

"The grave's a fine and private place ..." Andrew Marvell, *"To His Coy Mistress"*

A modern cemetery, with its in-ground markers and manicured lawns, is a peaceful setting in which to remember those we loved. An old cemetery, with its many stones varying in size, composition and wear, is more than a resting place. It's also an art gallery, showcasing the work of artisan stone carvers.

Elizabeth (Colburn) Ball died 13 January 1783 when she was not yet 24 years old. Her grave in the Hollis Congregational Church Cemetery is marked by a beautiful old slate stone inscribed, "Memento Mori// Erected// In Memory of M^{rs}.// Elisabeth Ball// wife of M^r. William// Ball who depar[^]ed// this Life January y^e// 13th 1783 in y^e 24th// Year of her age."¹ This stone incorporates several distinctive design elements, including the "face in an arch" carved on the tympanum, an enlarged lower case "a" beginning the word "age," and the words "Memento Mori" inscribed on the tympanum, that suggest this stone was carved by her brother-in-law, John Ball.² In addition to the work of John Ball, the Congregational Church Cemetery serves as a gallery for the wonderful work of several eighteenth-century artisans: William Park and sons John and Thomas, the brothers Abel and Stephen Webster, and Paul Colburn, Elizabeth's first cousin and John Ball's brother-in-law.³

The stone also memorializes William, seven-week-old son of William and Elizabeth Ball, who died on the 13th of January, too. At first glance, it appears that mother and son died on the same day, but a closer reading shows that William died in 1782, exactly one year before his mother. This beautiful stone does not tell the full story. A second William Jr. was born to William and Elizabeth on 23 December 1782, only three weeks before his mother's death.⁴ Was Elizabeth's death on the first anniversary of her first child's death simply coincidental? Or was it possible that postpartum depression played a role? Some questions will never be answered. This stone is a loving memorial to a sister-in-law and nephew who died too soon.

¹ Find A Grave, Inc., *Find A Grave*, database and images (<http://www.findagrave.com/> : accessed 21 March 2014), Mrs. Elisabeth Ball (1759-1783), memorial no. 75241781, Congregational Church Cemetery, Hollis, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire, photograph © Rick Weaver, 2011.

² Theodore Chase and Laurel K. Gabel, "The Colburn Connections: Hollis, New Hampshire, Stonecarvers 1780-1820," in *Gravestone Chronicles: Some Eighteenth-Century New England Carvers and Their Work*. (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1997), I: 232.

³ American Antiquarian Society, *Farber Gravestone Collection*, database and images (<http://www.davidrumsey.com/farber/> : accessed 21 March 2014), Hollis, New Hampshire, gravestone images.

⁴ Hollis, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire, State's copy of Records of Hollis, 2: 27 (image 24), William Ball Jr. birth (1782); Town Clerk's Office, Hollis; digital images, "New Hampshire, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1636-1947," *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/> : accessed 13 January 2014); browse: Hillsborough > Hollis; imaged from FHL microfilm 15177.