"Remember Me As You Pass By": Material Evidence of the Planters in the Graveyards of the Maritime Provinces

Deborah Trask
Assistant Curator, Nova Scotia Museum

Actual artifacts of the Planter period in Nova Scotia are scarce. More than any other artifact type, gravestones from the eighteenth century have survived. For the most part, these are original objects, standing in much the same place and serving the same function for which they were created. A gravestone is material evidence of an individual's existence, proof that a real person lived and died. More than the inscribed information, a gravestone as an object can also provide data about the political, economic and social climate in which it was crafted. Through the careful study of material and carving details, as well as written records, it is often possible to determine where and by whom a stone was carved. This information in turn may further our understanding of the individual, community or period.

The oldest English inscribed gravestones in the Maritime Provinces were carved in New England. Those dating before 1760 can be seen in the old burial grounds of Annapolis Royal[1] and Halifax,[2] and in the collection of Parks Canada, Fortress Louisbourg.[3] In the early years of the Planter period (pre-1770) gravestones were still being imported from New England, mainly from the area around Massachusetts Bay (Figure 1). Those found outside of Halifax invariably commemorate the life of a young wife who died "in childbirth." If a male head-of-household died in this period, his grave may very well have been marked in some way, but the expense and bother of arranging with a New England stonecarver for an inscribed gravestone seems to have prohibited their importation. In some

---

1 The Bathiah Douglass stone, 1720, at Annapolis Royal, is the oldest English gravestone in the province. It has been attributed to the Boston carver Nathaniel Emmes. See Deborah E. Trask, *Life How Short, Eternity How Long: Gravestone Carving and Carvers in Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1978), 10-11. For more on Emmes, see Harriet Merifield Forbes, *Gravestones of Early New England and the Men Who Made Them, 1653-1800* (Boston, 1927), 57-9.

2 The oldest stone remaining at St. Paul's Cemetery, Halifax (originally the common burying ground), is that of John Connors, died 1754, which is a Massachusetts Bay carved slate, with an unusual skull profile.

3 Two stones dated 1745 were found near Fortress Louisbourg, in the ruins of the hospital. Both were carved in Newport, Rhode Island. See Deborah E. Trask, "Rhode Island Stones in Canada," *Association for Gravestone Studies Newsletter*, 8, 3(Summer 1984), 10.

1. Mary Hilton stone, slate, 1774, Chebogue, Yarmouth County, N.S. Signed by the carver: "Abraham Codner Next the Draw Bridge Boston".

(Nova Scotia Museum collection: P133/84.84.10 (N-15167)
Photo: Dan & Jessie Lie Farber)

cases, as in that of Stephen Post of Cornwallis who died in 1768, a stone was carved many years later to mark the grave (Figure 2). The style and imagery of this stone dates it about 1803.[4] The vast majority of burial sites before 1770 were not marked in any permanent way.

By the early 1770s more graves were being marked with imported stones in the Planter communities along the South Shore — Yarmouth, Chebogue, Barrington, Liverpool. There survives a remarkable variety of the New England stonecarvers' works in the old burial grounds of these communities. In fact, New England stones continued to be imported to what is now Yarmouth, Shelburne and Queens counties well into the nineteenth century. A local slate carver (William Gates Archer, who also considered himself a Baptist preacher) did work in the Liverpool, and later Tusket area, from c.1808-1828.[5] We know of some sixty of his stones; they

4 Trask, *Life How Short*, 20-21. Attributed to "the Second Horton Carver," second style.

5 Deborah E. Trask, "The South Shore Carver," *The Occasional*, 9, 2(1985).

stand alongside the imported ones of the same period. Even with someone carving locally, people along the South Shore must have found it just as convenient and/or inexpensive to order or bring in a gravestone from New England. There are very few imported slates to be found in the other Planter communities of the Maritimes — one at Truro, one at Windsor and two near Granville, are all that have been found, to date.

In the Annapolis-Granville area, there is evidence that there was a skilled carver working in sandstone, probably at Saint John, where a number of his stones can also be found, from the 1790s to about 1820. In Nova Scotia, almost all of these mark the graves of Loyalists (Figure 3).

At Chipman's Corner, Kings County, in one of the old burial grounds of Cornwallis, is a rare imported Connecticut sandstone from 1785, signed by its maker, Chester Kimball of New London.[6] This marks the grave of a young man whose Planter parents' graves nearby are marked with locally carved stones. Although it is apparent, as evidenced in the South Shore communities, that stones for women and children (or young men) were more likely to be imported than were grave markers for heads of households, there are no other imported stones in the area. All other eighteenth-century gravestones in Horton and Cornwallis were carved in Horton. Nor are there any imported stones in Falmouth or Newport townships. When Shubael Dimock, grantee at Newport, died in 1781, his grave was marked by a piece of soft sandstone roughly incised (Figure 4), very different from the elaborate sandstone carvings found in Mansfield, Connecticut, whence he came.[7]

In the mid-1770s a Scottish stonecarver in Halifax, James Hay,[8] advertised that he would make gravestones; soon after, stones with simplified depictions of the same symbols were appearing in the burial grounds of Horton, Cornwallis, Truro, Onslow and Londonderry (Figure 5). This carver has been called the "Horton Carver," as his work was first identified in the Wolfville area.[9] These simple, stylized, crowned angel-heads in sandstone date from the 1780s to the mid-90s when a different carver (the Second Horton Carver) who possibly moved from the Truro area to Horton about 1795, began to interpret the image his own way (Figures 2 and 6).

---

6 For more on Chester Kimball, see Ernest Caulfield, "Connecticut Gravestones VIII," continued by Peter Benes, in *The Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin*, 40, 2(April 1975). Chester himself was a Planter baby, having been born during his parents' brief period of residency on the Saint John River, in 1763. Chester Kimball's work is also noted in James A. Slater, *The Colonial Burying Grounds of Eastern Connecticut, and the Men Who Made Them, Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. XXI (Hamden CT, 1987), 35-37.

7 Slater, *The Colonial Burial Grounds of Eastern Connecticut*, 212-217.

8 For more on the prolific Hay, see Trask, *Life How Short*, 58-68.

9 Trask, *Life How Short*, 18-19.

2. Stephen Post stone, sandstone, 1768, Chipman's Corner, Kings County, N.S. Attributed carver: the Second Horton Carver, second style (c. 1801-1805).

(Nova Scotia Museum collection: P133,68.19
Photo: Deborah Trask)

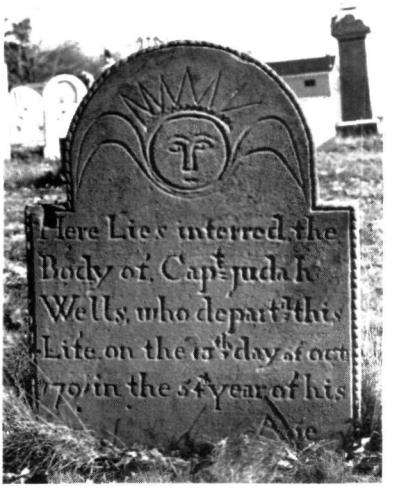
3. (Nova Scotia Museum collection: P133.87.4
Photo: Deborah Trask)

3. Francis LeCain stone, sandstone, 1806, Annapolis Royal, Annapolis County, N.S.

(Nova Scotia Museum collection: P133.87.5
Photo: Deborah Trask)

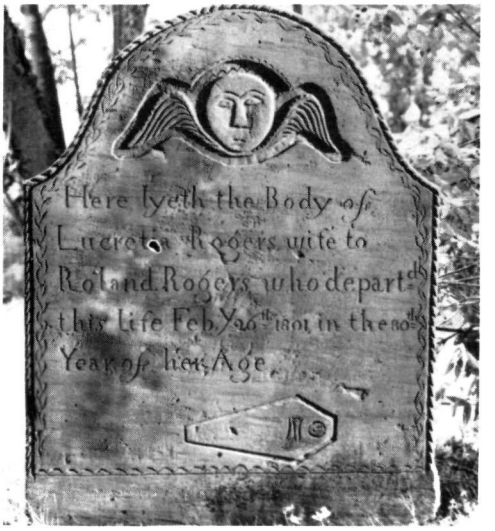
4. Shubael Dimock stone, fieldstone, 1781, Scotch Village, Hants County, N.S.

(Nova Scotia Museum collection: P133.96.7
Photo: Deborah Trask)



5. Capt. Judah Wells stone, sandstone, 1791, Upper Canard, Kings County, N.S. Attributed carver: the Horton Carver.

(Nova Scotia Museum collection: P133.29.25
Photo: Deborah Trask)



6. Lucretia Rogers stone, sandstone, 1801, Wolfville, Kings County, N.S. Attributed carver: the Second Horton Carver, first style (1798-1801).

(Nova Scotia Museum collection: P133/84.84. (N-13305)
Photo: Dan & Jessie Lie Farber)

The same craftsman may have continued to improve his skill, or perhaps a more competent competitor appeared in Horton. We know that from about 1800 to 1821, when he removed for good to Pugwash, the carver Abraham Seaman made most of the gravestones which still stand in Cornwallis and Horton (Figure 7). He was a Loyalist who owned land in Cumberland County, but resided at Horton where he carved gravestones for his Planter neighbours and in-laws, probably of Cumberland County sandstone. Some of his stones from this period can also be found at Truro, Londonderry, Parrsboro, Granville and Amherst.[10]

Another interesting Planter region of the Maritimes is Chignecto. The oldest markers are, as expected, rather crude and functional. Around Sackville and particularly Hillsborough, where good building sandstone was readily available, a different carving style evolved. Stones in this style can be seen around Shepody Bay, the Cumberland Basin, and up the Petitcodiac and Tantramar Rivers. These stones have an articulated tympanum, and are often incised with a simplified urn/lamp, sometimes surrounding the initials of the deceased (Figure 8). The stone for John Wallace, a grantee at Horton, who later moved to Hillsborough where he died "an old man, full of years," is an example of this style. The image of the urn/lamp, with a sprig of neo-classical willow, became very popular later with Saint John carvers, and their work can be found in all the coastal communities of the Bay of Fundy.

From this brief overview of the surviving gravestones of Planters in the Maritimes, it becomes clear that some insight can be gained through a study of material culture. By grouping gravestones loosely by the carving styles of individual craftsmen, distinct regions of similarity can be identified. It would seem that the place of origin of the decedent has no relevance to the source of his/her gravestone. That variable was determined by the region where his/her death occurred. The South Shore communities could readily obtain carved gravestones from New England, and there was little incentive for local craftsmen to enter the market. In the lower valley communities, similar conditions applied initially, until the closer market of Saint John developed, followed by local competition. In the upper valley and the upper reaches of the Bay of Fundy, including the Chignecto region, the local market developed early, with a ready source of materials and a more agrarian population. These are generalizations based on informal observation of surviving evidence, and not on a quantitative analysis of all existing material. In gravestone terms, the Planter period ranges from about 1760 to the mid-1830s. Only about one-tenth of all

10 For a preliminary study on the gravestone production of Abraham Seaman, see Deborah E. Trask and Debra A. McNabb, "Carved in Stone, Material Evidence in the Graveyards of Kings County, Nova Scotia," *Material History Bulletin*, 23(Spring 1986), 35-42.

7. William Alline stone, sandstone, 1799, Wolfville, Kings County, N.S. Attributed carver: Abraham Seaman.

(Nova Scotia Museum collection: P133/84.84.62 (N-15168)
Photo: Dan & Jessie Lie Farber)

8. Stephen Millidge stone, sandstone, 1803, Westcock, Westmorland County, N.B. Attributed carver: D. Shaw.

(Nova Scotia Museum collection: P133.146.1
Photo: Deborah Trask)

eighteenth-century graves are marked, and current scholarship still has a long way to go in the identification of individual craftsmen's work.

The Planters may be considered as a group, but they were a diverse collection of individuals, dying off over a seventy year period. Therefore, in the pursuit of Planters, it is worth while to recognize this diversity and to heed the warning of the number one favorite epitaph of the eighteenth century (as seen, for example, crumbling away at the bottom of the hill below Acadia University on the grave of Sylvenus Miner, a grantee of Horton — Figure 9): "Remember me as you pass by/ As you are now so once was I."

9. Sylvenus Miner stone, sandstone, 1786, Wolfville, Kings County, N.S.

(Nova Scotia Museum collection: P133.133.11
Photo: Deborah Trask)