

## Road Trip for August 2016

### Funerary Art Appreciation

Last month's trip took us far afield chasing after a river, so this month we'll stick a little closer to home with some familiar destinations. It's been a while since we've focused specifically on tombstones, so let's take the opportunity to visit a few nearby churchyards and cemeteries specifically looking for tombstones and symbolism. Begin your tour on the Square in historic downtown Newberry.

Before you get into the car, walk around to the Memorial Park side of the Square. At first glance it looks as though we've found our first cemetery, but these are actually memorials. Though memorials often take the same shapes as tombstones, they differ in purpose. A memorial commemorates an event while a tombstone marks the site of a burial. To the best of my knowledge, no one is buried on the Square.

From the Square head south on Caldwell Street. Turn left on Coates Street. On the left, across from Boundary Street School is the Old Village Cemetery. It is considered a cemetery, because it is not directly connected to a church. As a municipal cemetery, it was used by many churches in the area. Begun on one acre of land in 1809, by 1846 it had grown to about five acres. Though few markers remain (*the originals were mostly wood*) the cemetery was filled by the time Rosemont Cemetery was established in 1863.

Take care as you walk through the cemetery (any cemetery for that matter) both for your own safety and for that of the broken stones. Remember, also, this is a burying ground and commands a certain amount of respect and reverence. Despite the dilapidated condition, the opportunity arises to study how a tombstone is put together. A single stone monument standing upright is called a stele (or stela – it's a good crossword puzzle clue). Originally these were placed at the head of the grave without any support underneath. Thus older stelae sink over time and are often leaning at odd angles. About 1840, bases were attached to the slabs to make them more stable. A wide stone base, or foundation, is attached to the stele by means of bronze or iron pins. Where stones are broken, these pins or the holes that held them are sometimes visible.

Another early monument type that can be seen in our travels today is called an altar or table tomb. Because of our access to local granite, many of the ones in Newberry are constructed of large blocks or even a single block of stone. Unlike television's zombie movies, removing the top slab will not reveal a corpse or other remains – these are monuments on top of a burial site. There are enough damaged examples to learn from without vandalizing any more. The Village Cemetery also shows early examples of family plots. The ones here are outlined with brick, granite and iron.

>From Coates Street, turn left on Boundary Street. Turn right on Nance Street. Turn left on Pope Street and follow it out of town as it becomes Bush River Road. When you can see Bush River Baptist Church (founded in 1771) up ahead, turn left to visit the old cemetery.

When visiting older graveyards, always expect the unexpected – something that is different or unique. Bush River Baptist has a monument like that which is usually the first thing I notice when I walk through the gate. One of the monuments is covered entirely in cast iron. The monument marks the grave of Annie C. Spearman in 1875. The cemetery also has a number of altar tombs, old stelae and obelisks. The altar tombs often have long memorials carved into the marble slabs on top. Many of the older

stelae are shaped on top to resemble an upward curve flanked by downward curves. This is sometimes called a “tombstone” form. Obelisks are tapering square shafts of stone that were popular throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The earliest stones used for monuments were rough cut field stones and granite blocks. Granite blocks, because they are plentiful here, were also used in times of poverty. The most popular material in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was white marble, which lent itself to high relief sculpture. Polished granite became popular at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is still in use today. Among the sculpted ornament found at Bush River Baptist Church is the symbol of a broken rosebud. From the phrase “nipped in the bud,” this symbol is often used on the graves of children. There are also monuments carved to look like cut trees and logs. These were popular among the Woodmen of the World in the early twentieth century.

Continue on Bush River Road until you are about to leave Newberry County. Turn right on Hwy 560, which runs roughly along the border between Newberry and Laurens Counties. Just before the Railroad Tracks at Kinards, turn right on Carlisle-Oxner Road. On the right is Sharon Methodist Church (founded 1869) with its churchyard behind it.

This small graveyard features some interesting decorations. A large monument to the Boozer family appears to be draped by a cloth. A symbol borrowed from classical antiquity, the cloth represents the pall or shroud which was traditionally draped over a body. It can also be a testament to the skill of the stone cutter. In the Summer family plot are three more symbols commonly found in Newberry: a lily, sheaf of wheat and a dove. In the language of flowers, a lily is a symbol of purity and innocence as well as triumph (as in the Resurrection) and is often used for children and mothers. The sheaf of wheat is symbolic of being gathered in for the harvest. The dove represents the Holy Spirit, peace and innocence. It is also often used on graves of children.

Return to Hwy 560 and turn right. Turn right on Hwy 76. At Jalapa, turn left on Pete Harris Road and then left on Jalapa Road. Soon after crossing I-26, turn right on Beth Eden Road. On the left, not far from the other end of the road is Beth Eden Lutheran Church (founded in 1843).

Some of the monuments at Beth Eden are arranged with a headstone, a footstone and a border or cover connecting the two. Nineteenth century design books call this a “French style” tombstone. On one of the French style stones is a cross and crown – a symbol of heavenly reward. One family plot contains several stones with carved lambs. Often marking the graves of children, lambs are symbols of innocence and sacrifice. Also at Beth Eden are willow trees. Weeping willows became popular as a death image because they show something natural in the act of mourning.

At the end of the road, turn right on Old Whitmire Hwy. Turn left on Hwy 76 and almost immediately right on College Street. Visit Rosemont Cemetery (established in 1863). All of the tombstone types and the various symbols that we have seen thus far are represented at Rosemont, plus many more. One variation of the family plot found here is the family mausoleum. Mausoleums are enclosed above-ground tombs. In Rosemont, there are mausoleums for the Fair family, the Gauntt family and the Caldwell family.

After visiting the “Silent City adjoining our town,” turn left on College Street and return to historic downtown Newberry.