

In writing the following article, I have incorporated the research of several scholars in various disciplines, who have devoted considerable time to studying cemeteries and their artifacts. What they have discovered is that cemeteries and their gravestones can tell us much about the lives of our forebears and the society they shaped. At the end of the article is listed the bibliography so that one may delve further into their fascinating findings. I have been engaged in cemetery research and survey for many years and have found the research of these and other scholars very informative and useful. I hope that what each of you take away from this article will enable you to look at cemeteries and their elements with new eyes. ----- **Phyllis Roberson Hoots**

CEMETERIES AS OUTDOOR MUSEUMS

“the way a people look at death and dying is invariably and inevitably a direct correlation of the way they look at life.” --- David Stannard, Death in America

To consider cemeteries as outdoor museums may strike one as a rather novel idea. But a cemetery itself is a symbol of the civilization which created it. Hopefully, by giving a new perception, dismantling the images of horror and morbidity projected in movies and books, a healthier attitude will prevail. Perhaps those cemeteries that lie beyond the safety of church or municipal grounds will be perceived in a new way.

Cemeteries house the dead, but gravemarkers are fashioned by the living, who record on them not only their pleasures, sorrows, and hopes for an afterlife but also their history, ethnicity, and culture. Cemeteries and gravemarkers offer one of the richest, yet least exploited sources of information on American culture, past and present.

Scholars from such diverse fields as folklore, art history, cultural geography, anthropology, history, American studies, and English are engaged in an in-depth study of the fascinating world of the cemetery and its artifacts. These experts recognize that by studying cemeteries, they can learn a culture's attitudes toward life through its responses to death. They understand that a society's behavior in the interment of its dead reveals its cultural values. Every aspect of the cemetery reflects the culture that created it: its vegetation, gravemarkers, ornamentation, and boundaries (fences, walls, trees), even its orientation. Not only do cemeteries and their gravestones reflect collective attitudes toward the other world, beliefs about spiritual beings, the fate of the soul, and bereavement, they also can reveal relations between members of the social group, whether living or dead.

Unfortunately, death in the twentieth century came to be avoided, if possible, turning over to professionals the responsibility of disposing of the corpse with as little discomfort as possible to the family and friends. Even the upkeep of many cemeteries is the

responsibility of paid professionals. This distancing between us and death has been reflected in the more utilitarian gravestones, displaying only vital statistics and a brief epitaph. Scholars say that this move toward utilitarianism reflects the secularization of the 1900s.

Fortunately, since the last decades of the twentieth century, the trend seems to be moving away from strictly utilitarian gravestones and suggests that people are yearning for more personal or autobiographical commemoration of their loved ones. It is suggested that this trend may reflect attitudes of Americans as a response to secularization as well as may reflect changes in society, with humane treatment of the dying, grief support, and instructions for dealing with the ending of life with dignity.

America's four hundred years of history have provided scholars with a rich cultural harvest, through careful examinations and analyses of cemeteries and gravestones, particularly in New England and the surrounding areas. Not as much detailed study of Southern cemeteries that encompasses the entire region has been accomplished. We must keep in mind that much of the South was rural and cemeteries were scattered and often not marked or marked by field stones, so there was not as much early evidence, and much of what little there was has long disappeared from the landscape. However, fortunately, there are still some funerary artifacts available for study, and many of those are rich with cultural symbolism, waiting to be read. There are several focused studies by scholars, notably Dr. Ruth Little on black cemeteries in North Carolina and Diana Williams Combs' *Early Gravestone Art in Georgia and South Carolina* and Donna J. Booth's *Alabama Cemeteries: A Guide to Their Stories in Stone*. These works provide us with insight into the uniquely southern graveyards.

Indeed, research by Dr. Gregory Jeane, Professor of Geography at Auburn University, Alabama, has revealed a distinctly Southern trait, after his extensive study of hundreds of rural Southern cemeteries in nearly two hundred counties. His large field observations reveal "repetitive association of characteristics, which indicate a distinctive type of rural cemetery that appears to be geographically extensive only within the South." He refers to this as the "*Upland South folk graveyard*." Further, he states that this cemetery type is widely dispersed throughout the South and can be identified through "small size, hilltop location, east-west orientation, scraped ground and mounded graves, and preferred species of vegetation." Creative decorations express the art of "making do" (using materials or skills at hand).

Jeane mentions three phases of evolution which can be recognized in these Upland South cemeteries: pioneer, transitional, and modern, and each phase clearly reflects the dynamic aspect of the culture. According to Jeane, these cemeteries, more widely distributed than plantation burial grounds, mirror the extended family ties characteristic of the rural South, ties based on kinship patterns which evolved through intermarriage of families.

Conversely, limited surveys by other researchers, especially in regions such as Charleston, South Carolina, exhibit similarities of carvings and epitaphs found there and

those displayed on gravestones located in New England cemeteries. In fact, Diana Combs' study confirms the affluence and power in places such as Charleston and Savannah. Wealthy planters, merchants, and others of fortune were able to purchase finely wrought markers imported into the southern region from New England.

Perhaps no other historical artifact matches the gravestone's many advantages as a cultural indicator: its widespread distribution, visibility, durability, relative immobility, and sheer numbers. The gravestone reflects a brief sketch of an individual's life, contemporary taste and symbolic expression, as well as reveals its carver or manufacturer, and its age is reasonably easy to establish. Also, the gravestone rarely stands alone but rather is to be found in small family plots to large, urban cemeteries. Thus, cemeteries indeed are museums, portrayal of the past built to last, and have given experts an opportunity to analyze how these "communities of the dead" were planned, sited, named, subdivided, and filled in to echo the ideals and norms of society.

Much of the study of cemeteries and its artifacts has been concentrated in America's northeast, particularly in New England. Although few gravestones survive which date before 1660, many examples are numerous after that time in that region. The area's social development, from its puritanical beginnings through the periods of the Great Awakening, the Republican era, the Victorian age, through the acceleration of the industrial age to the beginning of the twentieth century can be traced through its monuments to the dead.

Those first colonists in New England were merchants, ministers, craftsmen, and laborers. They had hardly arrived when the need for burial markers arose. The first art form and sculpture in America began in the seventeenth century with the modest efforts of craftsmen who adorned gravestones, Bible boxes, and various utilitarian objects with simple, low-relief decorations. These artisans were the artists, and carpenters and stonecutters who became carvers of gravestones.

Research reveals that the earliest stones were merely thin slabs inscribed with the name of the deceased, possibly his or her relationship to a spouse or a parent, and date of death. These slabs were generally made of slate, freestone, limestone, or a crystalline rock (schist). Slate weathered better than the other stones and so more of them have survived. The first motifs were simple rosettes or radiating suns. But over time these motifs became more complex. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, though, the primary motif was the winged skull, a stylized, two-dimensional symbol of the fleet approach of death, expressing the terror of the grave. Written below the design was the inscription which reminded the living to be always conscious of death. The carved, crossed bones, present on many of the gravestones, were potent reminders too. Also primitively rendered little faces of creatures of the spirit world are carved into either side of the stone, along with gothic style arches, which are survivors of medieval traditions.

James Deetz, in his book *In Small Things Forgotten*, points out that the earliest design is “a winged death’s head with blank eyes and a grinning visage, the earlier versions being quite ornate on occasion and becoming less so as time passed.” Whereas we in the modern world have distanced ourselves from images representing death, they were very much a part of the Protestant world, particularly the Puritan segment. Since late medieval times, the cadaverous specter of death and the skeleton had been familiar sights in the imagery of Western man.

For Puritans, Deetz says, life on earth was a grim existence; many of their visual images and much of their literature expressed their preoccupation with death. Death was their familiar companion. Those fortunate ones who lived to maturity were well aware of their good fortune. The presence of early death was everywhere, and children were continually reminded of “how filthy, guilty, odious, and abominable they are, both by nature and by practice.” So it is hardly any wonder that fear was always present. For the Puritans, to be frightened was a natural, rational response. To the Puritans “to not be frightened was a sure sign that one was either spiritually lost or stupid or both.”

Researchers Dianna George and Malcolm Nelson state that even as disconcerting as the skull on the stone may appear, one notices that it is grinning as well as grimacing and is winged, suggesting the freed soul which, hopefully, is winging its way to heaven. It looks both down into the grave and up to heaven, expressing the contradictory message of hope as well as fear. It is warning that one must be mindful of the fleeting nature of all earthly things and that decay waits for all flesh. George and Nelson explain that the Puritans recognized the graveyard as a ground of discourse between this world and the next, rather than just being a final resting place. They maintain that taken together, iconography and epitaphs can lead gravestone studies closer to the minds and souls of our American predecessors.

Although this puritanical attitude spread well beyond New England, as can be seen by looking at gravestones of the coastal regions of the Southern states, and was expressed well into the eighteenth century, other images began to replace the skull. One image, arising from the period of the “Great Awakening,” which was a gradual moving away from the skull, was the winged cherub. In looking at this iconography, it is sometimes difficult to discern which is which during this transition period. Scholars say that the message of these cherubs, with full-fleshed human faces and wings of angelic nature, assured that “the dead shall be raised incorruptible.” Diana Combs, in her research in Georgia and the Charleston, South Carolina, area, remarks on a group of carvers working in that area who were from New England. She said that they also carved markers with the death’s head but, interestingly, enclosing this emblem of death are voluptuously rounded forms, identified as figs, ornamenting the pilasters. She says that these forms, with their suggestion of fertility, undermine subtly the grim delight of Death through the promise of continued life.

The first appearance of effigy portraits in stone coincides with a general breakdown of Calvinism, an increase of wealth in the colonies, and the rise of a philosophy that allowed men to enjoy certain honestly gained material pleasures. The Age of Reason dawned and

the colonies offered Benjamin Franklin as their representative to it—as opposed to those Puritan leaders, John Cotton and Richard Mather. Men of Franklin’s time embraced a far more worldly philosophy than their predecessors had allowed, and scholars say that this was bound to find its way to the graveyard.

Thus, as life in the colonies became more influenced by continental thought, gravestones became a more positive, worldlier reflection of contemporary attitudes. Research indicates that the next shift in motifs fits into this major social and intellectual development occurring in American society. By the 1820’s the willow and urn almost totally replace the cherub, indicating an emphasis on nature and the spirit of the age of Romanticism and sentimentality.

Simultaneously, a growing enthusiasm for neoclassical forms in America reflects the spirit of Republicanism, as the nation celebrated its new government. Other types of iconography make an appearance: classical pagan symbols, sphinxes, herbal motifs, all these reflect the spirit of Republicanism. Scholars suggest that the use of Greek forms expressed ideal societal and artistic perfection: the obelisk, minitemples, and pyramids in graveyards, even as Greek revival forms are being expressed in architecture.

During the Victorian Age, romantic, rather bizarre tombstones made their debut in cemeteries. This was the era when Queen Victoria of England mourned the death of her husband for forty years, and grief became a preoccupation of the period that bears her name. Messages on gravestones were meant to solace the survivors. Also, many Victorian graves were testaments to the deceased’s cultural refinement and material success. Death, in its starkest manifestation, during this period wasn’t mentioned; instead, death was described as people falling asleep, “going home to heaven.” Such sentiments were displayed through the “broken rose” symbol and the “bed” graves. According to Deborah Smith, Curator of Documentary Papers at Strong Museum, Rochester, New York, denial of death is an important characteristic of the era. She found in her study that nineteenth century attitudes toward death were profoundly influenced by changing concepts of family affection. She surveyed 96 children’s markers located in eighteen churchyard cemeteries in northern New York, dating between 1840 and 1899 and representative of a white, middle-class, Christian population. She concludes that as Victorian parents, like parents in any era, experienced pain at the loss of a child, the majority of stones communicates the survivors’ painful sentiments through words, images, or a combination. Communication on children’s markers was meant to promote comfort for the survivors more often than to eulogize the child.

Paralleling gradual change in gravestone designs were changes in cemetery sites. From the seventeenth century to the late nineteenth century, the graveyard underwent dramatic transformation. Puritan settlers had regarded the hinterlands as “heidious and desolate wildernesses full of wilde beasts and savage men to be shunned or destroyed,” so graveyards were treated as unattractive necessities and were squeezed in among the living and were placed in unkempt sections of the town common. The Puritans did not bring to the New World the old English customs of decorating graves and adorning graveyards with vegetation.

However, in the early nineteenth century attitudes about death and burial began to change as a result of pressing social reasons. Researchers explain that the rapidly increasing population meant that the graveyards also became increasingly crowded, finally becoming “stinking quagmires” and creating serious public health hazards. As outcry was made, in 1825, a search began for an alternative to the charnel grounds and thus arose the garden idea, in vogue at the time. The new cemetery was to be a place, not of final judgment, but of repose, offering visitors of the deceased a sense of reassurance, union, and triumph.

Mount Auburn Cemetery, founded in 1831 on the outskirts of Cambridge, Massachusetts, became the flagship of a rural cemetery movement that flourished across the European continent. Scholars contend that Mount Auburn became a re-creation of Virgil’s Elysian Fields: “meadows circled by trees and crossed by streams, a demiparadise.” Nature, long regarded as the haunt of the devil, was cleansed. At Mount Auburn’s consecration ceremony, Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story introduced the notion of the cemetery as a cultural institution, “an outdoor school of history and philosophy, which would preach lessons...that there is no adversity that is not followed by a better day.”

Within 20 years, however, the picturesque, the more natural, orderly layout of these rural cemeteries gave way to the “gardenesque,” which included many man-made objects, resulting in a more cluttered appearance. As early as the late 1840s, people complained that greenery was scarcely visible through the plague of wrought-iron fences around almost every family plot. This was followed in the 1850s by an epidemic of granite curbing. A culmination of an assault on nature was the iron lawn furniture. Finally, at the turn of the century, Mount Auburn Cemetery began to remove much of this excess---some 1,500 fences and 525 curbing; and the changes signaled the beginning of the uniform greensward which we know today.

As the twentieth century began, with all the hustle and bustle of modernity, researchers show that American cemeteries began to follow a more utilitarian mode, where whims of fashion and individual expression were discouraged. As the century progressed, gravestones became more uniform, made of granite, plain, with little ornamentation, and with just the basic inscriptions. Professional cemetery crews began to administer the care of cemeteries. However, in the last 20 years, there has been a renewal of individuality in cemeteries. Even though cemeteries still have regulations, at the gravesites themselves, one can see individuality, from the types and shapes of gravestones to the decorations placed at the graves. As one walks through a cemetery, particularly during a holiday such as Christmas, little Christmas trees or tiny toys can be seen on a number of graves, spreading a seasonal spirit, which loved ones of the deceased obviously wish to share. Even a bowl of nuts has been spotted, nestled in front of a tombstone. It is fascinating to examine the increasing number of ornate markers dotting the cemetery. On some are large engravings of lovely scenes, some in color, pleasing the eye. Other markers give clues to the personality or career of the deceased, perhaps displaying a fire helmet or a set of golf clubs or some other interesting, revealing designs.

In looking at cemeteries here in North Carolina, I have been especially intrigued by several examples of gravestone designs and iconography. One reflects the work of the Bigham family of carvers, who settled at nearby Steele Creek near Charlotte, where a community of Scotch Irish Presbyterians had established a church. Edward Clark has conducted an interesting study of the Bigham's work. He states that these carvers capture in stone a point in the American past when ethnic origins were being supplanted by an emerging sense of national identity. The gravemarkers they created from 1750 to 1780 reflect their having come from Northern Ireland. However, from the time of the American Revolution until 1815, they incorporated distinctly American symbols of the young republic into their repertoire of designs. Many of these people immigrated to Pennsylvania in the mid-1730s and then migrated down to the Carolinas. Stones gradually began to reflect the change from traditional coats of armour to innovative variations to truly American motifs.

In the early days of our state, most of the fancy gravestones were in cemeteries of the Presbyterian churches, because early artisan-crafted stones were very expensive, and many Presbyterians had the money to afford them. Many early stones survived from Alamance County south through the piedmont and into northern South Carolina. But, overall, there were only a few stone carvers in the early days of North Carolina, and their movements can be traced by similarities arising in stones of different areas. One of the largest centers for making gravestones was Mecklenburg County, where the Bigham carvers worked. Between 1765 and 1810, this region turned out many stones. After 1810, carvers seem to have scattered to other places.

There was stone to make gravemarkers in the piedmont but not much native stone was available in the coastal regions. Often, gravestones for the coast had to be brought from England or the northern states. In some areas of the state wooden markers were used as late as the 1930s but, of course, not many survived. What studies have been conducted by scholars in North Carolina reveal elaborate workings, including angels, sun and moon, birds, coats of arms, symbols of occupation, and an occasional carving of a deceased person.

Perhaps some of the most intriguing gravemarkers found in North Carolina are located in Davidson County. Francis Duval and Ivan Rigby conducted a study of the openwork memorials found at various churches in the area. They say that many of the openwork gravestones were being carved around 1822, the year when Davidson County was formed from Rowan County. Churches in this region were organized during the second half of the eighteenth century by immigrants from the Palatinate (western Rhine region), from Switzerland, and also from the eastern part of France, such as Alsace. English, Scots and Welsh settlers also settled here during the colonial period.

Duval and Rigby say that openwork stone carving was practiced in ancient times, long before that technique became identified with Gothic structures and was much admired. Tracery-like openwork stones are unique for their refined craftsmanship. One can look for these beautiful stones at the following churches: Abbotts Creek (Baptist), Bethany (Reformed Church), Pilgrim (Lutheran), and Beulah (Reformed Church). A more limited

openwork style sampling can be viewed at the churchyards at Fair Grove, Emanuel, Spring Hill, Good Hope, St. Luke's, Beck's, and Jersey.

These openwork gravestones are generally tapered in silhouette and rather small in size, about 20-30 inches in overall height, with a thickness varying from one inch to over two inches. Some of the other specimens, footstones especially, are among the most diminutive markers ever seen. The majority of these gravestones were made from steatite, a soft soapstone, rich in talc, which made the openwork carving much easier. To obtain the design effect, a combination of drilling, gouging, and abrading was used. There are a few slate specimens among these memorials, but slate was much harder to work with.

These researchers point out that the most frequently used symbol is the fylfot, whirling sun (or swastika, which in Sanskrit means "it is well"). The fylfot is an ancient symbol with implications other than a resignation to the inevitable; often it stood for the sun and, by derivation, for eternal life. The fylfot can also be seen carved into mantels and furniture. The heart motif is used repeatedly, as are trees of life, birds, and tulips, and the Urbogen, a sacred Nordic symbol of the diminishing arc of the sun, which brings on the barrenness of winter, earth's season of death. According to Duval and Rigby, one will note that many openwork stones bear unrelated carvings on their two faces---the fronts displaying the inscriptions, the backs or reverse faces showing high-relief geometric designs.

Their research points to members of the Swisegood school of cabinetmakers as being the makers of these collective openwork memorials. Duval and Rigby found that these eighteenth century woodcarvers are known to have produced household items such as cupboards, which have details bearing a close resemblance to the memorials' decorative style. Records show that in 1810 John Swisegood became an apprentice to Mordica Collins, a local wood artisan. Collins moved to Indiana in 1816. Swisegood took on two apprentices, Jonathan Long and Jesse Clodfelter, and taught them the woodworking trade.

The researchers state that Jesse Clodfelter may be the "Joseph" Clodfelter, who identified himself by signing the back of the 1802 Josiah Spurgin memorial at Abbotts Creek. But they explain that this stone is probably back-dated by at least 20 years, a common practice at the time. John Swisegood moved to Illinois in the mid-1840s. Jonathan Long remained as a thriving carver until around the 1850s. Duval and Rigby emphasize that the memorials clearly are not the work of a single carver. Hopefully, other artisans who had a hand in carving these beautiful stones may eventually be identified. One thing is certain, because these artifacts are fragile, they must be protected. They are still in good condition, but scarring and chipping are apparent on their surfaces. It would be a pity if this beautiful gravestone art becomes lost.

In thinking about the urgency of surveying, studying, and protecting these outdoor museums and their precious artifacts, one must keep in mind that there have been even fewer studies of African-American burial grounds and gravemarkers, but Dr. Ruth Little, in an article "Afro-American Gravemarkers in North Carolina," 1989, (her work has

since been published: *Sticks and Stones: Three Centuries of North Carolina Gravemarkers*, 1998, UNC Press), makes some interesting points. She says that there are four basic types of black gravemarkers—the grave mound, the head and foot marker, the grave enclosure, and the grave sculpture. She discovered that there is more similarity between individual markers for blacks and whites than there is between the overall design of black graveyards and white graveyards. Nevertheless, she maintains that there are fundamental visual distinctions in black and white grave traditions in North Carolina. In general, black craftsmen are less guided by popular and academic gravestone traditions and are more original.

The most striking between the two is in overall design. While generally oriented east-west, black graves are not aligned parallel with each other or in rows as are white graves, Little says. Families are loosely grouped, but the placement of individual graves within the family grouping has no established order, so that the rhythm of the overall design is irregular and strongly individualistic.

Another striking distinction between the two is the design of the individual markers. Little explains that a majority of markers in rural black graveyards are homemade. Objects such as shells and bric-a-brac, concrete, metal and plastic items, bowls, vases, and mirrors are used. Some research of the use of household objects on graves has been explained by blacks themselves as a means of appeasing the spirit of the deceased and of preventing the spirit from returning to the home. The dirt grave mound, the minimal marker, is a venerable black tradition, Little emphasizes, one often found in combination with other types of markers. The single most common type of black gravemarker is the concrete headstone, usually hand-crafted.

According to Little, in the 1960s a flat concrete slab came into widespread use in eastern North Carolina black graveyards and continues to be popular there. No examples were found in white graveyards. She says that most slabs have a smooth finish covered with white paint, but they occasionally have a rusticated finish and sometimes a covering of reflective silver paint. In West African tradition, the grave symbolized the bottom of a river bed, where the soul rested. Mirrors on the grave created the impression of reflective water.

Little remarks that the two most interesting black folk headstones recorded in the piedmont county of Davidson are made of concrete and decorated with bits of mirror and stained with glass. She says that many grave enclosures in the black cemetery take the form of a low cinderblock wall, plastic fences, or borders of bricks, shells or rocks. Grave sculpture includes objects as diverse as a wooden ladder that extends from a grave, apparently representing a ladder to Heaven. A styrofoam chair decorated with greenery and flowers sits at the head of an otherwise unidentified grave in a black community cemetery in New Hanover County. Its presence gives the grave a domestic security, as if the chair is keeping watch over the grave or is a symbolic resting place for the deceased. Little states that the primary distinction between markers for whites and blacks is that those for whites are bound more tightly by popular aesthetic norms than those for blacks.

(I highly recommend Ruth Little's work; represented here is only a small part of what is detailed in her book.)

In conclusion, cemeteries and gravemarkers as material culture, as outdoor museums, portray the past, in that they reflect a brief sketch of an individual's life, contemporary taste, and symbolic expression. It is the voice of a culture we hear when we consider any object made by that culture. Through continued study of these visual cultural images, we will gain further insight into how society orders itself in the face of life and of death.

NOTE: FUNERAL CUSTOMS

Interesting facts:

Coffins used until the 1880s were utilitarian. Often used less wood by being made out of scraps of wood.

After the 1890s, caskets were used more frequently.

Bodies were traditionally buried on the third day, but because climate was problematic, burials often took place by the second day. However, "cooling benches" were used. A partition was dropped at the base of the coffin or casket and filled with ice.

Torpedo coffins were manufactured in the late 1880s because of an increase in grave robbings. Glover Corporation in Ohio made a 10" long cylinder filled with explosives and with a mechanism to cause it to fire if anyone tampered with the body.

Epilogue

The main concern facing students of gravestone studies is the vulnerability to which stones are evermore prone. I once came across a magazine article which stresses this fact. In the article, Alfred Fredette, a retired school teacher recounted the problems he encountered when, in 1976, he began recording every stone in every cemetery in Scotland and other towns in Connecticut. By comparing the town and state probate records with records he made of the stones in the graveyards, he discovered that many of the early eighteenth-century stones were missing. Through all this, he became not only an authority on eastern Connecticut stonecarvers but he also became responsible for one of the many laws passed by the state of Connecticut (1987), a law which at long last makes it a Class B felony (punishable by a fine of up to \$5,000 and imprisonment for up to five years) to remove a stone or fragment thereof from a cemetery. His actions point to a problem: who is responsible for these stones? Because the often primitive sculptures created by our early carvers have been recognized as a unique form of American folk art, gravestone theft has escalated rapidly within the past 20 years, to feed a growing market in folk art collecting. Quite by accident a stone, known as the Constantine Baker stone, was discovered hanging on the wall of an exclusive New York City antiques gallery, for sale for \$1,950. Fredette says that the systematic

removal of Connecticut eighteenth-century gravestones for sale in the antiques market can be documented as a problem for a number of years.

While theft of stones for sale in antiques markets may not be a major problem in North Carolina as yet, vandalism by insensitive individuals and destruction of whole cemeteries and their markers by developers, who do not wish to take the time or go to the expense to remove cemeteries in the path of their development, are on the rise. We should all respond to the urgency to protect these “outdoor museums and artifacts,” so that they can be studied as meaningful indicators of American culture. Another article will follow shortly which focuses on cemetery laws, especially in North Carolina, and how individuals can use them effectively in protecting these fast-disappearing treasures of our culture.

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