

SYMBOLS

In interpreting symbols one must be aware that sometimes there is more than one meaning for some of these symbols, so one cannot say with absolute certainty that he knows the meaning that was intended. Only the relative who ordered the gravestone for the deceased knew exactly what these symbols signified. Today we can only review what is written about the symbols, look at the lifespan of the individual and then try to interpret these lovely motifs.

In old burying grounds the graves are positioned east/west, the most common orientation. The dead were buried with their feet pointing toward the east and the head of the coffin was toward the west. They were ready to rise up and face the "new day" (sun) when "the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised" or when Christ would appear and they would be reborn. Thus, even the placement of graves connotes meaning in a graveyard.

Enjoy a leisurely walk into the heart of this old cemetery while finding some of the beautiful symbols that are pointed out in this brochure.



Tour and brochure created by The Nansemond River Garden Club

www.vintageviews.org/vvtlpages/Cen_Symbolism.html

www.angelfire.com/ky2/cemetery/reid.html

from article on "Tombstone Symbols" in Oct 2000 Ancestry Magazine

<http://freenet.buffalo.edu/bah/a/forestL/symbols/index.html>

www.gravestonestudies.org/faq.htm

www.chicora.org

Anchor: Hope.

Angel: Rebirth or resurrection; spirituality, agents of God, guardians of the dead.

Clasped hands: Marriage, close bond, unity, affection even after death. The person who died first holds the other's hand, guiding the spouse to heaven.

Daisy: Gentleness, youth.

Dove (flying): Resurrection.

Fern: Sincerity, sorrow.

Garland: Victory of the redemption.

Ivy: Immortality, fidelity, undying affection.

Lamb: Usually marks the grave of a child. Purity, innocence, sacrifice.

Lily: Majesty, often used on women's graves, innocence, purity, resurrection. Restored innocence of soul at death.

Lily of the Valley: Purity, humility.

Morning Glory: Youth, resurrection, mourning, farewell, brevity of life.

Obelisk: From an Egyptian form; power, lord over all, creator.

Roses: Completion and the brevity of earthly existence. Love, beauty, hope unending love.

Bud of rose: Normally a child under 13.

Partial bloom: Usually a teenager.

Full bloom: Deceased died in prime of life.

Rosette: The Lord, hope, promise and love.

Scroll: Scriptures.

Scythe: Death.

Thistle: Earthly sorrow; Christ's crown of thorns, Scotland = country of origin.

Torch/Flame: Immortality of the spirit, resurrection.

Inverted torch: Extinction of life. Death.

Tree: Life. **Trunk** = shortened life;

Severed branch = immortality.

Weeping Willow: Sorrow and mourning.

Wheat sheaves: Divine harvest; often represents the aged.

CEDAR HILL CEMETERY

Suffolk, Virginia



CEMETERY SYMBOLS

A SHORT WALKING TOUR

SUGGESTED BY

THE NANSEMOND RIVER GARDEN CLUB

In walking through this old part of the circa 1802 cemetery, one finds many devices or designs that were likely to be immediately recognizable to people of an earlier era. The beautiful symbols carved into a headstone denoted something about the person interred there.

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1. *THE WOODWARDS*
On your left as you ascend Holly Street, look for a monument with a praying *angel* for Claire, 1881-83. Also note the *baby's bed* for Inez with a *dove* at the head and the *lamb* at the foot. The "bed" is used to mark young children's graves.

2. *THE FINNEYS*

On Martha Finney's grave (1837- 85) is a *sheaf of wheat* being cut by a *scythe*. Note the *rosettes*; and the *lily* and *rose* on top.



3. *RIDDICK'S OBELISK*
Look for the down-turned *torches* with a *flaming urn* on the top of the *obelisk*. Notice the *garland*, as well. *Continue walking down Holly Street, pass the scatter garden on the left, and turn left on Seventh Street (right before the woman grasping the obelisk).

4. *LUCY ALLEN (1841-1893)*

The headstone on the left has beautiful *passion flowers*. Continuing on in this plot, we find young Archibald Allen's grave with its *morning glory*, *ivy*, *fern*, *thistle*, *daisy*, and *lilies*. Behind his grave is Janet Whitehead Prentis' grave. This headstone for a much loved infant is made to appear to be a *stump*, covered with *morning glory*, *lily of the valley*, *lily* and *fern*.



5. *OBELISK WITH WOMAN*
This large monument across from Lucy Allen's headstone symbolizes *faith*. Martha Jane Rountree Smith (1840-1915) Within this plot is Agnes P. Ashburn (*lily*), and her husband, Isaac Walter Ashburn, (*clasped hands* on the headstone) and their infant daughter, Minnie (*lily of the valley*).



6. *EDWARD D. HARGROVES* (1846-1899) On this *obelisk* is the symbol for the Freemasons (*Masons*): *square, compass* and *G* (geometry or God). *Notice the *draped obelisks and urns* as you walk. In Victorian times black cloth was often placed on monuments.

7. *LOOK TO YOUR RIGHT* and see the *cylindrical* monument typical of those shown in the *Sears Tombstones and Monuments 1902* catalog. This design is relatively rare in the southeast. Its *bolster/pillow* shape may indicate that the deceased is at rest.



8. *ON YOUR LEFT* is Mrs. Mary Parker with the *weeping willow* on her headstone. *As you continue walking, look right to the enclosed *Dunn plot*.

9. *DUNN PLOT*
Hattie B. Dunn died at age 24. Her stone has a *broken daffodil*, signifying death of youth and beauty. Katie, 7 months and 10 days with *lily of the valley*. May, only 15 when she died, has a *scroll* for her headstone. Notice the interesting footstones here.



10. *NURNEY ANGEL*
Susie Bartlett Nurney, age 17. Notice the *wheat, thistle* and *lamb* in this plot. *Slightly to the right across the street, looking northeast ...



11. *IDA J. WHALEY PARKER'S* (26 years old) monument is one of the most beautiful—*trunk of a tree with its anchor, broken limb, ivy and fern*. The anchor was used by early Christians as a disguised cross.

*Head downhill on Magnolia Street and look to the left for this plot.



12. *JAMES H. SMITH* (1864–1902) Look for this stone to the left beyond the Riddick's plot. *Cross, anchor and crown*.

