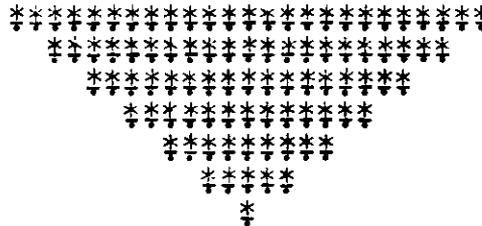


WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

A Paper, Prepared and Read by
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At the Annual Meeting of the
Chautauque County Historical Society at
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WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

Friends --- We go from here to the cemetery. Not today, but certainly sometime. There we shall be lain to rest, even as we have laid those away who have gone before us. Stones will probably mark our graves, and future generations will read that which is chiseled upon them, just as we now read names and dates and epitaphs on tombstones set two hundred years ago ... more or less.

This paper is not a discourse on what cemeteries are, or how they should be kept, or who in particular are buried in them. It is written in hope of stimulating the study of grave-stones, which I have found to be intensely interesting, not only as memorials and genealogical records, but also on account of the rare beauty of form, lettering and decoration of many of them. The epitaphs are a never ending source of interest, and though stilted, are often sweetly sentimental, sarcastic, or quite amusing in a dry sort of way.

Many materials have been employed for tombstones. Ordinary hard shale was often used, and lasted a hundred years before splitting and crumbling. In New England a red sandstone was much used and lettering chiseled in 1760 is quite legible today. Welsh slate was used sparingly in many of our old cemeteries in the East, it looks like red soapstone and appears to be impervious to weather. White marble had its long use and was beautiful, but had all the bad qualities too; - water stains, splitting, fragile, eroded quickly, collected dirt and smoke and was susceptible to fungous growths which often covered it. During the 1870's monuments and markers were fabricated from a composition of lead and other metals, these were satisfactory but decidedly expensive and hence not often seen. Granite is generally used now -- on account of its hardness and consequent lasting qualities. The writer has seen some very attractive markers made of concrete containing granite dust. Bronze plates are gaining favor and have much to commend them.

The older gravestones were of two general types, the flat slab, and the square or obelisk. The large obelisk had four sides on which to record the family data and so was equivalent to four ordinary slabs. Flat slabs of white marble -- or the various sandstones are generally used and upon these are found most of the epitaphs, the best lettering and the choicest decorations. The study of tombstones reveals the fact that during various periods there were definite styles in form, decoration and lettering, which appear to have changed about every fifty years. The type of decoration is perhaps most readily noticed and consequently any change is quickly observed.

Stones of the 1670 - 1720 period were generally undecorated, the lettering was of comparatively large size and thus apparently sufficed. From 1700 to 1800 we find several distinctive decorations. First, the urn in various sizes and shapes; then the winged-hour-glass, and appearing about 1750, the skull and cross-bones.... often surmounted by a single or double crown. (I shall show a rubbing of this decoration, later.) Following this, the cross-bones were omitted and quite elaborate wings "grew" from either side of the skull... or perhaps more often... from an extremely plain face with a very straight mouth. Crowns were plentiful on this type also. About 1800, epitaphs, heretofore by no means uncommon, became more popular and more elaborate..... sometimes attaining sixteen lines in length. 1820 witnessed the advent of the "weeping-willow" decoration, which, with its companion urn and the four, six or eight-line epitaph lasted well through the Civil War period. Then came such an array of decorations as to bewilder the stoutest hearted:- clasped hands; lady's hand holding a rose; Hand with forefinger pointing upward.. to signify the departed had arisen, and finally the American flag; crossed sabres and heaps of cannon-balls, denoting the late war. The weeping-willow and the epitaph ceased to appear about 1885 when the new style rectangular gravestones became popular. These willow decorations are a study in themselves, scarcely any two are alike.

Many stones are "signed" with the initials or name and the residence of the stonecutter .. and sometimes dated. This was usually cut low on the stone and is often hidden by grass. I have found these signatures in our local cemeteries,-

D. H. Geddes; S. Nixon; C. S. Payne; E. C. Nixon;
E. Evans, Sculp. (meaning "cutter") F. L. Knight;
Hubbard; Geddes & Beal; and Fisher, Sc., Warren.

It is pleasing to note our stonecutters omitted the "Mr." and "Mrs." so generally seen on stones in New England..... however they clung to the "Relict of", and "Virtuous Consort of," (often misspelling virtuous) for nearly a century.

Many of our early stones are exact copies of those to be found in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Stones set on Old Burial Hill at Plymouth, in 1800, apparently were copied by our stonecutters and came into use here about 35 years later. As example, - This is from Old Burial Hill, -

"In memory of Mrs. Polly Holmes, wife of Mr. Joseph Holmes, who died July 3, 1794 aged 26 years.

"Death is a debt to nature due,
Which I have paid, and so must you."

And this inscription is from Hamlet Cemetery, in Chaut., Co.,

"Joel Payne died March 11, 1835, in the 72 year of his age." --

"Death is a debt
by nature due,
Which I have paid
and so must you."

Markers were often set many years after the deceased was laid away. An excellent example is found in the old cemetery at Pleasantville, here in the town of Chautauque, where, upon a fine marble slab is the following, -

"In memory of Stephen Washburn, died Nov. 12, 1820, aged 29 years, 16 days."

The stone is signed, -

E. EVANS, Sculp., 1835. (15 years later)

Epitaphs were often written by wives, for their husbands, and vice versa, and sometimes are not too complimentary.

Delightful mistakes in spelling occur on many of these old tombstones, look closely and you will find them. Sometimes a sequence of letters was too long for the width of the stone, so the workmen ended the line with several very small letters, or cut them above or below, at the end. You will find these also. I suggest you pay a visit to your nearest cemetery ... go to the older part and study the lettering chiseled on the stones a hundred years ago (1840). You will appreciate its excellence.

It may interest you to know, --- The selling of family plots in cemeteries is of comparatively recent origin. Grove Street Cemetery at New Haven, Conn., was incorporated in 1794 and there the first family plots were sold in 1798. Before this, bodies were buried side by side in the order of decease. This cemetery, the correct name of which is THE NEW HAVEN CITY BURIAL GROUND, is an interesting place to visit. Here are buried Eli Terry, of clock-making fame; Samuel Finley Breese Morse, portrait painter and inventor of the telegraph; Jedediah Morse, (father of Samuel) author of the first geography published in America, 1798; Eli Whitney, inventor and

manufacturer of the Whitney rifle and inventor of the cotton-gin; Charles Goodyear, who perfected the vulcanizing of rubber and many others.

Sleepy Hollow Cemetery at Tarrytown, N. Y., contains much of interest. Here Washington Irving, Andrew Carnegie and Mr. Whitelaw Reid are buried ... along with some four thousand others. Woodlawn Cemetery, Elmira, N. Y., contains the graves of Mark Twain and his wife. Also at Elmira, in the Woodlawn National Cemetery are the graves of nearly three thousand Confederate soldiers who died at a nearby prison camp.

Thousands of tourists go to Plymouth, Mass., and see only the Rock in its beautiful setting. Old Burial Hill cemetery is but a three minute walk from Plymouth Rock, and is intensely interesting. A young man is usually in attendance there, and for fifty-cents will conduct your party about the Hill. He is thoroughly familiar with the stones, and recites the epitaphs along with a running talk about the early settlers who rest there. Many of the old stones in this cemetery are protected by painted copper "hoods" which cover the entire back and top of them and prevent erosion and splitting. The backs of the older stones are toward the north-east, for from that direction come those terrible storms, called "nor' easters", which, no doubt, would soon destroy the lettering.

Now, to come nearer home, --- There is an interesting and unusual gravestone near the center of the cemetery on the hill a short distance east of Napoli, Cattaraugus County. In the upper center of this large marble slab, a deep rectangular recess is cut to hold a Daguerreotype case, containing a picture of the deceased. The recess is covered by a small slab of marble, held at the top by a single screw which permits swinging this cover either to the right or left, revealing the picture.

I am going to read you a few inscriptions which I have copied faithfully at various places; The first is from Busti Village cemetery,-

"Sacred to the memory of Catharine Tanner, Relict of Elijah B. Carpenter. Died Sept. 19, 1869, aged 80 years, 7 months. She died of Heart Disease in a Sleeping Car between Devton & Middletown, Ohio; while travelling South to visit her Daut. In Cincinnati, Ohio."

From Villenove Cemetery, Chaut., Co.,-

"Susanna A., Daughter of Solomon & Arran Crowell, died July 2, 1855, aged 25 years & 9 months.

"My dear associates fare you well
I'm gone where Jesus and Angels dwell.
And ye who council sweet shve given
Remember Susie lives in Heaven."

From Old Burial Hill,-

"In memory of Elizabeth Savery, wife of Lemuel Savery, who died August 1, 1831, aged 71 years.

"Remember me as you pass by
As you are now so once was I
As I am now you soon must be
Prepare for death and follow me.

(I was told some college boys added these lines, in red pencil)

"To follow you I'm not content,
Until I know which way you went."

From Old Burial Hill,-

(The First Woman Schoolteacher in America.)

"In memory of Mrs. Tabitha Plasket, who died June 10, 1807, aged 64 years.

"Adieu vain world, I have seen enough of thee,
And I am careless what thou sayest of me.
Thy smiles I wish not, nor thy frowns I fear,
I am now at rest my head lies quiet here."

From Hamlet Cemetery, Chautauqua County,-

"In memory of Hiley, wife of Elias Clark, who died Dec. 3rd, 1837 in the 80th year of her age.

"Go home my friends, dry up your tears,
I must lie here 'till Christ appears."

This is copied from a large white marble slab in the Pleasantville Cemetery, just north of our County Farm. Marks the grave of Arnon Miles, son of John Miles, a soldier of the War of 1812.

"At morn was well, noon can't tell,
The same respecting me,
For life had fled and I was dead
By the falling of a tree."

"Boast not thyself of tomorrow for thou
Knowest not what a day may bring forth."

From Old Burial Hill,-

"Erected to the memory of Mrs. Mehitabel, wife of Capt. Thos. Atwood, who died Jan 14, 1809; in the 38 year of her age. In early life, her feeble constitution gave painful premonitions of her early exit. She however, unexpectedly passed the meridian of life, discharging in a very laudable manner, filial, parental and conjugal duties. At length, the seeds of death were planted in her vitals -- she sickened, languished and expired, in hopes of a blessed immortality.

"Short is our longest day of life,
And soon its prospect ends;
Yet on that days uncertain date
Eternity depends.

And this last one, just for fun, is taken from the February, 1939, National Geographic Magazine, page 271, and is of English origin,-

" Here lies John Steere,
Who, when living, brewed good beer.
Turn to the right, go down the hill,
His son keeps up the business still."

Thus ends my paper and I leave this thought with you,-
"A nicely kept cemetery denotes a well ordered community."

I thank you!



VALLEYHAVEN, October 5, 1940.

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