

Friday Lectures
Coordinator Ian W. Brown

AGS 33rd Annual Meeting and Conference
June 25, 2010
Denison University
Granville, Ohio

Lecture 1, 9:00-9:20 A.M.

"In Memory of Susan Freedom": Searching for Gravestones of African Americans in Western Massachusetts

Bob Drinkwater

Susan Freedom died Dec. 28, 1803 at age 19. Her gravestone stands alone in the old section of the Springfield Cemetery in Springfield, Massachusetts. Her epitaph suggests her social status: "Tho short her life, and humble her station, she faithfully performed all the duties of it." According to Thomas Bridgman, who published her epitaph in his 1850 collection of gravestone inscriptions, Susan was "a colored girl brought up by Col. Worthington." She was one of a thousand or so African Americans living in western Massachusetts at the turn of the 19th century, a little more than a decade after the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court declared slavery to be contrary to the state constitution. She is one of a small number of African Americans who can be identified directly, or in her case, indirectly, by the words inscribed on her gravestone. A much larger number are known (or presumed) to lie in unmarked or minimally marked graves, many of them in prescribed areas of municipal cemeteries. An as yet undetermined number of African Americans lie hidden in plain sight beneath gravestones virtually indistinguishable from those of their European-American neighbors. In this presentation, I will summarize the results of previous efforts to locate the gravestones of African Americans in southern New England. I will then outline a strategy for continuing and intensifying the search in western Massachusetts.

Bob Drinkwater is a past President of the Association for Gravestone Studies and a current trustee.

Lecture 2, 9:20-9:40 A.M.

Egyptian Revival Funerary Art & Architecture in New York City

Elizabeth Broman

Much of American architecture, sculpture, and decorative arts in the 19th and carrying over into the 20th century is characterized by “revivalism” and “eclecticism”. The same influences and attitudes that inspired these revivals and eclectic styles also carried over into funerary art. A 19th-century fascination (or preoccupation) with death led to the creation of highly symbolic, sentimental, religious or dramatic images and forms in funerary art. Nineteenth-century attitudes towards death and dying were reflected in the iconography of funerary monuments while stylistically drawing from classical, medieval and Egyptian art forms. We will look at the evolution of the Egyptian Revival in the 19th and 20th centuries and the architectural books and drawings that inspired them. Oddly enough, the Egyptian Revival style was certainly not the most popular, not even in funerary art, where it had the most common associations with burial and death. Were Egyptian monuments considered a little too barbaric and incompatible with traditional Christian iconography, or could they have the same meanings? This talk will focus on Egyptian Revival forms and motifs that appear in a few notable New York City cemeteries. Green-wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, Woodlawn in the Bronx, and other select cemeteries have beautiful and dramatic examples of the Egyptian Revival style.

Elizabeth Broman is the Reference Librarian at the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Library, Smithsonian Institution.

Lecture 3, 9:40-10:00 A.M.

The St. Thomas White Bronze Company (1883-1900)

Leighann C. Neilson

In her seminal article on the Monumental Bronze Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut, Barbara Rotundo postulates that the company’s Canadian subsidiary, the St. Thomas White Bronze Company (STWBC), may have played a role in the early demise of its Detroit subsidiary. This paper picks up on this suggestion and reports on research in progress, which uncovers cross-border connections between the two subsidiaries. Set within the broader context of Canada’s “National Policy”, an economic policy Rotundo credits with creating a “buy Canadian” ethos, this discussion begins to answer the question, “Why St. Thomas?” A second research question is: if white bronze monuments were as good as company ads suggested, why did the St. Thomas subsidiary survive only seventeen years? Previous researchers have offered a number of rationales, but adopting a marketing theory lens allows us to investigate the viability of these arguments from a different perspective. According to marketing theory, the elements over which the company manager has control are product, price, promotion and place (distribution). Managers combine these elements to create a “marketing mix”, designed to

encourage the success of their offerings. Furthermore, marketing strategy involves analytically dividing the marketplace into profitable “segments,” “targeting” certain segments as most appropriate to serve and, finally, “positioning” the product in the mind of the consumer in order to make it appealing and motivate purchase. By comparing the STWBC’s marketing mix and strategy with those of its granite and marble monument competitors, new insight is gained into its competitive position in the Canadian marketplace.

Leighann Neilson is Assistant Professor, Marketing at the Sprott School of Business, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. She teaches a senior undergraduate course in Not-for-Profit Marketing, focusing this year on the cemetery industry.

Lecture 4, 10:00-10:20 A.M.

English vs. American Principles in Cemetery and Monument Design: The Case of St. Mary’s Anglican Cemetery, March, Upper Canada

Bruce S. Elliott

Old St. Mary’s Anglican Church and Cemetery in rural March near Ottawa was a project of immigrant English gentry in the 1820s, an attempt to establish a squire and parson landscape and social model on the Upper Canadian frontier. Chief amongst its architects was a London merchant whose strategy was to retire from business at 35 and employ his capital to reinvent himself as a landed gentleman, the customary path to power in English old regime society, here achieved on the edge of empire. English power structures were, however, attenuated on a frontier where landownership was widespread and the majority of the population (outside March, at least) was not Anglican. The influence of the American “rural cemetery” movement on Canadian city cemeteries has long been acknowledged; its influence on real rural, that is country, cemeteries, has been less well documented. Overlying the veneer of English manorialism at today’s St. Mary’s is the influence of this American movement, spreading outwards from Boston’s Mount Auburn of 1831, affecting Upper Canadian cemetery design by the 1850s and serving as the model for Ottawa’s exurban Beechwood Cemetery of 1873. In the 1880s the rural cemetery model inspired an expansion and redevelopment of St. Mary’s churchyard in accordance with these American cemetery design principles. The design of monuments had come to follow American precedent even earlier, with American metropolitan tastes and materials, influential along the St. Lawrence from the 1810s, universally adopted throughout eastern Canada by 1850.

Bruce S. Elliott is a professor of history at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. He teaches a university seminar course on gravestones and cemeteries and spoke at AGS last year on the American Civil War headstone program.

Lecture 5, 10:20-10:40 A.M.

Exploring Key West, Florida's Unique Cultural Identity Through Funerary Art, Epitaphs and Offerings

Michele L. Zakis

From the tales surrounding its distinctive 19th-century widow's walks to its popular, nightly "ghost" tours, Key West, Florida is a town with a keen interest in life after life. Established after a destructive hurricane claimed numerous lives and wiped away the existing burial ground, Key West's City Cemetery serves as an ever-evolving testimony to the community's rich history, as well as its sometimes unique outlook towards life and death. This paper explores the unique manner in which many of Key West's residents have continued to express themselves, even after death. In particular, the paper examines the ways in which Key West's diverse cultural identity is displayed within its centuries old cemetery. Bahamian Conchs, former slaves, Cuban expatriates, Florida Crackers and New Age Bohemians influenced the community during their lives, and their burial sites continue to provide insight into their fascinating stories long after their passing. Established during the "Rural Cemetery" movement of the mid-1800's, the Key West City Cemetery remains an active burial ground. Its funerary art allows visitors to travel through time and explore the manner in which generations of Key Westerners have memorialized their dead. Garnered from obituaries, newspaper articles and regional histories, the text provides readers with insight into both a fascinating cemetery and the intriguing individuals at rest within its walls.

Lecture 6, 10:40-11:00 A.M.

Plain and Ornamental: Nineteenth-Century Buena Vista Sandstone Cemetery Monuments in Cincinnati, Ohio

J. A. Chewning

This paper is an illustrated survey of the use of the Buena Vista sandstone for gravestones and cemetery monuments in Cincinnati during the 19th century. The quarries were located 96 miles up the Ohio River from this thriving inland river and canal port. Canal builder John Loughry purchased the quarries and expanded operations in the early 1830s to supply stone for locks on the Miami and Erie Canal at Cincinnati. The Buena Vista sandstone is a fine-grained siltstone that weathers from olive-gray to buff and brown. It has held up well and still shows crisp inscriptions and classical and naturalistic details. Even before intensive quarrying began, sandstone was being taken from hilltop outcrops and sent downriver, where it was used for numerous 18th-century type tombstones and a few table tombs and box tombs. The great era of sandstone monuments in the Ohio Valley was from the 1830s through the 1860s when numerous Greek Revival obelisks, columns, and

pedestals were erected. The Buena Vista sandstone was last used in the 1880s for a few treestones. Important Cincinnati monument makers who worked with this stone include David Bolles, Charles Leopold Fettweis, David Guiou, John Humble, George Roos, and Herman Suhre. Examples are shown from Cincinnati cemeteries such as Spring Grove, St. John's, St. Joseph's, United Jewish, Vine Street, Walnut Hills, and smaller burial grounds. Although the Buena Vista quarries remained open into the 1890s, the stone was used in the later years mostly for building stone, as marble and granite became the preferred stones for monuments.

Dr. J. A. Chewning is an Associate Professor of Design in the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning at the University of Cincinnati. He is also Consulting Historian for Spring Grove Cemetery and Arboretum.

Lecture 7, 11:00-11:20 A.M.

That Which Has Been: Exploring the Use of Photographs in the American Cemetery

Robin Hanson

In this paper I present an analysis of several gravestones and their accompanying photographs. Cemeteries provide the opportunity to study the borderland where the ideational aspects of our supernatural belief systems interact and coalesce with the materialism of our physical existence. In the physical borderland of the cemetery where tangible signs reflect the deeper structure of human need and desire, the interpretation of this multifarious text provides access to meaning often beyond our preliminary examinations of human culture. By examining the use of photographs in the production of the cultural landscape of the American Midwestern cemetery, the formation of both ideational constructs and cultural materialism are made available for analysis. This study provides unique insight into the cultural expressions of the people and the community in which they lived and died. The choice to include a photograph and the photograph selected tells a story unique to each individual that views the image. The photograph serves as a sign, part of the symbolic system of language that conveys meaning through its insertion into the reality of the cemetery. The act of inclusion embeds another layer of meaning into the photograph that was not originally intended by its author—thus relegating the text variable and dependent upon external intervention. Even though the image does capture “that which has been” it is the interpretation, influenced by the dynamic nature of the various cultural and historic narratives that is the essence of the projection.

Robin Hanson graduated from Saint Louis University with a PhD in American Studies with a focus on American cultural landscapes and the formation of cultural identity. Her background includes a Masters Degree in Anthropology (with concentrations in Cultural Anthropology and Archaeology) from California State

University, East Bay in 2004 and a Masters Degree in Human Relations from the University of Oklahoma in 1997.

Lecture 8, 11:20-11:40 A.M.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and the Gates Ajar on Tombstones Then and Now

June Hadden Hobbs

While most popular 19th-century graveyard icons in the United States seldom appear on tombstones today, the graphic of the gates of heaven standing ajar is enjoying renewed popularity. Though the concept of heavenly gates is certainly biblical, the more immediate inspiration for the icon was a trilogy of novels by the Spiritualist Elizabeth Stuart Phelps: *The Gates Ajar* (1868), *Beyond the Gates* (1883), and *The Gates Between* (1888). As these novels suggest, the gates ajar icon had obvious resonance in a nation dealing with the national spiritual crisis brought about by the loss of some 620,000 soldiers in the Civil War. The anti-Calvinist idea that heaven was both near and accessible was a source of comfort for those recovering from this great national tragedy. In addition, the novels touted the American values of progress and human equality. The gates novels and the ideologies associated with them became so popular that images of the gates ajar were stock symbols in hymns, other novels, popular verse, and a variety of material manifestations by the end of the 19th century. After the first decades of the early 20th century, however, Phelps' novels fell into oblivion, and the gates ajar lost favor with those buying memorial stones. Today the gates ajar icon is becoming popular once more on gravestones across the United States, suggesting that the highly condensed argument they promote is especially congenial to a post-modern/post-industrial audience. Far from signaling a break with tradition, however, the trend suggests that many of the notions associated with the gates ajar in 19th-century culture have simply become normalized.

June Hadden Hobbs is Professor of English at Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, North Carolina. She is a member of the AGS Board of Trustees and the editor of *Markers*.

Lecture 9, 11:40 A.M.-Noon

"Dear Father, Mother, Brothers, and Sisters, I guess I have come to die": Two Coal Mining Disasters in the Southern Appalachian Mountains

Martha Wiley

This sad statement begins the epitaph of Eugene Ault, a 22-year-old coal miner who died in the 1911 Cross Mountain mine disaster in Briceville, Tennessee. Ault had the

unfortunate opportunity of being able to write his own epitaph while trapped underground, along with his brother Taylor and others, waiting for the end to come. Between the Briceville disaster and the earlier 1902 Fraterville mine disaster in nearby Coal Creek (considered the worst mining disaster in the history of the South), almost 300 men and boys perished, wiping out the male population of these two small communities as effectively as any flu epidemic or world war. Six cemeteries, running the gamut from large, well-maintained cemeteries to overgrown graveyards, contain the final resting places of most of these victims. All lie within a few miles of each other just north of Knoxville, Tennessee, and have been linked on a self-guiding auto tour created by the non-profit Coal Creek Watershed Foundation, Inc. The grave markers themselves, combined with their locations in some of the most beautiful and, at times, bleakest, mountains of northeastern Tennessee, hold a place that is unique in the study of gravestone culture. Evocative epitaphs and marker configurations add to the tragic nature of these men's deaths over a century ago, in what remains one of Appalachia's most dangerous professions.

Martha E. Wiley is the historian for Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, located at the point where Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky meet.

Lecture 10, 1:00-1:20 P.M.

The Transformation of the São José Cemeteries in Porto Alegre: Damage to Funerary Art of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

Luiza F. N. Carvalho

This paper presents the results of an ongoing study, which investigates the impact of changes occurring in the funerary art of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. I discuss here the case of cemeteries São José I (1888) and São José II (1913) in the city of Porto Alegre. The monuments in these cemeteries have been damaged by weathering, vandalism and neglect, as well as a supposed modernization, which has resulted in partial or total removal of graves and the loss of individual and collective memory. My research seeks to locate important works in the history of marble yards like Casa Aloys (1884-1961) in the State of RS/Brasil. I will also examine the current state of funerary collections and propose interventions to stop its destruction and distortion.

Lecture 11, 1:20-1:40 P.M.

Intimate Relics: Skull Painting in Alpine Charnel Houses

Paul Koudounaris

The topic of the paper is the tradition of painting and decorating skulls in charnel houses in Austria and Bavaria during the 18th and 19th centuries. The practice had a hierarchical aspect, allowing status to be maintained against the anonymity imposed by the mass ossuary, and also allowing family associations to be preserved. An iconography was developed that could express worldly achievements and attributes, express hopes for the salvation of the soul of the departed, and provide the sentimental respects of the living. The evolution of the practice will be traced through a similar tradition in Eastern Orthodox monasteries for the identification and veneration of esteemed brothers, which was disseminated in the West by traveler's accounts, and then took hold especially in the Alps. While the phenomenon of painted skulls is now mostly associated with only a few sites, principally Hallstatt, Austria, the paper will show that the phenomenon was considerably more widespread than is usually believed, including several elaborate displays that are no longer extant. Through the use of photographs of surviving painted skulls and period documents, the tradition will be seen to have flourished through a wide section of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and even reaching as far east as the Moravia. The paper will also discuss superstitions and local folklore, which eventually developed regarding painted skulls, and show how the presence of these superstitions was partially responsible for the decision made by many churches to dissolve their collections.