

# Hartford Courant



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**KARYL EVANS'** new film looks at the historical significance of New Haven's Grove Street Cemetery, both in its own right and in what it tells about the city.

## LIFESTYLE

# HISTORY DISINTERRED

FILM EXAMINES HOW SEMINAL NEW HAVEN CEMETERY IS A WINDOW INTO COMMUNITY

By **STEVE GRANT**  
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**W**alking through the Grove Street Cemetery in New Haven, Karyl Evans stopped at the elaborate Victorian monument that marks the resting place of Jane Trowbridge, who died in the late 19th century.

Etched in stone was the message that Trowbridge was preceded in death first by her twin daughters, then by a newborn son, though her son died only a few hours before she did.



To see more photos of New Haven's famous Grove Street Cemetery, visit [courant.com/grovestreet](http://courant.com/grovestreet).

"It is a reminder of how many women died in childbirth back then," Evans said.

"This is the only way we know about Jane, because it happened to be put on her tombstone. We happened to find out about her three children and how she died. There may be no other record other than that stone right there. So it is pretty incredible history that is here," she said.

Evans, a filmmaker based in North Haven, sees the

Grove Street Cemetery as not only a historical resource but also a history-making institution itself. She documents that in "Grove Street Cemetery: City of the Dead, City of the Living," which airs on CPTV Sunday at 6 p.m. It will be repeated Monday at 11 p.m.

The Grove Street Cemetery, established in 1797 and surrounded by Yale University, was the first cemetery in the country designed with family plots. Moreover, it is regarded as the first cemetery with a planned network of streets.

"It really started this whole idea of an organized

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cemeteries with streets and avenues and labels on the streets and paving and planned plantings," Evans said. "It gave a lot of structure to cemeteries, whereas in the old days people were just kind of spread around, not even with their families."

Peter Dobkin Hall, a senior research fellow at Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and a historian who has written often on Connecticut history, sees the Grove Street Cemetery as "a real turning point."

"It is the first private, nonprofit cemetery in the world and represents a whole redefinition of how people viewed death and dying," Hall said. To have planned plot spaces was "a totally revolutionary thing" at the time. Right in New Haven, for example, before creation of the Grove Street Cemetery, people were buried on the green "every which way," he said.

Also, the idea of perpetual memorials and the treatment of the body as a sacred object, inherent in the Grove Street Cemetery, represented a significant change from early Colonial treatment of the dead, Hall said.

Today, the Grove Street Cemetery, enclosed by a brownstone wall and an iron fence, is a place where people walk during lunch hour, escaping the bustle of city streets. Visitors come from afar to see the graves of the many notables buried in the cemetery; among them Eli Whitney, inventor of the cotton gin; Noah Webster, creator of the American dictionary; Roger Sherman, the statesman who was a

signer of all four of the seminal documents of the American Republic; and dozens of others, including 14 Yale presidents.

"Often people think, 'Oh, it was just for the upper crust.' There *were* a lot of Yale people here, so, yes, they were well educated," Evans said. "But it was open to everyone."

Evans is a five-time Emmy Award-winning director, producer, editor and writer with more than 25 years in the film industry. Her recent "The Rise and Fall of Newgate Prison: A Story of Crime and Punishment in Connecticut" won an award of merit from the American Association for State and Local History.

"What I wanted to do was to really capture a reflection of what the community is here," she said of the film. "I wanted it to be about the women of the community, African Americans in the community, scientists, everyday people. So in that way it is really a reflection of what our community is about."

Bill Hosley, executive director of the nearby New Haven Museum & Historical Society, said the cemetery constitutes an invaluable and tangible chronology of New Haven history.

"We use it as an extended classroom because it is such a wonderful resource for teaching civics and any number of topics related to the city's history," he said.

Consider it a history of New Haven families, Evans said. "Cemeteries are so much about our family and our history and what it means in society to be a family and to contribute to a community," she said. "I think they are very contemplative places."



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**AN ANGEL** looks over the grave of E. Hayes Trowbridge and his wife, Catherine Allen Quincy, at the Grove Street Cemetery on the Yale campus in New Haven. Many famous Connecticut people are interred at the 18-acre site, including Eli Whitney, at top, inventor of the cotton gin.