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THE OLDEST GRAVE – A Question Somewhat Difficult of Solution – Two Old Burial Grounds

The oldest grave in Chester! Who lies beneath the mound that was the resting place of the first white soldier of this old town? The question was asked to a Times man, but it cannot be answered. There are two very old burial grounds in Chester, and within these enclosures is the dust of many a colonist awaiting the summons for the quick and the dead. These places are St. Paul's old cemetery at Third and Welsh Streets and the Friends' burial ground on Edgemont Avenue and Sixth Street.

But whose is the oldest grave no one can tell, for no one now living knows. The bodies of the Swedes who lived here before Penn came over from England, lie beneath the sod in the city, but the graves are not marked, those who knew then are buried by their side and no record of their identity exists. But one of the oldest identified graves is that of James Sandelands, whose mural table stands in St. Paul's P.E. Church across the street. The big slab records that "Here lies the body of James Sandelands, Merchant in Upland, in Pennsylvania, who departed this mortal life April 13, 1693, aged 56 years and his wife, Ann Sandelands." When Ann also departed this mortal life the writer of the epitaph evidently did not consider of sufficient importance to note.

Sandelands, though buried nearly two hundred and six years ago, was very closely related to the present generation, that is, that part which feels that the chief of man is to run for office and get it for Sandelands not only ran but got there. And considering the few offices at the disposal of the powers that be in those days, managed to have many years of tenure to his credit. He was a politician who would have been the boss of this town had he lived to enjoy the glory and parcel out the official pie of the closing hours of the nineteenth century instead of shedding his luster upon one evening of the seventeenth.

This James the king of the colonial politicians, was a soldier and was accused by a horrified Quaker of killing an Indian while engaged in warfare. Then he embarked in mercantile pursuits, was one of the Deputy Governor's Council, and then was appointed a justice of the Upland or Chester Courts. Then he ran a hotel, coined money, died and had a big funeral.

Sandelands owned a large part of the present Third ward, all of the territory south of the present Twelfth Street and is recorded that he refused to give William Penn the terms he desired, compelled that worthy gentlemen to go fifteen miles further north to build the City of Brotherly Love.

Had it not been for the obstinence of this Sandelands, over whose grave in St. Paul's the winds have howled a requiem for two hundred years, Mayor Black would have been chief executive of Philadelphia and Tom Barry been in a marble city hall with twelve hundred patrolmen subject to his orders.

The Friends' burial ground on Edgemont Avenue has in it graves that intimidate that of Sandelands, but they are not marked. Some headstones are so time worn, that the inscriptions are not decipherable, but others are easily read. Many people prominent in colonial days are buried there and among the records on the tombstones are these: Mary Marker, April 6, 1731; Mary Mather, 1757; John Mather, 1768; Caleb Copeland, October 13, 1767; Ann Bevan, February 13, 1758; Aubrey Bevan, February 12, 1761; Grace Licyd, March 19, 1766; William Graham, August 6, 1753.