

CAVE HILL CEMETERY

GUIDE TO CEMETERY SYMBOLS





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The symbols carved on many grave markers throughout Cave Hill Cemetery are meant to represent something about the deceased persons. Symbols can express religious affiliation, club membership, occupation, or simply the way the mourners feel about the deceased person. In the past, symbols helped to convey information to people who could not read.

This guide gives the textbook meanings of religious and secular symbols commonly found in cemeteries such as Cave Hill. But keep in mind that the person who chose a symbol for a marker might not have known the meaning of the symbol or might have intended the symbol to have a different meaning. For instance, a pansy symbolizes remembrance, but someone could have chosen a pansy for a marker simply because it was pretty or because the deceased person loved pansies. Even though we may never know for sure what meaning a symbol had for those who chose it, looking up the most common meanings of the symbols found in historic cemeteries is an interesting exercise.

Cemetery art is art in the truest sense of the word. The stonecutter was an artist, and some of the sculpture found in cemeteries is as beautiful as the sculpture found in museums. Whether or not we can interpret definitively the meaning of a symbol or piece of artwork, we can enjoy the beauty and workmanship involved in carving these intricate designs.

ANCHOR | Christ, who prevents people from becoming lost. Can also mean the deceased person was a sailor.

ANGELS | Spirituality. Angels guard the tomb, guide the soul, pray for the soul, and direct living visitors to think heavenwards.

- The angel Michael bears a sword.
- The angel Gabriel blows a horn.
- A guardian angel is one without horn or sword.
- A cherub or baby angel is most often used on children's markers.



Anchor
Section P, Lot 102

ARCH | Victory

BANNER | Victory or triumph

BIRD | Symbol of the soul

BOOK | The Bible or wisdom. A stack of books indicates knowledge. An open book symbolizes the word of God revealed to the deceased.



Book
Section B,
Lot 7

Angel
Section D, Lot 18

BUTTERFLY | Short life

CANDLE BEING SNUFFED | Loss of life

CHALICE | Wine, symbolizing for Christians the blood of Christ

CHAIN LINKS (THREE OR FIVE) |
A Masonic symbol

CHILD | A sleeping child was used during the Victorian era to symbolize death.

COAT OF ARMS | Mark of status and wealth. Sometimes used to signify the deceased person's country of origin.

COLUMNS | Often used for war veterans.

- Multiple columns tied together represent members of a family.
- Broken column represents decay, usually indicating the loss of the family head.



Broken column
Section P, Lot 334

CROSS | One of the most common images found on Christian gravestones, the cross comes in many varieties.



- *Celtic or Irish Cross*—Cross within a circle. The circle stands for eternity. This cross is often used to mark the graves of priests and monks.



- *Egyptian or Coptic Cross*—Adapted from the ancient Egyptian symbol known as the ankh, which symbolizes life.



- *Greek Cross*—Cross with four arms of equal length.



- *Jerusalem Cross*—Also known as the Crusaders cross, because it was used during the Crusades. The five crosses represent the five wounds Jesus received on the cross or the five nations active in the Crusades: Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain.



- *Maltese Cross*—Cross with four V-shaped arms, used in the insignia of some veterans' groups. It was associated with the military order that ruled the island of Malta in the Middle Ages.



- *Orthodox, Patriarchal, or Eastern Cross*—This cross with three horizontal bars became popular after the Great Schism between Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. The lettering represents the inscription Pilate placed on Jesus' cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (abbreviated INRI).



- *Roman or Latin Cross*—Recreates the actual form of the crucifix.



- *St. Andrew's Cross*—Looks like the letter X. Legend has it that when St. Andrew was martyred, he could not bear to be crucified upon the same type of cross on which Christ had died.



- *Cross with rays of the rising sun*—Glory



- *Cross, anchor, and heart*—Faith, hope, and love

CROWN | Faithfulness and the glory of death as purification

DOG | A good master; worthy of love

DOOR | Entrance to a new life, opening to the house of the dead, or passage to the unknown



Door
Section A, Lot 194

DOVE | A bird that appears in both Christian and Jewish cemeteries

- For Protestants, the dove symbolizes the Holy Spirit.
- For Jews, the dove symbolizes peace.
- A dove ascending to heaven is transporting the soul.
- A sitting dove is guarding the soul.
- A dove descending from heaven is assuring one's passage to heaven.

DRAPERY | Sorrow and mourning

EAGLES | Fierceness and ascension. Often found on the grave markers of veterans.

EYE | God's eye watching over Christians

FISH | Christian abundance

FLAME FROM URN | Christian life



Lily
Section I, Lot 71

FLEUR-DE-LYS | Virgin Mary or the Trinity

FLOWERS |

- *Flower garlands*—A pure life
- *Flower bouquet*—Grief
- *Broken flower*—Life terminated
- *Lily*—Purity
- *Calla Lily*—Marriage
- *Morning Glory*—Beginning of a new life
- *Pansy*—Remembrance
- *Rose*—Virgin Mary
- *Poppy*—Eternal sleep; death
- *Lotus*—Motif from the Egyptian Revival style, popular in decorative arts of the 19th and early 20th centuries

FRUIT | A righteous life



Hand pointing up
Section M, Lot 48

GATE | Departure from life; entrance to heaven; death as the gateway to heaven

GRIM REAPER | Death personified

HANDS |

- *Hands pointing up*—Pathway to heaven
- *Hands clasped*—Marriage
- *Hands praying*—Asking God for eternal life
- *Hands blessing*—Blessing of those left behind

HARP OR LYRE | Heavenly music or joy

HEART | The living still care about the person who died.

- Two joined hearts symbolize a marriage.
- The Sacred Heart is unique to Catholic gravestones. It depicts the heart of Jesus surrounded with a crown of thorns, representing the suffering of Jesus.

HEAVENLY BODIES |

- *Moon, sun, and stars*—Heavenly home of blessed soul rising to heaven
- *Moon*—Renewed life (crescent moon symbolizes the Virgin Mary)
- *Sun*—Jesus, the Son of God, or God's eye looking down on us
- *Rising sun*—Warmth and resurrection
- *Setting sun*—Death
- *Stars*—Hope of a new life
- *Five-pointed star*—Spirit rising to heaven
- *Six-pointed star*—Star of David, or Magen David, the emblem of international Judaism

HOURLASS | Time has run out.



Rising sun
Section F, Lot 496

INSIGNIAS|

- *BPOE*—Benevolent Protective Order of the Elks, a fraternal organization. Symbols include an elk and a clock with hands stopped at 11.
- *CSA*—Confederate States of America. Symbols include Confederate flag or insignia from soldiers' uniforms.



- *DAR*—Daughters of the American Revolution. Logo is a blue star superimposed on red stripes.
- *GAR*—Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Union Civil War veterans. Symbol is an eagle sitting on top of an American flag on top of a five-pointed star.
- *IOOF*—Independent Order of the Odd Fellows, a fraternal organization. Most common symbol is a three-link chain with the initials F, L, T (Friendship, Love, Truth).
- *Knights of Pythias*—A fraternal organization. Symbol is an upside-down triangle with the initials F, C, B (Friendship, Charity, Benevolence).



- *Masonic Order*—A fraternal organization, symbolized by an inverted compass over a carpenter's square, often with a G in the middle.
- *OES*—Order of the Eastern Star, a women's organization. Symbol is a five-pointed star with a pentagon in the center containing an altar with an open Bible.
- *SAR*—Sons of the American Revolution. Symbols include an eagle sitting on top of a Maltese cross, often with the words "Libertas et patria."
- *VFW*—Veterans of Foreign Wars, symbolized by the Maltese cross.
- *WOW*—Woodmen of the World, a fraternal society, now called WoodmenLife, known for grave markers shaped like logs or tree stumps.



Lamb
Section B, Lot 10

LAMB | Most commonly found on 19th-century child grave markers, the lamb stands for innocence. Christians associate it with the Lamb of God, meaning Jesus. A lamb with a banner signifies resurrection.

LAMP | Word of God; truth; good works; immortality of the spirit

LION | Courage; guard for the tomb

MENORAH | Emblem of Judaism that predates the Star of David symbol

MOURNING FIGURE | Usually a woman, this symbol recalls the myth of Niobe, who the gods turned into stone as she wept for her slain children.

PEACOCK | Incorruptibility; resurrection; immortality; beauty of the soul

PLANTS

- *Ivy*—Friendship and fidelity
- *Thistle*—Scottish descent and remembrance
- *Vine*—Christian church (wine signifies Jesus' blood)
- *Wheat*—Divine harvest; death of an elderly person



Lion
Section 1,
Lot 207



Shell and Scroll
Section B, Lot 76

RING (BROKEN) | The family has been severed.

ROCK | Steadfastness and stability

ROOSTER | Awakening; resurrection

ROPE | Eternity

SCALES | Equality and justice. Archangel Michael is often portrayed holding a set of scales to weigh the souls of the departed. Use of the scales can also display the occupation of the deceased.

SCROLL | Law or scriptures

SCYTHE | Harvesting tool that represents death

SEA SHELL/SCALLOP SHELL | Earthly pilgrimage of human beings, or birth and resurrection



Scythe
Section H, Lot 62

SHEEP | Christians (Jesus is the shepherd.)

SHIP | Occupation of the deceased, or the human journey through life

SNAKE (WITH TAIL IN MOUTH) | Everlasting life

SUNDIAL | Nearness of death

SWORD | Martyrdom, courage, or warfare

WORDS (CROSSED) | Military person of high rank

THREE (CHAINS, POINTS, LEAVES, ETC.) | The Trinity

TORCH |

- *Lit torch*—Life or eternal life
- *Extinguished torch*—Death, or living memory and eternal life
- *Elevated torch*—Resurrection
- *Lowered torch*—Death



Lowered torch
Section E, Lot 31



Ship
Section O, Lot 236

TREES|

- *Growing from a tomb or urn*—Rebirth
- *Fallen tree*—Death
- *Broken tree branch*—Mortality
- *Tree trunk*—Brevity (shortness) of life
- *Tree stump*—Life interrupted
- *Sprouting tree*—Life everlasting
- *Uprooted tree*—Unexpected death, usually from disease
- *Almond tree*—Favor from God; virgin birth
- *Cedar tree*—Strong faith; success
- *Cypress tree*—Sorrow, death, eternal life; Roman symbol for mourning
- *Evergreen tree*—Immortality
- *Oak tree*—Christ, eternity (Some believe that Jesus' cross was made from an oak tree.)
- *Olive tree*—Peace, healing faith
- *Palm tree*—Grief, death, sorrow
- *Willow tree*—Grief, death, sorrow
- *Yew tree*—Immortality



Tree stump
Section P, Lot 409

TRUMPET | Call to the glory of resurrection

URNS |

- *Broken urn*—Elderly person
- *Draped and empty urn*—Soul has left the body.
- *Urn with a flame*—Eternal remembrance

WREATH | Ancient symbol for victory. In the Christian religion, a wreath symbolizes the victory of redemption.



Wreath
Section B,
Lot 26

OTHER CEMETERY FEATURES

Here are a few of the other items most commonly used to mark or decorate burial sites:

Garden pieces, known as “cemetery furniture,” became popular during the Victorian period. Many people would bring a picnic lunch to the cemetery and spend the day looking at the markers and relaxing in a park-like setting. Benches, small tables, planters, urns, fountains, and bird baths—objects more commonly associated with gardens—were used to decorate gravesites and became features associated with the cemetery landscape.

Flowers serve as expressions of sympathy to the mourners and as tributes to the deceased. In the past, the importance of an individual was determined by counting the number of wagons and attendants used for flower delivery. Since the 1950s, artificial flowers have replaced fresh flowers and plants to a degree.

Toys are often left at the graves of children. At one time, the graves of both adults and children were decorated with various objects associated with their lives. The custom of leaving items on graves still can be found in many cultures.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Keister, Douglas. *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2004.

Keister, Douglas. *Going Out in Style: The Architecture of Eternity*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1997.

Memorial Symbolism, Epitaphs, and Design Types. Olean, New York: American Monument Association, Inc., 1947.

Meyer, Richard E., ed. *Cemeteries and Graveyards: Voices of American Culture*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1992.

Association for Gravestone Studies
www.gravestonestudies.org

The background image is a black and white photograph of Cave Hill Cemetery. In the foreground, several tombstones are visible, including a large, tall, rectangular one on the right and several smaller, rounded ones on the left. In the middle ground, there is a large, dense bush. In the background, a tall, thin evergreen tree stands on the left, and a stone building with a gabled roof and a chimney is visible on the right. The sky is cloudy.

CAVE HILL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Founded in 2004, the Cave Hill Heritage Foundation is devoted to preserving the past for the future at Louisville's historic Cave Hill Cemetery.

The Foundation serves the community by restoring the monumental art within Cave Hill Cemetery, preserving the arboretum, and providing educational opportunities about the history of the cemetery and the people buried here.

IF YOU LOSE YOUR WAY . . .

The Broadway and Grinstead entrances are connected by a solid white line. Broken white lines intersect the solid lines, which will eventually lead you to an entrance. A solid yellow line marks the road from the Grinstead entrance to Col. Harland Sanders' lot. A green line marks the road from the Administration Office to Muhammad Ali's lot. All sections are marked by cedar signs and are shown on the map by the smaller round dots (•). Larger colored dots and lower-case letters on the map indicate points of interest (see descriptions below).

Points of Interest

• MUHAMMAD ALI—SECTION U

Humanitarian, civil rights leader, heavyweight boxing titleholder who championed peace and unity throughout the world.

• SATTERWHITE MEMORIAL TEMPLE—SECTION C

Preston Pope Satterwhite gave many antiques to the J.B. Speed Art Museum. In 1928, he erected the "Temple of Love," made of pink Italian marble, which is a copy of an ornate structure in Marie Antoinette's Petite Trianon garden at the Palace of Versailles in Paris.

• CAVE HILL NATIONAL CEMETERY

Burial site for more than 5,500 soldiers killed in the Civil War and other American wars.

• PATTY HILL—SECTION G

A kindergarten teacher who wrote the "Happy Birthday" song.

• GEORGE ROGERS CLARK—SECTION P

"Founder of Louisville" and "Washington of the West," who was originally buried in the family cemetery at Locust Grove, the home of his sister Lucy Clark Croghan.

• COLONEL HARLAND SANDERS—SECTION 33

Founder of the Kentucky Fried Chicken empire. His monument, which includes a bronze bust designed by his daughter Margaret, is suggestive of the KFC headquarters building.

a MERIWETHER LEWIS CLARK, JR.—SECTION A

Established the Louisville Jockey Club on Churchill land and created the Kentucky Derby in 1875.

b WILDER MONUMENT—SECTION B

Designed by Robert E. Launitz, the "father of monumental art in America," and erected in memory of Minnie, the Wilders' only child, who died at the age of seven.

c JAMES GUTHRIE—SECTION B

Distinguished political, business, and educational leader who served as a U.S. senator, president of the University of Louisville, and president of L & N Railroad.

d LITHGOW MONUMENT—SECTION C

Features marble sculpture of the Angel Gabriel and four figures representing Faith, Hope, Mercy, and Religion.

e DAVID ROSS—SECTION I

Cave Hill's first superintendent, whose widow placed a triple-sided monument with a club-moss carving, which was the badge of the Ross clan and a special favorite of David Ross.

f TINGLEY MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN—SECTION E

Erected in 1922 as a public memorial to brothers William and George H. Tingley, who achieved success as a wagon maker (William) and as superintendent of Louisville Public Schools (George). The fountain was restored in 2004.

g RUSTIC SHELTER HOUSE—SECTION H

Built in 1892 as a watchman's shelter house and covered in oak bark in St. Andrew's cross pattern, this is a copy of the gardener's cottage in Marie Antoinette's Petite Trianon garden in Paris. It is one of the oldest examples of rustic architecture in the United States.

h DOUGLASS LOT—SECTION G

The family sold 49 acres to the cemetery in 1863 with agreement that the fence around the family lot would remain.

i TIFFANY VASE—SECTION N

Monument designed by Tiffany's of New York.

j JIM PORTER—SECTION N

The "Kentucky Giant," 7 feet, 8 inches tall, Porter drove a hackney coach and ran the Big Gun Tavern in Shippingport.

k IRVIN MAUSOLEUM—SECTION P

One of the few gothic revival designs attributed to the prominent Louisville architect Henry Whitestone.

l ELKS REST LODGE—SECTION 5

Purchased by the Elks as a burial site for members, it features a life-size bronze elk.

m NICOLA MARSHALL—SECTION 5

Creator of the Confederate uniform and the flag of the Confederacy, he painted portraits of Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln.

n THOMPSON FAMILY TREE—SECTION 5

Symbolic monument in the form of a tree with branches removed and individual headstones resembling logs. Made for Edwin Vivian Thompson, a landscape gardener and farmer.

o CALDWELL SISTERS—SECTION 13

Family contributed money to build Sts. Mary & Elizabeth Hospital in 1872 in memory of their mother, Mary Elizabeth Breckinridge Caldwell. Sisters married European royalty.

p J. GRAHAM BROWN—SECTION 26

Prominent Louisville businessman and philanthropist. Inventor of the Hot Brown sandwich.

q GHEENS MAUSOLEUM—SECTION 33

Features a likeness of Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* painted on glass in rear window.

r PETE "THE GLADIATOR" BROWNING—SECTION A

A professional baseball player and one of the best right-handed hitters and fighters ever. Used John Hillerich's bats to create the Louisville Slugger.

s HENRY WATTERSON—SECTION P

Editor of *The Louisville Journal* newspaper, which later became *The Courier-Journal*. Louisville's Watterson Expressway is named after him.

t LOUIS SEELBACH—SECTION 13

A bellboy at the Galt House, he became an entrepreneur and developed the beautiful Seelbach Hotel.

u SEBASTIAN ZORN—SECTION 1

President of the Louisville Water Company, he created the filtration system and Crescent Hill swimming pool.





701 Baxter Avenue
Louisville, KY 40204
502-451-5630
www.cavehillheritagefoundation.org
www.cavehillcemetery.com

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