

Inch by Inch: Clues from Beyond the Grave

Presented by RGRC





While combing a gravesite for your loved ones, you may discover information that you were oblivious to before. On a head stone you can find:

- Name
- Birth Date
- Death Date
- Relation
- Military Service
- Religious Affiliation

A wealth of Information

Symbology

There are many types of symbols and all of these can give the onlooker insight into the personal history of the deceased.



Animals

- **Birds in Flight** - Seen symbolically as the *winged soul*, birds are often symbolized as the messenger of God and represent peace, the soul and purity. In Christian theology, they are symbolic to the Holy Ghost. Some older burial art only features wings, which has been represented as the symbol of divine mission.
- **Eagle** - Often recognized as a symbol for a military career, the eagle is symbolic to courage and valor.
- **Owl** - Associated in Western folklore as studious scholars and wise elders, a person of wisdom and intelligence.
- **Rooster** - Signifies the awakening; the Resurrection.
- **Butterfly** - There is an Irish saying which goes, "Butterflies are souls of the dead waiting to pass through purgatory." Because a butterfly begins its life as a caterpillar before entering a metamorphosis into a butterfly, the butterfly has long been symbolized as resurrection and further represents the soul leaving the body.
- **Dog** - Dogs have long been a symbol of loyalty, fidelity, watchfulness and vigilance.
- **Dolphin** - Portrays the idea of resurrection.
- **Lamb** - This is the most common animal symbol found on children's graves.
- **Serpent** - Everlasting life, often creating the shape of a circle with its own tail in its mouth (this is known as oroboros). As old folklore goes, the snake is thought to have been able to cheat death and gain vigor by shedding its own skin.



Angels

- **Angel of Grief** - Much like the commonly used *Weeping Angel* statue, the *Angel of Grief* statue was the last work created by American sculptor, art critic and poet, William W. Story, in memory of his beloved wife Emelyn, and which he had finished before his own death in 1894. Since then, the memorial statue has been replicated numerous times throughout the world.
- **Angel Blowing a Trumpet (or Two Trumpets)** - Symbolic to the day of judgment and a call to the resurrection, an angel blowing a trumpet, also known as the *Angel Moroni* has long been used throughout the years as a memorial sculpture. First sculpted in 1846, using gilded wood by an unknown artist, however, the first official Moroni was sculpted in 1892, by American sculptor, Cyrus Edwin Dallin.
- **Angel Carrying the Departed Soul** - Often depicted with a child in its arms or as a Guardian embracing the dead. The *messengers of God* are often shown as escorting the deceased to heaven.
- **Angel(s) Flying** - This symbolizes a rebirth.
- **Angels Gathered Together on Clouds** - This is a depiction of angels in heaven.

Body Parts

- **Hands clasped** - Portray a marriage or close bond between individuals and represents a unity and affection even after death. Farewell or last goodbye, whoever died first is shown as holding the other's hand to represent guiding their spouse to heaven.
- **Hands holding objects** - Hand holding a broken chain symbolizes the death of a family member, while a hand holding an open book signifies the embodiment of faith. However, while more commonly used during 19th century memorials, hands clasping hearts was symbolic of charity and was typically seen on memorials of members of the independent *Order of Odd fellows*.
- **Hands pointing** - Pointing downward, it represents mortality or sudden death, and can sometimes be a depiction of a secret *Masonic* hand shaker. Pointing upwards are symbolic of the reward of the righteous; a confirmation of life after death and the ascension to heaven.
- **Hands praying** - Hands shown in prayer is commonly seen as a devotion.
- **Two hands touching at the thumb** - Commonly used on Jewish gravestones, the representation of two hands touching at the thumbs with the middle and ring finger parted to form a V



The Heart

- *Heart* - Love, mortality, love of God, courage and intelligence, and can be depicted in various ways on tombstones such as:
- *A Bleeding Heart* - Signifies the suffering of Christ for our sins.
- *Encircled with Thorns* - A symbolic representation of the suffering of Christ.
- *A Flaming Heart* - Signifies extreme religious fervor.
- *A Heart Pierced by a Sword* - This has been represented to symbolize the sacrifices of made for the better of charity, however, in reference to Christian theology, it signifies the Virgin Mary, harkening to Simeon's prophecy to Mary at the birth of Christ, "A sword shall pierce through thine own soul."



Geometry



- **Ankh** - The Ankh is the Egyptian symbol of eternal life
- **Circle** - Symbol for eternal Life and never-ending existence
- **Cross** - For Christianity
- **Triangle/Trefoil/Triquetra** - Godhead, wisdom
- **Pentagram** - Used by magicians and sorcerers during the late Middle Ages. Christianity adopted the figure and the symbolism to suggest the five wounds suffered by Christ on the cross. To this day, the Pentagram is used both by Christianity and Wicca.
- **Pyramid** – Means of preventing the devil from reclining on a grave. However, in ancient Egypt, pyramids have long been thought to represent the primordial mound from which the Egyptians believed the Earth was created, with the shape of the pyramid representing the descending rays of the sun.
- **Menorah** - This is the Jewish symbol for divine presence of God. Symbolic of the seven days of creation.

Objects

- **An Anchor** – Found on the graves of sailors and symbolizes steadfast hope or eternal life.
- **An Anvil** - Symbolizing the creation or forging of the universe, blacksmiths.
- **An Arch** - Rejoining to heaven.
- **Arrow** - Mortality and martyrdom.
- **Beehive** - Human industry, faith, education and domestic virtues
- **Book** - When closed can be seen as a final act written; when open, as perfect knowledge; with a cross laying over it - faith personified. Sometimes if a person died at a young age, the book will appear shorter on one side, to show that a person had died young.
- **Broken Chain Link** - This is a symbol for a loss in the family.
- **Broken Wheel** - Life revolves in a circular motion, where one life ends the other begins – however, a break in the circle or wheel of life symbolizes the end of life.
- **Candle** - Candles represent the spirit of the soul
- **Cherubs** – For the monuments of children, cherubs symbolize angels sent to guard the way of the tree of life.



- **Hourglass** - Time's inevitable passing,
- **Scythe or Sickle** - Symbolic of cutting down a plant in its prime for harvest
- **Skull** - (often when shown with wings) can indicate the fleeting nature of life and impending death.
- **Star** - In legend, myth and even scripture, stars have acted as guides, omens and portents for men and served to mark special events and people, often representing heavenly guidance and divine leadership.
- **Sun** - Rising, it can symbolize new life or the resurrection in the afterlife, while a setting sun can represent death.
- **Urn** - The return of the body back to ashes and dust



Plants



- **Daisy** - Innocence, youth, hope
- **Forget-me-not** - Remembrance
- **Ivy** - Abiding memory, friendship, fidelity
- **Lily** - Purity, innocence, heavenly bliss
- **Morning Glory** - Bonds of love and affection
- **Oak** - Supernatural power and strength; eternity
- **Palm** - Spiritual victory over death, martyrdom, peace
- **Rose** - Love, wisdom, beauty
- **Sunflower** - Adoration
- **Tree** - The Tree of Life; faith
- **Violet** - Faithfulness, modesty
- **Weeping Willow Tree** - Mortality, mourning
- **Wheat** - The divine harvest
- **Wreath** - Victory in death; indestructible crown worn by triumphant Christian

Historical Context



Evolution of the Modern Grave

In colonial years, a gravesite would have been built upon land that was not suitable to farm or build upon. There was little future planning and most had to make do with what was available.

Families would use wooden crosses or crude stone markers to mark their loved ones. Therefore it may be difficult to find an ancestor's final resting place.

By the 1700's European iconography and grave styles were being adapted to fit colonial sensibilities

Early settlers' Puritan motifs depicted the harsh reality of death and importance of salvation with a variety of skulls, urns, and angels of death. However during the 18th century, iconography changed as so did religious sentiment to a softer, more peaceful depiction of death





- While graves used to serve as a warning and stark reminder of impending death, newer “memorial parks” focus only on the lasting impression left by our loved ones and hope for peace in death.
- Growing ever popular, is the green burial movement. There is little fanfare here and harkens back to the way people used to be buried. There is no embalming and no unnaturally made caskets. The only difference being there is rarely a headstone marker.





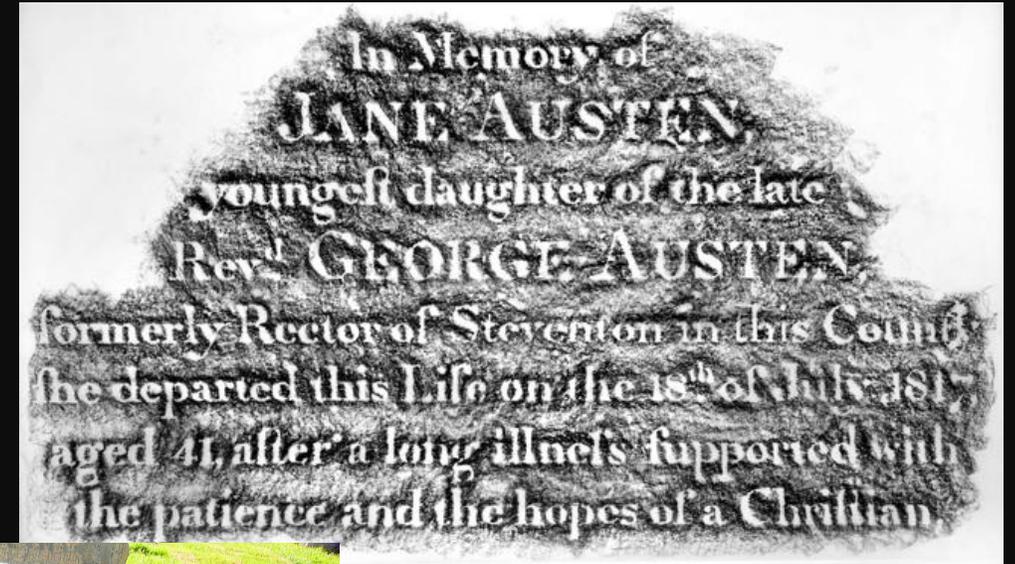
Grave Rubbings: A Controversial Practice

For:

- Cool and unique
- Life sized reproduction
- Can sometimes turn out better than a photoshopped image
- “A spiritual experience”

Against:

- Can damage headstone
- Wears down stone inscription
- Banned in some states
- Has alternatives like photography



Death Records



- Getting death records depends on when and where the records were generated. Most states did not require death records to be kept until the mid-19th century to the early 20th century. If the record you want falls within this time period, you can usually find it at the state department of vital records, available for a fee (the fees vary from state to state).
- New England kept records from the colonial times, so if you need an earlier record there, you can usually find it at the town hall of the town in which the death took place, or in one of the many published books of colonial New England vital records that are available at the genealogical departments of libraries and at historical societies.
- In other states, you may have to rely on family Bible records or even headstone information to get a record of a death that occurred earlier than the mid-1800s.

PERSONAL PARTICULARS (To be filled in by Medical Examiner.)		MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH (To be filled in by Medical Examiner. See over.)	
1. NAME OF DECEASED (Print) EDDIE First Name Middle Name Last Name Social Security No.		Certificate No. 25366	
2. USUAL RESIDENCE: (a) State N.Y. (b) Co. Queens (c) Town or City Brooklyn (d) No. 32-50 - 93d Street, Jackson Ave. Heights St. (e) Length of residence or stay in City of New York immediately prior to death Life		16. PLACE OF DEATH: (a) NEW YORK CITY: (b) Borough Brooklyn (c) Name of Hospital or Institution Flatbush Avenue & (If not in hospital or institution, give street and number.) (d) If elsewhere than in hospital or own residence, specify character of place of death, as: hotel, office, store, street, taxicab, etc. Deep Creek	
3. SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED, OR DIVORCED (write the word) Married		17. DATE AND HOUR OF DEATH (Month) (Day) (Year) (Hour) December 23d 1940 P.M.	
4. WIFE } of Gretchen HUSBAND }		18. SEX Male 19. Color or Race White 20. Approximate Age 29	
5. DATE OF BIRTH OF DECEDENT (Month) (Day) (Year) October 20th 1911		21. I hereby certify (a) that in accordance with Sections 878-2.0 and 878-3.0 of the Administrative Code for the City of New York, I went to, and took charge of the dead body at Kings County Morgue	
6. AGE 29 yrs. mon. dae. hrs. or min.		this 24th day of December 19 40 , (b) that I examined the body and investigated the circumstances of this death, and I further certify from the investigation, (complete autopsy)* (partial autopsy)* (incision) and examination, (c) that, in my opinion, death occurred on the date and at the hour stated above and resulted from (natural causes)* (accident)* (suicide)* (homicide)* (undetermined circumstances pending further investigation)*, and (d) that the causes of death were: Crushed Chest & Abdomen; Hemothorax & Hemoperitoneum:- in aeroplane crash.	
7. OCCUPATION A Trade, profession, or particular kind of work, as plumber, sawyer, bookkeeper, etc. B Industry or business in which work was done, as silk mill, sawmill, bank, etc. Aeroplane Pilot		* (Cross out terms that do not apply.)	
8. BIRTHPLACE OF DECEDENT (State or country) U. S. 9. How long in U. S. (if of foreign birth)		11. NAME OF FATHER OF DECEDENT Emil	
10. IF DECEASED WAS VETERAN, NAME WAR		12. BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or country) Germany	
11. NAME OF FATHER OF DECEDENT Emil		13. MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER OF DECEDENT Inga Petersen	
12. BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or country) Germany		14. BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or country) Norway	
13. MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER OF DECEDENT Inga Petersen		15. SIGNATURE OF INFORMANT GRETCHEN SCHNEIDER M. E. Case No. 4418 Signed Richard [Signature] Assistant Medical Examiner Approved Joseph [Signature] Chief Medical Examiner	
14. BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or country) Norway		16. RELATIONSHIP TO DECEASED WIFE	
15. SIGNATURE OF INFORMANT GRETCHEN SCHNEIDER		17. ADDRESS 32-50-93RD ST. JACKSON HGT'S	
16. RELATIONSHIP TO DECEASED WIFE		18. PLACE OF BURIAL OR CREMATION Fairview, N.Y. DATE OF BURIAL OR CREMATION Dec 27 1940	
17. ADDRESS 32-50-93RD ST. JACKSON HGT'S		19. FUNERAL DIRECTOR New York Funeral Service ADDRESS 148 E. 74th St PERMIT NUMBER 2383	
18. PLACE OF BURIAL OR CREMATION Fairview, N.Y.		20. FUNERAL DIRECTOR New York Funeral Service ADDRESS 148 E. 74th St	
19. FUNERAL DIRECTOR New York Funeral Service ADDRESS 148 E. 74th St		21. BUREAU OF RECORDS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH CITY OF NEW YORK	

Thanks for joining us!

