

Headstone Icons, Symbols and Their Meanings:

ANIMALS

Many grave memorials display incised or three-dimensional animals and these have strong symbolic meanings. The following are some symbolic animal designs:

Ants - Christian industry.

Bats - (rare) The underworld.

Bees - Resurrection; risen Christ.

Bird/s in flight - These are symbolic of the "winged soul." The representation of the soul by a bird goes back to ancient Egypt. Some older burial art features only wings to convey the symbol of divine mission. Often denote the graves of children, eternal life.

Butterfly - The soul, Although quite rare, it is occasionally seen on graves (most often of children). It is symbolic of the resurrection of Christ. The meaning is derived from the three stages of the life of the butterfly—the caterpillar, the chrysalis, and the butterfly. The three stages are symbols of life, death and resurrection. Short-life.

Cardinal – Passion for life.

Cobra - Death (an Egyptian influence).

Cock (Rooster) - Awakening to resurrection. Vigilance.

Cocoon or Chrysalis - represents the metamorphosis to the afterlife.

Chrysalis - Christian metamorphosis; resurrection.

Dog - Dogs often appear at the feet of medieval women, signifying the loyalty and inferior place of each in the chivalric order. Modern dogs only imply that the master was worth loving.

Dolphin - portrays the idea of resurrection.

Dove - An important symbolic animal in Christianity representing the Holy Spirit. The white dove is referred to in the story of baptism of Christ. "And John bore record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him" (Bible, John 1:32). The descending dove is a very common motif on grave memorials. Seven doves are representative of the seven spirits of God or

the Holy Spirit in its sevenfold gifts of grace. Purity, devotion, Divine Spirit.

Dove and Olive Branch - Peace. This symbol stems from Judeo-Christian culture and the biblical story of Noah and the great flood. When the dove returned to the ark with an olive branch from the Mount of Olives in its beak, it was a sign of God's forgiveness. It is now a common secular symbol.

Dragon - Dramatically different interpretation between Eastern and Western cultures. In the Orient, the dragon protects humans from evil spirits and represents joy, health and fertility. But in Western cultures, the dragon possesses the negative traits of the snake, destruction, danger, depravity, and loss of innocence. In Jewish tradition, mythical beasts like the dragon are messianic creatures. Also, a dragon being defeated by St. George depicts triumph over sin.

Eagle - suggests courage and possibly a military career, symbol for Saint John.

Egg – Regeneration.

Fish - indicates faith.

Foo Dog - Guardian beings found at the gates of many Chinese cemeteries. Foo dogs are what resulted when Indian Buddhist missionaries described lions to Chinese artists (who had no such creature lurking in their woods.) One male and one female foo dog guard each assigned entryway. The male, sitting on the right as you enter the gate, holds down a ball, sometimes painted gold. This signifies the authority of the man over the family's worldly affairs. The female, sitting on the left, holds down a kitten. She rules the domestic life, including the raising of the children and the management of the household. These relationships, like all familial ties, persist into death.

Frog - depicts sin and worldly pleasures, or may represent resurrection.

Fox - Cruelty, cunning.

Hart (male deer) - represented either faithfulness, thirsting for God, or Christ slaying Satan.

Hooped Snake - In 18th and 19th century New England, this symbol meant eternity.

Horse - Courage or generosity. An attribute of St. George, St. Martin, St. Maurice and St. Victor, all of whom are represented in Christian art on horseback. It was in honor of the crusaders.

Lamb - This is the most common animal symbol found on a child's grave. The lamb appears throughout the ages with great regularity in Christian art and

because it is a symbol of Christ: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" (Bible, John 1:29). The use of the lamb in religious art pre-dates Christianity and appears to have been used first by the Egyptians. It signifies purity and innocence. Christ in his sacrificial role and personifies: innocence, meekness, gentleness and humility.

Lion - Symbolizes the power of God and guards the tomb against evil spirits. Like other guardians, the lion's watch is as eternal as the stone of which it is depicted. The lion also recalls the courage and determination of the souls which they guard; they manifest the spirit of the departed. Resurrection.

Lion, Winged - St. Mark the Evangelist.

Mermaids (or Sirens) - From mythology, which was a part of the Puritan's life. Sirens or mermaids were the messengers of Prosperina and were sent to carry the souls of the dead to Hades.

Owl - Suggests wisdom.

Ox, Winged - St. Luke the Evangelist.

Peacock - Symbolized the incorruptibility of flesh, a symbol of immortality (even St. Augustine believed the peacock's flesh to have "antiseptic qualities" and that it didn't corrupt), the peacock became a symbol of Christ and the Resurrection. Its image embellished everything from the Catacombs to everyday objects, like lamps, especially in early Romanesque and Byzantine churches. (The peacock, for obvious reasons, was also used as a symbol for pride, too).

Pelican - Charity (also reflects a longer story about their own blood) Catholic meaning: The Pelican is a symbol of the atonement and the Redeemer and is often found in Christian murals, frescos, paintings and stained glass. The pelican was believed to wound itself in order to feed its young with its own blood. In the hymn "Adoro Te," St. Thomas Aquinas addresses the Savior with, "Pelican of Mercy, cleanse me in Thy Precious Blood." Allusion is even made to this belief in "Hamlet" (act iv): "To his good friend thus wide I'll open my arms And, like the kind, life-rendering pelican, Repast them with my blood."

Phoenix - Resurrection It's a wonderful bird symbol with wings and head to the side. It's a Greek symbol of the resurrection, beauty of soul, immortality, symbolized the incorruptibility of flesh, resurrection, beauty of soul, immortality.

Ram - Sacrifice.

Rooster - Awakening, the Resurrection.

Serpent- Ancient Egyptian symbol for life and health. Shown swallowing its own

tail it represents eternity.

Sheep & Goats - Christians and non-believers.

Squirrel with a nut - Religious meditation or spiritual striving.

Snake - Sin, Satan, fall of man.

Snake, Hooped - Eternity.

Snake with Tail in Mouth - Eternity, unity.

Stag - Life, Wisdom, Regeneration and Growth, Virility. Because its antlers resemble branches, the stag has been associated with the Tree of Life and because of the way it renews its antlers, it's been used as a symbol of regeneration. In the West during the Middle Ages, the stag was often shown with a crucifix between its horns where, in Christianity, it represents purity and solitude and was the enemy of Satan, the serpent. The Celts believed the stag led souls through the darkness. The stag also was associated with warriors and hunting in Celtic culture and in Greco-Roman mythology where it was an animal sacred to Artemis. In Buddhism, the golden stag represents knowledge. The Chinese regard it as a symbol of virility and happiness.

Swallow - Indicates a child or motherhood.

BODY PARTS

Arms outstretched - The plea for mercy.

(The) Death's Head - On medieval monuments the death's head was used to represent Death, a reminder that death comes to everyone, as indicated by the words that later accompanied it, *Memento Mori*, meaning "Remember that you must die." Heart in the Mouth of a Death's Head means the soul emerging triumphant from death.

Eye of God/All-Seeing Eye - The Eye of God or the All-Seeing Eye symbolizes the all-knowing and ever-present God. During the Renaissance period in Europe, it was common to illustrate the Eye of God surrounded by a triangle (the Holy Trinity). The eye within the triangle, surrounded by a circle and radiating rays of light is used to symbolize the holiness of the true God.

Hands - The use of hands in some form is very common on grave memorials. Symbol of leaving.

Hands, clasped - At first glance, these hands all seem to be in the same fashion but a number of interesting characteristics stand out. First, most of the hands illustrate the right hand in a grasp with fingers overlapping the other hand while the left hand is open. This could be the depiction of a man holding a woman's hand and indicate marriage or a close bond between individuals, unity and affection even after death. Clasped hands are also symbolic of a farewell or last good-bye. Look at the cuff to distinguish between a man's or woman's hand (woman would have a frilly cuff.) The person who died first holds the other's hand, guiding the spouse to heaven.

Hand of God plucking a link of a chain - represents God bringing a soul unto himself.

Hands holding -

- A chain with a broken link - Symbolizes the death of a family member.
- A heart - Symbolic of charity and is common on 19th century memorials. It is typically seen on memorials of members of the Independent Order of Odd fellows. Charity.
- An open book - The embodiment of Faith.

Hand pointing -

- Downward - Mortality or sudden death. (Possibly a depiction of a secret Masonic handshake.)
- Upward - The reward of the righteous, confirmation of life after death. Heavenly reward, ascension to heaven.
- Hands praying - Connote devotion.
- Two hands touching at thumbs - The hands are making the "Live long and prosper" gesture that Mr. Spock used on Star Trek (Leonard Nimoy is Jewish, and that's where he got it). The Cohen was the priestly caste. They perform a few specific functions in Orthodox Judaism, and have a few unique restrictions: they are not supposed to remarry or touch a dead body, for example. People who are Cohen often have Cohen as their last name. This is the hand gesture made by Cohen at the end of services in Orthodox synagogues, it's a benediction, and had come to universally represent Cohens.

Heart - Love, mortality, love of God, courage and intelligence.

Heart Bleeding - Christ's suffering for our sins.

Heart Encircled with thorns - The suffering of Christ.

Heart Flaming - Signifies extreme religious fervor.

Heart Pierced by a sword - The Virgin Mary, harkening to Simeon's prophecy to Mary at the birth of Christ, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul." It can also be used to represent charity.

Heart Sacred - Usually found in Catholic cemeteries, this heart refers to the suffering of Christ for our sins.

Skull, Wreath on - Victory of death over life.

GEOMETRIC SYMBOLS

Geometric forms are commonly found on grave memorials:

Circle - The circle is pre-Christian and its original symbolic meaning has been adopted by Christianity. It is universally known as the symbol of eternity and never-ending existence. Extremely common on grave sites, its usual representation is a cross surrounded by circle. Two circles, one above the other, represent earth and sky. Three interconnected circles represent the Holy Trinity.

Cross - The ties between all religious beliefs and symbolism have always been strong. To the Christians the greatest symbolic message is in the crucifix. The crucifix or cross can generate many symbolic messages ranging from love, faith and goodness to terror and fear (e.g. the Ku-Klux-Klan's use of the burning cross). There are many different types of Christian crosses worldwide, but only a handful is common in North America.

Botonee Cross - So named because of its modified trefoil (three-lobed) ends, represents the trinity.

Calvary Cross - A Latin cross standing on three steps or blocks, it signifies faith, hope and love. Love is sometimes replaced by charity.

Celtic Cross - The circle around the crosspiece symbolizes eternity. It's origin can be traced to the Celtic cultures of the British Isles. There is a legend of how St. Patrick when preaching to some soon to be converted heathens was shown a sacred standing stone that was marked with a circle that was symbolic of the moon goddess. Patrick made the mark of a Latin cross through the circle and blessed the stone making the first Celtic Cross.

Eastern Cross - Used in Orthodox (Russian/Greek) Christian Religions, this cross upper horizontal shoulder representing the inscription over the head of Jesus. The lower slanting shoulder represents the footrest of the crucified Jesus.

Fleuree Cross/Gothic Cross - This flowered cross symbolizes the adult Christian by its more opened flared out ends.

Greek Cross - It has four arms equal in length and is the traditional symbol of Christian faith. The equal length drawings of the cross is pre-Christian, and in paganism, represented the four elements—earth, air, fire and water.

Ionic Cross - Similar to the Celtic Cross, its ends flair outward. The ionic cross signifies everlasting salvation, love and glory. The circle around the crosspiece symbolizes eternity.

Latin Cross - One of the oldest symbols of Christianity and the most commonly used form, it is also the simplest in design. In early times, it was called god's mark.

Latin Cross surrounded by circle or oval - Representing eternity or never-ending existence.

The Eye of God surrounded by a triangle and a circle - symbolic of the eternity of the Holy Trinity.

Fleur-de-lis - Passion and love.

Menorah or seven-branched candlestick - Jewish symbol for divine presence of God. The seven branches of the candlestick represents the seven days for the creation of the world by God.

Ohm, Om, Aum - Within Hinduism symbolizes the unborn non-dualistic, omnipresent, impersonal Absolute, which incorporates all forms of life; which is life. The sacred AUM symbol above represents both the unmanifest, nirguna, and manifest, saguna, aspects of the Absolute. By sound and form, AUM symbolizes the infinite Brahman* (ultimate reality). A stands for Creation, U stands for Preservation, M stands for Destruction or dissolution.

Pentagram - This is a five-pointed, star-shaped figure made by extending the sides of a regular pentagon until they meet. This figure pre-dates Christianity and was first known to be used by Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher. Later in the Middle Ages, the pentagram was used by magicians and sorcerers. It was believed that the pentagram offered protection against evil. Christianity adopted the figure and the symbolism to suggest the five wounds suffered by Christ on the cross. It is interesting to note that the pentagram is used by both Christianity and pagan beliefs such as modern day Wicca.

Pyramid - Eternity. It was supposed that a pyramid-shaped tombstone prevented the devil from reclining on a grave.

Square - It represents the earth and earthly existence. Some monuments have a cube or square inverted to point the corners downward and upward. This illustrates earthly existence and the directions of earth and heaven.

Star

A five-pointed star - Is symbolic of the life of Christ and may also represent the

five wounds of Christ.

Five-pointed pentagram star - This star is drawn with one stroke of the pen. Its exact origin is unknown, and its meaning has changed throughout the ages. The pre-Christian Celtic priests called it the witch's foot. It is also called Solomon's Seal and was known in the Middle Ages as the goblin's cross. Today the symbol is a favorite among graffiti artists and so-called demonology practitioners. Like the pentagon, it is believed to have protective powers against evil. In Wicca beliefs, it represents protection against demons and a symbol of safety. The ancient Babylonians used the symbol as a magic charm. The five-pointed pentagram star represents the five senses. To the Jews, it represents the five mosaic books. This symbol has also been adopted by Masonic organizations (e.g., the Eastern Star).

The Star of David - Six-pointed star or Star of David, also known as Magen David (Hebrew for shield of David), it is typically used as a symbol of Judaism. The star is actually made of two triangles. It signifies divine protection as epitomized by the alchemistic signs for fire and water which are an upward and downward apexed triangle. The star is a very ancient symbol, used by several Asia Minor cultures, as well as some Greek city states. For Judaism, the Star of David came into widespread use at the beginning of the 20th century. Theodore Hertzl, a Jewish activist, adopted the symbol in his writings promoting Palestine as a Jewish homeland.

Stars and Stripes Around Eagle -- Eternal vigilance and liberty. Often seen on military markers.

Swastika - Exact origin is unknown but it is considered one of the oldest and widespread symbols used. Commonly found on Buddhist memorials, it represents the seal of the Buddha's heart; the doctrine of Buddha; the round of existence. To the Chinese, the swastika had two forms symbolizing the male and female; clockwise and anti-clockwise. Also used by the Romans and later by the Nazi party in Germany during the Second World War.

Trefoil/Triquetra - In Christianity, the equilateral triangle is the symbol of the Trinity. Other geometric shapes representing the Holy Trinity are the trefoil, the triquetra, the circle within the triangle, the triangle in circle and the triquetra and circle. To the ancient Egyptians, the triangle was an emblem of Godhead; to the Pythagoreans, it symbolized wisdom. Another use of the triangle is in the symbol of the eye (eye of God) surrounded by a triangle.

Triangle - In the Christian tradition, the triangle represents Faith, Hope and Charity, and the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The symbolism of this shape is always associated with its three sides, signifying a variety of triads such as birth, life and death; heaven, earth and human; mind, body and soul; body, soul and spirit; and father, mother and child. In ancient Egypt, the triangle

combined will, intelligence, and love to represent man's soul. The ancient Egyptians and the Mayans built stepped pyramids with temples at the top to represent the cosmic mountain. In magic and alchemy, the pyramid with its apex pointing upward represents fire or masculinity and when inverted, represents water or femininity. These two triangles combined signify the unity of the elements in alchemy and, in Judaism's Star of David they stand for the union of opposites. The pyramid can also represent aspiration, the struggle to climb to the top and achieve one's earthly ambition or heavenly ascent.

Yin-Yang Circle - The symbol comes from Taoism and Confucianism and represents harmony and balance. It denotes the two existential and controlling forces of the universe, the yin, the negative and passive feminine power depicted in black and on the left side of the circle, and the yang, the positive and active masculine power depicted in white on the right side of the circle. Yin represents the soul, wetness, cold, darkness, the moon, the Earth and sustenance. Yang represents the spirit, light, heat, dryness, day, the sun, heaven, creation and dominance. The yin before the yang signifies primeval darkness before creation. The small circle of the opposite color contained within both the yin and the yang represents the seed of the other and therefore their interdependence. The sigmoid line dividing the yin and yang means dynamism and the two are contained within a circle of revolution and unity.

OBJECTS

Alpha and omega – The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; symbolic of God, the beginning and the ending.

Anchor - Early Christians used the anchor as a disguised cross, and as a marker to guide the way to secret meeting places. A Christian symbol of hope, it is found as funerary symbolism in the art of the catacombs. Often set amongst rocks. It can also be an occupational symbol in sea-faring areas or the attribute of Saint Nicholas, patron saint of seamen, symbolized hope and steadfastness. An anchor with a broken chain stands for the cessation of life.

Ankh - The original meaning of this ancient Egyptian symbol is not known. One possible theory suggests that it combines the male and female symbols of Osiris (the cross) and Isis (the oval) and therefore signifies the union of heaven and earth. It is usually portrayed in ancient Egyptian art in the hands of a deity. As a hieroglyph, it likely encompassed a range of meanings depending on its associated hieroglyphs but all of these expressions centered around the concept of life or life-force. Over time, the ankh certainly came to symbolize life and immortality, the universe, power and life-giving air and water. "Its key like shape also encouraged the belief that it could unlock the gates of death". The Coptic

Christians used it as a symbol of life after death. The ankh has been used in magic and today it usually symbolizes peace and truth.

Anvil – Martyrdom.

Arch - Victory of life; or victory in death.

Ark - Church, salvation.

Ark of Noah - (rare) Refuge, salvation.

Armor - Protection from evil.

Arrow - Denotes mortality.

Arrow, a Quiver of - Warlike.

Angels - The agent of God, often pointing towards heaven; guardians of the dead, symbolizing spirituality. Angels are shown in all types of poses with different symbolism.

Two angels commonly identified by the objects they carry: Michael, who bears a sword and Gabriel, who is depicted with a horn.

Blowing a trumpet (or even two trumpets) - Representing the day of judgment, and "Call to the Resurrection".

Carrying the departed soul - As a child in their arms, or as a Guardian embracing the dead. The "messengers of god" are often shown escorting the deceased to heaven.

Angel/Cherubim - Guardians of a sacred place, servants of God; divine wisdom or justice.

Flying – Rebirth.

Many angels gathered together in the clouds - Represents heaven.

Angel Weeping - Grief, or mourning an untimely death.

Anthemion - (an THEE mee on) Plural: anthemia. Alternate name: Honeysuckle ornament. A classical ornament featuring honeysuckle or palmettes with foliage below; used singly on antefixes (ornamental blocks concealing tile-ends at the edges of a roof), or as a running ornament on friezes. Greek: "anthemion" - a flower. One type of ancient Greek palmette resembles honeysuckle flowers, another is more like a palm leaf. Both were used in bands of anthemion ornament.

Baby's chair - Small, empty furniture symbolized unfulfilled lives of children; represented the child now gone; with small shoes on chair - connection to childhood, symbolized inability to achieve adulthood.

Banner - Victory, triumph.

Battle Axe - Martyrdom.

Bed - At rest.

Bells - Call to worship.

Bell, Deid - This was rung to give notice of funerals, and at the funeral itself; a small handbell, it was a favorite emblem north of the Tay, Scotland.

Bible - Connotes a religious lay person or a cleric.

Black and white tiles - Checkered pattern or similar, represents good and evil.

Bones - Death and decay. One of the symbol set of the Memento Mori. See Hourglass, Sickle and Skull.

Book - Faith, learning to read and write, a scholar. A prayer, or knowledge or even memory. It may represent the Book of Life and is often shown as a bible. A popular form is the book as a double page spread.

A pair of Holy Books - On Mormon (LDS) headstones indicates the Bible and Book of Mormon.

Three Holy Books - On Mormon headstones indicates the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine & Covenants -- all of which are scripture to the LDS Church.

Branch - Severed mortality.

Bridge - Since antiquity, bridges have symbolized linking; between the earthly and heavenly realms, between the physical and the spiritual, or between life and death. In modern psychoanalytic terms, bridges symbolize the transition from one state of being to another and the opportunity for change. The bridge's near side represents the past, its opposite side the future, and water flowing underneath, the chaos of the unconscious mind.

Broken Ring - Family Circle Severed.

Bugles - Resurrection and the Military.

Candle, with a flame – Life.

Candle being snuffed - Mortality.

Candlestick - Christ, devotion.

Cannon – Military service.

Chain - Means truth.

Chains - Medieval thinkers sometimes held that a golden chain bound the soul to the body. Broken links on a headstone can mean the severance and subsequent release of the spirit from the body. Chains are also the insignia of the International Order of Odd Fellows, so called because of their dedication to giving the poor decent burials. This association can be clinched by the observation of the letters IOOF or FLT (Friendship, Love, Truth) either inside or near the chain.

Chalice – Sacraments.

Chariot - Taking the soul to heaven.

Cherubs - The graves of children.

Cherub's Head - The soul.

Children - Usually represent the untimely death of the innocent. They may be shown mourning a parent, but if holding a skull that means they are dead themselves.

Child Sleeping - Sleep is the tie between life and death; children are purity, artlessness, and innocence

Chrisma - A cross like shape formed by a combination of two Greek letters, chi (X) and rho (P) corresponding to CH and R of the word, Christ, hence a symbol for Jesus Christ.

Circle - Eternity or Earth.

Comedy & Tragedy - Person laid to rest was a theater performer or lover of the theater.

Cornucopia – A fruitful life.

Crossed keys - St. Peter.

Clock/Watch – (rare) Represents the transitory nature of human existence. In psychoanalysis it signifies human emotions. It also can represent new beginnings and opportunities.

Clouds- Atmospheric veil which conceals God from his worshipers.

Coat of Arms - High social status and family lineage.

Columns, with archway - Heavenly entrance.

Crescent Moon – Virgin.

Cross and Anchor - Another early Christian symbol referring to Christ as "hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sincere and steadfast" (Hebrews 6:19).

Crescent (Most often with a star) - The deceased was probably a Muslim.

Crown - Immortality, righteousness, victory, triumph, resurrection, symbolic of honor or glory, glory of life after death. May be shown being offered to those on Earth by Angels.

Cross - Salvation.

Cross with Rays of Rising Sun - Glory.

Cross with Winding Sheet - Descent from the cross.

Crown on a cross - Sovereignty of the Lord.

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Draperies/Curtains - In the days when the body lay in state in the parlor, it was the custom to cover everything in black. Draperies, with their fancy frills and tassels, are more elaborate than a simple shroud. They allow the expression of mourning to linger long after the body has been taken out the front door and the accoutrements have been stowed for the next death in the family.

Curtains can also set the stage. Parted, they reveal a telling excerpt. What is important in such displays is the main actor or central object of the scene.

Father Time – Mortality.

Field artillery (rare) - The military profession.

Flag – Patriotism or member of the armed services.

Flame - Eternity.

Figure with Dart – Mortality.

Finger - Pointing to heaven.

Fluer-de-lis - Trinity, Virgin.

Flyfot - Swastika.

G.A.R. STAR - Grand Army of the Republic (a Civil War Union Veteran marker).

Garlands - Victory in death.

Gateway - Carries much of the same symbolism as the door but the destination is less personal. It represents entrance to greater areas, the mystical, heaven or hell, spiritual palace. A series of gateways can represent the stages of enlightenment. In dream interpretation, the gateway invites self-exploration. It is a symbol of initiation, passing through the gateway into a new state of being.

Grim Reaper - Death personified.

Globe, winged - Symbolic of creator, wings represent “God over all”.

Hammer - This tool, used in building and shaping, represents the power of creation.

Harp - Associated with David in the Old Testament; symbol of St. Cecilia, patron saint of musicians. Symbolic of worship in heaven, hope.

Heart -Charity; the soul in bliss, love of Christ.

Heart with anchor & cross - Faith, hope & charity.

Horns - The Resurrection.

Hourglass - Time's inevitable passing, attribute of death and Father Time, represents the passage of time and the shortness of life.

Hourglass On its side - That time has stopped for the deceased.

Hourglass with Wings of Time - Time Flying; Short Life.

Incense - Worship, prayer, adoration.

Imps – Mortality.

Keys - Keys stand for spiritual knowledge or, if held in the hands of an angel or saint, the means to enter heaven.

Knot - The interlaced Celtic knot represents resurrection and life everlasting.

Labarum - This symbol is also known as the Monogram of Christ, Constantine's Cross, the Chrismon, the Christogram and the Chi-Rho. Since the Roman emperor Constantine I used this symbol on his shield, overcame his enemy in battle, and consequently converted to Christianity, the labarum has been a symbol of Christianity. In pre-Christian Greece it signified a good omen. It also represented the Chaldean sky god.

Labyrinth - The passage of life.

Lamb of Christ – Religious dedication and beliefs.

Ladder - Passion, Jacob, aspiration.

Lamp - Knowledge, a love of learning, and the immortality of the Spirit.

Lance - Martyrdom.

Lighthouse – Resting place of a lighthouse keeper or someone with inspired vision.

Lyre - (harp) A recognition of musical talents.

Masonic Compass and Set-square - Freemasons combine religious and construction and architectural forms in their symbols. Viewing God as the architect and builder of the universe, Freemasonry intends to build the temple of humanity through self-improvement with stone-masonry work. The compass, used in geometric calculations, symbolizes creation and the spirit. The set-square draws perfect right angles, so represents uprightness and lawfulness. The compass and the square measure things, so they symbolize judgment. They also represent geometry, and the union of the sky (the compass's circle) and the earth (the square). The letter "G" in this symbol represents God, geometry and geomancy. Compasses and a mason's square also were the emblems of the Chinese emperor Fu Hsi.

Moon - Death and rebirth.

Muskets (rare) – Military profession, professional huntsman.

Nimbus - Circle of disk around arms of cross; crown of thorns, eternity.

Orbs as Celestial Bodies - The reward of the resurrection.

Orbs as Effigies - The soul.

Palette (and brushes) - The artist's accolade.

Pall, Pick, Spade – Mortality.

Pallbearers - Mortality.

Picks - Mortality. Commonly used in 17th and 18th century New England.

Pinwheels - This new phenomenon brings motion to otherwise still graveyards. First appearing on the graves of children, pinwheels now can be seen on the graves of adults. The continual movement suggests constancy, perhaps of affection. The wind which propels the tiny mills evokes the spirit. As with all the symbols mentioned in this glossary, people may choose to use them to express these meanings or just because they are pretty.

Pitcher – Jewish symbol - Traditional symbolism for Levites would have been the pitcher or ewer, representative of washing the hands of the High Priests.

Portals - Passageway to eternal journey.

Red Lettering - Chinese tombstones often appear before the decease of the commemorated. Red lettering shows that the person named is still alive. When that person dies, the stonecutter comes and repaints the letters in white.

Rings – A married couple.

Rocks - Everlasting strength in Eternity, referring also to foundation.

Rod or staff – Comfort.

Rope - Eternity, Binding and Connection. In Egyptian hieroglyphics, a knotted cord signifies a man's name, a symbol of an individual's existence. In Vedic teaching, the silver cord "expresses the sacred, inner path which binds the outer consciousness of man (his intellect) with his spiritual essence".

Rosary – Symbol of constant prayer for a loved one.

Scales - Justice, balance. Originating in Chaldea as the mystic symbol of justice, it represents the equivalence of guilt and punishment. From the zodiacal archetype of Libra it represents immanent justice, the idea that guilt automatically unleashes the forces that bring self-destruction and punishment.

Scarab - An ancient Egyptian emblem symbolizing the renewal of life. When shown with falcon's wings it represents transcendence and protection.

Scallop - Symbol of the Crusades, pilgrim, pilgrim's journey, resurrection, life everlasting, connotes one's life journey. A symbol of birth and resurrection, a traditional symbol of the Puritans.

Scroll - Symbol of life and time. Both ends rolled up indicate a life that is unfolding like a scroll of uncertain length and the past and future hidden. Often held by a hand, representing life being recorded by angels. Can also suggest honor and commemoration.

Scythe - Death, the divine harvest.

Sextant - A symbol of a navigator or explorer.

Shattered Urn - Someone Old.

Shell - The use of shell in burials is pre-Christian in practice and pre-dates even Egyptian burial practices. Shell is symbolic of fertility, resurrection and pilgrimage. Shells, coins and small stones are the traditional objects left at grave sites. There are several meanings given to this act. It may be a symbolic referral to the ancient custom of burying the dead under a cairn of rocks to protect the body from scavenging animals, or a reminder that the individual is not forgotten.

Ship - The grave of a seafarer.

Shovels – Mortality.

Sickle - Death as the "last harvest".

Skeleton - The personification of death.

Skull - Death; sin; with crossbones – mortality.

Sphinx - One of many neo-Egyptian designs (along with obelisks and pyramids) which have crept into modern cemeteries. Two kinds of sphinxes appear: the male Egyptian sphinx modeled after the Great Sphinx at Giza and the female (and often bare breasted) Greek Sphinx. Both feature the head and torso of a human creature grafted to the body of a lion. Like foo dogs, sphinxes guard the tomb.

Star - Stars stand for the spirit, piercing the darkness as an expression of their

triumph against the overwhelming odds of oblivion. Five pointed stars represent the spirit rising to heaven.

Steps - A common symbol used around the world, steps generally mean Ascension, Stages or Levels. The number of steps brings the meaning of numbers into the interpretation as does the symbolism of any objects that surround or are a part of the steps. In Romanesque art, steps represent the relationship between worlds. In many religions steps, or a ladder, are seen as the path to god. For alchemists of the Middle Ages, steps were associated with the transmutation process.

Sun - God or the Son.

Sun setting – Death.

Sun shining/rising - Renewed life.

Suns, Moons and Stars - The reward of the resurrection.

Sun- Half - Can symbolize both the beginning and the end of life. The sun is also a symbol of heaven and the journey to heaven.

Sundial - Passage of time.

Sword - A military career.

Swords, crossed - indicates death in battle.

Tao Symbol - The Tao or the Way shows the totality of the universe -- the light and the dark, the male and the female -- always in harmonious opposition. As we find it in cemeteries, it speaks to our relationship with the dead beneath our feet and to the process of life which includes death. The tao also serves as an emblem of religious belief or nationality, signifying one's Buddhist or Taoist faith.

Three points, three stars, three of anything - Trinity.

Torch - lit or upright torch represents life, the inverted or extinguished - death.

Toys - The loss of a child can devastate a family. Flowers did not seem enough to families. Perhaps the custom of adorning children's graves with toys began with a sibling leaving a cherished possession at the graveside. The act shows that the feeling of relationship with the deceased remains after death, even if the child died in infancy.

Trumpets - Victory and resurrection.

Two tablets – The Ten Commandments; God's laws.

Urn - Greek symbol of mourning, the body as a vessel of the soul, originating as a repository for the ashes of the dead in ancient times - a popular symbol of mourning. Most represent an ossuary. In several examples an Angel is looking inside it as if to inspect the contents. A flame is sometimes shown coming from the Urn. They are often draped with a cloth or festooned with a wreath or garland. This fashion of Urn's persisted well into the 1850's at least.

Urn, draped - Connotes death, often of an older person.

Urn with flame - Undying friendship; eternal flame.

UCV HOUSES - United Confederate Veterans.

Vessel with flame - The eternal flame or the eternal spirit of man.

Winged face - Effigy of the soul of the deceased.

Winged globe - A symbol of the Egyptian sun god, Re; on Victorian monuments it is symbolic of the power that can recreate and, with the wings, means, "God, Lord over all, creator."

Winged skull - Flight of the soul from mortal man.

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Winged Sun Disk - This is an ancient Egyptian symbol which represents the journey of the sun. Ra was the creator of the world, ancestor of the pharaohs and god of the sun (symbolized by the solar disk) and skies (symbolized by the wings). The winged sun disk symbolizes the life-giving power of the sun and the spiritual attributes of the heavens.

Winged wheel - The Holy Spirit.

Woman with or without Bible pointing upward – Faith.

Woman hanging onto Cross - Faith. Original drawing accompanied Rev. Toplady's hymn "Rock of Ages." Also seen as woman clinging to pillar or anchor.

Yoke - Bearing service.

FLORA - Flowers, Trees and Plants

Flowers convey love, grief, happiness and other emotions. These symbolic connections of flowers with emotion are cross-cultural and their origins are unknown. During the 1800s, the use of floral symbolism became so popular that almost every flower known had a symbolic gesture attached to it. The following are some symbolic references to common plants and flowers.

Acacia - Immortality of soul.

Acanthus - Heavenly garden. One of the oldest cemetery motifs, acanthus is associated with the rocky ground where most ancient Greek cemeteries were placed. It is the most common motif found on memorials.

Acorn - As the seed of the oak, the acorn is a symbol of potential. In Norse and Celtic culture, acorns symbolized life, fertility and immortality. Druids ate acorns, believing them to have prophetic qualities, and acorns were sacred to the god Thor whose Tree of Life was the oak. "Acorns and oak leaves form one of the circular 'hex' signs used by the Amish and Mennonite communities of southern Pennsylvania, the various signs believed to bestow favors such as protection or natural abundance".

Almond - Favor from God, virgin birth.

Anemone - Those of this flower which are the color of blood represent the transience of life.

Apple - Sin, Eve.

Ash - Nordic peoples thought that the planting of an ash tree brought about the death of the planter or a near relation or his unborn children. The mountain ash or rowan deters evil spirits from bothering the dead. The precise nature of the diabolicals' allergy to the rowan is unknown.

Asphodel - The classic flower of death said to cover the Elysian Fields. Its name is said to mean "field of ashes" or "the beheaded". The use of this flower as the base for a liqueur has certainly caused many an imbibor to feel as if his head has dropped off.

Bamboo - The emblem of Buddha. The seven-knotted bamboo denotes the seven degrees of initiation and invocation in Buddhism. On Japanese memorials, symbolic of devotion and truthfulness.

Beans - The magical fruit was forbidden to initiates of the Orphic Mysteries because of their association with spirits of the dead. One wonders if the ancients observed in flatulence the same spiritual properties that they saw in smoke and banned beans for the less pleasant odor which they affected upon digestion.

Bellflower - Gratitude.

Birch - The ancient Celts covered their dead with birch branches, perhaps to infuse them with the stuff necessary for a successful afterlife.

Bouquets - Condolences; grief.

Boxwood - Box wood has long been used to make coffins.

Bristlecone Pines - Bristlecone pines are among the oldest living things on earth. In the dry climate of eastern California, the wood resists rot for centuries. The people of Mono and Inyo counties, California, place twisted burls on their graves, perhaps to symbolize eternal life.

Buds - Renewal of life.

Buttercup - Cheerfulness.

Calla lily - Symbolizes marriage.

Cherry - The non-fruiting, Japanese cherry blossom represents perfection of virtue and existence. As the blossom withers and succumbs to the inevitable wrecking of the wind, it represents to the Japanese the ideal of the Perfect Death.

Chrysanthemum - Where in Europe this flower represents the harvest, the Japanese see the sun, immortality, and the perpetuity of the Imperial Family.

Cinquefoil - Maternal affection, beloved daughter.

Clover or Shamrock - Irish, or for luck in a gambler.

Corn - It was a country custom to send a sheaf to relatives on the death of a farmer. It may be used as an occupational symbol.

Crocus - Youthful gladness.

Cypress tree - Designates hope or deep mourning.

The cross of the crucifixion was allegedly constructed in part of Cypress. Once felled, a cypress never grows again.

Daffodil - Death of youth, desire, art, grace, beauty, deep regard.

Daisy - Innocence of child, Jesus the Infant, youth, the Son of righteousness, gentleness, purity of thought.

Dead leaves - Sadness, melancholy.

Dogwood - Christianity, divine sacrifice, triumph of eternal life, resurrection.

Easter Lily - Modern symbol of the resurrection.

Evergreens - Immortality.

Fern - Sincerity, sorrow.

Figs, Pineapples - Prosperity, eternal life.

Fleur-de-lis - Flame, passion, ardor, mother.

Flower/s, general - Frailty of life.

Flower, broken - Life cut short; mortality.

Forget-me-not – remembrance.

Fruits - Eternal plenty as in the fruit of life.

Fruit on vines - As Christ is to the church.

Gourds - In 17th and 18th century New England, the birth and death of earthly matters.

Ivy - Memory, immortality, friendship, fidelity, faithfulness, undying affection, eternal life.

Grapes - Represent Christ.

Grapes and Leaves - Christian faith.

Hawthorn - Hope, merriness, springtime.

Holly – Foresight. People used to believe that holly bushes protected tombs and other monuments from lightning strikes.

Honeysuckle - Bonds of love, generosity and devoted affection.

Jujube - A single specimen of this tree growing in Paradise, some Muslims

believe, bears one leaf for every living soul. On the night of 15 Sha'ban, the tree is shaken. Those leaves that fall belong to souls destined to die in the coming year.

Lalla - Beauty, marriage.

Larch - Siberian peoples revere this as the World Tree. Like other conifers, this plant also stands for immortality.

Laurel Leaves - Special achievement, distinction, success, triumph.

Lily - Majesty, innocence, purity, and resurrection. Often associated with the Virgin Mary and resurrection. Often used on women's graves. The use of lilies at funerals symbolizes the restored innocence of the soul at death.

Lily of the Valley - Return of happiness, purity, humility.

Lotus - Purity, Resurrection, Evolution, Potential. Commonly used in ancient Egypt and in Hinduism, the flower is sacred in Buddhism. "It symbolizes the creation of life from the slime of the primordial waters. The closed lotus represents potential. Depending on the number of petals, the lotus' symbolism changes, shaped by the symbolism of the number. With eight petals, it represents cosmic harmony; with 1,000 petals it means spiritual revelation. The lotus is the emblem of India and Egypt.

Mandrake - A belladonna relative whose roots grow in the shape of a man. Mandrake is believed to spring from the life-force of the interred. Lively imaginations hear a shriek when it is pulled from the ground. Germans used to make dolls from the tuber and keep their creations in little caskets.

Maple leaf – Long life and self control; Canada.

Marigold - A large variety, called cempasuchitl, enjoys a special association with Mexico's Day of the Dead; mostly because of its availability in that season. Marigolds not only decorate the graves in the form of crosses and arches, but also form trails to lead the souls of the dead to a home altar set with their favorite foods, photos, and other pleasantries hard to obtain in the afterlife.

Millet - Millet is offered to ancestors of some Chinese as a food to sustain them in the afterlife.

Mistletoe - The marvelous ability of this parasite to sustain itself far above the ground lent to the Druidic belief that it was a sacred plant and an ingredient of immortality. The "golden bough" was used in animal sacrifices. The Norse God Balder lost his immortality when he was pierced by a mistletoe-tipped spear.

Monkey Puzzle Tree - Sometimes found in Eastern England planted on the edge

of graveyards, the tree's sparse foliage was believed to deprive the Devil of a hiding place from whence he might observe funerals and steal the souls of the departed.

Morning Glory - Resurrection, mourning, youth, farewell, brevity of life, departure, mortality.

Moss – Merit.

Mulberry - I will not survive you.

Myrtle - Like the laurel and the bay, the evergreen myrtle represents achievement. It also suggests eternal life.

Mystic rose – Mother.

Narcissus - Aside from sharing the name of a conceited youth who died when he tried to pursue his true love in a pool of water, the flower enjoyed popularity among the Ancient Greeks as a decorative border for graves. It's name means "numbness".

Oak tree - Hospitality, stability, strength, honor, eternity, endurance, liberty. It is believed to have been the tree from which Jesus Christ's cross was made. In smaller pioneer cemeteries, it is common to place children's graves near oak trees. The oak tree was the tree of life in pre-Christian times. The Druids worshipped the oak. The oak, oak leaves and acorn can stand for power, authority or victory. Often seen on military tombs.

Olive - Peace; healing faith.

Palm - Spiritual victory, success, eternal peace, a symbol of Christ's victory of death as associated with Easter.

Pansy - Symbolizes remembrance and humility.

Passion flower - The elements of the passion of Christ: the lacy crown—the crown of thorns; the five stamens—the five wounds; the 10 petals—the 10 faithful Apostles.

Peach - The fruits of a sacred peach, located in the Chinese Garden of Immortality, allow souls who eat of it to regenerate. Unfortunately, the fruit ripens only once every three hundred years. Some Chinese also believed that a Ghost Gateway existed within the branches of a massive specimen with a trunk that was 3000 lis (or about a mile) wide.

Pear - As the wind disassembles and scatters the white blossoms (which are the

color of mourning in China) of this fruit tree, one is begged to consider life's fragility and its eventual end.

Pine - Fertility, regeneration, fidelity.

Pineapple - Hospitality, good host.

Poinsettia – A death occurring near Christmas.

Pomegranate - Immortality, resurrection, unity, nourishment of the soul.

Poplar - Where other cemetery trees promise immortality, the poplar grants us only memories and the sorrows that accompany them.

Poppy - Peace, rest, sleep, eternal sleep, consolation.

Reeds - Evil spirits don't like the looks of reeds and keep their distance. Those who return from the Chinese land of the dead find them efficacious for giving the body a thorough scrubbing over, presumably to remove any putrefaction which the living might find unsightly and repugnant.

Rice - As a food given to one's ancestors, rice states wealth and abundance.

Rose - Love, beauty, hope, unending love, associated with the Virgin Mary, the "rose without thorns." A red rose symbolizes martyrdom and a white rose symbolizes purity and virginity.

Whether the rose is a bud, flower or somewhere in between indicates how old the person was at the time of death.

Rose bud - Normally a child 12 or under.

Rose, partial bloom - Normally a teenager.

Rose, full bloom - Normally in early/mid twenties. The deceased died in the prime of life.

Rosemary - As Ophelia said, "Rosemary, that's for remembrance." In former days, it was put in coffins and given to mourners as a favor.

Sakura - The non-fruiting, Japanese cherry blossom represents perfection of virtue and existence. As the blossom withers and succumbs to the inevitable wrecking of the wind, it represents to the Japanese the ideal of the Perfect Death.

Stumps - Visitors to American cemeteries are often puzzled by stones shaped

like tree stumps. Some of these are very fancy, with tiny squirrels and birds perched on the sawn-off branches. Catholic cemeteries often have crosses made from logs over the grave. Closer inspection often reveals the acronym W.O.W. on the marker. These stones are the product of Woodmen of the World, a 19th and 20th century fraternal organization which provided such stones as part of the insurance available to members. They were usually sculpted by local craftsmen who used sandstone, concrete, and other materials to create the monuments. They symbolize, undoubtedly, the cutting off of life, as well as membership in the organization.

Sun Flower – Life fulfilled.

Thistle - Earthly sorrow, Christ's crown of thorns, Scotland as country of origin.

Tree - The all-covering love of Christ. Life, The Tree of Life.

Tree Felled - Mortality.

Tree/Severed branch – Mortality.

Tree Sprouting - Life everlasting.

Tree Stump - Life interrupted.

Tree Stump w/Ivy - Head of Family; Immortality.

Tree Trunk - Brevity of life.

Tree Trunk Leaning - Short interrupted life.

Tree of life - Symbolized both earthly and heavenly life and spirituality. The "weeping willow" may have also symbolized the sadness family members felt at the time of a loved ones death.

Vine - The sacraments, God's blood, God.

Weeping Willow - Nature's lament, a symbol of sorrow and mourning.

Wheat - Resurrection, bread and wine (Christian), fertility.

Wheat Gathered: Harvested into a new life, often denotes someone dying in later life.

Wheat Bushel - Body of Christ.

Wheat Sheaves - The divine harvest. Often represents the aged.

Wreath or Garland - The use of garlands, wreaths and festoons dates back to ancient Greek times and it was adopted into the Christian religion as a symbol of the victory of the redemption.

The laurel wreath is usually associated with someone who has attained distinction in the arts, literature, athletics or the military. The ivy wreath is symbolic of conviviality (gaiety or joviality). The wreath and festoon together symbolize memory.

Ancient symbol of victory. Memory, passed to eternal life.

Wreath Bridal - May signify the grave of a young bride or groom.

Wreath of Maiden's Garland - A garland of white paper or linen, embellished with streamers and a single white glove, which was carried at the funerals of unmarried women of blameless reputation. The garlands were hung in the church after the funeral and allowed to decay. Then the pieces would be buried in the graveyard.

Wreath on Skull - Victory of death over life.

Yew tree - Sadness, eternal life.

OCCUPATIONS

The following occupations or trades may (but may not always be) represented by the following gravestone symbols.

Barber - Bowl and razor.

Butcher - An ax, steel knife and cleaver.

Farmer - Coulter (type of hoe), flail (threshing implement), swingletree (rod for beating flax), stalk of corn.

Gardener - Rake and spade.

Mason - Wedge and level.

Mariner - Anchor, sextant and cross staff.

Merchant - Scales, a type of sign.

Minister - Bible.

Shoemaker - Leather cutter's knife, nippers, sole cutter and awl.

Smith - Crown, hammer and anvil.

Teacher - Open book (but this can also refer to the Book of Life or Bible).

Weaver - Loom, shuttle and stretchers.

Wright - (A worker skilled in the manufacture especially of wooden objects --usually used in combination (shipwright or wheelwright) and compasses.

Writer - Inkwell and quill.