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Biographies in stone: Gravestone iconography, symbolism and epitaphs in the American southwest

Deborah Ann Cogan

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BIOGRAPHIES IN STONE: GRAVESTONE ICONOGRAPHY,

SYMBOLISM AND EPITAPHS IN THE

AMERICAN SOUTHEAST

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A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

Social Sciences

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by

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Approved by:

Dr. Russell Barber, Chair, Anthropology   Date   May 13, 2013

Dr. Thomas Long, History

ABSTRACT

Can gravestone markers truly depict the whole some of a person's life through icons, symbols and epitaphs? My research focus incorporated a series of photographs taken on cemetery sites, census records, death cards and epitaphs of the 18th and 19th centuries. This data was then deciphered to reveal the possible biographies of the deceased individuals in the Southeast sample study groups. I used the information on the epitaphs, the various symbols and iconographic images correlated with city and county public records to support my thesis. My research turned out to be a much more difficult task than originally anticipated, due to the expanse of the American Southeastern territory to cover. Therefore, I narrowed my research area to Charleston, South Carolina and Savannah, Georgia due to their rich abundance of 18th and 19th century cemeteries, public records and historical societies. Unfortunately, due to the passage of time and the loss of information regarding the exact meaning of certain iconographic images and symbols, today's gravestone scholars often find it difficult to properly interpret these artistic/cultural designs. However, if you carefully analyze the icons and symbols for their true intended meaning in relationship to

their epitaphs you will find that they do convey the sum of the individual's life. I found that in almost every instance this proved to be true. Researchers should keep in mind that cemeteries were created to be sacred sites and should be preserved and respected as monuments to our heritage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

And lastly my gratitude is given whole-heartedly to my Southern friends and neighbors who are fiercely private and proud, but took me into their fold.

In the end I hope my eternal resting place will tell my story. Possibly with a trowel, camera, pen and paper crafted in stone above my head with the epitaph "To be treated read pieces of her thesis, for she who lies here beneath this stone worked her fingers to the bone, gathering knowledge and seeking the truth of those who were born and died before her."

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INTRODUCTION

Can gravestone markers truly depict the whole sum of a

person's life? Through a series of photographs taken on

site, my intention will be to decipher these grave markers.

I will attempt to reveal the biographies of the deceased

individuals, using only the dates of birth, death, various

symbols, iconographic images and epitaphs found on the

surface of the markers. In other words, I will attempt to

determine what social and/or cultural roles these

individuals played in life and how they interacted with

their specific environments.

In general terms, some gravestone markers exhibit an

entire range of iconographic images, symbols and epitaphs

allowing the viewer to decipher information about the

deceased. In contrast, some gravestone markers that only

exhibit information about the deceased in the simplistic

form of a name, date of birth and death and perhaps a short

epitaph like "May He Rest In Peace" or the familiar Latin

phrase "In Pace Requiescat," other markers provide

iconography, symbols and epitaphs which express more deeper

meaning. For example, in ancient Egypt, one can readily

find very elaborately engraved tombs covered with

hieroglyphic paintings which relate the entire life history

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of the deceased, while in Europe, gravestone markers
exhibiting the familiar death's head or dancing skeleton
are scattered everywhere as reminders of the all-consuming
power of death over mortal man and the futility of his
efforts to conquer it.

But it was not until the Victorian era during the
reign of Queen Victoria in Great Britain that "exceedingly
elaborate gravestone commemoratives for the dead"[1] appeared
on the landscape. It was a trait that eventually made its
way to the American colonies and became so prolific that
they can now be found in virtually every cemetery,
especially those located along the Eastern Seaboard and in
the Deep South.

Unfortunately, due to the passage of time and the
loss of information regarding the exact meaning of certain
iconographic images and symbols, today's gravestone
scholars often find it difficult to properly interpret
these artistic/cultural designs. As James Deetz, writing
in *Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture*
points out, understanding "the historical, cultural and
social significance of gravestone markers," especially in

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[1] Deborah Hacker, *Iconography of Death: Common Symbolism of Late 18th-20th Century Tombstones in the Southeastern United States.* (Columbia, SC: Chicora Foundation, 2001),56.

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archeological terms, "provides the scholar with important insights into how people of the past lived, worked, loved, hated and died" and offers clues concerning "the expansive heritage of a very diverse American society" during the years of the 19th century.[2]

Approach Methods

My first approach in conducting this research project was to visit several private, church, and public cemeteries in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee and Virginia. Due to the extensive geographical area of original research I narrowed my concentration to Georgia and South Carolina. Georgia and South Carolina are rich in many 18th and 19th century research resources such as local courthouses, public census records, death cards, numerous historical societies, Daughters of the Confederacy, libraries, universities, churches and the cemeteries themselves.

Hundreds of individual photographs of icons and epitaphs were taken from three or more cemeteries respectfully in the cities of Savannah, Georgia and

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[2] James Deetz, *Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture.* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 154.

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Charleston, South Carolina. Each kept sample was logged in regards to their location within the cemetery, what type of stone the marker was made from, condition of the marker, how many individuals in the grave, if any religious or ethnic affiliation of the cemetery were known. Special attention was given to the dates of births and deaths. Only graves of individuals interred within the 18th and 19th centuries were used as samples (with a few exceptions to show a Southern reluctance to funerary change). This was mainly due to the fact after the 19TH century I found that many grave markers took on a less personalized form and tended to be mass produced with inscriptions of name and dates only.

Samples were then divided and categorized first by cemetery and then location within the cemetery. The location was critical because it often identified ethnic, religious and social status. With each burial a short written summary of what I believed the icons along with their epitaph reflected about each individual. The photographs were then divided once again to produce material for a blind sample. This was done by shuffling the photos like a deck of playing cards. They were then dispersed face down on the library table. My research

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assistant randomly selected 50 photographs. Those chosen for the blind study were then crossed referenced against death cards, census records, historic newspapers and city directories to prove or disprove my hypothesis.

Hours were spent fishing through courthouse death records, church recordings of births, deaths and baptisms. The city libraries proved to be one of the most beneficial and rewarding places to do research. Enormous amounts of microfiche period newspapers, microfiche census records as well as death cards were at my disposal. Prior to this research I had no personal knowledge of what a death card was. These are similar to a 3x5 index card in size. They contain the name, race, gender, place of residence, age, occupation, birth/death dates, cause of death (disease), who attended the death and place of interment. These cards even indicated if the person was a slave or not.
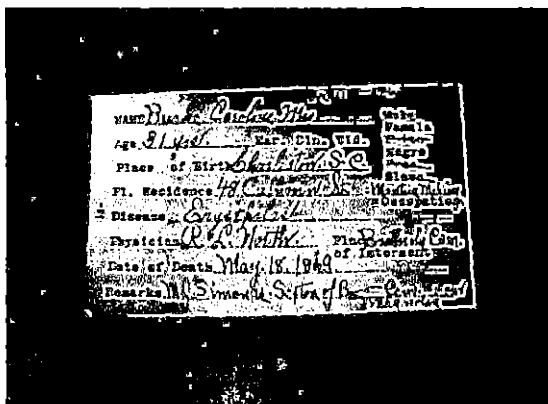
Figure 1: Photo by Researcher: Death Card/City Directory:
Charleston County Library[3]

With the completion of cross referencing the blind

study photographs and the above mentioned documents was how

I determined my impact of Methodology. In addition to the

blind study I focused on and analyzed the remaining

photographs in greater detail to determine if any gave

iconic or written word which could in itself be a

determinate of the individual's personal, social or family

background. Findings from each state's cemeteries were

then again cross-analyzed to determine if there was a

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[3] Photo by Researcher: Death Card/City Directory: Charleston County
Library.

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regional difference in the same time frame of reference.

(See graphs in Findings)

Figure 2: Photo by Researcher: Census Record: Charleston County Library[4]

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[4] Photo by Researcher: Census Record: Charleston County Library.

CHAPTER ONE

A HISTORY OF AMERICAN GRAVESTONE ARCHEOLOGY

Much like any other archeological pursuit, whether
excavating an ancient city such as Pompeii or Herculaneum
or removing the remains of Native American Indians from
burial sites in the American Southwest for relocation,
understanding and interpreting the iconography, symbolism
and epitaphs found on gravestone markers located in
cemeteries and graveyards throughout the United States
requires a keen eye, great patience, and physical stamina.
Another key asset for analyzing gravestone markers is
having a flair for academic research, particularly at
university and museum libraries that specialize in holdings
related to American archeology and all of its various
branches and disciplines.

As a self-described "Gravestone Rambler," William
Thomas Vincent, writing in 1896, provides the following
metaphor in relation to "rambling about the English and
Scottish countryside" in search of gravestones "old and
curious".

"Old lore is an evergreen tree with many branches and
gravestone archeology is but a very young shoot. It is

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part of an old theme, but is itself rather new. Books
abound on tombs and epitaphs, but of the common gravestone,
the quaint and curious, often grotesque, headstones of the
churchyard, there is no record. These grave markers belong
to the past and are hastening to decay . . . thus; it is
much like a duty to preserve the counterfeit presentments
of those which remain."[5]

These "counterfeit presentments" are in essence
nothing more than images or pictures engraved upon the
surface of a stone so as to replace or replicate reality,
i.e., they are "counterfeit" representations designed to
provide information and knowledge to the viewer/observer
deemed as vitally important by the individual "at rest"
under the marker; in other words, the text, symbols and
iconography on a gravestone marker are there simply because
the person "at rest" cannot express himself in any other
way, due to being dead. As an example, Vincent describes
the gravestone for one Andrew Brown in a churchyard in
Newhaven, Sussex, dated 1768, with much allegorical power
and "pronounced character" in the shape of a diabolical
smiling skull, "a reference to the deceased trampling the

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[5] William Thomas Vincent, *In Search of Gravestones Old and Curious.*
(London: Mitchell & Hughes),4.

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King of Terrors beneath his feet" while "confined and skeletoned in his grave."[6] Thus, Mr. Brown, although deceased for more than two hundred and fifty years, has managed to demonstrate his personal feelings to the viewer/observer via "counterfeit presentments."

The history of gravestone archeology in America is a rather new endeavor, for after searching through a myriad of bibliographic information in books, magazines, journals, reference works and on the Internet, there appears to be little scholarly material on the subject, due in part to the iconography, symbolism and epitaphs on old American grave markers being difficult to understand and interpret, even when viewed through the trained eyes of a professional archeologist who then might simply ignore them. In this respect, American amateur gravestone "Ramblers" are far ahead of the professionals, for they have dedicated years of intense study to interpreting and conceptualizing the iconography and symbolism found on grave markers created prior to 1900. As Vincent sees it, gravestone archeology as a branch of study has been "quite neglected" and as of 1896, the simple gravestone of the churchyard "as an object

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[6] Ibid, 5.

of archeological importance has not found its student and is still looking for its historian."[7]

As Deborah Hacker relates, since there are often no clear objectively-based explanations for some of the iconography and symbolism found on American gravestone markers, archeologist and other interested parties must "examine their histories and the culture of the periods to which they belong in order to understand their use on individual stones."[8] This is much in line with what archeologists and teams of skilled specialists perform in the field, such as when unearthing an ancient grave or some type of historical site and discovering that the artifacts are not recognized by any member of the team, thus mandating that they "hit the books" to reveal historical and cultural facts related to the unknown artifacts. Therefore, in its widest sense, the history of American gravestone archeology is in its infancy and it is hoped that a few dedicated individuals will find it necessary to devote their time and energy to deciphering and understanding what Vincent calls the "germ of pictorial and

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[7] Ibid,8.

[8] Hacker,1.

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allegorical gravestones" as they currently exist in the
far-flung reaches of America's cemeteries and churchyards.[9]

For the gravestone scholar, the first area of inquiry
is related to knowing and appreciating two specific
traditions which have been handed down from very ancient
times. The first of these falls into a category known as
memento mori, a Latin phrase loosely translated as
"Remember Death." This phrase emerged from "a particular
set of values that focused on the devaluation of the human
body and the valorization of the human spirit." These
types of markers "discursively and iconographically
encourage viewers to remember death as a way of reminding
the living to prepare for final judgment."[10] The meaning is
that the viewer is forced to face his own mortality and
thus consider the consequences of his actions in relation
to standing before the throne of God in Heaven on Judgment
Day. One prime example of memento mori in the context of
literature appears in Omar Khayyam's classic poem *The
Rubaiyat* of 1120 C.E. in which the poet declares in Stanza
32, "While you live/Drink!--for once dead, you shall never

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[9] Vincent,12.

[10] Vincent,136.

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return."[11] This is implying a demand to celebrate one's life every single moment and to remember that death is final and everlasting.

Memento mori gravestone markers are usually quite modest in physical size and proportions and generally only provide the name, age and date of death of the deceased. Yet, they sometimes also provide information like date of birth, the cause of death and the social status of the deceased individual. In addition, a good number of these types of gravestones exhibit Latin phrases like *Fugit hora* ("Times Flies" or "Hours Flee"). They may also present to the viewer specific icons related to time and death, such as a human skull, a skeleton, an hour glass, or something similar in nature meant to "leave little doubt in the mind of the viewer that he too will someday join the ranks of the dead only to be remembered as a memento of what once was."[12]

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[11] Ibid,137.

[12] Ibid,138.
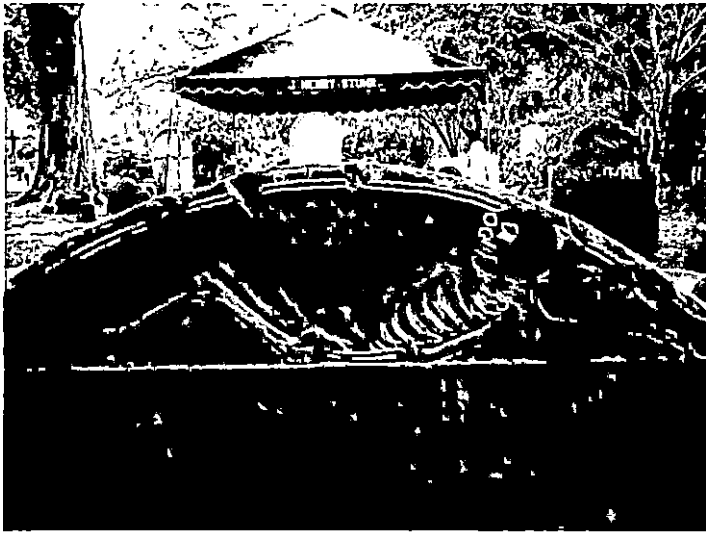
Figure 3: Photo by Researcher: Skeleton[13]

A sub-category of memento mori gravestones came about
during the early years of 18th century America when the
influence of settlers from Europe had just begun to
infiltrate practically every area of society. These
gravestones "identify a specific person as the object of
remembrance or memento and are normally about the same size
and shape of earlier memento mori gravemarkers." But in
contrast, these gravestones "discursively and
iconographically stress the life of the deceased individual
by drawing the attention of the viewer to specific emotions
related to that individual's passing" from life to death.[14]

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[13] Photo by Researcher: Skeleton.

[14] Ibid, 140.

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Upon entering almost any 18th or 19th century cemetery located in the Southeastern portion of the United States, one can immediately find gravestones that reflect the cultural and social values of this sub-category of memento mori. For the most part, these gravestones serve as memorials to the deceased individual and are often beautiful and engaging works of art. They range in size from small markers about the size of traditional headstones to enormous works in marble, granite and limestone or some other type of naturally-occurring igneous, metamorphic or sedimentary rock gleaned from nearby quarries. In addition, these types of grave markers more often than not exhibit iconography and symbols borrowed from various forms of Western art, such as Greek, Roman and Gothic artistic styles, a reflection of European cultural sentiments and preferences.

Also, these types of memento mori gravestones exhibit emotional and/or subjective iconic and symbolic representations associated with an entire range of what Deborah Hacker calls "pathetic sentiments."[15] Some of the most commonly found of these representations include

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[15] Hacker, 214.

animals, such as a dog or cat that served as a faithful

companion to the deceased individual. Other representations

include angelic religious icons, such as an angel with arms

outstretched, reaching to Heaven with a pleading look on

its face; women and children linked to the deceased

individual as in family members and images representative

of the natural world, such as the moon and stars, trees,

clouds and other meteorological images. Under most

conditions, these types of memento mori gravestones, rather

than forcing the viewer to consider the religious

implications of death serves as "a way of expressing and

encouraging the viewer to live life to the fullest."

Additionally, for them, "to consider that all will be left

behind after death regardless of individual subjectivity."[16]

The second and by far the most fascinating and

archeologically informative gravestone tradition next to

memento mori is known as ignoratio mori, another Latin

phrase loosely translated as "Ignore Death" or "Death Is

Not Important." This tradition first appeared in colonial

America sometime around the middle of the 18th century and

can still be found in today's cemeteries and memorial

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[16] Ibid, 215.

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parks. Basically speaking, this form of gravestone, "rather than replicating themes indicative of earlier traditions. . . sets death aside and focuses heavily on the lived accomplishments"[17] of the deceased individual, a form of biography in stone.
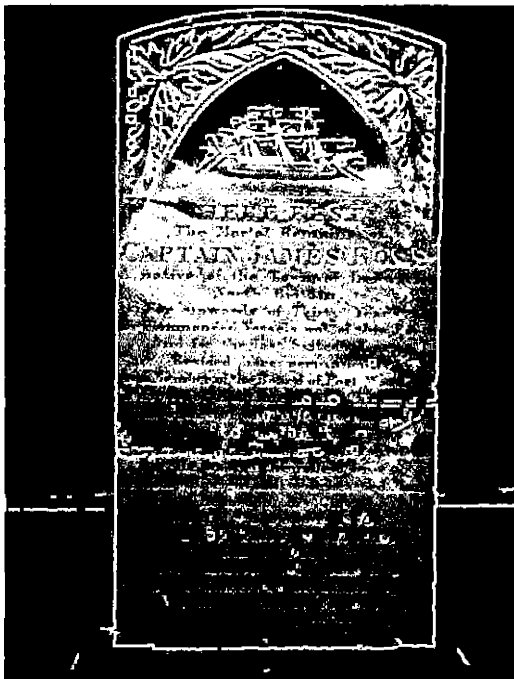
Figure 4: Photo by Researcher: Ship[18]

One of the most important aspects of the ignoratio mori gravestone tradition stresses to the observer the

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[17] Richard Morris, "Gravestones and Other Markers." Encyclopedia of Death & Dying. 2007. Internet. http://www.deathreference.com/Gi-Ho/Gravestones-and-Other-Markers.html.

[18] Photo by Researcher: Ship.

personal achievements, social and cultural standing and

out-of-the ordinary actions of the deceased individual.

Examples such as professional achievements in a particular

field or job-related position, membership in an

organization, or institution like the Masons or some other

religious or political group, or perhaps the role the

deceased played in a particular war or military campaign,

such as the American Civil War.
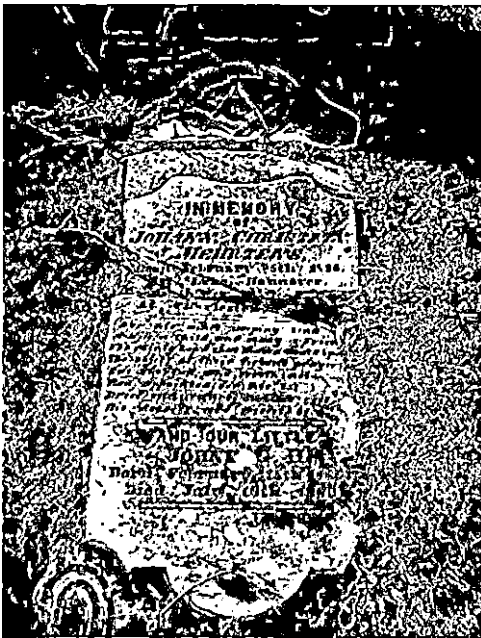
Figure 5: Photo by Researcher: Mason[19]

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[19] Photo by Researcher: Mason.

Not surprisingly, the iconography and symbolism associated with this gravestone tradition is often quite perplexing, especially when attempting to accurately decipher what appears on the marker after perhaps hundreds of years of erosion and human indifference.

According to Douglas Keister, gravestone markers which exhibit iconography and symbolism in the tradition of the ignoratio mori can be described as "stone sentinels,"[20] designed to last for eternity by their makers and by those who commissioned the work for the dear and departed loved one. These "stone sentinels" usually fall into six distinct types, covering virtually every subjective iconic symbol that can be transferred from the mind of the stonecutter and onto the surface plane of a smoothly-polished slab of stone. These include flora (plants and flowers), fauna (animals), the human condition (the seven human virtues, human body parts and worldly symbols), mortality symbols, religious devotion (Christian and Hebrew iconography), "Heavenly Messengers" or angels and symbols and iconography associated with secret societies, clubs and fraternal

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[20] Douglas Keister, *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography.* (MFJ Books, 2004),5.

organizations, such as the Masons or the Knights of Columbus.[21]

It should be pointed out that gravestone markers, much like archeological relics and artifacts, bear witness to the past and very often reveal long-hidden, ephemeral information which can then be used by archeologists, scholars and historians in other related pursuits. Moreover, from a subjective standpoint, ignoratio mori gravestone markers serve as testimonies of the dead and often take the viewer on a journey through time by relating profound and emotionally moving stories based on the lives of those who came before us. These markers also transcend space and time and often conjure up feelings of joy, peace, dread and fear; and more often than not force the viewer to face his own mortality and to deeply consider his own subjective opinions on life, death and the existence of the "hereafter."

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[21] Ibid, 3.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EVOLUTION OF GRAVESTONE MARKERS IN AMERICA

The earliest American gravestone markers with incised and/or raised iconography and symbolism can be found in New England, predominantly along and not too distant from the Eastern Seaboard, and down to the Atlantic coastlines of South Carolina and Georgia, and can be traced back to circa the middle years of the 17th century when British and French colonists were fervently involved in forcing the ideals of "Manifest Destiny" upon the so-called Native American Indian heathens whom the colonists viewed as animals without culture, morals or any common respect for the Christian God.

In the very early days, most gravestone markers were designed and carved by artists that specialized in other trades like stone masonry or perhaps lithography as a printer or plate engraver, but as the population of the United States increased between 1700 and 1750 as a result of European immigration, the trade or craft of making gravestone markers also increased substantially. For instance, a professional stone mason would trade in his trowel for a set of finely-sharpened chisels and take up

gravestone making as a full-time career. Also during this period, "greater pains and finer workmanship was bestowed upon the symbolic figurement of the gravestone" and more elaborate allegorical representations came into vogue and expanded into popular taste and culture.[22] When the Industrial Revolution exploded in the mid-19th century, the craft of gravestone making "became a very important and profitable occupation and allowed professional stonecutters and masons to accept commissioned works of art" that would stand as eternal memorials for those who have passed on and are no more.[23] Many of these new-found funerary artists took apprentices for the expanding demand. Two of the most renowned of these were John Walz and his apprentice Anthonio Aliffi of Savannah, Georgia. Visitors may still appreciate their art today at the Bonaventure and other Savannah cemeteries.

But as the Industrial Revolution progressed into the 20th century, the ability to build complicated machines that could do the work of the stone mason quickly became commonplace; even the art of engraving suffered, for people

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[22] Ibid,13.

[23] Deetz,156.

could purchase gravestones pre-made in factories, and frequently gravestone designs and inscriptions could be chosen from illustrated catalogs or from design examples in the shops of the stonecutters. This, of course, still occurs today, and those who continue to create gravestone markers the "old-fashioned way" are now considered artisans of the highest caliber.[24]

At this point in our discussion, it should be mentioned that the iconography and symbolism found on American gravestone markers created between 1750 and the late 1800's almost always fall within eight specific subject categories as opposed to types of markers, such as the human form, fauna and flora. These categories include the passage of earthly time, the inevitability of death, the resurrection of the soul or afterlife, individual characteristics or religious beliefs, occupation, lineage or membership in an organization and the cause of death.[25]

Gravestone self-appointed scholars may on occasion encounter a gravestone marker with symbols and icons not readily identifiable nor described in a book on gravestone iconography and symbolism, such as *Memorial Symbolism,*

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[24] Hacker, 2.

[25] Ibid, 3.

Epitaphs and Design Types by the American Monument
Association (2001) and *Memorial Art, Ancient and Modern* by
Harry A. Bliss (1912). In this case, one would be advised
to consult other interested researchers or perhaps even the
living relatives of the deceased who may hold the key to
some of the icons and symbols. In a rare situation when
the professional engraver was given permission by the
family of the deceased individual to express his own
artistic inclinations related to meaning, one may never
figure out what certain icons and symbols represent, for
they are figments of the engraver's imagination. In the
end, as Harriett M. Forbes reminds us, "It is important to
remember that the interpretation of gravestone iconography
and symbolism is not an exact science,"[26] much like today's
efforts to decipher genetic flaws in order to find a cure
for specific diseases. Gravestone markers' iconography and
symbolism are only guidelines to understanding a glimpse of
what the deceased was really like as a living person.

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[26] Harriette M. Forbes, *Gravestones of Early New England and the Men Who Made Them, 1653-1800*. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1927),12.

CHAPTER THREE

ICONS AND SYMBOLS

Flora

In the realm of flora, many specific plants and
flowers, from simple grasses to towering trees to the
delicate petals of the rose, serve as iconic reminders to
the viewer of the beauty and simplicity of the natural
world and the brevity of human life, just as a flower
blooms in spring, thrives in the sunshine for a specific
length of time, then closes, bringing an end to yet another
cycle. Flora also stands as symbols of remembrance to the
viewer, a tradition dating back thousands of years to the
ancient Egyptians and Babylonians and beyond. Richard
Bradley, writing in Ritual and Domestic Life in Prehistoric
Europe, maintains that the archeological record is quite
clear related to demonstrating how ancient man during the
Iron Age utilized flowers, for he often "broke them up,
sprinkled them in the grave and then once covered with
soil, sprinkled the top of the grave with more flowers as a
sign of remembrance and dedication to a life lost."[27]

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[27] Richard Bradley, *Ritual and Domestic Life in Prehistoric Europe*. (New York: Routledge & Co., 2005),87.

Some of the species of flora found on gravestone markers include various types of flowering plants, fruits, vines, grains, trees and bushes, often sculpted in beautiful detail and botanically correct in every aspect. On American gravestone markers numerous types of flowers represent qualities inherent to humans. Frequently seen is the Poppy which represents the forgetful and sleepiness of death. The bellflower depicts constancy and gratitude, the calla lily, "majestic beauty and marriage", or as a religious icon for the Virgin Mary, the lily of the valley, "symbolizes innocence, purity and virginity".[28] By far, the most popular flower is the rose which besides its associations with love and romance stands as a Christian symbol for martyrdom and purity and as an icon for "the rose found in Paradise which did not have thorns but acquired them on Earth to remind man of his fall from grace." Not surprisingly, the rose is frequently found adorning the gravestone markers of women, due to "Venus, the Roman goddess of love, claiming the rose as her own."[29]

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[28] Eliza Ann Youmans, *Descriptive Botany: A Practical Guide to the Classification of Flowering Plants.* (New York: Appleton, Century & Crofts, 1952),231.

[29] Keister,54.

Figure 6: Photo by Researcher: Lily[30]

Also found in abundance are various types of trees,

such as the leaves and branches of the majestic oak which

can "symbolize many things, including strength, endurance,

eternity, honor, liberty, hospitality, faith and virtue"[31]

which may account for oak-related icons appearing on the

gravestones of soldiers killed in battle or those who

exhibited much bravery and sacrifice during their lives.

Another type is the olive tree or branch which may include

the depiction of a dove "With an olive branch in its beak

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[30] Photo by Researcher: Lily.

[31] Ibid, 62.

27

which symbolizes that the soul of the deceased has departed in the peace of God."[32]

The olive branch also signifies "fruitfulness, purification, strength and victory" and may be found on the gravestones of religious figures or persons who devoted their lives to helping the less fortunate among them. In addition, the seed-bearing cone of the pine tree symbolizes hospitality, immortality and the incorruptibility of the human spirit and is often associated with the Greek goddess Aphrodite as a sign of her fertility.[33] One other type is the weeping willow tree which suggests "grief and sorrow," along with Christian immortality. This type of floral icon "was one of the most popular gravestone decorations of the late 18th and early 19th centuries" in America and is also "frequently paired with other cemetery symbols such as lambs and crosses."[34]

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[32] Ibid, 62.

[33] Ibid, 64.

[34] Ibid, 67.

Figure 7: Photo by Researcher: Willow Tree[35]

Fauna

As to types of fauna or animal-related icons (i.e.,
mammals, birds, bats, insects, fish, shellfish, reptiles,
amphibians and mythological creatures), these are also
found in abundance throughout cemeteries in the United
States for a variety of reasons. For example, animals,
whether household pets, animals of the wild or those found
on farms, are the closest living things to human beings and
often possess attributes that humans find especially
appealing. As Keister so aptly puts it, "Whether it
slithers or crawls, trudges or gallops, soars or hovers,
animals are an important part of the symbolism". They can

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[35] Photo by Researcher: Willow Tree.

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be "found on gravestone markers and can serve as religious icons related to immortality, eternity, rebirth and transformation, as well as resurrection."[36]

One of the most common animal icons is the ordinary house cat which in Christian iconography "is a symbol of laziness, lust, darkness" and even the devil. Obviously, if one encounters the image of a cat, either as a solid representation placed upon the top of a gravestone or as an engraving. It can signify that the deceased was an avid cat lover or was considered by his peers as non-productive and indifferent to the travails of life. However, as the cat is often misunderstood for its "supposedly negative attributes of trickery and laziness," cat defenders maintain that these attributes are "actually purposeful feline aberrations for their remarkable in-born powers of cunning and stealth"[37] which in human terms may indicate that the deceased possessed in life uncommon mental prowess and the ability to deceive and manipulate those around him at his leisure.

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[36] Ibid, 69.

[37] Edward Clodd, *Animal and Human Psychology*. (New York: Kessinger Publishing, 2006), 145.

One also finds in abundance icons of dogs which symbolize the human virtues of fidelity, loyalty, vigilance and watchfulness, much like a beloved household pet guarding the entrance to its owner's home or watching over children at play as a protective entity. Although dog icons are almost always portrayed as positive reinforcement for the deceased; they can also symbolize "fierce beasts," such as wolves or "Satan's soul-hunting hounds from Hell" or may simply signify that the deceased was an avid hunter or dog breeder.[38]

In addition to cats and dogs, one may also discover icons of other familiar mammals like lambs, horses, sheep and swine, all of which signify specific human traits or emotions. Lambs could also signify the Christian belief of the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world.

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[38] Keister, 72.

Figure 8: Photo by Researcher: Pigs and Urn[39]

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[39] Photo by Researcher: Pigs and Urn.

Figure 9: Photo by Researcher: Lamb[40]

Perhaps the most majestic and powerful of all these

mammalian icons is the male stag which when found with a

cross attached to its rack of antlers symbolizes the

Christian tale of St. Eustace who was converted to

Christianity from Roman paganism in the 2nd Century A.D.

According to Marilyn Yalom, St. Eustace (a.k.a. Placidus, a

wealthy Roman general) was converted to Christianity upon

meeting a stag in the forest which identified itself as

Jesus Christ in disguise. After being baptized, St. Eustace

was challenged to test his faith which much like the

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[40] Photo by Researcher: Lamb.

biblical Job resulted in his wife being kidnapped and his sons "carried off by wild beasts."[41]

In the end, St. Eustace regained his family and his honor but when he refused to worship the Roman pantheon of gods, he was roasted alive inside a bronze bull. Thus, a cross hanging in the antlers of a stag symbolizes the piety and devotion of St. Eustace. As to the deceased whose gravestone bears this type of iconography, one can assume either a position of religious authority or servitude or perhaps a great devotion to wildlife and hunting, since St. Eustace has long been considered as the patron saint of hunters.

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[41] Marilyn Yalom, *The American Resting Place: 400 Years of History Through Our Cemeteries and Burial Grounds.* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 2008),176.
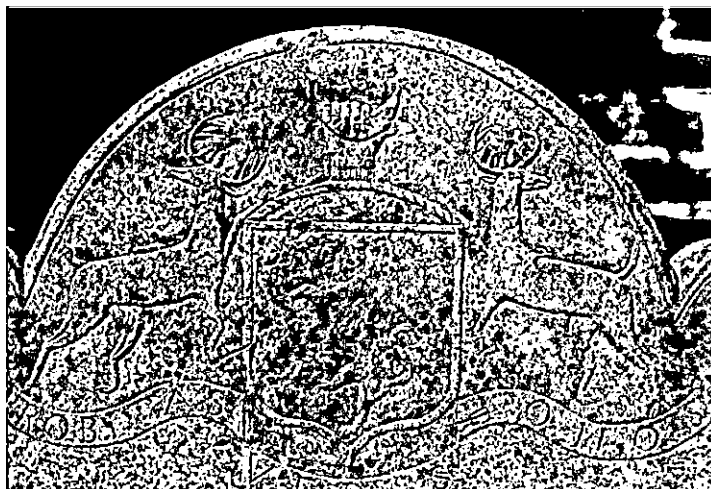
Figure 10: Photo by Researcher: Stag[42]

In regards to avian iconography, the most popular type

found on gravestone markers in the United States is

undoubtedly the eagle, "the quintessential symbol of

America" which as a feature of funerary art symbolizes

"resurrection and rebirth" since it was once thought that

the eagle "from time to time flew into the sun where its

feathers were burned away, then plunged into the water to

be resurrected,"[43] a metaphor similar in context to the

ancient myth of the phoenix which rose from the ashes to be

reborn.

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[42] Photo by Researcher: Stag.

[43] James B. Griffen, *Archeology of the Eastern United States*. (IL: University of Chicago Press, 1964),215.

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This watery renewal has also been compared to baptism, wherein a human is plunged into water and thus given new life. In America, the icon of the eagle as a symbol of strength and endurance often encloses some type of badge or emblem associated with a political movement or organization or perhaps a type of fraternal organization with a narrow banner encircling the outside of the badge or emblem with a Latin phrase inscribed within its borders.

There is also the two-headed eagle icon, the symbol for power and respect, which stands as "one of humankind's oldest emblematic symbols. It dates back to the ancient Hittites of Mesopotamia, and was adopted in the Middle Ages as an emblem for the Crusades," and later as the coat of arms of imperial Russia and Austria. This unusual avian icon with one head pointing to the left and the other to the right also serves as the foundation for a number of heraldic designs from Western and Eastern Europe and was borrowed by the Freemasons circa the 18th century. Besides being a symbol of power and strength,
The two-headed eagle can also signify "the dual nature of unity" with one head representing a major national/international power and the other representing a lesser power, such as Russia and one of its secondary

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holdings.[44] Some double-headed eagle icons portray the bird itself clutching a bar or flagpole in its talons upon which is draped a banner inscribed with a Latin phrase.

With reptilian iconography, the most dominant American type is the snake or serpent, especially on gravestone markers made in the late 18th and through most of the 19th centuries. The motifs related to snake iconography are quite substantial, but the most familiar ones found in the United States depicts a snake biting its tail which stands as a symbol of immortality, whereby the snake forms a loop or some other kind of ovoid shape. Of course, snakes can also be found "slithering around the edges of a tombstone or winding their way through a human skull,"[45] a subjective design by the engraver indicating the mortality of man or in some instances as a sign of the cold-bloodedness of the deceased.

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[44] George Kenning, *Kenning's Masonic Encyclopedia and Handbook of Masonic Archeology, History and Biography.* (New York: Kessinger Publishing Co., 2003),423.

[45] Hacker,186.
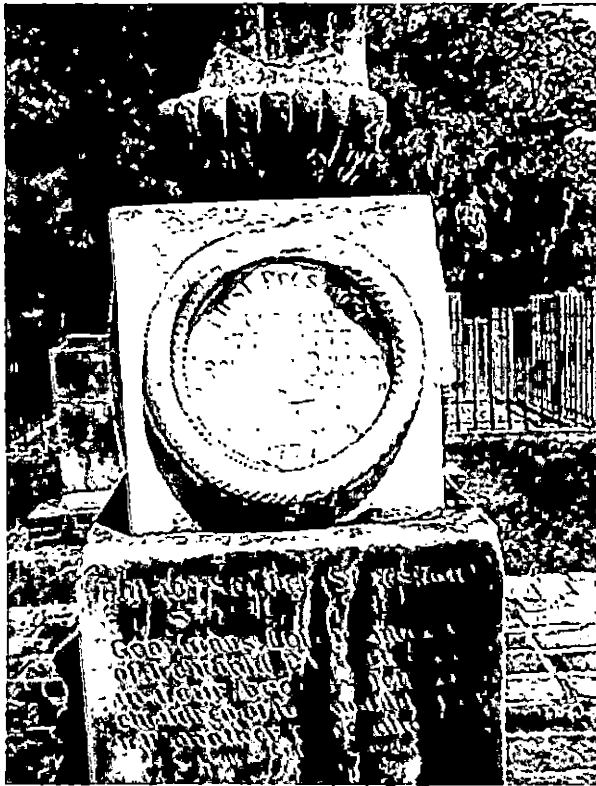
Figure 11: Photo by Researcher: Snake[46]

Psychologically, the snake represents the antithesis of man and is seen as repellent and disgusting, partially due to its connections with mans' fall from grace in the biblical Garden of Eden. It should be noted that some snake icons from the very early years of the 19th century are coiled with the head pointing upwards and the forked tongue clearly visible, a symbol of the old slogan "Don't tread on me," which can be found on gravestone markers of men that

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[46] Photo by Researcher: Snake.

served and died in the Revolutionary War and the War of
1812.

Human Virtues

Certainly, the most emotionally-charged and eye-
appealing gravestone icons and symbols are those associated
with the human body and with what Keister calls the "human
condition,"[47] meaning that specific icons and symbols
represent subjective virtues which human beings regardless
of culture or place of origin cherish above all other
traits, usually based on religious ideologies. There are
basically seven virtues represented by symbols or icons on
American gravestone markers—faith, hope and charity
(theological virtues), temperance, prudence, fortitude and
justice (cardinal or moral virtues), with the first three
almost always found together. It should be pointed out
that gravestones which exhibit these symbols and icons are
mostly full-figured markers, much like a statue in a
contrapposto style reminiscent of Greek and Roman statuary
standing on a short pedestal with the virtue itself carved
on the pedestal; however, one can find gravestone markers

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[47] Keister,101.

with these symbols and icons engraved directly into the
stone.
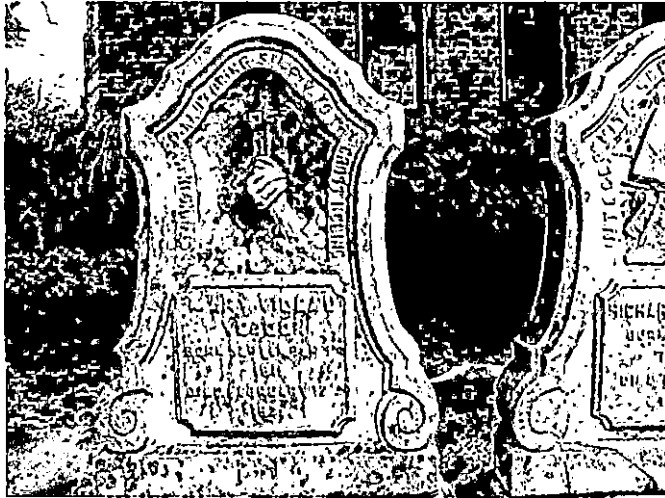
Figure 12: Photo by Researcher: Hands Holding Cross[48]

The virtue of faith is usually depicted by a woman (or
her hands) holding a cross, a candle or some type of
drinking vessel; hope is usually symbolized by a winged
figure or by an anchor, the ancient symbol for hope, or
perhaps by a ship on top of the figure's head; charity is
symbolized by a woman either nursing an infant or in the
process of "revealing a single breast" or perhaps by some
type of flame, torch or candle. Symbols for temperance,
such as a water pitcher "extolling the virtues of clean

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[48] Photo by Researcher: Hands Holding Cross.

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living," a torch or a sheathed sword, can be found on the gravestone markers of prohibitionists and teetotalers or those who refrained from drinking alcohol during their lives for religious reasons.

Prudence, although not usually found on American gravestone markers, is symbolized by a woman gazing into a mirror which instead of representing vanity symbolizes "the wisdom related to the personal quest for self-knowledge and self-understanding." Fortitude is often depicted as a type of female warrior holding a club or some other kind of weapon and wearing a helmet and a shield, an allusion to "certain Greek and Roman goddesses that served as patrons of city-states," and lastly, justice is almost always symbolized by a woman holding the familiar set of balance scales and sometimes blindfolded, an icon more closely associated with American justice or jurisprudence.[49]

Human Body

Regarding human body parts, the most prevalent are the hands and feet with an occasional full-figured human head. In the Deep South in states like Georgia, Alabama, North and South Carolina, the human eye is the most prolific

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[49] Vincent,176.

iconic symbol. The "All Seeing Eye" with rays of light emanating in all directions and is usually found within a triangle. In ancient times, the "All Seeing Eye" stood as the symbol for God's omnificent power or represented the ability of the human eye to radiate good or evil as in the old adage "The Evil Eye."

The human eye when found on gravestone markers usually indicates that the deceased individual was associated with some type of fraternal organization, especially the Masons. In the later years of the 18th century in America, the "All Seeing Eye" which now occupies the reverse of the U.S. one dollar bill, was most closely linked to the Founding Fathers, such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and Alexander Hamilton, all of whom were devoted and life-long Masons.[50]

Along with the human eye, other prevalent body parts are the hands which symbolize a number of subjective traits based upon religious motifs. There are basically three specific hand icons found on gravestone markers in America—first, a hand (usually the right) pointing downwards, emerging from a cloud and open-palmed with the fingers

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[50] Griffen, 225.

together and the thumb resting against the index finger. Between the hand itself and the cloud, one usually finds the end of a sleeve which may represent some type of clothing worn during bedtime or possibly clothing associated with a burial gown.

Biblically speaking, this hand icon symbolizes "the hand or arm of God" with the "presence of the Almighty depicted as a hand emerging from the clouds" of Heaven, sometimes with "three fingers pointing down which represents the Holy Trinity" (i.e., the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost or Spirit). Oftentimes, this hand icon is holding some kind of flower or a broken chain which symbolizes that the deceased has severed his bondage to life through death and is now in the merciful hands of God.[51]

Second, a hand pointing upwards, usually the right, indicates "that the soul of the deceased has risen to Heaven to be with God in eternity." The hand is also open-palmed with either the first two or three fingers bent down on the palm with the index finger pointing up. Obviously, when this type of hand icon is found on a gravestone

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[51] Gordana Babic, *Christian Icons*. (Berlin: I.P. Verlagsgesellschaft, 1998),156.

marker, it shows that the deceased has hopefully gone to Heaven, but if the deceased individual was a member of the clergy, "the hand represents the hand of God, the Manus Dei."[52] Much like the hand pointing downwards, this icon may also symbolize the Holy Trinity and is often enclosed in a circle or an oval with some type of garment sleeve between the hand and the rim of the circle or oval. There is a much less common hand icon, "the Greek form of the Manus Dei, displays the first two fingers and the fourth finger upwards with the third finger bent down upon the palm." This configuration "simulates the Greek letters IC and XC which are contractions for the name of Jesus Christ."[53]

Third, a pair of hands together, clasping one another as in a handshake which symbolizes matrimony, amity or friendship. In the case of matrimony, the sleeves of each hand should be different in some way, either through the shape of the sleeves or the presence of buttons; if the sleeves "appear to be gender neutral, the hands can represent a heavenly welcome or an earthly farewell."[54]

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[52] Keister,108.

[53] Babic,158.

[54] Keister,108.

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Almost always, this type of hand icon appears just below

the inscribed words "Farewell" or just below a banner

proclaiming "Here Lies Our Mother and Father."

Figure 13: Photo by Researcher: Pointing Hand[55]

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[55] Photo by Researcher: Pointing Hand.

Figure 14: Photo by Researcher: Hand From Cloud[56]

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[56] Photo by Researcher: Hand From Cloud.

Figure 15: Photo by Researcher: Hand With Chain[57]

As to internal body parts, the main organ found on American gravestone markers is the human heart which according to Edward Clodd "is the symbol for love, the deepest of all human emotions, and may also symbolize great courage, sorrow and unbounded joy."[58] The vast majority of human heart icons are not anatomically correct, meaning they are formed in the familiar shape of the Valentine's Day heart or something very close to it.

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[57] Photo by Researcher: Hand With Chain.

[58] Clodd, 213.

Figure 16: Photo by Researcher: Hearts[59]

In religious and cemetery iconography, a human heart

that appears to be engulfed in flames represents religious

fervor; a pierced heart indicates repentance and devotion,

while a heart wrapped in thorns is associated with "the

great promise of the Immaculate Heart of Mary,"[60] the mother

of Jesus Christ, which may indicate that the deceased

individual was a devout member of the Roman Catholic

Church, a member of some type of Catholic-sponsored charity

or perhaps a nun. This type of heart icon can also

symbolize "some kind of promise or conversion made at the

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[59] Photo by Researcher: Hearts.

[60] Keister,109.

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hour of a person's death," such as promising "with all of
one's heart to help those in need in Heaven," a conversion
to another religious faith or a conversion from a sinner to
a believer as in being "born again" at the moment of
death.[61]

Human Related Icons and Symbols

In addition to iconography based on the "human
condition" and human body parts, there are also icons which
symbolize things associated with living and working in the
real world as a human being. These are known as worldly
symbols and occupy two distinct categories—things linked to
the constructed realm of man (i.e., things either
manufactured or built) and things from the natural world.

For instance, a cannonball, usually inscribed, may
indicate that the deceased individual was a war veteran. A
ship's anchor, the traditional symbol of hope, may indicate
some type of seafaring career as a ship's captain or a
sailor. A closed book indicates scholarship, a love for
reading or perhaps the Holy Bible or a position as a
librarian or dealer in rare books, or a full life, a.k.a. a
bibliomaniac.

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[61] Babic,176.

Figure 17: Photo by Researcher: Book and Pen[62]

An open book "can be compared to the human heart, its thoughts and feelings open to the world and to God."[63] A closed book with a crown placed on top represents God and the Holy Bible; a crown by itself symbolizes victory, leadership and personal distinction.

A cross placed inside a crown "denotes a member of the York Rite Masons and symbolizes the power and authority to lead or command." An anvil, the sign of the "primordial forging of the Universe," connotes a blacksmith or ironworker. A shepherd's crook with "the end shaped like a semi-circular hook," is often associated with fallen Odd

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[62] Photo by Researcher: Book and Pen.

[63] Keister,113.

Fellows, a widely-known American fraternal organization. A ladder, sometimes referred to as Jacob's ladder, symbolizes "the pathway between Heaven and earth" and may also indicate that the deceased individual was a carpenter or some other type of skilled tradesman.[64]

Figure 18: Photo by Researcher: Anchor[65]

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[64] Richard E. Meyer, ed. *Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1989),215.

[65] Photo by Researcher: Anchor.

As to the natural world outside of living animals, one may find things such as feathers or plumes which due to their "associations with wings and flight symbolize the ascent to Heaven" and represent "the human authority to administer justice and jurisprudence" which may indicate that the deceased individual served as a judge or some other kind of authority figure linked to the law or the court. Feathers are also found on gravestone markers of Native American Indians for obvious reasons. A flame, such as that burning via a torch, "represents eternal life and vigilance, religious fervor and sometimes martyrdom," due to so many Catholic and Christian saints ending up burned at the stake. One of the most popular icons related to the natural world is the star, the symbol "of divine guidance" with a single star "almost always standing as the symbol of the Star of the East," which according to the New Testament guided the Magi to the place of Jesus' birth in the city of Bethlehem. A grouping of twelve stars signifies the biblical Twelve Apostles or the Twelve Tribes of Israel which may indicate that the deceased individual was of Jewish descent, especially when the star is in the familiar shape of the Star of David.[66] Of course, the star has been

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[66] Babic,188.

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utilized as an iconographic symbol for various motifs since the dawn of recorded human history, due to its predominance in the heavens as an astronomical entity. Christians also used the Star of David conjoined with the cross to show the link from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

Figure 19: Photo by Researcher: Star Of David[67]

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[67] Photo by Researcher: Star Of David.
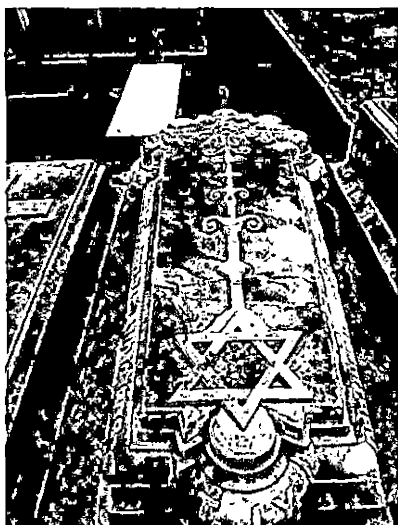
Figure 20: Photo by Researcher: Star Of David/Cross[68]

In some cultures, the star symbolizes the highest attainment possible in human terms, such as becoming the leader of an influential religious movement or perhaps the leader of a nation. A star may also indicate that the deceased was some type of entertainer who reached what we refer to as stardom as in Hollywood; when one finds a star set within a crescent moon, this indicates that the deceased was a member of the Islamic faith, either as a common follower or as a religious figure with substantial earthly powers and influence.

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[68] Photo by Researcher: Star Of David/Cross.

Mortality

In the realm of mortality symbols or those pertaining to death and dying, as a general rule, "the older the gravestone marker, the more literal is its mortality iconography," meaning that on modern-day markers, it is quite unlikely one will find icons like a skull and crossbones, but on American markers dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries, mortality icons crop up quite frequently and to the casual observer are hard reminders "that man's time upon the earth and in the realm of the living is extraordinarily fleeting and brutally short."[69]

Although one may stumble across mortality symbols on American gravestone markers like the image of Father Time, the Grim Reaper with his familiar scythe or an hour glass, symbolizing the passage of time which is generally found on European markers, the most common death-related icon is the death's head or human skull. These tend to vary in size, shape and appearance, depending on when the marker was created, the artistic idiosyncrasies of the carver and the prevailing religious ideologies of the time. Despite the fact that death-related icons are classified as memento

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[69] Morris, Internet.

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mori, the presence of a death's head or human skull on a gravestone frequently reveals a number of biographical details that might otherwise be overlooked, particularly when one finds a marker with an epitaph that reads "Remember, as you pass by, as you are now so once was I. As I am now so must you be. Thus, remember that you too will die as I have."[70]

Generally, there are some eight different death's head icons to be found on American gravestone markers with dates ranging from the time of the Puritans in the mid-17th Century and up to the later years of the 19th century. The earliest is very simple in appearance with an almost formless skull, round holes for orbits and perhaps a single femur bone lying beneath the skull, along with a simple spade or shovel and an inverted hour glass. As time progressed, the death's head icon evolved into a true work of the stone engraver's art and following a somewhat more complex image of a skull with a defined upper jaw and the familiar crossed femur bones beneath it, engravers became more emboldened and added wings to the sides of the skull

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[70] Allan I. Ludwig, *Graven Images: New England Stonecarving and Its Images, 1650-1815.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1966),89.

as a sign that death was fleeting and could come at any moment. Some of these skulls even possess hair and defined eyes which resemble(s) a corpse fresh from the grave.

By the 19th century, the death's head skull took on the form of a living human face with hair, eyes, eyelids, a nose and a mouth with the wings now placed underneath the skull as if conveying the Angel of Death. By the end of the 19th century, the death's head skull took on a new countenance, often referred to as a "soul effigy" which resembles the face of a child with blank eyes or perhaps a winged cherub. Inscriptions also altered as time progressed, beginning with something as simple as "Here Lies the Body Of. . ." followed by the name of the deceased and often "This person lived for awhile and now he's dead." This evolved into, "Sacred to the Memory Of . . . and the often-quoted "Gone But Not Forgotten."[71] Biographically, gravestone markers that feature the death's head skull can tell us a few esoteric things about the deceased individual that lies beneath. For instance, the person in life may not have been much loved, nor admired, or may have been in some cases downright despised or hated.

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[71] Ibid, 92.

Also, the person was possibly of very low social standing
or perhaps a nuisance to the community in which he lived,
thus inviting the death's head icon as a sign of
indifference to his death, or in other words, "He's gone,
so let us forget about him. Fare thee well."[72]

Figure 21: Photo by Researcher: Skull and Bones[73]

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[72] Vincent,256.

[73] Photo by Researcher: Skull and Bones.

Figure 22: Photo by Researcher: Winged Skull[74]

Figure 23: Photo by Researcher: Winged Skull/Bones[75]

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[74] Photo by Researcher: Winged Skull.

[75] Photo by Researcher: Winged Skull/Bones.

Figure 24: Photos by Researcher: Three Cherubs[76]

Religious

As can be deduced from the icons and symbols already

discussed, a large number have some type of connection with

religion with many overwhelmingly religion specific, which

in itself is not surprising, due to death and dying being

virtually inseparable from religious beliefs and practices

and the notion that upon dying, the soul of a human being

either ascends to Heaven or descends into Hell. In America,

most religion specific icons and symbols are linked to

Christianity and Judaism, two of the major world religions

(with Islam being the third) practiced by a majority of the

[76] Photos by Researcher: Three Cherubs.

American population both in the past and in the present day. Also, many if not all of these icons and symbols are not the creations of our modern world, for they date back far into the past with ancient Rome standing as the original source for many of them. Christian icons and symbols come in a variety of shapes and styles and generally reflect either attributes associated with Jesus Christ or the Holy Trinity.

For example, a drinking chalice with wafers, grapes and wheat combined into a single scene "are collectively symbols of the Eucharist," being the last meal shared between Jesus Christ and his disciples at the Last Supper. The application of all of these food-related elements together "is usually restricted to religious orders,"[77] such as the Dominicans and the Franciscan monks. The depiction of a dove "dive-bombing from the heavens with an olive branch or a cross in its beak" symbolizes the Holy Ghost, while a dove "holding the earth in its beak" is a symbol for "the highest degree of the Knights of Columbus," a Catholic fraternal organization which can be found

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[77] Keister,142.

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throughout the United States.[78] There are also a number of
letters associated with the Greek and Roman alphabet, such
as IHS or IHC which are overlaid atop each other and are
similar to a monogram. According to tradition, both of
these sets of letters "are abbreviations for the Latin
phrase *in hoc signo*," but in reality, they signify "the
first three letters of Jesus' name using the Greek
alphabet—Iota, Eta and Sigma. Other letter-based icons
include a combination of the Greek letters IC (Jesus), XC
(Christ) and NIKA ("conquers") which are mostly arranged
into four separate sections surrounding a cross.[79]

Additional Christian icons and symbols include a set
of keys which relates to St. Peter who possessed the
ability to lock and unlock the gates of Heaven, i.e., the
"Keys of the Kingdom;" a lamp, the symbol of wisdom and
piety; a pair of scales which refers to "the weighing of
the souls of the departed," and a wheel, similar to the
spoked wheel of a wagon, a symbol "of the endless force of
divine power" which sometimes is found to be broken, an

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[78] Ibid,143.

[79] Ibid,147.

indication that life's journey, much like a turning wheel that stops, is over.[80]

As to symbols and icons related to Judaism, Hebrew gravestone markers "do not have nearly the vocabulary of symbols as Christian tombstones" and on almost all Jewish tombstones, "the father of the deceased person is always written" on the marker which provides genealogists a step back one generation.[81] Some of the most prevalent symbols and icons related to Jewish gravestone markers include the menorah, a seven-branched candelabra which is often found on the gravestone of a "righteous Hebrew woman," meaning that the deceased led a righteous and pure life and followed the tenets of Judaism "religiously"; the Star of David, a symbol of divine protection and the most well-known of all Jewish symbols, dating back to the 1880's and then used during World War II by Nazi Germany as an identifier of Jews; the yahrtzeit which resembles a candle or a wick floating in an oil-filled basin; the ewer or pitcher which "signifies a Levite, a person according to the Torah who was responsible for cleaning the hands of the Temple priests," and the cohanim, usually represented by

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[80] Babic, 256.

[81] Keister, 153.

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two hands joined together by the thumbs or the forefingers

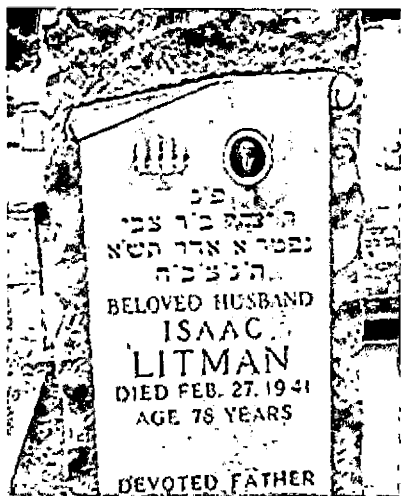and a symbol for a member of the ancient priestly tribe of

Aaron the Levite.[82]

Figure 25: Photo by Researcher: Menorah[83]

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[82] Alfred Rubins, *Jewish Iconography*. (London: Nonpareil Press, 1982),236.
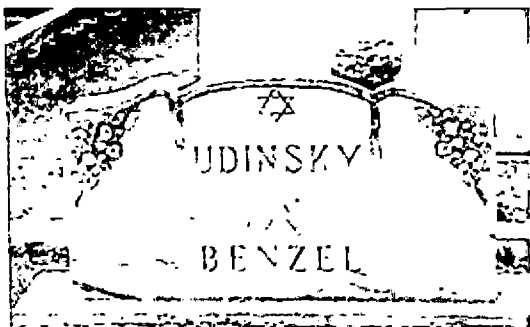
[83] Photo by Researcher: Menorah.

Figure 26: Photos by Researcher: Star Of David/Hands[84]

Secret Societies and Fraternal Organizations

This particular area of gravestone iconography and symbolism is undoubtedly one of the best categories discussed so far in relation to gleaning biographical information from what appears on the surface of a cemetery marker. In general terms, secret societies, clubs and fraternal organizations, also referred to as benevolent societies, "were founded to provide members with companionship, medical assistance and personal care when it came time for a member to pass on" into the realm of the dead. Immigrants from countries like England, France, Germany, Ireland and Scotland created many of these societies "as a way to preserve, honor and respect the traditions of their individual countries in Europe" however, there were also American citizens who wished to

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[84] Photos by Researcher: Star Of David/Hands.

"distance themselves from new immigrant arrivals"[85] by

creating their own secret societies and organizations. The

greatest popularity of these societies came about before,

during and after the Civil War, yet some of them, such as

the Freemasons, date back to the days of the Founding

Fathers and the turmoil of the Revolutionary War.

Figure 27: Photo by Researcher: Mason/Trumpet[86]

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[85] Alvin J. Schmidt, *Fraternal Organizations and Their Icons*. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1981),67.

[86] Photo by Researcher: Mason/Trumpet.

Today, most of these societies still exist, yet their memberships have dwindled over the last fifty years. In addition, a good number of these societies and organizations maintained their own cemeteries for their members and provided upon death either a headstone, a grave plot or a space in a fraternal mausoleum. The best-known of these societies in the United States are the Masons and the Odd Fellows with the Knights of Columbus and the Rosicrucians in third and fourth place.[87]

In the American Southeast, the signs and symbols of the Freemasons (a.k.a. Masons) are undoubtedly the most easily recognized and the most abundant, due in part to the history of the Freemasons in the United States, originating with historical persons like George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, both staunch and practicing Freemasons. The primary icon of the Freemasons is the square and compass with a capital G in the center which may symbolize geometry or God. The square, in this instance, is a type of measuring tool or ruler bent at a sharp 45 degree angle and used to gauge when a wall or a floor is "square" as in the corner of a room; similarly, the compass is another tool,

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[87] Ibid, 68.

made up of two projecting pieces of metal sharpened at one end and with a hinge in the center where the pieces of metal are joined together. This type of tool is usually used by architects to create geometrically perfect circles or arcs as in the blueprints for a building. As icons, the square and the compass symbolize the "dependence between the mind and matter and often refers to the progression or journey from the material world to the intellectual and then to the spiritual."[88]

As an historical note, exactly how and when the Freemasons first came into existence is not clearly understood, but most scholars and historians tend to agree that the Freemasons were a group or guild of stonecutters (stonemasons) who helped to create and construct some of the greatest and enduring cathedrals of the Western world, such as Notre Dame in Paris and the Cathedral at Chartres. Almost all of the men that belonged to this group or guild sometime in the Middle Ages were entrepreneurs; i.e., they were self-employed stone masters who went from job to job on a "freelance" basis, thus the term Freemason. At some point in time, the members of these guilds came together to

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[88] Kenning, 425.

form what are known as lodges or fraternal organizations

for the purpose of supporting each other in life and in

death.

Besides the square and the compass, several other

Masonic icons include the All-Seeing Eye, set within an

equilateral triangle with rays of light emanating from it;

and the Masonic keystone with the letters

HTWSSTKS arranged in a circle and within the boundaries of

a keystone, formed with a semi-circle at the top. It also

had slanting sides with a crescent moon shape at the

bottom. As a piece of architecture, the keystone served as

the middle support for the center of an arch (i.e., Roman

or Gothic) with all the other stones dependent upon it for

remaining in place against gravity. If one was to remove

the keystone, all the other blocks of stone in the arch

would fall away, thus relating why the Masons see the

keystone as the penultimate icon of solidarity and eternal

brotherhood.

CHAPTER FOUR

REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLES OF CEMETERIES

Magnolia Cemetery, Charleston, South Carolina

Magnolia cemetery has often been referred to as one of
the best kept secrets in Charleston. Once you pass the
white pillars at the entrance of Magnolia Cemetery, you
will be awed by the Southern majesty of this burial ground.
Massive stone crosses and crumbling brick tombs are set
against a backdrop of ancient oaks draped with moss.
Monuments mark many historic figures. George Alfred
Trenholm, a pioneer cotton broker who served as secretary
of the treasury of the Confederacy, a man upon whom many
believe the character Rhett Butler was based, is interred
here. Union soldiers encamped here before they took
Charleston during the Civil War. Around 35,000 people are
buried at Magnolia, which is still a working cemetery.

Figure 28: Photo by Researcher: Magnolia Cemetery[89]
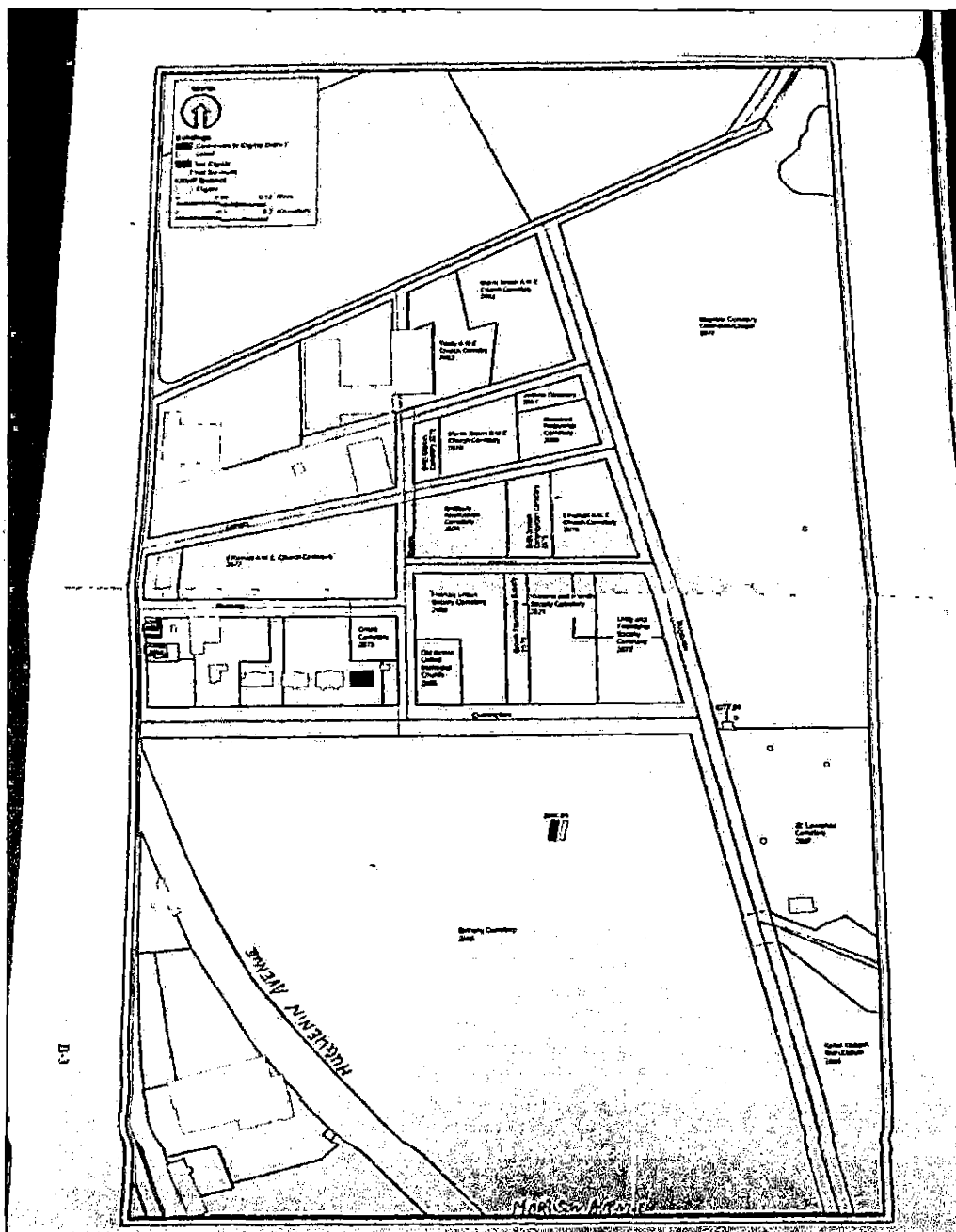

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Figure 29: Photo by Researcher: Map of Magnolia Cemetery:
Charleston County Library[90]

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[90] Photo by Researcher: Map of Magnolia Cemetery: Charleston County
Library.

Bonaventure Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia

Bonaventure Cemetery (which means Good Fortune) was
originally established by two of Savannah's founding
families as a plantation. The plantation was in part
dedicated as a public cemetery in June of 1868. It has
become famous for its moss covered trees and its ornate
statuary, mausoleums and gravestones. It is a
quintessential Victorian garden. Bonaventure Cemetery was
intended to be used like a park, although some have
referred to it as nature's cathedral. People visited often
to take long walks and to maintain their loved ones graves.
Carriage rides and picnics were often enjoyed on sunny
afternoons. Tall brick tombs found here are believed to be
unique to Savannah and Charleston. Those who take the time
to read the flowery but faded descriptions on Bonaventure's
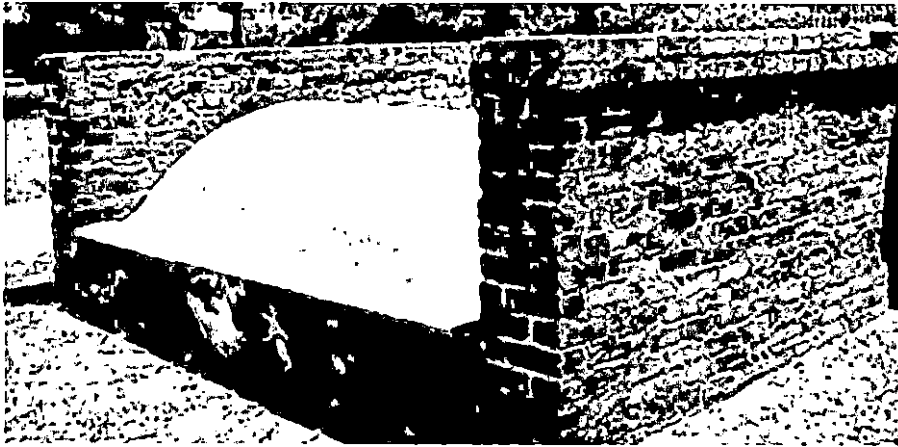graves will find fascinating stories.

Figure 30: Photo by Researcher: Brick Tomb[91]

[91] Photo by Researcher: Brick Tomb.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

One aspect of my methodology incorporated a blind

study. Samples of photographs and their corresponding death

cards, city death registry or city directories that were

used in the blind study are also included below as a visual

aid. In addition to the blind study the numerous

photographs that were cataloged and individually examined

further substantiate the blind study results. I have

included blank copies of field organizational sheets that I

developed to keep notes.

As explained in the Methodology section, these

randomly chosen photos were then taken to each city's

research libraries. I then pulled their corresponding

death cards, city directories, death registries and census

records, comparing statistical data per each individual. I

continued my research by visiting The Daughters of the

Confederacy, courthouses, and numerous historical

societies. The literature, documentations and leads were

abundant.

The accumulated documentations matched the data found

on the epitaphs in ninety present of the samples. The

icons found on the gravemarkers were compared and analyzed using my primary source entitled, *Memorial Symbolism, Epitaphs and Design Types*, by the American Monument Association, to determine their emotional meaning. I then conjoined the icons and epitaphs to see if they conveyed the sum of the individual's life. I found that in almost every instance this proved to be true.

Southerners cannot separate the importance of their cemeteries from who they are. This is proven once again in the sample graphs of the photo analysis. The graphs gave credence to the importance of the epitaphs to the 18th and 19th century beavered Southerners. Epitaphs paired with carefully chosen icons by family members were a means for them to express their loved ones place in society and their biographies in stone.

Figure 31: Photo by Researcher: Mason[92]

Figure 32: Photo by Researcher: Death Card: Edward Cubsted:
Charleston County Library[93]

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[92] Photo by Researcher: Mason.

[93] Photo by Researcher: Death Card: Edward Cubsted: Charleston County
Library.

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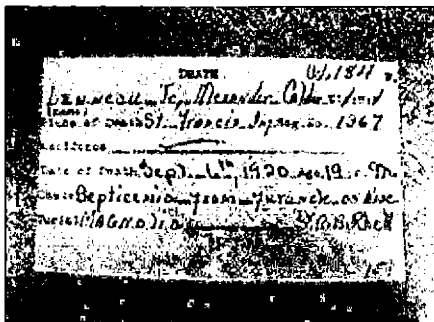Figure 33: Photo by Researcher: Alexander Lanneau, Jr.[94]

Figure 34: Photo by Researcher: Death Card: Alexander
Lanneau, Jr.: Charleston County Library[95]

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[94] Photo by Researcher: Alexander Lanneau, Jr.

[95] Photo by Researcher: Death Card: Alexander Lanneau, Jr.: Charleston
County Library.

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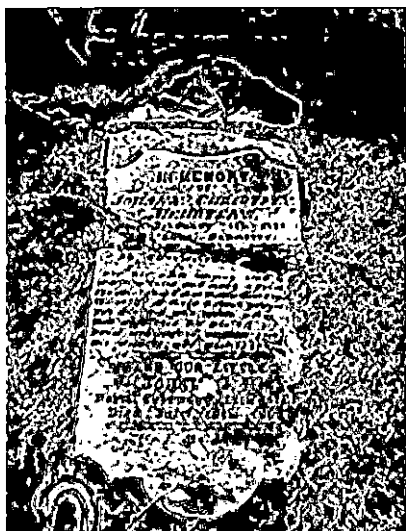Figure 35: Photo by Researcher: Johann Mehrtens[96]

Figure 36: Photo by Researcher: Death Card: Johann
Mehrtens: Charleston County Library[97]

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[96] Photo by Researcher: Johann Mehrtens.

[97] Photo by Researcher: Death Card: Johann Mehrtens: Charleston County
Library.

Figure 37: Photo by Researcher: Robert Lockwood[98]

Figure 38: Photo by Researcher: Death Card: Robert
Lockwood: Charleston County Library[99]

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[98] Photo by Researcher: Robert Lockwood.

[99] Photo by Researcher: Death Card: Robert Lockwood: Charleston County
Library.

Figure 39: Photo by Researcher: Annie Beaty[100]

Figure 40: Photos by Researcher: Death Card: Annie Beaty:
Charleston County Library[101]

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[100] Photo by Researcher: Annie Beaty.

[101] Photos by Researcher: Death Card: Annie Beaty: Charleston County
Library.

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CEMETERY SURVEY FORM

Name of Cemetery:_____

Date:_____._____

City:_____

Deceased and vitals:_____

_____

Type of Cemetery
__church __public
__memorial park

Special Sections in this Cemetery
__ethnic __fraternal organizations __infant __religious
__stranger

Status and Condition of Cemetery
__abandoned __maintained, but no longer in use
__currently in use __well maintained
__overgrown, but graves easily identifiable
__overgrown, graves difficult to find and read
__graves not identifiable, but burial site known to exist
through tradition or research
Explain:_____

_____

Markers (check types found in this cemetery):
__upright headstones __footstones __grave houses
__false crypts __mausoleums __family markers
__flat markers set flushed with the ground

Marker Composition (check types found in the cemetery):
__slate __marble __granite __sandstone __limestone
__metal __other

Prominent Artwork on Markers in this Cemetery
__flora __soul effigy __fauna __human virtues
__human body __human related __mortality __religious
__secret societies and fraternal organizations branches

Historical or other remarks about the cemetery:_____

Figure 41: Researcher's Form: Cemetery Survey[102]

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[102] Researcher's Form: Cemetery Survey.

HEADSTONE TRANSCRIPTION FORM

Name of Cemetery:
Location of Cemetery:
Starting Point:

Headstone Inscription	Marker Description
	Headstone Composition: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ ___ Artwork: - _____ ___ _____ ___ Grave Icons: _____ _____ ___ Other: _____ _____ _____ ___ _____ ___ Condition of Stone: _____ _____ _____ ___ Condition of Inscription: _____ _____ _____ ___ Photograph Taken? ___Yes ___No
	Headstone Composition: _____ _____ _____ _____Foot Stone: _____ _____ ___ Artwork: - _____

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```
 ____
Grave Decorations:
_____

_____

 ___
Other:

_____

 ___

_____

 ____
Condition of Stone:
_____

_____

 ____
Condition of Inscription:
_____

_____

 ____
Direction of Grave:
_____

Direction Inscription Faces:
_____

Photograph Taken? ___Yes ___No
```

Figure 42: Researcher's Form: Headstone Transcription[103]

The second method was a photographic sample analysis of the pertinent information found on the gravestones from Savannah and Charleston. Random samples of fifty photographs from each city were taken from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. The gravemarkers' death dates were rounded up or down to the nearest century for the purposing of the graphs. Then I entered any identifying iconic and

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[103] Researcher's Form: Headstone Transcription.

epitaphic data based on my thesis research. Under each

sample graph is a short explanation of the data which

supports my hypothesis stated in the Introduction.

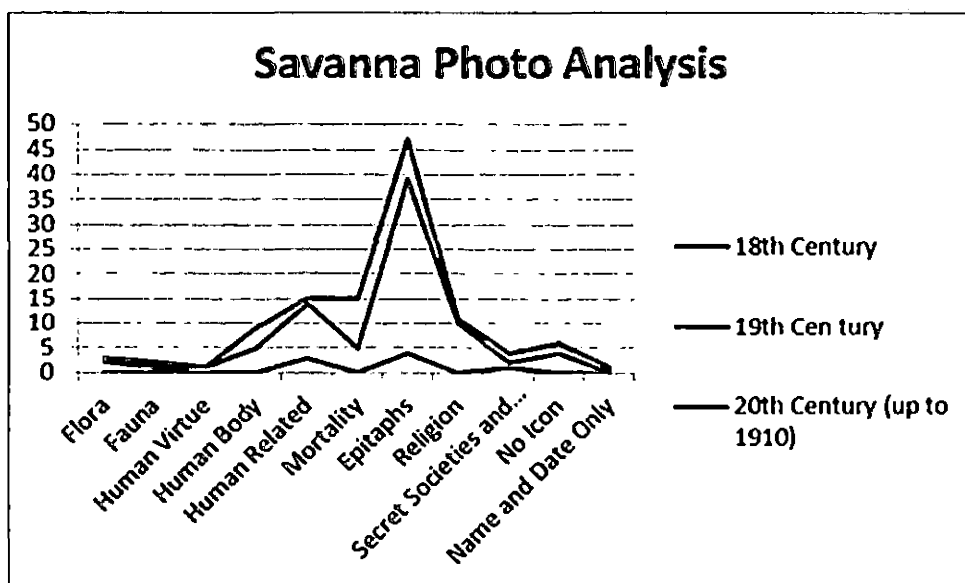Figure 43: Researcher's Graph: Savanna Photo Analysis[104]

As seen in the above graph, Epitaphs were the most

used and important factor in gravestone markers during the

18th and 19th centuries, with Human Related and Religious

icons following in importance. The graph reflects the

dramatic decline in the use of Epitaphs in the beginning of

the 20th century.

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[104] Researcher's Graph: Savanna Photo Analysis.
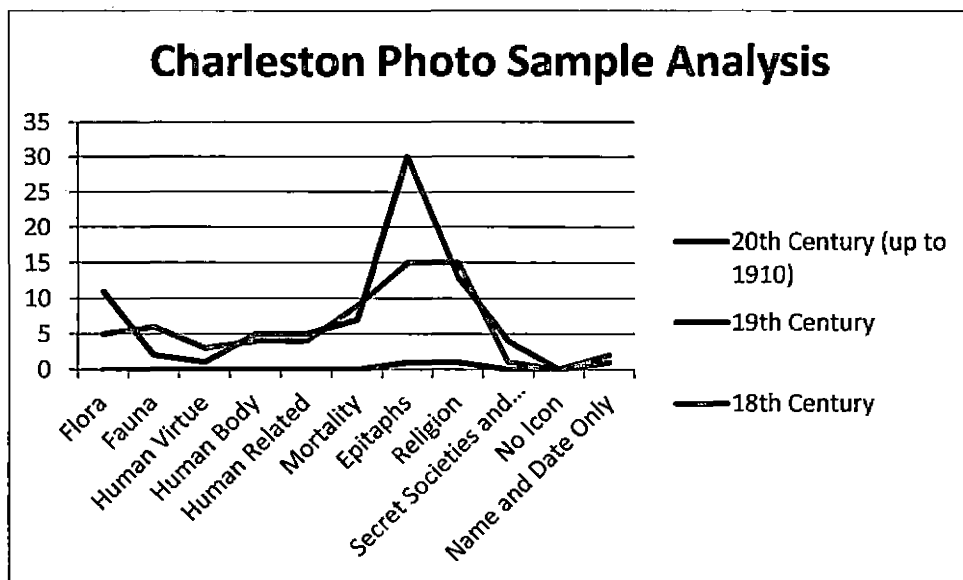
Figure 44: Researcher's Graph: Charleston Photo
Analysis[105]

As seen in the above graph, Epitaphs were once again
the most used and important factor in gravestone markers
during the 18th and 19th centuries, with Mortality and
Religious icons following in importance. This graph also
reflects the dramatic decline in the use of epitaphs in the
beginning of the 20th century.

There is a strong similarity in both samples in
regards to the use of epitaphs. In the 18th century
Savannah had a stronger use of Epitaphs than Charleston.
Charleston's use of Epitaphs doubled in the 19th century,

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[105] Researcher's Graph: Charleston Photo Analysis.

whereas Savannah's use slightly declined. It could be argued that Charleston's doubling of the use of Epitaphs was due to its' Civil War dead being honored in stone.

Through my extensive research and cross-referencing of my numerous resources, I found a strong consistency and repetition in the implied meaning in these icons and symbols of the 18[th] and 19[th] century. This has proven to be evident in the meticulous thought given in the choosing of the exact icons to represent the deceased by their love ones. These 18[th] and 19[th] century Southerners paid close attention in selecting symbols that would invoke the exact emotion to best represent their dearly departed.

Beautifully orated commentaries seen in the epitaphs themselves carved on thousands of markers in cemeteries throughout the South display personal comments on love, loss, marriage, occupation, religion, war, death, social change and community sentiment. When carefully examined these epitaphs coupled with their emotionally charged icons candidly reveal much of early American life. The graphs show the greatest concentration to be in these categories. Epitaphs are literally stone history books begging to be read. It could be argued that gravestones are the best place to state what a person stood for in life to their

family and society. Simply put, they are the voice for the
dead, a stone sentinel waiting to tell their story.

Unfortunately by the end of the 19th century cemeteries
could no longer claim to be a perpetual record keeper in
stone. The changing mind-set or fashion in gravestone
icons and inscriptions became evident. Lengthy epitaphs
filled with the sum of one's life, occupation,
accomplishments and virtues were being abruptly replaced
with a short and almost sterile documentation of one's
life. The Industrial Revolution and economics became a
direct contributor to the mainstream population conforming
to simple non-dimensional name plates to identify the
deceased. Further evidence of changing times in the 20th
century is seen in cremations becoming more and more
popular.

CONCLUSIONS

"Vivos Martui Docent"

"Let the Dead Teach the Living"

It would be a true statement to say that most

cemeteries in the American Southeast were created to be

sacred sites. Cemeteries embrace and keep safe our past.

Remains of family, friends, clergymen, public officials,

unknown individuals and, yes even pets, in some cemeteries

deserve our respect. Cemeteries are libraries to our past.

As with our academic libraries, some are small while others

are immense. Some are older and more specialized. But

they all offer us comfort in knowledge and a link to our

past. Although most gravemarkers are made of stone, a

great number are losing their integrity to age, weathering

and vandalism. Soon many will have lost their information

forever.

However, they are also artistic sites. And they

should be considered permanent historic archaeological

features and in such each deserving the same care of any

museum piece; hence, justifying the increased need for

national public awareness. It is my opinion that continued

future research would be prudent.

The thesis research performed attempted to prove that the blending of each icon with an appropriate epitaph created a true representation of the deceased during the early centuries of the American Southeast. The thesis statement hypothesized that symbolic iconic representation of sentiment blending with the written word in epitaphs individualized early grave monuments. It was also theorized that by studying cemetery icons and epitaphs it would give some incite to our early community history and archive genealogical information about the people who were buried and those who loved them. I feel that the material gathered and presented in this thesis shows the hypothesis to be true. Having made this statement, I caution future researchers to be diligent and careful and not to accept all icons to be a true representative of individuals' lives, loves or occupations. Cross referencing materials must go hand in hand with gravestone markers if the information on them is not clear or limited.

My research turned out to be a much more difficult task than originally anticipated. Placing meaning to icons without bias proved to be troublesome at times. Cross referencing death cards to headstone photographs was tedious, but rewarding in the end. Care had to be taken

not to skew the data. Along with the difficulty in obtaining local archives and county records and contacting local historians were the Southeastern folk themselves. The people of the Southeast are one of the friendliest, helpful and considerate people you will run into. However, they are very private and suspicious of strangers. Gaining their trust can be a long time-consuming and sometimes difficult process. Participation in local events and sharing of your own personal background as well as relating the reasons for doing the study had to be explained in great detail before I become accepted within the fold. Although once accepted the information I was seeking was forth-coming and usually over-flowing. It has taken the author over three years to gather information to complete the thesis, but in doing so I have gained a wealth of knowledge and made lifelong friendships.

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    Illustrations and Descriptions of the World's Most
    Notable Examples of Cemetery Memorials*. Buffalo, New
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    261 pgs.

This book is an early examination on mostly American

memorials with over 700 illustrations and photographs of

various moldings, ornamentation and lettering. Some of the

chapters/sections include "The Mausoleums of the World as

Expressed in the Order of Architecture" by W. Liance

Cottrell; "The Exedra in Memorial Design" by John Francis

Stanley; "The Cross" by L.A. Whitehouse; "Sculpture and Its

Relation to the Present" by Ora Coltman, and "Architectural

Orders in Monumental Work" by Frank C. Brown. Also contains

contemporary examples of letter carving on memorial stones

with critical comments on each regarding the

appropriateness of the design.

Memorial Symbolism, Epitaphs and Design Types. Olean, New
    York: American Monument Association, Inc., 1947.

This book was privately published by the American

Monument Association. Focuses primarily upon American

gravestone markers found throughout the United States and

discusses in-depth gravestone symbolism, epitaphs and

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this book was intended to be used a guide and sales tool.

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Society, William Thomas Vincent traveled extensively to all

regions of the United Kingdom, including greater England,

Wales, Ireland and parts of southern Scotland and although

written somewhat tongue-in-cheek, this book provides an

overview of many ancient and 19[th] century gravestone

markers, ranging from simple inscriptions to giant

memorials, dating back to the early 18[th] century. The

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Daughters of the Confederacy

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Magnolia Cemetery

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St. Michael's Episcopal Church Cemetery

St. Phillip's Anglican Cemetery

Cemeteries of Savannah, Georgia

Bonaventure Cemetery

Colonial Park Cemetery

Laurel Grove cemetery (North and South)

Courtesy of Charleston County Library

Cemetery Lot Records and Maps

Census Records

City Directories

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Historic Newspapers

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Courtesy of Savannah County Library

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