

## Burial Ground

The churchyard burial ground, located to the north and west of the Meeting House, served as the final resting place for the remains of Alexandria's Presbyterians from the town's earliest days through 1809. In that year, the congregation established the Presbyterian Cemetery on Hamilton Lane in response to an 1804 ordinance from Alexandria's Common Council that prohibited further burials within the city limits. The churchyard had been conveyed as a gift to the congregation by Richard and Eleanor Arell in 1773, but evidence indicates that interments preceded that date, perhaps by many years. Records of individuals who were laid to rest in the burial ground prior to the land's transfer to the Meeting House include Sarah Fairfax Carlyle (d. 1761), the first wife of John Carlyle, and Archibald Thompson, who died in August 1772. The practice of burying on lots prior to their use for constructing a place of worship occurred fairly frequently during this period.

Church records indicate that at least 300 persons were interred in the churchyard during the half century or so that it served as the primary burial site for members of the congregation. Among those buried here are men and women from the families that founded the town of Alexandria—Alexanders, Carlyles, Ramsays, and others; the Rev. William Thom, the congregation's first minister and Mary Thom, his mother; members of the family of the Rev. Dr. James Muir, the congregation's third minister; and numerous veterans of the French and Indian War and of the Revolutionary War. The Tomb of an Unknown Soldier of the American Revolution is also located in this burial ground (see below). Several memorial services are held throughout the year at this site. In addition, the burial ground holds the remains of members of the Society of the Cincinnati and founding members of Alexandria-Washington Masonic Lodge No. 22, which George Washington served as Master. The last person known to be interred here was Elizabeth Love Muir, daughter of the Rev. James and Mrs. Elizabeth Muir, in 1876.

Two plaques, located in the northeast corner of the burial ground, memorialize those interred here. One specifically honors the many Revolutionary War Patriots who are buried here. It was emplaced in 2006 by the George Washington Chapter, Virginia Society Sons of the American Revolution and the St. Andrew's Society of Washington, D.C. The 43 Revolutionary War dead in the burial ground and the Presbyterian Cemetery combined equal the largest number of such interments in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The second plaque, honoring all who were laid to rest in the burial ground, was erected by the congregation in 2009.

Only about 40 gravestones are present in the burial ground today. This figure, rather than a number in the hundreds which would more closely represent the actual number of burials, is the result of several factors. Many burials were of infants who died within a year of birth and were interred before being formally named, so many of their graves were never marked. Further, the memorial stones erected by the strong Calvinist Presbyterians tended to be plain and free of artistic embellishment, much like the Meeting House itself. Not considered visually interesting as time passed, they were disregarded and not maintained or replaced as they deteriorated.

The space allocated to the burial ground has diminished over time. Gravesites were covered over and lost when the Meeting House was rebuilt and expanded during the 1830s and 1840s, and

others were lost when the northern property line was adjusted southward. The location of this line was adjusted several times prior to erection of the brick wall that has defined it since 1932. As just one illustration of the contraction of this space, the remains of a soldier from the American Revolution were unearthed during the expansion of St. Mary's sanctuary in 1826. They were reinterred in the Meeting House burial ground, and the Tomb of an Unknown Soldier of the Revolutionary War was erected in 1929 to mark his grave by the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

In 2008, the Meeting House congregation established a new committee to oversee the churchyard burial ground. In 2011, this Committee prepared an accurate new map of the site and used it as the basis for a new brochure. The Committee also conducted a thorough survey of the burial ground and developed an assessment of the condition of each gravestone and fragment. These data formed the basis for a comprehensive three-phase conservation plan for the site. In the spring of 2015, the Meeting House received a grant from the Historic Alexandria Foundation for partial support of this conservation work. With these funds, a further grant from the Presbyterian Cemetery Board, and accumulated monies in hand, the Committee immediately began to address the most pressing issues. In September 2015, workers from Manassas Granite & Marble—experts in the conservation and repair of grave markers using approved methods—completed the Phase I conservation work.