

A Guide to

FUNERARY ART

in Manitoba



CARMAN/DUFFERIN



Municipal
**HERITAGE
ADVISORY**
Committee

A Guide to Funerary Art In Manitoba

A CEMETERY TOUR is a terrific way to get people up close and personal with a community's history.

A tour can highlight fascinating stories of the past, and with the actual resting places of the individuals themselves can help make a community's heritage even more vibrant and compelling.

At the same time, a cemetery tour is an excellent opportunity to become familiar with a very important historical and aesthetic aspect of our Victorian- and Edwardian-era pioneers.

Death, funerals and cemeteries were revered in Victorian times—thus the 19th and early 20th centuries—and a great deal of attention (and money) was devoted to funerals and to the final resting places of departed family members. A fine gravemarker was de rigeur. A tour of a cemetery is an excellent way to get to know this fascinating aspect of our history.

It is interesting to note that 100 years ago, at the height of the garden cemetery movement, in which ambitious stones were placed in lovely garden settings, the graveyard was a very busy place. Picknickers flocked there. People went on Sunday strolls there. The many details

presented on various stones would have been entertaining and even meaningful.

Victorian cemeteries and the gravemarkers they contain are a veritable treatise on ritual, design, craftsmanship, poetry, and belief. They are complex and rich in symbolism, and so it is nearly essential to have handy some information about funerary art – the types of gravemarkers and the wealth of symbols used in their creation.

This guide has been developed by the Carman/Dufferin Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee, which is devoted to preserving our own fine collection of local cemeteries.

The following information will help those people who are guides leading a cemetery tour. It provides the basic information that will help to “read” gravemarkers – through their forms, styles, materials and especially through the symbolic iconography that was so important to gravemarker designs of the era.

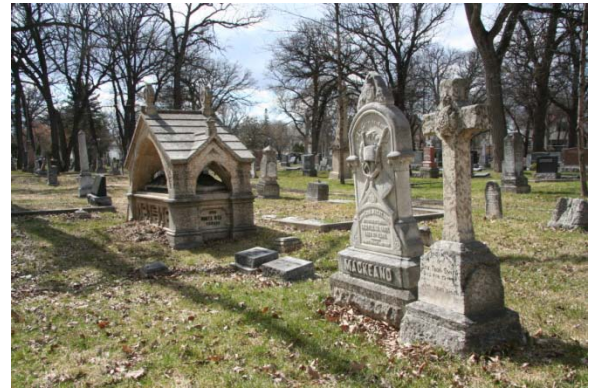
A Brief History

The history of Manitoba can be read in cemeteries and gravemarkers. The resting places of the great, the ignoble and just plains folks who built this province reveal the individual stories, some that actually affected the course of history, some that still resound with the power of their special contribution, and some that are simply run-a-day tales that are nevertheless reflective of major underlying currents of their time. All of them help us better connect to the moments—great and small—that defined our past. And all of them also remind us of the single human life, lived and lost.

Manitoba's cemetery history begins with the burial mounds of the Aboriginal peoples who inhabited the province for thousands of years before the arrival of European explorers. The history of cemeteries which are now most familiar to us—the peaceful resting place set aside from the hurly-burly world, either beside a church or in lush, silent land—begins in 1812, as the newly arrived Selkirk Settlers set aside land for a burial ground, choosing a pleasant acreage on the banks of the Red River, just north of what is today known as Point Douglas in Winnipeg. Stories state that when Lord Selkirk visited his colony in 1817, and designated the site for a church, his decision was prompted because the Settlers' cemetery was already located there.

For the next 70 years cemeteries in Manitoba were invariably connected to a church, usually Roman Catholic or Anglican, and then with the arrival of more immigrants, Lutheran, Mennonite, Ukrainian Catholic or Ukrainian Orthodox.

Many of these cemeteries continue to be used by the faithful, and those ancient burial traditions which still accompany them powerfully connect the long-dead and newly-dead in an ongoing reverie.



Gravemarkers at St. John's Anglican Cathedral Cemetery, Winnipeg.

By the early 1880s, as the railways opened the province to settlement, and scores of communities sprang up, a new type of cemetery was born. Municipal cemeteries, typically situated outside rural communities, and open to all denominations, appealed to those faiths without a local church cemetery—often Methodist, Presbyterian, and later, United—and to those in urban centres where the old church cemeteries were starting to get cramped. These municipal cemeteries, like Brookside and Elmwood in Winnipeg and Brandon Municipal Cemetery, also were conceived in grander forms, in what has come to be called large garden cemeteries.

In terms of appearance, there is not much to distinguish church cemeteries from municipal cemeteries, except the absence in the latter of a church—and even in those cases a storage structure, whose fine architecture insinuates the need to imply a religious purpose, may be on site. For the most part, the traditions of church burial and orderly rows of gravemarkers often facing east—an old Christian tradition based on the belief that this is the direction of the Rising Sun from which Christ will appear at the Last Judgement—and sometimes organized by curving paths and curbs, are also employed in municipal cemeteries.

There are, according to the Manitoba Genealogical Society, more than 30,000 cemeteries in Manitoba. Many of these are small plots containing the remains of a pioneer family. There are, however, at least 1,000 graveyards large enough to sustain a high level of community interest.



Gravemarkers at Cypress River Cemetery.

Gravemarker Styles

Two basic styles have informed gravemarker designs over the past several centuries, just as they informed Manitoba's architecture between 1800 and 1920: the Gothic Revival and the Classical Revival.

The Gothic Revival, popular in cemetery "architecture" from the early 19th century to the first decade of the 20th century, was eminently suited to graveyards. With the romantic towers, spires, arches and richly carved ornament, Gothic details abounded in many Manitoba cemeteries. And of course the style's association with English, French and German antecedents would have made it very popular here, at a time when most immigrants had European roots.

The Classical Revival is less noticeable in Manitoba cemeteries. But there are still important and interesting variations on the theme, using all of the orders—Doric, Tuscan, Ionic, Composite, Corinthian—as well as nods to the expressive qualities of Baroque and Mannerist styles—like the broken pediment;

Interestingly, there are few Manitoba examples where the two styles are explicitly and ambitiously explored. In most cases there will be an element or feature of detail lifted from the respective canons and placed for effect.



A gravemarker at Virden Cemetery is one of the finest examples of Gothic Revival styling used on a Manitoba stone.



A family site at the St. Pierre is an exuberant example of Classical styling.

Types and Shapes

The basic elements of gravemarker design have been established over the centuries, and a few elemental shapes and basic details have been adopted. These are all in view in Manitoba's cemetery landscape.

From the time when the first formal gravemarker was pushed into the ground in Manitoba during the early fur trade days of the 18th century and well into the 21st century, two iconic forms have defined most of Manitoba's gravemarkers, the tablet and the cross.

The tablet, a simple vertical form, both aesthetic and functional, allowed for easy text application, and at its upper edge for dramatic shapes that could distinguish it from so many others. The primary surface of the object also lent itself to dramatic carving, both in lettering and details.

The cross, the primary symbol of Christianity, has been a major memorial object for many centuries.

The Victorian period, which saw a dramatic interest in all things deathly, saw a welter of new gravemarker types and shapes. Ancient texts and images were mined for meaning and new symbolism. Hence the popularity of obelisks (a decidedly un-Christian symbol), dead trees, arcopogi, tables, chairs. There also arose interest in family groupings – a large family stone surrounded by smaller ones for each member. Large sculpted figures also came to be used on the most expensive markers.



An elaborate tablet-style marker at High Plains Methodist Cemetery.



A very fine Christ on the Cross marker at Ste. Genevieve Cemetery.



A collection of tower stones



Tree stone



Obelisk



A major composite stone

Materials

Over the past 200 years, Manitobans have looked to a host of materials to use in the creation of the gravemarkers to recall and honour their dead.

The first Manitoba gravemarkers undoubtedly would have been of wood, lovingly fashioned into a simple cross or tablet and then incised with a buck-knife with a name, dates and perhaps a simple symbol—Christian at that time—to give the marker more meaning.

Stone has been a common obvious choice for gravemarkers, given that it is so durable. In Manitoba the first stone markers were fashioned from local limestone, beginning in the mid-1800s. There is nothing as fine as an old limestone headstone, usually of elemental form, that has been maintained and where the deeply incised letters and numbers contrast beautifully with fossilized background that defines Manitoba's particular limestone.

For a brief period in the mid-1850s a few of Red River's hoi-poli imported exquisite slate gravestones from England. Only a handful of these stones were used here, found at St. John's Anglican Cathedral and St. Andrew's Anglican Church cemeteries. These extremely hardy stones, which are characterized by a wide face and almost razor-thin depth, sport beautifully scripted text and flourishes not seen on many other types.

The most common gravestone material used in the late 19th century was marble. Its links to Classical antiquity and its sumptuous

beauty was one thing. Equally important was the easy ability to carve the stone. Thus it lent itself to beautiful lettering, and a wealth of sculptural detail. In Manitoba, marble stones were de rigueur until about 1900, but it was surely the vagaries of the local climate that spelled their demise – like limestone, the softness of the stone meant that it was susceptible to erosion.

And so it was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that granite, one of the hardest of stones, gained prominence, an exalted position it still holds. It was important that a technological advance happened around the same time – acid etching. With this technological advance, a whole new world of gravemarker designs emerged in Manitoba's cemeteries. Elaborate tower confections, sturdy composite things, hefty, lugubrious boxes. And the sculptural possibilities of stone and acid produced astonishingly, ravishingly, beautiful objects.

The exuberant inventiveness of the Victorians also extended to gravemarkers, and the need for hardy materials naturally led them to experiment with the metals they were exploring in architectural and engineering projects. A few cast iron stones can be found in Manitoba, but it was zinc that gained popularity for about 15 years, from 1895 to 1910. These were especially popular because they could be easily built up from a whole set of pre-cast pieces and details.



A small wooden cross



Slate tablets



A granite column and limestone obelisk



An enormously elaborate marble tablet

Symbolism

Gravestone symbolism is a rich and fascinating subject, with a dizzying array of images to decipher. They range from the religious, to the worldly to the natural. Of course it's important to remember that many symbolic details came with the package offered by stone manufacturers, but it is also true that survivors often worked hard to discern the right memorial symbol that could become a private, personal link to the dead.

The following pages provide an introduction to this important aspect of funerary art, with gravemarker images and their symbolic connotations organized according to five broad categories: Christian Symbols, Jewish Symbols, Symbols of Secret Societies, Worldly Symbols and Natural Symbols.

It is important to keep in mind that the selection of these symbols on a gravemarker were often carefully considered – used to sum up and express a life.



A Manitoba gravemarker loaded with Victorian-era symbols

Christian Symbolism

Christianity boasts a host of important symbols, the most important of which is the cross that defines the faith. Because this is such a defining symbol, because it has such a rich and complex heritage, and because it has come to define a whole category of gravemarker designs, the cross is discussed in a separate entry at the beginning of this section. But there are other Christian symbols that occur with regularity, and a visitor to a cemetery will have a more profitable experience when the meaning of the images is understood.

The Cross

There are dozens of cross types used in cemeteries, all having evolved from three types: the Latin Cross, which looks like a lower case letter t; the Greek Cross, which looks like the mathematical sign for addition; and the Celtic Cross, which consists of a circle connecting the four arms of the cross.

There are several versions of Latin-type crosses that abound in Manitoba cemeteries. The Calvary Cross has a three-stepped base that represents the Trinity and also is often associated with Mount Golgatha, upon which Christ was crucified. The Cross of Lorraine has a shorter arm above a longer one. The shorter arm specifically recalls the plaque nailed above Christ which read "Jesus King of the Jews." The Russian Orthodox Cross, or Eastern Orthodox Cross, is a version of the Cross of Lorraine with an additional short and angled crossbar below the main crossbar that is thought to recall St. Andrew, who was crucified on an X-

shaped cross, and who is thought to have brought Christianity to Russia.



An elaborate Latin cross, of iron, common in Franco-Manitoban cemeteries

The Greek Cross, and other crosses with equidistant arms, are more likely to appear as part of a decoration on a tomb rather than as freestanding element. The Maltese Cross and its numerous variations is distinguished by the four arms appearing like arrow heads pointing to a centre point, with the eight outer points each representing one of the eight beatitudes, biblical commendations for those who are pious and will be therefore be rewarded by God.

Other Greek-style crosses include the Floriated Cross, which has arms that end in three petal-like projections, and the Pattée Cross, where the arms look like triangles with the tips of the triangles pointed to the centre – the broad arms represent the wings of a bird and symbolize the protective power of the cross.

The Celtic Cross is pagan in origin, predating Christianity by a number of centuries, but its two constituent parts were readily adaptable to the new faith. The pagan form featured a cross shape—representing male reproduction—enclosed within a circle, representing female reproductive power. As the Celts began to convert to Christianity in the 5th century AD at the lead of St. Patrick, the shapes were adjusted, so that the cross shape got larger and the circle smaller. The Celtic Cross is one of the most effervescent of forms in a cemetery—and given its Celtic roots it typically marks those of Irish or Scottish ancestry—its tall, slender form topped with the cross and nimbus, and also often writhing with the kind of intricate tracery and symbolism associated with Celtic culture.



A Celtic Cross

Words and Letters

After the cross, the most common of Christian symbols can be grouped according to lettering combinations. The most important of these are the letters IHS or IHC, usually seen emblazoned with crosses with the letters overlaid to look uncannily like a dollar sign (IHS is the abbreviation for Christ in Greek). The oldest Christian symbol – even older than the cross – is known as the Chi-Rho and contains the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ – XP; when the letters are overlaid they form a distinctive cross-like design.

Hand Coming Down

This image is a stand-in for God, created because it was not possible – even sacrilegious – to represent the whole being. The hand was deemed acceptable to suggest Him with his hand alone, often emerging from clouds, sometimes with three fingers pointing down in representation of the Trinity. Occasionally the hand is also shown holding flowers.

Dove

The dove is one of most common Christian gravestone symbols, and represents the Holy Ghost, which is what. The dove can be shown diving from heaven and sometimes with an olive branch or cross in its beak.

Chalice

The chalice, the Lord's cup, is a symbol for human heart's yearning to be filled with true spirit of the Lord.



Two examples of IHS lettering



Chalice

City Mansions

In the King James Version of the Bible there is a famous reference that had strong resonance for Victorians; "In my Father's house are many mansions: If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." On gravemarkers the verse is usually accompanied by a standard carved image showing various buildings.

Eucharistic Cup

The Eucharistic cup, the Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God, is sometimes depicted as a lamb with a cross and also with a halo and banner. Sometimes the cup is also presented with the Chi-rho, alpha and omega symbols. Without these items the lamb is symbol of innocence and thus associated with children. Accessorized it is always Agnus Dei.

Heart

The heart is a symbol of deepest heartfelt emotions, including love, courage, sorrow, joy, and is a very special one for Christians. In many instances in Roman Catholic cemeteries there are figures of Jesus exposing a heart: when pierced it represents repentance; when flaming it suggests religious zeal; when bleeding it reminds us of Christ's suffering. If the heart is in the hand it represents love and piety. A heart surrounded by thorns is connected to St. Catherine of Siena; exposed heart with seven blood drops seven virtues.

Ostensorium

The Ostensorium, also known as the monstrance usually marks the grave of a member of the clergy. The Ostensorium is medieval in origin and relates to the altar

vessel of the Eucharist, and usually appears with a sunflower motif.

Stone

The use of a stone or stone-like surface on a gravemarker suggests the Resurrection.

Cross with Crown

The cross with a crown is a Christian symbol of the sovereign Lord.



City Mansions



Ostensorium

Angels

The grandest of the Christian symbols are sculptural angels. At the time when many of these were crafted, at the turn of the 20th century, it was of some import to know which angel was being combined with the person being memorialized. For the record, there are nine spheres in the angel hierarchy (ten if you count the fallen angels under the leadership of Satan, although these of course do not show up in Christian cemeteries). The first sphere, containing the highest three orders includes the Seraphim, whose duty is to regulate heaven, the Cherubim, who guard the way of the tree of life, and the Thrones, the many-eyed angels with a duty of carrying out God's decisions. The second sphere contains the Dominions, angels who regulate other angels, the Virtues, those who bring God's blessings and messages to earth, usually in form of miracles, and the Powers, who maintain order in heaven and prevent fallen angels from taking over world. The third sphere is made up of Principalities, guardian angels of cities, nations and rulers; Archangels, who carry God's most important messages to humans; and finally Angels, celestial beings who are closest to humans, intermediaries between God and humanity and are called guardian angels. In cemeteries it is often the Cherubim and the Virtues that find sculptural form. Cherubim, the chubby-cheeked baby angels, are naturally associated with monuments to children. For adults it is the Virtues that provide grand figural expression on a handful of Manitoba gravesites. While there are seven Virtues, only five are used in cemeteries; Prudence, which is usually depicted with two heads or a snake is obviously too frightening in a cemetery

context and Justice is more often found in front of courthouses. The five cemetery Virtues are associated with a certain object or something, which makes it easier to decipher the meaning of the selection. Faith is a woman with a cross, chalice or candle, and also can be found with a baptismal font or oil-burning lamp. Hope is often depicted without wings in cemeteries and is almost always with an anchor, an ancient symbol of hope. Charity is usually shown nursing an infant; in chaste Victorian examples this might be suggested only with some cleavage. Temperance is often presented with some sort of water pitcher. And Fortitude is depicted as female warrior – with a club and helmet and shield.



Two examples of angel sculptures

Jewish Symbolism

Major Jewish symbols used on gravemarkers are the Star of David and the Menorah, the seven-branched candelabra, usually commemorating a righteous woman.

Ewer

The Ewer (also called the Levite pitcher) is connected to the Levites; according to scripture responsible for cleaning the hands of the temple priests.

Cohanim Hands – Priestly Blessing

Two hands with outspread fingers indicated that the dead man was descended from priestly stock (Kohanim) who blessed the people in this fashion.

Candles

Candles are one of the most accepted symbols of the woman. The candle was lit by the Jewish woman. Most of the candlesticks have three branches but there are ones with two, five and more. A broken candle on a gravestone symbolizes an early death, at a young age.

Broken Tree/Branch

A broken tree or branch is a sign that the deceased was young at the time of death.

Bird

The bird appears on the gravestones of many women.



Star of David and Ewer



Cohanim Hands



Bird

Symbols of Secret Societies

For about 50 years, from 1880 to 1930, secret societies, fraternal organizations and benevolent groups were central to the social life and well-being of many Manitobans. For men, it was the Masons, International Order of Odd Fellows, Orange Lodge, Eagles, Catholic Order of Foresters, or any number of other clubs that provided brotherly bonding experiences. For the much smaller number of women involved in such enterprises it was the Order of the Eastern Star (associated with the Masons) or the Daughters of Rebekah (associated with the Odd Fellows) that gave them an opportunity to spend time together, and perhaps also to keep an eye on their men.

The primary purpose of these organizations was to provide a venue for camaraderie and the potential for useful social or business contacts, amongst people of similar interests, ambitions, ethnic origin or religious affiliation. But many of these societies also maintained a more sombre purpose. In the years before formal health care and life insurance were commonplace, benevolent organizations, through their dues, often provided their members and more importantly their families, with medical care and even assistance with their funerals.

Visitors to Manitoba cemeteries will encounter many gravemarkers trumpeting an affiliation with one of these societies.

Freemasons

The primary symbol of a Freemason, whose roots stretch to the stonemasons who built early cathedrals of Europe (but who also claim connections to the great biblical

master builder Solomon) is the square and compass, often with the letter G, which is thought to stand either for geometry or God. Sometimes a stone will also feature clasped hands and in this case the square and compass are thought to represent the interaction between mind and matter and refer to the progression from material life to intellectual and spiritual realms. Some markers also contain the all-seeing eye, often with rays of light. They are rare here, but if you come across the letters HTWSSTKS arranged in circle within a keystone you are likely standing before a grand master (the letters abbreviate the phrase “Hiram The Widow’s Son Sent To King Solomon”). Some Manitoba stones also feature specific information on the Mason’s position in the organization, with references to their Masonic degrees and attributes.



Tell-tale Freemason gravemarker symbols

Knights Templar

Members of the Knights Templar are part of the convoluted Freemason structure and the group is shrouded in mystery, with roots back at least to 12th century. On a gravemarker their emblem is always in Masonic form – a cross with a crown enclosed in a Maltese Cross often with the phrase “In Hoc signo Vinces” (In this sign conquer).

Eastern Star

The female counterpart of the Masons, members of the Order of the Eastern Star will feature on their gravestone a five-pointed star with its tip pointing down representing a heroine and the tenets of the order – fidelity, constancy, loyalty, faith and love – represented in the points of the star by various images: broken column, sheaf of wheat, goblet, sword and cross.

Knights of Columbus

Founded in 1882 and known as Catholic Masons because they were forbidden by papal edict from joining the Masons, this group was originally formed to provide assistance to widows and orphans of a parish. The emblem of the Knights of Columbus is a medieval knight's shield mounted on a formee cross. Mounted on the cross are three objects: fasces (the ancient Roman symbol of authority composed of a bundle of rods bound with an ax); anchor, mariners symbol for Columbus; and a short sword suggesting a knight acting in an errand of mercy.

Odd Fellows

The International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) was formed in England in the 1700s as a working-class society and benevolent association and found a ready community of working men in North America in the early 1800s. Some IOOF chapters bought plots in local cemeteries as one of the benefits of membership. The symbol of the organization is three links of a chain containing three letters reminding viewers of the tenets of the group: Friendship, Love and Truth.

Daughters of Rebekah

The female auxiliary to the Odd Fellows, the Daughters of Rebekah, has adopted several symbols: the beehive, representing associated industry and the result of united effort, the moon and seven stars which suggests the value of the regularity of work, the dove, the emblem of peace and the white lily, a symbol of purity.

Eagles

The Fraternal Order of Eagles was founded in Seattle by theatre owners in 1898 and was originally composed of people working in the theatre. The group gained wider popularity in the early 1900s and is still active today, and includes a women's auxiliary. Eagles devised a script for their funerals and gravemarkers can be distinguished by the letters FOE along with an eagle.

Knights of Pythias

The Knights of Pythias were founded in 1864 as secret society for government clerks and by 1923 numbered 900,000 members; women who are associated with the group are called Pythian Sisters. Gravemarkers of Knights and Sisters can be marked with a heraldic shield with a suit of armour, along with the letters F, C and B (Friendship, Charity, Benevolence). It is claimed that this organization has more than 20,000 symbols, so it would not be unusual to find many additional symbols on a stone.

B'nai B'rith

The Children of the Covenant, also called B'nai B'rith, was a Jewish fraternal organization formed in New York in 1843 because Jews typically were not allowed into other fraternal organizations. The identifying marks are the letters IOBB.

Elks

The Elks club was an offshoot of a drinking club that was formed in 1866 in New York called the Joy Corks. Gravemarkers of Elks are easy to identify, emblazoned with an elk surrounded by Roman numerals and the letters BPOE (Benevolent Protective Order of Elks). Sometimes a stone will feature a clock with the hands frozen at 11 o'clock, a sacred time to Elks.

Moose and Women of the Moose

Moose and Women of the Moose were founded in 1888 in Louisville Kentucky as a group supporting working class men and women. In 1928 the club numbered 650,000 members and today boasts around 1.8 million. The primary symbol for the group is a moose with the letters PAP – Purity, Aid, Progress.

Woodmen of the World

The Woodmen of the World was founded in Omaha, Nebraska in 1890 by Joseph Cullen Root, and originally was open only to men aged between 18 and 45 who were not involved in hazardous professions (like gunpowder factory employees, train brakemen, bartenders, baseball players). The group was a small one compared with others, but one of best represented in cemeteries – and that's because until the 1920s it provided every member with a tombstone. At first the designs were supplied to local manufacturers but eventually the group allowed local firms to use any number of forms and designs as long as the Latin words Dum Tacet Clamet (Though silent, he speaks) were included.



Woodmen of the World

Worldly Symbolism

Victorian gravemarkers abound with images and symbols that are derived from worldly sources, turning everyday body parts, gestures and objects into affecting and moving stand-ins for grief and meaning. In general these symbols can be divided into two groups – those associated with the human body and those with worldly objects and features.

The Human Body

Eye

The all-seeing eye with rays of light is an ancient symbol for God; the image is often associated with the Masons.

Foot

Given that it is constantly in touch with the earth the foot is associated with humility. The story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet also adds meaning to the image.

Hand Pointing Up

This image is an indication that the soul has risen to Heaven. If the first two fingers are together and the deceased was a member of the clergy the emblem represents the hand of God.

Hands Together/Clasped Hands

In the Victorian age the shaking of hands was a symbol of matrimony. Look closely at the sleeves on each arm – one should appear feminine and the other masculine. If the sleeves are gender-neutral then it is more likely that the image suggests heavenly welcome or earthly farewell.



Hand Pointing Up



Hands Together/Clasped Hands

Physical Objects

Anchor

The anchor is associated with hope. The Anchor cross, known as the “crux dissimulate” is the Christian cross in disguise.

Anvil

An anvil suggests the primordial forging of the universe.

Boat

The boat is a symbol of crossing to the other world.

Broken Column

The broken column is a symbol suggesting the end of life; and specifically of a life cut short. This was a popular motif in the mid-nineteenth century and became one of most popular symbols because of its visual impact. In Manitoba it is more common to see it as an image on a stone and not as the stone itself.

Closed Book/Open Book

The closed book suggests a completed life; it also can be associated with virginity, secrecy and mystery. The open book reminds viewers that the deceased’s life was open to all.

Crown

A crown is a reminder of victory and leadership.

Curtain, Veil

The curtain or veil is a symbol of the passage from one type of existence to another; it can also be seen to protect as well as to conceal.

Draped Urn

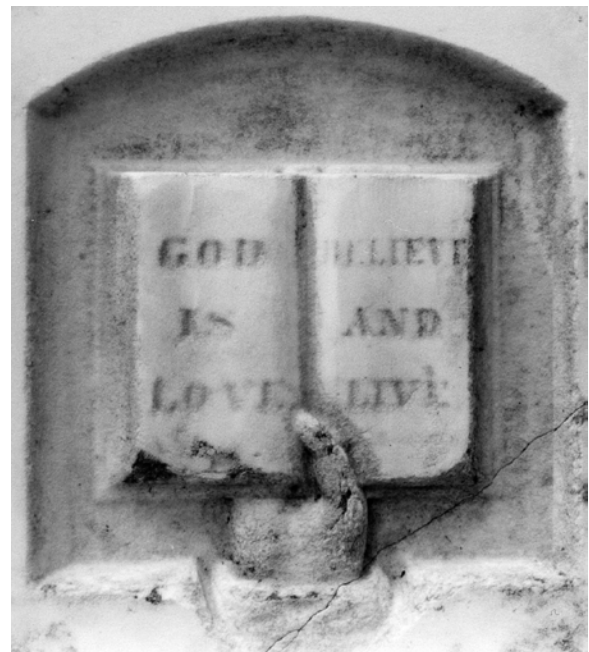
Probably the most common nineteenth-century funerary symbol, the drape was either a reverential accessory or a symbol of the veil between states of existence – life and death. The urn was used in Ancient Rome to contain cremated ashes, which makes it a curious Victorian symbol since cremation was rarely practiced during this period.

Empty Chair

The empty chair is often seen with a small pair of shoes, and obviously demarked the grave of a child.

Flame

The flame represents eternal life or eternal vigilance and also has a connection to religious fervour and martyrdom.



Open book

Gate

The gate was a popular representation of the passage from one realm to the next and is often joined with a dove (the Holy Ghost) or other objects and animals.

Inverted Torch

The inverted torch is a purely funerary symbol. If the torch is burning it is understood that the spirit will burn in the next realm; without the flame the meaning conferred is of a life extinguished.



Draped Urn



Curtain, Veil combined with a closed book

Natural Symbolism

The reasons for employing plants – flowers especially – on gravemarkers is easy to understand. They are beautiful, delicate and in their myriad forms, dramatic features whose decorative potential makes them appealing elements for gravemarker designs. They are also ephemeral, lasting but a few days, perhaps weeks, before fading and falling. But because they also hold the potential for renewal, in their annual cycle of death and birth, they have become the perfect symbol suggesting the poignancy in the cycle of human life and death.

It would take the skills of a botanist to identify the profusion of plant life on gravemarkers. And the fact that each plant and flower has its own particular meaning in funerary symbolism makes it necessary for most of us to consult one of the guidebooks on the subject. There are some popular floral choices that occur so frequently on Manitoba gravemarkers, however, and whose appearance is so well known, that the following brief catalogue is a good starting point for gaining an appreciation for this interesting subject.

Acanthus

Used as a motif on Greek funerary architecture, the acanthus may have symbolized death's conquest of the sufferings of life, represented by its spiky leaves and thorny stems. It became a common decorative motif in Greco-Roman architecture, on the capitals of certain columns, for example.

Anemone

In Greco-Roman mythology the anemone sprang from the blood of the dying Adonis.

Bellflower

The bellflower, also called Campanula (Latin for small bell) has the attributes of constancy and gratitude.

Buds and Seedpods

Buds and seedpods remind us of the fragile beginnings of life; these images almost always decorate the grave of a child.



Buds and Seedpods

Calla Lily

With its broad leaves and huge vase-like flowers the Calla Lily is a stunning flower and symbolizes beauty and marriage.



Calla Lilly

Chrysanthemum

In Western art the chrysanthemum, which looks increasingly sensuous as it dies, represents decadence and death.



Chrysanthemum

Daffodil

The daffodil suggests rebirth.

Daisy

In its unassuming simplicity the daisy was made popular by Renaissance artists seeking to symbolize the innocence of the Christ Child, and so it has assumed connections to children. The daisy also became a symbol of the Virgin Mary – like Mary's love the daisy can grow almost anywhere.



Daisy

Evening Primrose

The Evening Primrose opens early in the morning and closes in mid-morning. The flower has assumed a number of symbolic references: eternal love, memory, youth, hope and sadness.

Fern

The fern symbolizes humility, frankness and sincerity.

Iris

The iris is the rival of the lily in Christian symbolism, with deep connections to the Virgin Mary.

Ivy

Eternally green, ivy is associated with immortality and fidelity, and because it clings for support it can also be linked to friendship, attachment and affection.

Laurel

Laurel usually appears in the form of a wreath, and can represent victory, eternity, immortality or chastity. Laurel is also a Chinese symbol for immortality.

Lily of the Valley

Lily of the Valley symbolizes innocence, purity and virginity. The flower is especially significant in funerary art as it is one of first plants to flower in the spring, thus symbolizing renewal and resurrection.

Lotus

The lotus flower is a potent Chinese symbol with many meanings, among them purity, perfection, spiritual grace and feminine genius.

Oak Leaves

The leaves of the so-called King of Trees suggest strength, endurance, eternity, honour, liberty, hospitality, faith and virtue.



Oak leaves

Rose

The Queen of Flowers is an ancient symbol, suggesting longevity and beauty. In Christianity the rose is associated with martyrs and purity. The rose is usually found on women's gravemarkers.



Roses, a daisy and a hand

Thistle

The thistle is a major Scottish symbol but also has connections with Christ and his crown of thorns.



Thistle

Vine

The vine is a powerful Christian symbol underlining the relationship between God and man.



Vine, with heart

Weeping Willow Tree

Although the form of the weeping willow tree suggests grief and sorrow, in many religions it also suggests immortality. In Christianity it is associated with the gospel of Christ because the tree will flourish and remain whole no matter how many branches are cut off. The willow and urn motif was one of the most popular grave decorations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and was often combined with other cemetery symbols like the lamb and crosses.



Weeping willow with thistle

Wheat

A sheaf of wheat can be used to denote someone who lived a long and fruitful life of more than 70 years.



Wheat, with scythe