

# Family cemetery deeply rooted in the town's past



TIM JEAN/Staff photos

From left, history buffs Cary White, Charlotte Lyons, Amy Janovsky and Marc Fournier stand in the Woodbridge-Jenkins Family Cemetery in Andover.

## Discovering hidden history

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ANDOVER — Low on the tree trunk, the centuries-old white pine sports an oddity — a massive crooked arm that extends above a historic burial yard, the Woodbridge-Jenkins Family Cemetery.

Below, the tree's roots rise from the ground and fan out toward the leaning headstones.

The name of the nearby street — Douglass Lane, honoring the famous abolitionist Frederick Douglass — and two quiet markers hint at the storied past that predates the neighborhood, an upscale subdivision.

Its history is tied to

Andover's earliest settlers, to Revolutionary War veterans, to fugitive slaves finding refuge, and to ardent abolitionists — including Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, William Lloyd Garrison and the Hutchinson Family Singers (popular troubadours of the 1840s).

The history connects directly to William Jenkins (1796-1878) and his wife, Mary, who lived on the farm in the homestead. He was Andover's foremost abolitionist and would be buried in the family cemetery until his remains and those of other Jenkins family members were reinterred at the town's Spring Grove Cemetery in

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Paul Sanborn, Andover tree warden and parks and grounds superintendent, checks on the old white pine at the Woodbridge-Jenkins Family Cemetery.



1882.

Over the past few decades, people have taken a keen interest in the Woodbridge-Jenkins Family Cemetery, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The interested parties include South Church of Andover historian Charlotte Lyons; Woodbridge family descendant Cary White; Eagle Scout Jeff Page and Girl Scout (and Silver Award recipient) Rachel Mitchell, whose families live in the neighborhood; town Tree Warden Paul Sanborn, who is also the parks and grounds superintendent; and Andover arborist Marc Fournier.

Lyons has put names to unmarked graves, including three Jenkins children, Joel, Mary and Benjamin — all under the age of 6 — buried on successive days in September 1753; identified or confirmed graves of Revolutionary War veterans Benjamin Woodbridge and Benjamin Jenkins; and established a link between Woodbridges in the cemetery and Andover's first ordained minister and original settler, the Rev. John Woodbridge.

"The deeper I dug, the more interesting it got," Lyons says of the research that left her kitchen table piled with index cards.

Page built a 20-foot bridge that provided crucial access to the cemetery — tucked away in a cove of pines — for visitors and town employees. The town took over cemetery maintenance in 2002.

Mitchell identified a historic Baldwin apple tree by the cemetery and planted two apple saplings to continue the legacy.

Sanborn and his crew maintain the cemetery and path and put flags on graves for Memorial Day and Veterans Day. A spring storm in 2017 almost killed the cemetery's ancient white pine, which is an estimated 300 years old.

"We lost the whole top of it," Sanborn says.

Fournier says that it was common for families to locate cemeteries around an established tree. They represent continuity and stability in a place where the dead rest.

"Trees are emotional, spiritual," he says.

#### Preserving the stories

The efforts of many people have enriched the cemetery's sense of place, making it easier to access and the visits more informative.

Still, any passerby might be surprised to know that the otherwise typical-looking neighborhood of big homes on abundant lots has such a storied past.

Before home construction started some 20 years ago, there was only one house here, the Jenkins homestead, built in 1765. Over the years, the property and nearby Skug River have supported a farm, quarry and sawmill, among other uses.

In more recent years, starting in 1947, there was a mink farm here.

The Jenkins house, which has been added on to and modified, remains at the end of the cul-de-sac. A sign to the right of the house, when facing it, identifies

the historic Jenkins Quarry where stone remnants remain.

Today, Linda Foley and her family live in the house. She can feel the history.

"A lot of good karma," she says.

There's a trap door in the attic that leads to a large room behind the central chimney, a place for runaway slaves to hide.

The house has 10 fireplaces, one of them made from blue soapstone quarried on the property.

People who lived in the house generations ago were laid to rest in the Woodbridge-Jenkins Cemetery, placed some 100 yards away (now near the entrance of the neighborhood). The cemetery sits by a stone wall and under the shade-giving and distinctive-looking white pine.

The farm land was sold in 1996 for subdivision development. As a condition of approval, and in keeping with legal requirements, the contractor hired an archaeology team, from the University of Massachusetts to locate any unmarked graves and determine the cemetery's dimensions.

The Andover Preservation Commission, Andover Historical Society and Massachusetts Historical Commission worked with the landowners or otherwise saw to the project's respect for historical resources.

#### 'A well-intentioned idealist'

The team of six UMass workers did the cemetery investigation. They dug trenches and identified 17 grave shafts within a 48-foot-by-43-foot area, says one of the project's leaders, Christopher Donta, who now does similar work for SWCA Environmental Consultants in Amherst.

"We look for different soil, both color and texture, from the surrounding naturally developed soils, to identify

a grave shaft," Donta says.

Donta researched vital records and local histories to prepare the report that accompanied the cemetery study.

The report states that when William Jenkins' remains were moved to Spring Grove Cemetery in 1882, his grave was marked by a rock that reads: "He lived to see the fulfillment of his great desire, the abolition of slavery in America."

The rock, a blue soapstone monument, came from the quarry on the Jenkins property. In the 1830s, William and two partners ran a quarry business there, providing stone for buildings, monuments and tombstones. When the treasurer absconded with the company funds, the enterprise went to pieces.

According to author Claude Moore Fuess (1885-1963), a Phillips Academy headmaster and historian, Jenkins, a strident abolitionist, was "a well-intentioned idealist, very aggressive and obstinate, not unlike William Lloyd Garrison, whose friend he became."

Garrison and escaped slave, orator and author Douglass were said to have been regular visitors to the Jenkins homestead.

Douglass was a powerful speaker and imposing figure who changed hearts and minds while telling audiences of his years in bondage. He spoke on Feb. 8 and 9, 1842, at the Methodist Meeting House in an address to the Essex County Antislavery Society, according to Tom Dalton, the author of a book about Douglass' years living in Lynn.

"Newspaper writers compared Douglass to the great orators of the century,"

Dalton says. "He was self-taught, handsome and as big as a linebacker."

#### Seeking safety and solace

Other visitors to the Jenkins homestead were fugitive slaves traveling to points north and Canada, according to scholar and Underground Railroad historian Wilbur Henry Siebert (1866-1961).

"From Reading the fugitives traveled some ten miles along the Boston-Haverhill Turnpike, crossing the Essex County line and reaching the estate of William Jenkins, who owned hundreds of acres of farm and woodland," Siebert stated in an article for the American Antiquarian Society. "His large house, surrounded by commodious barns and outbuildings, was the principal Underground station of the countryside, and is said to have been in operation from the 1830s onward."

Fugitive slaves were said to have been living on the Jenkins estate as late as 1863.

A 1975 historical inventory of the Jenkins homestead, by local historian Bessie Goldsmith, states that a large rock in the yard was hollowed out underneath and hid fugitive slaves.

Still others who called upon William Jenkins were Stowe and her husband, Calvin, who lived for 12 years at Phillips Academy, from 1852-64. Calvin was a biblical scholar. Harriet became famous after publishing the anti-slavery novel "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in 1852. She died at age 85 in 1896 and is buried, with her husband, in a small cemetery at Phillips Academy.

And yet others who visited the Jenkineses were America's first widely popular traveling musicians, a family from Milford, New

Hampshire, the Hutchinson Family Singers. They sang four-part harmony and songs on behalf of abolitionism, women's suffrage, workers' rights and temperance.

The homestead and cemetery — and those who lived, visited, hid and were buried on the property — exert a pull on people's imaginations.

Andover resident Cary White is a Woodbridge descendant on her mother's side. Her son, Reid, 25, bears the Woodbridge name — Reid Woodbridge White.

Some of her family are buried in the cemetery off Douglass Lane. She learned this in recent years through her friend and genealogist Lyons.

White's happy to know the site's rich history and thinks many people would be surprised by it.

"People pass it regularly and have no idea," she says.

Lyons says that she feels at peace when visiting the cemetery and thinks how the families of yesteryear, who had difficult lives, must have taken solace knowing their loved ones were buried nearby.

In the end, she is fascinated by how the cemetery and site fit into the town history, into American history.

The cemetery and history remain, nestled in a modern subdivision marked by a distinctive and enduring white pine, a silent witness for hundreds of years.