

Funerary Iconography

Fauquier County ARB
Cemetery Workshop 2013

Grave markers and other memorials to the dead often display a variety of messages that usually represent or describe the individuals buried. Some take the form of epitaphs or verbal descriptions, but much of what is communicated is accomplished through the use of an elaborate vocabulary of visual symbols or icons. By reading these symbols over time, it's possible to discern great shifts in our cultural values, beliefs, and societal norms throughout history.

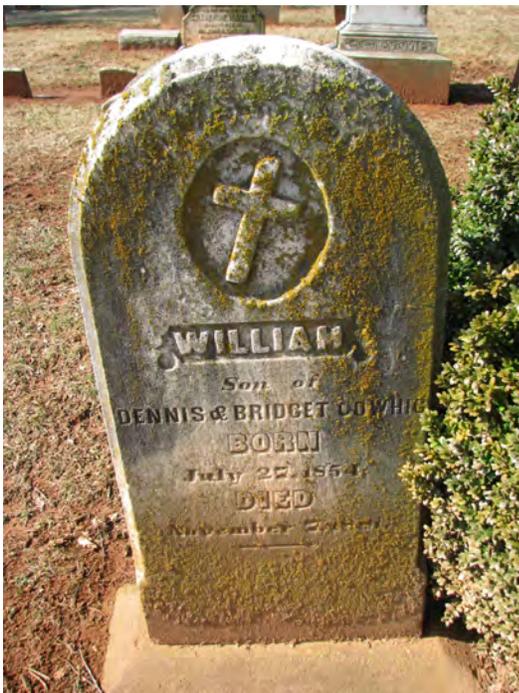
Crosses

Latin Cross (Shaped like a 't')



Cross - Represents salvation through faith in Christian God.

Three pronged tips - Represent the holy trinity. [1]



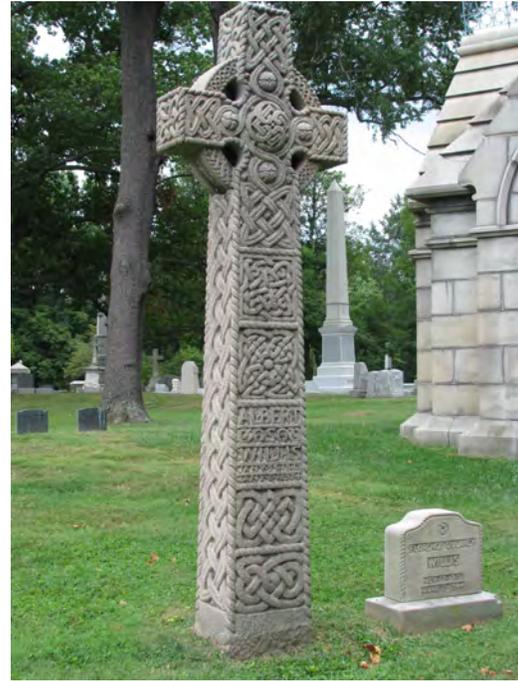
A sideways cross represents hope of the resurrection. [4]



Living Cross - Cross with vines or plants. Represents life everlasting in association with Biblical teaching. [2]

Cross and Crown - Christian symbol of sovereignty of the Lord often interpreted as symbolizing the reward in heaven (the crown) coming after the trials in this life. It is also an emblem used with the Christian Scientist religion, and is a symbol of the Knights Templar. [3]

The Celtic Cross



Chi Rho Cross



Superimposed "X" (chi) and a "P" (rho), the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek. Used from the earliest days of Christianity. Linked to the conversion of the Roman empire.^[6]

Intricate tracery symbolizes a persons roots. The three arms of the cross date from pagan times and represent male reproductive power, the circle the female reproductive power.^[5]

Angels and Cherubs



Angel (Seraphim): Messengers or attendants of God: Guardianship, divine intervention, answers to prayer. [7]



Cherubs (Cherubim): Spiritual resurrection. Evolution of 17th Century 'death's-head' icon. Gentler image of later, romanticized view of death and afterlife. [8]

The Next Life



Finger Pointing Up: Symbolizes the soul has risen to the heavens. [9]



Gates of Heaven: Confirmation that the deceased has been granted admittance. [11]



Hand Coming Down: Symbolizes the hand of God. In this case picking the rose representing the life cut short. [10]



Clasped Hands: Cuffs of different genders symbolize marriage. Neutral cuffs can mean heavenly welcome or earthly farewell. [12]

Fraternal/Social Organizations

Woodmen of the World



Trees, tree stumps, log piles.^[12]
Until the 1920's membership in Woodmen of the World provided each member with a tombstone. The tree stump symbolized equality and commonwealth.^[13]

Independent Order of Odd Fellows



Most common symbol of IOFF is a chain with three links, meaning Friendship, Love and Truth. The hand with the heart in this stone is a symbol meaning Charity.^[14]

Freemasons



Symbols: carpenter's square, level, compass, five and six-pointed stars, pyramid, open eye, wings.

^[15]

Infants and Children



Lamb: Purity, innocence, associated with the agnus dei or lamb of God. [16]



Reclining Child Figure: Common from about 1890-1920, reflective of the Victorian conceit equating death with sleep. [18]



Furled Flower Bud: a life ended before it began. [17]



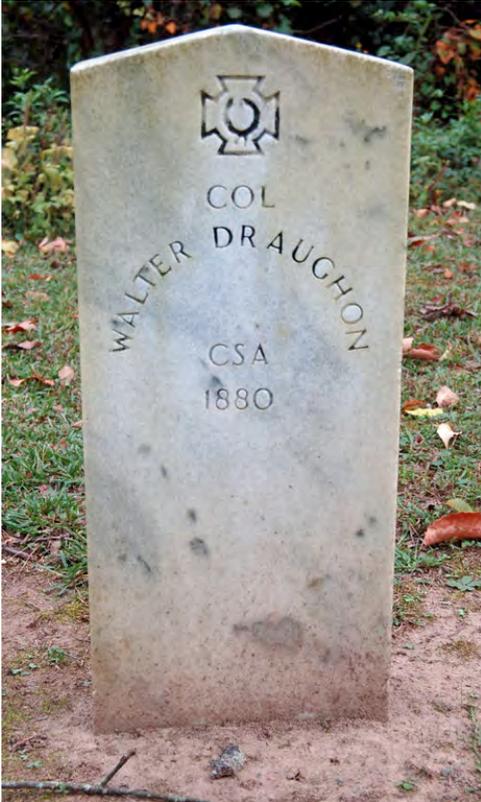
Dove: Purity, messenger of God [19]



A child being delivered to heaven. [19]

Military

Confederate Headstone



20th Century military-issue headstones are generally uniform in size and color, and contain minimal iconography (indicative of a soldier's religious affiliation or association with the Union or the Confederacy). [20]



Monuments provided by the family of the deceased may include symbols indicating rank, branch, etc. [21]

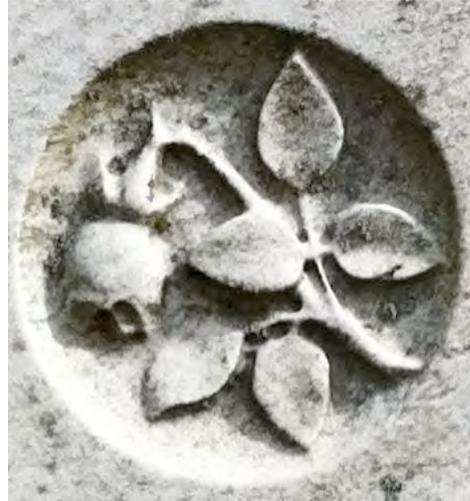
Union Headstone



Mourning



Flowering Branch with Broken Bud: Loss of a child. The blooms represent the grieving parents. [22]



Broken Bud: A symbol for a premature or untimely death—a life that has ended before it has bloomed. [24]



Inverted Torch: The “flame of life” snuffed out. [23]

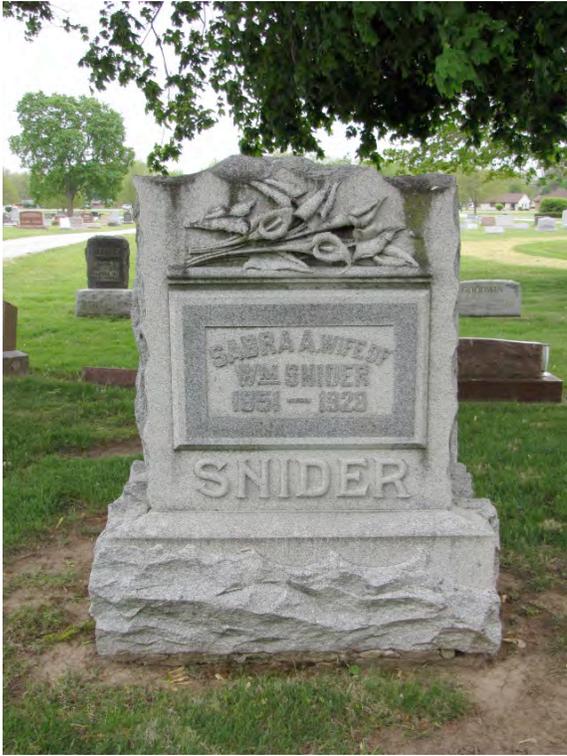


Mourning Figure: Almost always female. Draping and veils are emphasized in keeping with Victorian mourning traditions. [25]

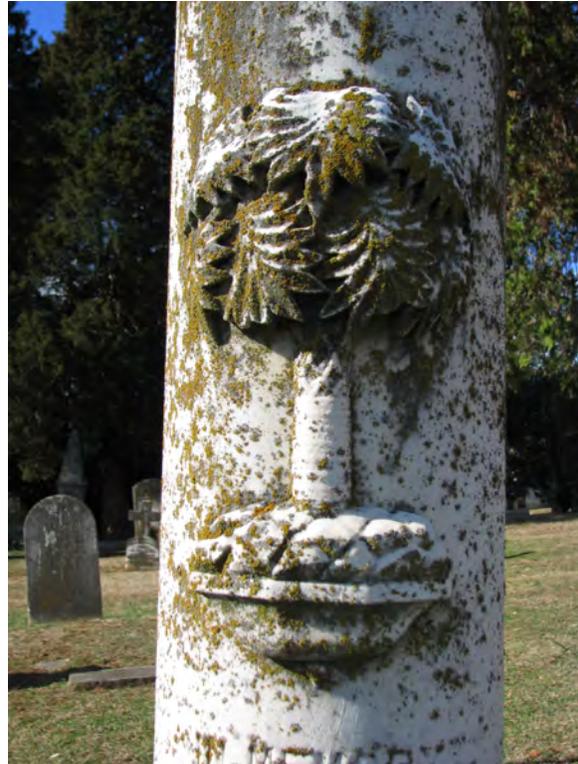


Tree Stump: A life cut short. Some iconographers believe that the branches represent other deceased family members. [26]

Plants



Calla Lilly : Marriage, fidelity. [27]



Palm: Resurrection [29]



Willow: Mourning, weeping, mortality.
See also Memento mori. [28]



Ivy: Eternal Life (Evergreen) [30]



Lily of the Valley: Innocence and Purity. [31]



Fern: Resurrection, humility, sincerity. [34]



Thistle: Earthly sorrow, repentance. May also signify Scots ancestry. [32]



Dogwood: Sorrow, repentance [33]



Morning Glory: Metaphor for life and death because of opening and closing and because of its attention to the sun, also represents the Resurrection. [35]

Memento Mori (Remember you must die)



Willow: A symbol of both mourning and the hope for resurrection. Often combined with other symbols such as broken columns and flowers, urns, and figures. Regularly used in the mid-19th through early 20th centuries. [36]



Hour Glass: Symbolizes the transience of life. With wings, the symbolic depiction of Latin *tempus fugit* (literally “time flies”). [38]



Urn: Represents the deceased persons remains. [37]



Skull and Crossbones: 17th and 18th century stark view of death. [39]

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8. Ibid
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14. www.graveaddiction.com/symbol.html
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Hour Glass: <http://gravelyspeaking.com/page/48/>

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