

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

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1. Name of Property

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historic name: MANSFIELD CENTER CEMETERY

other name/site number: N/A

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2. Location

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street & number: Corner of Storrs Road and Cemetery Road

city/town: Mansfield

not for publication: N/A

vicinity: N/A

state: CT county: Tolland

code: 013

zip code: 06250

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3. Classification

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Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: site

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

- buildings
- sites
- structures
- objects
- Total

1

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. See cont. sheet.

Signature of certifying official: [Handwritten Signature] Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

Date: 6/17/92

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Entered in the National Register

entered in the National Register See continuation sheet.

[Handwritten Signature] 7/24/92

determined eligible for the National Register

See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain):

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: FUNERARY Sub: cemetery

Current: FUNERARY Sub: cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

N/A

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation	<u>N/A</u>	roof	<u>N/A</u>
walls	<u>N/A</u>	other	<u>N/A</u>

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: state.

Applicable National Register Criteria: A,C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : D

Areas of Significance: ART  
SETTLEMENT  
RELIGION

Period(s) of Significance: 1693-c.1800

Significant Dates: 1693

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: N/A

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above. X See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References
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X See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- \_ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
\_ previously listed in the National Register
\_ previously determined eligible by the National Register
\_ designated a National Historic Landmark
\_ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
\_ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- X State historic preservation office Connecticut Historical Commission
\_ Other state agency 59 South Prospect Street
\_ Federal agency Hartford, Connecticut 06106
\_ Local government
\_ University
\_ Other -- Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreage of Property: approx. 1.5 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

Table with 4 columns: Zone, Easting, Northing, Zone, Easting, Northing. Rows A, B, C, D.

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The nominated property includes the entire cemetery at the corner of Storrs and Cemetery Roads, referenced in Mansfield Land Records, Vol. 32, pp. 651-52.

Boundary Justification: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The boundary includes the entire historical extent of the cemetery.

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11. Form Prepared By Reviewed by John Herzan National Register Coordinator
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Name/Title: Bruce Clouette

Organization: Historic Resource Consultants Date: February 26, 1992

Street & Number: 55 Van Dyke Avenue Telephone: 203-547-0268

City or Town: Hartford State: CT ZIP: 06106

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CONTINUATION SHEET**

Description                      Mansfield Center Cemetery                      7-1  
   Mansfield, Tolland County, CT

Mansfield Center Cemetery is a small 18th-century burying ground with an estimated 300-400 headstones (Photographs 1 and 2), more than 130 of which are 18th-century monuments attributed to specific stone carvers. The cemetery is located along a busy state highway in a part of the village of Mansfield Center that is primarily characterized by 19th and 20th-century buildings, many of them residences that are now in commercial use. The cemetery is separated from the road by a narrow green swath, planted with widely spaced tall shade trees, and is surrounded by a fieldstone wall. Granite gate posts frame a break in the center of the west wall, where there is a portion of a wooden-picket gate. The yard within the wall is generally level, and all the burials are oriented eastward, so that the carved sides of the headstones face the west.

The character of the burying ground is created by row upon row of closely spaced 18th-century monuments, most of which are tablet-shaped and carved with winged cherubim, geometric figures, and vine-like designs; death-heads and coffin carvings also appear, but in smaller numbers (Photographs 8 through 12). Most stones are lettered with the person's name, age, and date of death; many also list the virtues of the decedent, and some add an epitaph in verse. Although almost all the stones are in a tradition that scholars have labeled the Eastern Connecticut Ornamental Style, they vary greatly in detail according to the distinctive personal styles of the individual carvers. Several prominent Connecticut carvers are represented, most by several examples. Among the markers with credible attributions are those by John Hartshorne (Photograph 3), who is credited with bringing the style from Essex County, Massachusetts; Obadiah Wheeler, in both his early geometric and mature "moon-faced" styles (Photographs 4 and 6); the Collins family (Photographs 4 and 7); and Gershom Bartlett (Photograph 9), also known as the "Hook and Eye Man." The single most prevalent style is that of the Manning family of carvers, whose bat-winged, pompadour-coifed, pouting cherub is found on almost 80 stones (Photographs 5, 10, and 14).

Although most stones were carved from locally abundant granitic schist,<sup>1</sup> white marble (Photograph 11), slate (Photographs 8 and 12), and brownstone are also represented among the cemetery's 18th-century markers. In addition to headstones, there are two table-style monuments, one on fluted square columns, that mark the graves of particularly prominent residents (Photograph 13). The cemetery was in general use until the 1870s, when burials in the so-called "New Cemetery," a short distance east on cemetery road, became more common.

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Description                      Mansfield Center Cemetery                      7-2  
   Mansfield, Tolland County, CT

Consequently, there is also a large number of early 19th-century stones, many of white marble, with the urn and Masonic motifs that characterized that period (Photograph 14). Many of the headstones, from both the 18th century and the early 19th century, accompanied by small corresponding footstones (Photograph 15). Most of the burials are arrayed in long continuous parallel rows, though there are a few family plots defined by low iron fences, particularly at the southern end of the burying ground (Photograph 16). The last recorded burial was in 1941.

While weathered, most of the markers are legible and in at least fair condition; some are in remarkably good condition, but a few are lying on the ground. The oldest extant headstone in the cemetery, the 1722 Exercise Conant marker (Photograph 6), considered one of the finest early stones by Obadiah Wheeler, was replaced by a replica; the original is preserved in the Mansfield Historical Society's museum.

NOTE

1. This coarse-grained gray stone is found in many places in eastern Connecticut, including nearby Windham. Physical and documentary evidence indicates that the quarries at Bolton Notch (still in operation) were an important source of material.

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Significance                    Mansfield Center Cemetery                    8-1  
   Mansfield, Tolland County, CT

Summary

Mansfield Center's old cemetery has significance for the history of American art (Criterion C) because it contains a large number of 18th-century gravestones that, collectively, illustrate a major tradition within New England stonecarving. Headstone carvings are today recognized as one of the principal artistic expressions of early New England culture. The rich variety of cherubim, geometric designs, vines, and funerary symbols found in the Mansfield Center Cemetery represents a vibrant folk-art tradition that, while deeply rooted in Puritan culture as well as earlier English precedents, had a life of its own, as individual carvers refined their styles and influenced each other. Gravestone-carving was always a practical art, serving the explicit purpose of satisfying a family's need to memorialize the dead, yet high artistic values, such as inventiveness, composition, and proportion, are everywhere evident on these stones. The individual stonecarvers represented in the cemetery, including John Hartshorne, Obadiah Wheeler, Benjamin and Zerubbabel Collins, the Manning family, and Gershom Bartlett, were all artists with distinctive styles and highly refined technical skills; their stones can thus be termed recognizable works by "masters." Although there are several eastern Connecticut cemeteries with comparable collections of headstones, Mansfield Center Cemetery ranks among the foremost in the number, concentration, and diversity of its markers; it has been described by a leading scholar of colonial gravestones as one of the "premier granite burying grounds of eastern Connecticut . . . one that must not be missed."<sup>1</sup>

Related to the gravestones' artistic significance is their significance as keys to the culture of the Puritans and their descendants. Although burial was not conceived of as a religious rite, both the markers and the cemetery itself shed light on the ideas about life and death that permeated New England in that period (Criterion A). The orientation of the burials, facing the rising sun, expressed faith in resurrection, as did much of the iconography carved on the stones. The inscriptions on the monuments, emphasizing familial devotion, piety, and service to the community, reveal the virtues that were valued in the period. Even the materials present in the burying ground suggest the cultural ties that linked eastern Connecticut with other places in New England: although the vast majority of markers were carved on local stone by artists who lived in eastern Connecticut, the presence of Connecticut Valley brownstone, Rhode Island and Boston-area slate, and Vermont marble show that the area was far from isolated.

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Significance                      Mansfield Center Cemetery                      8-2  
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Finally, Mansfield Center Cemetery has historical significance as a symbol of the early 18th-century origins of the town. This site, chosen for a burying ground as early as 1693, when Mansfield was still part of Windham, served along with the Congregational meetinghouse as a central focus for the community, a role that it continued for at least a century and in some respects still plays today. Virtually nowhere else in town are there visible remains from as far back as the 1720s, and as a common burying ground, the cemetery is certainly the oldest surviving expression of community life in Mansfield.

Cemeteries are ordinarily not eligible for listing on the National Register. However, the artistic value inherent in the stones, their significance in illuminating the culture of the period, and the site's importance as an early town institution justify its inclusion (Criteria Consideration D).

Historical Background

Mansfield was settled from Windham in the 1690s and was known as Pond Place, after the small body of water just to the east of the old cemetery. As early as 1693 a committee was chosen to select a burying ground, with Captain William Hall agreeing to trade the cemetery plot for two acres elsewhere in town. Mansfield became a separate town in 1703, and this plot remained the central burying ground until the Storrs cemetery was laid out in 1744. The original cemetery plot was enlarged with additions at the south end in 1752, 1796, and 1840. It was first enclosed by a stone wall in 1794, with the present gate posts probably dating from 1859. Although the civil authority of the town purchased the land, the cemetery was administered by the Congregational church's Ecclesiastical Society. After church and state were separated in 1818, the First Congregational Church continued managing the cemetery, finally turning it over to a private association in 1936.

Along with the Congregational church, the cemetery served as a focal point for the community. The earliest settlers of Mansfield are buried there, including William Hall (Photograph 3). New England cemeteries were commonly visited on a weekly basis, in between services on the Sabbath. They thus served to reaffirm people's social connections, not only with their own families, but also with people from other parts of town, whom they might see only on Sundays. Even after other cemeteries were established in Mansfield, the Center Cemetery continued to be used by people from all parts of town, even those who lived in far outlying



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areas.

Important Stone Carvers

Most of the 18th-century headstones in Mansfield Center Cemetery belong to an artistic tradition characterized by a winged cherub, often highly stylized, supplemented by border carvings of vines or abstract geometric designs; the carving is almost entirely two-dimensional. The type, termed the Eastern Connecticut Ornamental Style, forms a distinct contrast both with the winged skulls dominant in the Boston area (Photograph 8) and with the more realistic faces, sometimes regarded as an attempt at portraiture or at least relevance to the deceased, found in other traditions (Photograph 12). Mansfield Center Cemetery contains stones by more than a dozen carvers in this tradition, most with multiple examples, allowing not only comparison among different carvers, but in some cases, between earlier and later phases of an individual's work.

The style is believed to have been brought to the area by John Hartshorne (1650-c.1737), a stonecarver who moved to Franklin, Connecticut, from Essex County, Massachusetts, at the age of 70. The Essex County type had a wide-eyed round face with stylized wings that included shapes that could also be interpreted as birds or serpents; rosettes, vines, spirals, and other ornaments filled the borders. Mansfield's 1727 William Hall stone, carved by the elderly Hartshorne, epitomizes the type (Photograph 3); it is said to be the first with bird/serpents in eastern Connecticut. There are a dozen other markers by Hartshorne in the cemetery.

The early stones of Lebanon's Obadiah Wheeler (1673-c.1749) continue the Essex County tradition (Photograph 6), particularly in the use of spirals and rosettes. In place of the bird/serpent wings, however, the cherub is enframed by spirals that suggest stylized hair. Wheeler, considered the "finest craftsman of the inland rural carvers of eastern Connecticut",<sup>2</sup> later developed a distinctive protruding moon-faced cherub enframed by finely detailed feathered wings (Photograph 4). Nine stones by Wheeler are found in the burying ground, illustrating all of his major style changes.

Fine feathers also became the signature of Benjamin Collins (1691-1759) of Columbia (Photograph 4, center). Collins's cherub design seems to include some kind of headdress and collar, with heart, floral, and vine carvings continuing the ornamental tradition. The Collins family were

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cabinetmakers as well as stonecarvers. The work of Benjamin Collins's son Zerubbabel (1733-1797) is also represented in the cemetery. These include both early stones (Photograph 7) and stones in Zerubbabel's mature style, in which flat carvings have been replaced by highly sculptured vines and wings (Photograph 4, right). Similarly bold vine carvings distinguish the work of Elijah Sikes (dates unknown), whose wingless, thin-necked feminine cherub shows a classical influence (Photograph 11).

Gershom Bartlett (1723-1798) abstracted the cherub-face to an almost cartoon-like degree (Photograph 9). In his highly original style, which earned him the name "Hook and Eye Man" among early scholars, the hair of the cherub and the odd spotted wings are almost indistinguishable from the vegetative ornament that makes up the rest of the carving. Bartlett's cherub, in its shape and toothed "chin," suggests a mixture of the angel-face and skull motifs.

Mansfield Center Cemetery, and much of eastern Connecticut, is rich in the work of the Manning family (Photograph 5). Developed by Josiah Manning (1725-1806) and continued by his sons Rockwell (1760-1806) and Frederick (1758-1810), as well as several carvers heavily influenced by them, the Manning style is distinguished by a strong-featured cherub with elaborate hair, preacher-type collar, and solid or carved bat-type wings. The shape of their stones is often complex, with richly carved flowers, shells, spirals, vines, crowns, half-circles, and other motifs. Some of their most highly detailed stones are found in Mansfield Center Cemetery.

Cultural Significance

The headstone carvings in Mansfield Center Cemetery illustrate the degree to which Christian ideas of death and resurrection permeated everyday life in the 18th century. Some of the floral and geometric designs appear to have little significance; they are similar to the carved motifs found on Early American furniture and probably represent long-established traditions in English carved decoration. Most of the designs, however, have their origin in Christian iconography. Hartshorne's bird/serpent, for example, is derived from a common 17th-century Puritan allegory, in which the perfect Christian (symbolized by the wings of resurrection) is composed of the emotional heart of the dove and the rational head of the serpent. The triumph of resurrection is also symbolized by vegetative designs intended to suggest laurel leaves (Photograph 3) and by the many varieties of crowns on the

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Manning stones (Photograph 5). The winged cherubs themselves symbolize resurrection, both as angels of God and as effigies for the souls of the departed. These highly stylized depictions were meant to suggest the disembodied soul as an otherworldly, transformed spirit. Finally, the stones depict, more than any other plant, the vines, leaves, and fruit of the grape, a rich and complex Christian symbol. First and foremost, the grapevine symbolized the unbreakable continuum between Christ and his followers--"I am the vine, you are the branches"--and thus made an implicit connection between the deceased and those still alive. Secondly, the grape symbolized salvation, as the source of the Last Supper's wine. Finally, the grapevine, as the vineyard, symbolized earthly existence in which the Christian labored for God.<sup>3</sup>

The legends on the headstones also offer clues to the virtues that were valued in 18th-century Connecticut. Piety and faith were extolled, but also familial devotion, parental tenderness, and public spiritedness. In general, these burials lack the emphasis on sudden death found in Massachusetts Bay-area burying grounds, both in legends and in iconography. At the same time, the Christian hopefulness of the majority seems to be challenged by the grim agnosticism of Bridget Snow's monument (Photograph 10). Not only is the soul effigy shown in the coffin, rather than taking wing, but the legend offers some disturbing verse:

My Lover, Friend, Familiar, all --  
Remov'd from Sight & out of Call,  
to dark Oblivion is retir'd,  
Dead, or at least to me Expir'd.

Burying grounds such as Mansfield Center Cemetery cannot alone provide definitive explanations of the character, development, and diversity of colonial New England culture. Yet as both artistic expressions and statements of belief, the stones they contain offer unique evidence to the ideas about life, death, family, and community held by 18th-century Connecticut residents.

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NOTES

1. James A. Slater, The Colonial Burying Grounds of Eastern Connecticut and the Men Who Made Them (Hamden: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1987), 212.
2. Ibid., 7.
3. That this symbolism had a special meaning for New Englanders is attested to by the use of transplanted grape vines as the major motif on the Connecticut seal. How much thought people gave to the symbolism of these motifs, apart from their being attractive designs, is of course open to speculation.



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Photo captions      Mansfield Center Cemetery      Photos-1  
                                 Mansfield, Tolland County, CT

All photographs:

1. Mansfield Center Cemetery
2. Mansfield, Tolland County, CT
3. Photo Credit: HRC, Hartford, CT
4. February, 1991
5. Negative filed with Connecticut Historical Commission  
                                 Hartford, CT

Captions:

Overview of cemetery, camera facing northeast  
Photograph 1 of 16

Overview of cemetery, camera facing southeast  
Photograph 2 of 16

Monument to William Hall (1727), John Hartshorne, carver, camera  
facing east  
Photograph 3 of 16

Monuments to Hannah Williams (1742), Obadiah Wheeler, carver; Joann  
Conant (1743), Benjamin Collins, carver; and Mary Williams (1760),  
Zerubbabel Collins, carver; camera facing east  
Photograph 4 of 16

Monuments to Eunice (1779) and Huckens (1784) Storrs, with other  
Manning-family carved stones in background, camera facing east  
Photograph 5 of 16

Monuments to Exercise Conant (cast reproduction of 1722 original) and  
Joanna Dimmuck (1727), Obadiah Wheeler, carver, camera facing  
southeast  
Photograph 6 of 16

Monument to John Storrs (1753), Zerubbabel Collins, carver, camera  
facing southeast  
Photograph 7 of 16

Monument to Hannah Estabrook, slate, Boston style, camera facing  
southeast  
Photograph 8 of 16

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Monument to Ruth Conant (1766), Gershom Bartlett, carver, camera facing  
northeast  
Photograph 9 of 16

Monument to Bridget Snow (1768), Manning-family carver, camera facing  
east  
Photograph 10 of 16

Monument to Doctor David Adams (1790), white marble, Elijah Sikes,  
carver, camera facing east  
Photograph 11 of 16

Monument to Deacon Boaz Stearns (1796), Stephen Spalding, carver,  
camera facing east  
Photograph 12 of 16

One of two brownstone table-type monuments, camera facing east  
Photograph 13 of 16

Monuments to Jerusha (1811), John (1795), and Dan Throop Swift (1785),  
Manning-family carver, camera facing southeast  
Photograph 14 of 16

Footstone, Jerusha Swift (1811), camera facing west  
Photograph 15 of 16

Enclosed family plot, Barrows family, 1860s, camera facing southeast  
Photograph 16 of 16