

THE FRENCH BURYING GROUND

New Milford's Historic
Huguenot Cemetery



THE FOUNDERS

The French Burying Ground (aka the French Huguenot–Demarest Cemetery) was established circa 1677, making it the oldest cemetery in Bergen County and one of the oldest cemeteries in the State of New Jersey. It is also the last remaining element of three important structures that once occupied this site.

The cemetery is located within the boundaries of the French Patent of June 8, 1677, the transaction in which David Demarest Sr. (aka David des Marests) purchased approximately 2,000 acres of land along the east bank of the Hackensack River from the Tappans. His intention was to establish the first settlement for French–Huguenots in the colony of New Jersey. Demarest, whose family fled their native France to escape religious persecution, lived in the Netherlands and Germany before his arrival on Staten Island in 1663. Two years later, Demarest and his wife, Marie Sohier, along with their sons and families moved to upper Manhattan.

THE OLD DEMAREST HOUSE

The Demarest family built a small log home between Marie's grave and the river. It was located approximately where the Elks Club now stands. Eventually, this wood structure was replaced by a small sandstone house, which stood at this location for more than 150 years until it was relocated in 1955 to Historic New Bridge Landing Park.

Known as the "Old Demarest House," this building may be the best surviving example of a Bergen Dutch sandstone cottage, but its history of ownership is



Historians have offered several reasons why Demarest felt compelled to establish his own community. He has been portrayed as a pioneer seeking religious freedom. Others note that he was also a savvy entrepreneur who took advantage of a real estate boom along the Hackensack River.

After the Demarest family settled their affairs in New York, they left by boat for their new colony. During the journey, Marie fell ill with smallpox and died. The family's first task was to bury Marie. They chose a site on a bluff overlooking the river, and she became the first person to be buried in the cemetery.

The Demarest family went on to build houses, mills, and a church to attract other Huguenot settlers to the area. Ultimately, David Demarest was unsuccessful in his plan to enlarge the colony; however, the small community he established became a permanent settlement—the first in Bergen County for European emigrants—as the Dutch and others began arriving in the area.

complicated. Samuel Demarest, David Sr.'s son, originally owned the land where the log house and cemetery were located. Because of this association, many believed that he also owned the sandstone house; however, it was built after his death.

Samuel died in 1728, and his land was passed down from one generation of Demarests to the next. In 1791, Jacobus Paulison purchased the property. Paulison built a grist mill on the river, as well as the sandstone house, to celebrate the marriage of his son, John, who managed the mill. These two-door, two-room houses were typical of "starter" homes of this period. No one knows the fate of the old log house.

The property changed hands several more times. By 1937, the stone house and small cemetery had fallen into disrepair. A Demarest descendant, Hiram B. Demarest Blauvelt, formed the Demarest Family Association, which purchased the property. The Demarest Association focused its efforts on the relocation and restoration of the house.

The Demarest House as it appeared at the turn of the 20th century before it was removed from its original New Milford site

THE FRENCH CHURCH

At first, the Demarests attended the Bergen Reformed Dutch Church in what is now Jersey City; however, they wanted to establish a French–Huguenot church closer to home. They selected a site to the east of the log house, adjoining the little cemetery where Marie was buried. The first meeting in the newly erected French Church of Kinkachemeck (Kinderkamack) was in 1682. Services were conducted by Rev. Pierre Daille, a minister from the French Church of New York.

David Sr. died in 1693 and was laid to rest beside his wife. (The exact locations of these graves are unknown.) While the population of the area was growing, the number of French Huguenots was not. In 1696, Rev. Daille left the area. With no minister to conduct services and the congregation dwindling, members of the French Church joined the Dutch Reformed Church in Hackensack. The Demarests dismantled their building and sailed the materials downriver so they could be incorporated into the construction of the Dutch congregation's new Church on the Green in Hackensack. The east wall of this historic church still contains a "heart stone" honoring the Demarest family that bears the initials "DMR".





An artist's rendition of the Old Demarest House and the French Church and Burying Ground as they might once have appeared

THE FRENCH BURYING GROUND

During the 18th and 19th centuries, it was a common practice among landowners to set aside a portion of their property for a family burial ground. In the case of the French Burying Ground, many members of prominent French-Huguenot and Dutch families who moved to Bergen County during the 18th and 19th centuries are buried here. They include more than four dozen descendants of the Demarest family, as well as nine Revolutionary War soldiers and one Civil War soldier.

In 1902, John Neafie, a genealogist and member of the Holland Society, recorded the names and inscriptions on markers for approximately 160 persons. According to this inventory, the oldest surviving gravestone was dated 1721. Few burials took place until the Revolution, when circumstances may have made it difficult to conduct burials in local churchyards. An undated map commissioned by the New Milford American Legion Post 217 marks many of these graves.

More than 100 years later, New Milford Girl Scout Troop 52 conducted another survey. A number of the gravestones inventoried by Neafie were no longer in existence. Some inscriptions had worn

away over the years. In addition, five gravestones had been replaced with Veterans Administration markers. The Girls Scouts also noted that Martha Gustafson Demarest was the last to be buried in the cemetery, in 1928.

In June 2018, the Demarest family foundation transferred ownership of the burying ground to the Borough of New Milford. In 2019, the New Milford Historic Preservation Commission, which oversees the cemetery, authorized a ground-penetrating radar survey to confirm the existence of probable gravesites in areas where tombstones are no longer visible.



NOTABLE NAMES IN THE CEMETERY

The complete inventory of names and inscriptions can be viewed on the historic commission's page on the borough website: www.newmilfordboro.com. Some of the more notable names include nine Revolutionary War soldiers.

- **CORNELIUS BOGERT** (1748–1825)
VA replacement marker, Row 7, No. 125.
- **JAMES BOGERT** (1749–1830)
served in the 3rd Battalion of Capt. Patterson's Company, location unknown.
- **JACOBUS DEMAREST** (1735–1807)
a justice of the peace, location unknown.
- **REV. JOHN DEMAREST** (1764–1837)
served three years with an unknown company, Row 2, No. 27.
- **JOHN DEMAREST** (1732–1809)
served in the militia from 1777 to 1781, Row 5, No. 63.
- **PETER DEMAREST** (1758–1820)
Row 5, No. 66.
- **PETER (PETRUS)* DEMAREST** (1756–1884)
VA Replacement Marker (1765–1844)*
Row 10, 169.
- **UZAL MEEKER** (1757–1829)
VA replacement marker, Row 1, No. 3.
- **JOHN VAN NORDEN** (1732–1810)
VA replacement marker, Row 1, No. 6.

Also buried in the cemetery are:

- **WILLEMPIE BOGERT** (1734–1813)
John Demarest's wife, who served as a courier, relaying information to patriot troops, Row 5, No. 64.
- **JACOB DEMAREST**, a Civil War soldier
Row 7, No. 133.

The VA replacement markers were installed in 1958–59. The DAR sponsored the marker for Cornelius Bogert, and the American Legion sponsored the markers for John VanNorden, Uzal Meeker, and Peter Demarest. Why the original tombstones were replaced is unclear, and in the case of one marker, the information is inaccurate.

*The VA marker for "Peter Demarest" should read "Petrus Demarest." Petrus enlisted as a 13-year-old and served to the end of the war with Samuel Demarest, John Outwater, and John Huyler. The dates are also wrong; the marker notes that he was born in 1756 and died in 1884, which means he lived 128 years!

This brochure was prepared by the New Milford Historic Preservation Commission. The NMHPC is charged with preserving the integrity of the borough's historic heritage as the birthplace of Bergen County through preservation and archiving of buildings, land, and items of historic value; through research into the people, events, and locations that have formed that history; through public education programs for all ages, and through commendations for borough residents and organizations that have aided this mission.

Funding has been made possible in part through grant funds administered by the Bergen County Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs, Department of Parks, through a General Operating Support grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State.

New Milford Historic Preservation Commission



NEW MILFORD BOROUGH HALL
930 River Road
New Milford, New Jersey 07646

PHONE: (201) 967-5044

Find us on Facebook at
New Milford Historic Preservation Commission