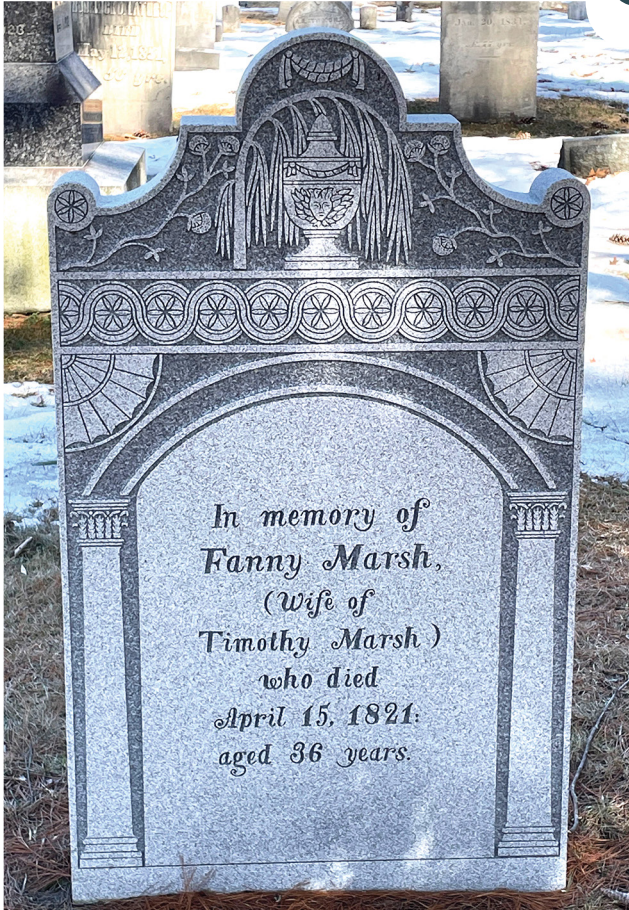


Resting in Pieces



In 2019, after years of research and collaboration, the author had this replacement gravestone for her ancestor Fanny (Durkee) Marsh installed at the Pine Hill Cemetery in Sharon, Vermont.



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Fanny Marsh's Gravestone in Sharon, Vermont

Probably no one saw the huge pine tree fall and snap the marble gravestone of my third great-grandmother into two weathered pieces. Passing through Sharon, Vermont, in August of 2015, I stopped to visit Pine Hill Cemetery for the second time and again enjoy the artistic imagery on the stone.¹ I was depressed to find it broken in half.

Finding Fanny Marsh's gravestone had been the ultimate discovery for me. Several years before, after decades of cemetery explorations in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New York, I was excited when I first saw the stone with its intricate carving and its poignant inscription. Fanny's short life ended in 1821 when she was 36. Nearby were the gravestones of her husband, Timothy Marsh, and his second wife. Fanny's stone, the smallest of the three, was the most elaborately carved.

The detailed carvings on Fanny's gravestone were fascinating and included every symbolic funerary theme of the time: a weeping willow bending over a classic urn; a face of death with a benign, accepting expression; tapering ionic columns supporting an arch over the memorial text; rays of sunshine to symbolize the resurrection; a flourish of fabric draping the top arch; a line of circular flowers; and vines with flowers.

As an amateur calligrapher, I was intrigued by the font. The "A" in April looked very distinctive. An online search led me to a phone conversation with Margaret Ruth Jenks, a noted genealogical researcher (now deceased) who had documented all the gravestones in Rutland County, Vermont. The marble industry in the eastern part of Rutland County and the slate on the Vermont–New York border had drawn large numbers of gravestone carvers and dealers to Vermont in the 1800s.

Like me, Margaret thought the distinctive capital "A" might offer a clue to the carver and she pointed me to her voluminous research notebooks held by the Rutland Historical Society.² My husband, Dave Adams, and his grandniece Sarah Tollett joined me in scouring every

page of them. We learned that Margaret had discovered this carver earlier and photographed his letter styles, but, unfortunately, had been unable to identify him or where he worked.

I had some information about my ancestor Frances (Durkee) Marsh, who was born in Pomfret, Vermont, in 1784, a daughter of Ransom and Hannah (Vail) Durkee. Frances married Timothy Marsh on December 4, 1808.³ Timothy was a descendant of Isaac Marsh of Plainfield, Connecticut, who wintered in the area alone in 1764–65 to fulfill the settlement requirement for founding the town of Sharon.⁴ Fanny and Timothy had four children: Frances, Emeline, George D., and Charles D. Frances's name was passed down in five successive generations.

I found no other stones in Pine Hill Cemetery with the distinctive style seen on Fanny's marker. I next searched for the gravestones of Frances's parents and maternal grandparents. Her parents and grandmother were living in Pomfret when Fanny died on April 15, 1821,⁵ of an unrecorded cause—perhaps childbirth or ensuing complications. Unique features on several family markers in Hewittville Cemetery in Pomfret clearly indicated that the carver of Fanny's stone also created less elaborate gravestones for her parents and grandparents.⁶ I theorized that Fanny's bereaved parents had commissioned a local carver to use his creative talents with all his richest imagery for Fanny's beautiful stone.

Recreating Fanny's gravestone

I began to wonder how Fanny's gravestone, in place for over 180 years and now eroded, broken, and stripped of

some of its carvings, could be saved. I contacted Rock of Ages, a renowned granite quarry monument company in Barre, Vermont.⁷ I spoke with Steve, an account specialist who had worked his way up in the company and knew the entire production process. Seeing my enlarged photos of Fanny's broken and weathered headstone, Steve was intrigued by the beauty of the original carving and the challenge of reproducing its look—the thick and thin lines and the drop shadows of the imagery—using today's manufacturing techniques.

In June 2018, Steve and Greg—the draftsman assigned to the project—decided that the actual broken pieces might show more detail than my photos and transported them to Rock of Ages. Greg had intended to use his computer drafting app, but seeing the stone and the many photos I had enhanced with Photoshop Elements convinced Greg to draft the project by hand. Given the level of difficulty, he could undertake this painstaking work for only a few hours at a time. Greg's contribution was a labor of respect for a woman who died too soon and for the artistry of the original unknown carver. For Rock of Ages, the project offered an opportunity to acknowledge the craftsmanship of the many anonymous and unsung gravestone carvers of the past.

Fanny Marsh's original 1821 gravestone.

A detail from the carving.



In January 2019, when I received Greg's full-scale drawing, I realized that an exact replication of the old carving on a new piece of polished granite would look strange. In addition, the mechanized sandblasting method used today takes away granite to make the design stand out, instead of carving the design into the stone. We all agreed that the solution was a balance between the original design and one created with today's precise drafting and production techniques.

With Steve's guidance, we held meetings and exchanged emails for many months. On a printout of Greg's drawing, I carefully marked my interpretations of the original design's spacing, symmetry, letter shapes,



The author and her husband, Dave Adams, admiring the finished gravestone on the factory floor at Rock of Ages. July 2019.



Fanny's new gravestone after being snapped off at its base during a winter storm in 2024.

the vines, and the expression on the skull's face. Greg realized that the flower was red clover, the Vermont state flower, and not a thistle, as I had thought. When he drafted the blossom's missing parts with the clover in mind, the result was perfect. I realized how lucky I was that Steve and Greg appreciated the stone's finer details as much as I did. Steve commented that in some ways this undertaking had become an art project.

Finally, in July 2019, Dave and I visited the impressive Rock of Ages factory floor with Steve and Greg to see a huge crane gently lower the completed, four-inch-thick gravestone right in front of us. Seeing our vision brought to life gave the four of us the feeling that this project was so much larger than all of us.

Unfortunately, the story doesn't end there. Nearly five years later, on March 31, 2024, after a pleasant family Easter dinner, Dave and I stopped by Pine Hill Cemetery to enjoy viewing the beautiful gravestone once more. We made a horrific, almost unexplainable, and deeply depressing discovery. Once again, a giant pine tree had fallen over during a winter storm, cracking and breaking Fanny's new stone. The pine had neatly missed all the adjacent stones, damaging only Fanny's marker.

Pine Hill Cemetery's sexton cleared the tree debris as soon as the snow melted and watched over the stone until July 2024, when patient Steve brought it back to Rock of Ages. The new challenge is how to repair Fanny's stone so it can be returned to Pine Hill. As usual, Steve has some problem-solving ideas. The question is whether nature will allow Fanny's memorial stone to remain intact and undisturbed in the future. ♦

Notes

- 1 Pine Hill Cemetery (also known as Sharon Village Cemetery), Sharon Valley Road (Rt. 14), Sharon, Vermont.
- 2 Rutland Historical Society, 96 Center Street, Rutland, Vermont; rutlandhistory.com.
- 3 Birth and marriage records for Frances Durkee, *Pomfret, VT: Vital Records, 1778–1860*, citing a 1929 unpublished typescript. AmericanAncestors.org.
- 4 Lewis C. Aldrich and Frank R. Holmes, *History of Windsor County, Vermont* (Syracuse, New York, 1891), 749. See also dbnews.americanancestors.org/2019/01/18/new-early-vermont-settlers-1700-1784-ske.
- 5 *Vermont, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1732–2005*. FamilySearch.org
- 6 Hewittville Cemetery, Old Pomfret Road, Pomfret, Vermont.
- 7 Rock of Ages Quarry, 558 Graniteville Road, Graniteville, Vermont; rockofages.com.