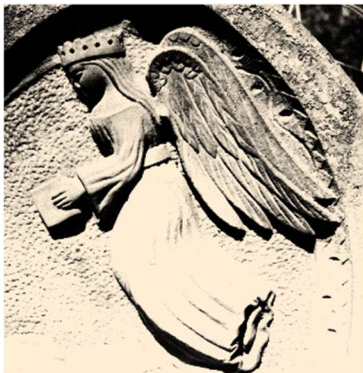


THE

CORNICE



*IN
THE*



G R O U N D

**125 Important Manitoba Gravemarkers
& The Victorian Culture of Death**

David Butterfield and Maureen Devanik

THE CORNICE IN THE GROUND

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& The Victorian Culture of Death

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2020

On the Cover: The main image is a view of St. Andrew's Anglican Church Cemetery, north of Winnipeg; the small image is a detail of a marker in St. John's Anglican Cathedral Cemetery in Winnipeg.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to our friends who have gone before

Paula Sargent
Graham Taylor
Manuela Dias
Christine Paulus
Jim Brown

And to our parents

Tannis Mulligan Devanik
Doris Courtney Butterfield
Stanley Devanik
Floyd Butterfield

PROJECT TITLE

The title for this project has been taken from a line in a poem by Emily Dickenson variously entitled *The Chariot* and *Because I Could Not Stop For Death*. The poem was published posthumously in *Poems: Series 1 in 1890*. Emily Dickenson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts on December 10, 1830 and died on May 15, 1886 – thus aged 55.

Because I could not stop for Death —
He kindly stopped for me —
The Carriage held but just Ourselves —
And Immortality.

We slowly drove — He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility —

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess — in the Ring —
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain —
We passed the Setting Sun —

Or rather — He passed Us —
The Dews drew quivering and Chill —
For only Gossamer, my Gown —
My Tippet — only Tulle —

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground —
The Roof was scarcely visible —
The Cornice — in the Ground —

Since then — 'tis Centuries — and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity —

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Introduction

"On Sundays he approaches his Maker by a series of ritualized steps, rising at dawn, taking a breakfast of tea and bread, then walking out, and in all weathers, to the burial grounds off the Quarry Road. Where my mother's solitary gravestone once sat, now rises a hollow tower some thirty feet in height and still growing. The stones that constitute its fabric have been chosen for their strength and beauty and for their effect on the overall design. A spiral of cantilevered stones protrudes, and these allow him to ascend the steep sides as easily as an insect or a lizard might scale a wall.

"More and more my father chooses to decorate the stone surfaces with elaborate cipher, even though Tyndall stone, with its mottled coloring, is thought to be resistant to fine carving. Patterns incised on this mineral form seem to evade the eye; you have to stand at a certain distance, and in a particular light, to make them out. This impediment is part of the charm for him. What he carves will remain half-hidden, half-exposed, and as such will reflect the capriciousness of the revealed world. Here he inscribes a few holy words, there the image of a bird, a flower, a fish, a face, a sun or moon. An angel half the size of his hand freezes on a worked limestone sky. A tiny stone horse grazes in a stony meadow. Cupids, mermaids, snakes, leaves, feathers, vines, bees, cattle, the curve of a rainbow, a texturing like skin – the tower is a museum of writhing forms."

An excerpt from Carol Shields' *The Stone Diaries* in which Daisy Goodwill's father builds a memorial to his wife, and her mother. Carol Shields won the 1993 Pulitzer Prize and the Canadian Governor-General's Award for Literature for this novel.

There is of course no such gravemarker in Manitoba – a thirty-foot-tall tower, with elaborate coded messages embedded in the stonework. But this eloquent description clearly establishes the two key attributes of nearly any gravemarker – first the creation of an eye-catching form and then of the inclusion of texts and symbols that can reveal meanings on close inspection. And while no Manitoba headstone can claim the kind of grandeur suggested in this passage from *The Stone Diaries*, there are many that obviously were created with that aspiration. As for the ciphered messages, many other Manitoba gravemarkers share this impulse – but without the highly individualized symbols; indeed, many markers include at least one (and sometimes several) images that are seen to illuminate the character of the deceased, but which are mysterious enough to require some kind of guidebook. This project is mainly about these two aspects that have attended the history of gravemarkers in Manitoba – the desire to create memorable markers and then to imbue them with meaningful thoughts and ideas about, and for, the dead.

Although humanity buried its dead in the early stages of history and with degrees of ritual that suggest forms of magical or religious belief in an after-life, many millennia elapsed before people began setting up markers to commemorate the deceased. There have been various interpretations regarding the meaning of the basic forms of the first Bronze Age gravemarkers (3200-600 B.C.), but scholarly thinking about the origins and meaning—at the earliest stage when a grave was identified by a *menhir*, a single standing stone—supports two theories. In the first, the *menhir* is thought to have suggested a phallus and thus have been connected to fertility rites. The second holds that the stone was connected to the cave or shelter and thus was a reminder of a dwelling, of a safe place for the dead.

In Manitoba, the thousands of years of history that attended the formal evolution of gravemarker design are distilled into the rich examples of the Victorians and Edwardians (the periods defined by the reigns of these two British monarchs, 1837-1901 and 1901-1910 respectively), which might be seen as the apex of Western funerary traditions. A familiar array of gravemarker forms can be found throughout the province—crosses, tablets, obelisks, towers, a few idiosyncratic novelties—each type with its own impressive history. The handful of materials used to fashion this impressive gallery of remembrance—wood, stone, metal—while apparently limited was nevertheless, in the hands of designers and craftsmen, worked up into thousands of distinctly different interpretations. And gravemarker texts and symbols, which give us insights into the lives and deaths of Manitobans buried over the past 200 years, are equally varied and intriguing. Each of these three important themes is addressed through the following entries.

While the impressive and enduring physicality of historic Manitoba gravemarkers is the focus of this project, it has one other goal – to connect these markers to the actual experience of death in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This latter feature is an important additional aspect of this project. Main texts or sidebars on facing pages will illuminate how our forebears dealt with dying—in an age when death was much more present—and how they developed the wealth of responses that they hoped would mitigate their losses. These sidebars—with three headings, *Victorian Funerary Traditions*, *Victorian Funerary Inventions* and *I Remember*—enhance an appreciation for how Manitobans lived and died over the course of a century in which our province was formed. There is often a temptation with this kind of project to highlight the rich and famous, and thus to use gravestones as a pretext to feature short biographies of the deceased – so that you can stand in front of the very bones of a famous person, and contemplate their accomplishments. That will not be the case for this project, although a few notables are featured—Louis Riel and James Richardson for example—but their stories are more about their deaths, not their lives. It must also be noted that this approach is not for the faint of heart – there are a few entries where observations or recollections of the day, especially about the act of dying, are shocking or disturbing.



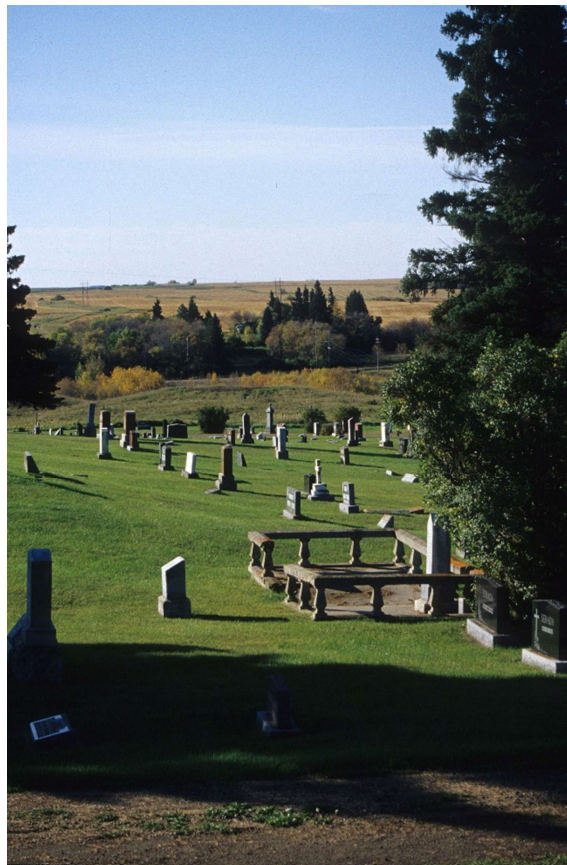
An exploration of Manitoba's historic gravemarkers, and of the funerary traditions that evolved in the 19th century, rests on three major social and cultural developments during this time: cemetery design, the Romantic movement in literature and art, and the effect on Queen Victoria of the death of her husband, Albert.

Until the late 18th and early 19th centuries, European and North American burials were invariably undertaken in cemeteries physically adjacent to a church building. But by the late 1700s and especially the early 1800s, burgeoning urban populations and a growing understanding of the spread of disease, led to a revolution in cemetery placements and design. By the early 19th century, authorities throughout Europe, armed with new scientific attitudes, began to observe that overcrowded church cemeteries, often in the hearts of communities, were sources of disease and polluters of groundwater supplies. And that the growing populations could not be buried there forever, no matter how creative they were in trying to solve this problem. The result of these powerful societal forces was the creation of what came to be called the garden cemetery. The consequent approach to cemetery location and design produced the kind of burial ground we are familiar with today – an “oasis” on the outskirts of the city with winding paths and a forested setting. It was the opposite of the crowded churchyard, and these new graveyards became an immediate success. In fact, they became so popular that they also assumed a role as public recreation areas. Here, people could enjoy the shaded walkways and fascinating monuments, while enjoying a picnic on weekend afternoons. Most of Manitoba's cemeteries, even many church graveyards, were developed with this garden cemetery approach, although it is the largest that come closest to a full expression of the type – at Brookside and Elmwood in Winnipeg, and smaller graveyards at Brandon and Portage la Prairie. At Brookside, grand formal gates, a meandering stream, towering trees, curving paths and almost 100,000 gravemarkers make it a textbook garden cemetery, and one worth exploring for a day or two.



Opposite page: A view of Argyle Cemetery, northwest of Brandon, suggests some of the typical forms, styles and materials that make a Manitoba graveyard and its markers so appealing and interesting.

This page, top: St. Andrew's Anglican Church and Cemetery, ca. 1889 (Archives of Manitoba). This image shows the typical church graveyard of the period, with a stone fence and studded, even packed, with tablet markers, likely of marble. Left: Minnedosa Cemetery is a charming little garden cemetery, and uses the hilly local topography to charming effect, allowing views to the grain fields beyond, and allowing closer views of the many interesting gravemarkers.



The Romantic era was an artistic, literary, musical and intellectual movement that originated in Europe towards the end of the 18th century, and in most areas was at its peak in the approximate period from 1800 to 1890. Romanticism was characterized by its emphasis on emotion and individualism, as well as glorification of the past and nature, preferring the medieval rather than the classical. It was partly a reaction to the Industrial Revolution, to the aristocratic social and political norms of the Age of Enlightenment, and the scientific rationalization of nature – all components of modernity. The movement emphasized intense emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience, placing new emphasis on such feelings as apprehension, horror and terror, and awe. Romanticism assigned a high value to the achievements of "heroic" individualists and artists, whose examples, it maintained, would raise the quality of society. It also promoted the individual imagination as its own critical authority, let loose from the strict classical notions of form in art.

The popularity of Romanticism was to find its perfect accompaniment in terms of funerary traditions with the death of the royal consort, Prince Albert, in December of 1861, said at the time to be due to typhoid, although recent research suggests cancer or Crohn's disease. Queen Victoria, then 42 years old, was devastated by the loss, and spent the rest of her long life in mourning, often in seclusion and always dressed in black. Her deep-felt and encompassing reaction to Albert's death fully embraced prevailing Romantic attitudes, and was raised to the highest levels by the nobility, and especially by the growing middle classes, which sought to emulate their high-born "betters." And these responses came to affect every aspect that could be associated with a death – from funeral-announcements cards and obituaries, to coffins, hearses and processions, to elaborate gravemarkers. The Victorians brought their enormous curiosity and ingenuity to bear on even the smallest details, and a smothering etiquette also came to attend all of this activity. All of these developments are recounted and explored in many of the entries that follow.



A shocking reminder of death and funerary traditions in Manitoba history – here young pallbearers and attendants pose with the coffin of one of their own – also a young child, presumably cut down by one of the typical epidemics of the day – perhaps diphtheria or scarlet fever. The faces are grim, tense, wary – for even as youngsters, they would know that this could also be their fate. (Archives of Manitoba)

There are two organizing and presentation principles used for this project. The first sees the contents divided up into four sections: Gravesites of the Red River Settlement; Gravesites of the Young Province; Gravesites of the Mature Province – City of Winnipeg; and Gravesites of the Mature Province – Town & Country. This organization groups gravemarkers of similar age, location and historical context, allowing for an easier appreciation of the specific qualities that defined each distinct period and place. The second approach uses chronology within each section so that the evolution of gravemarkers, of the various aspects associated with their design and manufacture, and of the many attendant issues of death and funerary development, are approached as they evolved over the 150 or so years under consideration here. The sharp-eyed reader will note 80 entries in the Table of Contents, not the 125 identified in the subheading of the project. This is not an editorial oversight – several of the main entries have been supplemented with other gravemarker examples. These 45 bonus examples ensure a deeper exploration of the subjects at hand.

This project has its origins in a major survey of cemeteries and gravemarkers undertaken by the authors between 2002 and 2005. One hundred and nineteen of the province's major community and church cemeteries, as well as 93 small and obscure burial grounds (thus to a total of 212 graveyards*), were visited over those four years. And more than 8,000 gravemarkers were photographed and catalogued as the primary objective of that initiative. This comprehensive and detailed inventory allowed us to explore nearly every possible gravemarker form, style and material used in Manitoba over the past 150 years. The inventory also allowed us, with great confidence, to identify major cultural and religious themes, as well as special and unusual examples. Ancillary historic funerary subjects also came into focus – cemetery designs, gravemarker symbolism, and epitaphs. The 125 subjects presented in this current project are just the most interesting and expressive of this vast and fascinating subject.



The 2002-05 cemetery inventory took in many cemeteries in northern Manitoba – at Thompson, Flin Flon, Nelson House, Norway House, Grand Rapids and The Pas, whose Lakeside Cemetery is featured here.

* The Manitoba Genealogical Society has enumerated at least 900 cemeteries in Manitoba, but many hundreds of these are only the resting places of early pioneers, either in single graves or in small family groupings, and mostly situated on private land.

Two final observations for those interested in their own investigations of Manitoba gravemarkers and cemeteries: The opening sections of this introduction imply the need for a guidebook to fully appreciate the various symbols that appear on many Manitoba gravemarkers. Some useful materials are available on-line, and a book entitled *Stories in Stone. A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography* (Douglas Keister, Salt Lake City, Utah: Gibbs Smith Publisher, 2004) is an excellent resource. But there is also a made-in-Manitoba publication, developed by the Carman-Dufferin Heritage Advisory Committee. Called *A Guide to Funerary Art in Manitoba*, and available in PDF format (3.2 MB), this 26-page, full-colour booklet, provides a great deal of information on the myriad symbols seen on our historic gravemarkers. The booklet is available by its title on-line, as well as on the Heritage Manitoba website (<http://heritagemanitoba.ca/>) under the content sections called "Tell the Story" and then "Resources and Guides." Also – the Manitoba Genealogical Society is a very important resource for anyone interested in gravemarkers and cemeteries. The Society maintains a database on nearly every Manitoba cemetery, with the texts of thousands of markers available to members.



A funeral at Sts. Vladimir and Olga Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral, September 6th, 1920. (Archives of Manitoba) The enormous crowd arrayed around the coffin—which may have been for a member of the clergy—is astonishing to contemporary eyes.