

# *Symbols in the Cemetery*

## *Symbols and their meanings*



**Acorn:** strength, independence

**Alpha & Omega:** Beginning and End (Greek Alphabet)

**Anchor:** Steadfastness; attributed to St. Nicholas, Patron Saint of Sailors

**Angels:** Going to Heaven, Guide to Heaven

**Anvil:** Martyrdom

**Apples:** Salvation, Sin

**Arch:** Triumph, Victory

**Armor:** Protection from evil

**Arrows:** Martyrdom

**Axe:** Death

**Banner:** Triumph, Victory

**Bat:** (Rare to find) Death, Misfortune, Underworld

**Battle axe:** Martyrdom

**Bees or Beehive:** Chastity, Resurrection

**Bells:** Death Tolls, Call to Worship

**Bird:** Symbolizes the soul or spirit

**Boat:** (See Ship)

**Book:** Wisdom, (Bible)-Clergy or Deeply Religious Person

**Bones:** Death, Decay

**Butterfly:** Resurrection, Soul Leaving the Flesh/Body

**Candle:** Devotion

**Candle Flame:** Life

**Candle Snuffer/Being Snuffed:** Putting out life's light

**Candlestick:** Christ, Devotion

**Celestial Bodies:** (Moons, Stars, Sun)-Heavenly Home, End of Life on Earth Beginning in Heaven

**Chain:** (with one broken link)-Loss of a family member (three connecting links with IOOF or FLT with eye/handshake)-Member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows-IOOF, FLT-Friendship, Love, Truth

**Chair, Vacant:** Usually symbolizes the Death of a Child

**Chalice:** Eternity

**Cherubs:** Innocence, Happy, Divine Wisdom, Justice

**Child, Sleeping:** Child's Grave (Victorian symbol of the

Death of a Child)

**Clock:** Passage of Time

**Clouds:** Transition to the Afterlife, Divine Abode

**Coat of Arms:** Genealogical, Lineage, Wealth Status

**Coffin:** Death, Death of the Flesh/Body

**Columns:** Supporting roof of Heaven, Entrance to Heaven (Broken)-Broken Life, Sorrow

**Compass:** Member of the Society of the Freemasons

**Corn:** Body of Christ

**Cornucopia:** Full of Life, Fruitful Life, Harvest is the End of Life

**Cross:** Traditional Symbol of Christianity, Salvation (With Rays of Sun)-Glory (With Winding Sheet)-Descent from Cross

**Crossed Bones:** Represents Place Occupied by Death

**Crown:** Faithful, Loyalty, Righteousness

**DAR:** Daughters of the American Revolution, women's organization for the descendants of American Revolutionary War Veterans

**Death Heads:** Puritan Symbol of Immortality, The first generation of decorative art

**Demon (Imp):** Form Serving the forces of Death, Rarely seen after early 1700s

**Door:** Portal, Entrance into a New Life, House of the Dead, Passage to the Unknown

**Deer, Male (Buck):** Faithful, Christ Slaying Satan

**Dog:** Loyalty, Watchfulness, Fidelity, vigilance

**Dove:** Christianity, Holy Ghost, Peace, Innocence (With "R" and Half Moon)-Member of the Rebekah Lodge, the female equivalent of the Odd Fellows)

**Drapery Over Anything:** Mourning, Sorrow

**Eagle:** Ascension, Fierce (With "FOE")-Member of the Fraternal Order of Eagles; (With Spread Wings, holding arrows and olive branch in its feet with Celtic cross behind it)-Member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, (Double-Headed Eagle)-Masonic Symbol of the 32nd



Classic "Death's Head" with wings motif.

Degree Mason

**Earth:** New Life

**Elk:** (With "BPOE")-Member of Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks

**Eye:** God's Eye Watching Over Christians

**Father Time:** Passing of Time, Inevitability of Death

**Feathers:** Soul's Flight to Heaven

**Fig:** Prosperity, Happiness

**Fish:** Christian Plentifulness

**Figure Arising:** Rebirth

**Flame from Urn:** Eternity, Essence of Life

**Flowers:** Life, Frailty of Life, (Broken or Budding)-Life Ended in Bloom-An Untimely or Premature Death, (Bouquet)-Sweet thoughts, Tribute

**Acanthus:** One of the oldest of all ornamental motifs in classical architecture, Heavenly Gardens

**Calla Lily:** Beauty, Marriage

**Daffodil:** Beauty, Deep Regard

**Daisy:** Youth, Innocence, Purity, Gentleness

**Dogwood:** Resurrection, Christianity

**Hollyhock:** Nature, Ambition, Productiveness

**Ivy:** Friendship, Faithfulness, Undying Affection, Eternal Life, Christian Constancy

**Iris:** Eloquence, Protection, Message

**Laurel:** Special Achievement, Distinction, Success

**Lily:** Purity, Flower of the Virgin

**Lily of the Valley:** Purity, Humility, Happiness, Children, Bride

**Lotus:** Regeneration, Youth, Immortality

**Morning Glory:** Farewell, Mortality, Departure

**Narcissus:** Death of Youth, Memory, Beauty, Music

**Olive Branch:** Peace

**Pansy:** Meditation, Thoughtful Recollection, Remembrance

**Poppy:** Eternal Sleep, Consolation, Rest, Peace

**Rose:** Love, Simplicity, Modesty, Mother, Brevity of Earthly Existence

**Thistle:** Independence, Earthly Sorrow, Scottish

**Shamrock:** Trinity, Irish

**Passion Flower:** Christ's Suffering, Passion,

Crucifixion

**Wood Anemone:** Immortality, Resurrection

**Fleur de Lies:** Virgin, Trinity

**Fox:** Cunning, Cruelty

**Frog:** Resurrection

**Fruit:** Product of Growth, Righteous Life, Abundance

**Fugit Hora:** Latin for "Hours are Fleeting"

**Gate:** Death, Departure from Life, Heaven's Gate

**Garlands:** Victory of a Pure Life

**Goats:** Non-believers

**Gourd:** (Squash) Scriptures, Ministry, Deliverance from Grief

**Grapes:** Blood and Body of Christ, Wine, Divine Fluid

**Griffin/Gryphon:** (Lion with head & wings of an eagle)

Ancient Greek Symbol of Superiority, Invincibility, Wisdom, Watchfulness

**Hammer & Nails:** Crucifixion

**Hand with Heart in Center:** Charity, A symbol of both the Masons and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows

**Hand, Pointing:** Pointing toward Heaven

**Hands, Clasped:** Look at the cuff to distinguish between a man's or woman's hand, a woman would have a frilly cuff. The person who died first holds the other's hand, guiding the spouse to heaven.

**Hands:** Embracing Rebirth, Embracing Life,

(Handshake)-God welcoming to Heaven,

(If wearing gloves/clothing)-Marriage

**Hands Open with Touching Thumbs:** Member of the Priestly line of Aaron (Jewish Stones)

**Hands Praying:** Pious Devotion

**Harp:** (Lyre) Heavenly Music, Joy, (Broken Strings)-No longer functions, Musician's Grave

**Heart:** Soul in Bliss (Colonial Times), Romantic Love (Victorian Times), Soul's Love of God, Charity, (Often with Wings)-Flying to Heaven, (If in the middle of

Death Head)-Triumphant Soul emerging out of Death

(With Cross & Anchor)-Faith, Hope and Charity

**Heavenly Bodies:** (Moons, Stars, Sun)-Heavenly Home, End of Life on Earth Beginning in Heaven

**HIS:** Abbreviated form of Jesus, Latin derivation of IHC, meaning *Jesus, the Savior of Men*

**Hourglass:** Passage of Time, Inevitability of Death, (Sometimes shows with wings or skeleton)

**IHC:** Monogram for Christ using first three letters of the Greek spelling of *Christ*

**INRI:** Jesus

**Ivy:** Friendship, Immortality, Memory

**K:** (Large "K" in a Circle)-Member of the Kiwanis civil service club

**Keys:** (Crossed) Saint Peter

**Ladder:** Passion, Jacob, Aspiration

**Lamb:** Innocence, Most Popular for Children's Graves,



**A pair of illegible tombstones in Harper's Ferry Cemetery.**

(If lying down)-the Suffering of Christ, (If standing)-Christ Risen

**Lamb with Banner:** Resurrection

**Lamp:** Word of God, Truth, Knowledge, Wisdom, Good works, Guiding Light, (If extinguished)-Death

**Lance:** Martyrdom

**Laurel:** Victory over Death

**Leaf:** Happiness

**Lighthouse:** Safety, Final Port, Watchfulness

**Lion:** Strength, Bravery, Courage, Royalty, (If two lions' heads, back-to-back, with a circle with an "L" in center)-Member of the Lions civil service club

**Memento Mori:** Latin for "Remember Death"

**Mermaid:** Represent the dualism of Christ, Half God, Half Man

**Military Trappings:** Occupation or Station in Life

**Moon:** Renewed Life, (Crescent Moon)-Virgin, (Crescent Moon with One Star)-Symbol of Islam

**Moose Head with Antlers:** Member of the Loyal Order of the Moose civil service club (PAP, their motto: Purity, Aid and Progress)

**Mortar & Pestle:** Found on the graves of Pharmacists and sometimes doctors

**Nails, Three:** Crucifixion of Christ

**Owl:** Wisdom, Watchfulness

**Ox:** Patience, Strength

**Palm of Victory:** Righteous Person, Salvation

**Panther:** The Lord's Power to Attract All Men

**Peacock:** Fabled Incorruptibility of Flesh, Resurrection, Beauty of Soul, Eternal Life, Immortality, Vanity, Pride

**Pear:** Christ's Love for People

**Pelican:** Ancient Symbol of Atonement (since it feeds its young with its own blood)

**Phoenix:** Immortality, Baptism

**Pitcher:** Symbol associated with the Levites who washed the hands of priests prior to religious service

**Pick Ax:** Grave Digger's Tool

**Pick & Shovel:** Implements of Death, Death's Reminder

**Pineapple:** Hospitality

**Plow:** Harvest, Reaping of Life

**Pomegranate:** Resurrection, Immortality, Unity

**Ram:** Sacrifice

**Rabbit:** Humility, Gentleness, Self-Sacrifice

**Rings, Interlocked:** Marriage

**Rock:** Steadfastness, Stability

**Rosary:** Devotion to Mary

**Rosette:** A Soul Effigy

**Rooster:** Calling attention to a passing life, Vigilance, St. Peter awakens from his fall from grace, Awakening to Repentance

**Scales:** Equality, Justice, Archangel Michael holding scales to weigh the souls of the departed, May indicate profession

**Scallops Shell:** Humans' Earthly Pilgrimage, Decoration, Birth, Resurrection, Traditional symbol of Puritans

**Scroll:** Law, Scriptures, Wisdom

(If on Jewish grave)-Divine Presence

**Scythe:** Passing of Time, Cuts Down Life

Serpent with Tail in its Mouth: Ancient Symbol of Eternity, Unity

**Sheep:** Christian

**Shell:** Resurrection, Life Everlasting, Man's Earthly Pilgrimage, (Conch Shell)-Female Reproductive Tract

**Shrine:** Knowledge of Antiquity

Shield with Anchor and AOUW: Ancient Order of United Workmen

**Shield with Celtic Cross placed like an X behind it:** Member of the Knights of Columbus

**Ship:** Occupation, Humans' Journey through Life, Hardship, early symbol of the church, carrying the Christian across the wild sea of life to the port of eternal joy, Heavenly Voyage, Crossing Over to the Other Side, Sometimes on graves of those lost at sea

**Shoe:** Loss of a Child

**Sickle:** Death the Reaper

**Skeleton:** Death Figure

**Skeleton with Laurel:** Death as Conqueror

**Skull:** (Sometimes winged)-Sin, (With Crossbones)-Mortality of Humans, (On Pillar)-Triumph of Life, (Wearing Wreath)-Victory of Death over Life



**Sleeping Child Tombstone typical of the Victorian Era.**

**Sleeping Child:** Child's Grave (Victorian Symbol of the Death of a Child)

**Snake:** Sin, Satan, Fall of Humans

**Soul Effigies:** Souls in Flight to Heaven

**Spade:** Grave Digger's Tools

**Squirrel with Nut:** Religious Meditation, Christian forethought, Spiritual Striving

**Stag:** (See Deer)

**Stars:** The Hope of a New Life

**Strawberry:** Righteousness, Humility, God or Sun

**Sun:** Renewal of Life, Symbol of Glorified Souls, (Sun Rising)-Resurrection, (Sun Setting)-Death, (Winged Sun)-Ancient Egyptian Symbol of Divine Protection

**Sword:** Martyrdom, Courage, Warfare

**Tablets, Two Joined:** Symbolizes the Ten Commandments

**Tassels:** Homelike, Comfortableness, Popular during Victorian Times

**Tempus Erat:** Latin for "Time is Gone"

**Torch:** (If elevated)-Resurrection, (If lowered)-Death, (If Inverted)-End of Family Line

**Three Points, Leaves, Etc.:** Trinity

**Trees:** Tree of Life, God's Family in a New Land, Paradise, Represents Human Life, (If springing from Tomb or Urn)-Rebirth, (If fallen on a stone)-Death of a Person

**Almond:** Favor from God, Virgin Birth

**Cedar:** Strong Faith, Length of Days, Success

**Connecticut Marriage Tree:** (These were planted by newlyweds) Uprooting-Separation

**Cypress:** Sorrow, Death, Eternal Life, Roman Symbol for Mourning

**Evergreen:** Immortality

**Hawthorn:** Springtime, Hope

**Oak:** Supernatural Power and Strength, Eternity, Honor, Liberty, Hospitality

**Olive:** Peace, Healing, Faith

**Palm:** Victory, Martyrdom, Reward of Righteous,

**Pine/Pinecones:** Boldness, Fidelity, Stability, Fertility, Healing

**Willow:** Grief, Death, Nature's Lament for the Departed Soul, Symbolic Tree of Human Sadness, Carried at Masonic Funerals

**Yew:** Immortality

**Tree Stump:** Usually marks the graves of Woodmen of the World members. Broken branches on the tree symbolize a life cut short.

**Train with BRT:** Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen

**Triangle/Trefoil/Three Interwoven Circles:** Father, Son and the Holy Ghost

**Trumpet:** A Call to the Glory of Resurrection

**Urn:** Death of the Flesh, Shrine, Temple, Portal through which Soul passes to Immortality, Soul, (Draped Urn)-

Sorrow

**Urn with a Flame:** Soul Rising from Earth

**Umbrella:** Protection of Life by Religion

**Vines:** Replanted in the Soil of the New World, Wine, Divine Fluid

**Vine and Corn:** Blood and Body of Christ

**Weeping Woman:** Mourning, Sorrow

**Wheat:** Deceased had a Full Life, Harvest, Prosperity

**Wheel:** (Winged)-Holy Spirit, (Broken)-End of Life, Break in the Circle of Life

**Woman, Clinging to Cross:** Symbolizes Faith, A soul lost in the sea of sin whose only hope is to cling to Christ's cross

**Woman, Holding Anchor:** Hope

**Woman, Holding Cross:** Faith

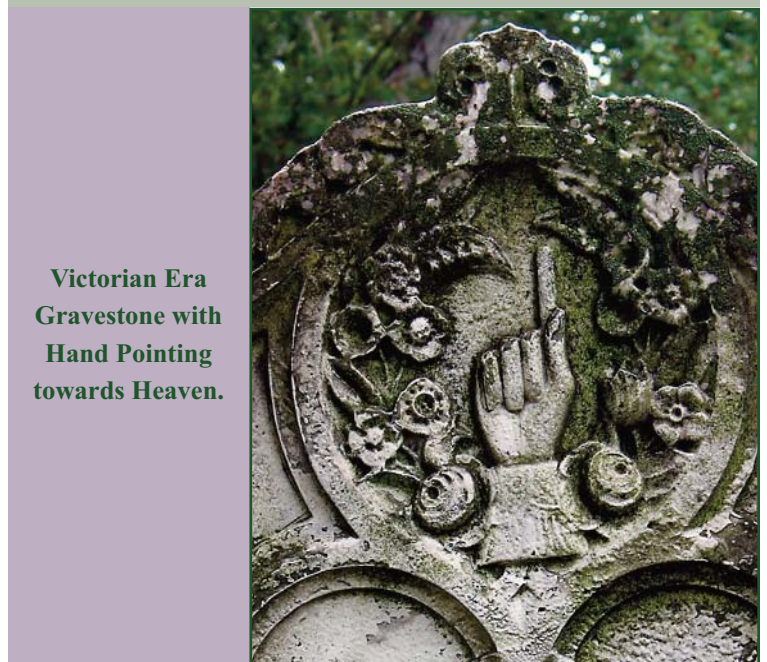
**Woman, Weeping:** Mourning, Sorrow

**Wreath:** Mourning, Victory (Worn by Skull)-Death's Victory over Life

**Yoke:** Burden Bearing, Service, Patient



**Weeping Willow Tree with Urn.**



**Victorian Era  
Gravestone with  
Hand Pointing  
towards Heaven.**