

## HISTORY OF RIDGEBURY CEMETERY

Ridgebury Cemetery is a pre-Revolutionary War cemetery located at 655 Ridgebury Road, Ridgefield, CT about one-quarter mile north of the Congregational Church. It comprises three acres and contains over 700 graves with room for at least 100 additional. It is the final resting place of many Keelers who were among the early settlers of Ridgefield. The first burial, based on an inventory of gravestones in 1960, was that of Ruth Smith Keeler in 1734. However, an inventory in 1993 could find none older than that of a Timothy Benedict who died June 21, 1757, the earlier gravestones having disappeared. An updated inventory including photographs was made in 2003 and 2004.

Ruth Smith Keeler was the second wife of Jonah Keeler who built the famous "Pink House" in Ridgebury in 1717. Their wedding was the third to take place in Ridgefield. The house was continuously occupied by Keelers until the death of Nehemiah "Fuzzy" Keeler, a great-great-great-great-grandson of Jonah, in 2005. A neighbor purchased the house, and with no regard for its historic significance tore it down in 2009.

Ridgebury residents were a thirsty lot during the 1700's, there being a tavern just north of the cemetery operated by Captain Nehemiah Keeler, grandson of Noah, and one south of the cemetery operated by Ensign Samuel Keeler, brother of Capt. Nehemiah.

There are fifty-two veterans of various wars buried in the cemetery:

- King George's War (1744-48)	1
- Revolutionary War	16
- War of 1812	3
- Civil War	6
- World War I	4
- World War II	24
- Korean War	3

In April of 1777, during the Revolutionary War British troops, after burning Danbury, marched through Ridgebury enroute to Ridgefield where they fought the Battle of Ridgefield. Two of my great-grandfathers, Pvt. Jonathon Reynolds and Capt. Nehemiah Keeler were in the local militia at that time, and presumably took a few shots at the red-coats. Among the veterans are two African-Americans who served in the Civil War, and Cornelius Ryan, author several books about World War II including "The Longest Day" and "A Bridge Too Far."

The land for the cemetery was appropriated for the burial on December 17, 1734 which is the accepted date of its establishment. The cemetery has been enlarged twice. Once (date unknown) by Legrand Keeler and George Boughton, and then on June 26, 1926 by gift of 1.44 acres to the west by Ralph Keeler Reynolds and Nellie Keeler Reynolds. There was apparently no formal organization to manage the cemetery until 1907 when on October 21st the Ridgebury Cemetery Association was formed. There were sixteen charter members including Dr. Annie Keeler Bailey who was elected superintendent and served for twenty year until her death in traffic accident in 1927. Ralph Keeler Reynolds was then elected superintendent and served for twenty-three years, retiring to Florida in 1950. The association was inactive for several ears, but in 1960, at the urging of Frances Reynolds who was concerned about the care and maintenance of the cemetery, a group of lot owners got together and incorporated it on December 29, 1961 as a non-profit cemetery association. Robert Keeler Reynolds who, on summer vacation from Yale in 1946 mowed the cemetery with a reel-type hand mower, was elected president and has served as such ever since.

In 1907 the Association established a trust fund with the Town of Ridgefield, depositing money from bequests and sales of plots the income from which would be used for maintenance. Twenty years later, in 1927 the fund amounted to \$1,730. By 1948 in had increased to \$4,608 of which \$3,995 was from bequests and \$613 from plot sales. The trust fund plus other cash assets as of January 1, 2016 totaled \$302,508. Lot prices have increased over the years. The oldest deed on file, dated February1, 1870, was

for \$1.67. The current price is \$2,100.

File: cemhistory.wps



