



*The mission of the Association for Gravestone Studies is to foster appreciation of the cultural significance of gravestones and burial grounds through their study and preservation.*

- Welcome
- News & Notes
- Join the AGS
- Preservation
- Store Directory
- Publications
- External Resources
- AGS Conferences
- AGS Awards
- Research Clearinghouse
- Archives
- More Information
- Contact Us
- Home

## FAQ

**B**elow is a list of frequently asked questions to AGS, as well as corresponding answers and additional information for use by both members and non-members. Click on the links below to jump directly to that section.

- [Some Gravestone Rubbing Do's and Don'ts](#)
- [Steps to Reset a Stone \(With Photos\)](#) (This is a PDF file)
- [Review and Evaluation of Selected Brand Name Materials for Cleaning Gravestones](#)
- [Tools and Materials for Gravestone Cleaning Projects](#)
- [How to Identify Major Stone Types](#)
- [Reading Weathered Marble Gravestones](#)
- [Adhesive Suppliers](#)
- [Symbolism on Gravestones](#)
- [White Bronze Markers](#)
- [Monumental Bronze Catalog](#) (This is a PDF file)

### **Some Gravestone Rubbings Do's and Don'ts**

Gravestone rubbing is fun. It is possible to collect some beautiful artwork that can be framed and displayed. A carver's skill can be preserved, or an ancestor's stone recorded and appreciated through this craft. However, gravestone rubbing is also controversial. Especially in cemeteries where a restoration project is in progress, rubbing is often banned. This is to enable the restorers to have an opportunity to preserve all the stones possible before more damage occurs. Even if a restoration project is not in progress, if the those who care for the cemetery have determined there are very fragile stones there which may be damaged if pressure is applied to the surface as happens in rubbing, there may be prohibitions in place. So be sure to check.

Below are some Do's and Don'ts that will make your experience in the cemetery a good one.

#### **Please Do**

- Check (with cemetery superintendent, cemetery commissioners, town clerk, historical society, whoever is in charge) to see if rubbing is allowed in the cemetery.
- Get permission and/or a permit as required.
- Rub only solid stones in good condition. Check for any cracks, evidence of previous breaks and adhesive repairs. Defoliating stone with air pockets behind the face of the stone that will

and adhesive repairs, deteriorating stone with air pockets behind the face of the stone that will collapse under pressure of rubbing, etc

- Become educated; learn how to rub responsibly.
- Use a soft brush and plain water to do any necessary stone cleaning.
- Make certain that your paper covers the entire face of the stone; secure with masking tape.
- Use the correct combination of paper and waxes or inks; avoid magic marker-type pens or other permanent color materials.
- Test paper and color before working on stone to be certain that no color bleeds through.
- Rub gently, carefully.
- Leave the stone in better condition than you found it.
- Take *all* trash with you; replace any grave site materials that you may have disturbed.

Please **Don't**

- Don't attempt to rub deteriorating marble or sandstone, or any unsound or weakened stone (for example, a stone that sounds hollow when gently tapped or a stone that is flaking, splitting, blistered, cracked, or unstable on its base).
- Don't use detergents, soaps, vinegar, bleach, or any other cleaning solutions on the stone, no matter how mild!
- Don't use shaving cream, chalk, graphite, dirt, or other concoctions in an attempt to read worn inscriptions. Using a large mirror to direct bright sunlight diagonally across the face of a gravemarker casts shadows in indentations and makes inscriptions more visible.
- Don't use stiff-bristled or wire brushes, putty knives, nail files, or any metal object to clean or to remove lichen from the stone; Soft natural bristled brushes, whisk brooms, or wooden sticks are usually OK if used gently and carefully
- Don't attempt to remove stubborn lichen. Soft lichen may be thoroughly soaked with plain water and then loosened with a gum eraser or a wooden popsicle stick. Be gentle. Stop if lichen does not come off easily.
- Don't use spray adhesives, scotch tape, or duct tape. Use masking tape.
- Don't use any rubbing method that you have not actually practiced under supervision.
- Don't leave masking tape, wastepaper, colors, etc., at the grave site

[Top of page](#)

---

## **Review and Evaluation of Selected Brand Name Materials for Cleaning Gravestones**

*by Tracy C. Walther- Architectural Conservator*

**I. INTRODUCTION** -- Some important general guidelines to remember when considering cleaning burial monuments:

A. Evaluate the general condition of the burial monument. Do not attempt to clean the monument if it exhibits any cracks, flaking and scaling, or eroding granular surfaces. Carefully sound (gently tap surface with finger) stone to determine if there are any underlying hollow areas. If hollow areas are detected, do not continue with cleaning or handling.

B. Determine the type of soiling to remove it in the most effective manner. Types of soiling could

be:

- Carbonaceous or sooty soiling
- Urban grime; dirt
- Organic--algae, fungi, lichens, mosses
- Stains--metallic, oils, etc.
- Efflorescence (salts)

C. Initiate cleaning process with the least aggressive method--gentle, clean water rinsing. If washing with water alone is not sufficient, carefully proceed with the use of a selected material to facilitate cleaning. Select the gentlest possible method that will achieve a desirable or acceptable level of cleanliness.

D. Always test selected cleaning method(s) before general application. Test entire cleaning procedure in a small inconspicuous area on the monument.

E. Pre-wet monument with water before the application of any chemical cleaning solutions. Pre-wetting prevents excessive penetration of cleaning solutions and soiling into the stone, and facilitates softening of soiling.

F. Clean from the bottom to the top of the monument to avoid streak staining on the stone. Periodically rinse runoff.

G. Always rinse thoroughly with water. Residues from chemical cleaning solutions can create a blotchy appearance, provide mediums for bacterial action, and cause staining. Do not allow cleaning solutions to dry on a monument.

H. Do not assume that a cleaning procedure that is effective in one specific case is therefore applicable for all cleaning situations.

I. Consult with a conservation professional.

## **II. Review and Evaluation of Selected Brand Name Materials for Cleaning Gravestones**

### **A. Soaps and detergents**

1. Soaps (e.g., "Ivory"): commercial household detergents (liquids and powders) are not recommended for cleaning masonry. They are rendered insoluble by calcium ions present in stone and hard water. They may also produce free alkali and fatty acid salts.

2. Non-ionic Detergents (e.g., Photo Flo - a Kodak product): Non-ionic detergents are recommended for cleaning gravestones. They are electrically neutral cleaning agents that do not contain or contribute to the formation of soluble salts. They provide better wetting of the masonry surface and, therefore, successfully facilitate the removal of general soiling. Non-ionic detergents are available from conservation, janitorial, and photographic suppliers. A suggested cleaning solution is one ounce non-ionic detergent to 5 gallons water.

### **B. Acidic Cleaning Materials**

1. Hydrochloric or Muriatic Acid, Phosphoric Acid (e.g. "Lime Away," "Naval Jelly"), oxalic acid are not recommended for general cleaning of gravestones. The use of hydrochloric or muriatic acid may result in ferrous chloride (rust) staining and the deposition of soluble salts. Muriatic acid, which is readily available in hardware stores, is a raw acid. It is a by-product of processing steel and contains metallic particles that can cause ferrous staining.

### **C. Alkaline, Corrosive, and Biocidal Cleaning Materials**

### C. Alkaline, Corrosive, and Bleach Cleaning Materials

1. Sodium Hydroxide (e.g., "Borax"), Sodium Hypochlorite (e.g., "Clorox" "liquid chlorine") is not recommended for general cleaning of stone.
2. Calcium Hypochlorite (e.g., Chlorine, "HTH," "Shock Treatment"): Calcium hypochlorite or chlorine is effective for the removal of biological growth. It is a granular product that is not to be confused with "liquid chlorine" or sodium hypochlorite. Calcium hypochlorite is available from swimming pool suppliers. A suggested cleaning solution is one ounce calcium hypochlorite to one gallon hot water. This product should be used only when a waterhose with a good water pressure (e.g., 55 psi) is available.
3. Ammonium Hydroxide (e.g., household ammonia): Solutions of household ammonia are recommended for cleaning light colored stones. Ammonia is particularly effective for the removal of biological growth. One cup ammonia to one gallon water.
4. Quaternary Ammoniums (e.g., algacides or biocides for swimming pools): Quaternary Ammoniums have a slightly different chemical structure than ammonium hydroxide. They are especially effective for the removal of biological growth, particularly stubborn black algae. Quaternary ammoniums are available from swimming pool suppliers and list ingredients such as alkylbenzyl trimethyl ammonium, benzyl alkyl dimethyl ammonium chlorides, or benzyl alkyl dimethyl ammonium bromides.
5. Trisodium Phosphate (e.g., "TSP," "Calgon"): Trisodium phosphate is not recommended for cleaning monuments. It can cause the formation and deposition of soluble salts. "Calgon" contains trisodium phosphate and a number of additives that may be detrimental to monuments.
6. "Fantastic" All Purpose Cleaner, "Formula 409," "Spic and Span" and abrasive cleansers: These are not recommended for cleaning monuments. Avoid products containing sodium chloride, sodium sulfate, sodium carbonate, sodium bicarbonate, and ammonium carbonate, due to their ability to form and deposit soluble salts in monuments.

### III. MISCELLANEOUS MATERIALS OR TOOLS

- A. The following items are recommended for use in cleaning procedures for masonry: soft natural bristle (e.g., tampico) brushes, nylon brushes, tooth brushes, Q-tips, sponges (especially natural sponges). Wood and some plastic spatulas are also recommended.
- B. Do not use metal brushes or scrapers, or abrasive pads (e.g., "Brillo," "Scotchbrite") to clean monuments.

### IV. SOME FINAL REMINDERS ABOUT BRAND NAME CLEANING MATERIALS

- A. Do not rely solely upon product labels or advertising. Brand name materials that are readily available from hardware and grocery stores are generally intended for household use. Information is not provided for specialized applications outside of the home or workshop.
- B. Remember to consult with a conservation consultant before cleaning. The use of improper cleaning materials and practices can cause serious and irreparable damage to gravestones.

Further detailed information is found in "A Graveyard Preservation Primer" [click here](#) for order information

[Top of page](#)

---

## HOW TO IDENTIFY MAJOR STONE TYPES

### **GRANITE**

**I**gneous rock with visible grain, primarily quartz and feldspar

**S**peckled appearance with sparkly mica and dull black flecks

Extremely hard rock that is difficult to carve by hand

Grays, pinks in a wide range of colors

Commercial granites include gneiss and other rocks not strictly granite

Exhibits a full range of grain sizes with uniform surface patterns

Granular with no discernable bedding planes

Often used for monuments and tombs

### LIMESTONE

- Soft, sedimentary rock primarily composed of calcite
- Fossils may be recognizable and are the most diagnostic trait
- Tan, buff or gray colored that darkens with age
- Matte surface almost never polished
- Somewhat rough texture, rarely “sugars” like marble
- No marked veining like marble
- No definite layers or bedding planes like sandstone
- No sparkly mica grains like granite
- Often gets gypsum crusts

### MARBLE

- Hard, dense crystalline or granular metamorphic limestone
- White when new or in new breaks, but older marbles may appear gray from soiling
- Capable of taking a high polish, yellows with age
- May have veins of gray or gold
- Commercial marble is any lime carbonate capable of taking a polish, could include limestone and many colors
- Tennessee marble is medium-grained similar to limestone in texture with a pink cast
- Georgia marble is very large-grained, somewhat gray in color
- Predominant stone for gravestones in the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Many early marbles are eroded and “sugaring”

### SANDSTONE

- Sedimentary rock composed of cemented sand grains – “bedding planes”

- Red and brown (Brownstone) in color, can be gray, tan or blue (Bluestone)
- Fine-grained stone with sand grains
- Often flakes and delaminates

### **SLATE**

- Metamorphosed shale, hard and brittle
- Usually black, gray or blue
- Sometimes fades with time
- Extremely smooth, fine-grained stone with even bedding planes usually running parallel with the stone's face
- Holds carving very well, inscriptions usually very clear
- Uniform surface appearance
- Gravestones tend to be thin and simple in shape, generally not more than six inches

### **SOAPSTONE**

- Metamorphic rock
- Largely composed of the mineral talc and is rich in magnesium
- Easily carved and darkens over age
- Smooth to the touch
- Used in 19<sup>th</sup> century, commonly for slot and tab tombs in Georgia
- White, gray, greenish gray, pale green -- commonly discolored in reddish or brownish hues and mottled

[Top of page](#)

---

## **Tools and Materials for Gravestone Cleaning Projects**

*by Fannin Lehner Preservation Consultants*

### STONE TYPES

- Marble and Limestone
  - Water
  - Non-ionic Detergent (Photo-Flo-Kodak product)
  - Household Ammonia (Requires water hose for rinsing and Hydrion Paper test strips for pH testing.)
  - Calcium Hypochlorite (HTH) for biological growth retardation. (Requires water hose for rinsing and Hydrion Paper test strips for pH testing.)
- Slate and Other Stone

- Water
- Non-ionic Detergent (Photo-Flo-Kodak product)

#### GENERAL CLEANING

- Good water supply
- Non-ionic Detergent (Photo-Flo--Kodak product).
- 1/4 oz./5quarts water
- Ammonia--1 cup/1gal. water (for marble only)
- Calcium Hypochlorite (granular)-2 oz. dry/1 gal. warm water
- Assortment of brushes (NOT WIRE) of varying stiffness.
- Toothbrushes (firm), sponges
- Scrapers- craft sticks, plastic scrapers

#### POULTICE--SOFTENING

- Kaolin/porcelain clay (dry),
- Glycerine (use 50/50 mixture with water)
- Water
- Saran Wrap and heavy plastic for wrapping
- Tape/ string to secure plastic
- Scrapers- plastic and wood

#### CLEANING DON'TS

- Wire brushes, metal instruments, abrasive pads (Scotchbrite, Brillo, Steel wool)
- Acid or acidic cleaners (especially on marble or limestone!) (Should only be used by conservators with proper training on non-calcareous stone)
- Household cleaners: soap (Ivory), detergents (liquid or powder), Borax, Clorox, TSP, Calgon, Fantastik, Formula 409, Spic and Span (or any other abrasive cleaner)

REMEMBER: The use of improper cleaning materials and practices can cause serious and irreparable damage to gravestones! Make sure the stone is stable before attempting to clean it - no flaking, delaminating, etc.

See [Preservation](#) for information on how to cast a new base for a broken gravestone, and several other frequently asked questions.

---

#### Adhesive Suppliers

Eastern Marble & Granite  
904 Marcon Blvd.  
Allentown, PA 18109-9552  
(610) 266-3121

Stone Boss Industries  
3604 Borough Place  
Woodridge, NY 11377  
Akemi Products for Marble and Granite  
(718) 278-2677

Wood and Stone  
10155 Residency Road  
Manassas, VA 22111  
Akemi Products for Marble and Granite

PROSOCO Products  
Call Gary Cook at Waldo Bros. in Boston (617) 828-6551, or in Connecticut (860) 289-9500  
Numerous products for gravestone conservation including fiber glass rod for blind pinning.  
Also stone consolidant Conservae HCT

Miles Supply Co.  
POB 237, Barre, VT 05641  
(800) 396-8049 or in Elberton, GA (888) 283-5863  
or Vermont residents (802) 476-3963  
Barre-Pax Epoxy

*Cleaning Bronze tablets (kits):*

Matthews International  
252 Park West Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15275-1002  
(412) 788 2111

Gran Quartz  
4963 South Royal Atlanta Drive  
Tucker, GA 30084  
(770) 621-0774

Waldo Bros. in Boston  
202 Southampton St.  
Boston, MA 02118-2716  
(617) 445-3000

---

### **Symbolism on Gravestones**

*by Jessie Lie Farber*

What is the meaning of the designs carved on old gravestones? This question is often asked by both the interested layman and the serious student of gravestone art. A great deal of casual speculation and considerable scholarly research have been devoted to finding answers.

Speculative interpretations of some of the more obvious designs can safely be made by the insightful observer. The winged hourglass, for example, tells us that time flies; the hourglass on its side, that time has stopped for the deceased; the broken flower or tree, that life has been cut short. Hundreds of other designs invite this kind of easy, simplistic interpretation, and a number of lists have been prepared which suggest to the reader what the symbol probably means. The best of these is included in a handsome book of gravestone photographs by Francis Duval and Ivan Rigby, *Early American Gravestone Art in Photographs*.

Unfortunately, not all designs on gravestones can be interpreted in such a neat, uncomplicated way, and attempts to do so are fraught with the likelihood of error. Professional scholars disagree



snarply about the meaning or particular designs; they even debate the extent to which it is possible to determine their meaning and significance. This healthy diversity of opinion stimulates interest and further study.

Because there are few simple answers, you should, if you are interested in the symbolism on old gravestones, approach the subject with an open, inquiring attitude laced with a healthy skepticism. Familiarize yourself with varying scholarly opinions. Read literature about the work of individual carvers and about the life of the period. And most important, study the stones themselves. With patience and perseverance you will develop a good background and understanding of this fascinating subject.

### **FAQs on Symbolism**

Here are several sources and interpretations for some frequently used symbols on gravestones. There is more than one interpretation for some symbols so interpretations must be used as possibilities, not certainties.

#### *General Gravestone Symbolism*

See *Clasped Hands: Symbolism in New Orleans Cemeteries*, by Leonard V. Huber, published 1982 by the Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana. It is fully illustrated and deals only with gravestones and tombs.

#### *Fraternal Symbolism*

See "Fraternal Organizations" by Alvin J. Schmidt from *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Institutions*, published by Greenwood Press, 1980, or see *The International Encyclopedia of Secret Societies & Fraternal Orders* by Alan Axelrod, published by Facts on File, 1997 or see *Markers XI, "Ritual Regalia, and Remembrance: Fraternal Symbolism"* by Laurel K. Gabel.

#### *Woodmen of the World*

Woodmen of the World derived from the Modern Woodmen of America, a fraternal group which was founded in 1883. Fraternal scholar William Whalen describes it as an insurance society with some fraternal lodge features. Woodmen advertised themselves as an organization for the "Jew and Gentile, Catholic and Protestant, the agnostic and atheist." The Woodmen of the World emblem is a sawed-off tree stump, often with a mallet or beetle, an ax, and a wedge: the motto "Dum, Tacet Clamat" (Though Silent He speaks") usually appears somewhere on the border. These Woodmen emblems are found throughout the United States, but the largest concentration is in the South and Midwest.

#### *Mortuary Carriages*

In the 19th century some larger urban areas had pallbearer or mourners' coaches. These would be the equivalent of a limousine today, but they certainly had features that separated them from an everyday coach. You may want to look up [www.hearse.com](http://www.hearse.com) on the Internet. They have photographs of funeral coaches of every size and may have a pallbearer's coach. There is also a national mourning collectors group.

#### *Mourning cards*

Generally most mourning cards are black with gold lettering. Some have generic images, like a dove, flowers, etc. They were used as family mementos and may have been incorporated into a large piece. Some companies produced large lithographs with various mourning iconography, angels, doves, flowers, biblical verses, and there was a spot to place the mourning card within the lithograph. The whole thing was then hung on the wall. I have seen mourning cards in photographs taken of the flower arrangements from the funeral. The photographer propped the cards up near the flowers. I have seen these cards used in shadowbox frames with other artifacts from the person and their wake. The whole thing was then hung on the wall in tribute to them.

#### *Shells*

Clam shells, scallop shells, and other types of shells are a symbol of a person's Christian pilgrimage

or journey through life and of baptism in the church. In the middle ages, Christians wore the scallop shell to indicate that they had made a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James of Compostella in Spain. Placing a shell on a gravestone when visiting the site is an ancient custom and may in fact have several different meanings depending on the cultural background of the people placing the shells. The idea of crossing over a body of water to the promised land or crossing the River of Styx to the afterlife, the final journey to the "other side" is also part of the symbolism of the shell.

#### *Hands*

Hands are found on many gravestones. It may be the hand of God pointing downward signifying mortality or sudden death. The hand of God pointing upward signifies the reward of the righteous, confirmation of life after death. Praying hands signify devotion. Handshakes may be farewells to earthly existence or may be clasped hands of a couple to be reunited in death as they were in life, their devotion to each other not destroyed by death.

#### *Some initials found on gravestones:*

FLT stands for Friendship, Love, Truth, three degrees associated with the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. The Odd Fellows, first organized in the US in 1819, is a popular fraternal/benefit organization. The emblem of the Odd Fellows is usually shown as three links of a chain. A number on the stone is the local lodge number.

FCL stands for Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty. These same letters were also used by the Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War and a similar hereditary group called the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic.

#### *The Obelisk*

The obelisk is, to quote McDowell and Meyer in *The Revival Styles in American Memorial Art*, one of the "most pervasive of all the revival forms" of cemetery art. There is hardly a cemetery founded in the 1840s and 50s without some form of Egyptian influence in the public buildings, gates, tomb art, etc. Napoleon's 1798-99 Egyptian campaigns, the discoveries at the tombs of the Pharaohs, and our new Republic's need to borrow the best of the ancient cultures (Greek revival, classic revival, the prominence of classical studies and dress, etc.) led to a resurgence of interest in the ancient Egyptian culture. Obelisks were considered to be tasteful, with pure uplifting lines, associated with ancient greatness, patriotic, able to be used in relatively small spaces, and, perhaps most importantly, obelisks were less costly than large and elaborate sculpted monuments. There were many cultural reasons for the revival styles of the nineteenth century. Freemasonry, while part of the overall cultural influence, was not responsible for the prevalence of obelisks. If you would like to read more about some of these styles, see *The Egyptian Revival: Its Sources, Monuments and Meaning, 1808-1859*, by Richard Carrott.

#### *What is the origin of the practice of all headstones facing east?*

In many, but by no means all, early New England burying grounds the graves are positioned east/west. This east/west orientation is the most common orientation in other parts of the country and world as well. The earliest settlers had their feet pointing toward the east and the head of the coffin toward the west, ready to rise up and face the "new day" (the sun) when "the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised" or when Christ would appear and they would be reborn. If the body was positioned between the headstone and the footstone, with the inscriptions facing outward, the footstone might actually be facing east and the decorated face of the headstone facing west. If the headstone inscription faces east, the body would most commonly be buried to the east of it. Much depends on the layout of the graveyard -- if there was a church or other building in the center of the burial site, where the high ground was located, the location of access roads, etc. Early graves were seldom in the neat rows that we are used to seeing. Burials were more haphazard, more medieval in their irregularity; families didn't own plots and burial spaces were often reused. The north side of the cemetery was considered less desirable and is often the last part of the burying ground to be used, or you may find the north side set aside for slaves, servants, suicides, "unknowns," etc. In many burial grounds graves face all four points on the compass. Sometimes a hilly site will have stones facing all four directions. With the coming of the Rural Cemetery

Movement in the 1830s and 40s, an entirely new style of burial became popular. The ideal of winding roads and irregular terrain dictated the orientation of the monuments to a large degree.

**To view a listing of common symbols from the 17th and 18th century [click here](#).**

**To view a listing of common symbols from the 19th century [click here](#).**

[Top of page](#)

---

### **White Bronze Markers**

*by Barbara Rotundo*

Hollow-metal markers in a bluish-gray color, white bronze gravestones are cast zinc. If you are not sure whether you have iron or zinc, try a magnet, because zinc is not magnetic like iron. All zinc cemetery monuments came one way or another from Bridgeport, Connecticut. These markers, made in the same shapes and styles as marble and granite monuments, appear in cemeteries from Hawaii to Maine to Texas and from Vancouver to Halifax in Canada. Each of the four sides was separately cast, and in the case of very tall monuments there would be several castings to each side. The cheapest (about \$6 in the 1890s) was a single cast tablet.

Bridgeport started manufacturing them in the mid 1870s and discontinued production in 1912. The company continued to make zinc and other nonferrous castings for automobile and radio parts until the owner dissolved it in 1939. In 1881 Bridgeport set up its first subsidiary, in Detroit. After that it established plants in Philadelphia, New Orleans, St. Thomas, Ontario, and the two longest-lasting plants, Western Bronze in Des Moines and American Bronze in Chicago

The accounts are not clear as to whether the parts were all cast in Bridgeport and shipped to the subsidiaries for fusing or whether the actual casting was done in the various cities. The patented process, that has held up very well, was the scheme of heating molten zinc much higher than its melting point and pouring it into the joint between the cast pieces. This melted the surface of the cast pieces and fused them more solidly than soldering would have done.

The markers were all custom-made. That is, none were made ahead of time but were ordered by the customer from a catalog. (The Winterthur and Metropolitan Museums are two places holding these catalogs.\*) The customer ordered from a local agent. Rarely did marble and granite monument dealers also sell white bronze, and contrary to folk belief, Sears Roebuck never sold white bronze monuments. Often cemeteries have only one marker or one plot with zinc for every family member. Another folk belief is that these were put up as demonstrations. There is no evidence for this. At the end of every catalog was an entreaty urging people to become agents. "No capital investment needed." I believe the single markers represent an agent who met with little success and soon gave up. Where you find a dozen or more white bronze, you are looking at some agent's success story.

Having chosen the style and size, a customer could order as many images for decoration as he wanted. Since price was not related to the number, some customers chose several for each side. The individual epitaphs were usually cast on separate plates-some of the four plates having only images at first. These were fixed to the marker by screws with an ornamental head. They could then be replaced when additional family members died.

Vandals also learned how to remove the screws and sometimes walked off leaving holes in the sides of the markers. These gave rise to two folk tales. The first is that smugglers used the markers to hide their bottles during prohibition. The second says the tall monuments with holes were for storing rakes and brooms. There may have been such uses after the plates vanished, but the insides are not really that roomy or convenient.

Zinc resists corrosion, and modern industrial processes still take advantage of its anti-corrosive properties. Thus the castings are still sharp and clear. However, zinc has two unfortunate characteristics. It is quite brittle and may break if hit--by a falling branch, for instance. The other is that over many years unsupported weight will cause it to creep. Many statues of Civil War soldiers with no inner armature to support the weight have crept so that the soldiers now lean and look tinsy

with the inner structure to support the weight have crept so that the soldiers now lean and look up, or half asleep. Architectural Iron in Milford, Pennsylvania, is willing to undertake repairs of zinc and does a fine restoration job, but the cost will take your breath away. Keep your fingers crossed and enjoy what you have!

For more details, read Barbara Rotundo's article in Dick Meyer's "Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture".

\*And many research libraries have the microfilm collection "Decorative Arts Catalogs from the Winterthur Museum

---

[Welcome](#) | [News & Notes](#) | [Join the AGS](#) | [Preservation](#) | [Store Directory](#) | [Publications](#)  
[External Resources](#) | [AGS Conferences](#) | [AGS Awards](#) | [Research Clearinghouse](#) | [Archives](#)  
[More Information](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Home](#)

^ [Top of Page](#)



Association for Gravestone Studies  
101 Munson St., Suite 108 · Greenfield, MA 01301

Phone: 413.772.0836  
E-mail: [info@gravestonestes.org](mailto:info@gravestonestes.org)

Copyright © 2005, The Association for Gravestone Studies, All Rights Reserved  
Web Site Design & Web Site Hosting by [Dot.Inc Solutions](#)