WATERHOUSE SYMBOLISM

ISSUE 43

JANUARY 2010 NEWSLETTER
GRAVESTONE TERMS

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Sun conveys light, warmth and life on earth but can also lead to destruction and drought
- Anchor conveys immortality and resurrection
- Chalice conveys life after death and resurrection

GRAVESTONE ICONOGRAPHY

Gravestone Iconography is the interpretation of symbols on gravestones. I always use the word gravestone loosely here because we should also include mausoleums, crypts, etc. when looking at gravestone iconography. One example is the gravestone to the right from Christ Church Cemetery in Greenville, SC.

The origin of the sun symbol is related to the Egyptians worshiping Osiris and Amun-Ra. It conveys light, warmth and life on earth but can also lead to destruction and drought.

The sun, seen to the right, peaking out of the clouds conveys Christ and is based on the prophecy of Malachi 4:2: "But onto you that fear the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings."

Notice the woman is standing on rocks (the person's life was built on a firm foundation) and below her is the choppy ocean (unsteadiness of life.)

She is holding an anchor which relates to "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Hebrews 6:19.) In early Christianity, the anchor was used as a disguise for the cross and marked the way to clandestine meetings of early Christians.

In the Christian faith, it conveys immortality and resurrection.

GRAVESTONE ICONOLOGY

Gravestone iconology is the study of the various descriptions of the deceased epitaphs and symbols found on gravestones.

Gaylord Cooper, in his book *Stories Told in Stone: A Manual for Genealogy Research* explains that gravestone iconology "includes historical and cultural attitudes regarding death and burial practices reflected on the gravestones themselves. Therefore, this is part science, part art, part history, and frankly, it is sometimes part tea-leaf reading, too." An example is the photo to the right sent by Gale Wall and the military monument is located at Gypsum Cemetery, Saline County, Kansas.

CONSORT (DIED BEFORE HER HUSBAND)

While preparing for my Victorian Symbolism PowerPoint Presentation, Cathy Vogel sent this marker (in Oakland) to me primarily because of the wonderful epitaph. The gravestone reads:

Ms. Sally N. Geurin
Consort of John Geurin,
daughter of James and Malinda Mckinney
Was born in Pickens, So. Car. July 7, 1828 and departed this life June 25, 1870
She was a kind and affectionate wife
Remember all as you pass by
As you are now so once was I
As I am now, you must be
Prepare for death and follow me

What does the grave marker tell us?

She died before her husband because of the word consort.

She died relatively young (42) for today's standards but the average life span of a woman in the 1870s was 49 and today it is 81.

Her husband grieved her because the symbol of the weeping willow conveys mourning or grief.

She was faithful to her husband as seen by the line: She was a kind and affectionate wife.

We can understand the preparations and ritual of death the Victorians believed in by the epitaph lines: Remember all as you pass by; As you are now so once was I; As I am now, you must be.

RELICT (DIED AFTER HER HUSBAND)

Emily Sparrow sent me this photo of the grave marker for Jane Nostram Hood Summerville from Oak Grove-Franconia Cemetery in Aliceville, AL. She and her husband moved to Pickens County, AL, in the early 1830's with a group from Kershaw County, SC.
They came with a large group from the Beaver Creek Church near Camden, SC. The group included Hoods, Cunninghams, Turnipseeds, Goings, Summervilles, Somervilles, and others. Emily says that she can safely she say that the great majority of their descendants still either live in Pickens County, AL or have strong family ties there. The cemetery, Oak Grove Franconia reads like a history of the original settlement.
A number of years ago Jane Nostram H. Summerville's maker was broken into many pieces. Emily's uncle (Robert Hugh Kirksey) and another cousin (Anne Chalmers Baker) replaced the broken maker with the one photographed to the right. Of course, they used the exact same wording from the original.

Mary Bess Kirksey Paluzzi shared about Oak Grove Franconia Cemetery that Oak Grove Presbyterian Church was organized in 1837 at Franconia, Alabama in Pickens County. The church had thirty-two charter members, thirty whites and two slaves, most of whom came from the Beaver Creek Presbyterian Church near Camden, South Carolina.

CENOTAPH

A cenotaph is a tomb or a monument erected in honor of a person or group of persons whose remains are elsewhere. It can also be the initial tomb for a person that has since been interred elsewhere. The word derives from the Greek words *kenos*, one meaning being "empty" and *taphos*, "tomb". Although the vast majority of cenotaphs are erected in honor of specific individuals, many of the best-known cenotaphs are instead dedicated to the memories of groups of individuals, such as the war dead of one specific country or empire.

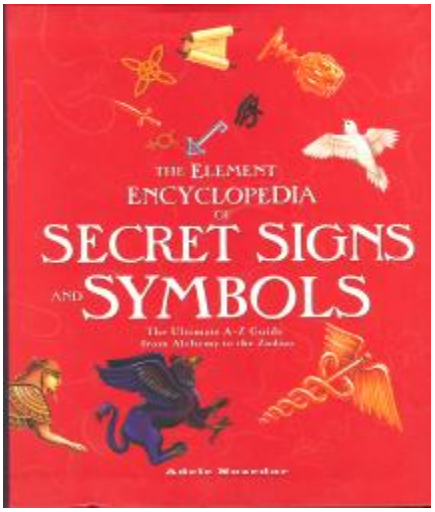
One example is the one that Wynn Montgomery shared with us last issue for Ensign Joseph Cabell who was swept overboard doing the line of duty on February 11, 1898.. The cenotaph is located at the Lexington (KY) Cemetery.

SYMBOLATE

It is always fun to wander the discount books of Barnes & Noble and Borders and see if there are any symbol books among their offerings. One example is the one to the right, Adele Nozedar's *The Element Encyclopedia of Secret Signs and Symbols: The Ultimate A-Z Guide from Alchemy to the Zodiac.*

What I really like is about this book is that it delves into the history and mystery of symbols.

One word that popped out to me was "symbolate" which Ms. Nozedar explains is an object that also has symbolic meaning. Her example is a wine glass because "it might be a handy vessel from which to drink a nice glass of dry white wine at the end of a day, but as the chalice or goblet, it becomes a significant and universal symbol of the feminine and is used in such a ritual. As the Holy Grail (see below), it becomes a symbol of deeply meaningful quest for the spiritual, a symbol of the feminine part of man and the ultimate search for the Goddess within, the marriage of opposites and one of the ultimate aims of alchemy. "



CHALICE

The work to the right is called Angels holding the Holy Grail and it is an illumination from the Playfair Book of Hours, Rouen, France, late 15th. The Illumination is now housed at the British Museum, in London.

Legend has it that the holy grail was the chalice that Jesus used to perform the first Eucharist during the Last Supper right before his death on the cross. It was also used to catch some of his blood during the crucifixion.

Another similar vessel is the Gundestron Cauldron, Denmark, 1st-2nd Century AD. It may have originally been taken from Gaul to Denmark and now resides in the Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen, Denmark.

It was a ceremonial cooking vessel that was central to rituals of the other world, the feasting associated with rebirth and resurrection.

Magic cauldrons abound in Celtic literature—Irish supposedly had a cauldron where dead soldiers were put at night so they could rise and fight again the next day.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF CHALICE

The painting to the right is *Crucifixion* by Raphael, 1502-03 and resides at the National Gallery in London.

Sun and moon at the top of the painting convey the sorrow of all creation at the death of Christ.

The INRI above Christ's head on the Titulus stands for Iesus Nazaremus Res Iudaeorum, Latin for Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. Supposedly, these are the words that Pontius Pilate wrote so that he could make the orders to crucify Christ.

The angels hold gold chalices to catch the blood of Christ (Holy Grail.) Notice the chalices are similar to the one seen above.

The four figures of the bottom are the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Saint Jerome and John the Evangelist. Notice the barren landscape.

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MEDITATION OF THE MONTH:

A good character is the best tombstone. Those who loved you and were helped by you will remember you when forget-me-nots have withered. Carve your name on hearts, not on marble.

~Charles H. Spurgeon

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

Thanks to Rosalind Hill-house for suggesting the meditation of the month. If you have meditations you want to share with others, let me know.

Thanks to everyone's comments on last month's newsletter. We had some great discussion and many of your comments I added to my blog.

I actually have the themes of the next three issues chosen: Saint Valentines Day; Saint Patty's Day; and Easter.

Have a successful 2010.

Take care,

Richard Waterhouse

Waterhouse Symbolism

SYMBOLISM: A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

A QUERY

Elisabeth Roark, Associate Professor of Art History, Chatham University, Pittsburgh, PA sent in the following query hoping that you might be able to help her out. Beth explains that "I've just started a new project, though it builds on previous research I did about an unusual marker in Baltimore's Greenmount Cemetery. The marker was created by a relatively well-known Italian sculptor, and I'm now interested in learning more about markers in American garden cemeteries by Italian sculptors who lived in Italy (not the late 19th-century Italian sculptors who came to work in America, often settling near large cemeteries -- Cleveland's "Little Italy" is right next to Lakeview Cemetery). I am collecting examples of sculpture and grave-markers by Italian sculptors that appear in large American garden or "rural" cemeteries before 1900. If you work with or frequent cemeteries of this type, and are aware of works by Italians identified by signatures, documents, or research you have done, I would be very grateful if you would share this information (and possibly a picture) with me. I promise to send you a copy of the paper I write based on this information." Beth's email address is Roark@Chatham.edu.

One example is "Our Thomas", photo to the right, at Historic Oakland Cemetery. The original that "Our Thomas" is based on was Samuel without wings and sculpted by an Italian named Luigi Pampaloni of Florence in 1827. It was first used as a garden ornament and later became popular as funerary sculpture.