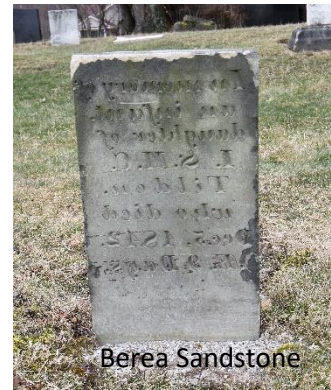


Headstone History and Information

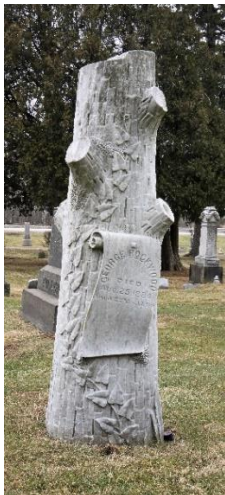
The use of grave markers was originally meant to keep the dead from rising from the earth, but by the 19th century they were instead used to memorialize the dead. For those who research history or genealogy, headstones can provide information about the deceased and their families. By the time of the Victorian era, styles had moved toward elaborate markers, and many of those are found in our Rural/Park Cemeteries such as Woodvale. The symbols used on the stones can also provide interesting clues and stories of the departed.

In Colonial America during the 1600s, there were few Masons available outside of Boston to make headstones, so in most areas they were crudely made, or graves were marked with items that did not withstand time. Initially Boston was the center of gravestone carving, as true carvers were imported from Europe, Boston had a larger population, and there was access to high quality slate that was very durable and easy to carve. Stone patterns and shapes were brought from old Europe, and the slate headstones were eventually shipped to many locations in the colonies. The chances of having a stone marker during this era was rare in most places outside of a port city.

In the 18th century it was common to use local stones for headstones, and the stones had to speak to those who could not read. The images were often brutal, imparting a fear of the afterlife as most thought only a few could go to heaven. By the mid-1700s centers of headstone carving were making designs more elaborate and ornate, but even into the 18th century, stone carving was considered a side job, and the local carver usually had a different full-time vocation. Newport, Rhode Island became the next center of headstone carving, but the slate in this area was not as good of a quality. Connecticut started using a sandstone with a high silica content that still holds up well, and was often used for construction (brownstone). Berea sandstone as locals know, is very high in silica content and very dense. Many examples in our cemeteries throughout the area remain quite legible. Soapstone, very soft and easy to carve and also high in silicates weathers extremely well, but is very rare to find.



Berea Sandstone



Marble quarries were started in Vermont in 1785 and became the stone of choice for headstones and monuments in the 1800s. In the 19th century the use of marble, statuary, multi piece stacked monuments, brownstone obelisks and pillars were found in our cemeteries. Epitaphs became common, and most simple stones or tablets were slabs about 2" thick that were rounded early on, but had squared edges by the mid-century. The Rural Movement of cemeteries influenced design with more comforting symbols like angels and hands reaching down; gradually designs evolved into Victorian romanticism with emphasis on naturalism (flowers, animals), and classic and Egyptian motifs (willows, urns, columns). New techniques in manufacturing and advances in quarrying in the 1840s made good quality stone cheaper and railroads made delivery faster (Stone weighs about 150 lbs./cubic foot to 180 lbs./cubic foot for granite). The sale of graves in rural cemeteries made the use of monuments more popular. Not surprising, the distance from railroad tracks influenced the transition to newer styles and materials. On the other hand, cemeteries closer to the stone source took longer to move to marble and granite, if at all.



The period during the Civil War showed little stone work being done, but there was a boom after the war as people buried their dead or memorialized them. Sandblasting was invented in 1871 and was used for the first time in Vermont in 1891 to inscribe marble- it was not common elsewhere for many years, but is commonly used today. In 1873 Congress enacted national cemeteries and stones for honorably discharged veterans. In 1879 legislation was passed that provided uniformity of stones for veterans in private or national cemeteries. The “Golden Age of American Monuments” stretched from the Civil War to WWI. Typical were larger and less expensive monuments as pre-made monuments became popular in all materials. In 1897 Sears offered cemetery related products for sale including grave guards and arches, by 1900 they offered “markers” made of Vermont marble (about \$28), and by 1902 they had an entire department devoted just to memorials. Sears-Roebuck continued to offer monuments in their catalogues until 1949.

Of interest: In 1873 M. A. Richardson of New York developed a zinc-based metal used to create monuments that look like stone. He tried to get his business going, but ultimately sold the rights to the Connecticut based Monumental Bronze Company in 1879. The metal was marketed as “white bronze” and was much cheaper to use than stone with the added benefit that no lichens will grow on them. Lighter than stone, the hollow blue-gray monuments have held up very well with little change in their appearance over time. Most of us have seen them in Soldiers and Sailors monuments, but they are found in most cemeteries in small numbers. World War I was the downfall of their production as the company was forced to make weapons parts. The company survived until 1939 making part for previous monuments, but did not produce new ones ever again. In the 1900s, almost all headstones and monuments were made of granite.



With the change in cemetery styles in the mid-1900s, headstones became more homogenous with less decoration and creativity. In last 30 years however, more personality has returned to stones thanks to the laser engraving of images and improved overall technologies, plus the desire to put a personal stamp on a memorial. The more recent trend toward green cemeteries means fewer monuments overall, and if present, they are much smaller.

Common Terminology:

Gravestone/tombstone: single piece headstone

Monument: larger multipiece headstone, common mid to late 1800s

Memorial: grave marker, usually ornate

Flush Stone: rectangle level with the ground

Upright: vertical stone with base, most common

Slant: wide base angles up at 45 degrees to tapered top

Bevel or Pillow: angle less steep with back only a few inches above the ground

Bolster: long cylindrical marker on a pedestal

Ledger: thick slab covering entire grave

Tablet: domed, shouldered, Gothic style, slab of stone set at right angle to ground

Obelisk: tall, pointed at top, square cross-section

Monolith: large vertical stone with no base or cap

Pillar: tall slender, ornate with circular cross-section

Foot stone: small marker placed at foot end of a grave

Grave curb: low border at ground level open in the middle around grave or plot

Boulder: larger minimally finished stone

Emerging stone: one portion of stone carved (dressed) and the rest is not carved (undressed) or partially dressed

Table tomb: chest of stone with a top supported by columns at the corners

False tomb: covers a grave completely, extends above grave a few inches to a several feet; may have inscriptions and ornamentation, often has accompanying gravestone

Symbolism:

Early symbols on markers were not endorsed by the church, but also not forbidden and often included death heads, a grim reaper with scythe, or an hourglass to remind us that life is short, don't sin, and be fearful. In the 1700s death heads morphed into a soul effigy flying off to heaven. Winged cherubs were also popular until the Victorian age of the urn (soul) and the weeping willow (sadness). The meaning of headstone symbols can vary a bit depending on what source is referenced- but they are all interesting. When you visit a cemetery, see how many you can find! A few examples are below.

Anchor: Steadfast hope, seaman
Angel of grief: Sorrow
Arch: Rejoined with partner in Heaven
Birds: The flight of soul
Book: Faith, wisdom
Chain with 3 links: Odd Fellows, Trinity, faith
Cherub: Divine wisdom or justice
Column: Noble life
Broken column: Early death
Conch shell: Wisdom
Cross, anchor and Bible: Trials, victory and reward
Crown: Reward and glory
Dolphin: Salvation, bearer of souls to Heaven
Dove: Purity, love and Holy Spirit
Drapes, veils: Mortality, lasting mourning
Evergreen: Eternal life
Flame: Eternal life
Frog: Worldly pleasure, sin
Fruit: Prosperity, eternal life
Garland: Victory over death
Gourds: Deliverance from grief
Hands clasped: A relation or partnership, farewell
Hand pointing up: pathway to Heaven
Heart: Devotion
Horseshoe: Protection against evil
Hourglass: Time and its swift flight
IHS: Stylized version of iota-eta-sigma, a Greek abbreviation of "Jesus, savior of mankind"; Commonly indicates Roman Catholic faith
Ivy: Faithfulness, memory, and undying friendship
Lamb: Innocence, young age
Lamp: Immortality
Laurel: Victory, fame

Lily: Purity and resurrection
Lion: Strength, resurrection
Mermaid: Dualism of Christ—fully God, fully man
Oak: Strength
Olive branch: Forgiveness, and peace
Palms: Martyrdom, or victory over death
Peacock: Eternal life
Pillow: a deathbed, eternal sleep
Poppy: Eternal sleep
Rooster: Awakening, courage and vigilance
Rope circle: Eternity
Rose: Victory, pride, love and purity
Single rose: Sorrow
Shell: Birth and resurrection
Skeleton: Life's brevity
Snake in a circle: Everlasting life in Heaven
Square and Compasses: Freemasonry
Star of David: Judaism
Swallow: Motherhood
Broken sword: Life cut short
Crossed swords: Life lost in battle
Torch: Eternal life if upturned, death if extinguished
Tree: Life, knowledge
Tree trunk: Beauty of life, interrupted life
Triangle: Truth, equality and the trinity
Tzedakah box (pushke): Righteousness
Urn: Soul, immortality
Urn with shroud: Lasting mourning of soul
Shattered urn: Old age, mourning if draped
Weeping willow: Mourning, grief
Woman: Consolation
Wreath: Victory



