

Historic Woolsey Cemetery Victorian Cemeteries

Cemeteries throughout the United States that were founded during the Victorian Period (1837-1901) were highly influenced by Victorian Symbols. Historic Woolsey Cemetery has several wonderful examples.



One symbol seen on a young person's grave is the Lamb of God which conveys innocence, protection from God, and Jesus' sacrifice for our sins. Note that the lamb is resting in front of rocks which convey that the child's short life was built on a firm foundation so she will have eternal life.



In the 1850s to the turn of the century, children were dying very young because there were no immunizations and vaccines for smallpox and diphtheria, so families were trying to find symbols to show that grief. Other symbols that you see on their graves are weeping willows, doves, and empty baby cribs.

Another stone seen in Woolsey Cemetery is this one seen with the magnificent Crown and Cross Motif. The idea is that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and he rose to become King of Heaven. Thus, you see the Crown and Cross Motif which allows person buried here to have eternal life.



The two ornaments are in each side are probably just decorative but could be leaves of acanthus which convey heaven.



On this stone is the dove with a branch in his beak which conveys resurrection and life after death. The story of the branch and the dove comes from the Ark when the Dove visits Noah after the flood with the branch letting him know that there is life after the flood.

On this gravestone is the ladder which conveys the ladder of heaven which leads you to the doors of heaven. At the top of the ladder are grapes and grape leaves. They convey the Eucharist or life after death.



The Confederate gravestone to the left shows the cross of the Confederacy and the wreath which always conveys resurrection and eternal life.

Originally the marker was made from wood and when these decayed and were no longer readable, they replaced them with these markers. At Oakland, there was a rounded marker that was usually put up after the wooden marker. The pointed marker was replaced much later.

Clasped hands are usually seen on a married couple's grave and usually signified unity here on life and unity after death or eternity. Notice that one of the hands is male and one of the hands is female. Also notice palm branches which conveys spiritual victory over death. We think back to the story of Jesus arriving on Palm Sunday with the people waving palms.





Wheat seen on a grave always a symbol of resurrection because it is seen as the end of harvest here on earth and the beginning of a new life in heaven. Notice that the wheat is tied with a rope neatly. Sometimes the gravestone will have a scythe on it.

CONCLUSION: What is so fascinating about symbols discovered during the Victorian Period is the families still use them today even the tool today is probably a laser and not a hammer and chisel. Also, you can wander American cemeteries throughout the country and find many of the same symbols that you see in the Woolsey Baptist Church Cemetery. If you have questions or comment about these symbols or other symbols, please don't hesitate to contact Richard Waterhouse at rwsymbolism@gmail.com or (774) 251-8620.