

Historic Gravestone Iconography or Symbolism in Five Little Rock Cemeteries

Cemetery iconography refers to the vernacular, commercial and individually commissioned artwork on gravestones. Historically, memorialization of the dead was practiced across social levels, which resulted in a plethora of funerary architecture and symbolism. Seventeenth and eighteenth century emblematic messages conveyed the finality of death. The grim “memento mori” (an image or item that served to remind one of impending death) is sometimes attributed to the Puritanical tenet that certain people wouldn’t make the path to Heaven. When their time was up, there was no other domain but the dirt. Gravestones in the churchyard would often display death’s heads – a human skull combined with bones – or hourglasses, skeletons and coffins in order to get that message across.¹

It is thought that as the seventeenth century progressed, religious shifts attributed to the Great Awakening, which originated in Europe and spread to America. Ordinary humans were told they were worthy of a joyous existence after death rather than a hell-bound eternity. Funerary emblems evolved and were tempered as the images became less evocative of moldering remains and reminiscent of a soul with admirable attributes.² On the other end of the spectrum, some scholars suggest that the blatant symbols of death were simply favored devices by certain carvers and were utilized by adherents of many religions.³

This shift was most apparent in America during the Romantic era, 1830-1870. Literature and art then reflected a belief that man was a direct result of God’s natural creations. This lightened the mood and death became a natural process with the promise of immortality.⁴ Iconography then included references to resurrection and life everlasting. The images were tempered with milder characteristics such as flowers, cherubs, drapery (also known as palls - cloths laid on caskets and bodies), weeping willows and clasped hands. Particular symbols for children emerged during this era as well.⁵

In 1804 the “garden-cemetery” became popular due to the establishment of the Cemetery of Pere-Lachaise in Paris, France. The treeless graveyard with frightening images was previously thought to be detrimental to the health of nearby residents; it was not a place to linger if you didn’t have to. The sentimental elegance of Pere-Lachaise - with landscaping and graceful monuments evoking a heaven on earth - was replicated at Mount Auburn Cemetery near Boston, Massachusetts in 1831.⁶

¹ Douglas Keister, *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*, (Sale Lake City: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2004), 132, 135.

²Robert Caldwell, III, *Theologies of the American Revivalists: From Whitefield to Finney*, (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2017) 8; Keister, 136; Sherene Baugher and Richard F. Veit., *The Archeology of American Cemeteries and Gravemarkers*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2014), 79-87.

³ Baugher, 88.

⁴ Paige Dorner, “Romanticism and Ruralism: Changing Nineteenth Century American Perceptions of the Natural World,” *The Spectrum: A Scholars Day Journal* 3, (2013-2015) 4, 22.

⁵ Keister, 8.

⁶ James Curl Stevens, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, 2000), 70-71.

Five of Little Rock's, historic cemeteries- B'Nai Israel, Agudath Achim, Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park and Mount Holly Cemetery - reflect this gentle aesthetic with curving avenues, retention of large trees, cribs, and coping for flowers and shrubs. While the monuments and mausolea are not as immense as earlier burying grounds in the United States, these cemeteries exhibit comparative regional examples. These Little Rock cemeteries were chosen for study because they contained a variety of iconographic examples from the Victorian era into the twenty-first century. Gravestones observed were high-style forms commissioned by wealthy families, mass-produced stones ordered via catalogs or monument dealers and hand-made vernacular examples. Symbolism noted in the aforementioned cemeteries was unique or highly personalized and reflected the ethnic, economic, social and cultural levels of Little Rock's residents.

Many of the nineteenth century stones in both cemeteries are constructed of marble or limestone. Up to the twentieth century carvers typically did not have storefronts; they traveled the state and obtained stone from local quarries. It was noted in the 1850 census that there were 24 stone and marble cutters in Arkansas. (This would include those that were employed in the building trades and the census did not differentiate between stone and marble cutters, but there would likely have been crossover in order to obtain steady work). Because of their temporary status and constant movement, they did not have the tools to work granite, which replaced the softer limestone and marble by 1900, so the flamboyant artistry of hand-carved gravestones began to be replaced with substantial monuments conveying muted symbolism. As a result, common funerary images influenced by social acceptance, the Bible and "flower dictionaries" faded from the cemetery through the twentieth century. Today, most gravestone imagery displays illustrations from the monument dealers' computer file or serves as a passionately individualized message from the interred or their family. Such representations can include colored scenes from a favorite locale, life-sized portraits, references to hobbies, or "hand-written" verses and personal communications.⁷

The Mount Holly Cemetery

Little Rock was named the territorial capital in 1820 and town lots were being sold by 1821. Access to the area was provided by the Southwest Trail and the Arkansas River but they were not easy paths year round so development progressed slowly. The river was the main transportation artery so the commercial, political and residential center was located along the river bank and the landing at modern Commerce Street (newly renamed River Market Avenue). Even as the town spread some early nineteenth century homes of Little Rock were considered farmsteads with accompanying outbuildings and gardens.⁸

⁷ M.L. Booth., translation from the French, "The Marble-Workers' Manual: Designed for the Use of Marble-Workers, Builders and Owners of Houses," (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman and Company, 1856), 255; Abby Burnett, *Gone to the Grave: Burial Customs of the Arkansas Ozarks, 1850-1950*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 149, 152-153.

⁸ Hampton Roy, Sr., Charles Witsell, Jr. and Cheryl Nichols, *How We Lived: Little Rock as an American City*, (Little Rock, AR: August House, 1984), 18-19, 21, 34.

As in the country, urban residents were known to have interred their dead on home sites. The first secretary of the Arkansas Territory, Robert Crittenden, owned a home and land bordered by Seventh, Eighth, Scott and Cumberland streets. The Crittenden Cemetery was the only known burial ground for the town from 1820 to approximately 1828. In 1883, the remains of two adults were found at a construction site at the corner of Seventh and Rock streets. The *Arkansas Gazette* reported that it was discovered there had been a family cemetery at the location.⁹

Although the Crittenden Cemetery was publicly acknowledged as a burial ground for two of Crittenden's children who died in 1824 and 1826, there were accounts of possible earlier interments. In 1820, two traveling missionaries died in Little Rock and were reported to have been buried by the Arkansas River. Historian Margaret Ross suggested in 1965 that the women were potentially buried in the Crittenden Cemetery because they were camped on Crittenden's land. Ross also noted other deaths in Little Rock in the period 1816-1820. Some of the burials were said to have been in the location of the Old State House and three graves were discovered on the site during construction in 1885. Doubtless there were other undocumented interments in Little Rock but Ross stated that she could find no other evidence of public cemeteries other than that on Crittenden's land; therefore, she felt that it was likely the "official" burial ground at that time.¹⁰

The Crittenden Cemetery was abandoned when prominent lawyer and U.S. Senator Chester Ashley donated a tract of land at Fifth and Gaines streets (now the site of the 1961 Federal Building) for a public cemetery in 1828. An 1834 Little Rock town ordinance decreed that the cemetery on Ashley's land be named Little Rock's official public graveyard. Section 2 of the ordinance also defined individual or private graveyards as nuisances. From that point on there would be a fine for violation and the costs of exhumation and removal would fall on the violator. Ashley's burial ground supplanted the Crittenden Cemetery, but in 1839 Ashley and Roswell Beebe provided four blocks of land on Broadway Street to the city for a public cemetery called Mount Holly. The first burial there was in spring of 1843. Previous interments at the "Old Burial Ground" were relocated to Mount Holly in 1860 because of the construction of the Peabody School. However, one marked grave remained in situ as well as those that were unmarked.¹¹

The Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park

By 1862 the numbers of Civil War dead necessitated the establishment of a new cemetery called Oakland. It was located east of the city limits on the 160-acre farm of Paul. B. Starbuck upon his death. The area around Oakland was occupied by Confederate and Union encampments by 1861.

⁹ Sybil F. Crawford, *Jubilee: The First 150 Years of Mount Holly Cemetery, Little Rock, Arkansas*, (Little Rock, AR: The Mount Holly Cemetery Association, 1993), 1-2; "A Ghostly Find While Digging a Foundation," *Arkansas Gazette*, Aug. 22, 1883.

¹⁰ Margaret Ross, "First Public Cemetery is Built in Capital After 14 Years: Private Area Used Earlier," *Arkansas Gazette*, (Aug. 22, 1965), 6B.

¹¹ "Town Ordinances," *Arkansas Gazette* (Feb. 18, 1834); Ross, *Arkansas Gazette* (Aug. 22, 1965); Crawford, *Jubilee: Mount Holly Cemetery*, *Pulaski County Historical Review* 2, (June 1954), 13.

Subsequently, a sexton's report noted that Union and Confederate soldiers as well as civilians were buried there from 1861 to 1869.¹²

Although the burial ground is collectively known today by the name "Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park," it is actually divided into seven separate cemeteries. The year 1866 marked the first subdivision when a nine-acre area was added for Union soldiers – at that point the Confederates were buried separately in Oakland - and named National Cemetery. The acreage expanded to eighteen acres in 1868. The second subdivision occurred in 1890 when eleven acres in Oakland was set aside for the Confederate Cemetery. This held Confederate burials and re-interments from the Mount Holly Cemetery. A second Confederate burial ground contained a mass grave for 900 soldiers from Little Rock's hospitals during the Civil War.¹³

The B'nai Israel Congregation purchased five acres from Oakland for a cemetery in 1874, and in 1901 the Agudath Achim Congregation instituted a cemetery on one-and-a-half acres at Oakland, which was expanded to four-and-a-half acres in 1948. African Americans were historically interred in sections E, F and H of Oakland, but in 1893 they received fourteen acres from the city for the Fraternal Cemetery west of Barber Street and Oakland Cemetery. By 1877 the Oakland Cemetery was considered the new city cemetery as the Mount Holly Cemetery was nearing capacity.¹⁴

As the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP) Special Projects Historian, I surveyed the Mount Holly Cemetery and the Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park in the winter and spring of 2018. The two cemeteries were selected because they are the largest and most historic burial grounds for the city of Little Rock. As such, they contained a representative sample of marble, limestone and granite gravestones. These markers most likely display the popular iconography that local carvers produced for individual customers or types that were selected from catalogs.

Attention was paid to vernacular markers as well, which brings awareness to the cross section of Little Rock's population and the cultural and societal divisions that were present in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While the majority of the gravestones noted were created in the Victorian era, I also documented forms from the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries that exhibited both typical and atypical iconography.

At the Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park, I did not record symbolism from the National Cemetery or the Confederate Cemetery sections, as these areas did not have a variety of funerary images or architecture. My method of research was to walk the avenues of the cemeteries and photograph gravestones and mausoleums that I considered to be good examples of historically accepted

¹² Lakresha Diaz, "Oakland-Fraternal Cemetery," National Register of Historic Places registration form, October 09, 2009, Section 8, p. 3.

¹³ Lakresha Diaz, "Oakland-Fraternal Cemeteries: a Brief History and Tour," (2009), 1-3; Lakresha Diaz, "Oakland-Fraternal Cemetery," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, online article at <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=7383>, accessed 6/12/2018.

¹⁴ Diaz, "Oakland-Fraternal Cemeteries: a Brief History," 4-7.

symbolism. I also documented particular combinations of iconography and unique vernacular examples. While the majority of these symbols are common in cemeteries nationally and statewide, this study concentrates on the forms specific to the Mount Holly Cemetery and the Oakland Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park – those that give the two burial grounds their regional character.

The Mount Holly Cemetery contains classic gravestone forms of square, gothic and round tablets, ground level and slant markers, ledgers, obelisks, sarcophagi, chest tombs, crosses and sculptural figures. The messages conveyed on the markers by the families of the interred are both complex, with combinations of symbolism, and simple, with a single poignant emblem.

The evolution of marker forms and iconography through the centuries is evident in Mount Holly. In 1843, the influence of the rural, landscaped cemetery with gentler attitudes toward death made the language of flowers a popular emblematic device. Floral images evoked beauty, fragility and positive Christian characteristics. The popularity of flowers was appropriate for burial grounds instituted during the vanguard of garden cemeteries. Floriography in the form of wreaths, festoons, borders, vines and bouquets broadcast the attributes of the interred with each unique flower's message.

Many of the graves are marked with a cairn of rocks linked to the Lord and His strength, topped with a cross, an angel or an urn. Scrolls to signify a heavenly record of life in Christian cemeteries are frequently used on markers of the nineteenth century. These images were popular choices for Mount Holly Cemetery and Oakland Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park, but the floral symbol with its numerous stories to tell was a primary feature of the markers studied.¹⁵

The grave of Emmett Butler (D. 1897) utilizes several of these elements. His marker is an example of the cairn with scroll and a rustic cross evoking the branches of a bark-covered tree. A tendril of ivy clings to the cross as a symbol of immortality and eternal feelings for the deceased. A wreath at the base of the cross was typical of many Victorian-era gravestones in that a variety of blooms conveyed mourning messages. The wreath includes roses as a Christian symbol of Paradise, daisies for a link to the Virgin Mary and the innocence of the Christ child, a Madonna lily for purity and lily of the valley to continue the theme of virtuousness. A second stalk of ivy and a single flower adorns the base of the scroll.¹⁶

The use of the lotus or water lily is a popular image for Egyptian and Chinese cultures but is not seen often in Arkansas. Author and Ozark cemetery expert Abby Burnett proclaims the urn for Tullis C. Walker (D. 1904) to be the best example she has seen in the state of the lotus imagery. The blooms of the lotus emerge at sunrise after descending beneath the water at night – seemingly tailor-made for suggesting rebirth and the afterlife.¹⁷

¹⁵ Tui Snider, *Understanding Cemetery Symbols: A Field Guide For Historic Graveyards*, (Castle Azle Press: 2017), 207; Keister, 123.

¹⁶ Snider, 137; Keister, 46, 49-50, 54.

¹⁷ Keister, 49; E-mail to Holly Hope from Abby Burnett, 5/12/14.

The marble marker for Maria E. Thibault (D. 1864) utilizes a simple example of floral elements. It is beautifully carved and an obviously heartfelt tribute from Maria's brother James B. Keatts. A curving inscription stating that James erected the marker for Maria surrounds a hand with bent index finger pointing upward. This indication that the interred is bound for Heaven is not uncommon in cemeteries; however, the finger breaks from a flat bas-relief image into a three-dimensional sculptural form. A collar of flowers consisting of roses and morning glories, linked to the Resurrection, embellishes the wrist of the hand.¹⁸

A particularly exuberant example of floriography is the gothic cross-vault marker of Maggie Bower Rymal (D.1900). A lancet-arched panel bordered by columns features a complex spray of flowers springing from ferns. This bouquet piles on the symbolism as morning glories rise from ferns to meet a bunch of forget-me-nots nestled into the leaves of a calla lily. Forget-me-nots are not included in funerary art often, but they can stand for remembrance and connection. Atop the single calla lily springs the spiked leaves of anthemion, which is not a mourning symbol, but rather a decorative element that provides a framework for the culmination of the spray, which consists of an Easter lily, a rose, and what appears to be a small bunch of passionflowers as a symbol of the crown of thorns and the faithful apostles.¹⁹

A similar gothic-style marker for Mattie A. Chrisman (D.1882) combines flowers in a wreath of morning glories and Easter lilies. This panel surrounded by Corinthian columns differs from Maggie Rymal's in that a presenting hand representing the hand of God descends from the clouds clutching the wreath. The fourth commandment in Exodus proclaimed that there should be no images of "what is in heaven above...;" therefore, Christian art does not portray God's countenance. However, biblical allusions to the hand or arm of God gave rise to the use of a hand as a frequent symbol for the deity.²⁰

Angels in Mount Holly Cemetery

Images that were allowed in the cemetery were those of cherubs, saints and angels. Several childlike, androgynous figures as well as adults, some winged, some wingless, adorn graves in Mount Holly. While a favorite esthetic symbol seen as a benign decorative emblem, angels and cherubs worked hard and performed several tasks like transporting souls, delivering messages, presenting various forms of iconography for the interred, grieving for the family, recording in the Book of Life, and trumpeting to signal the Resurrection. The favored form is that of the cherub, usually nude. They are small, evoking a child of about three years old but exhibiting no gender. The cherub is a favored symbol for children's graves.²¹

¹⁸ Keister, 108, 50.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 46; Snider, 129, 141; "Flower Meaning," online article found at <http://www.flowermeaning.com/forget-me-not-flower-meaning/>, accessed 07/23/2018.

²⁰ Keister, 108.

²¹ Barbara Rotundo, Laurel Gabel and Francis Duval, "Symbolism in the Carvings on Old Gravestones," Adapted from materials produced by The Association for Gravestone Studies, 1; Keister, 164.

The Miller family plot includes a sculptural winged cherub clad in a toga-like sheath. This being is placing a crown at the base of a cross to symbolize victory and Christianity. A similar cherubic figure standing on a small sarcophagus brandishes a pall, or drape at the grave of Mary Hooper (D. 1875). A fringed throw would be symbolic of the cloth used to cover a coffin or a hearse and the image is used often with various funerary configurations. The ubiquitous cairn, flowers and scroll are included on both the Miller monument and Mary's markers.²²

The tablet marker of Samuel A. Dodd (D. 1883) was created by Little Rock stone carver William L. Funston. In 1881 Funston owned Little Rock Marble Works in Little Rock and his work is found in many Arkansas cemeteries.²³ Samuel's marker is difficult to interpret because of deterioration, which makes it appear more primitive than it likely was, but it is an unusual composition for this cemetery. Three amorphous cherubs with the remnants of wings are seated on swirling clouds, perhaps waiting to receive Samuel.

A different type of cherub presents roses at the grave of Melba Ward (D.1935). This is rather late for the use of the typical three-dimensional Victorian symbol. The figure is more slender than earlier forms and is dressed in a tunic cinched with a rope. A cloth is draped at the shoulders. This resembles a scapular, or cloth worn by monks. In fact, if not for the wings and the youthful facial features, the figure might be construed for a monk or saint.

A much later use of the cherub in the more typical nude form is a bronze example on the ledger stone of Elizabeth Gardner Hall Clark (D. 1971). This compact figure is seated on a drape with one leg cocked atop the knee of the other. Unfortunately, the open book it once held in its hands has been stolen. Likely, this was a representation of the Bible. Adjacent to Elizabeth's grave is a second ledger stone with a similar cherub in bronze, also seated on a drape. The figure appears to have been recording the name of the interred, William Moore Clark (D. 1999) in the Book of Life. This marker was also the victim of vandalism. The cherub with one knee raised to support the book, which has been stolen, clutches a pen in its hands as its head is lowered in concentration.

An angel performing the task of transporting the dead can be seen on the zinc marker of Tacoma Eisenmayer (D. 1884). The angel of death in a flowing robe extends its wings as it guides a canopied boat. A prone figure with arms crossed on the chest is on its way "from death to eternal life," as her epitaph proclaims. While this depiction is not unusual in cemeteries across the nation, this is the only such example in Mount Holly.

Adult angel forms are given feminine attributes and are as numerous as the cherubs. There are two masculine angels – Gabriel and St. Michael. Gabriel is tasked with sounding the trumpet on Judgement

²² "Gravestone Symbolism," online article at <http://www.thecemeteryclub.com/symbols.html>, accessed 7/23/2018

²³ "The Stone Carvers," *Stories in Stone*, (March, 20, 2016), an online article at <http://www.sistark.org/blog/category/funston>, accessed 08/06/2018.

Day and he is poised with his instrument on the grave of Herbert Wassell (D. 1905). This figure does appear feminine because of his long flowing hair and full-length robe, but he is indeed a male.

The sculptural device of an angel transporting the interred is not uncommon but one example in Mount Holly stands out as it is powerfully expressive and a testament to the carver's abilities. A graceful winged angel lifts the soul of Mary Watkins (D. 1878) heavenward. Mary's face gazes upward toward the pointing hand of the angel who floats skyward from the base. Mary's hands are folded at her chest in the typical repose of the dead. The fluid folds of their robes convey soft movement and a star at the forehead of the angel depicts divine guidance.²⁴

Several gravestones at Mount Holly are more literal secular symbols of the earthly lives of the interred. There are fraternal symbols in most cemeteries that reveal the group activities enjoyed in life but rarer are those that indicate vocations or reveal personal details that provide insight into the likes and dislikes of the individual.

A marker that can be considered a unique tribute at Mount Holly is that for Henry Brookin (D. 1891). Brookin was a firefighter who died in the line of duty. He is depicted in a zinc sculpture standing on a rooftop wearing his uniform and fireman's helmet. The nozzle to a firehose is gripped in his hands, the hose itself is missing. On the marble cap of the marker below the sculpture is a shallow carving of a firewagon.

Former Little Rock mayor Donald Mehlburger (D. 1992) is remembered with a granite monument. The marker is simple but its form is reminiscent of gravestones called the "Cottage Monument," popular at the turn of the century. This includes a tall shaft with protruding graduated caps. The "die" or shaft, features a carving of a sextant, which is an association with Mehlburger's job as an engineer. The historic architecture of the marker erected in the twentieth century could be indicative of his time as a founding board member of the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas.²⁵

Tony Curtis is currently looking ahead and has purchased a granite ground marker at Mount Holly, for the future event of his death. To ensure that he was remembered appropriately, he had a likeness of his Queen Anne style home at 1221 Louisiana Street carved on the marker. Curtis attributes his experience with the house, built by Sam Kirby, to his career as a realtor in the historic downtown area of Little Rock.²⁶

The simple marble tablet marker of Dr. William Irl Wade (D. 2002) includes a round inset with a bas-relief carving of a caduceus or staff of Asclepius – snakes twining around a rod. This has been associated with the Greek god Hermes and the physician Asclepius. This image was often used from the sixteenth

²⁴ Snider, 119; Keister, 124.

²⁵ "Little Rock Look Back: Mayor Donald Mehlburger," online article at <https://lrculturevulture.com/2013/10/19/little-rock-look-back-mayor-donald-mehlburger/>, (October 19, 2013), accessed 07/25/2018; Advertisement for Harrison Granite Company, New York City, (January 1, 1918).

²⁶ Interview with Tony Curtis, Little Rock, July 23, 2018.

to the eighteenth centuries on illustrations for books containing information on drugs. Eventually it became the official symbol for medicine.²⁷

Sandford C. Faulkner (D. 1874) was not initially a musician. He had tried his hand at politics, planting and banking, but he is most well-known for creating “The Arkansas Traveler.” It began as the story of an encounter with a cantankerous settler and became a famed painting and lithograph, eventually spawning a tune on the fiddle. The tale is still part of Arkansas’s oral traditions. Faulkner’s tablet style marker provided by the Pulaski County Historical Society in 1954 is embellished with musical notes to represent the tune inspired by Faulkner’s narrative.²⁸

The granite slant marker for the double burials of John Ward Hodoway (D. 2011) and first wife Virginia Belle Hyde Hodoway (D. 1961) features a carving of the Muse of Comedy and the Muse of Tragedy, associated with theater. This reveals to the viewer that John had an appreciation for the stage. Indeed, Hodoway’s obituary stated that he took part in a community drama group that was the precursor to the Arkansas Repertory Theater.²⁹

The love of Moisie Seligman III (D. 1974) for art was expressed on his monument. His grave is marked with a granite block topped with a remnant of a Roman sculpture dated 79 A.D. Seligman was in the military and he traveled extensively as a businessman, which offered him the opportunity to collect works of art. This intensely personal element from his collection is a very poignant gesture from his family and tells the story of several facets of his life.

A second such tribute can be seen on the grave of Sheila Dewitt Sherman (D. 2012). Sherman’s granite marker features an abstracted bronze sculpture titled “Eve in Conversation with The Angels.” The linear design was created by her husband Robert Sherman. The front of the granite base also features a bronze plaque with abstracted design. The depth of the meaning of this marker to Sherman’s husband is offered on a second plaque detailing the name of the sculpture and his words that “She completed me and was the love of my life. Without her I would never have known the meaning of love.” Despite the modern image Sherman chose for his wife’s gravestone, the sentiment he included is similar to nineteenth century epitaphs.³⁰

Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park

Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park contains several diverse types of iconography. This cemetery, like the Mount Holly Cemetery, is also an example of a rural garden type burial ground. The

²⁷ Keith Blayney, “The Caduceus vs. the Staff of Asclepius, (Asklepian),” (September 2002, revised 2005), online article at <http://drblayney.com/Asclepius.html>, accessed 07/26/2018.

²⁸ Stephen Teske, “Sandford C. “Sandy” Faulkner (1809?-1874),” *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, (Updated 1/25/2017), <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2408#>.

²⁹ “John Ward Hodoway II,” online article at <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/102537935/john-ward-hodoway>.

³⁰ “Escape to the Silent Cities,” online article at <http://escapetothsilentcities.blogspot.com/2010/11/>, accessed 07/26/2018; “Moisie B. Seligman, Jr.,” online obituary at <http://www.ruebelfuneralhome.com/obituaryindividual.php?id=654>.

architecture of the monuments and mausoleums is similar to Mount Holly's, but there are several vernacular examples interspersed among the large marble monuments, some produced by well-known carvers. Winding roads traverse the hilly topography arranged into discernable sections. Three granite and iron entry gates provide access to the cemetery. One is situated at the original entrance at College Street and two on Barber Street. The Fraternal section of the cemetery is entered at the southwest corner of East 21st and Barber streets through a similar entrance. These various elements make the sections of the historic park apparent. Within the disparate areas there is a great variety of funerary forms that reveal the diverse ethnic influences of the interred.

Trees in Oakland and Fraternal

Trees were favored as late eighteenth and early nineteenth century mourning images. From that point the funerary architecture of the tree evolved into a different expression until approximately the mid-1920s when it fell out of favor. Often the willow would be included with an urn, lamb or a cross, but the use of the oak tree would be common as well. Beginning as primarily bas-relief carvings, they evolved into sculptural forms. Trees on gravestones are sometimes representative of the Tree of Life, which can symbolize the continuance of physical life as people draw energy from their belief in God. The symbol has many meanings in several cultures including life, immortality and salvation.³¹

This popular iconography is found on several gravestones at Oakland and Fraternal. The tablet style marker of Bernhard Weisel (D. 1867) features a rounded tympanum (the curvilinear apex of a typical tablet stone) that provides the appropriate space for a carving of a sorrowful willow tree. The willow's domed form is rather abstracted by the thick, uniform layering of the branches, giving it a stiff configuration rather than the usual draping appearance. Another tree image was utilized on the marker of Harry Landsberg (death date not visible). This symbol appears to be an oak tree with full canopy. The trunk is snapped and the branches droop to the ground. A break in a tree or a flower stem typically translates to a life cut short. This imagery is also depicted on the gravestone of five year old Leon Menkus (D. 1885); however, the bare tree that speaks of Leon exhibits several severed branches and the crown of the tree is broken from the trunk.³²

Detailed sculptural examples of trees can be found in a great number of cemeteries in Arkansas. Most are attributed to the fraternal Woodmen of the World (WOW) markers but many are actually not linked to the organization; rather they are three-dimensional versions of the bas-relief mourning symbols. The tree stump with articulated bark and inclusion of vines, ferns, flowers and sometimes small animals, evolved from the Rustic movement in America. This was a turn of the century effort to create a uniquely American design. It evolved from the Arts and Crafts movement (1895-1920), which emphasized simple lines and the use of natural light and materials. So this aesthetic was not particular to cemeteries but as with other forms of art it was eventually expressed in funerary architecture.³³

³¹ Keister, 65; Randy Alcorn, "What is the Tree of Life?", online article at <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/what-is-the-tree-of-life.html>, accessed 08/03/2018.

³² Keister, 67; Snider, 145.

³³ Rick Newby, *The Rocky Mountain Region: The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Regional Cultures*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 19.

In keeping with the Rustic movement, Emma May Wright's husband chose a tree stump marker for his wife in 1887. The tree rests atop a shallow cairn of carved rocks from which an arrangement of ivy, ferns and flowers rise. Three broken limbs protrude from the trunk, one of which provides a "hook" for a scroll inscribed with Emma's name. The scroll hangs from a crude rope, contributing to the rusticity of the image. The tree marker for Joe Carrado (D. 1890) is like Emma's in several ways, a cairn base, vines of ivy, broken limbs and a scroll; however, in this version the document is nailed to the trunk.

Woodmen of the World markers come in many versions and each is visually interesting. The Woodmen of the World was founded in 1890 as a fraternal benefit society. From its inception to 1900, members received free gravemarkers. From that point there was a rider charge for the marker but it became too expensive by the mid-1920s and the service was discontinued. The theme of the markers was based on founder James Cullen Root's vision of the WOW as an organization that "would clear away problems of financial security for its members," as the woodman does to the forest. This also tied in neatly to the currently popular use of the tree stump in cemeteries.³⁴

One such stone stands out in the Miller family plot. There is no name inscribed on it but the gravestone for J.H.N. Miller (D. 1896) is situated behind it so it's generally accepted that the stone was placed there for Miller after his burial. There are several iconographic devices utilized. From the base of the stump a fern grows. A single ledge of lichen protrudes from the front of the trunk. From the rear, a limb of oak leaves is wrapped toward the front. Even though they employ leaves on this element, some of the twigs are severed, in keeping with the life cut short theme. Ivy vines rise from the base and twine up the trunk. The floral messages continue with a wreath consisting of roses, morning glories, forget-me-nots and daisies hanging from a broken limb. On the opposite face of the marker an anchor resting on a nest of three leaves leans against the trunk. Representing hope, it can also be linked to the use of the anchor as a cross. At the establishment of Christianity, followers had to hide their beliefs so they used the anchor as a covert symbol to others. At the apex of the marker rests a maul, wedge and the head of an axe, traditional tools of the woodman.³⁵

While the gravemarker of Roy Dennis (D. 1924) is not a tree, it does present oak leaves in a very distinctive manner. The form is a shallow vertical concrete box with a truncated gable pediment on top. The marker is deteriorated but it can still be discerned that there was a glass front from the few shards of broken glass present. Within the recess of the box, which appears to have been painted red at one time, is a cross of metal oak leaves created from a wire frame. There is no other marker like this one in the cemetery.

³⁴ Joy Neighbors, "Woodmen of the World and the Tree Stone Grave Markers," (June 21, 2011), online article at <http://agraveinterest.blogspot.com/2011/06/woodmen-of-world-and-tree-stone-grave.html>, accessed 08/02/2018.

³⁵ E-mail to Holly Hope from Jan Hearn Davenport, Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park, Little Rock, 8/01/2018; Keister, 111.

Besides the flower and the tree, other forms of vegetation made their way into funerary lexicon. A lovely double marker for Charles Sumner Rector (D. 1888) and his little brother Willie Lavina Rector (D. 1876) features two doves resting on olive branches that emerge from an urn. The beaks of the doves are touching in a loving gesture. The olive branch, olive tree and doves are mentioned frequently in the Bible and are indicative of the soul's parting from earth within the peace of God. Doves are used often in a variety of poses on children's graves as a figure of purity. The stems of the olive tree diverge and arch around the children's separate inscriptions to form a border along the shoulders and edges of the small tablet stone. A single rose is placed at the center of the tympanum.³⁶

Doves are also used on the recent marker of Ruth Lucille Scott Kay (D. 2004). While most granite markers today utilize shallow laser-etched designs, Kay's stone displays three-dimensional forms in a graceful pattern. The top and one side of the die drip with ivy carved into the stone. This treatment displays a lighter color and texture than the polished die. Two doves perch atop the stone. The visual interest of the carving softens this modern form.

Grape clusters can be seen on the stone of Mrs. Annie Morris (D. 1885). Although this is an early death date for the Rustic movement, it has that character as the grapes are folded around a primitive wooden frame. As a symbol of the Eucharistic wine, the grape clusters eventually came to represent the blood of Christ changing to wine or food.³⁷

A sheaf of wheat can be seen often in Arkansas cemeteries but it was not as popular as other symbols. A double tablet marker featuring a single epitaph for Mary B. Jackson (D. 1882) includes a sheaf of wheat, a daffodil and an open Bible. Sometimes wheat can represent a person who has lived a long life. This would not have applied to Mary as the symbol is placed above the opposite blank half of the double marker and she was only 25 years old at her death. The epitaph states that she was the wife of G.M. McIntosh so it must have been meant for him; however he is conspicuously absent. On Mary's half of the marker is carved a roundel with a single daffodil, a flower with a double meaning. It is used to refer to Narcissus, a conceited boy who drowned in a pool as he was admiring himself. The narcissus flower emerged from the water, which spawned the meaning of the bloom as rebirth and victory over death. A third roundel with a shallow carving of the open Bible is placed at the top of the triple tympanum of the stone. Again, these depictions are not atypical, but the stone is visually pleasing in its arrangement and conveys a variety of personal meanings.³⁸

Angels at Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park

Like the Mount Holly Cemetery, Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park has its share of angels and cherubs executing duties, but there are fewer sculptural forms. Among the three-dimensional examples are two architecturally and artistically important illustrations. The sizeable Steen monument is one of a few American replicas of the original "Angel of Grief" executed by sculptor William Wetmore

³⁶ Keister, 62, 79.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 57.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 45-46.

Story in Rome for his wife Emelyn Story. This version is larger than Emelyn's 1895 marker, but the architecture is similar and like Story's, a wreath and olive branch is included. A large winged angel in robes lies prostrate in grief across the monument, her face buried as one arm droops despondently.³⁹

The Strickland monument consists of three separate figures on a single marble base. Even though the marker has suffered extensive damage in the loss of feet, hands and heads, the symbolism is still apparent. The central figure is a wingless presenting angel wearing a belted robe. These beings clutch bouquets of flowers and usually are extending a hand holding a single blossom. The Strickland bouquet is varied and contains lilies, morning glories, roses and forget-me-nots and other decorative blooms. Two cherubs are seated atop cairns on either side of the angel. Previous damage to the marker resulted in the loss of the cherub's heads. The cherub to the left of the angel is clothed in a loose robe, feet crossed at the ankles and holding a small cross embellished with a lily. The cherub to the right is nude but a pall drapes beneath it. A scroll unfurls at its feet and it holds a single inverted torch. In this instance the torch is still burning, meaning that the interred is not gone, but existing in another world. This is the burial place of Mary E. Strickland (D. 1889) and what is assumed to be her two sons Earnest and Burnard (no death dates). This grouping can be taken to mean that the mother is represented by the central adult angel while the cherubs are symbolic of her sons.⁴⁰

Shallow bas-relief carvings of angels are more common than sculptural forms in the Oakland Cemetery section of the historic park. The one-day old son of G.W. and E.R. Templeton (D. 1884) is remembered with a cherub. Sugaring – the outmigration of marble crystals caused by the freeze-thaw cycle or improper cleaning - has affected this tablet marker but it presents interesting iconography. The small wingless body appears suspended in profile. Its upraised arms are holding what might possibly be a pall as though it were a parachute, which lends it a more playful air than what his parents surely intended. A more personalized angelic symbol was utilized on the grave of Amanda Howe (D. 1878). It is likely a stylized portrait of the child with a full head of ringlets framing her face. Wings form a sphere from her shoulders. A similar angel is employed on Lulu Baroset's marker (D. 1879). The childlike figure with wings clothed in a full robe, kneels at a tablet stone, laying flowers. Like Amanda, the hair is arranged into large ringlets, evoking a potentially realistic characterization.

The story of Elizabeth Stratmann (D. 1873) is not known, but the artwork on her large marble tablet marker suggests perhaps the previous loss of children. A mature angel with spread wings holds the bodies of two prone babies as it ascends. Apparent grief is signified by the angel's bowed head. Easily the most expressive and artistically emotional marker at Oakland and Fraternal is that of Delia Lewis (D. 1871). The base of this short vertical marker is composed of a stone cairn, ivy vines and a scroll. A furred banner proclaims "Our Delia." This device is topped with the serene face of an angel framed by a collar of feathers extended into spread wings. What would otherwise seem a disjointed smooth block of marble provides an unbroken surface for a gracefully curving morning glory vine that

³⁹ Jay Jensen, "Culture: Monumental Love – The Story of the Story's and the Angel of Grief," *Brave Magazine Blog* (April 16, 2015), online at <http://www.bravemagazine.com/blog/culture-monumental-love-the-story-of-the-storys-and-the-angel-of-grief/>, accessed 08/02/2018.

⁴⁰ Keister, 137.

emerges from the angel's head like a crown. The vines join in the center and twine to the top of the marker where the blooms become a three-dimensional element.

Nineteenth and early twentieth-century double markers, usually for married couples often utilized multiple sentimental symbols. Most mid-twentieth century gravestones tended toward starkness, but a modern granite marker for Walter (D. 1960) and Bessie Scruggs (D. 1980) is reminiscent of earlier forms in that several images sum up their lives. The couple's epitaphs are carved into two closed Books of Life. Primroses curl toward the center element, which consists of a semi-circular canopy of trees beneath which a trail leads toward the horizon. Two figures holding hands walk through the tree trunks along the trail. "Memory lane" is inscribed beneath their feet. Most granite markers of that period exhibit very shallow, uniform carving, but the central tableau and the primroses are of a deeper cut than the books, which draws the eye to the couple walking from life to the afterlife together.

Another unusual example of a double-marker for a couple can be found in the B'nai Israel section dedicated to Harry (D. 1925) and Birdie Lasker (D. 1948). A large Torah approximately five feet long and four feet wide forms a ledger stone flat on the ground. The Torah can be basically defined as "God's revealed teaching or guidance for humankind."⁴¹ The open book of limestone is carved to emulate the natural fall of the pages, which provides "blank pages" for inscriptions. It is simple with the couple's names above small Art Deco decorative devices. Hebrew lettering is inscribed above the names and at the base of the pages.

Folk Art Symbolism at the Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park

Besides the numbers of commercially carved monuments, the Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park contains a few examples of vernacular gravestones. More often than not, family members would construct these homemade forms using inexpensive materials or found objects. While rudimentary and not formal iconography, it was a symbol of heartfelt loss and a form of folk art.

The grave of Viola Lester (D. 1930) exhibits no birth date but it is obviously the resting place of a child as a small crib or coping of concrete and crystals extends from the headstone. The gravestone is a simple concrete tablet form. A copper Healey and Roth funeral home nameplate is hammered into the concrete. "Viola" is spelled out with small crystal pebbles and "Lester" is formed with shards of blue and milk glass. Beneath her name the bottom of a blue bottle provides a decorative device. It has been noted that African American burial traditions include grave goods or objects that were meant to recognize the deceased and protect their spirit. Broken bottles and pebbles such as those found on Viola's marker are recorded among the characteristic articles. It is not known if Viola was African American but it is possible, if she wasn't that it was a borrowed emblem. As her story is unknown there

⁴¹ "Torah: Sacred Text," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, online article at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Torah>, accessed 08/13/2018.

could be many reasons they chose such symbolism, economy being one of them or simply that the creator or the deceased thought the glass was attractive.⁴²

In the Fraternal section of the park, one vernacular gravestone also displays the use of grave goods. Large elaborate obelisks were employed in funerary architecture frequently and the concrete marker of Mrs. Emma Proctor (D. 1937) was styled on that form. Obelisks were influenced by pagan Egyptian memorials symbolizing tributes by kings to deities. Eventually it became a gravestone; however, monument carvers warned that its origins were pagan, so the purchaser should take pains to include a Christian symbol.⁴³

Mrs. Proctor's obelisk is approximately four-and-a half feet tall with a concrete planter incorporated into one side at the base. An inset square displays her name and birth and death dates with impressed bits of seashells. One fragment of shell as a decorative embellishment remains but indentions in the concrete demonstrate that there were other shell bits. Two forms with perhaps three leaves are deeply pressed in the shaft about mid-point. This could be an approximation of ivy, a flower or a symbol of the Trinity. At the top of the shaft is a diamond-shaped inset with a cross composed of shell shards. Perhaps this was the advocated Christian mitigation.

The use of shells would have tied in with the grave good custom as African American burials were frequently marked with such items (Fraternal Cemetery was instituted for several African American fraternal lodges in 1888). This has been linked to the symbol of the sea as an ingress and egress for the deceased. The shells "...stand for water, the means of glory and the land of demise." This symbol is another example of a shared practice, as it can be found in white cemeteries.⁴⁴

Symbols with their sentimental, religious, ethnic and cultural associations are important to those who are left behind. So much so that they inscribe them in materials meant to remain after they're gone. The Mount Holly Cemetery and Oakland and Fraternal Historic Cemetery Park are repositories of the well-known and the lesser-known and all are commemorated flamboyantly or as best as could be. The iconography exhibited in these burial grounds continues to elicit responses and the evolution of such traditions can be followed from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. So it can be seen that cemeteries are historically revealing to the genealogist, the artist and the anthropologist.

⁴² "African American Grave Decoration," Art of the American South, online article at <https://southernart.ua.edu/african-american-grave-decoration/>, accessed 08/13/2018.

⁴³ Captain John K. Shawvan "Memorial Types: The Obelisk or Shaft," *Design Hints*, (1930), 10, 30.

⁴⁴ "History of African American Cemeteries," online article found at <https://www.sciway.net/hist/chicora/gravematters-1.html>, accessed 08/13/2018.