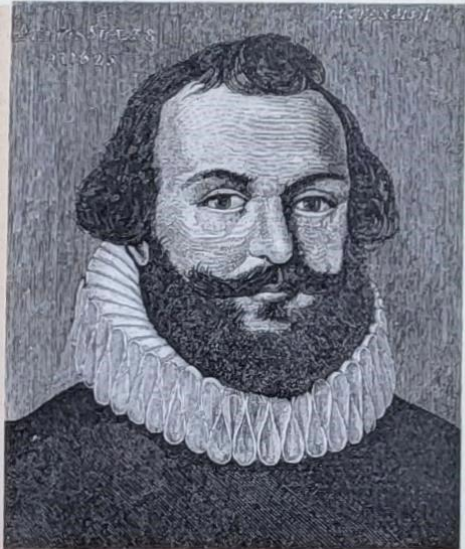


Captain Myles Standish

Funding provided by the
Duxbury Community Preservation Act Fund



Engraving of a portrait believed to be Myles Standish (although not authenticated); from *History of Boston* by Justin Winsor, 1885

Capt. Myles Standish. (c. 1584 – October 3, 1656) was one of the passengers aboard the *Mayflower*, arriving in Plymouth Colony in the late-fall of 1620. Little is known of his early life and career. He was most likely raised in Lancashire, England and it is believed that he served in the English Military in Holland during the early 1600's in aid of the Dutch in their Eighty Years' War against Spain.

While living in Holland, Standish came in contact with the English Protestant dissenters, known as Separatists, in Leiden. Although not a follower of their religion, he was hired to accompany these Pilgrims on their journey to the New World and act as their military advisor. He and his wife, Rose, were aboard the *Mayflower* during its harrowing two-month long voyage across the Atlantic. Once in Plymouth, Standish played a leading role in the defense and administration of the Colony, organizing the Colony's defenses and becoming the first commander of the militia. He also served on the Governor's Council of Assistants and as the Colony's treasurer.

In 1627, Standish and his second wife, Barbara (his first wife died in January 1621), received a land grant of 120 acres not far from this burying ground and helped establish the town of Duxbury. It is commonly believed that the town is named for a Standish family manor, Duxbury Hall, in Chorley, Lancashire, England.

Standish was a courageous yet sometimes brutal military commander, who led expeditions against the native population as well as against the French and even other English settlers. The military side of Standish has been overshadowed by the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow romantic narrative poem, *The Courtship of Myles Standish* (1858). The poem's popularity elevated Standish and fellow Pilgrims John Alden and Priscilla Mullins, to American folk-heroes and is partially responsible for the late 19th century fervor over finding Standish's grave.



1873 lithograph depicting expedition against Nemasket led by Standish, guided by Hobbamock. Courtesy of Henry T. Peters' "American on Stone" Collection, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution



Myles Standish Gravesite, c. 1890. Courtesy of the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society

When he died in 1656, he was buried in this burying ground. His grave, like most at the time, did not receive a carved head stone. However, oral tradition, passed down through generations, held that his resting place was marked instead with two pyramid-shaped field stones. In 1889, as this burying ground was being reclaimed and cleared, two stones matching the above description were discovered. A dig commenced to verify Standish's burial location, but the initial findings were inconclusive.

Two years later, in 1891, another, larger dig took place. This time, the skeleton of a man, observed to have red and gray hair remaining on the skull, was shown to be buried between two women. The skull was consistent with Standish, and the location of the two female skeletons was consistent with Standish's request to be buried between his daughter, Lora, and daughter-in-law, Mary (Dingly) Standish. Also, the remains of two boys were found nearby, possibly his sons Charles and John Standish.

The evidence was enough to convince those participating in the exhumation, including several descendants, that they had indeed found Myles Standish. In 1930, Standish was exhumed one final time and his remains were placed in a copper box and hermetically sealed, before being re-interred.

The fieldstone enclosure you see before you was erected in 1893. At that time, three engraved stone markers were placed in the enclosure beside the two pyramid-shaped field stones, marking the graves of Standish and his daughter and daughter-in-law. The castellated stone walls of the enclosure hold four 19th century cannons (dating from 1853, and relocated from the Boston Navy Yard), which were loaned to the Town by the US Navy.



Standish enclosure, c. 1893. Courtesy of the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society