

Cemetery Symbols and Inscriptions

(12/15/21 Patrick Tisdale)

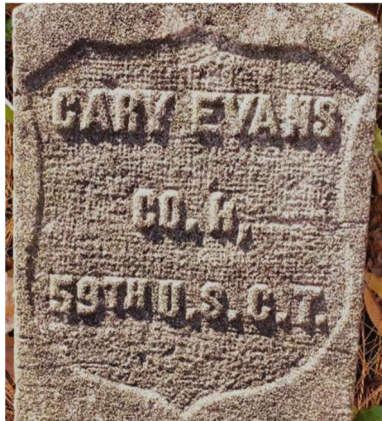
There are a variety of resources available to the public that describe symbols, inscriptions, artwork and other gravestone design elements commonly found in the United States. This resource does not attempt to recreate that information, it focuses on examples found in the Mount Zion and Female Union Band Cemeteries. We also have symbols and inscriptions needing interpretation - perhaps you can help us solve some of these mysteries!

Please share questions or information you may have on this topic with our website team via the info@mtzion-fubs.org email address.

Military Service Units

Inscription: "U.S.C.T"

United States Colored Troops



Before the full integration of black soldiers within the Army and other branches of the armed forces, individuals served in segregated units. The U.S.C.T. units were also referred to as U.S. Colored Infantry ("U.S. Cld Inf"), "U.S. Cld. HA" (Heavy Artillery), and "U.S. Cld. Cav" (Cavalry).

"CO. H"

Company ("H" in this case)

Social and Professional Organizations

Symbol: "Three chain links"

Grand United Order of Odd Fellows



The Grand United Order of Odd Fellows was created in Europe as a fraternal brotherhood group providing mutual benefits. The first affiliated black membership lodge in the United States was created by Peter Ogden in 1843. The Odd Fellows extended mutual aid, as well as moral and social outreach into the community.

In addition to providing financial support, members vowed to remain *sober, honest, industrious, and benevolent, a good husband, a kind father, and a loyal and virtuous citizen*. The black Georgetown lodge was located at 28th Street NW and Dumbarton St NW.

Symbol: "Mason square and compass"

A Mason Lodge Member



Masons are a fraternal group who must believe in the existence of a supreme being and in the immortality of the soul. The teachings of Freemasonry include morality, charity, and obedience to the law of the land. Borrowing from the Massachusetts Masons, "Being a Mason is about a father helping his son make better decisions; a business leader striving to bring morality to the workplace; a thoughtful man learning to work through tough issues in his life."

In 1782 Prince Hall of Boston petitioned the Grand Lodge of Ancients in England for permission to establish a "Lodge of Free Negroes," and the petition was granted in 1784. Individual Masons from Washington who were inducted into a lodge in Pennsylvania in 1823. Two years later they successfully petitioned to establish Social Lodge No. 7 in Washington in 1825. In 1848 Social Lodge No. 7 and two other lodges formed the Union Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia - later changed to the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge.

<http://www.mwphgldc.com/index.php/masonichistory>

Symbols: Combination of Mason and Grand United Order of Odd Fellows



Other Cultural and Religious Symbols

Symbols: Weeping Willow, and Obelisk



Carvings of weeping willows became common on gravestones in the early 1800's, often associated with obelisks, urns and plinths symbols. Greeks often incorporated willow branches in funeral traditions. Willows growing along rivers may convey Christian beliefs of crossing into the afterlife, absolution by bathing or reaching the promised land (ties to the River Jordan)

Symbols: Praying Hands with Sprig of Leaves



Praying hands are thought to convey devotion. In this example, the hands bring a sprig

Symbol: Crown on Gravestone or Monument



A crown, whether engraved or a carved cap on a monument stone, is thought to represent the glory of life after death and the deceased's ascension into heaven.

Symbol: Bird in Flight with Olive Sprig



Birds in flight may represent the soul released from the earthly body to in a journey to heaven. Doves are also associate with peace, or in the Christian faith the Holy Spirit.

Symbol: Grapes Swag



Grapes can represent wishes for prosperity in the afterlife.

Floral Bouquet



Floral bouquets are commonly seen on women's headstones as a symbol of the restored innocence of a soul at the time of death.

Primrose in Bloom



The primrose is commonly seen on women's headstones. It can symbolize restored innocence of a soul at the time of death, as well as love, beauty, hope. A rose in full bloom is often describes a person who died early or in the prime of their life.

Christian Cross and Heart



The Christian cross and heart symbols convey the deceased was devoted to their Christian faith. On occasion a ship's anchor is added to these two symbols to mean a steadfast faith.

Abbreviations and Terms

“Consort of”

Used to describe a deceased woman's marital status

In the 17th through 19th centuries, consort most often described a woman that predeceased her husband (an alternative to “wife”). Other interpretations have been proposed. These include a woman in a relationship not yet consecrated in a formal religious ceremony (in historical times, awaiting a marriage to be performed by a traveling minister, pastor or priest), or a relationship between a woman and man, often associated with offspring, not legally recognized as marriage (a description given to the woman in an interracial couple)

Mystery Symbols and Annotations

Mystery Headstone Symbol



Two such headstones exist at the burial grounds. Research thus far has included African tribal symbols, enslaved symbols and brands, societies and professional associations, alphabets, and musical instruments.

Perhaps a stylized lyre? As a symbol of Christian love and chastity; divine harmony; attribute of Greek god Apollo; common symbol of music and poetry

Or the astrological symbol for the “South Lunar Node”? The south node is associated with the past, in the karmic sense of things brought over from past lives into the present one, or the influence of the past in the present life, such as one's inherited nature. The south node can also define a stage of life where an individual has achieved what they can, and little further growth will occur.