New Castle Historical Markers: NCHS-sponsored series.

Jim Cerny
New Castle Historical Society
published 2025-06-23

Markers Sponsored by NCHS.

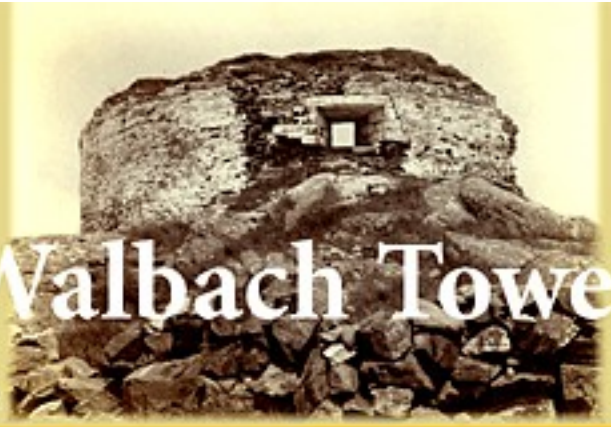
- This is a list, in chronological order, of the history markers sponsored by the New Castle Historical Society. There are six at this writing.
- Carol White is the lead on most of these for the research, design, and production, with input from many others, including designers Susan Kress Hamilton and Denise Brown.
- For each marker there are at least three slides: (1) explanation, (2) marker in plan view, (3) marker in installed context.

6
Portsmouth Ave
Oliver St
Cape Rd
Laurel Ln
Portsmouth Ave
River Rd
Cranfield St
5
Elm Ct
Piscataqua St
3
The Islander Cafe
Main St
Judd Gregg Marine Research Center
Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse
1
Ocean St
Wentworth Rd
4
147 Cranfield St Library
Tarlton Cemetery
Walton Rd
Walton Rd
Neals Pit Ln
New Castle Beach
Shaw Cir
New Castle Island
Mainmast Cir
2
18
Tabbutt Wy
New Castle Public Library
Great Island Common
Pose Inside Outdoor Picture Frame
Tabbutt Memorial Way
Spring Hill Rd

1. Walbach Tower.

- This marker was created in 2014 to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Walbach Tower. The tower was built in summer of 1814, late in the War of 1812. Bobbi Sweet paid for it and had major input in the design. It is a double-width, created by Susan Kress Hamilton of Phineas Graphics. It is on Sullivan Way, just outside the fenced UNH property.
- Originally we planned a three foot high viewing platform, but OSHA rules would have required 36 feet of ramp!

Walbach Tower



WALBACH TOWER

From Colonial times through World War II to the present day, Fort Point has played a strategic role in the defense of our coastline.

Walbach Tower, built in 1814 during the War of 1812, was one of Fort Point's more interesting but mostly forgotten efforts at coastal defense. The fortification now stands as a ruin atop of Jenkin's Rock.

During the war of 1812, the guns of Fort Constitution protected Portsmouth Harbor from a British naval attack. However, in 1814, British warships attacked Eastport, Maine and threatened the whole coast. Fearing attack, Captain Walbach mobilized his small militia and the town's inhabitants to build a fortification in the form of a Martello Tower, 50 feet in diameter. It was built in remarkably short time. The British never did attack.

Unfortunately the tower was built with mortar made of local sand from the nearby beach, called "sloat sand", rounded and salty. Faulty construction techniques also contributed to its early deterioration. The construction of battery Farnsworth in 1899 impinged on the Tower, and it was finally taken further by the Army during World War II.

An undated photograph of Walbach Tower showing the earthwork, blockhouse and entrance. The date is unknown. The tower is today reproduced

Local legend tells us the town bonded together to complete the Walbach Tower in one night as illustrated in the following excerpt from the verse:

THE LEGEND OF WALBACH TOWER

Stone capped, thatway, that Lords day eve none slept, thatway, that night,
But all night long, with tireless arms, each toiled to beat the night;

Four fine-haired boys of sixteen see the flickering torches stay,
Purpling with their shadow groups the canopy of gray;

Grandsires, with frost above their brows, the mustering mortar note,
Dame Dolbeth apron, strip at town, help haul the rubber bricks;

White pilot, sea-pat, mockerelman, parson and squire as well,
Make hasten plant the pinkie pin, and raise its citadel.

George Houghton, "The Legend of Walbach Tower," The Atlantic Monthly, March 1861, v. 13, issue 109, pp. 375-376. [no caption, 40 lines]

Detail of an undated oil painting of Walbach Tower, looking northeast and showing the Piscataqua River and Kittery shore by artist Hollis E.M. Black. Courtesy of the collector.

JEAN BAPTISTE DE BARTH, BARON OF WALBACH

Jean Baptiste de Barth, baron of Walbach

"Baron Colonel John Walbach" arrived in New Castle in 1806 with a company of heavy artillery to garrison the port of Fort William and Mary. He spearheaded the reconstruction of the fort, rededicated Fort Constitution in 1808, and in 1814, he ordered the building of a Martello Tower to guard against British incursions from Little Harbor.

A refugee escaping the terrors of the French Revolution, Jean Baptiste de Barth (1766 – 1823) left behind an aristocratic French upbringing and the baronetcy of Walbach, France, to become a soldier in the new Army of the United States, known simply as "John Walbach".

He was born in Marsiac, France, and graduated the military College in Strasbourg as an artillerist, serving with the Hussars of the Count d'Artois and the Prince de Rohan before coming to America in 1791. General Alexander Hamilton enlisted him aid in designing the structure of a new Corps for the young Army. During the War of 1812, he was cited for gallant conduct at the Battle of Crysler's Field. His authority, his charm and his fine leadership is exemplified, as well as the splendid wording used for awards then, were remarked upon for generations.

After a three year posting in New Castle, he went on to command other fortifications in Virginia, and rose to the rank of Brigadier General, but his influence in New Castle has never been forgotten.

Chateau Walbach, Grave Jurisdict France, the home of the Baron Walbach prior to the French Revolution.

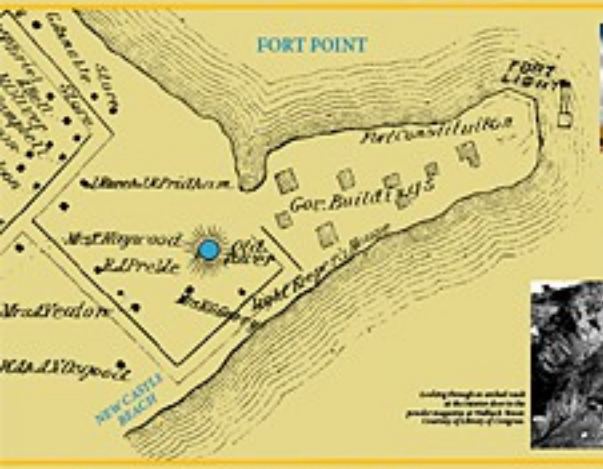
THE WAR OF 1812

"Free trade and sailors' rights" became the rallying cry for the United States as it declared war on Britain on June 18, 1812. Relations in the with France during the Napoleonic Wars threatened British maritime supremacy and resulted in her Crown blockading US ports. The impressment of American sailors by the Royal Navy, sometimes within view of the coastline in US territorial waters, stirred the American government to retaliate. Soon battles raged from the St. Lawrence River and Chesapeake Bay to New Orleans, culminating in the burning of Washington, D.C.

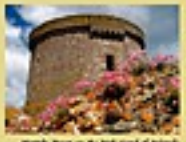
The war spread to New England when the US Enterprise captured the HMS Boxer off Pemaquid Point in September of 1813. By July of 1814 the British had invaded Eastport, Maine, killing the American garrison at Fort Sullivan without a single shot fired. The British sacked Hampden, Bangor and Machias and occupied all ports and coast of eastern Maine until April of 1815.

Following the occupation of Maine, British ships were sighted off the Isles of Shoals and rumors of a landing at Little Harbor prompted the construction of additional coastal defenses here in New Hampshire. The erection of Walbach Tower in 1814 was one such hasty but determined attempt to prepare for a British land attack.

The USS Constitution defeated HMS Guerriere early in the War of 1812, an important event to Americans mostly of New Castle. Painting is by Thomas Chambers, circa 1840. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Detail of Fort Point from the atlas of the State of New Hampshire, D. H. Hurd & Co. Boston, 1892, showing Walbach Tower and existing buildings, with NOT CONSTRUCTED as added in light. Courtesy of the Portsmouth Athenaeum.



Martello Tower on the Irish coast of Ireland's Eye, near Dublin. Courtesy of Creative Commons, user Steve, photographer

THE ORIGEN OF MARTELLO TOWERS

A round tower built at Mortella (Myrtle) Point in Corsica inspired the design of these circular fortresses. The Corsicans had constructed similar forts along their coast during the 1500's to help ward off North African pirates. The towers were squat, only forty to fifty feet high, with thick stone or brick walls approximately 44 feet in diameter. The flat roof, or turnpikan, surrounded by a parapet, had a mount platform in the center on which was mounted a cannon or other heavy artillery piece capable of firing in all directions. The walls, which had narrow slits for musketeers rifles, encircled two or three interior levels.

The British built over a hundred "Martello" towers to guard the Irish and English coastlines, as well as several in the Mediterranean during the Napoleonic Wars. The United States Army copied the design and built 20 Martello Towers, including our own Walbach Tower in New Castle, New Hampshire.

WALBACH TOWER CONSTRUCTION FACT SHEET

- Circular design – Martello type
- Built summer 1814
- 50-foot diameter
- 11-16 feet high – varying with terrain
- Central pillar to support roof
- Three gun casemates – 4 lb. guns
- Naval cannon on roof – 32 lb. gun
- Powder magazine
- 60,000 – 70,000 bricks
- Local stone quarries
- Flat, tarred roof (turnpikin)

Looking through an arched vault at the interior door to the powder magazine at Walbach Tower. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

Walbach Tower in 1941, showing several arched vaults and the round staircase (right side). Courtesy of the National Archives, College Park, MD.

This historic marker was created by the New Castle Historical Society in 2014 on the 200th anniversary of Walbach Tower.

Bobbi Sweet and Nancy Borden

2. Lost at Sea Monument.

- This marble obelisk was originally installed in 1856 in a garden on the Congregational Church grounds. Then in 1916 it was moved to high ground in Riverside Cemetery. Then it was moved to the Common, near the Oceanside Cemetery.
- The obelisk has weathered badly and is barely legible. We have a complete inscription from Brewster's Rambles, not long after it was originally installed.
- Carol White cleaned the stone.

NEW CASTLE - NEW HAMPSHIRE

SETTLED 1623 - INCORPORATED 1693

"TO THE MEMORY OF CITIZENS OF NEW CASTLE LOST AT SEA"

In 1856, under the direction of then minister, Rev. Lucius Alden, this marble obelisk, created by J. Wentworth & Co., was placed in the New Castle Congregational Church's garden plot east of the present-day church. It was described like this: "Here is the neat little church edifice, around which is a white open fence, enclosing a refreshing green spot, handsomely laid out with gravel walks, mounds, flower beds, and ornamented with trees, shrubs, vines and flowers. And in its midst a handsome marble monument."

By 1916 the garden no longer existed and the obelisk had been moved to Riverside Cemetery. In 1997 the obelisk was moved to this location on the New Castle Town Common. This is, unfortunately, only a small sample of the New Castle men who have been lost at sea.

LOST WITH THE *INEZ* NEAR THE ISLE OF SABLE
APRIL 1847
Ebenezer Yeaton, Age 52
Edward Martin, 51
William Amazeen, 49
John H. Gerrish, 33
James P. Baker, 30
Robert Martin, 21
Samuel Hall, 15

PERISHED ON THE *BALERMA*, NEAR PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
IN THE STORM OF OCT. 3, 1851
Benjamin Trefethen, age 34
Benjamin Hunt, 33
William Amazeen, 27
Nathaniel B. Davis, 20

LOST FROM THE *MEXICO* FROM BOSTON FOR
WESTPORT, NOVA SCOTIA OCT. 1851
Charles Smith, age 20

LOST FROM THE *ELIZA* FROM BOSTON FOR BALTIMORE
NOV. 17, 1854
Calvin D. White, age 21

LOST WITH THE *NILE*
APRIL 16, 1860
Samuel Batson, 46 Richard Thompson, 24
Gilman Hilliard, 34 John Meloon, 20
Henry Yeaton, 27 Elias J. Hubley, 20
Meshach B. Cousins, 17

LOST FROM THE *NEBRASKA* ON GEORGES BANK
FEB. 15, 1861
John Yeaton, 30

LOST FROM THE *HELEN ELIZA* OFF THE COAST OF NOVA SCOTIA
MAY 4, 1863
John Tarlton, 31

LOST WITH THE *PORTSMOUTH* FROM IRELAND
OCT 1867
Horton O. Card, 26

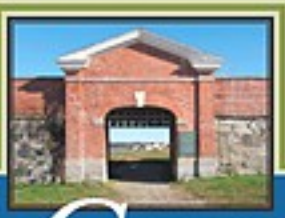
This plaque generously donated & made possible by the New Castle Historical Society, 2018

"TO THE MEMORY OF CITIZENS OF NEW CASTLE LOST AT SEA"
STOP

Carol White

3. Frost Cemetery.

- This is the town's oldest cemetery, with many slate gravestones. There are 50 identfied graves and the oldest is 1721. The marker explains the signifcance of some who are buried there.
- A Frost family member created a trust for the cemetery in the 1920s, managed by Historic New England. We persuaded them to pay for the marker, the first expenditure from the trust!



Frost Cemetery

The Frost Cemetery was a private family burying ground passed down through the Frost and Bell families for many generations. The families lived near the Piscataqua River and the cemetery was located at the end of their properties near the original church.

Reverend John Blunt

Died August 7, 1761

Reverend John Blunt, the son-in-law of John Frost, Esq., was the pastor of the Church of Christ in New Castle for sixteen years. He was so loved by the townspeople that upon his death at age 42, they voted to continue his salary to his wife, Sarah, for nine months. The poetry on his tombstone includes the following: "Safe in the sleep of sainte=in Peace they lie. They rest in Silence, but they never die."

Captain John Hollicomb

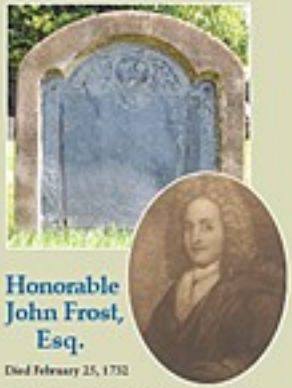
Died around January of 1721

Little is known of the occupant of possibly the oldest grave in the cemetery. Based on remaining records, Hollicomb was likely from Devon, England, where his two sisters lived. By 1688, he resided in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, and was employed as a fisherman. By 1698, he was in New Castle and by 1705, was a sea captain trading rum, molasses, and cotton between Barbados and Portsmouth on the ship "Sarah." Once, he was captured by the French and had to pay a ransom to free himself, his crew, ship, and cargo. He drafted his will in 1716, paid the local tax in 1720, and in 1721, his will was proved.

Captain Meschach Bell

Died July 18, 1764

Prior to an eventful career in the military, Bell was a mariner and cooper (a barrel maker). He participated in the gunpowder raid on New Castle's Fort William and Mary in December of 1774 and was a Second Lieutenant in Colonel Pierce Long's regiment during the march to Fort Ticonderoga in February of 1777. He was Captain of Fort William and Mary, known then as Fort Hancock, when he died at age 54.



Honorable John Frost, Esq.

Died February 25, 1732

A mariner for much of his life, Frost commanded Colonel William Pepperrell's pinky, a traditional fishing schooner featuring a narrow, pointed after-deck extension, named "Bonetta" during the 1710 British assault on Port Royal, Nova Scotia. While captain of the "Bonetta," he was attacked in 1717 by pirates enroute from Barbados to Portsmouth, NH. Frost went on to become a successful merchant, inventor—he operated the ferry that ran between New Castle and Portsmouth, was a Royal Councilor, and Justice of the Superior Court. He was the husband of Mary Pepperrell and father of seventeen children.

Portrait Courtesy of Historic New England. Gift of Mrs. Norman Niles, 1981.26

Mehitable White

Died September 3, 1827

Mehitable was the daughter of Captain John Simpson and the wife of Captain Robert White. In 1822, Widow White was the only remaining member of the New Castle Church, sitting alone during the regular service hours in the church, which had been boarded up since 1795. The poem on her tombstone reads: "Tis my Redeemer lives, and often from the skies, looks down and watches my dust, till he shall bid ye rise."

Private Meschach Bell

Died July 3, 1827

A seaman by trade, Bell volunteered as a "Sea Fencibles" (naval militiamen who protected ports, harbors, and other vital coastal areas) in May of 1813 when a British attack on Portsmouth seemed imminent. Though the attack never materialized, he was stationed at Little Harbor until November, after which he returned to his seaside family.

Abigail Frost

Died January 30, 1742

Daughter of the Hon. John Frost and Mary Pepperrell, Abigail Frost passed away at age 23. Her elaborately carved gravestone features a portrait of a young woman, presumably Abigail, surrounded by symbols of her faith as described in the inscription.

HISTORIC NEW ENGLAND
Defining the past. Shaping the future.

Funding for this historic marker was provided by Historic New England, 2016.
www.HistoricNewEngland.org
Text references can be found at the New Castle Historical Society.

marker design: Susan Kress Hamilton/Phineas Graphics, Portsmouth, NH.

Frost Cemetery
The Frost Cemetery was a private family burying ground passed down through the Frost and Bell families for many generations. The families lived near the Piscataqua River and the cemetery was located at the end of their properties near the original church.
Reverend John Blunt
Captain John Hollicomb
Captain Meschach Bell
Honorable John Frost, Esq.
Mehitable White
Private Meschach Bell
Abigail Frost
HISTORIC NEW ENGLAND

4. Ritson Mill Pond.

- What looks like an island-enclosed shallow waterway, was a mill pond for operating a tide mill (grist mill), last used in the 1840s.
- The marker shows how such a mill would have operated.

The Bell/Ritson Tide Mill

The mill ponds were blocked off by earthen man-made dams built with quarried rock and fill, connecting the islands and the mainland. Built into the dams were two wooden vertical wall-like gates.

Twice a day the surrounding water rose with the tide, filling in the mill pond. The gates closed as the tide began to go out.

The water within the mill pond was slowly released via a sluice system.

As the tide went out, the water was directed to pour over a turbine wheel that turned and powered the shaft connected to the millstone above, on the floor in the mill building.

Even today, the remains of the dams enclose a mill pond, now used for recreation. The dams are a slippery walkway to explore several islands.

Funding provided by the New Castle Historical Society in 2018

The Bell/Ritson Tide Mill

The mill ponds were blocked off by earthen man-made dams built with quarried rock and fill, connecting the islands and the mainland. Built into the dams were two wooden vertical wall-like gates.

Twice a day the surrounding water rose with the tide, filling in the mill pond. The gates closed as the tide began to go out.

The water within the mill pond was slowly released via a sluice system.

As the tide went out, the water was directed to pour over a turbine wheel that turned and powered the shaft connected to the millstone above, on the floor in the mill building.

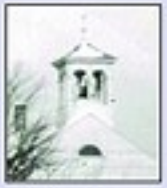
Even today, the remains of the dams enclose a mill pond, now used for recreation. The dams are a slippery walkway to explore several islands.

5. Museum Building.

- The Museum building at 120 Main Street has had three distinct phases: (1) a church, with bell tower now removed; (2) the town library; (3) in this new millennium, the museum for the New Castle Historical Society.
- The building is owned by the town and rented annually to the historical society.

The New Castle Historical Society Museum

This New Castle Historical Society structure has served many purposes during its existence. It was built by the Free Will Baptist Church which was first organized in 1787. It is believed the congregation met first in private homes and later in a barn on the property to the left of this building. In 1844 the name of the church was changed to First Christian Church. They purchased this land, and afterwards erected the current building.



In 1873 a belfry was added to the church. A few years later a 500 lb. composition copper bell was added to replace an earlier steel bell. In 1882 the Cape Cod style house to the east of the church was purchased as a parsonage.

In the late 1800s the church became very active. Most of the town's citizens were members. During those years, many New Castle-ites went to church three times on Sunday: to the Congregational service in the morning, to the First Christian Church in the afternoon and to the Advent Chapel on Vennards Court in the evening. Each service lasted about two hours, but as a long-time resident candidly admitted, "There wasn't much else to do."

In the 1920s most members had moved to the Congregational Church. The land was sold, and the belfry removed. The church building became the New Castle Library, where community residents spent enjoyable hours.

During the 1990s the building was closed, and the library moved to the New Castle Recreation Building on Wentworth Road. By 2000, the Select Board had considered tearing down the old church building. This mobilized a group, led by local matriarch Ruth Lanham, to renovate the building and start a new historical society. In 2006, the beautifully renovated old church was reopened as the New Castle Historical Society Museum.

Museum Interior—Stage Backdrop Painted by Edmund Tarbell

Funding provided by the New Castle Historical Society in 2021. Research by Carol White, April 2021

120
The New Castle Historical Society Museum

6. Riverside Cemetery.

- Riverside Cemetery was originally an area for fish flakes, created as a cemetery in 1868. When it ran out of new lots in the 1990s, a search for space resulted in creating Oceanside Cemetery.
- There are over 1200 people buried in the cemetery, almost all listed on the Find A Grave web site.
- With limited sign space there are many others buried there who are noteworthy.

Riverside Cemetery

Riverside Cemetery was established in 1868 as a private cemetery and stayed private until 1958. Burials prior to 1868 were reinterments from other family cemeteries. This walking guide map shows several of New Castle's famous residents.

1. Capt. Joshua K. Card, 1822-1911: He spent 42 years as a lighthouse keeper; 35 of them at Fort Point Light in New Castle. He was the first light-keeper to use kerosene in place of sperm whale oil in the light.

2. Maude H. Trefethen, 1874-1956: Beloved local school teacher for 51 years. New Castle Elementary School named for her.

3. Rear Admiral Ernest Fremont Robinson, 1889-1969: Served in WWI in Europe and in WWII in the South Pacific. He received the Navy Cross.

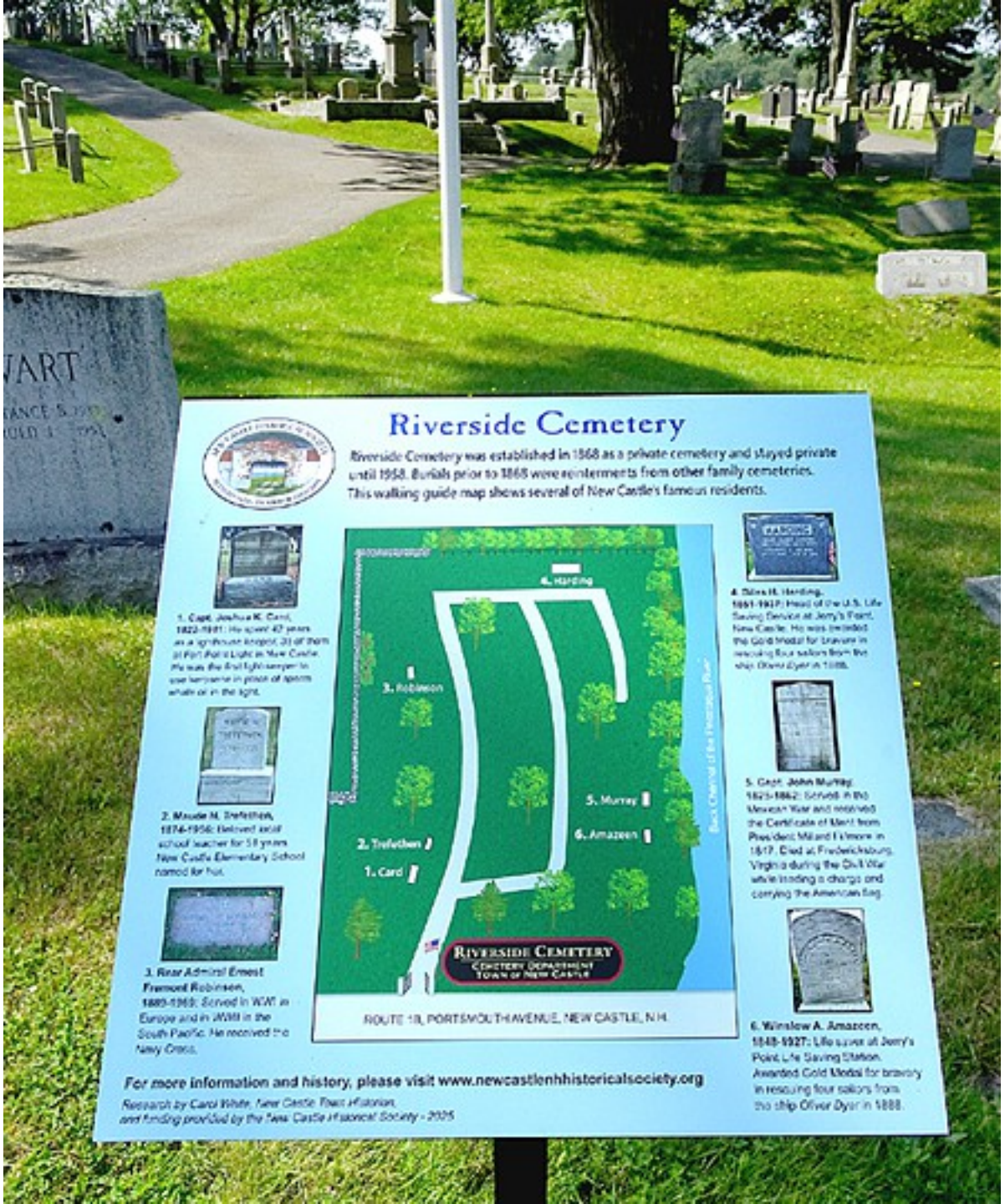
4. Silas H. Harding, 1851-1937: Head of the U.S. Life Saving Service at Jerry's Point, New Castle. He was awarded the Gold Medal for bravery in rescuing four sailors from the ship *Oliver Dyer* in 1888.

5. Capt. John Murray, 1825-1862: Served in the Mexican War and received the Certificate of Merit from President Millard Fillmore in 1847. Died at Fredericksburg, Virginia during the Civil War while leading a charge and carrying the American flag.

6. Winslow A. Amazeen, 1848-1927: Life saver at Jerry's Point Life Saving Station. Awarded Gold Medal for bravery in rescuing four sailors from the ship *Oliver Dyer* in 1888.

For more information and history, please visit www.newcastlenhhistoricalsociety.org/

Research by Carol White, New Castle Town Historian, and funding provided by the New Castle Historical Society - 2025


Riverside Cemetery
Riverside Cemetery was established in 1868 as a private cemetery and stayed private until 1958. Burials prior to 1868 were reinterments from other family cemeteries. This walking guide map shows several of New Castle's famous residents.
1. Capt. Joshua K. Card, 1822-1881: He spent 42 years as a lighthouse keeper, 31 of them at Fort Point Light in New Castle. He was the first light keeper to use kerosene in place of sperm whale oil in the light.
2. Maude M. Trefethen, 1874-1956: Beloved local school teacher for 58 years. New Castle Elementary School named for her.
3. Rear Admiral Ernest Fremont Robinson, 1889-1969: Served in WWI in Europe and in WWII in the South Pacific. He received the Navy Cross.
4. Silas H. Harding, 1851-1917: Head of the U.S. Life Saving Service at Jerry's Point, New Castle. He was awarded the Gold Medal for bravery in rescuing four sailors from the ship Oliver Dyer in 1888.
5. Capt. John Murray, 1825-1862: Served in the Mexican War and received the Certificate of Merit from President Millard Fillmore in 1847. Died at Fredericksburg, Virginia during the Civil War while leading a charge and carrying the American flag.
6. Winslow A. Amazeen, 1848-1927: Life saver at Jerry's Point Life Saving Station. Awarded Gold Medal for bravery in rescuing four sailors from the ship Oliver Dyer in 1888.
4. Harding
3. Robinson
5. Murray
6. Amazeen
2. Trefethen
1. Card
Back Channel of the Piscataqua River
RIVERSIDE CEMETERY
CEMETERY DEPARTMENT
TOWN OF NEW CASTLE
ROUTE 1B, PORTSMOUTH AVENUE, NEW CASTLE, N.H.
For more information and history, please visit www.newcastlenhhistoricalsociety.org
Research by Carol White, New Castle Town Historian,
and funding provided by the New Castle Historical Society - 2005

COME ON, KIDS! WANNA LEARN SOMETHING? ...HEY, GUYS?
THIS MARKS THE SITE OF THE FIRST ATTEMPT BY PARENTS TO MAKE THEIR KIDS READ A HISTORICAL MARKER
Bill Whitehead

THE PAST
NOW
THE FUTURE

Jim’s favorite marker.

- Formerly located in the grass at the junction of Walbach Street and Wentworth Road.
  N.O.N. Historical Marker / On This Spot /
  February 29, 1776 / Absolutely Nothing / Happened