

Cracking the Code Cemetery Symbolism

Headstones contain a lot information that is valuable for genealogist. But all information needs to be verified!!!



- Names
- Nicknames
- Date of birth and death
- Birthplace
- Religion
- Associations/ Organizations
- Cause of Death
- Military Service
- Occupation
- Social economic status
- Cause of death
- Spouses, Children, Parents, Siblings
- Hobbies

Types of Cemeteries

- Church
- Public
- Private
- Lodge
- Ethnic
- Family
- Military

Types of Headstones

- Flush or Flat
- Ledger or Low Monument
- Pedestal
- Rock or Bolder
- Obelisk
- Box
- Flower box
- Bed



Terms

Consort – more often on a wife's stone. Means she died before her husband passed.

Relic – a wife who did not remarry after her husband passed

F.O., M.O., D.O., S.O.- Father, Mother Daughter, Son of

Symbols/ Meanings

Animals

Doves = Holy Spirit, innocents, purity

Eagles = military

Roosters = repentance

Butterflies/ Moths =

Caterpillar = life

Chrysalis = death

Butterfly/ Moth = resurrection

Bees = resurrection

Frogs= sin

Lion= power of God

Lambs= often on children's stones but all ways.



Flowers & Trees

Apples = sin

Crocus = youthful gladness

Cypress Tree= hope

Fern = sorrow

Figs = eternal life

Grapes = Christ

Honeysuckle =bonds of life

Morning Glory = resurrection

Rose = love

Rose Bud= child

Open Bud= long life

Tree = Tree of Life

Tree stump = life cut short

Tree leaning = life cut short

Weeping Willow = sorrow

Wheat =long life lived



Anchors = used to hide the Christian Cross

Anchoring your belief in Christ

Maybe even for a seaman

Hearts

Human heart = love of God

Flaming Heart= extreme religious devotion

Bleeding or crown of thorns = Christ's suffering

Pierced by a sword= Virgin Mary

Hands

Hand with finger pointing up = God's hand welcoming you to heaven

Hand with finger pointing down = sudden death

Clasped hands

Look at the cuffs –Male/ female

There will be a rigid hand being clasped

Angels/ wings = agents of God, guardians of the dead

Bed = at rest

Candles= life

Draped Urn = death of an older person

Hourglass = time passing, shortness of life

Hourglass on its side= death

Open book = Saint Peters book or a scholar

Torch= life

Upside down torches = a life snuffed out

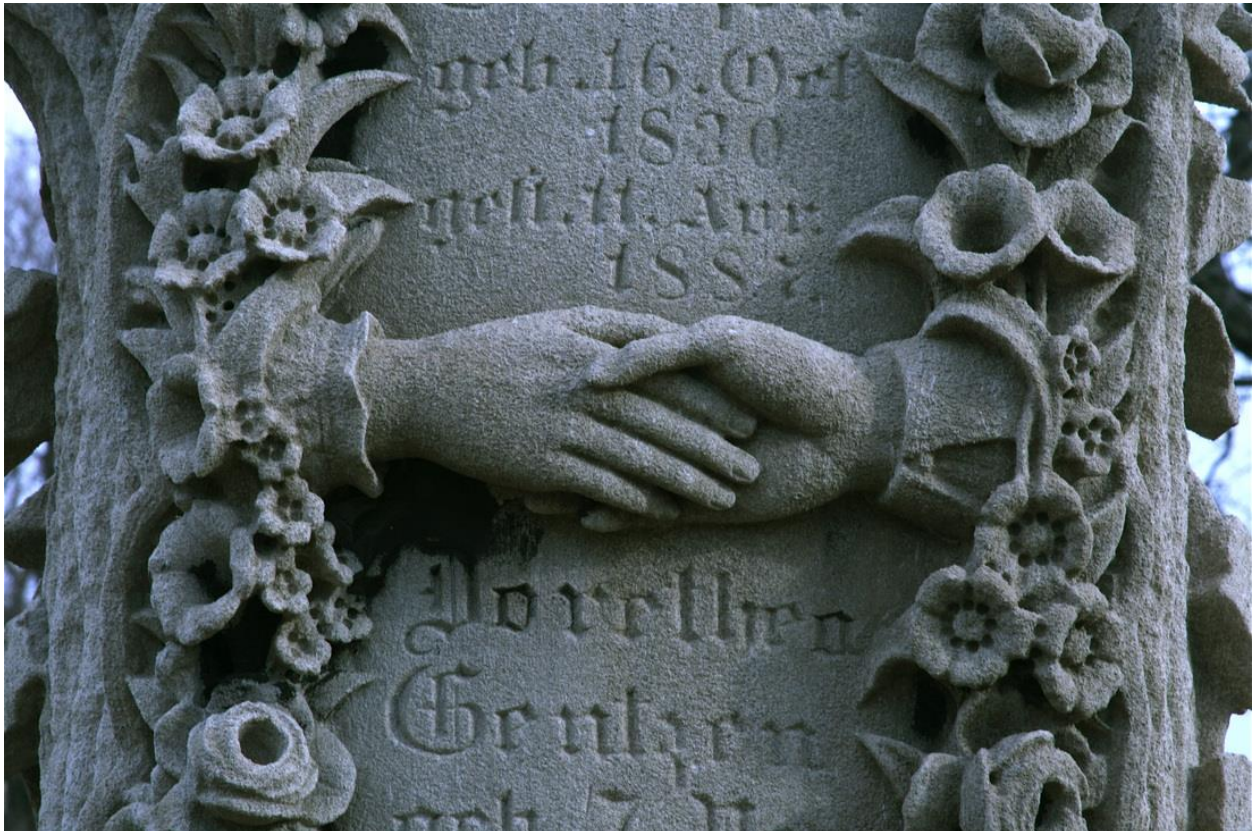
Urn with flames = friendship

Urns= mourning, body as the holder of the soul

Weeping angels = mourning

Winged face= effigy of the soul

Winged skull= flight of the soul



Bibliography

Books

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Websites

- The Cemetery Club --<http://www.thecemeteryclub.com/>
 - Excellent list of symbols
- International Association of Cemetery Preservationists -- <http://iacpinc-org.dbprginc.org/>
- Association of Gravestone Studies --<https://www.gravestonestudies.org/>
- Facebook group –Cemetery Art

- Find A Grave www.findagrave.com
- BillionsGraves <https://billiongraves.com/>
- Google the name of a cemetery and its location
- Lexington Cemetery in Lexington
- Cave Hill in Louisville

Videos

- Grave Faces-Grave Marker Types, Styles, & Motifs with Nancy Adgent
- Search cemetery symbols or motifs on www.youtube.com
- Lexington Public Library's DVD Eight acres of history African Cemetery No.2
- Tombstone Symbolism by Shiloh Museum of Ozark History

(Those topics for another day—grave house of Eastern Kentucky, mortsafe, safety coffins—bell pull and shouting tube)