

Tales from a Dedham Graveyard

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It's October, and in honor of my favorite holiday I will be featuring stories and pictures from Dedham's graveyards. Here is a picture of the tomb of Dr. Nathaniel Ames in the Village Avenue burying ground:



Ames Family Tomb (now covered)

Ames was a prominent Dedham citizen and renowned almanac publisher who died in 1764. In the fall of 1775, during the siege of Boston, a young Colonial Army lieutenant named Jabez Fitch visited the grave on one of his many excursions into graveyards and tombs in the Boston area. The following diary entry describing Fitch's visit should help get you in the Halloween mood:

About 12 O'clock...went into the burying yard, where we found Doctor Ames' tomb open ... We several of us went down into the tomb, opened the old doctor's coffin and see his corpse. The under jaw was all fallen in, the other part of the bone of the head retained their proper shape, the teeth were whole in the upper jaw, but the whole back and rest of the body, as far as we could see, was covered with a black film or skin, which I suppose to be the winding sheet in which the corpse was buried, being blended with the moisture of the body.

I also observed one of the arms to have fallen off from the body and the bones laying by the side of the coffin. While I was thus in a sort conversing with the dead and viewing those melancholy curiosities, I could not help reflecting that nothing of the philosophy and astronomy which once adorned the mind of that person and made him appear great among his contemporaries, was now to be seen in this state of humiliation and contempt... After sufficiently gratifying our curiosity, we moved on...