



Leaving a Mark on History

American Antiquarian Society and David Rumsey Provide Collection of Historic Gravestones a New Resting Place Online

WORCESTER, MA & SAN FRANCISCO, CA – October 29, 2003 – A unique collection of historic gravestones has found a new resting place online. The grave markers, which are subject to vandalism and deterioration, have been preserved in photographs and are now available on the Internet for the entire world to pay its respects by examining and appreciating these extraordinary objects.

More than 13,500 images documenting the sculpture of more than 9,000 gravestones, most of which were made prior to 1800, make up the Farber Gravestone Collection. The American Antiquarian Society (AAS) converted the photographic collection to digital form, and now, with help from David Rumsey's Cartography Associates, a digital publishing company, this unique collection is available for free public access online.



Photo source: Farber Gravestone Collection

"We are thrilled to have the Farber Gravestone Collection online, so people have the opportunity to freely explore the rich early history of our country and its founders, many of whom are memorialized in the grave markers that make up this fascinating collection," says AAS President Ellen Dunlap.

The Farber Gravestone Collection reflects the work of the late Daniel Farber of Worcester, Massachusetts, and his wife, Jessie Lie Farber, who photographed historic gravestones for more than 20 years. The collection can be found online at www.davidrumsey.com/farber/. Others whose work is incorporated into the collection include Harriette Merrifield Forbes, who worked in the 1920s mainly in Massachusetts, and Dr. Ernest Caulfield, who documented Connecticut grave markers.

These gravestones, America's earliest form of sculpture, are a significant form of artistic expression and serve as precious records of biographical information. Now subject to vandalism and deterioration from the environment, the photographic records help preserve a perspective of our nation's history.

In a description she wrote of the collection, Jessie Lie Farber said the digital images of the gravestones show "the sternness of the Puritan seventeenth century, replaced by the 'Age of Reason' of the eighteenth century, and that in turn replaced by the nineteenth-century's extravagance, love of nature, and free expression of sentiment. The twentieth century, punctuated by two world wars and a depression, is by comparison secular, straight-forward and business-like. Death has become more distant."

Map collector David Rumsey, owner of Cartography Associates and a member of the AAS Council, says the unique nature and rich history contained within the collection inspired him to donate the resources needed to bring it to

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the Internet. Rumsey's own historic map collection is available for free public review online, and he has supported Internet access to other important cultural heritage resources, including a collection of historic Japanese maps from the East Asian Library at Berkeley.

"In many ways the grave markers are similar to maps because they combine historical events and artistic expression, and they also embody location because they are about places," Rumsey says of his fascination with the collection.



Photo source: Farber Gravestone Collection

The collection provides some insight into the private lives of historical figures, such as Paul Revere, Sr., the father of the legendary silversmith who warned of the coming British. Upon viewing this grave marker and rechecking historical facts, one quickly realizes that Paul Revere, Sr., never knew of his son's contribution to our nation's history, having died a year before his son's well-known ride. The collection also confirms that John "Grizzly" Adams is not a work of fiction. He died in 1860, and a carving of a hunter with a bear appears on his marble gravestone where he is interred in Charlton, Massachusetts.

Many of the early grave markers give evidence of our past by relating stories of death by such means as disease, falling from a horse, fording a river, raising a barn, being cast away in a storm or slain by Indians.

John Stockbridge's death in 1768 was documented as "sudden, premature, awfull (sic) & violent, providentially occasioned by the fall of a tree." But in case those paying their respects misunderstood the epitaph, the marker also contains an illustrated carving – presumably of Stockbridge – showing a tree limb striking his head.

The data accompanying the photographs in the online collection includes the name and death date of the deceased, the location of the stone, and information concerning the stone material, the iconography, the inscription, and – when known – the carver.

Like the award-winning David Rumsey Map Collection, Los Angeles-based Luna Imaging's (www.lunaimaging.com) Insight software is being used to allow Web viewers to experience this unique collection of historic gravestones in a revolutionary way. Using Insight, users can zoom in, pan and do side-by-side comparisons of grave markers simultaneously. Users can save groups of images to create their own customized collections. They also can crop or magnify areas of gravestones that otherwise would be difficult to decipher, and discover details that reflect artistry, culture, theology, precision and history.

The launch of the Farber Collection online reflects AAS's commitment to use technology to make historic resources more widely available. This is in keeping with the tradition of the Society, one of the first research libraries to use microfilm to preserve and provide wider access to important historic works.

*The **American Antiquarian Society** (AAS) is an independent research library and learned society founded in 1812 in Worcester, Massachusetts. The library's collections document the life of America's people from the colonial era through the Civil War and Reconstruction. Collections include some three million books, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals, broadsides, manuscripts, music, children's literature, graphic arts, genealogy and local histories. The Society is located online at www.americanantiquarian.org.*

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***Cartography Associates (CA)**, founded in 1996 by map collector David Rumsey, promotes the distribution of digital facsimiles both in print and electronic media. Specializing in both primary source documents and cutting-edge technology, CA (www.davidrumsey.com) is committed to developing tools that integrate cataloging with visual images on the Internet. CA's vision is to offer users the best of both worlds: the powerful searching, access, and user functionality made possible by technology, combined with the visual beauty, technical mastery and intellectual richness of original source materials.*

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