

living with her second husband Nathan Rathbun and several of his children.^[82] Nathan made his will 10 May 1867, and it was probated 14 Dec. 1868. He ordered his sons Thomas and Lorenzo to pay Martha \$10 per year and to provide her with six bushels of meat, 100 pounds of pork, fifty pounds of beef or mutton, two barrels full of apples, and three cords of wood “part oak and part chestnut,” cut and split, and delivered to the door. She was also to have the use of the west front room and the west bedroom. This was all in lieu of her dower rights.^[83]

Martha apparently remained on the homestead farm that Nathan had left to his sons Thomas and Lorenzo. In 1870 she was with Thomas and his family and in 1880 with Lorenzo’s family.^[84]

Child of Rodman and Martha (Congdon) Hazard:

1. *George T. Hazard*, b. ca. 1834, d. 26 Aug. 1852 in his 19th year.^[85]

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82. 1850 U.S. Census, North Kingstown, Washington Co., R.I., roll 847, p. 316; 1860 U.S. Census, North Kingstown, Washington Co., R.I., roll 1211, p. 306.
83. North Kingstown Probate Records, 36:95-97.
84. 1850 U.S. Census, North Kingstown, Washington Co., R.I., roll 847, p. 316; 1860 U.S. Census, North Kingstown, Washington Co., R.I., roll 1211, p. 306; 1870 U.S. Census, North Kingstown, Washington Co., R.I., roll 1473, p. 263; 1880 U.S. Census, North Kingstown, Washington Co., R.I., roll 1210, p. 368C.
85. McAleer, *Elm Grove Cemetery* [note 42], p.4.

HOW MUCH DID THEY COST? Answers and Other Musings on Early Newport Gravestones

John E. Sterling

In the 1990s I led a number of colonial burial ground tours for the Rhode Island Historical Society and the Brown Learning Connection. I was often asked “How long did it take to carve these beautiful slate gravestones?” and “How much did they cost?” I was not able to answer either of these questions at the time. The cost would have been relatively easy to determine in some other colonies—Massachusetts, for example—where the cost of gravestones was routinely included in probate accounts. During research for *Newport, Rhode Island Colonial Burial Grounds*, however, I finally found some answers in the facsimile of the John Stevens account book. The first resident carver in Newport, the most prosperous town in the colony, John¹ Stevens started carving gravestones in 1705 and progressed rapidly from crude relief work to wonderful and distinctive carving.^[1] At first, carving was only one means of putting food on the Stevens table: he was also making shoes, building chimneys and stairs, cutting hearths, plastering and whitewashing rooms. John¹ Stevens kept careful accounts of his business, compiling, it has been said, one of the earliest examples of double entry bookkeeping in America.^[2] These business records, continued by his sons and grandson throughout the eighteenth century, survived the centuries in the care of various proprietors of the Stevens Shop, now operated by the noted carver Nick Benson. The earliest book was reprinted in facsimile in 1953 by the Preservation Society of Newport County as *John Stevens, His Book 1705 — Facsimile of an account book kept by an early Newport artisan*. It is a wonderful resource for anyone interested Newport people and their gravestones.

Throughout the account book John Stevens documented what he charged for various jobs he and his employees were hired to do. As the master carver, John Stevens charged 10 shillings or half a pound sterling for a day of his labor. This rate should not be assumed to apply to all Rhode Island carvers in all towns—some of whom were at best rough craftsmen in rural villages—but it is a good indicator of what an expert carver in a wealthy town could charge. The correlation of time and charge is actually more important than the figure itself, given the difficulty of estimating what colonial money was worth at any given date. The Stevens shop carved small children’s gravestones in about three days and charged £1 10s. Larger adult gravestones took six to eight days and were charged out at £3 to £4. Box tombs were built for between £12 and £57 depending on size and complexity. Since the accounts include purchased materials like the slate blank and bricks for the box, it is difficult to estimate the amount of carving time to make these gravestones. We do know that a coat of arms took eight to eleven days to carve. The lettering at two pence per letter could take from

1. See Vincent F. Luti, *Mallet & Chisel, Gravestone Carvers of Newport, Rhode Island in the 18th Century* (Boston: NEHGS, 2002), 7-53, for extensive information on the first John Stevens and pictures of many of his gravestones.
2. Robert M. Jennings, “Selections from a Pre-Revolutionary Accounting Record,” *The Accounting Review*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Jan., 1962), 73.

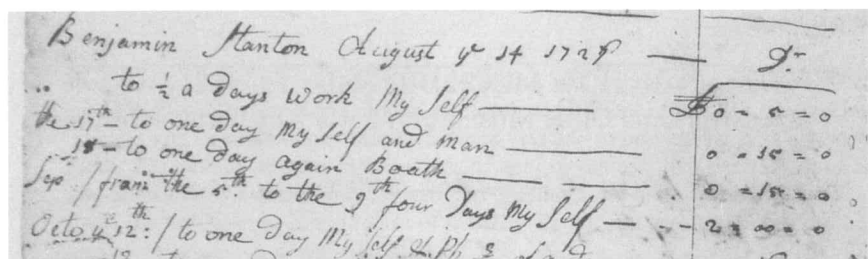


Figure 1. The Stevens account book includes a charge to Benjamin Stanton in August 1727 for 15 shillings for a day's work for John and his man, 10 shillings for him and 5 shillings for his man. This work appears to have nothing to do with gravestones.

three to nine days. In order to have such a gravestone made by the Stevens shop in colonial times a family had to be quite wealthy.

Because many of the gravestones Stevens and his descendants carved still stand in burial grounds in Newport and elsewhere, it is possible in many cases to look at the accounts and then at the stone being described. In most cases only the headstone has survived. "M^{rs} Burn" ordered a pair of gravestones on 20 December 1726, which was—if the dates on the gravestone and in the account book are correct—three days before her husband William died.^[3] She paid £3 for the pair. You can still visit William Burn's headstone in Newport's Common Burial Ground (section BH) or see a photograph of it on one of the companion DVDs available for *Newport Colonial Burial Grounds*. While you are there, either in person or at your computer, you can also see the gravestones that "M^r Norbert Wigner or German Doctor" ordered for two of his children who died young: his daughter Anterese who died 13 August 1721, age 20 months, and his son Norbert, who died 1 August 1724 at the age of 2 years 4 months. Dr. Wigner's account included "one pair of gravestones for your Indian" (location unknown) as well as charges for quilting a petticoat (8s.) and the making or repair of shoes for different family members, ranging from 3s. to 7s. Anterese's gravestones were carved by John¹ Stevens and lettered by his son John²; Norbert's were carved by John² Stevens. Each pair of gravestones cost £1.^[4] Dr. Wigner and his wife Susannah survived many decades (he to 1764 and she to 1748/9) and are buried beside their children under gravestones carved at the Stevens shop.^[5]

You might also see there the headstone carved by John² Stevens for the grave of little Stephen Brayton, 2, who died 17 December 1725 (Figure 2). His father Israel Brayton ordered a pair of gravestones for his child in February 1726/7, paying only 15 shillings. It's clear from the simplicity of the gravestone why it was so inexpensive. The tympanum is decorated with only an hourglass, and the side panels are unadorned with any decorative carving. Not much time was spent in carving this gravestone.

You would have to travel to Little Compton to see the gravestone that Elisha Woodwarth ordered in September 1729 for his wife Jane. Elisha and Jane had very little time together: they had married in Little Compton in 1728.^[6] The Stevens account is sparse: "Elisha Woodwarth/ Sep. 12 1729} to one pair of grave stones ... £2 -15."^[7] Jane died 12 February 1729 in her 28th year and is buried in Little Compton Historic Cemetery, the Commons Burial Ground.^[8] The next account, charged to William Hall, included £3 10s. in "accounts for our board" (evidently Stevens and workmen charged for meals when they delivered and set up the gravestones) and the £2-15 "to your brother Woodward's account."^[9]

In the summer of 1729 widow Ann Chapman ordered a fine gravestone for her husband Ralph who had died 17 February 1728/9 at the age of 48 (Figure 3). The account on p. 46 of the Stevens account book for "M^{rs} Ann Chapman" begins "July 1729/ to one pair of Grave Stones for your Husband, £4 - 0 - 0." At £4 the Ralph Chapman gravestone was equivalent to eight days of work. The account continues "to two pair for your Children, £3 - 0 - 0." Two of their children, Ann and William Chapman, had died young before their father. Their smaller, simpler stones thus cost £1 10s. a pair, a charge that equates to about three days of labor for each pair. John² Stevens, son of the original shop owner, did the carving on these stones with help from his brother William on the lettering on little Ann's stone.

It's hard—as the reader may have noticed—for a genealogist to look only at the prices and the time spent without musing on the people involved. Ralph³ Peckham (Ralph²⁻¹) was



Figure 2. Gravestone of Stephen Brayton in Section BD of the Common Burial Ground. Photograph by Barbara J. Austin and Letty Champion.



Figure 3. Gravestone for Ralph Chapman in Newport Historical Cemetery 14, the Clifton Burial Ground. Photograph by Barb Austin and Letty Champion.

3. John Stevens, *His Book 1705 — Facsimile of an account book kept by an early Newport artisan* [hereinafter Stevens Account Book] (Preservation Society of Newport County, 1953), 11.
4. Ibid., 56. The account was opened 1721/2 and closed 6 Apr. 1729 with the order for the gravestones for his Indian.
5. John Eylers Sterling, Barbara J. Austin, Letty R. Champion, *Newport, Rhode Island Colonial Burial Grounds* [hereinafter Sterling, Austin, and Champion, *Newport Colonial Burial Grounds*], ed. Cherry Fletcher Bamberg, FASG (Hope, R.I.: Rhode Island Genealogical Society, 2009), 208.

6. James N. Arnold, *Vital Record of Rhode Island 1636-1850* [hereinafter Arnold, RIVR] 21 vols. (Providence, R.I.: Narragansett Historical Publishing Company, 1891-1912), 4:6:78. Only the year is given.
7. Stevens Account Book [note 3], 56.
8. Reading of Vincent F. Luti, 2008, for the R.I. Historic Cemetery Database.
9. Stevens Account Book [note 3], 56.

the son of Ralph² and Mary () Peckham.^[10] Ann (Holmes) (Peckham) Chapman, daughter of John and Mary (Sayles) Holmes, had been twice widowed when she ordered the stones, her first husband Peleg Peckham having died in 1715.^[11] She was left at Ralph's death to raise two small children, having previously buried four others by her two husbands. Ralph's stone stands in the Clifton Burial Ground, a largely Quaker lot, on Golden Hill Street in Newport, near the gravestone for his mother Mary Chapman, who died in 1689, and that of his first wife Deliverance (Slocum) Chapman, who died in 1711.^[12] Ralph and Ann's five-month-old daughter Ann who died in 1722/3 and their one-year-old son William who died in 1727 had been buried in the Common Burial Ground without stones before Ann's order in 1728. They rest near Ann's children by her first marriage, Sarah "Peckcome" and John "Packhome," who died young in 1707 and 1708 respectively, and Ann's father John Holmes.^[13]

While upright slate gravestones were the most common type ordered, colonial Newport families of wealth and influence sometimes marked their graves with expensive box tombs. These orders involved considerable labor on the part of the gravestone carver who built the box along with carving the ledger stone. As carvers were also masons who built chimneys and did other brick work, they were already expert at that part of the job. Box tombs were sadly vulnerable to all sorts of problems from the collapse of brickwork to the curiosity of vandals, and relatively few have survived completely intact. A box tomb that survives only in part is that of Abigail Wanton. In 1726 the merchant George Wanton, the eldest son of Col. William Wanton, ordered an elaborate box tomb with a family crest for his young wife, Abigail (Ellery) Wanton, the second daughter of Benjamin Ellery. The total price for the box tomb was £20 8s. The plain ledger stone cost £10, a charge that included the cost of the blank from the quarry and the cost to square and flatten the blank. John² Stevens did the carving on this ledger stone (Figure 4). The "cutting one cwoat (*sic*) of armes" was billed at £4, the equivalent of eight days work. Apparently grief-stricken, George Wanton had a great deal to say about his wife—the epitaph for this stone is 528 letters—including the fact that she had "left 5 Pledges of her Love." At 2d. per letter, the charge came to £4 8s. At that rate Stevens could carve fifty letters per day. Karin Sprague, a talented modern gravestone carver from North Scituate, Rhode Island, considers this a reasonable estimate, if there was not a lot of layout work, but it indicates that Stevens was working steadily at a brisk pace. The long inscription on Abigail Wanton's stone would have taken him nine days.

10. John O. Austin, *Genealogical Dictionary of Rhode Island* [1887] (repr., Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1969), 41.
11. Stephen Farnum Peckham, "John Peckham of Newport, R.I., and Some of His Descendants," *Register*, Vol. 57 (1903), 35. In his 1712 will John Holmes left his daughter Ann Peckham £70 and land in Newport (Jane Fletcher Fiske, *Gleanings from Newport Court Files 1659-1783* [Boxford, Mass.: The Author, 1998], n. pag., Case 35).
12. Sterling, Austin, and Champion, *Newport Colonial Burial Grounds* [note 5], 393; Charles B. Gerard, *Descendants of Ralph Chapman* (Newburgh, N.Y.: F.M. Rutternber, 1876), 14-15; Charles E. Slocum, "The Slocum Genealogy," *Register*, Vol. 34 (1880), 393. Deliverance's death date and parentage are noted in the Rhode Island Friends Record (Arnold, RIVR [note 6], 7:92).
13. Sterling, Austin, and Champion, *Newport Colonial Burial Grounds* [note 5], 268-269.

One might have expected Abigail to be buried in Trinity Churchyard. The couple had been married at Trinity Church 15 December 1715 and the births and/or baptisms of their five children appear in Trinity records.^[14] The present building had replaced its humbler predecessor in 1726, and the shape of the burial ground was well established when Abigail died. Family associations often trumped religious affiliation, however, and Abigail is buried in the Common Burial Ground near many other members of the Ellery family (Figure 4).

A more mysterious gravestone is that of Judeth Brown, wife of Major James Brown, and two of their children whose names are now illegible. Judeth *shouldn't* be in Trinity Churchyard, but she is. Judeth Brown died 14 September 1728 in her 37th year. The account in the Stevens book is very clear. Major James Brown of Newport placed an order on 2 December 1729 for "one Tomb Stone" and various related goods and services. The ledger stone alone cost £13, a price that included the cost of the slate slab from the quarry, the cost to shape and smooth it, and the cost to mold the edge. In addition, 160 letters, now very worn indeed, were carved into the stone at 2d. per letter or £1 6s. 8d. This lettering took about three days. There was no charge for additional decorative carving. The box was constructed of 260 bricks at 5s. per hundred. And finally for "getting ye stuff together & building ye boxes" Stevens charged £1 15s.

It all seems plain enough, and undoubtedly was to the people involved, but the story of this wandering gravestone has not been resolved to my satisfaction. Judeth's extremely worn ledger stone—all that remains of the box tomb—serves today as a stepping stone in Trinity Churchyard near the front of the church.^[15] How did it get there? Probably not on a cart from the Stevens shop. It seems highly likely that the Stevens box tomb was erected somewhere else. Judeth Brown, like James Brown, was a member of the Second Baptist Church in Newport when she died.^[16] Trinity's burial ground was reserved for the most prominent



Figure 4. Ledger stone of Abigail Wanton, Common Burial Ground. Photograph by Barb Austin and Letty Champion.

14. Arnold, RIVR [note 6], 4:2:478, 532.
15. See Sterling, Austin, and Champion, *Newport Colonial Burial Grounds* [note 4], 369-370, for photos of the entry in the account book and the sadly worn ledger stone.
16. "Newport (R.I.) Church Records," *NEGH Register* (1915), 69:91-92. That this is the same woman is shown by the agreement of church records and the gravestone on her date of death as 14 Sept. 1728. The men and women are listed separately in the records so there is no proof that the church member James Brown was her husband.

members of its Anglican clergy and congregation, never local members of other religious groups. In fact, Judeth's stone was recorded in the nineteenth century by Henry E. Turner in the Island or Common Burial Ground;^[17] it was not recorded in Trinity in 1900 by Jonas Bergner. It was in Trinity Churchyard by the mid-twentieth century: before 1957 it is said to have been in the pathway from the tower door on the Frank St. side of the church and then moved to its present humble position.^[18] To make matters even more confusing, the identities of James and Judeth Brown, apparently important people in their own time, have not been confirmed in other Newport records or found in voluminous published genealogical research on the Brown family.

Naturally many grave markers mentioned in the Stevens accounts have not survived, some not even long enough to have been transcribed in the nineteenth century. The pair of gravestones ordered by Seth Leonard in 1726 and those ordered by Samuel Coe for his father in 1729 have never been recorded in Rhode Island. Some have disappeared recently. The pair of gravestones for his wife that Weston Clarke ordered in July 1729 at a cost of £2 10s. were shattered, likely by lawnmowing equipment, by 1984.^[19]

Perhaps the most mysterious of these missing gravestones is that of Governor William Brenton. You have never seen it? Well, you are in good company. To my knowledge only archaeologists have seen any part of it since it was put up. Brenton, a fabulously wealthy and powerful man, died in 1674 before the era of professionally carved gravestones in Newport. In 1727 his son Jahleel, then 72 and approaching his own death, commissioned the Stevens shop to carve an elaborate double box tomb for his father. It was the most expensive order in the Stevens account book, and there is a very careful list of charges (p. 41).

Mr. Jalel Brenton 1727

	£	S	P
one double tomb stone for the Governor	45	00	00
600 bricks at 6 shillings a hundred	01	16	00
lime 11 bushels	00	13	09
sand bushels @ 6 a bushel	00	04	00
two stones for the foundation	00	08	00
carting the bricks and lime and sand	00	07	00
carting the tomb stone	01	00	00
cutting the coate of arms	05	10	00
building ye boxes	02	10	00
	57	08	09

Was this splendid box tomb ever erected? If so, where? These questions have troubled many lovers of Rhode Island history for a very long time. No transcription of this elegant memorial or even a casual allusion to it has ever been found. Most striking of all is the failure of Ezra Stiles, a keen observer and a great lover of gravestones, to mention it although he copied the

17. Jonas Bergner, *Ye Gravestones in Trinity Church Yard* [ca. 1900], ms, The Redwood Library; Henry E. Turner, *Cemetery Records*, A #179, Newport Historical Society Library, p. 19 of the typed transcript. Turner's records jumble together entries from Newport Historical Cemeteries 1 and 3, the adjoining Island Cemetery and Common Burial Ground.
18. John B. Hattendorf, *Semper Eadem, A History of Trinity Church in Newport 1698-2000* (Newport, R.I.: Trinity Church, 2001), 468.
19. Sterling, Austin, and Champion, *Newport Colonial Burial Grounds* [note 5], 293.

inscription on Jahleel Brenton's gravestone in 1774, less than fifty years after the box tomb was ordered. Stiles wrote of Jahleel Brenton's death and his grave: "Jahleel Brenton Esq. died Nov. 8, 1732, aged 77, and lies buried by his own Direction near a Rock between two Pare Trees North of the house, which Trees he bro't out of England. His Father was Gov. Brenton..."^[20] With the level of detail in that description, the sharp-eyed Ezra Stiles simply could not have missed a grand box tomb for a governor a few feet away.

One might imagine that Governor Brenton had simply been buried elsewhere, as he owned thousands of acres in southern New England,^[21] but that appears not to have been the case. When Jahleel Brenton's grave had to be moved in 1938 to make way for U.S. Navy housing, archaeologists jumped at the chance to look for another burial nearby. They found human remains in an earlier, heavier casket about five feet away, although no evidence of bricks or a ledger stone.^[22] The remains were gathered, placed in an urn, and buried beside Jahleel in his new resting place, Newport Historic Cemetery 33, the Jahleel Brenton lot. What happened to the box tomb commissioned for Governor Brenton is still unknown.

The questions with which this article began—how much gravestones cost and how long it took to carve them—have largely been answered by reference to the Stevens account book, at least for the 1720s. Like every journey of historical exploration, however, new questions have arisen on the path of discovery. If any reader has clues to the story of Judeth Brown's ledger stone or information on Gov. William Brenton's box tomb, please contact me at the address below.

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20. [Ezra Stiles] *Extracts from Itineraries and Other Miscellanies of Ezra Stiles, D.D., L.L.D.*, ed. Franklin Bowditch Dexter (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1916). 353.
21. James N. Arnold wrote an article "Supposed Burial Place of Gov. Wm. Brenton" for the *Sunday Tribune*, issue of 11 Dec. 1921, illustrated with a photograph by a Professor Sweet of a burial ground in Swansea. Arnold cited unnamed "historians of Taunton and vicinity" who asserted that Brenton was buried near his trading post in Swansea, but he did not find their arguments convincing.
22. Ralph Mohr, *Three Hundred Years of Governors of Rhode Island* (n.p.: State of Rhode Island Graves Registration Committee, 1954), 7-8, 78-79.