

Cemeteries : Markers, Medallions and Icons for Genealogical Research

Grayce Moorehead, MILS, Mohr Library / 2020.08-09

I am really quite surprised that our parents and/ or grandparents were not more motivated to express to members of the family the cultural and ancestral heritage that we as students of genealogy are so interested in today. Why did they not pass along the genealogy of our ancestors? I could only speculate on an answer. When I was growing up, I suspect that each of my Grandparents left Europe for something better, perhaps because of economic downturns? hopes for freedom? that being in America they would realize a better life? What do you think?



Vital Records such as **Death Certificates** can reveal additional family names, circumstance of accident or type of illness. Lots of relevant facts can be extracted from an **Obituary** such as first and last names of children and other relatives along with former employment or organizations and married names. **Newspapers** offer other clues.

Cemeteries may hint at more details beyond the little we may know as only our grandparents' country of origin. Looking for symbols on gravestones or how a stone is designed may tell us more. And don't forget to look for graves that are close-by to your relatives. This handout speaks to those details.

More Closely related Topics:

Stone Carving ♦ Stones for Gravestones ♦ Funerals ♦ Eulogies ♦ Death Certificates ♦ Obituaries ♦ Cemetery Maintenance ♦ Preservation of Gravestones ♦ Pet Cemeteries ♦ Cemetery Rules ♦ Style of gravestones: 21st Century Designs – photos of the loved one and QR codes ♦

Important Websites:

★ GRAVE SYMBOLS: Abbreviations on Gravestones

URL: http://www.olivetreegenealogy.com/misc/grave_symbols.shtml

From Olive Tree Genealogy, try to ignore the ads because this list looks really good, bearing in mind that the meaning of symbols can vary with time or different sources.

★ GRAVEN IMAGES: Gravestone Motifs & Their Meanings

URL: <http://www.olivetreegenealogy.com/misc/grave.shtml>

From Olive Tree Genealogy, try to ignore the ads. A good list.

★ Memorial Symbolism

URL: <https://stolzmemorials.designmarthosting.com/index.php/memorial-symbolism>

This list is from the L.W. Stolz Memorial Company in Texas, and who should know better? Also includes fascinating information on granite colors, and the carving techniques.



Selecting a tombstone is usually a monumental task.
~ unknown

Further Detailed Information:

★ Association for Gravestone Studies

URL: <https://www.gravestonestudies.org>

★ Grave Exclamations: An Analysis of Tombstones and Their Use as Narrative of Self

This is a 2012 Master's Thesis by Lacey Jae Ritter at the University of Minnesota that I came upon. It is lengthy (142 pages) but I found the ideas compelling. The premise is that gravesites offer the bereaved or the interred a last way to show their personality. Lots of examples with icons.

Make a request and I will send it along.

Note:

This handout does not presume to cover all the iconography found on a gravestone. There is so much more!

Cemeteries (more):

"She glanced around at the tombstones. "You're surrounded by death here. Way too depressing. You really might want to think about getting another job."

"You see death and sadness in these sunken patches of dirt, I see lives lived fully and the good deeds of past generations influencing the future ones."

~ David Baldacci, [The Collectors](#)



Some Helpful Videos

These videos are all quite short and give a glimpse into the iconography and symbols that can be found in cemeteries. Remember, symbols can change their meanings.

★ Headstone Designs, Symbols, Cherubs, Iconography Found in Cemeteries

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzJJUBPvUcY>

Connie Knox introduces us to Eric Kozen Superintendent of Oakdale Cemetery that was begun in 1855 Wilmington, North Carolina. Kozen gives an energetic running story about the various symbols on these old gravestones and the gravestones themselves. (about 20 minutes)

★ 7 Popular Symbols on Jewish Headstones

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7-acCXJlGE>

Jewish Genealogy Society of Long Island – www.jgsl.org (less than 4 minutes)

★ Gravestone Epitaphs & Iconography: Part 1, 2 and 3

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtxHEPJanvE>

Burial Hill in Plymouth dates back to the 1600's. A look at a cemetery that is close by in New England that you could even take a road trip to – after you watch the 3 videos. Dr. Anne Mason, PAS Executive Director, Plymouth Antiquarian Society gives concise chats. (each part varies from 6 to 9 minutes)

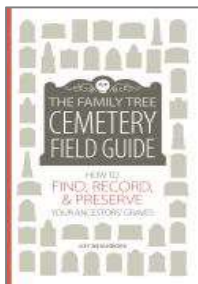
★ Funny And Creative Tombstones That Actually Exist

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sClg-ivSGNo&t=257s>

You won't learn a lot from this amusing video – and the music is annoying, but seeing how some people honor (?) their relatives is eye-opening and the variety of stones is astounding. (less than 10 minutes)

Hmmm...
If you try to look up
gravestones in Ocean
State Libraries Catalog
(OSL) you will be
re-directed
to the words --
"Sepulchral monuments"

Some Books



The Family Tree cemetery field guide : how to find, record, & preserve your ancestors' graves
by Joy Neighbors

This book covers just about any and every thing you might want to ask about cemeteries and graves. We own it at Mohr Library, so ask.



Understanding cemetery symbols : a field guide for historic graveyards by Tui Snider

Tui Snider helps history buffs, genealogists, and other curiosity seekers decode the forgotten meanings of the symbols our ancestors placed on their headstones so that the meaning behind the architecture, acronyms, & symbols found in America's burial grounds can be understood.

Gravestone or Tombstone?

Frankly, I am not really sure. Several dictionaries I checked used the two terms interchangeably, whereas an unidentified source noted that tombstone formerly referred to the lid of a stone coffin or the stone coffin itself and gravestone as being the stone slab over a grave. Is it a case of living language and changing definitions?

