

Symbolism

Cemeteries are a rich source of information and art. Most historical information is located in the form of paper documentation maintained in the cemetery office. Historical artwork, however, is depicted throughout the cemetery grounds in the shape, size, and engravings found on each monument.

Monuments shapes and their engraved symbols each tell a story about the deceased individual: ethnicity, religion, association membership, occupation, genealogy, hobbies, cultural beliefs, and historical events.

Missoula City Cemetery contains a plethora of symbolism in its monuments and street names. Watchful eyes will find poetry, short stories, letters, genealogy lineage, photos, hobbies, scripture, occupations, culture, religion, statues, and more. Some symbols are commonly found throughout the cemetery along with two very unique monuments. The meanings of these symbols vary depending on cultural and religious belief. Symbolic meanings that stand out in Missoula City Cemetery are:

- **Street Names** – Faith, Hope, Charity, Laurel, and Rose each represent special meanings.
 - **Faith** – Belief in God.
 - **Hope** – Belief in not despairing with expectation of something better waiting.
 - **Charity** – Selfless, unconditional, and voluntary loving kindness.
 - **Laurel** – Tokens of peace, quiet.
 - **Rose** – Love, beauty. Five roses in a bunch signify the five wounds of Christ.
- **Monument Symbols**
 - **Cross** - Belief in God, salvation, redemption, sacrifice
 - **Praying Hands** – Prayer
 - **Open Book** - the Holy Bible, the Word of God
 - **Ivy** - Memory, fidelity
 - **Star of David** - Eternal divine protection
 - **Dove** - Peace, purity
 - **Wheat sheaves** - Eucharist, the body of Christ
 - **Lamb** - the Lord as the Good Shepherd, innocence (commonly denotes the grave of a child)
 - **Lily** - Purity, marriage, Christ's resurrection
- **Occupations and Labor Organizations** – each represented by their individual symbols.
- **Veterans** are represented by military monuments noting rank, title, and war service and can be found near the veteran's monument as well as throughout the grounds.

Missoula City Cemetery is home to many unique monument styles that depict history of events, religion, status, and culture.

- **Cement markers** – Small flat cement markers can be found throughout the cemetery. Cemetery staff poured small flat slabs of cement, roughly stamped a surname and year of death into the cement and then placed the marker on a gravesite for identification purposes. Over the course of the life of the cemetery many of these markers have become overgrown with sod and are only recovered after light probing with a shovel. These markers can be quite deceiving in the stories they tell. The majority of these markers tell tales of poverty, epidemics, or class status. However, others represent the expiration of an entire family, a feud carried to the grave and wealthy individuals forgotten by their descendants. Today many descendants are replacing these old markers with new monuments.
- **Above ground burial crypts** – These burial sites contain the full casket of an individual within a multi-chamber system above ground. Historically, these monuments were built for those with high status or wealth. Many older cemeteries have quite elaborate mausoleum crypts including elaborate buildings the size of many smaller homes. These buildings are decorated with

symbolism inside and out. Missoula City Cemetery is home to three relatively modest above ground crypts; two directly across from the cemetery office and one along the north fence line.

- **Iron cross** – An iron cross is located directly across from the cemetery office. This marker was common among the Germans from the Russia area. The Germans migrated to the steppes of Russia where there were no trees; therefore, they made iron markers. No two markers were the same. Generally, markers never noted personal information on them. Only the family was to know who was buried under the cross. This cross is unique because it has a ceramic plate noting in German that August Trautwein lies there. The iron cross in Missoula City Cemetery is the only one of its kind found in western Montana.
- **Victorian monument** – Missoula City Cemetery is home to only one Victorian monument belonging to Daniel Kendall (1847-1898). Victorian monuments were known for their elaborate symbolism and were placed on graves of highly esteemed or greatly loved individuals. This monument is located directly across from the cemetery office. Its symbolic meanings represent the cultural and religious beliefs of an 1800s family. The monument is covered in the following symbols:
 - **Ivy** – eternal memory
 - **Lily** – Eve’s tears as she left the Garden of Eden
 - **Anchor** – another symbol of the cross
 - **Dove** – peace, love
 - **Nest** - home
 - **Eggs in nest** – rebirth, Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)
 - **Fern** – renewal, rebirth
 - **Rope** – ladder to Heaven
 - **Tree Trunk** – renewal, rebirth
 - **Drapery on urn** – mourning, sadness
 - **Forget-me-nots** – remembrance
 - **Scroll** – petition to God to accept this soul

Researched by Mary Ellen Stubb, Missoula City Cemetery Administrative Manager and Paulette Parpart, Missoula City-County Library genealogist. Information sources: “Stories in Stone” by Douglas Keister and historical cemetery documents on file with Missoula City Cemetery.