

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

For HCRS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received 2/29/95

date entered 2/29/95

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic CHESTER VILLAGE CEMETERY

and/or common CHESTER VILLAGE CEMETERY

**2. Location**

*NH 102 and NH 121*

street & number Intersection NH Highway Routes 102 and 121  not for publication

city, town Chester  vicinity of First congressional district

state New Hampshire code 33 county Rockingham code 015

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: cemetery

**4. Owner of Property**

name Town of Chester

street & number Town Hall

city, town Chester  vicinity of state New Hampshire 03036

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Rockingham County Registry of Deeds  
Rockingham County Courthouse

street & number Hampton Road

city, town Exeter  vicinity of state New Hampshire 03833

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title N/A has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

city, town  vicinity of  state

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## 7. Description

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**Condition**

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

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**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Chester Congregational Church was established in 1730; there were four other churches existing about the same period; burials at this time were made either in plots on the family property, or in graveyards, usually in close proximity to the churches. After the establishment of the Village Cemetery in 1751, the remains of many of the decedents were relocated from church graveyards or family plots to the Village Cemetery.

The Chester Village Cemetery comprises about 2.5 acres on level ground; it is centrally located in Chester, Rockingham County, at the crossroads of New Hampshire state highways 102 and 121. The cemetery is generally in the shape of a rectangle, about 85 yards along Route 121 and about 175 yards along Route 102. The cemetery is composed of 3 purchases and one donation of land; the oldest section, about 1 acre, is known as the "Revolutionary Section," and was purchased from Capt. Jonathan Blunt for 70 pounds in 1751 (1). It occupies all the frontage along Route 121, and about half of the frontage along Route 102. The "Jonathan Dearborn section" (1), about 1/2 acre, abutting the Revolutionary Section along Route 102, was purchased in 1834 and in 1852 the Town purchased the "Coffin French Section" (1), about 1/2 acre, abutting the Jonathan Dearborn section along Route 102. A gift of about 1/2 acre from Amos T. French (French Section) was accepted in 1937 (2); this land abuts the Dearborn and Coffin French Sections on the east side of the cemetery.

The monuments in the Revolutionary Section (12) are to be found in all sizes, shapes, and compositions, although the majority are slate and sandstone (or fieldstone) and in remarkable good condition, after 2 1/2 centuries of exposure to the elements. The monuments are arranged in dis-continuous and irregular rows, with a few in family plots, and a number in isolated areas. There are a number of "slab type" upright marble monuments, several natural rock boulders, a few with crude lettering thereon, but most unmarked. There are three horizontal granite "table tombs" (3' x 6') at ground level with elaborate lettering and engraving thereon.

There are many monuments which bear hand-carved images thereon, with a range of styles from the mid-eighteenth to the early 19th century. In addition to the vital data pertinent to the deceased, the monuments bear symbols including death's heads, cherubs, urns, willows, anchors to denote seafaring men, hearts, diamonds, and other geometric designs.

Many monuments have epitaphs thereon, some of religious nature, some to warn passers-by of their eventual fate, and some which extol the virtues of the person resting therein. A few monuments are double width, to accommodate the vital data for both husband and wife, mother and child, etc.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art history	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) history of burial practices
<input type="checkbox"/> invention				
<b>Specific dates</b>	<b>Builder/Architect</b>	N/A		

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Chester Village Cemetery is remarkable for the number of signed gravestones it contains. In several instances these stones have served as important documents in identifying early stonecutters, thereby permitting an analysis of the evolution of symbolic content and style in the mortuary art of southeastern New Hampshire and northeastern Massachusetts. The Chester Cemetery contains the only known signed gravestone by stone-cutter Stephen Webster, who was born in Bradford, Massachusetts, and grew up in Chester. This stone, that of Hannah Webster (1762), has led to an analysis of Stephen Webster's stonecutting style and use of symbolism, thereby permitting his work to be differentiated from that of his brother Abel. (James L. and Dona-Belle Garyin, "Stephen Webster, Gravestone Maker," Historical New Hampshire, XXIX, 2 (Summer, 1974), pp. 93-104; Peter Benes, "Abel Webster, Pioneer, Patriot, and Stonecutter," Historical New Hampshire, XXVIII, 4 (Winter, 1973), pp. 221-240.) While the Chester Cemetery contains a number of slate stones in Stephen Webster's mature style, it also contains many stones of schist, dating from the 1750's, which appear to represent his earlier work. The cemetery also includes one slate stone, apparently by Abel Webster; Abel Webster himself is buried there.

Among the other signed stones in the Chester Cemetery are several by John Marble of Bradford, Massachusetts. These resemble stones carved by John and Thomas Park of Groton, Mass., and illustrate the pervasive influence of the Parks' style on other stonecutters of the region. The cemetery also contains stones signed by Grennell and Walker of Concord, New Hampshire, D. Nichols of Lowell, Mass., and Timothy G. Eastman of Exeter, New Hampshire.

Many of the unsigned stones in the cemetery may be attributed to known makers on stylistic grounds. Among the makers so represented in Chester are John Wight of Londonderry (Peter Benes, "John Wight, The Hieroglyph Carver of Londonderry," Old-Time New England, LXIV, 2 (October - December, 1973), pp. 31-41), Enoch Noyes of Newburyport, and John and Thomas Park of Groton.

The comprehensive local and regional collection of gravestones in the Chester Cemetery makes this burying ground one of the most significant in the state, providing an ideal index of style, of the traffic in stones from community to community, and of the spread of symbolism from one region or one stonecutter to another.

### History of Burial Practices:

The history of burial practices in the area of New Hampshire between the Sea Coast and the Merrimack River is typified and preserved in the Chester Village Cemetery. The early combination of small church and family plots, the designation of a main cemetery, the relocation of burials and/or stones, the shifts in stone material, design, and burial pattern are all part of the cemetery.

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

History of Old Chester, from 1719 to 1869, Benjamin Chase, published by the author in 1969.  
 History of Chester, New Hampshire, including Auburn, NH, a supplement to the "History of Old Chester," compiled and published by John C. Chase, Derry, NH, 1926.  
 (See Continuation Sheet #2)

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2.5+ acres

Quadrangle name Manchester, NH

UTM NOT VERIFIED

Quadrangle scale 1:62,500

UMT References

A 

1	9	3	1	6	1	0	0	4	7	5	8	4	1	1	0
Zone		Easting				Northing									

B 

1	9	3	1	6	0	4	0	4	7	5	8	3	1	1	0
Zone		Easting				Northing									

C 

1	9	3	1	6	0	0	0	4	7	5	8	3	3	0	0
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D 

1	9	3	1	5	9	7	0	4	7	5	8	2	5	0	0
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E 

1	9	3	1	5	8	9	0	4	7	5	8	3	2	0	0
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F 

1	9	3	1	5	9	5	0	4	7	5	8	4	6	0	0
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G 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Lot 16, Map 28 of Town Property Map.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Hon. Richardson D. Benton, State Representative

organization NH House of Representatives date June 1, 1979

street & number RD 2, Box 44A telephone (603) 887-3951

city or town Chester state New Hampshire 03036

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local


As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

Commissioner, Dept. Resources & Economic Development  
 title NH State Historic Preservation Officer date August 6, 1979

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

 Coral D. Skell date 11-29-79  
 Keeper of the National Register

Attest: Bruce M. Dwyer for date 11/27/79  
 Chief of Registration

FHR-8-300A  
(11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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CONTINUATION SHEET

1

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

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SIGNIFICANCE (Continued)

The common slate, or fieldstone - sandstone memorials in the southwest section of the cemetery reflect 18th century trade routes for stones and carvers. As one walks north, the headstones and footstones are replaced by the marble designs and inscriptions of the 19th century. Burial tombs and family plots appear obvious. Continuing north, the centuries mix with the introduction of formal family plots marked by a center stone and surrounded by individual markers and fence or stone boundary. Throughout the area we see the incursion into family plots of 19th and 20th century stones and monuments showing a great deal of individuality from simple granite blocks to elaborate sculptures of doves and religious figures. Very old trees in the south end of the cemetery give way to formal Victorian planting in the northern section.

We have here an exceptional opportunity to see in a composite, change over time in the burial practices of the people of New England from the 18th century to the present.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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CONTINUATION SHEET 2 ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (Continued)

Interview with Anne Giesecke, archaeologist, April 24, 1979.

James L. and Donna-Belle Garvin, "Stephen Webster, Gravestone Maker,"  
Historical New Hampshire, XXIX, 2 (Summer, 1974), pp. 93-104.

Peter Benes, "Abel Webster, Pioneer, Patriot, and Stonecutter,"  
Historical New Hampshire, XXVIII, 4 (Winter, 1973), pp. 221-240.

Peter Benes, "John Wight, The Hieroglyph Carver of Londonderry,"  
Old-Time New England, LXIV, 2 (October-December, 1973), pp. 31-41.