

STUMP MOTIF GRAVESTONES OF SOUTHERN INDIANA

Dear F I person,
Here's a wood
paper that I
currently feel I
can live without.
I think I may have
sent you a xerox copy
years ago - but this
one has the ~~is~~
gravestone inscriptions
on the back of the
photos.

Happy filing,
Margy Wallace

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"Each early stone is individual, the flowers, acanthus and laurel leaves and fruit, arranged as the fancy of the sculptor dictated, with a freedom from set patterns which seems extraordinary when we realize that he had so little suggestion outside his own fertile brain. This constant variety in detail shows that the stone carver loved his work - that his mind was always alert for a more pleasing way of presenting the old thoughts to the people of his day."¹

Sepulchre monuments, carved in the form of tree stumps, exemplifying extremes in austerity and elaborate, symbolic, decoration can be found in surprisingly large numbers in almost any Southern Indiana cemetery. The stones are found in Northern Indiana and Illinois but seem more restrictive in design, originality, and density. The further away that one finds them from the Indiana limestone region. The original and apparently popular form of these monuments led me to contact several people closely familiar with limestone cutting and carving in the hope of learning the origin of the motif, the reason for its popularity during a time span from around 1830 to 1900 and the symbolism of the various forms of ornamentation.

A

My first informant was fifty-one year old John Buker, chief draftsman at the Indiana Limestone Company, Bedford, Indiana. Inquiring where the motif came from; if it was brought by settlers, or if it was inherent to Southern Indiana, I was told by John that one "can go two or three states away and not see it." This presumably results from the abundant, local stone supply and

and that shipping perhaps six to seven hundred pounds of stone, uncut or as a finished monument was not practical for those living hundreds of miles away, in spite of the stones originality and personal symbolism. Easily stained and weather worn, limestone is not a very good monumental stone, except as it is abundant and inexpensive as in Southern Indiana. Mr. Buker believes that the motif originated in Lawrence County where, at the turn of the century most of the stone mill employees were capable of producing the grave stones in varying degrees of complexity. He did say that "a couple of years ago all the carvers were Italians," and in their carving, they strove for such realism, "that you could smell the flowers". Often, the stones would be carved in the mill for free by a close friend or a member of the deceased's family, "to show the thoughts of someone who died." Now there just is not any who do it," resulting from a change of attitude toward death, the Industrial Revolution which removed the necessity of the hand carver and recent cemetery rulings which no longer allow limestone monuments as they attract a "dark and unattractive" form of lichen. Therefore, the once abundantly carved stump-gravestone is "almost a lost art."

My second and third informants are both employees of the Woolery Stone Company, Tapp Road, Bloomington, Indiana. Harold Elger, one of the few skilled carvers still alive (age 65) was unable to tell me any more than Mr. Buker about the stones. He has been acquainted with the motif all his life and yet has no idea or opinion as to the place of its origin. Max Woolery gave me some general information about stone cutting and carving; a cutter utilizes a pattern usually produced by a draftsman while a carver works from his own creativity, a drawing, or a photograph and is more artistic. In answer to my question as to the origin of the motif he said that "they just copied nature," and was probably popular because the stone was cheap and the style not too difficult to carve.

My last informant is Mr. Erskine W. Hoadley of R.R. 2, Gosport, Indiana.

Now at the age of eighty-six, Mr. Hoadley was a child when many of the 'stump-stones' were created. His grandfather William and two of his five uncles, Claude and Sylvester were in the stone business and are known to have carved the monuments in the small graveyard in Yellowwood State Forest (Brown County, Indiana).

The following was transcribed from a tape recording made at Mr. Hoadley's home in Gosport, March 29, 1974. W

E.W. Hoadley: One of the brothers liked to make things go, use big tools, big hammers. He did the rough work and then there was another brother; did most of the carving although they all could carve. Sylvester Hoadley was the ah, did most of the carving after the other brothers kind of roughed it out, mostly, you know. That's the way they divided up their stone work. And then they got, ah, I don't know where the idea came of these. of these; well they call the rustic stumps. Now I don't know where they; whose idea it was or all of it. They all worked together just like a football team, you know, and lived together there at home before they started getting married, you know, for years; that's up here right next to the Christian Church; that big two-story house. That's the old Hoadley home. But anyway, they got started, these rustic stumps and my father, they made pictures. My dad drew the pictures of what they had in mind. He went out and sold 'em, you know; bring those pictures in and they'd go to work and they'd create those stumps. Then after they got a few made, then the people would come and look at what were already made and then they'd make changes to suit whatever it was.

The peculiar thing and the thing that we folks later on don't think of is that every one of those stumps, if you knew it, means

something to the particular family. Now this one out here in the cemetery, it's a double one. Have you seen the double ones?"

M. Wallace: "Yes."

E.W.Hoadley: "Double ones; sort of intertwined, you know, and ah, that was for a man and his wife; and then there's another one some place, they're scattered. I don't remember where they are. They put up all of 'em, but, ah, this fella that carved it, my father found out in making the sale that his man was very generous, and those days, you know, tramps were all over the country. They travelled all over, you know, and, ah, he'd never turn one away; bring him in, feed him, keep him all night and so on, Well, my father found that out by talking to him. He told the other brother that carved it. So when he carved this stone, he made two hands on that stone; one was giving and the other receiving and then he put a little thing inside and called it a biscuit." Laughter. "This old boy was giving the fella something to eat!" Laughter. "Oh, shoot! And those, all those monuments, I don't know where all they are anymore. Practically all these, a radius of, I expect, forty miles around here, you'd be apt to find one, and usually, of course, 'n these little, old cemeteries someplace that probably, maybe abandoned, and now some of them are abandoned, you know."

Unfortunately, my informants, in spite of their age and familiarity with the motif and stone business were unable to tell me little more than I had already conjectured about the origin, popularity and symbolism of the tree stump motif. I have found, in fact, some of the statements to be false. The Stump-stones are found profusely in large public cemeteries. While the 'double-ones', generally marked the graves of ^{couples} ~~two men~~; another marking the graves of two couples, presumably close friends. Finally, (although I have no proof at

this time) I have heard that the stones are to be found in Kentucky, Wisconsin, and Connecticut which suggests that they are characteristic not only to Indiana. However I suspect that for obvious reasons, Southern Indiana probably hosts the largest number and thusly the most variety in style.

Each of my informants indicated to me that the creation of the tree-stump gravestones "is almost a lost art." This seems to have resulted from several factors. Firstly, there has been a decrease in the number of skilled carvers and an increase in the number of stone cutters. Architecture requiring less detail has become predominant. The detail that is required can generally be executed by one or two carvers whose productivity level has been raised by the use of air hammers. Cutters are needed to produce the flat and carved stones used for building facades, and they are not acquainted with the small tools used for detailed work. Secondly, because limestone is not a quality monumental stone, people prefer to buy granite which is more durable and no longer exorbitantly expensive. Because granite is much harder, it cannot be carved in the same manner as limestone. A decrease in the demand for carvers has resulted in a decrease in their number.

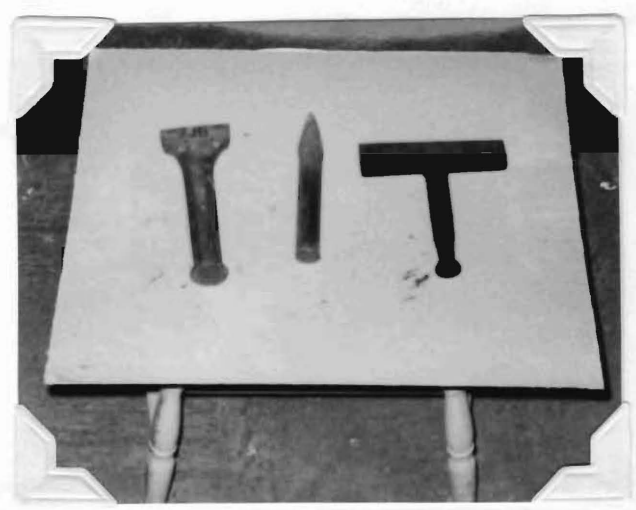
Although planters, bird baths, and benches continue to be carved in the bark motif, there is an apparent decline in the realistic quality of the objects. The third reason may partially be credited to the use of the hammers as opposed to hand chisels with which one can work more slowly and carefully.

The skilled craft of carving the tree stump gravestones, once a part of the cooperative labor system and widely practiced in Southern Indiana is now almost dead. It is now only evidenced by the numerous grave markers.

TOOLS USED BY THE HOADLEY BROTHERS FOR CARVING THE MONUMENTS

1. "big tools" used for roughing out the shape
2. "big hammers"
3. medium tools used for refining the shape
4. small tools used for detailed carving

(now owned by E. W. Hoadley)



1



2



3



4

Early graves, that were marked by a cross made from two sticks, initials carved into a tree's bark or a log placed on top of a grave to prevent wild animals from disturbing it, possibly inspired the motif. However,

"It is perhaps correct to say that in the whole range of symbolism no emblem is more widespread or has exerted greater influence upon the institutions of mankind than the branches of a tree. Primitive man was impressed by the huge proportions of trees, their age, and the usefulness of their fruits. Furthermore, the tree was to early man his village meeting-place, and his protection from the fierce heat of the sun or the cold of the rain. We can thus understand how after a time he came to regard it as an object of veneration and worship."²

The early settlers knew the tree as an object of veneration and worship. They also knew the tree as a symbol of uncleared land; the wilderness and the personification of the strength and unpredictability of nature. It is evident how the settlers psychologically fared their environment by the fine finishing or painting of their furniture, by using siding, plaster, white wash on their homes to remove themselves, at least temporarily, from the feeling of being entirely enclosed by nature's hostile elements. By creating an intricate tree carving from stone, in any form desired and by decorating it with personal ideas and objects, man again expressed his desire to control his environment and to create his destiny.

The basic symbolism of the tree is known but the difficulty arises when one examines the numerous interpretations, stylized or realistic, standing erect or a log on the ground, as if the top appears to have been sawed or chopped off or weathered away.





"The ornamentation on gravestones was not only a means taken by the carver to express his sense of beauty and fitness, but even more to interpret the epitaph...."³is in agreement with Mr. Hoadley's statement that each of the stones had a particular meaning to the carver and the life of the person for whom it was carved.

According to their stylistic elements, I have not been able to form distinct categories for the gravestones. However, I was able to loosely group them in the following manner: I) childrens' stones II) standard, single stump stones III) double stones or single stones marking the graves of two or more persons IV) groupings of stones comprising family plots V) recent stones carved in granite VI) exotics.VII).

The motifs of decoration, with the exception of the lamb used only on a child's grave, follow no specific pattern in their use. A combination of lilies; vines, grape or ivy; and Christmas ferns which stay green throughout the year and which symbolize the eternity of life, are found on most stones (male, female, child or adult).

"The grape vines (actinida) have their origin in Paradise. God se God sent an inspector to earth and reported there were no a actinida, so he took some from Paradise which were gold, silver and bronze.... In Paradise the soil si metal and all things which grow out of it are endowed with strength and life."⁴



"The most plausible explanation of all this symbolism seems to be that the lotus flower which grows upon the sacred tree and opens itself to the sun's rays every morning, was regarded as a symbol of resurrection, and it is therefore represented as the 'flower of life'. The lily of the Old Testament may be discussed in connection with the lotus for it is quite possible that they are the same flower."⁵



B

This section resembles a pictorial essay but includes commentary on the general motif and particulars about some of the stones. It is hoped that the reader will look at the pictures carefully enough to realize that any descriptive analysis would be fertile. Each stone is an entirely individualistic, creative sculpture. The stones utilize a basic motifs of ornamentation but some variation in form and/or ornamentation is always present. It is hoped that the photographs will provide a more accurate and interesting profile than an ethnography might.

I

Children's grave stones usually exhibit the traditional motif of the lamb or dove. Some are extremely simple and small, others are highly ornamented with a hat or other possessions carved into the stone. Some have no ornamentation indicative of a child's grave and can only be ascertained by reading the epitaph.





II

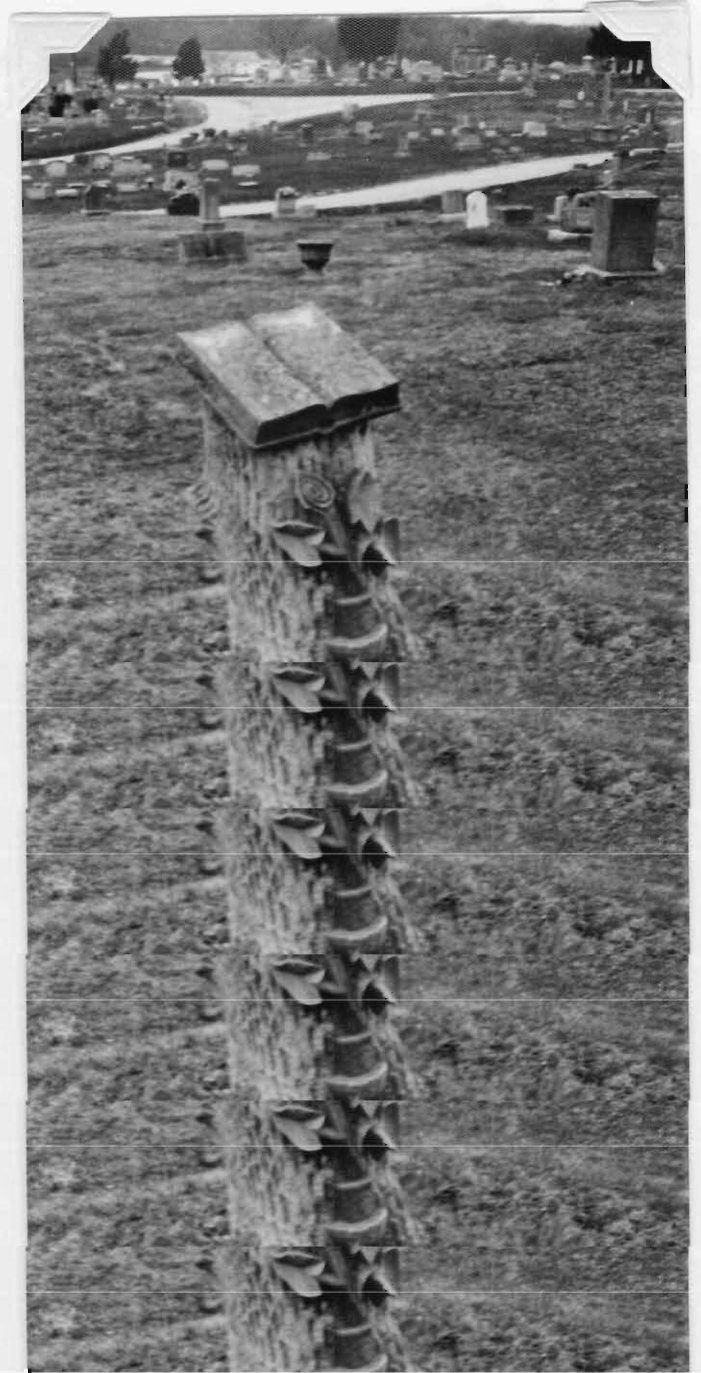
The single stump is more frequently found marking two graves than it is marking a single grave. The great variety of artistic interpretation is shown by the following single stones which mark a single grave. The familiar scroll, upon which the epitaph is "written" is attached to the stump in several ways. It is held in place by a Bible; hung on an elaborate cord; tacked on as if it were a public notice or; laced on by a rope which also holds an anchor, which seems inappropriate when one realizes that it is a girls gravestone. A more logical style of stone would be one with lacey vines and flowers.





"There is little doubt that the tree served as an effective pulpit."

It is interesting to note that all the stones I found carved in this motif except one were marking the graves of women. This seems slightly amusing considering that traditionally men are the ones to stand behind the pulpit.



The last stones in this category show what liberal interpretation on the basic design was allowed. The stone with the cross is a typically Catholic interpretation. The log on its side will be seen again in family groupings. The wedge is quite unusual and I found only one other similar stone, which I believe to have been carved by the same person.



III

Single stones, marking two graves usually belong to a husband and wife. It now becomes apparent how over-lapping the motifs are. A simple stone with a dove, usually marking a child's grave is now found to mark a couples grave. Another couples grave is marked by a "pulpit stone." One stone shows a sheaf of wheat, a traditional symbol of fertility. Another stone appears to have begun to grow around a standard gravestone until it was struck by lightning.



"How was a man to show his reverence for such sacred trees? Obviously by removing some of his clothing and valuables and placing them upon the tree, thereby symbolising his readiness to sacrifice his all to the diety which it represented."7

Several stones exhibit specific personal belongings. One unusual stone had a man's hat leaning against the base. More common is the axe and maul. The most highly decorated monument is the one Mr. Hoadley spoke of in reference to the "biscuit." It exhibits a dove, spinning wheel, axe and maul, a stack of books and the giving and receiving hands which provide a visual biography for all who pass.





Other markers consist of peculiar arrangements of logs and bark.



IV

Again, evidence is found to illustrate the unending variety of the stones in the carvers attempt to create a more symbolic or more esthetic marker. "Consider, for instance the legendary belief that two trees were the progenitors of the humsn race!"⁸⁸ Here, it is important to remember the folk custom of a newly-wed couple planting two trees in front of their home as symbols of thier lives and growth. All the markers are quite siniliar in form but are subject to extensive variation in the vine, fern and flower decoration. The Dickey stone has a small planter between the trees probably representing a new life to be crewted. Two almost identical stones whic look as though they were accidentally placed too far apart mark the graves of two men of the same family, but their kinship is not indicated.

The trees which appear to have been chopped or sawed off suggest that the persons life had been stopped short. A weathered-away trunk would seem to indicate that the person had died in old age. The dates on the epitaphs, however prove that this is not the case. This decorative motif, as are most others, are applied in an arbitrary manner reflecting only the artistic quality of the carver.

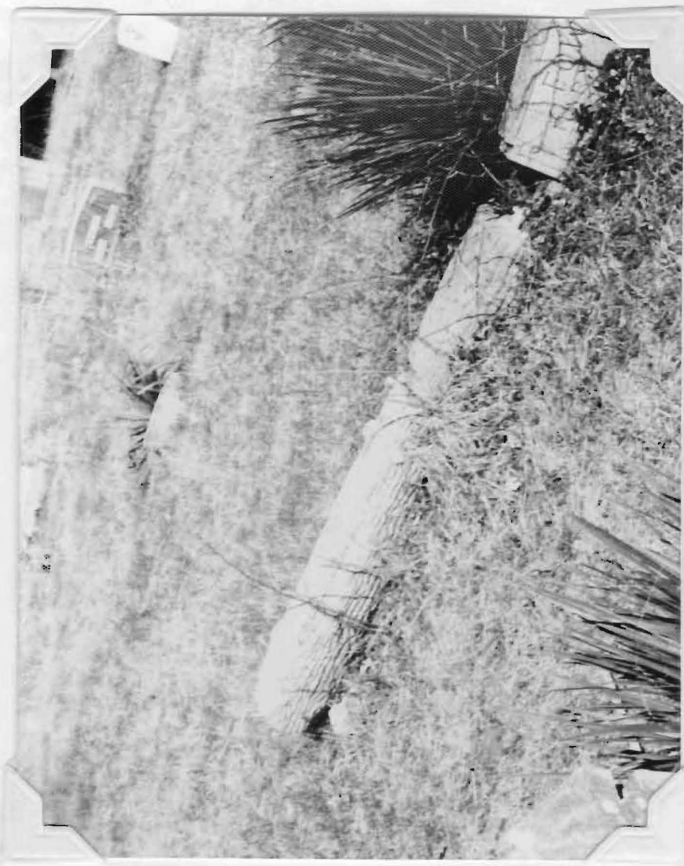




V

A family plot usually consists of a central stone which bears the family name. Individual markers host more complete epitaphs. Some are only marked with "Mother" or "Father." Other small stones have first names and initials as well as the dates of birth and death. One unusual exception is a marker, carved as two separate logs, which bears the names of five different brothers and sisters. Finally, one grouping consists of three complete, individual stones. They are totally unrelated in form and are only tied together by their ~~close~~ proximity and common family name.





VI

The granite stones, expensive and difficult to carve are to be found in small numbers. However, the very fact that they do exist shows that there is still an attraction toward the old motif. Following the tradition of individualistic interpretation the following, modern grave-stones show new ideas and suggest that the motif will be popular for some time to come.



VII

This last category I have labeled as exotics for lack of a better or a more descriptive term. All of the following photographs could have been placed in one of the previous categories, yet they are so distinctive in their oddity that it seemed more worthwhile to group them together.







C

Hopefully, this study has provided the reader with an overall view of the basic types of the tree-stump motif gravestones. As basic as the categories are, one can see that there is no simple solution to their classification; the cross-referencing of motifs is unending.

The tree, a symbol of life is shown cut in half, indicating that death was felt to have cut short a life. The first five categories, (with only a few exceptions) clearly show that the basic carvings were based upon this idea. The last two categories show that through time, the stone carver strayed from the basic "life cut short" symbolism and began to use the stump motif in a more creative manner.

Note

All pertinent data as to epitaphs, dimensions and location of the gravestones is marked on the back of each photograph.

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NOTES

1. H.M. Forbes, Gravestones of Early New England (Boston: Riverside Press for Houghton Mifflin, 1927), p. 19.
2. M.H. Farbridge, Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1923), p. 27.
3. Forbes, Gravestones of Early New England, p. 114.
4. A. Porteous, Forest Folklore, Mythology and Romance (New York: Arno Press, 1928), p. 178.
5. Farbridge, Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism, p. 45.
6. Porteous, Forest Folklore, Mythology and Romance, p. 111.
7. Farbridge, Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism, p. 31.
8. Porteous, Forest Folklore, Mythology and Romance, p. 93.