

Washington State Cemetery Association

Issue 1 Number 2, January 2000

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Tree Stump Tombstones: Funerary Art From Indiana

by Joanne Raetz Stuttgen, Folklorist

Tree stump tombstones dating from about 1895-1935 can be found in many older cemeteries throughout the United States. These are significant examples of folk art made of oolitic limestone from south central Indiana. They are not molded pieces but rather handcarved by skilled stonecarvers, many of whom were English, German, and Italian immigrants.

This region of Indiana is noted for limestone of exceptional fineness. Many of the limestone buildings in America are made of stone from the Indiana quarries, including the Empire State Building, the stone for which was cut from a single deposit that was never used again.

The stonecarvers created the artistic ornaments—capitals, gargoyles, pediments, friezes—for buildings such as these. For most, employment was steady and well-compensated; they were paid well for their long hours, and they also enjoyed a certain prestige as artists. Carver Jack Kendall told Scott Russell Sanders some time ago, “They knew they were somebody. You could see they were special in the way they carried themselves.”

In their off-hours time, to commemorate the life of a relative, friend, or colleague, the stonecarvers often created detailed tombstones in the form of rail cars, barrels, and occupational tools. A breathtaking example is the Louis J. Baker stone in Green Hill Cemetery in Bedford, Indiana. Baker was a young stone carver who in April 1917 laid down his work at the end of the day, went home, and was killed by lightning. For his monument, his friends carved his bunker, or carving table, exactly as he had left it.

Far more common are the tree stump tombstones—or “stumps” as they were called by the carvers. There were two basic varieties: 1) standard catalog pieces on which a name and date could be carved; and 2) highly personalized tombstones on which the carver and an individual or individuals collaborated. The former tend to be relatively simple and small and are found in near duplicates across the country. The latter tend to be elaborate and finely detailed. They also evoke powerful emotion.

For example, in Indiana, as elsewhere, many limestone figures of children stand to commemorate the loss of a son or daughter too early in life. Perhaps the mother or father provided a photographic image that the carver converted into stone, or perhaps they supplied a narrative of a life that was translated into symbols carved in the stone. Little girls, now nearly a hundred years old, stand with delicate lace edging at collars and wrists; straw hats; high-top shoes; a favorite toy or basket of flowers. Boys are often accompanied by a bat and ball or a straw hat.

Among the finest tree stump tombstones in Indiana is the David Huston stone in the Bono Cemetery,



Louis J. Baker Stone, Green Hill Cemetery, Bedford, Indiana.

Photo courtesy Joanne Raetz Stuttgen.

Lawrence County. An early pioneer and bachelor farmer, Huston appears to have contracted with carver George Eisele for his own tombstone. “It consists of a beautifully detailed tree-trunk at least ten feet tall against which leans a full-sized muzzle-loading rifle. From the stub of a branch hang a powder horn and a shot bag. The base of the monument is a rocky hillside in miniature across which streak three miniature hounds in determined pursuit of a jaunty, bounding fox.”

The Huston marker is significant not only for its amazing realism and detail but also because it encouraged others to copy elements for their own tombstones. In nearby Mitchell, for example, Eberle Martin borrowed the motifs of the rifle and fox and hounds for his own stone, which is not nearly so finely wrought as the original. The Huston stone spoke for a man's life in symbols that his community understood, valued, and duplicated.

The rifle was among a man's most important possessions. Often paired with an ax and/or a wedge, these tools symbolize the male pioneer who carved civilization out of the wilderness. It is quite common

Tree Stump Tombstones continued next page



Here rests a Woodman of the World, John A. Gilliam, Born near Dallas Ore., April 3, 1860, Died near Oakesdale, October 23, 1915. Genesee City Cemetery, Genesee, Idaho. Photo courtesy Bud Engelhardt.



Hathaway, Charles N., 1857-1922, age 65 years, "Here Rests a woodman of the World." Tekoa Cemetery, Whitman county, WA. Photo courtesy Bud Engelhardt.

to see double tree stump tombstones for a husband and wife. If a woman's tools are present, they often include a spinning wheel, symbolic of home industry, or a stack of books. Typically, the topmost book is a Bible to indicate that it was valued above all other books.

Though it is not a double tree stump, the Marcus and Malinda Smith stone in Gosport Cemetery, Owen County, includes all of these symbols. Like the Huston stone, it, too, was seen by others and copied. There are at least three similar stones located within a four-county area.

Tree stump tombstones are rich with symbolism, and many motifs show up time and again. The tree stump itself represents a life cut short. Typically the break is jagged and rough to mark the sudden, unexpected termination of life. Branches can be twisted and broken as well; the number is often associated with the number of children an individual or couple had. Double tree stump tombstones often have intertwined branches and/or joined roots to indicate two lives that have become one. Frequently, a dove with a broken wing is found nestled in a branch; the meaning here is clear. Another animal that is common is the squirrel; it symbolizes planning for the future.

Plants are frequently seen, among them the Christmas fern and English ivy, which stay green throughout the winter and symbolize the promise of life after death. The calla lily represents resurrection; the oak leaf or acorn does as well. Mushrooms or other fungi represent life emerging from decay or death. Other plants include corn, oats, and wheat, representative of the biblical phrase "bringing in the sheaths" which associates death and new life with the harvest.

A frequently seen and misinterpreted motif is the anchor, which does not indicate the deceased was sailor (although I have seen it on tree stump monuments commemorating an individual's death at sea). The anchor is a symbol of the deceased's relationship with God, as in "God is my anchor." Anchors are usually accompanied by very intricate carved chains or ropes, in which separate skeins are clearly seen. Fish are less common than anchors, and though they may indicate that the deceased was a fisherman, it is more likely that they reference "the fisher of men."

Fraternal symbols were often included on tree stump monuments to commemorate an individual's membership in a specific organization. The Masons, for example, used the all-seeing eye; compass and square; and three columns representing the three Masonic degrees. The Independent Order of Oddfellows used the letters I.O.O.F. and three joined links of chain. But the fraternal orders that are most closely associated with tree stump tombstones are the Modern Woodmen of America and the Woodmen of the World.

The Modern Woodmen of America, and its later sibling the Woodmen of the World, originated in 1883 with founder Joseph Cullen Root, who envisioned a fraternal organization that would provide life insurance and death benefits to its members. The word "woodmen" has nothing to do with logging or the lumber industry, but instead is said to refer to Root's interpretation of the pioneer as a man of the woods. His woodmen would be pioneers, forging a new brotherhood in a new wilderness. The death benefits provided by membership included a choice of several models of tombstones, and it was natural for the leaders of the organization to favor the tree stump, as it so aptly symbolized the organization. By about 1930, the tombstone no longer was provided to members.

The loss of this benefit coincides with the decrease in popularity of the tree stump monument, but it is wrong to infer that one caused the other. The tree stump tombstone was popular from about 1890-1940, the period which historians of the American decorative arts refer to as the "rustic period." This was marked by a rejection of Victorian finery and frills in favor of a simple and natural aesthetic. In domestic architecture, for example, the heavily ornamented Queen Anne style house was replaced by the Shingle, Craftsman and bungalow styles that emphasized open, flowing floor plans and natural materials such as brick, wood, slate, and stone. Styles in furniture changed also, away from the intricate Eastlake and other Victorian designs and toward clean-lined Mission, Stickley and rustic furniture. Rustic furniture included the rough indoor-outdoor pieces produced by the Old Hickory Furniture Company of Martinsville, Indiana, and other manufacturers statewide. The rus-



Left: Mammie Osborn Maddox, July 1 1858, May 20 1937. Right: Alonzo Maddox, Feb 27 1851, Jan 26 1922, Gosport Cemetery, Owen County, Indiana. Photo courtesy Joanne Stuttgren.



Photo courtesy Joanne Raetz Stuttgen.



Thomas Burl Jones, Born mar 18, 1876, Died Dec 20, 1906, Old Oroville Cemetery, Oroville, Okanogan County, WA. Photo courtesy Dorothy L. Petry.

tic aesthetic in home furnishings also applied to accessories like lamps and birdcages; picture frames; cigar stands; and other pieces—all in such great demand now by collectors.

Like the tree stump tombstone and the fraternal order of Woodmen, rustic house and furniture designs hearkened back to an earlier period of American history. Whether real or imagined, this mythic past was a time when men were brave and strong—and the women were too—as they bravely confronted the wilderness. The period 1890-1930 marked the transition between the old, traditional way of life and a modern, industrial and world community. The experience of the First World War forever changed the way Americans viewed themselves and their predecessors, and new symbols were needed to convey the change. In housing, the bungalow was replaced by the minimalist, streamlined architecture of the 1940s. In death, the tree stump tombstone was replaced by smooth, square granite and marble slabs. Death was no longer a narrative of life, but a glossy surface on which nothing was reflected.

In recent years have I seen a move towards personalizing tomb-

stones with laser cut images. The grave site, too, is commonly personalized with sculpted landscapes and the leaving of cards and letters, balloons, toys and seasonal decorations. Death is becoming once again the channel through which powerful emotion flows.

1. Scott Russell Sanders. (1985) *In Limestone Country*. Boston: Beacon Press: 106-107. This is an exceptional ethnography of the Indiana limestone industry told by cutters, carvers, owners, community residents. Sanders, a noted essayist, begins his story with a visit to the Empire quarry.
2. Warren E. Roberts. (1988 [1978]) *"The Sincerest Form of Flattery: Originals and Imitations in 'Rustic Monuments' of the Limestone Belt of Indiana."* In *Viewpoints on Folklife: Looking at the Overlooked*: 148. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Warren Roberts, who passed away in February 1999, was my mentor at Indiana University. He hunted tree stump tombstones for nearly 40 years and was recognized as the expert on them.
3. For more reading on tree stump tombstones, I refer you to Warren Roberts's *Viewpoints on Folklife: Looking at the Overlooked*, which contains many fine articles. Warren's

student, Suzanne Ridlen, wrote her dissertation at Indiana University on tree stump tombstones, and it has just been published in book form as *Tree Stump Tombstones: A Field Guide Approach to Rustic Funerary Art in Indiana*. Contact the Kokomo-Howard County Public Library, 220 N. Union St., Kokomo, IN 46901-4614. For more on rustic furniture and other household furnishings, see the many works by Ralph Kylloe, an authority on Indiana rustic furniture and related styles.

Joanne Raetz Stuttgen teaches Indiana folklife by examining the traditions and customs of everyday life in Indiana both past and present, focusing on material forms of cultural expression—limestone quarries, chairs, quilts, landscapes, vernacular architecture, festivals and spectacles—that define the Hoosier experience. Joanne may be reached by writing 759 E. Washington St., Martinsville, IN 46151, or email stuttgen@reliable-net.net. Visit the Indiana Folklife course web site at <http://folklifeindiana.freesevers.com/folklore/Folklore.htm>.

Florence Cemetery Has Countywide Impact

The discovery of burials outside the boundaries of the historic Florence Cemetery last year has had an impact on the County's building and development permitting processes, including the treatment of archaeological resources.

The problem came to light when an elder of the Tulalip Tribes noticed that land was being cleared for a development just outside the boundary of the cemetery. However, it was merely the historically recognized boundary, not the true one, for beyond the maintained portion, Native Americans had been buried.

A smallpox epidemic had taken its toll in the 1880s, resulting in the deaths of many native people who had no resistance to the disease. Over the years, brush, grass and trees grew in that area which was not recorded on any map as part of the historic cemetery.

The result of this discovery was the deeding to the Tulalip Tribes of that portion of land that held their sacred burials. The Florence Cemetery situation became a news item and focused public attention on the need to recognize and care for such cemeteries.

Volunteers chip in

As the year progressed, volunteers came forward to do everything from cleaning up the cemetery, (severely damaged in a windstorm) to spending hours researching other abandoned plots, sometimes on old homesteads and long forgotten

by the relatives of those who passed away years ago.

Special efforts were put forth by the President of the Washington State Cemetery Association, Andrea MacDonald, who commuted here from Pt. Townsend for weeks, to do research at our County Assessor's office. She was assisted by SnoIsle Genealogical Society members, Muriel Wolff, Carole Thul, Margaret Summit and Jane King.

Together they produced a detailed map and a list of 58 cemeteries in the county dating from the 1870s to the present day. This information is now used by Planning and Development Services to alert property owners who may have a proposed building project impacted by a cemetery.

Archeological Sites Recorded

The cemetery issue also brought attention to another type of site that needs recognition and care — archeological sites. Just as historic burials have been forgotten, so too have prehistoric sites. A number of these sites, dating back as far as 8,000 years, were identified back in the 1960s, and although the State of Washington had records of them, Snohomish County and many property owners did not.

That situation has also changed and now the County can alert property owners if there is a potential impact to a prehistoric site — another benefit of the Florence Cemetery "Year of Discovery."

Our thanks go to:

For their quick action in response to public interest and concern over Sidney Cemetery (see page 5).

Leslie J. Weatherill, Mayor
City of Port Orchard
216 Prospect
Port Orchard, WA 98366
(360) 876-1701

Building & Planning Department

City of Port Orchard
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Port Orchard, WA 98366
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Kitsap County Commissioner

Charlotte Garrido

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Port Orchard, WA 98366
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commissioner@co.kitsap.wa.us

Our thanks also go to **all citizens** who acted so quickly to ensure local government was aware of the situation at Sidney Cemetery.

Thanks to **Joanne Stuttgen** for her article on "tree trunk headstones."

Thanks to **Bud Engelhardt** for the photos he provided of tree trunk headstones.

Thanks to **Dorothy I. Petry** for photos of Woodmen of the World headstones.

MEMBER



Sidney Cemetery Port Orchard, WA

In mid-January, WSCA was contacted regarding the bulldozing of yet another cemetery. A state- and country-wide email was sent with information obtained and asked any interested persons to please write to the city, county, and state governments to voice an objection over the cemetery authority's desecration of the old cemetery.

An email was also sent to the Washington State Cemetery Board explaining the problem and asked them to intervene.

In the broadcast email, I stated that I believed we should contact the Planning & Permit Department of the City of Port Orchard and complain that a property owner had bulldozed a cemetery, was claiming there is no cemetery there, and was looking to build upon the property. I also stated we should ask them to please remember state laws and not allow this to continue and to certainly not issue a building permit.

Also asked was that individuals should also write the Mayor of Port Orchard and the City Clerk, the South Kitsap County Commissioner to let her know of the problem and ask her office to intervene. I included a 'dummy' letter for those who needed it. A list of officials was included and each person was asked to either phone, mail, or email the list to voice their concern.

This same thing happened in King County (Comet Lodge Cemetery) and it happened in Snohomish County. Up to this time King County had been the only local government which responded to our satisfaction. (Snohomish County Planners did not save Snohomish Cemetery but they are now working to protect all others in their county).

Many individuals from around the state and country contacted various officials which had been listed. The City was surprised by the number of contacts using a "form" letter.

The City contacted or will contact all individuals sending any form of communication to them. They want to assure the public that Sidney Cemetery has had a stop work order placed on it and that they are dedicated to preserving the cemetery.

WSCA contacted the Mayor and thanked him and his City employees for their quick action in the matter and their dedication for preserving cemeteries. We also forwarded copies of many of the emails which had been making the circuit on a variety of maillists.

WSCA had been aware previously that Port Orchard had made statements about preserving their cemeteries, but now Port Orchard has walked the talk and shown it's dedication.



Comet Lodge Cemetery Public Meeting

If you are interested in what's happening at the Comet Lodge Cemetery please attend the next public meeting on March 3 at 7:00 pm. The meeting will be held at the Van Asselt Community Club. For more information, contact King County Property Services at (206) . A summary of the meeting will be in our next newsletter.

Adams County Cemeteries

See our web site for more information

Adams	IOOF
Adams County	Jasman Grave
American Legion	Johnson Grave
Ammaus	Kansas Prairie
Bartges Grave	Kappel
Bauer Werttemberger	Knecht Grave
Bauman-Nissen-Friese	Labes Child Grave
Bell Graves	Lind
Bemis	Link Grave
Bess Hampton Memorial	Lutheran
Gardens	Memorial
Bonney Child Grave	Menno
Breese Grave	Michigan Prairie
Bruhl Family Graves	Mobley Grave
Carrico Graves	Mountain View
Chambers Child Grave	Paha
Christian Church	Pfannehuchen Graves
Congregational	Pleasant Valley
Crowe	Ralston
Cunningham	Ritzville Lutheran
Dead Man Hill	Ritzville Memorial
Delight	Saloma
Dormaier Graves	Sand Hill
Emanuel Lutheran	Schafer/Kiehn/Emmanuel
Glacken Child Grave	Smith Graves
Griffith	Snyder Family
Hampton Road	Stallion/Johnson
Harder Family	Unknown Individual
Hatton Graves	Washtucna Pioneer
Hoefner Graves	Weishaar Child Grave
Hoffnungsberg	Wilkinson, Hattie Family Graves
Hooper Family Graves	Woodruff Grandchild Grave
Horn, George Grave	Zoar

Washington State Cemetery Association
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Port Orchard, WA 98366

If you have information you would like to share, send it to PO Box 103, Port Orchard WA 98366, for inclusion in the next newsletter.

We are especially looking for items on abandoned or old, unkempt cemeteries, or on cemeteries which have severe problems (such as Jameson Cemetery on page 3).

Volunteers from around the state are needed for a variety of projects including newsletter editor. To volunteer, contact Andi MacDonald at (360) 871-5694 or at andimac@oz.net.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Washington State Cemetery Association (WSCA) is to research, protect, restore, and preserve old and abandoned cemeteries in Washington state, to maintain their history, and to provide education and awareness of old and abandoned cemeteries and their care to the public.

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~wapsgs/>

Washington State Cemetery Association

Membership Form

Name

Address

City, State, Zip

Home phone

email address

Membership Type

☐

Individual: \$12.00 per year

☐

Student: \$6.00 per year

Cemetery(ies) you are interested in and their location:

please place any additional information you would like us to have on the back...

Members will receive

- membership package by return mail
- quarterly newsletter
- notification of new laws
- assistance with cemetery projects

Mail completed application and check or money order to

Treasurer
Washington State Cemetery Association
PO Box 103
Port Orchard WA 98366