

## **Old Burying Ground (17<sup>th</sup> Century) & Fort Golgotha (1782)** *Behind the Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Bldg., 228 Main Street, Huntington*

The Old Burying Ground, located on top of the small hill behind the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Building south of Main Street, is the earliest public cemetery in Huntington. Although the earliest headstone still remaining today is dated 1712, it is clear that the cemetery was established in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, probably soon after the Town's founding in 1653. Also known as Old Burial Ground, Old Burial Hill, or Ancient Burying Ground, the cemetery was clearly historic prior to the American Revolution; however, during that conflict it gained additional notoriety as the scene of the most heinous desecration visited on the Town by the occupying British troops.



From September 1, 1776 until March 1783, Huntington endured six and one-half years of occupation by British troops. Although this period was marked by many hardships and indignities suffered by the local population, the most notable is widely acknowledged to be the construction of Fort Golgotha literally on top of the Town's Old Burying Ground using timbers taken from the Old First Presbyterian Church.

British Colonel Benjamin Thompson (1763-1814) (later known as Count Rumford) ordered the Church dismantled on November 26, 1782 and the timbers used to construct the new fort. The dual desecration of the Town's place of worship and its ancestral cemetery was further compounded by Col. Thompson's forced enlistment of Town residents to provide the required labor. Local carpenters were put to work tearing down the church and the sides of other buildings in the vicinity, while other inhabitants were ordered to bring their spades and axes to prepare the burial ground for the new construction. As a further insult, Col. Thompson ordered the local militia, who had been forced into British service, to deliver these orders to the local populace.

Over 100 tombstones were removed and the burial ground was leveled in preparation for the new fort. The dug up tombstones were used in construction of fireplaces, ovens, and floors within the fort. Tradition tells us that people employed around the fort saw the loaves of bread baked in these ovens with the reverse inscription of the tombstones of their friends on the bottom crust. The bread became known as "tombstone bread." Construction of Fort Golgotha was completed in fifteen days.

Rev. Ebenezer Prime, the Old First Church's third minister from 1723 to 1779 and an enthusiastic supporter of the American Revolution, had been buried in the Old Burying Ground in 1779. It is reported that when building the fort, Col. Thompson made sure that its exit was placed in front of the Rev. Prime's grave so that he might have the pleasure of "treading on the old Rebel" whenever he departed or entered the fort. (See "Old First Presbyterian Church" for further information on Rev. Prime and the history of this structure.)

In March 1783, just four months after disassembly of the Old First Church and construction of Fort Golgotha, the British troops evacuated Huntington. As his last act to aggravate Huntington's townspeople, Col. Thompson burned all the wood in the area so that the inhabitants would have less to heat their homes during the remaining months of winter. The hated Fort Golgotha was subsequently torn down and the Old First Church reconstructed (in 1784) on the site where it still stands today.

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