HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY

1626. The first European settlers, led by Roger Conant, came to Salem, known at the time as “Naumkeag.”

1637. Frances and Lydia Lawes immigrated to America from Norfolk, England, where Frances had apprenticed as a worsted weaver, living in the parishes of St. John Maddermarket and St. Mary Coslany. The couple arrived in Boston on June 20th, and proceeded immediately to Salem. Lawes acquired through grant and purchase, a large estate bounded by what are now Essex, Summer and Broad Streets and the Pickering estate. He constructed a home on the north side of Broad Street facing the street that remained in the family until 1830. The land on the opposite (south) side of Broad Street was common land, although it was referred to as Lawes Hill. Frances and Lydia had two sons who both died before they left England, and one daughter, Mary, born in Salem. Mary married Jonathan Neale.

1655. The town records of Salem reported an order that “there shall be a burial place on the hill above Frances Lawes’ house. It was first known as Lawes’ Hill Burial Place, and later “Ye Old Common Burying Hill.” At the time of its establishment, the eastern edge was lined with a road leading to Governor Endecott’s broad field. The easterly corner of the burying ground was secured with a red gate, but the burying ground remained unfenced until 1732.

1693. The oldest remaining gravestone is located near the south end. It marks the interments of Daniel and Mary Lambert.

1732. The burying ground was fenced for the first time.

1780. The burying ground became known as the Broad Street Cemetery.

1802. A description of the tombs to be built along the north edge was made, as part of a contract between the proprietors and stonemasons John Dodge, John Stimpson and Hooper Stimpson:

“The Tombs to be built in a row on the north side of the burying-hill, beginning at the east side of the front gate, on a line with the fence as it now stands or as it may be fixed therefore by other of the Town. The northern or back wall of the tombs to be continued up to the surface of the street, upon which is to be built a wall four feet ten inches high, one foot thick, face rocks at least twelve inches deep, and the remainder of the wall to be made of hard burnt brick, with nitches (niches) over each tomb to receive a slate of suitable size; iron rods of suitable size and length to be
fixed in the wall for the purpose of fastening a cap on the wall; the tombs to be built with abutments or partition walls of face stone eighteen inches thick and three feet six inches deep, between the tombs; up on the abutments to be built brick arches eight inches thick of the hardest burnt bricks, making each of the tombs eight feet deep in the clear, in the deepest part of the arch; each tomb to be thirteen feet long and nine feet wide in the clear, and eight feet deep as aforesaid; the entrance to each tomb to be three feet wide with a suitable head, with six or seven stone steps; cheeks and coyns (quoins?) to be built at the entrance as far as the steps extend from the head, on each side; the entrance to be covered with stone slabs...the head slab edgeways at the top of the tom one foot wide, the other slabs to be lain flat atop the entrance over the...to rest on the coyns, from eighteen to twenty-four inches wide, and about five feet under ground; brick grates in the bottom of the tomb, about eighteen inches distance, three or four courses high; all the stone and brick work to be well laid and pointed with good lime mortar and all done in the most workman like manner. The whole of the tombs to be covered with earth at least eighteen inches deep on the highest part of the crown of the arch, and smoothed and leveed, with a descent to cast off the water. The back wall and head wall to be of at least fifteen inches thick to each tomb.” The cost - $2,160.00.

1836. Salem incorporated as a city.

1841. Funds were expended for planting trees in front of the cemetery.

1856. The mayor reported that a neat and substantial iron fence was built at the cemetery, replacing an old wooden enclosure, and a large number of choice trees and shrubs were set out. Cast iron plaques were appended to the eastern end of the fence bearing the names of the tomb owners 1 – 18 and the date, “1802” (these had been constructed in 1802). It is also likely, at this time, the city established formal entrances at Summer and Winthrop Streets, marking them with decorative carriage and pedestrian gates, and connecting them with a carriage way, located along the north edge.

1882. The steps over the bank at the Summer Street end of the cemetery were built and three tombs were repaired.

1883. Fences were whitewashed, a gate repaired and a tomb mended.

1891. John Robinson wrote *Our Trees: a popular account of the trees in the streets and gardens of Salem, and of the native trees of Essex County, Massachusetts, with the location of trees, and historical and botanical notes*. In this book, he noted that in 1891, Broad Street Cemetery contained “several scarce introduced trees.” These included a “good
European ash specimen” near the corner of Winthrop Street, just south of the Dodge and Fogg tomb; a European white birch (Betula alba), “the first and third, counting from the east, a row of trees just at the bend in the roadway south from the High School building;” a European beech, “second in the row” previously described;” one “particularly fine weeping willow;” and two red pines near the Summer Street gate, at the right of the path.”

1913. Minor repairs were made to the boundary fence and stone wall.

1941. The city engineer prepared plans for the retaining wall to be built along the south edge. Wall material is not indicated, but the cap is specified to be concrete, and the fence chain link. To construct the wall, a tomb (likely the John Pickering tomb) was to be relocated.

1942. The retaining wall on the Mt. Vernon Street boundary was rebuilt and a fence was erected on top. This work may have been completed as part of a Works Progress Administration project.

1943. Salem’s board of cemetery commissioners expressed a desire to “landscape” the cemetery and expressed dismay with the Salem police for preventing the effort from moving forward.

1958. A tomb (unidentified) was entered and vandalized. If elms were growing in and around the cemetery, they may have been removed as part of a city-wide Elm Disease containment effort.

1966. The wood and iron fences/curbing were repaired.

2002. A survey of Broad Street Cemetery was completed as part of a “Salem Historic Burial Grounds Project,” through which several recommendations were made for upgrading the landscape.

2018. A group of history enthusiasts formed the Friends of Broad Street Cemetery to advocate for the property’s long term preservation.
Lander Tomb, Broad Street Cemetery, ca. 1890-1920, Frank Cousins Collection, Peabody Essex Museum

Pickering Tomb, Broad Street Cemetery, ca. 1890-1920, Frank Cousins Collection, Peabody Essex Museum
Curwen Tomb, Broad Street Cemetery, ca. 1890-1920, Frank Cousins Collection, Peabody Essex Museum
Mount Vernon Street Retaining Wall and Fence, 1941, Salem City Engineer.
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Books
Robinson, John, Our Trees: a popular account of the trees in the streets and gardens of Salem, and of the native trees of Essex County, Massachusetts, with the location of trees, and historical and botanical notes. Salem, MA: N. A. Horton & Son, 1891.


Documents
Burial Ground Planning Project, Martha Lyon Landscape Architecture, LLC, August 2002

The Cemetery at Pickering Hill, Salem, MA (Notes), John Goff, September 24, 2017

Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation/Essex National Heritage Commission, Salem Reconnaissance Report, Essex County Landscape Inventory, Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Program, May 2005

Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory Form E, 804, Broad Street Cemetery, 1967, updated 2002

Massachusetts Historical Commission Reconnaissance Survey Town Report, Salem, 1985

Watkins Family Papers, 1708-1830, Folder 3, Peabody Essex Museum

Photographs
Peabody Essex Museum, Phillips Library, Frank Cousins Photograph Collection, ca. 1890-1920:
- Lander Tomb
- Pickering Tomb
- Curwen Tomb
- Rear 3 Broad Street

Maps & Plans
1820 Saunders Map of Salem

1851 McIntyre Map of Salem

1916 Walker Map of Salem

WPA Project No. 15739 (map), undated (ca. 1940)

Broad Street Cemetery Proposed Masonry Wall and Chain Link Fence, City Engineer, 1941

Undated map of Broad Street Cemetery (Salem Engineering Office) (ca. 1950)
Geographic Information Systems data provided by MASSGIS (on-line database)

Assessors' Map for the City of Salem (on-line database)

Google Earth Aerial Imagery (on-line database, geolocated through AutoCAD)

Drone-base Imagery (provided by Salem State University)

Miscellaneous
Chris Burke, personal interview, October 20, 2020