



SECRET Symbols of CEMETERIES

BY COURTNEY HENDERSON

A walk through a cemetery when researching ancestors can be a haunting yet beautiful and reflective experience. Aside from the names, birthdates, and death dates, what other secrets might their tombstones reveal?

Those majestic, weather-worn stone carvings that you see (popularized by those cipher-loving Victorians from 1839 to 1920) are more than pure decoration. They mean something: a virtue the person ex-

emplified, a value they held dear, or a nod to how they earned their living.

The table opposite gives the meanings behind 21 popular gravestone symbols. (There are many more.) A revelation about your ancestor's life may just be right in front of you, hidden in plain sight!

Courtney Henderson is the digital editor of our sister publication *Family Tree* magazine. For much more information about all things genealogical, go to Familytreemagazine.com.

MEANINGS OF GRAVESTONE SYMBOLS

SYMBOL	MEANING
ACORN	Prosperity; power; triumph
ANCHOR; SEXTANT	Mariner
ANVIL AND HAMMER	Blacksmith
BASKET	Fertility; maternal bond
BIRD	Flight of the soul
CANDLE	Life
COLUMN/PILLAR (BROKEN)	Life cut short; sudden death
EVERGREEN	Faithfulness; remembrance
FERN	Sincerity; humility; solitude
FRUIT	Eternal plenty
IHS MONOGRAM	Christian; name of Jesus
KEY	Knowledge; entrance into heaven
LAMP	Knowledge; spiritual immortality
LILY	Innocence, purity, and the resurrection (Easter); marriage and fidelity (calla); innocence and humility (lily-of-the-valley)
OAK LEAF	Strength; stability; endurance
OLIVE TREE	Peace; reconciliation between God and man
PALM	Life conquering death
PLOW; HOE; RACK; STALK OF CORN; SHOCK OF WHEAT	Farmer
ROSE	Love; beauty; virtue; strong bond (intertwined); youthful death (rosebud)
SPHINX	Courage; honor; power
TREE-SHAPED	Possible member of the Modern Woodmen of America or Woodmen of the World fraternal organization member ■