

# Unlocking Winthrop's Tomb

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 00:20

[Sounds of birds singing, footsteps in the leaves and talking and laughter in the background] We're standing outside the mausoleum of Robert C. Winthrop. It's a beautiful fall day, and the writing here says, 'Robert C. Winthrop. Born May 12, 1809. Died November 16, 1894. Eminent as a scholar, an orator, a statesman and a philanthropist, above all, a Christian.' And there are also names on the side that one assumes lists the people who are interred inside. We have Eliza [Elizabeth] Cabot Blanchard, Wife of Robert C. Winthrop. Born May 27, 1809. Died June 14, 1842. Robert C. Winthrop Jr. Born December 7, 1834. Died June 5, 1905. Elizabeth, wife of Robert C. Winthrop Jr. Born October 1, 1844, and died April 22 1924.' That's on the left as we're facing the tomb, and on the right you have, 'Clara Bowdoin Winthrop, daughter of Robert C. and Elizabeth Winthrop. Born March 12, 1876, and died March 15, 1969.' She is the one who gave the MHS the key to the tomb. The door is bronze and has been aged. It's greenish. There are, for some reason, two knobs and two slots for keys, and we only have one key.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 01:56

[Intro music fades in] This is Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai.

**Cassie Cloutier** 02:04

This is Cassie Cloutier.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 02:06

And this is The Object of History. The podcast of the Massachusetts Historical Society. Since 1791, the MHS has sought to collect, preserve and communicate the building blocks of history. Each episode examines an object, document or set of items from the society's millions of manuscript pieces and artifacts. We take you on a behind the scenes tour of our stacks to explore the incredible stories held within our collections.

**Cassie Cloutier** 02:32

On this episode, we visit the Mount Auburn cemetery in nearby Cambridge and Watertown, Massachusetts. Following a suggestion by Hannah Elder, Associate Reference Librarian for Rights and Reproductions at the MHS, we investigate one connection that we have to the cemetery, a key to Robert C. Winthrop's tomb. Ahead of our trip to Mount Auburn, we speak with Hannah and Peter Drummey, Chief Historian at the MHS, to learn more about this object and the family interred in the tomb. We also learn about the cemetery itself from Meg Winslow, Senior Curator of Historical Collections and Archives at Mount Auburn. Before we visited the cemetery, we began our investigation

by sitting down with Hannah Elder, Associate Reference Librarian for Rights and Reproductions, to learn more about how she came upon this item in the collection and what she expects to find in the tomb.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 03:30

Since you are the origin of this idea, tell us how you came about it.

**Hannah Elder** 03:36

Yes, so you were in the library one day talking about the podcast, as you often do, and mentioned looking for ideas related to other institutions that we had interest in, our sister institutions, places whose papers we hold, etc and I had recently been on a visit to Mount Auburn cemetery, and as often happens when I'm there, I had noticed the many people whose papers we hold, who are interred and in various places at Mount Auburn, and that got me thinking, maybe we have some collection materials also related to Mount Auburn, and we do, including this key that I brought with me today, and this is the key to the front door of the Winthrop tomb.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 04:25

It's a very large looking key.

**Hannah Elder** 04:28

It is. It's quite impressive and the mechanism that goes into the lock is quite large. It's a thick key, about a centimeter thick, and the head of it, I'd say, is at least a centimeter wide as well. The key as a whole is about four centimeters high and nine centimeters long, and it's pretty hefty when you pick it up for a key, at least from a modern perspective. My house key is roughly a third the size of this one and less than a 1/10th of its weight.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 05:02

There is a tag on this key, and there's writing on it.

**Hannah Elder** 05:06

There is, yes.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 05:07

Is that original to [the key]?

**Hannah Elder** 05:09

This is original to the key. So, this tag is in the hand of Robert C. Winthrop, Jr and it says, 'Duplicate key of Winthrop Tomb, 2408 Lawn Avenue, Mount Auburn. The other key is at the superintendent's office. The bronze door admits

to the outer vault from which the inner vault is entered by breaking a brick door away of the thickness of a single brick cements at each internment.' So, Winthrop describes the inside of this tomb, which I believe at the point where, when he wrote this tag, his father would have already interred in the tomb. So, he describes the interior of it. It's not entirely clear to me if the interior is just immediately bricked up, like if we'll open the door and we'll just be faced with bricks, or if it's each person's space that is bricked up. So, I'm excited to see inside.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 06:05

What's the cast of characters surrounding this key?

**Hannah Elder** 06:09

So, there are seven people buried in this tomb. It's a little crowded, but for today, I'm going to focus on three of them and they are three people, direct descendants of each other. We start with Robert C. Winthrop. He was born in 1809 and died in 1894. We also have his son, Robert C. Winthrop Jr, born 1834 and died 1905 and then the last person to be interred in the tomb is Robert Jr's daughter Clara Bowdoin Winthrop, who was born in 1876 and died in 1969. So, like a lot of the Winthrop family members over the centuries, both Roberts and Clara were all involved with the MHS in various ways. The first Robert C. Winthrop was president of the MHS from 1855 to 1885. He was carrying on a family legacy. His father, Thomas Lindall Winthrop, was also an MHS president. And Winthrop Jr, while he was never president, he was a member. He was a very influential and active member, and he was on the committee that helped us to complete the construction and moving in process for this building, 1154 Boylston Street. Apparently, he didn't like it. He didn't like the way it looked. He didn't like its location. He lived on Beacon Hill and thought it was way too far away. But he was a big fan of the MHS and was a member from 1879 to his death in 1905. Clara was a little bit less involved. She was not a member, as far as I can tell, but she was heavily invested in the family's legacy, and she viewed herself, I think, as kind of the last of their line, and she started to look for places where the physical objects of their family history could live, be preserved and be accessible to researchers for the centuries after she was gone. She donated a total of 83 items to the collection, including the key to the tomb. She donated the key in 1936 so before she was ready for the tomb, but she must have trusted that Mount Auburn could still get in there. She was a philanthropist and a poet, and she traveled extensively. She was very invested in the family legacy. In addition to the MHS, she donated items to the Museum of Fine Arts. She donated to local historical societies where her family had connections, and she was interested in carrying on as well the family legacy of philanthropy, both Robert C. Winthrop's had donated large sums to the MHS at their deaths, and Clara Bowdoin Winthrop at her death, she donated to Bowdoin College in Maine. She was related to James Bowdoin, the namesake of Bowdoin College, and so she wanted to continue on that family legacy as well.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 09:24

When you came to me with this idea, did you expect that the folks at Mount Auburn would actually let us open the door?

**Hannah Elder** 09:31

No.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 09:31

Okay!

**Hannah Elder** 09:32

I didn't.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 09:34

I did not either!

**Hannah Elder** 09:34

Yeah, let alone invite us to go visit other folks who are also at Mount Auburn and yeah, I am fascinated by the fact that they will let us in, and also excited that Anne [Bentley] will allow us to bring the key there.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 09:50

Yeah, this is going to be fascinating. You must have thought about this and dreamt about this. What do you expect to feel and to see when you open that door?

**Hannah Elder** 10:02

Yeah. So, I think at this point I am expecting a brick wall right away and if not, I am expecting, you know, kind of the Hollywood image of what the inside of a tomb might look like, kind of dark leaves inside. But I think in terms of how I'll feel, I'm anticipating kind of a sense of wonder and also a feeling of meeting some friends, because I've been reading letters written by people who are interred in this tomb. I've been learning about their travels and what they thought about history and about the MHS, what role it played in their lives. And I'm looking forward to getting to meet them in a way, getting to visit with them.

**Cassie Cloutier** 10:58

Chief Historian Peter Drummey told us more about R. C. Winthrop and his family's legacy.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 11:06

R. C. Winthrop. He is from the very famous Winthrop family. The name going back to the founding of the colony.

**Peter Drummey** 11:17

Robert C. Winthrop is the seventh generation, direct descendant of Governor John Winthrop and John Winthrop Jr the governor of Connecticut. Wait Still Winthrop, John Winthrop again, who I think is John Winthrop, Fellow of the Royal Society, just to sort them out. Then John Still Winthrop, and then Robert's father, Thomas Lindell Winthrop, who, in both father and son, have long connections with the Massachusetts Historical Society.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 11:53

Okay, so the name goes all the way back to the colonial times. By the 19th century, does the Winthrop name still carry the weight it did?

**Peter Drummey** 12:04

There's a very strong understanding of this because Governor John Winthrop kept a diary that became, in fact, more or less an official history of the early years of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He was well known. He was always an important figure in Massachusetts history. But it's in fact, his descendant, Robert Charles Winthrop, a president of the Massachusetts Historical Society for 30 years, who assembles both materials he's inherited and other materials as well, and makes essentially a series of gifts which bring this enormous archive of papers from the colonial and early national period to the Historical Society during his presidency during the middle of the 19th century.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 13:03

It's R.C. Winthrop. He's the reason we have the Winthrop papers.

**Peter Drummey** 13:07

He's extremely important to the story and the reason we have them systematically. Now, when someone is so close to a collection, there are idiosyncratic elements of it. One thing that we don't have is that he decided, in his wisdom, that the problem of doing research in the 19th century was distance, that you had to go to all these places along one line, on the other hand, most interest in papers written in a place would be in that place. So, he didn't leave everything systematically here in Boston to the Massachusetts Historical Society. He thought that some papers to do with the history of Connecticut were better in Connecticut. And there was even an idea that papers brought to America, and the voyages to America may be the papers that originated in England, for the most part, all those connections with Ireland there as well, maybe they would be better back in the old country, so to speak.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 14:19

Public service is part of the Winthrop family legacy.

**Peter Drummey** 14:24

Yes, I think by the 19th century, the Winthrop's, at least here in Boston, are good Episcopalians, but they still have this Puritan sensibility that I think is instilled with this family heritage of both of service as being important, not to demonstrate your virtue necessarily, that calls into question different things. But this idea of an obligation often expressed is you do well, so you can do good. In the middle of the 19th century, when he was active in the Massachusetts Historical Society and other philanthropies, R. C. Winthrop was both the Chairman of the Board of Overseers of the Poor, that is, had a role in overseeing poor relief in Boston. He also was President or Chair of the Board of the Providence Society, that is an association of charities trying to rationalize public service and philanthropy at Boston, and also a Chair of the Commissioners to plan a public library for Boston, which is late in coming to Boston. This is not the present public library that we think of in Copley Square, but it was before that really quite an extraordinary building built, I believe, in the 1850s further along Boylston Street. There was a large, handsome public library before the public library that we in Boston know today important in that effort. So, he's very active and energetic within the Massachusetts Historical Society, but he makes the time to do all these other essentially public philanthropies as well.

**Meg Winslow** 16:22

I am so delighted to be joining you. My name is Meg Winslow, and I am the Curator of Historical Collections and Archives at Mount Auburn cemetery.

**Cassie Cloutier** 16:32

Can you share a little bit about your workplace and maybe a little bit about its history and why it's significant to Boston?

**Meg Winslow** 16:40

Well, I love that you asked that because we could talk for the rest of the day. It's one of my favorite places, and Mount Auburn, it means many things to many different people, and it's been here a long time in Boston, since 1831 as an institution that's part of the fabric of Boston life because it serves as a cemetery. Many people know it because they might have a friend or family buried here, or they might have come to a memorial service, or they might have come to early in the morning to go birding or attend a program. It's a beautiful green space that has an evolving, designed landscape that is very healing. It's a very important designed landscape, and so many of us can't find the words to articulate why it means something to us. I was just thinking about Notre Dame earlier this morning, and how listening to the comments that visitors were saying about how they never realized it was so important to them,

and how it had so much meaning, but they weren't sure how to articulate it. That's a little bit the way I feel about Mount Auburn because it's really it's a landscape of memory, and it's a landscape of meaning so, and it has an incredible history. It was founded in 1831 by a group of gardeners and enthusiastic horticulturalists and Boston area citizens who are very aspirational in their thinking about the city of Boston and very practical about their thinking in terms of solving a burial crisis that was going on in the city of Boston. Boston had grown so quickly and needed additional burial space, and it was difficult to find that land was expensive. Not everyone wanted to be near our cemetery, and it was hard to get the energy going to actually purchase land for additional burial space, and a group of really well-meaning citizens got together and made it happen, and that is the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, not to be confused with the Historical Society, but the first Horticultural Society in Massachusetts, which had been found in 1829, and consisted of botanist and horticulturalists, gentlemen, gentlewomen and people who believed in the art and science of horticulture to improve our life. They purchased land on the boundary between Watertown and Cambridge that would be burial space for the people of Boston, and the sale of burial lots would fund an experimental garden. So the creation of Mount Auburn cemetery is really to me I find it really fascinating, because it's a practical solution to the needs of a city that had grown very quickly that ran out of space, but it also was very aspirational in that it reflected the thinking of the time that was one of a romantic understanding of nature, a nostalgia for nature and a kind of new idea that nature is healing. That it would be a place for Boston citizens to come and leave the better for it, because of being in nature, because of reading the monuments and the inscriptions on the monuments, and a walking in a place that commemorated the people that had gone before us. It's the same thing that visitors do today. They come and walk and learn the history and look at the trees and look at the birds and leave better for it. I think it's a very important designed landscape. It's the first landscape of its kind in this country, the largest space design landscape open to the public in North America that was designed specifically to look natural, to enhance the natural features of the landscape. It's a National Historic Landmark because of its landscape, but you forget that when you're walking through the landscape. It's such a place of beauty, of memory. It's a sacred landscape that's always had a little bit of tension because of the sacred aspect of it, where people are being buried and remembered, and then the pleasure ground aspect, where people really enjoy walking along the paths and carriage avenues today. It was inspired by Père Lachaise Cemetery that was founded in 1804 as well as English picturesque landscape gardening. And also it was inspired by the books, the literature and the artwork of the time that that's kind of predated the actual landscape, which is also very interesting to think about, especially when you're working in collections, because if you have, as I know, you have at the Historical Society Memento Mori and drawings and embroideries and artwork of all kinds that represent, you know, an urn and the willow tree, that kind of romantic notion that was very, very significantly different from the Puritan idea of a burial ground as being purely functional, not a place that you would want to visit. That's another important thing about Mount Auburn. It was actually created for visitors to come. In fact, the rural cemetery movement is what was started by Mount Auburn. There were other rural cemeteries all over the world by different cultures, but in America, it was really the beginning of a movement, of monument building, of cemetery building, and of a new art form, too, of sculpture that's an untold story really mount Auburn's role in the proliferation

of sculpture in the city of Boston, and really providing the bread and butter for the new interest in sculpture and in Boston.

**Cassie Cloutier** 22:56

Could you tell us more about some notable figures that are buried at the cemetery or notable burial sites?

**Meg Winslow** 23:04

There are more than 200,000 individuals buried and remembered at Mount Auburn, people from all walks of life and from all over the world. And some of the names you may be familiar with are Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the popular 19th century poet, Buckminster Fuller, the innovator and engineer of the Geodesic dome, Fannie Farmer, who's known for her cookbook, Joyce Chen, who was an entrepreneur and restaurateur, Margaret Fuller, the extraordinary Transcendentalist and editor Friend of [Ralph Waldo] Emerson, Harriet Jacobs, who wrote Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and lived here in the Cambridge area, Julia Ward Howe, who wrote Battle Hymn of the Republic, Dorothea Dix, who did incredible work here and as a reformer, Dr. Harriot Hunt, who is one of the first female practicing physicians. You know, there are Supreme Court justices, there are civil war nurses, there are really remarkable people buried here, and all of them mean something to someone, and all of their monuments means something to someone.

**Meg Winslow** 24:26

I'm sure you know, I have many friends who are buried here. One thing I think it's important to know is that everyone, no matter what their faith is or what their race is, is able to be buried at Mount Auburn, and that was the case from the beginning. The first deeds represent blacksmiths and paper hangers, gentlemen, gentlewomen, lawyers, seamstresses the whole range of Boston, and so you'll see, you'll see every kind of individual here, and every individual reflecting the community that surrounds the cemetery because you can track, you know, an influx of different types of cultures and different types of people, and they're not separated in any section, like veterans, there's not a veterans section at Mount Auburn but veterans are buried throughout the cemetery. There's not a black section. Black Americans are buried throughout the cemetery. So, you'll see that when you visit other cemeteries across the country. I think that's something interesting about Mount Auburn that was a little like real estate. You could just choose to be buried in a single grave or in a large, 300 square foot lot, depending on your economic standing. If you didn't have the means to be buried at Mount Auburn, there were many charitable institutions that would buy a lot and provide burials for people who didn't have the means to be buried. One example of that is the Scots Charitable Society, which is the oldest charitable society in the United States and in they bought a lot, and they're more than 250 people buried in that lot who didn't otherwise have the means to be buried at Mount Auburn. If you walk around the newer area, you'll see many Armenian burials and different burials. There's even a Confederate burial here at Mount Auburn. You'll see more variety as you enter the more contemporary areas. When you go to a cemetery, usually right at the front entrance



is the oldest area, and when you go back and out further, those are the newer areas, and they often reveal very different demographics.

**Cassie Cloutier** 27:06

On October 30, joined by several members of the MHS staff, we met Meg at the cemetery to open the Winthrop tomb.

**Meg Winslow** 27:14

You know, we always have to be careful, because if a tomb hasn't been opened in many years, you know, you're not sure what you'll find when you open the tomb. And it's in really beautiful condition.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 27:27

It is!

**Meg Winslow** 27:28

So, we'll be able to hopefully get some good sound as we put the key in, the door in and [Meg makes key turning noises].

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 27:34

Okay!

**Meg Winslow** 27:34

Push it open.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 27:35

And is there a logbook or you can tell how when it was last open, you have to like sign in every time you open a tomb?

**Meg Winslow** 27:41

No, no. We don't keep a log of that. We do have some stories. Sometimes the people on staff who do work in the tombs might leave a little penny or something behind as a gift because a tomb may not be open for several 100 years again, depending on the family.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 28:00

We were thinking about, we were considering that what to potentially to leave as a time capsule.

**Meg Winslow** 28:04

Exactly, anytime a family erected a tomb here at Mount Auburn, they would be given the key so you could come and open the open the tomb. Many of the tombs have stained glass or a place to sit, or a little table. This is a side hill tomb. It's interesting all the different vocabulary in cemeteries. There's a tomb is a general word for all of the building structures that have shelves in them. This is a Hillside tomb because we just see the facade and the rest of the structures built into the side of the hill, and then the Freeland tomb that we see over here, that's a Free-Standing tomb that we call a Mausoleum. So, this is a Hillside tomb. A lot of the Hillside tombs have water infiltration, and so the some of the earliest were just buried back into the ground because they weren't well built. But this one is really exceptionally well built. It was designed by George Snell of Snell and Gregerson 110 Tremont Street, and it's on a very early lot. It was purchased by Robert Winthrop in December of 1854, before there were tombs like this installed at the cemetery. So, there are seven people in the tomb, his child, his wife and we also have a blueprint that shows the plan of the tomb, which shows that there are two chambers, a front passageway and then a hermetically sealed chamber in the back. How about that? Take a look at this. So, it's built deep into the hillside here.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 29:53

We have a question. This is Victoria.

**Meg Winslow** 29:55

Hi Victoria!

**Victoria McKay** 29:56

Hi! Nice to meet you.

**Meg Winslow** 29:56

Nice to meet you also.

**Victoria McKay** 29:59

Is there room for others?

**Meg Winslow** 30:00

There is yes, there is. So, if you're a direct descendant, if your issue, it actually, it depends on what the original proprietor stipulates. So, if Robert C. Winthrop says, all my family members can be buried here, and there's been no change since that directive, if you're direct issue, you could be buried in the tomb. If there's something that says, instead, you know, just my children, that's it, or if it's passed to the corporation in trust, then Mount Auburn carries

out that care according to the family wishes. So, you have to really look at the records to see what can happen with the tomb. So let me introduce you to Greg. Greg and our preservation staff are here to help us open the door. Greg is the keeper of the key and Peter Drummey may have...

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 30:55

Well actually Hannah is the reason we're doing this, because Hannah's the one who came to us with the idea, because she found the key in the collection.

**Hannah Elder** 31:05

Yes, I love Mount Auburn. It's one of my favorite places. And every time I'm here, I think about all of the connections with our collection. I always see names that I recognize, and I think of them as my history friends. And I was so excited to find this key and knowing that it came to the tomb of the Winthrop's, some of our very special history friends. It made it extra exciting for me.

**Meg Winslow** 31:26

It's very exciting to see this key in your hands with that with the tag and the beautiful ink.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 31:32

Is that Clara Bowdoin Winthrop's handwriting?

**Hannah Elder** 31:34

No, it's Robert C. Winthrop two junior's handwriting. Clara gave us the key, but her father had made the tag before that.

**Meg Winslow** 31:44

So that would make sense. It would be the son.

**Hannah Elder** 31:46

Yes.

**Meg Winslow** 31:47

And then we have a key that looks very similar.

**Hannah Elder** 31:54

Yeah, yours has maybe some more patina to it. It's touched more often.

**Meg Winslow** 31:59

It actually looks finer. It has a darker patina, and it has this beautiful cut out.

**Greg Ghazil** 32:06

The edges on your key seem to be crisper and obviously from less use. But the interesting thing about this tomb door is it actually has two key holes.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 32:19

I was wondering if you needed to turn both of them at the same time.

**Greg Ghazil** 32:22

Well, when I was first fiddling with it, I could get the locks to work, but I couldn't remove any the key. So, for a while, I thought that you needed both keys like a safety deposit box, but I ended up getting one lock to actually release the key while open, so I was able to open it with just the one key, but I still wasn't able to get the key out of the other side. So, one key has to stay in it at this point in order to open it.

**Hannah Elder** 32:22

Might it be easier with two keys?

**Greg Ghazil** 32:24

It might be easier with two keys, keeping one key in there means you won't lose it.

**Meg Winslow** 32:28

Why do you say we try both keys?

**Greg Ghazil** 33:01

It's up to them. They want to try it. What keys are for, right?

**Hannah Elder** 33:04

Yeah!

**Meg Winslow** 33:06

They are precious items in our collections, but they're also functional.

**Greg Ghazil** 33:09

I'm gonna call over one of my folks here, Julia. We have Julia Yoder, Preservationist here at Mount Auburn cemetery, is gonna help me unlock this door. This isn't it's more of a panel than a door, because it doesn't swing. It just is inset in a sort of a groove here on the bottom and locks this way and that way. And the keys kind of move on to the inside. They work opposite of each other. So, do you want to try the key?

**Hannah Elder** 33:40

Yeah!

**Greg Ghazil** 33:42

Alright here we go and then Julie and I will...

**Hannah Elder** 33:44

So, I should be turning it...

**Greg Ghazil** 33:45

You should be turning it this way.

**Hannah Elder** 33:47

Okay.

**Greg Ghazil** 33:54

[Sounds of opening the door] Mine's done.

**Hannah Elder** 34:00

There it goes.

**Greg Ghazil** 34:02

Keep going. Oh, actually, you're done. You're free. So that's see. I was able to move this key and take it out. That key is stuck in that position. And then I was able to do it in there. I'll take this one, I will leave that one in.

**Hannah Elder** 34:17

Okay, we'll leave the MHS key in the door.

**Greg Ghazil** 34:24

Pulls back sort of, there's the top and then we pull it out.

**Meg Winslow** 34:30

[Sounds of removing the tomb door] Heavy, heavy bronze door. Wow. It's not a swing. There are no hinges. It just lifts off.

**Greg Ghazil** 34:48

It's exactly the way we found it about two weeks ago. We haven't been in here, in this tomb very much. It doesn't have any inside perpetual care.

**Meg Winslow** 35:02

It's a beautifully built tomb.

**Hannah Elder** 35:06

Okay, I can hold the mic. Okay, so I'm gonna go into the tomb. There's a little door. Walking down through the arch bricked doorway. It's totally dark in here. It's just some sun coming in a little bit from the doorway, but I can see there's one metal cup in here, and I can see a gold urn. I imagine that's Clara. Hi, Clara.

**Meg Winslow** 35:48

And this is the door that we were talking about that's hermetically sealed that has another chamber beyond it, but it's been bricked up.

**Hannah Elder** 35:56

Okay so there's another door sealed, bricked up.

**Meg Winslow** 36:04

And this is a beautiful this is a metal casket [Sound of Meg tapping on the casket] and a beautiful patina. Look at all these hinges to lift off the to lift off the lid. But we don't, there's not a name here, so we're not sure exactly who this is, but it looks quite old. Some bronze color on it.

**Hannah Elder** 36:29

We have two family members in here, and then the rest must be in that second chamber.

**Meg Winslow** 36:35

And we've walked down five brick steps, and what a beautiful, vaulted room that's all lined with brick, finely, finely made beautifully pointed brick that's in incredible condition for not having been open, open for many years.

**Hannah Elder** 36:55

It's a beautiful space, very simple but...

**Meg Winslow** 36:59

High ceiling.

**Hannah Elder** 37:00

Yeah, and very well done.

**Meg Winslow** 37:02

Six, seven, eight, nine feet high, maybe, and eight feet wide.

**Hannah Elder** 37:12

I can see where there seem to be kind of spaces along this wall here. Do you think those are kind of reserved for maybe future folks?

**Meg Winslow** 37:24

It looks like that's for future planning, and they're just a few spider webs there on the steps.

**Hannah Elder** 37:33

Yeah, it's not, not creepy at all. At least I don't find it creepy. It's kind of a comforting space, I think.

**Meg Winslow** 37:44

Which makes sense for Mount Auburn.

**Hannah Elder** 37:46

Yes!

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 37:53

So, what did you think of going into his tomb?

**Peter Drummey** 37:56

I've thought about this, and I don't want to be disrespectful of the idea for it and of course, the cemetery itself and its totality is a wonderful kind of place to go, this sort of quiet, green, beautiful place, very close to built up Boston as sort of a place apart. It is a really wonderful example of serving the purpose of its intentions. That is the Winthrop tomb itself. But the greater cemetery has a wonderful attachment to its original plan and idea. I think, I mean, the tomb is, in some respects, a facade. It's this very handsome, very 19th century sort of idea of built into a hillside. You're seeing this presentation of it with this wonderful hollow so it can be more easily moved door. But this presentation of it with its sort of essentially street number imprinted on it. I think 2408 if I remember correctly. But in any case, it's like this, it's almost an architectural statement in its presentation, and then the interior of it, it was interesting to talk to people who are familiar, who see more mausoleums and tombs altogether, is that this connection of the family to it, which is clearly very important for members' descendants, is maybe less specifically connected in this case, that is this family Winthrop family is very large and extended, but the the people the immediate family buried there are relatively limited number of descendants, and including several descendants who were never married or had no children or married with their other relatives elsewhere. So, it seemed to me, the intention of having something that might carry forward over generations, and the long life of a granddaughter has made it carry over generations, but it's sort of overbuilt for what I think its original purpose was to encompass generations of descendants, many descendants. So, it seemed like maybe a lonelier place. It's hard to say talk about a tomb and not talk about as being a lonely place. But I was struck by that aspect of it. At the same time, I have to say, it was wonderful in having opening a tomb and finding it to be, perhaps different than you would imagine it to be sacred, but functional, you know, in that sort of sense, and something that had a connection to a much deeper past, as well as its modern presentation.

**Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai** 41:05

So, Hannah, we are back from our excursion and the culmination of this journey you set us on by proposing the idea for this episode. You've had a little bit of time to reflect on your experiences of going into the tomb. What did you think?

**Hannah Elder** 41:24

It was incredible to be able to encounter the Winthrop tomb, and to be able to be a part of the opening of it. I got to put the MHS key into the door and then turn it, and it felt like a momentous occasion. You know, there was a big crowd of us there, and actually entering into the tomb, it made me feel comforted that our history friends, to quote myself, from last time our history friends are being taken care of in that way. You know their space is clean. It's it was surprisingly clean. Hardly any leaves in there, hardly any bugs or spider webs or anything. It was a very calm space, and I felt reassured that the Winthrop family, their physical remains were being stewarded as well as their intellectual



remains were here at the MHS. It was a thrill, and I'm so glad I got to do it. Now I want to go into every tomb at Mount Auburn. It was such a cool experience!

**Cassie Cloutier** 42:42

[Outro music fades in] To look at the items discussed in today's episode, visit our show website at [www.masshist.org/podcast](http://www.masshist.org/podcast). The Object of History was produced by the research department at the Massachusetts Historical Society. We would like to thank Meg Winslow, Senior Curator of Historical Collections and Archives at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Hannah Elder, Associate Reference Librarian for Rights and Reproductions, Peter Drummey, Chief Historian and Sam Hurwitz, Podcast Producer at the MHS. Music in this episode is by Ketsa Music and Chad Crouch. See our show notes for details. Thank you for listening, and please rate, review and subscribe to both the MHS produced shows wherever you listen to podcasts.