

SOME COMMON SYMBOLS/EMBLEMS FOUND IN 19TH-CENTURY CEMETERIES

- Anchor - Christian symbol of hope, strong faith, steadfastness
- Angels - symbolic messengers between God and man
- Alpha and Omega - the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, symbolizing Jesus Christ, the beginning and the ending
- Bible - religious faith
- Book - an open book usually represents the Bible, faith; several books in a pile used most often to denote knowledge, academic life
- Broken branch, tree, column, or cross - a life cut short; death; mourning
- Butterfly - resurrection; rebirth; natural cycle of birth and death
- Chalice - Christ
- Chi Rho/Chrisma - XP, the first two letters of the Greek word XPICTOC, meaning Christ
- Circle - no beginning, no end; eternity; resurrection
- Cross - religious faith; resurrection
- Cross with crown - Sovereignty of the Lord; triumph over death; Christian faith; used in emblems of several fraternal orders
- Crown - triumph over death (the crown of immortality; righteousness resurrection); strong faith; often seen on stones for women
- Drapery/pall - mourning; death; sorrow
- Eagle - Christian symbol of resurrection; winged eagle = St. John the Evangelist (winged man = St. Matthew; winged lion = St. Mark; winged ox = St. Luke)
- Egg/dart - symbolic of life (egg) and death (dart); rebirth; resurrection
- Exedra - a seat or bench, often used as a memorial
- Pointing finger - "gone home," "until we meet again" (in heaven), "with Jesus," "Jesus calls" "heavenly sleep," -- departed, no longer on earth
- Flame - life, breath
- Flowers - love; reward (There was an extensive symbolic language of flowers in use in the 19th century. The most common examples are listed here.)
- Gates - portals to the promised land; entry into the kingdom of heaven
- Handclasp - parting, farewell; friendship/brotherhood; fraternal bond
- Harp/lyre - heavenly music; music; the arts in general
- Heart - life; love
- Hourglass - death, the end of time on earth (and when turned over, a symbol of rebirth, a new beginning, resurrection); winged hourglass has long been used as a message of man's fleeting time on earth, the uncertainty of our mortal future; also a symbol of temperance
- IHC - from IHCOYC, the Greek word for Jesus
- IHS - the Latin derivation of the Greek monogram IHC; the Latin letters stand for Jesus Hominum Salvator, Jesus the Savior of Men
- INRI - Latin, "Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum" or "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."
- Ivy - friendship; love; constancy/undying affection; immortality; remembrance

Lamb - innocence of a child; a lamb of God; when combined with a lion, the lamb is a symbol of Judaism

Lily - purity, innocence, love (the Archangel Gabriel is often depicted holding a lily); marriage

Lily of the Valley - the Advent of Christ; reawakening; purity and humility

Lotus/water lily - source of life; birth/rebirth

Morning glory - symbolic of youth, bonds of love; associated with the death of a child

Oak - strength, steadfastness, honor; strong faith; often seen on the gravemarkers of men

Palm - spiritual victory; heavenly reward; eternal peace

Passion flower (depicted with three nail-like stamen) - Christ; death and redemption through Christ

Poppy - death; eternal sleep

Quatrefoil - most common in Gothic architecture and may symbolize the Four Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

Rose - love, heavenly joy

Scroll - decorative way of presenting inscription or Bible reference

Shell - a journey, particularly a pilgrim's journey (St. James); Christian faith

Snake - the snake is often associated with death, but a snake with its tail in its mouth (uroborus) is the symbol of eternity

Star - divine guidance; birth/rebirth; Star of David = Jewish symbol of divine protection

Torch - life; a down-turned torch represents the extinguishing of life, death

Tree Trunk - a life that has been cut off

Trefoil - symbol of the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) surrounded by the Circle of Eternity

Urn - death; draped urn is traditional symbol of sorrow, mourning

Vine - symbolic of the Church; Christ and his followers ("I am the vine, ye are the branches....")

Weeping willows - mourning, sorrow

Wheat - productivity, bounty; gathered wheat represents harvesting and is seen most often on the gravemarkers of productive, mature men of faith

White bronze - the trade name for cast zinc monuments popular from about 1870-1915

Wreath - victory, honor; eternal love

Winged sun disk - Egyptian symbol of divine protection; blessing

