



Madison County Genealogical Society



Madison County Genealogical Society
P.O. Box 1031, Norfolk, NE 68702-1031
mcgs@telebeep.com

www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nemcgs/ www.nesgs.org/~mcgs

What Do you Want on Your Gravestone?

One of the important questions we need to ask is: “What do you want on your tombstone?” It is a question we should all ask and give a answer. During the past 40 years of observing the monuments at cemeteries there are several things that have been noticed. In the cemeteries across the states there are varieties of size, design and monuments. As we are individual people our cemeteries also reflect our individual styles. The things that are placed at our gravesites are a reflection of our own style or the person bringing items to it.

The size of our markers are ground-level (flat) to some that are 7 inches high to those 3 feet high to well over 5 feet high. We see the styles change depending upon the time when our loved one died. Before 1899 there were slender, square sandstone or slate slabs with or without elaborate carvings. Then between 1830 to 1860 there are the moderate sculptured stone of white marble subject to lichen moss. In the time frame of 1860 to 1880 we have square, towering marble stones often elaborately shaped or with ornate sculpture. From 1880 to 1910 we see many soft, gray granite stones subject to weathering. Then beginning around 1910 to the present time we have polished granite or marble.

If we are at the graveside of a person who has a newer stone than the time when the person died it may be due to the stone being a replacement. The original stone may have been damaged by time and weather. A relative may have placed a stone at the site when there wasn't one before. I think that every person should have a stone marker or a marker that will last for years. It is said that a gravestone is a scratch left on the surface to let you know they have been here.

What is placed on the monument is also a individual reflection. There are very elaborate wording, carvings and sizes. There are the more simple ones that give only name and year of birth and death. Some people are so kind that they leave the names of their parents and their children and even to the grandchildren names. What a find for somebody doing a family research. It is also helpful in finding the dates listed on the marker for birth and death in full month, day and year. There are inscriptions of some of the older stones and even a few new ones that reflect the individual. Carvings showing a lamb has a meaning of innocence usually found on small children. The older stones from late 1800's to early 1900's have handshakes for farewell, arches for victory in death, drapes for mourning and mortality, broken column showing the loss of the head of the family. Other ones that can be seen are oak leaves and acorn for maturity or ripe old age, roses for brevity of earthly existence, willows for earthly sorrow and even portals showing passageway to eternal journey. These are a few of many that are on our markers.

There are different types of cemeteries. There are city and county, national, private, church and even family cemeteries. The records for burials vary also from early

days to today. Records may be well kept in some and very lacking in others. The type of records you can find are: the sexton records; church burial records; burial permit records; grave opening orders, family Bibles; and tombstone inscriptions.

In caring for the markers of our loved ones you do not want to use anything with acid in the product or an oil-based product. These will eat the stone or leave a stain that will damage the stone. Never, never use a wire brush or a rough instrument to clean the tombstone. Always check to see the kind of stone it is before cleaning as with some your cleaning will further damage the stone.

The information on a marker should be copied exactly as found. The languages that was used on the stone have meaning that may be lost if we try to change it into our English spelling. We may think those marks are not important but that is the letters of their alphabet that need to be preserved. By changing a mark here or there it could move the location of where to look for records. In my case it is a long way from Norfolk, Nebraska to Norfolk, Virginia.