⁸

History of the Cemetery:

The history of the Old Colonial Cemetery begins with the history of the First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen, to which it originally belonged. Early authors are unsure when exactly the first church was built, but Ezra M. Hunt writes,

As the first church of Woodbridge was finished about 1682, although not constituted as a Presbyterian church until 1692, and as the settlement of the three townships of Woodbridge, Piscataway, and Perth Amboy were all of this period, it is quite probable that early in the century commencing with 1700, some place for worship existed on part of the land the early inhabitants had selected as their grave-yard, and which has been enlarged by at least three purchases since.⁹

Hunt also speculates that the size of the church was 36x25 feet. Another author also marks the church's original location, "where it stood upon the upper end of Main Street, in the old

⁸ Ezra Mundy Hunt, "Metuchen and Her History," in *Metuchen and Her History and The Churches of Metuchen: A Historical Sketch* (New York, NY: Fisk, Russell & Ames, 1870),3.

⁹ Ezra Mundy Hunt, "History of the Churches of Metuchen," in *Metuchen and Her History and The Churches of Metuchen: A Historical Sketch* (New York, NY: Fisk, Russell & Ames, 1870), 1-2.

burial-ground, next to Mr. Vanderhoven's lot of residence."¹⁰ An unknown historian of Woodbridge remarks the Woodbridge and Metuchen congregations were united until 1763, when "a portion of the inhabitants residing in the southern part of the township formed a separate congregation, subsequently known as the Second Presbyterian Church of Woodbridge, and eventually as the Presbyterian Church of Metuchen."¹¹ The church's land seems to have been enlarged in 1792 by fifteen feet, making the property 36x40 feet. A small lot for a Parsonage was purchased in 1795 and expanded in 1807, along with an additional one third of an acre for the cemetery.¹²

When the congregation grew too large for the old structure, a new church (measuring 40x60 feet) was built across the street from what is now the Old Colonial Cemetery and officially dedicated on January 30th, 1836.¹³ The railroad was built the same year and continued to nourish the town's economy. In 1887, the railroad underwent a track expansion project that cut into part of the land in the Old Colonial Cemetery. This transaction is noted in a map of the First Presbyterian Church's cemetery made in 1930 by Charles Carman:

The First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen sold a portion of the present Depot Lot to the United New Jersey Railroad and Canal Company by deed dated January 4, 1888 and recorded in Deed Book 216 page 76. The Trustees of the First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen sold a portion of the Old Cemetery and a strip north of the church cemetery, and Parsonage Lot to the United New Jersey Railroad and Canal Company by Deed dated June 27, 1887 and recorded in Deed Book 213 page 316.¹⁴

¹⁰ W. Woodford Clayton, ed., *History of Union and Middlesex Counties, New Jersey, with Biographical Sketches of Many of Their Pioneers and Prominent Men* (Philadelphia, PA: Everts & Peck, 1882), 846.

¹¹ Woodford Clayton, ed., *History of Union and Middlesex Counties, New Jersey*, 571.

¹² Hunt, "History of the Churches of Metuchen," 8.

¹³ Hunt, "History of the Churches of Metuchen," 15.

¹⁴ Charles Carman, "First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen Property," map (Metuchen, NJ, 1930).

I had no previous knowledge of the cemetery being split up prior to receiving this information from the Tyreen Reuter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society over online correspondence. This revelation came late in my project, and further investigation in the First Presbyterian Church's new cemetery did verify that graves of this time period did exist from reinterment after the expansion project of 1887. So far, I can find no records of the graves that were reinterred across the street during this project, but locating the other half of the graves from the Old Colonial Cemetery could merit it's own project. However, the remainder of this project will focus solely on the graves from the Old Colonial Cemetery that are located across the street from the First Presbyterian Church.

Methodology

Throughout this project, my primary research document has been the "Reproduction of the Record of Graves in the Old Colonial Cemetery," originally compiled by F.J. Sortore between 1931 and 1932. A large, bound copy of Sortone's ledger can be found in the Special Collections & University Archives Sinclair New Jersey Collection at Rutgers University, which I used to fill in some gaps during later research. The record was updated in 1993 when the former president of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society asked to have the aging ledger digitized and stored on a computer. In the 1993 reproduction, there are two main sections, titled "Original Data" and "New Data: Gravestone Statistics." There are four subsections of the "Original Data," including Revolutionary Soldiers and Patriots (Section 2), Gravestone Inscriptions (Section 3), Index of Names: Stone Number Sequence (Section 4), and Index of Names: Alphabetical Sequence (Section 5). There are six subsections of "New Data: Gravestone Statistics," including

Stone Number Sequence (Section 6), Alphabetical Sequence (Section 7), Revolutionary Soldiers and Patriots (Section 8), Birth-Date Sequence (Section 9), Death-Date Sequence (Section 10) and Age-At-Death Sequence (Section 11). The 1993 reproduction added birth date, death date, age at death, and veteran or patriot status in their Stone Number and Alphabetical Sequences, which is why these sections are repeated.

When I began my research in the summer of 2016, my main focus was mapping out all the graves in the cemetery, according to F.J. Sortone's Stone Number Sequence. I was given a printed copy of the updated 1993 reproduction, courtesy of Tyreen Reuter of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society. I primarily used the updated Stone Number Sequence (Section 6), as it contained more information that could easily be seen and verified on the headstone. This proved to be a time consuming and difficult task, as Sortone's numbers did not seem to follow any particular pattern. Family names (ex. Vanderhoven, Manning, Freeman, Campbell, etc.) did appear to be grouped sequentially, implying they were buried next to each other, but there was no way of knowing how Sortore went about labeling the headstones from one to 496. In order to figure this out, I had to answer two questions: where did Sortore start counting, and in what way did he organize his system (ex. In rows or columns, from right to left or vice versa, etc.)

I began my search by trying to create a focal point in the cemetery, a headstone that was indistinguishable and could be easily found whenever I returned. I made my focal point the headstone of John Campbell, since the engraving was still legible and a few years prior, a Eagle Scout Troop erected a memorial and commemorative post next to his grave. The stone number given to him by Sortore was 454, so I set out to find one of his sequential neighbors, Martha

Crow (453) or Rachael Campbell (455). I was unable to locate Rachael Campbell, but I did find Martha Crow two rows ahead of John Campbell. After finding Martha, I checked the headstone next to her and saw that it was Rachael Thornal (452) who happened to be next to Martha on the ledger as well. I continued this trend with the rest of the row, whose headstones were mostly intact and legible. I branched out until I had a few rough sketches of the surrounding area, encompassing only about thirty or forty graves that I could definitively identify (stones 436-454 as well as 310-317).

There were some completely faded or destroyed headstone in these original clusters as well. Although I could not see the names and inscriptions, I used the resources I had in order to logically place these “unknown” headstones. For example, the headstones ranging from 310-317 all belong to the Kelly family. Two of the eight headstone in this row were completely destroyed, one on the edge next to the cemetery fence, and another two headstones over. The first person I could clearly identify was Martha Kelly (311), who was directly to the left of the first destroyed stone. Next to Martha was Rhoda Kelly (312), and next to Rhoda was the second destroyed stone. After the second destroyed stone, the Kellys continued in order from Enos Kelly (314) to Clarissa Kelly (317). There were two people missing from this lineup, Zaccheus and Lewis Kelly (310 and 314, respectively). When I cross referenced the graves in front of me with Sortone’s ledger, I found that their headstones would logically be placed where the destroyed ones are, so I concluded that the destroyed graves must belong to them. This is the system I used in order to identify graves when I could. If I could not, I marked them in my map as “Unknown,” as I do not wish to mislabel anyone’s final resting place.

Eventually, I observed that all the gravestones I was able to identify were in the higher range of the Stone Number Sequence. I was primarily working by the entrance of the cemetery, right off of Main Street, so I began to speculate that if I moved towards the back, I would find the first headstone Sortore labeled. My intuition was right, as the grave of James Vanderhoven (1), which is located right against the cemetery fence and off to the side, was in fact the first entry in Sortone's records. From James Vanderhoven's grave, I looked at the headstones to his left and found that they matched the names and numbers of the next few entries. From this, I realized that Sortore created his list in more or less horizontal rows going from the right side of the cemetery to the left. Unfortunately, this did not prove to be completely true, as the graves towards the front of the cemetery began being numbered from left to right. This trend starts around the headstone of Anne Kelly (325) and continues (with a few exceptions) until the last grave which I could definitively identify, that of Robert Ross (494).

With this information, I was able to more efficiently identify graves and add them to my growing map. Over the next few weeks, I returned to the cemetery to tackle new sections and by the end of the summer, I was able to identify 439 graves, with only 57 still remaining "unknown." By "unknown," I mean that I could not definitively say who was buried there as these clusters of graves were far removed from other recognized headstones and I could not use my process of elimination to even suggest a name. As stated before, Sortore has listed everyone in the graveyard, so only the location of the person's grave is truly "unknown" on the map I created.

Eventually, my hand drawn map became too large and onerous to keep up, so I made the change to an electronic map via a Google spreadsheet. Although this is not a perfect solution, it

allowed me to record much more information than a hand drawn map could have. In one cell of the spreadsheet, I can have the person's name, Stone Number, and epitaph easily accessible. The tradeoff however, is less accuracy when it comes to grave location. There are some instances where trees have grown around gravestones, or headstones are abnormally spaced, which is not easy to replicate in a very geometric and ordered spreadsheet. I have not been able to find a more accurate mapping system that would allow for the digital recreation of the cemetery, but I believe it would be a great research tool for future historians who want to study the Old Colonial Cemetery.

The map is one of two projects that has come to being since my research began in 2016. Once the map was created, I realized that in order to make future research easier and less time consuming, a digital copy of Sortone's records needed to be remade and adapted for my own use. So, I created another Google spreadsheet and copied all the information of the New Data Stone Number Sequence. From this, I was able to extrapolate Birth-Date Sequence, Death-Date Sequence, Age-At-Death Sequence, number of males and females, median age, and death rates over the 161 year period the cemetery was actively in use. I was also able to attach inscriptions to the updated Stone-Number Sequence, creating for the first time a singular place where all pertinent information of the deceased could be found.

Data:

I must clarify a few discrepancies I have found among the data before moving forward. To begin, for reasons that are unclear to myself and others who have compiled F.J. Sortone's notes in the past, there is no records for Page 19 and Page 262 from his original bound ledger.

This means that while his Stone Number Index reaches 496, it should actually be 494 since there is no information for Pages 19 and 262.

Additionally, there are 15 instances of duplicate or triplicate numbers within Sortone's original compilation. This means that in certain cases, one headstone marked the burial places of two or more people. Most of these graves represent pairs of young children and parents or two young siblings sharing a headstone, perhaps to reduce costs to the grieving family. However, there are a few headstones that mark the burial spot of multiple aged family members, such as the Ford gravestone (209), whose deceased are aged 49, 56, and 20. Due to these 15 duplicates and triplicates, there are actually 514 people represented in the cemetery, but only 496 actual headstones. These 15 outliers are: Mary Clarkson Campbell and Mary C. Campbell (41), Benjamin Thornall Crow and Robert Bruce Crow (63), Ezra M. Campbell and Nancy Campbell (98), Rachel Ann Thornall and Lewis Thornall (104), Sally Maria Manning and Ann Eliza Manning (149), Sarah Rowland, John Harriot Rowland and Jonah Rowland (169), John Alward and Reuben Alward (201), William Washington Ford, Mary Compton Ford and Cornelia Ford (209), Humy Mundy and an unidentifiable sibling (227), Ellis Freeman and John Freeman (273), Josiah Freeman and Thomas Freeman (327), Ellis Bloomfield and Huldah Bloomfield (387), Olle Bloomfield and Huldah Bloomfield (394), Abigail Voorhees and an unidentified child (421), and Jeremiah Compton, Catharine Compton, and Esther Compton (448).

I did come across a discrepancy in this section when reviewing data that should be brought up. Sarah Cool and Mary Thickestun share a stone number (60) in Section Six: Stone Number Sequence, but they are listed as having headstones made of different kinds of stone and they do not appear to be related, which would make their sharing a grave improbable. In

Sortone's original section with gravestone inscriptions (Section 3), he gives Mary Thickstun the number 60.5 for an unknown reason. The 1993 team that digitized Sortone's records may have changed this number to 60 in order to eliminate this outlier without realizing the two women should not share the same number. So, Sarah Cool and Mary Thickstun should have their own separate numbers of 60 and 61, which brings the total headstone count back up to Sortone's original 496.¹⁵ However, since this order would shift every stone number after 61, I have decided not to change the numbers associated with each person until an updated version of the ledger is published and made available for public use.

I have organized my spreadsheet into seven distinct parts. The first part is a digital copy of Sortone's original Stone Number Sequence, as this list served as the basis for my research. Included in this digital copy is data such as 1) the sex of the deceased, 2) the stone number given to them by Sortore, 3) the type of stone used in the headstone, 4) their last name, 5) their first name, 6) birthdate (if given), 7) death date (if given), 8) their status as Revolutionary War veterans or patriots (if applicable), and 9) their age at death. To this I added a section for their inscription so that all relevant information could be found in one place. All of the supplementary sections I created contain these ten important data points, which I why I have listed them here. This section records 514 persons buried in the cemetery and 496 headstones.

The second part is called Soldiers and Patriots and lists every man that served the American cause during the Revolutionary War in alphabetical order. There are 67 men listed in this section: approximately 60 soldiers and 7 patriots. An additional inscription has been added

¹⁵ Sarah Cool and Mary Thickstun's new numbers would take the place of the Page 19 and 262, keeping Sortone's number at 496.

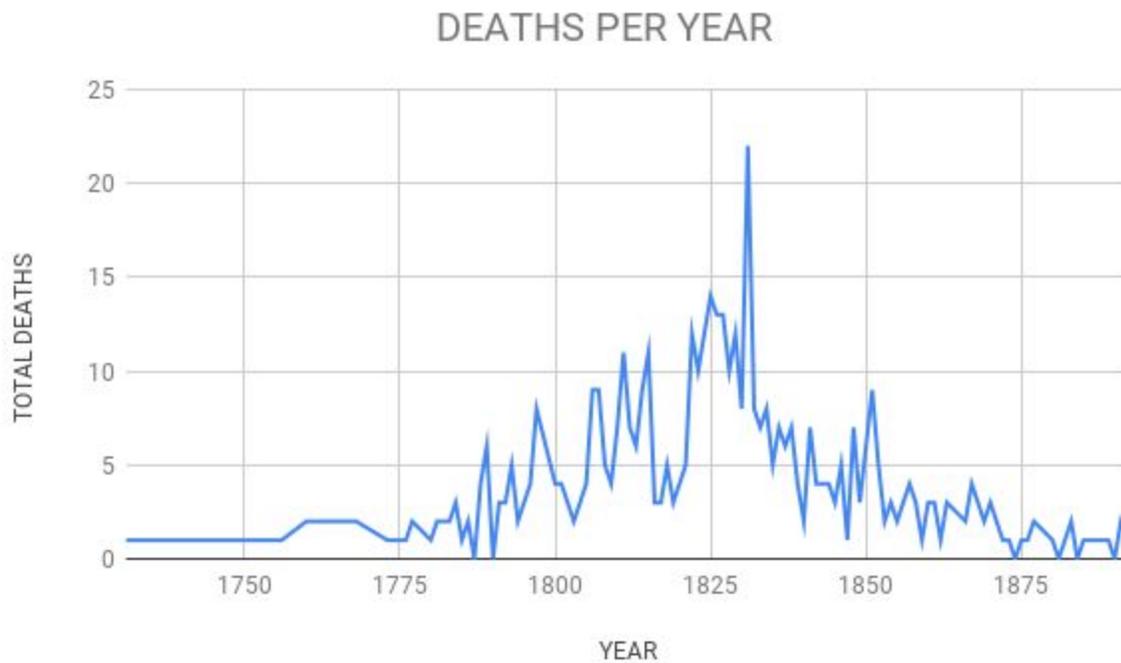
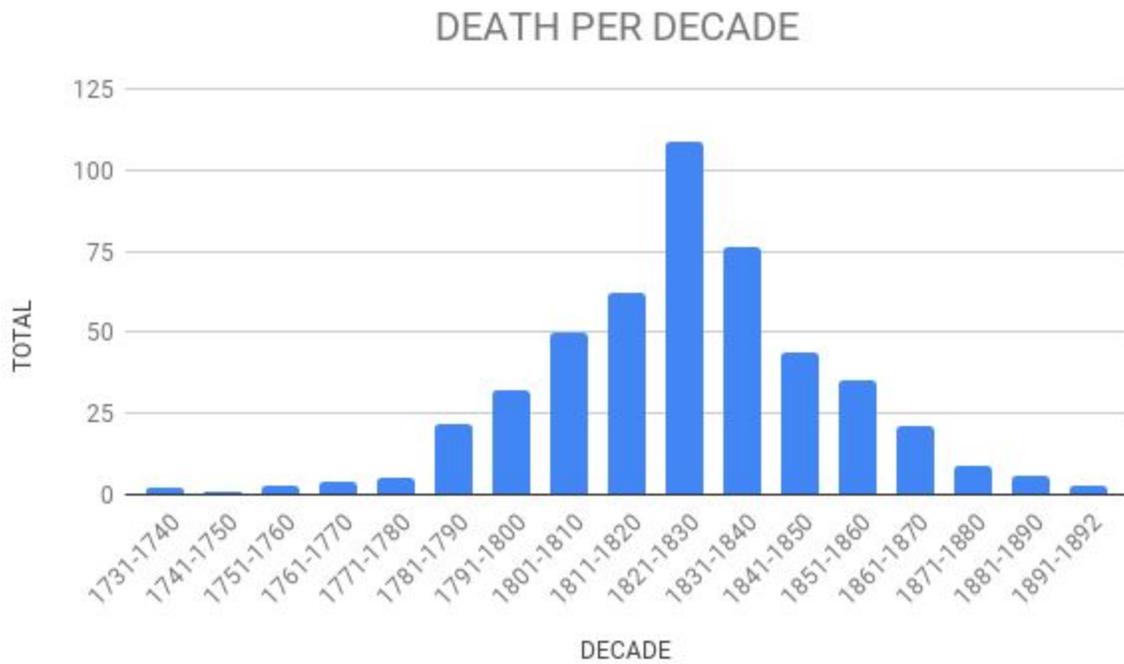
¹⁶ This comes from the total in the Stone Number Sequence minus two (since there is no record for Page 19 or Page 262)

to these graves which describes the rank, station, or patriotic action that man performed. This information was compiled by William T. Smith, former head of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society Cemetery Committee in 1998. Smith found most of this information from a compilation written by General William S. Stryker in 1872 called “Officers and Men of New Jersey in the Revolutionary War.” However, Smith simply refers to it as “Stryker’s List” in his annotations. Other references include the New Jersey State Library Veteran’s Files and several histories written about Middlesex County.

The third part organizes the original data by the person’s birthdate. There are 409 identifiable birth dates (including variations of day, month and year, just the year, or day/month and year). Unfortunately, there are 104 illegible birth dates, meaning not a day, month or year could be observed. The earliest birth date recorded is Thomas Ayers (408) who was born in 1693. The latest birthdate is William Henry Gaffney who was born on December 31, 1873.

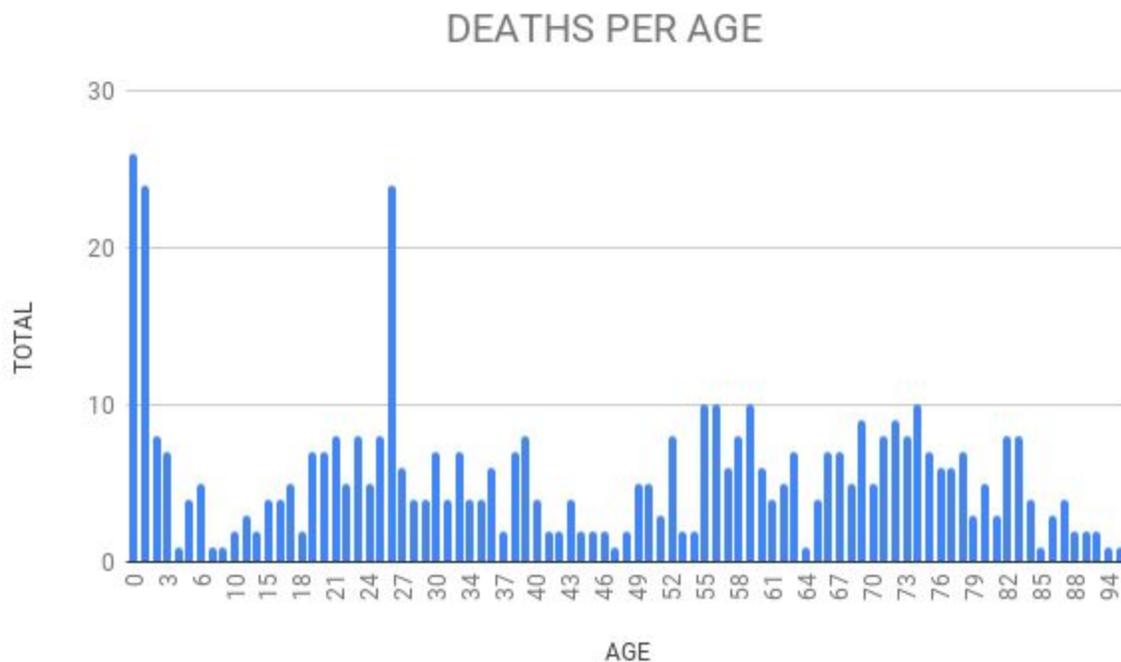
The fourth part organizes the original date by the person’s death date. There are 483 identifiable death dates (including variations of day, month and year, just the year, or day/month and year). There are 31 illegible death dates. The earliest death date recorded is John Campbell, who died October 15, 1731. The latest death date belongs to Jeremiah Compton (448) who died on January 16, 1892. I also compiled the total number of deaths throughout each decade, and during the period of 1821-1840, the community saw a huge increase in deaths. There was an especially large spike in 1831 that I am not able to explain due to lack of primary sources, but perhaps more focused research into the surrounding area’s history can provide an answer in the future.¹⁷ The graphs below map this information.

¹⁷ I attempted to find answers in historical newspapers, but the archives at the Metuchen Public Library and the resources of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society did not have newspapers or many other primary sources that went back that far. Ezra Mundy Hunt does not make any reference to this large number of deaths in his *History of*



Metuchen. There is also no indication of cause of death in the inscriptions of the twenty-two people who died in 1831.

The fifth part organizes the original data by age at death. This data can best be represented in the graph below. There is a large amount of death at early ages, which can be expected from a community at this time due to limited healthcare. However, if a child could make it into adulthood, they had a good chance of living a relatively long and fruitful life, as the average age of death for this community comes in around 43.9 years old. There are 478 identifiable ages in this data set, with the oldest resident, Hannah Demunn (288) living until she was 96 years old. There are 36 persons whose age we are unable to identify due to illegible headstones.



The sixth section organizes the original data according to the sex of the deceased person. There are 248 females and 249 men buried in the Old Colonial Cemetery. There are 17 persons whose gender is unable to be conclusively identified due to missing names or illegible inscriptions.

The seventh section organizes the original data by the type of stone used to create the headstone. There are 307 headstones made of white marble, 185 made of brown stone, 3 made of granite, and only 2 made of common field stone.

Statistical analysis has proven difficult for this data set due to the lack of primary sources that give population records of the time. The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society archives did not have any records of that kind, but they did inform me that Metuchen was a part of the greater Woodbridge township during that time. I was able to find some census records on the National Archives website that included Woodbridge population numbers at the time, but it is impossible to extrapolate the Metuchen population from these documents without other historical records to back up any specific number.

For Further Research:

There are many projects that could be explored using the information I have gathered from Sortone's ledger. Personally, I believe that the creation of an online map would be extremely helpful to future researchers in pinpointing the exact locations of the headstones. If there was a program that could not only map the cemetery, but also include all the pertinent information about that person, the cemetery could become a more interactive historical site and draw in more visitors. Research can also be done into the large range of deaths from 1821 to 1840 and the rather large spike in 1831. This could be done by looking into a more general history of the surrounding area, including Woodbridge and New Brunswick, which are more likely to show up in historical reports from this time due to their size and historical significance in our national history during this time.

If any more research should be conducted on the Revolutionary War soldiers and patriots buried at the Old Colonial Cemetery, I would recommend starting with the sources William T. Smith referenced in his research which are: Stryker's List (Officers and Men of New Jersey in the Revolutionary War) can be found online on the New Jersey State Library Website, *Woodbridge and Vicinity*- Reverend Joseph W. Dally, 1873, *History of Middlesex County* Pickersgill and Wall, 192, *History of Union and Middlesex Counties*, Nicholas Mundy Book-Rutgers Library, Records of Graves of the First Presbyterian Church in the Colonial Cemetery, Metuchen, NJ. Compiled by F.J. Sortore in 1931-32 for the Matochsnoning Chapter of the D.A.R, New Jersey State Library Veteran's Files (By Elinor McCann, Liason General 1983-84, Metuchen and Ms. Nora Crise Sutton, Genealogical Records Chairman for New Jersey in N.S.D.A.R. and Regent of Matochhoning Chapter of the Daughters of American Revolution) and the Adjunct General's Office of New Jersey.

Conclusion:

While reading Ezra Mundy Hunt's *History of Metuchen*, I came across a particularly interesting story about the Old Colonial Cemetery:

At the southeast end of the old grave-yard stood the Presbyterian meeting-house, of which the Rev. Henry Cook was the pastor. On the opposite corner lived a man of the name Mundy, who, although not addicted to cowardice, was once somewhat startled by a ghost. One night he heard a strange noise, and looking out his window, saw a white object in the grave-yard moving to and fro, with an occasional suppressed groan. It really seemed as if some spirit was abroad, and though at first hesitating, he concluded to make advance upon it. With due preparation, he betook himself through the darkness to the spot, and as he approached, still unable to discern what it meant, he could only see that the being retreated not at his coming, but swayed up and down as if looking out from the grave and then withdrawing into it. Summoning new courage, he marched out to the spot and found that a grave had caved in and that a stray sheep had fallen into the pit and, unable to extricate himself, could only signal his trouble by stretching

his head ever and anon above the surface. The ghost was relieved from his dilemma and the story lives to show how many a grave-yard apparition of human form and spirit has no basis in fact.¹⁸

While there are no actual ghosts in the cemetery, visiting this historic sight does transport the visitor back in time and make them feel as if the colonial people are still among us. The Old Colonial Cemetery has stood the test of time and continued to mark the resting place of over five hundred colonial people of Metuchen. Among them are war heroes and patriots who risked their lives for freedom, mothers who gave their lives for that of their childr, reverends who dedicated their lives to the faith, and doctors who tended to the sick. While all these people are commendable figures, we should not forget the other hundreds of ordinary people who made their living during the birth of our nation. They endured war, witnessed the foundation of the railroad, and saw the expansion of their congregation and church that still stands today. Metuchen will continue to change, but as Ezra Mundy Hunt said best in 1870, “the old brown headstones of the old grave-yard are the only unchanged erections and silent mementoes of the past.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Hunt, "Metuchen and Her History," 13.

¹⁹ Hunt, "Metuchen and Her History," 13.



Figures One and Two: Soul Effigy on the headstone of Isaac Monday



Figures Three and Four: The Willow on the headstone of John L. Reckless

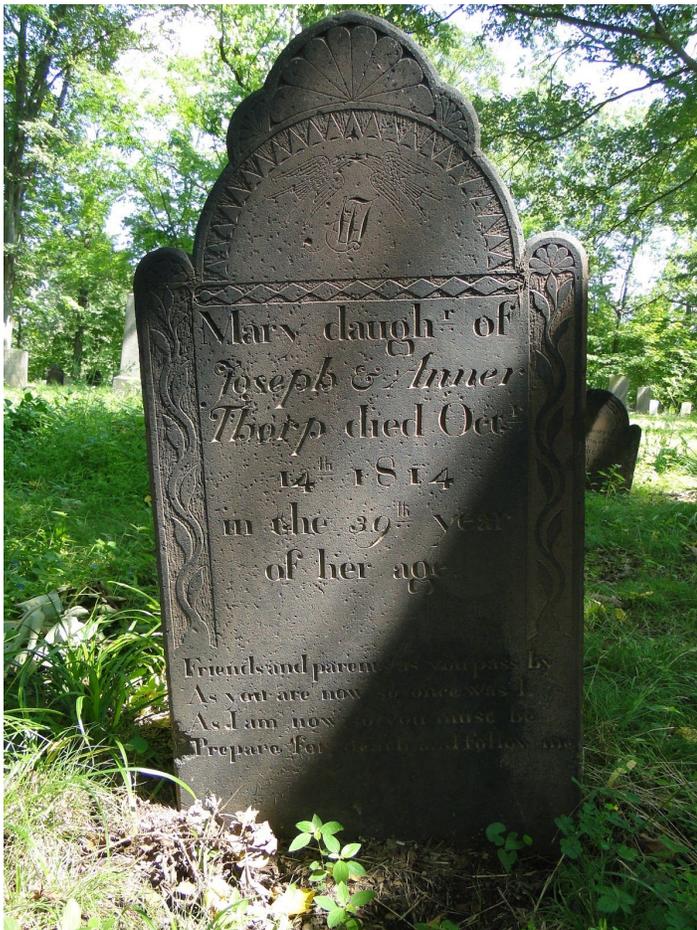




Figure Five: Flowers on the headstone of Eunice Freeman



Figure Six: The Urn on the headstone of Margaret Deyton Ross



Figures Seven and Eight: The Bird Motif and the deceased's initials can both be seen on the headstone of Mary Thorp



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