ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY CEMETERY ART

by Christine N. Simmons
and the Anne Arundel Genealogical Society

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Cover: Jickling tombstones at St. Anne's Cemetery, Annapolis, Maryland

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Introduction

Iconography is the use of visual images and symbols in works of art. While museums and similar buildings typically house works of art, cemeteries are not thought of as a destination to view art. Examples of cemetery iconography in this booklet illustrate the variety and uniqueness of artwork in a burial site setting.

Anne Arundel County, Maryland is blessed with a rich assortment of cemeteries as well as many different types of memorials to its people. This booklet represents some of the unique features found on tombstones as well as some of the emblems found.

Few tombstones exist from the earliest times. Wooden markers and fieldstones marked early graves. During the 18th century, they were often decorated with symbolic reminders of death such as skulls or winged skulls, winged cherub heads, or crowns. Some had emblems of trade or status. Church cemeteries followed, sometimes only for members while others were open to members of the local community. Commercial cemeteries, a fairly recent phenomenon, followed. Anne Arundel County has examples of these cemeteries as well as military and institutional (such as alms houses, mental hospitals, asylums, and prisons) cemeteries; but, by far, the most common are the private family cemeteries. There are two specialty cemeteries, one Hebrew, and the other Greek, both in Annapolis.

The most common symbols found in Anne Arundel County include weeping willows, praying hands, doves, flowers, crosses, angels, and hearts. Some monuments represent sadness and grief, while others reflect the day-to-day lifestyles or interests of the person they represent. Some are even whimsical. Some reflect the artistic abilities of the stone carvers or monument companies.

In Christian cultures, many families choose to mark the site of a burial of a family member with a gravestone. Sometimes a verse from the Bible or a short poem is included, generally on a theme relating to love, death, grief, or heaven. Epitaphs may praise the deceased, quote religious texts or poems, warn about morality or the inevitability of death. Sometimes the language used in the inscription may indicate a religious affiliation.

Anne Arundel County has hosted immigrants from many lands. Some of the languages found on tombstones include Hebrew, Chinese, Arabic, Hawaiian, Italian, Latin, Irish, Korean, Portuguese, Ba'hai, and Russian. Sometimes family genealogies can be found on some tombstones, ranging from the simplistic relationship such as the inclusion of "Father" and "Mother" to more elaborate family histories covering multiple generations.

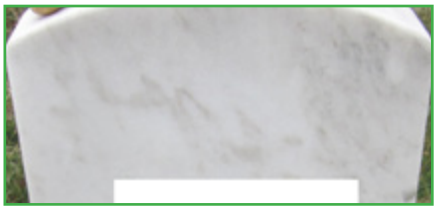
In earlier times, stonemasons carved tombstones and frequently "signed" their work near the base of the tombstone including their name and town where they plied their trade. The distances involved showed a sign of their superior talent.

With cremations becoming more popular, cemeteries have been losing their prominence in communities. Columbaria, urns, and memorial gardens are now taking the place of tombstones, crypts, and mausoleums. This booklet is an attempt at preserving some of the unique qualities of our local cemeteries.

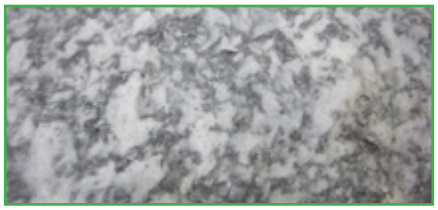
The Birkhead tombstones were moved from their original plantation graveyard at "Birkhead's Meadows" to St. James' parish churchyard in Lothian, Maryland in 1888. Ann's stone is the oldest in Maryland, dated 1665.

Materials

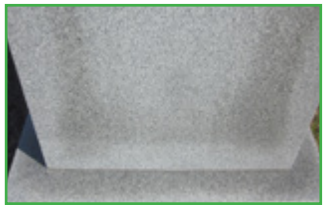
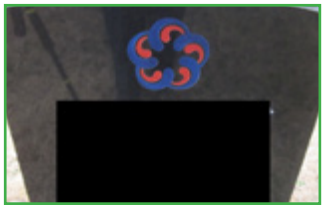
Gravestones may be simple upright stones with a variety of shaped tops. The oldest sections of cemeteries are identified by their appearance—their color, shape, size, and placement. Some are made of fieldstone, slate, sandstone, schist, or any nearby stone, and stood grouped together closely, with taller stones for important citizens and tiny stones for children. With modernization, the color and texture of the markers changed, and with different materials, the stones' shape, size, and decorative carvings were also altered. White marble became the common material and, although it is the softest and easiest to carve, it is also the shortest lived. Today, granite, a harder stone, is more common and generally carved using rotary bits and sandblasting. Use of bluish hollow, zinc, or white bronze, has grown out of favor as a material although it does not grow lichen, a problem with other tombstones.



Marbles



King of Prussia

Granites

Zinc

Fieldstone

Fieldstone

Wood

Cinder Block

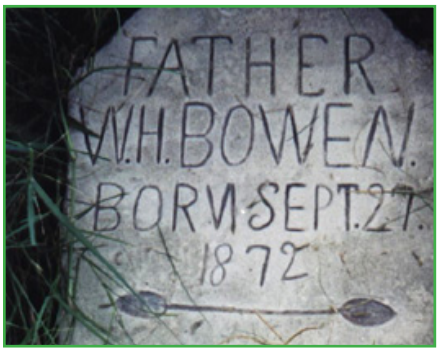
Plastic or
TemporaryMarker

Funeral Home Marker

Bronze Plaque

Hand-carved Tombstones

Hand-carved tombstones are typically made of cement. Not only are there misspellings on the gravestones, there is also considerable inconsistency, such as words, even surnames, written different ways on the same stone. Hand-carved tombstones often contain a backwards "N" or "S". This was due to lack of formal education or financial constraints leading some groups, particularly African-Americans, to create concrete monuments themselves sometimes resulting in unusual separations of words and dates.



Stonemasons

Tombstones sometimes featured the stonemason's or "maker's marks", which acted as a form of advertising. Gravestone carving was usually a second, part-time occupation of stonemasons and other craftsmen, although some carvers supported themselves entirely with this work. The majority of stonemasons in this area operated from about 1800 to 1910 in Baltimore, Maryland. The most prominent carvers were members of the Gaddess family. Alexander Gaddess, in particular, was noted for his artistry and commissions all along the Eastern Seaboard.

Only a small percentage of tombstones are signed by the stonecutter who was more likely to sign an important stone or one erected outside his area than to sign one of his routine carvings. But most carvers' signatures are simple and discretely located, often underground. Rock of Ages, North America's premier granite quarrier and manufacturer, has been in business since 1880 in Barre, Vermont.

Statuary

Unlike most stonemasons, the work of the monumental mason is of small size, often just a small slab of stone, but with a highly detailed finish. Generally, gravestones are highly polished with detailed engraving of text and symbols. Some memorials are more elaborate and may involve the sculpture of symbols associated with death, such as angels, hands joined in prayer, and vases of flowers. Carvings of a religious nature or of a profile of the deceased can be seen on some headstones, especially up to the 19th century. The majority of statuary in Anne Arundel County may be found at Cedar Hill and Holy Cross in Brooklyn Park and St. Anne's in Annapolis.

Skull & Crossbones

The skull and crossbones death head depicted on headstones were commonly used in the 17th to 18th centuries. The symbol was a warning to all that death cannot be avoided, no matter what our status is in life. A skull with wings symbolizes the impending death and regeneration of the soul or ascension to Heaven. There are no known death heads on tombstones in the county.

"Beds"

On some cradle graves, the top is designed to resemble the headboard of a bed and the bottom looks like the footboard. Plain or decorative curbing or molding can also be used to outline a single grave in the shape of a bed; hence these graves are also known as bed graves.

Cradle graves began appearing in American cemeteries in early part of the 1800s. This type of marker became popular during the Civil War, but by the 1920s, they were disappearing from the cemetery scene. Although they can be found throughout the United States, cradle graves were generally more popular in the South and Midwest.

Animals

By far, lambs and doves are the most commonly represented species on tombstones. However, the great variety of animals speak to the widespread interest in nature.

Plants & Flowers

Weeping willows are one of the most commonly found designs on tombstones. Lily of the valley, daffodils, and periwinkle are frequently found in cemeteries as tokens of remembrance.

Weeping Willow

Four-leaf Clover

Roses

Wheat

Log "Cut Down in His Prime"

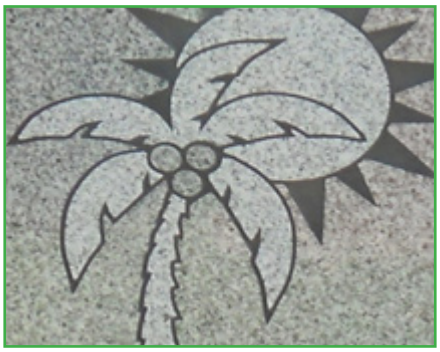
Lily of the Valley

Barren Tree

Tulip

Calla Lily

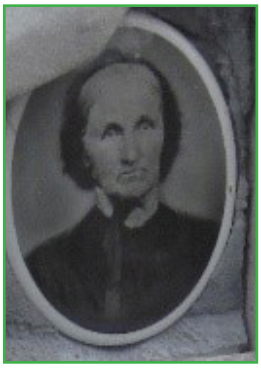
Iris


Palm Tree

Pansies

Portraits

Ceramic tombstone portraits became popular in the late 1880s. With the invention of photography, a gravestone might include a framed photograph or cameo of the deceased. They are found in greater numbers on tombstones of immigrants and African-Americans.



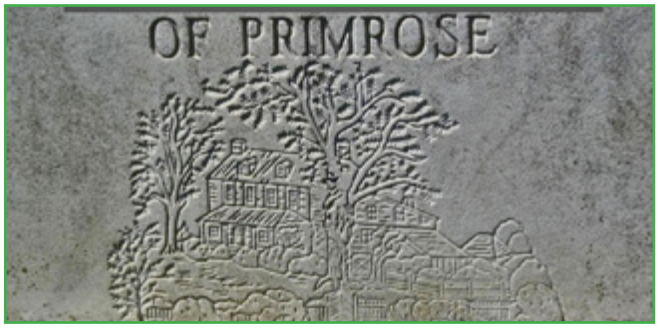
With the advent of laser-etching technology to create fine detail on tombstones, there has been a greater interest in showing portraits on monuments as well as photographic images or artwork showing some other image relevant to their life, interests or achievements.

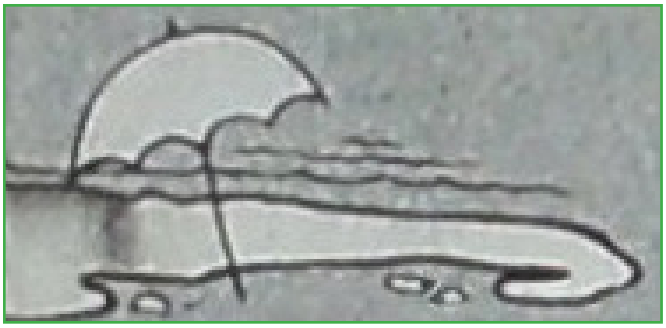
Laser-cut

Laser-etched technology was developed in the late 1980s allowing a wide range of intricate designs to be etched. Color can be added after the stone has been etched and is usually done by the hand of an artist.

Scenes

Water and vacation themes are frequently seen as preferred locations. Sometimes scenes show homesteads displaying the home or familiar settings of the deceased.

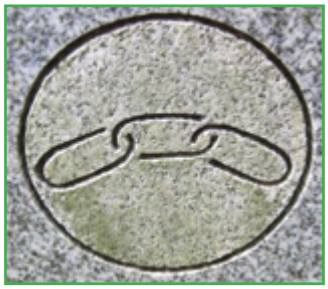




Organizations

FRATERNAL

Fraternal groups cover a wide range of interests, from historical military organizations, to college fraternities, to interests in various doctrines, social, political and religious beliefs.



Ancient Order of Odd Fellows

Boy Scouts of America

American Legion

Sons of the American Revolution

Veterans of Foreign Wars, Ladies Auxiliary

United Daughters of the Confederacy

Masonic

Job's Daughters

Lions Club

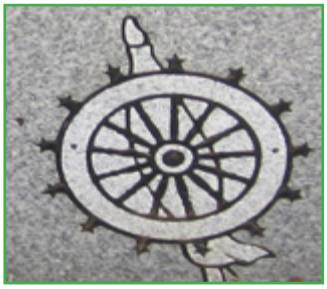
Rotary International

Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks

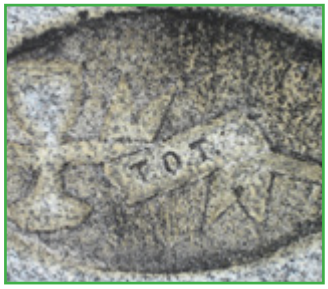
Order of the Sons of Temperance

Optimist International

32nd Degree Scottish Rite



Daughters of the American Revolution



The Improved Order of Red Men

PROFESSIONAL

Barber

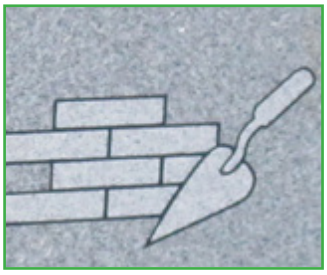
Carpenter

Farmer

Lawyer

Sailor

Medical Doctor

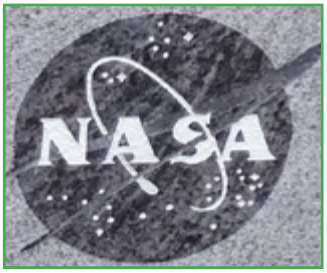

Masonry

Fireman

Int'l Assoc. of Journymen, Plumbers, Gas Fitters & Steamfitters Helpers

Telephone Pioneers of America

Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Company



National Aeronautics & Space Administration

MILITARY

U.S. Navy

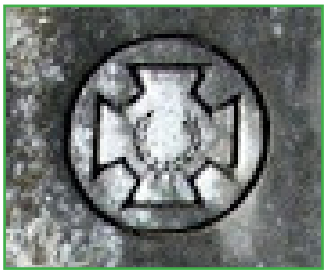
U.S. Army

U.S. Coast Guard

U.S. Air Force

U.S. Merchant Marines

Army Air Corps


Confederate Southern Cross

Army Signal Corps

Coats of Arms

Elaborate coats of arms are seldom found on tombstones due to the unique amount of skill required before the advent of laser carving in the late 1980s.

Bednarik

Sayre

Stockett

Peele

Tasker

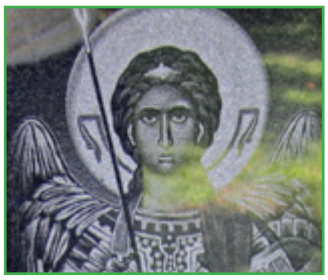
Genealogy

While many tombstones list one member of the family, such as “Father” or “Mother,” this example’s representation takes genealogy to an entirely different level.

Religious Symbols

Praying hands were used heavily in the 18th century. Anne Arundel County, Maryland's most common cemeteries are Methodist, Episcopal, and Roman Catholic.

Holy Family



Archangel

Madonna with Sacred Heart

St. Anthony with Child

Jesus Praying

Praying Hands

Pointing to Heaven

Stairway to Heaven

Kohanim/Cohanim Hands

Star of David

Holocaust Survivor

5-Branch Menorah (5 Levels of Souls)

Oil Lamp (Life)

Mormon Angel Moroni

Buddhist Wheel of Righteousness

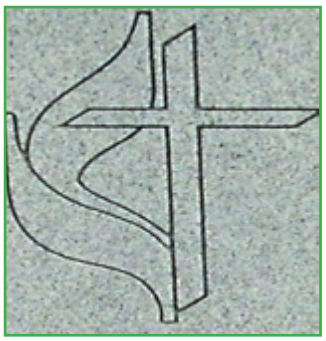
Islamic Star & Crescent

Angels & Cherubs

Angels are shown in different types of circumstances-celebrating, grieving, and praying. Angels with open wings are thought to represent the flight of souls to Heaven. An angel blowing a trumpet may depict the day of judgment. Angels are sometimes shown escorting the deceased to Heaven.

Crosses

There are many different styles of crosses. These represent just a few. The majority of churches in Anne Arundel County are Methodist, Episcopal, and Roman Catholic. There is a Hebrew cemetery, a Greek Orthodox cemetery, and there were formerly two Russian Orthodox cemeteries that later moved to Howard and Baltimore counties with the expansion of Friendship airport as Baltimore-Washington International Airport.



Methodist

Presbyterian

Disciples of Christ

Southern Convention Baptist

Episcopal

Scientology

Lutheran

Russian Orthodox

Unitarian

Elaborate Cross

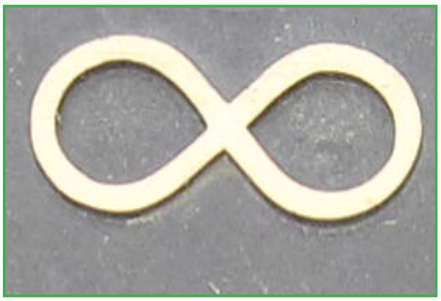
Celtic Cross

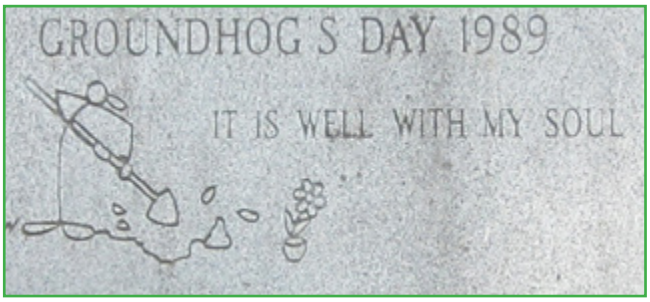
Crown and Cross

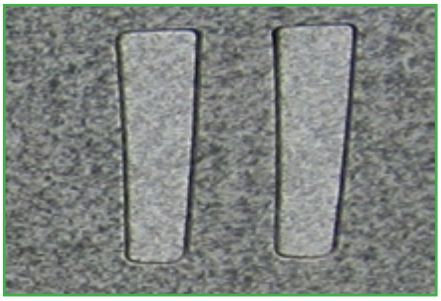
Maltese Cross

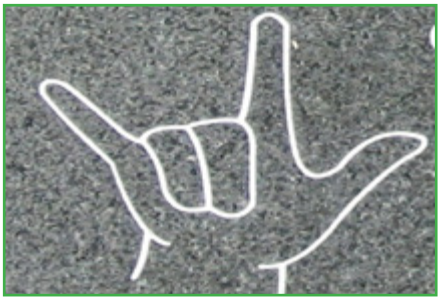
Cross Pattée

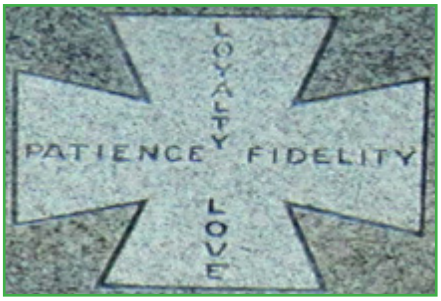
Modern Designs





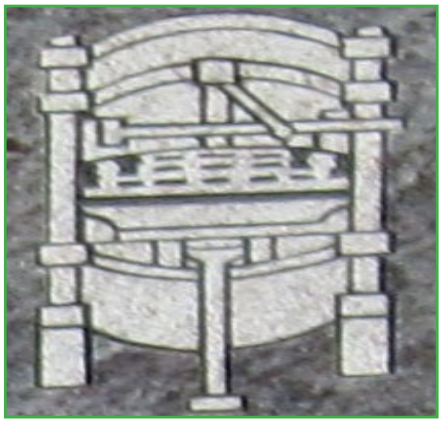






Unique Emblems

Sometimes emblems are found that we are unsure what they represent.



Hobbies & Interests

Any number of hobbies and interests can be found on tombstones. They may be as varied as the person they represent. Some tombstones include a number of the person's various pursuits.

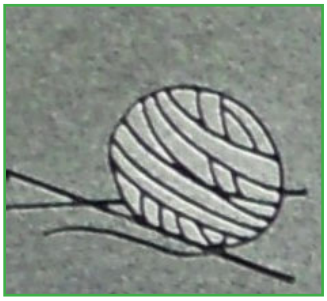
Playing Cards

Airplane

Antique Car

Bicycling

Artist's Palette


Knitting

Baseball

Surfing

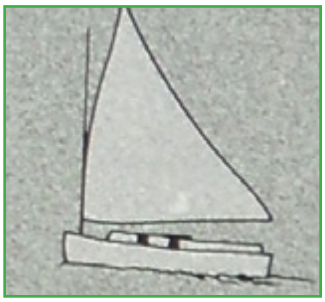
Bowling

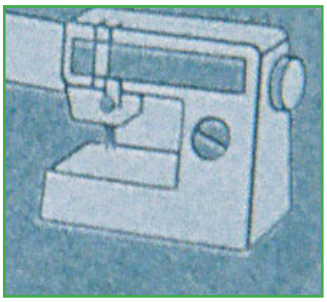
Golf

Theater

Square Dancing

Hunting


Sailing


Sewing

Horse Racing

Cartoons & Personal Beliefs

Although tombstones are not generally thought of as places for whimsy, sometimes well-known cartoon or symbolic figures may represent a person's unique interests, a married couple such as Minnie and Micky Mouse, or a young child's favorite thing.

Specialty Emblem

Donor Medal of Honor (Gift of Life)

Types of Burials

Sometimes there are other types of burials either in addition, or instead, of tombstones. There may be crypts for underground multiple burials; mausoleums which are elaborate buildings housing tombs; burial vaults enclosing a coffin; obelisks which are stone pillars marking the graves of one to four individuals; and columbaria which are rooms or buildings for niches with funeral urns. There may be memorial gardens where ashes have been spread. They may or may not include listings of those memorialized there. Urns may hold cremated remains called cremains.

Mausoleum

Vault/Mausoleum

Vault

Vault Cover

Obelisk

Obelisk

Columbarium

Columbarium

Memorial Garden

Memorial Plaque

Urn

Crypt

Resources

Books

Understanding Cemetery Symbols: A Field Guide for Historic Graveyards by Tui Snider, 2017

Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography by Douglas Keister

Cemetery Art & Symbolism in North America by D.A. Goodrich

A Beginner's Dictionary of Cemetery Iconography: Classic Symbols Defined and Photographed by Jacqueline DeBusk

Grave Marker Symbols: A Field Guide by Loren N. Horton and Michael D. Zahs

If the Stones Could Speak: A Guide to the Shapes and Symbols in Your Local Cemetery by Ryland Brown

Online sources

A Graphic Guide to Cemetery Symbolism:
https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/a-graphic-guide-to-cemetery-symbolism

Gravestone Symbolism:
http://www.thecemeteryclub.com/

Tombstones and their stories:
http://washtenawhistory.org/images/tombstone_symbols_v8.pdf

Richard Waterhouse's newsletter: rwsymbolism@gmail.com

Tombstones lined up against the wall at St. Anne's cemetery, Annapolis, Maryland

Back page: statue in niche at St. Anne's cemetery, Annapolis, Maryland

This publication was designed by Christine "Tina" N. Simmons, Cemetery Chair of the Anne Arundel Genealogical Society.

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ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY MARYLAND

ANNE ARUNDEL GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY MARYLAND 1974

ARTS COUNCIL OF ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY

Trader Foundation FOR MARYLAND BURIAL SITES