

Highland Cemetery Grave Iconography Tour 2

Arguably the most beautiful spot in Washtenaw County, Highland Cemetery offers an outstanding chance to examine 19th-century grave symbols. The following self-guided 2-hour tour highlights a range of some of the northern half of the cemetery's most interesting symbols. Numbers in the text correspond to the map.

Visitors can reach the cemetery by traveling down Washtenaw to its terminus on Huron. Turn left on Huron and right on Cross Street through Depot Town. At the remains of the Thompson Building at River, turn left. You will pass Forest Avenue and the ornate brick Swain home on the northeast corner of Forest and River. Continue down River; Highland Cemetery is a quarter mile down on the left.

Inside the main gates, open 8 a.m.-5 p.m. until April 30 and 8 a.m.-7 p.m. from May 1 to September 30, a small parking lot appears on the right. Park here and walk west to Starkweather Chapel at the end of the main driveway.

On the north (right) side of the chapel, three paths diverge. Take the middle path. A few steps down on the left is the grave of Maria Towler (1) with this barely legible poem:

[Remember] friends as you pass by

As you are now so once was I

As I am now, so you must be

Prepare for death and follow me.

From Towler's grave, cross west through this section of graves, to the opposite path.

Lying flat here on the ground is the grave of Mary wife of John Smith (2). It shows a **rose**, which when full-blown like Mary's can signify a person who died in the prime of life.

Just to the left of Mary's stone are a set of 4 graves (3) that tell the story of a man who married three times.

Crowning the third grave, for Otis Lee, is the legend, "Postmaster Lee."

Unlike some modern stones, 19th-century gravestones do not usually indicate occupations. Exceptions include military rank, political office, or occasionally religious office (and once in a great while, a trade). However, the job of local postmaster in Otis's era was a political office and coveted position, often hotly fought over in local

elections. Its appearance on Otis's grave is meant to indicate prestige in his community.

Flanking his grave are those of his three wives, Phebe, Lucy, and Minnie N. A careful examination of all four stones' death dates reveals that sometimes the spatial placement of stones tells a story. In this case, the stones are set in order of the deaths of all four people. One can see that Minnie, who died at age 44, nevertheless outlived her 72-year-old husband by three years.

Further down the path, Albert Coffman's grave (4) shows a **hand pointing to a book**. As seen on the previous tour, the book usually signifies the bible, and the pointing hand indicates faith.

Following the path's curve, one finds the grave of G. H. Griffith (5). Like Otis Lee's grave, Griffith's indicates his occupation: reverend. He died in 1832 at age 35.

Behind his grave is a pillar for the Weed family (6). It shows a book resting on a cushion, ringed with **ivy**, the evergreen that represents immortality or lasting memory. Nearby is a low monument showing three lambs nestled in sleep. A signifier of children's graves, the lambs refer to the tiny gravestones next to them. One is a double grave for two children. Nearly illegible, the inscription seems to say:

In memory of
[David M] Weed
who died August [18] 18[XX]
aged [15] months
Also of
Mary Ann
Who died Jan 20 18[XX] aged [2] months
Infant daughter of
[JR J W]
[ROLLIE V WEED]

Nearby a trio of graves for a man and his two wives (7) seem to tell a sad story. Edward Peal's wives Jennie and Roxcy Jane both died before him, and their ornate and beautiful—and likely expensive—graves are bordered in an intricate Greek key pattern. However, his own tiny grave is merely a rock with a polished face and his name, death date, and age of 75. One wonders whether he had no remaining children to provide a stone commensurate to his wives' beautiful stones, or if he was just a humble man who picked a humble grave for himself.

The nearby Scott and Willson obelisks (8 & 9) show unusual designs of **clasped hands** carved halfway up the monument. Clasped hands can indicate the unity of marriage, especially if the sleeves depicted are those of a man and woman, or signify a goodbye.

Circling back towards this section's starting point, one finds the 1878 grave of 21-year-old Sarah (10), wife of William H. Hayton. A poem on her grave reads:

*And I am like the flower
That blooms in fragrant May
When days of sickness find me
Then I shall fade away.*

Reenter the path at the starting point and follow it north, Shortly past the Phillips obelisk (11) on the right stands the double grave of Peter Miller and Catherine (12). Their names are carved on a shield which is surmounted by a **hand pointing to a scroll suspended from an arrow**. The scroll signifies the scroll of life, and the lethal arrow indicates mortality.

A bit further past the Miller grave is one for James H Phillips (13), showing a large **Masonic symbol** of compass and square resting on a book.

Continuing past the path that exits at left, and the Bacon obelisk at left directly after the leftward path, one finds at right the grave of Thomas Chicken (14). A martial eagle flanked by furled flags behind a shield hints that Thomas died in military service. A faint inscription on his stone reads, "Drowned while trying to rescue a comrade in Springfield, [ILL]. [June] 24, 1865, aged 24 years."

Slightly further down the path at left looms a huge white obelisk crowned by a green statue (15). This is Elijah Grant's monument, near the Brayton mausoleum. You might think that the tallest grave memorial in Highland Cemetery, after the Civil War Soldiers' memorial statue, honors a great philanthropist, doctor, scientist, statesman, or artist. Grant was a dry goods merchant who later made money in real estate.

Heading west past this marker and through this section, one finds near the path the grave of Helen May and next to it, that of her child (16). This poignant marker is unusual in being crowned with the white body of a nude sleeping child.

Entering this path and continuing westward, one passes at right the Dow obelisk. Nearby is the monument for Asa Dow's wife Minerva. It is said that the spirit of Minerva haunts the Ypsilanti Historical Museum, a claim that has been investigated

by no fewer than three paranormal societies. One volunteer at the Archives, who has written several articles about Minerva for the Historical Society's publication *Gleanings*, visits her grave every year on her birthday to place flowers. See if you can find the flowers at her grave.

Further westward, one passes at right a row of the titantic graves of the Norris family. The author has overheard one Highland visitor describe these massive graves as "Norrishenge." Behind them are the modest graves of Mark Norris, one of the early developers of Ypsilanti, and his wife.

Near the end of this section on the left is a striking grave showing a 6 and $\frac{1}{2}$ foot cross (17) twined with ivy and rising from a cairn of carved stones. Standing at this Henrich cross and looking to the south, one sees the unusual giant orb (18) marking the Cornwell family plot, where lies paper mill owner Cornelius Cornwell.

Heading west, turn left (19) onto the cemetery's rear path and walk past the section of newer graves at left to an intersection. At the grassy triangle, look left for the boulder-like Woodward grave (20). Gertrude Woodard, onetime U-M law librarian and the first licensed woman driver in Washtenaw County, lies here. She lived alone in the Huron Hotel on Pearl Street. When she died, it is said her living quarters were stacked to the ceiling with hoarded piles of newspapers, clippings, and other detritus.

Go up the leaf-covered path leading uphill from the Woodward grave and look for the Eliza Post grave (21), which shows another beautiful book-themed grave. Backtrack to the intersection of the paths and follow the westward one, with the section of newer graves at left. Follow it around the rightward curve and uphill, past the Meulbetch family plot at left. Look at left for the apparently home-made Snidecor grave (22), a strange concatenation of cemented rocks. Opposite it is the Sullivan family marker (23), showing the name framed by a rectangle formed by logs.

Follow the path around its bend at the northwestern end of the cemetery, which yields a beautiful vista. Continue around the bend. At left is another home-made grave (24), that of one Parrish, with no dates.

Continue along this path until you pass a large concrete wall leaning into the path from the right. Immediately after passing this wall, note the little leaf-covered switchback path at right. Take this path around its curve to the trio of Scovill-Jarvis graves (25). They provide a good example of a trio of hand iconography. These include **clasped hands**, the **up-pointing hand** pointing towards Heaven, and the **down-pointing hand holding a broken chain**, signifying the will of God in choosing the deceased, with the broken chain signifying a broken family link.

Backtrack from this path back to the gravel path. At the intersection, sight east between a large pine tree and a spreading evergreen. Look for a small grey stump, the grave of Lottie Reed (26), between them. An unknown artist made several such beautiful stump graves in cemeteries around Washtenaw County. The **stump** signifies a life cut down, or cut short.

Look east again for the large brown Ferrier obelisk at the center of this section and head there. On the way, you will pass the Worden graves (27), laying flat on the ground. These provide a feast of iconography in their four stones. Images include the hand with scroll and arrow, another scroll, and the handclasp. Try to find the stylized **crown**, signifying the glory of resurrection and life after death.

At the Ferrier obelisk (28), look east to St. John's cemetery across River Street. Walk in that direction until reaching the path and follow it left and downhill. Here, on the right, is a collection of graves (29) lying flat on the ground that represents one of the art treasures of Highland. These many exquisite graves offer a concentrated wealth of the iconography to be found throughout the rest of the cemetery: see how many symbols you remember.

To exit the cemetery, backtrack along this path and follow it south between the older and new sections back to the house and outbuildings and the chapel.

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Iconography Tour #2



