

# SYMBOLS OF THE SEA



W A T E R H O U S E S Y M B O L I S M N E W S L E T T E R # 6 2

## SPECIAL SYMBOLS

- The ship conveys consciousness, transcendence, safety and hope
- Anchor conveys hope, steadfastness and salvation
- Mermaids convey sensual pleasure, fatal allurements and the unconsciousness
- Seahorse conveys patience

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## Gloucester Fisherman's memorial

Barbara Clark, a Barnstable Patriot Culture Reporter, brought the Fisherman's Memorial to my attention. It is also known as the man at the wheel of the fisherman's memorial and is located in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Dedicated in 1925, it commemorates "they that go down to the sea in ships 1623-1923".

The fisherman conveys Saint Peter and Christ. Saint Peter's symbols are keys of heaven, pallium (ecclesiastical vestment worn in the Catholic Church), Papal vestments, and the rooster. Ways that Saint Peter is portrayed include man crucified head downwards, vested as an Apostle, holding a book or scroll. In art history, he is depicted with a bushy white beard and white hair. The symbol of the rooster is vigilance, the sun, activity,

resurrection, the male principle in Christianity, self confidence and the crucifixion.

Ships convey consciousness, transcendence, safety, hope, confidence, the womb, a feminine symbol of containment, the church and the attribute of Saint Peter.

Wheels convey the sun, passage of time, fortune, the zodiac, mutability, torture, transcendence, progress, completion, power, and an association with the lotus.

The fisherman in the sculpture of the Fisherman's memorial was modeled after Capt. Clay-

ton Morrissey, a prominent Gloucester fisherman, once the captain of the Effie M.



Morrissey. The ship, now known as the Ernestina, made many scientific expeditions to the Arctic, sponsored by American museums, the Explorers Club and the National Geographic Society. The ship's crew also helped survey the Arctic for the United States Government during World War

## WIDOW'S WALK

The widow's walk is a railed rooftop platform often with a small enclosed cupola frequently found on 19th century North American houses. A popular romantic myth holds that the platform was used to observe vessels at sea. The name comes from the wives of

mariners, who would watch for their spouses' return, often in vain as the ocean took the lives of the mariners, leaving the women as widows.

In some wealthier communities, it was known as the Captain's walk.



## a n c h o r

This particular memorial marker is in the Village Burying Ground in Bar Harbor, ME.

The anchor conveys hope, steadfastness and salvation. It is the attributes of Saint Clement of Rome (patron saint of virginity) and Saint Nicholas of Myra (patron saint of gift giving). In the 19th century, American sailors would get an anchor tattoo if they served in the north Atlantic.

Rope conveys bondage, enslavement, entanglement, mythic ascension, despair, betrayal, link, sun ray, and the prerogative of power. It is the attribute of St. Andrew (patron Saint of Martyrdom). Notice that the end of the rope is cut which conveys life cut short before the person or persons buried here reached their prime.

The chain conveys enthrallment, sin, slavery, imprisonment, authority, legal control, security, strength, matrimony, the length between

heaven and earth, attachment of the mind to the lower world, the power of the Devil, the flagellation of Christ, and is an attribute of Saint Peter.

The pier that we see the rope tied to conveys stability and strength.

The anchor has been an iconographic symbol for thousand of years. Supposedly, when the early Christians were being persecuted, they could not use the cross as their place of worship. They used the anchor so worship-



Anchor, rope and chain  
Village Ground Cemetery, Bar Harbor, ME

Do not follow where the path may lead. Go, instead, where there is no path and leave a trail.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Another wonderful gravestone marker is in the Old Burying Ground in Bar Harbor, ME.

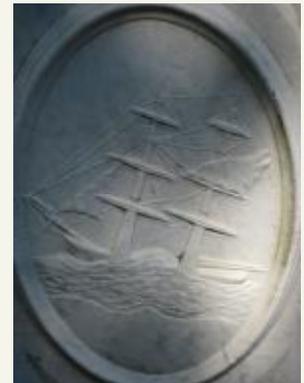
As stated earlier, the ship conveys consciousness, transcendence, safety, hope, the womb, and the church.

The ship on a stormy sea conveys the church surviving persecution, heresy and schism and alludes to

## S h i p s i n k i n g

Christ's calming the sea of Galilee.

Usually, when a sinking ship is shown on a gravestone like this one, it means that the person whose name is on the tombstone was lost at sea. Usually, this type of stone is a cenotaph and the person was lost at sea or buried at sea. The gravestone will usually not say that it is a cenotaph but might say that the person who was memorialized was lost at sea.



## M E R M A I D S

This grave stone marker is seen at Point of Graves in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Mermaids convey sensual pleasure, fatal allurements, the unconsciousness, the dual nature of Christ, the power of song-magic, and the power of seduction.

If you have seen the new Pirates of the Caribbean, movie you know how tempting and violent the mermaids can be.

If you are familiar with Ralph Cahoon's work, he portrayed mermaids in many works showing them living ordinary lives at tea parties, burlesques shows, etc.



## LIGHTHOUSE MARKER AT GROVE CEMETERY, BELFAST, ME

Lighthouse conveys safety, vigilance, watchfulness, religion, the Final Port, warning of danger, man's remoteness and solitude, Christ, salvation, the Word of God, the bible and refuge.

Another symbol related to lighthouse is light which conveys the spirit, virtue, intellect, creative force, cosmic energy, the Word, purity moral value, knowledge, wisdom, evolution, the masculine principle, creative force, optimism, the past, discovery, understanding, divine relation, and divine

love. In the Christian belief, it conveys belief, grace, charity and Christ.

The history of the lighthouse is fascinating which begins in Ancient Egypt with the lighthouse of Alexandria built in 280 BC to serve as the landmark of the port. At the time, it was the tallest structure between 330 and 440 feet. It was also designated as one of the seven greatest wonders by the classical writers. Other civilizations that constructed early lighthouses include the Chinese and Romans.



The voice of the sea speaks to the soul.

Kate Chopin

## SEAHORSE

The seahorse conveys patience, friendliness, protection, inflexibility, perspective, generosity/sharing, high perception, persistence and contentment.

The ancient Greeks and Romans believed the seahorse was an attribute of the sea god Neptune/Poseidon and as such, the seahorse was considered a symbol of strength and power.

Further, the ancient Europeans believed that the seahorse carried the souls of deceased sailors to the underworld – giving them safe passage and protection until they met their soul's destination.

Chinese cultures believed that the seahorse was a type of sea dragon, and as such they were revered for their power and thought to be symbols of good luck.



## OUR ANIMAL FRIENDS IN CEMETERIES

Bob Price sent me this wonderful photo of a hawk residing in Saint Louis' Catholic Cemetery.

The hawk conveys the evil mind of the sinner, fire, sun, and the spirit.

One of the great things about visiting historic cemeteries is the awesome wildlife seen throughout the area. For example, in Mount Auburn Cemetery, there is a place where

folks can write down what birds they have seen in the cemetery.

Bob tells a very funny story about seeing this young hawk and being dive bombed by the parents who were trying to protect their young. I remember a similar experience in Danville, Kentucky but the birds were owl parents trying to protect their owl baby who had fallen out of a tree.



**What are your ideas  
for future newsletters?**



**WATERHOUSE  
SYMBOLISM  
NEWSLETTER # 6 2**

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The mission of Waterhouse Symbolism is to research and document symbols locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

The wonderful thing about putting together exhibitions for the Cahoon Museum of American Art is the learning process. For example, after curating *Mighty Ships and their Journeys to Beyond*, I learned many things about the sea and all the symbols related to it.

We are slowly creeping into fall and celebrations with many symbols related to them like Halloween and Thanksgiving.

Take care,  
Richard Waterhouse

**REVISITING GENERAL WARREN**

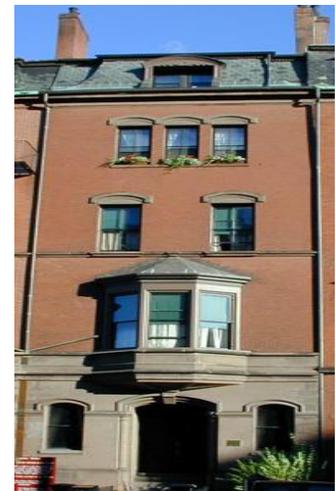
In the last newsletter on page 2, I showed the painting *Death of General Warren* by John Trumbull.

Mary Ethel Grady, a Cahoon Museum of American Art volunteer, let me know that " the Warren who was killed at Bunker Hill belonged to the Warren-Gibson family. Their home is now the Gibson House Museum, home of the Victorian Society! When the house was built in 1859, the family moved from it's original home on Park St. just down from the state house. After the new house was built in Back Bay at 137 Beacon Street, the location was considered the hinterland. "

There are at least three sculptures of

Joseph Warren on public display. Two are in Boston—one in the exhibit lodge adjacent to the Bunker Hill Monument, the other on the grounds of the Roxbury Latin School. The third is in a small park on the corner of Third and Pennsylvania avenues in Warren, Pennsylvania, a city, borough, and county all named after the general.

At the time of Warren's death, his children were staying with his fiancée, Mercy Scollay. She continued to look after them, gathering support for their education from Mercy Otis Warren, Benedict Arnold, and even the Continental Congress. Joseph's younger brother, John Warren, served as a surgeon during the Battle of Bunker Hill.



Gibson House Museum  
Boston, MA