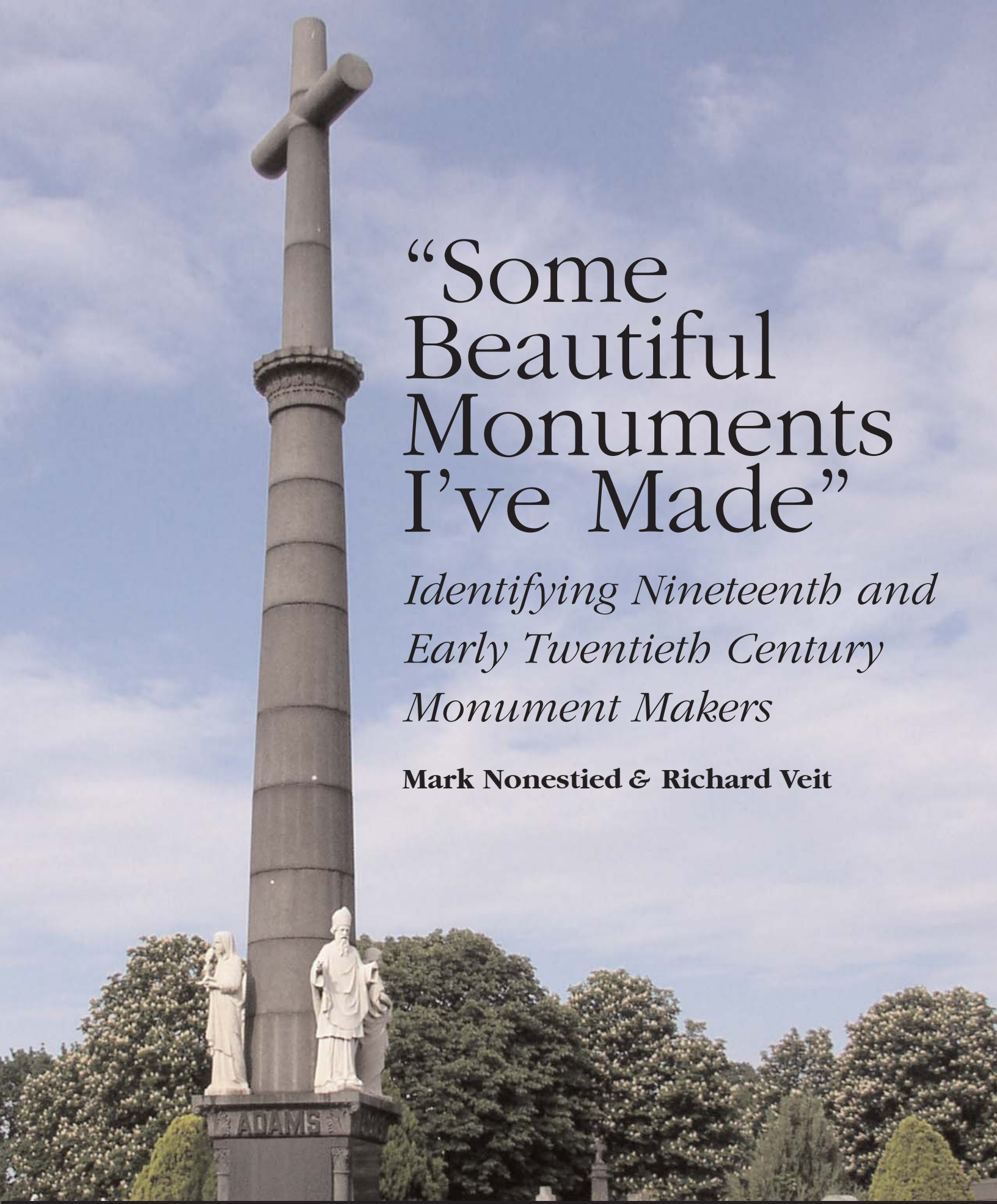

"Some Beautiful Monuments I've Made"

Identifying Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Monument Makers

Mark Nonestied & Richard Veit

Figure 1: This massive monument erected in Holy Name Cemetery in Jersey City in 1916 is for Martin Adams. Adams was a Jersey City monument dealer whose work can be found in many area cemeteries. The column is topped with a granite cross. Carrara marble statuary was added on the pedestal. Martin Adams died in 1927, eleven years after the monument was built.

Introduction

In 1899, Jersey City monument dealer Martin Adams placed an advertisement in the local city directory proclaiming that he was the "Monument Maker." In addition to this brash statement, Martin added the following whimsical poem to one of his advertisements; the first four lines are as follows:

In presenting my claims for recognition
I hope you will carefully read my petition;
I have selected this space to solicit some trade
And tell of some beautiful Monuments I've made
(1899-1900 Jersey City Directory, 68)

Martin Adams considered himself a purveyor of beautiful monuments, a trade where in his words, "business comingled with art." His own monument, erected in 1916, certainly solidified his claim as the monument maker. Located in Holy Name Cemetery in Jersey City, the sixty-three foot granite shaft, topped by a large granite cross was made from columns salvaged from the old Astor Hotel in New York City (*Veit & Nonestied, 2008:150*) (figure 1). The towering monument came towards the end of what was over a century of monument evolution, a period that saw a dramatic shift in the forms of cemetery commemoration — a shift from markers to monuments. This article will explore this shift and examine some stunning examples of the monument maker's art that can be found in New Jersey.

Monuments versus Gravestones

The predominant form of commemoration in the eighteenth century was a gravestone–a tablet of stone that was erected vertically in the ground (figure 2). The front side of the stone was reserved for the inscription and was sometimes decorated. This style of marker persisted well into the nineteenth century.

In addition to gravestones, during the first decades of the

Figure 2: The Yellow Frame Meeting House in Monmouth County contains an impressive collection of eighteenth and early nineteenth century gravestones. A Gravestone, a single slab of stone erected vertically in the ground was the main form of commemoration from this period. Most extend well below ground. Larger monuments were increasingly erected in cemeteries by the mid nineteenth century; several examples can be seen in the left side of the photograph.

nineteenth century, three dimensional monuments were also produced (figure 3). Instead of carving one surface, these markers were carved in the round — on all sides. While some were nothing more than boxy squares, others exhibited sculptural elements such as columns, urns and inverted torches. These styles would continue to develop in the nineteenth century creating some stunning sculptural elements.

Monument Description

Monuments can be complex, a series of sections and various pieces brought together to create the memorial. Late nineteenth century and early twentieth century trade catalogs defined the sections of a monument as follows. The lowest portion was the base and if the memorial consisted of several bases, they were defined as first base, second base, and so forth (*Sample 1919.8*). The next section was a rectangular block of stone often called a die, pedestal or base that was reserved for the inscription. The die may be topped with a cap stone, a shaft, statuary or other ornamentation. Some, like the Neilson family monument are simplistic, while others, like that of the Kohbertz monument, are the essence of nineteenth century Victorianism (figures 4, 5 and 6).

Figure 3 (above): Located in the Alexandria Presbyterian Cemetery, the Bunn Monument exemplifies the transition from gravestones to monuments during the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Figure 4 (above right): This boxy monument was erected for Catherine Neilson (d.1815). Carved by American sculptor John Frazee while at his New Brunswick shop, the marble monument was one of the earliest in New Brunswick and may have had a sculptural element on the top. In 1921, the monument and the Neilson family's graves were moved from the Presbyterian Burial Ground in New Brunswick to Van Liew Cemetery in North Brunswick. There the monument can be seen today.

Figure 5 (right): The Frederick Kohbertz (d. 1872) Monument located in Maple Grove Cemetery, Hackensack, is the essence of Victorian eclecticism in the decades after the Civil War. Erected in various sections, the monument consists of a shaft topped by an elaborate draped urn. There is even a marble bust of Frederick under glass just above the pedestal.

Figure 6 (right inset): Detail of the Kohbertz monument, showing the bust of Frederick Kohbertz (d. 1872) under glass.

Figure 7: This family plot with an elaborate cast iron enclosure is located in the Succasunna cemetery. Family plots became popular during the Rural Cemetery Movement.

Proliferation of Monuments

The proliferation of monuments parallels the development of the Rural Cemetery Movement, a movement in cemetery design that transformed the way society buried its dead. By the early nineteenth century crowded church graveyards were soon replaced with new, larger and well landscaped park-like cemeteries that were situated on the outskirts of urban areas. For more on this movement and early New Jersey burial grounds and cemeteries see *New Jersey Cemeteries and Tombstones: History in the Landscape* by Richard Veit and Mark Nonestied.

Although some of the earliest monuments can be found in churchyards, it was the Rural Cemetery Movement that encouraged their use by designing burial grounds with family lots instead of single burial plots as often found in older churchyards. The large size of family lots permitted the erection of more substantial monuments (figure 7). A common arrangement was the erection of a large central family monument with smaller stones situated around the memorial - marking the individual burials.

Figure 8: Marble became the predominant stone material for gravemarkers in the nineteenth century. In the sandstone belt region of Central and Northern New Jersey however, this light brown to reddish colored stone remained popular longer. The monument for Maria Mercer Talmage (d. 1838) was carved from a light colored sandstone. Located in the Old Somerville Cemetery the monument is a good example of a regional material utilized for a new style of commemoration.

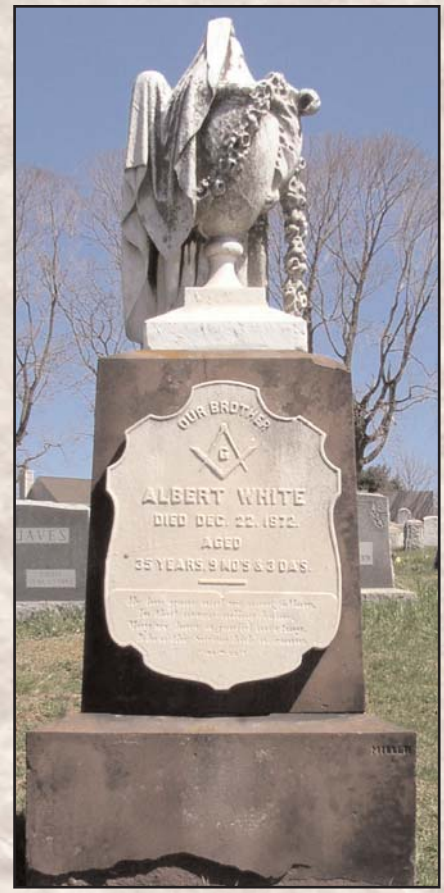

Figure 9: The monument for Albert White (d. 1872) is signed Miller on the base and may be the work of A.H. Miller a Lambertville monument dealer. Located in the Union Cemetery in Milford the memorial combines both sandstone and marble elements.

Monument Materials

The predominant stone material employed for gravemarkers in central and northern New Jersey during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was a brown to reddish colored sandstone. This material was replaced in the nineteenth century by marble and later granite. It is interesting to note however, that some monument makers continued to utilize sandstone well into the nineteenth century (figure 8 and 9). Some like the Talmage monument in the Old Somerville Cemetery is created entirely out of the material. Its juxtaposition against a backdrop of highly polished white marble must have been eye catching.

Although sandstone monuments exist in New Jersey, marble however, was the predominant material of the nineteenth century. The stone came from sources in the United States, especially in the states of Pennsylvania and Vermont, and later from other countries as well. Marble was used extensively for monuments in New Jersey, but unfortunately over time the material has suffered from the effects of erosion and acid rain, leaving the surface grainy, uneven, and stained. In urban areas, where a century of pollutants have done damage, it is sometimes difficult to imagine these memorials as they would have originally appeared with a brilliant white, highly polished surface. To a cemetery visitor in the nineteenth century they must have been awe inspiring.

Granite was also introduced into the cemetery landscape in the mid-nineteenth century and replaced marble as the material of choice by the close of the nineteenth century. A host of factors including new technology, a growing workforce, industrial wealth and new transportation routes aided in the development and growing popularity of granite (*Veit & Nonestied 2008:158 and Granite, Barre, Vermont USA 1904*).

Granite was quarried in the New England States and later

Figure 10: Early granite monuments, mainly dating from the mid-nineteenth century, have been documented in New Jersey. They are simple and often consist of a base and a die that is topped with a shaft.

from other areas as well, including the Lexington-Oglesby Blue Granite belt in Georgia. New technology such as pneumatic drills and large derricks made it possible to quarry and process the dense stone for a growing market. New rail transportation routes enabled the stone to be shipped to monument markers around the country.

Granite was first introduced into the New Jersey cemetery landscape during the mid nineteenth century mostly in the form of bases for marble markers (*Veit & Nonestied 2008:161*). Numerous examples have been documented in the state. By the time of the Civil War granite memorials begin to make an appearance. Most are in the form of a base, die and shaft (figure 10). Others like the Roebling Monument incorporated more ornate design features (figure 11). These early granite memorials should be catalogued and special attention should be given to examining the monument for manufacturers' names.

Figure 11: The John Roebling monument in Riverview Cemetery in Trenton is an example of an early granite memorial. The sarcophagus style marker harkens back to classical designs and was quite ornate as compared to other examples from this period. The monument was created by Batterson Canfield & Company of Hartford, Connecticut.

Figure 12: The historically important Juliana Latrobe (d. 1801) monument in St. Andrew's Cemetery, Mount Holly is an example of one of the earliest monuments in New Jersey. The image of a butterfly emerging from a cocoon was a radical departure from motifs utilized on other stones of this period.

Evolution of Monuments

In New Jersey, nineteenth and early twentieth century monuments are understudied. Cemetery research in this state has mostly centered on the eighteenth-century carving traditions, leaving the monuments of the nineteenth century a ripe field to contribute to. While the eighteenth century produced examples of America's earliest form of folk art, the nineteenth century was this country's earliest interaction with the fine arts — especially sculpture. Well known American sculptors like New Jersey born John Frazee got their start creating cemetery memorials. Examining monuments opens a window into these early artists and the work they created.

One of the earliest monuments in New Jersey was erected for four year old Juliana Latrobe (d. 1801), the daughter of Philadelphia architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe. The stone is a short squat monument that contains carvings on each side including an impressive resurrection image of a butterfly emerging from a cocoon (*Veit & Nonestied 2008:116 and Van Horne and Formwalt 1984:340*) (figure 12).

The Latrobe stone represents New Jersey's earliest transition from markers to monuments and during the following decades monuments were increasingly erected in churchyards by wealthy individuals. Most were carved from marble and were a stark contrast to the simple gravestones erected within the burial ground. It is also worth noting that a design similar to the one Latrobe used to commemorate his daughter's untimely death, would later be used on a much broader scale, sans butterfly and cocoon, to mark the graves of congressmen commemorated by cenotaphs in Washington D.C.'s Congressional Cemetery.

The Latrobe monument and others that would follow were inspired by classical designs. A heavy influence of Roman, Greek and Egyptian motifs contributed heavily to the cemetery landscape. Among them is a monument in the First Reformed Dutch Church of Hackensack and the Lawrence Monument at Yellow Frame Meeting House in Monmouth County (figures 13 & 14).

Interest in Egyptian architecture peaked during the early decades of the nineteenth century. By the 1840s, stone obelisks began to dot the cemetery landscape (figure 15). The earliest examples in New Jersey were often placed on flat, almost flush-to-the ground bases, while later examples tend to have multiple bases (*Veit & Nonestied 2008:118*).

Figure 13: This monument, located in the First Reformed Dutch Church of Hackensack, is a good example of the influence of classical designs on mortuary art during the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

Figure 14: The monument for Mary Lawrence (d. 1834) is located in the Yellow Frame Burial Ground in Monmouth County. When this marker was erected in the 1830s it stood in stark contrast to the older gravestones that surrounded it.

Figure 15: The Obelisk for the Dows family in the Jersey City and Harsimus Cemetery, Jersey City. John C. Dows drowned in the 1850s after falling overboard from the clipper ship *Sea Serpent*.

By the mid-nineteenth century more complex monuments were erected in New Jersey cemeteries. They consisted of multiple bases, pedestals, shafts and statuary. Examples have been catalogued in New Jersey's earliest cemeteries from the Rural Cemetery Movement. Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Newark has a large collection of pre Civil War monuments, many created by stone carvers in Newark (figures 16 & 17).

Monuments continued in popularity after the Civil War but began to detach stylistically from the classically inspired examples seen earlier. Monuments of the 1870s and 1880s often typified the excess and eclecticism of the Victorian period. Although new styles of Gothic revival appeared, others were

Figure 16: Several monuments located in Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Newark. The two marble monuments are from the mid-nineteenth century.

Figure 17 (right): The Morrison family monument, circa 1860, was created by the Newark monument firm of Passmore and Meeker.

Figure 18: The Woolverton Family plot in the Alexandria Presbyterian Cemetery in Hunterdon County was produced by Henry Tarr, a well known Philadelphia monument dealer. The family plot consists of a large central monument topped with a draped urn. The front enclosure to the plot is a marble fence that swoops downward at the entrance. Two marble urns on pedestals flank the entrance. The individual stones within the family plot are equally impressive including that of Elizabeth Woolverton, who died in the 1840s. Her stone consists of a reclining child on a bed. The Woolverton plot is a good example of the excessively elaborate mortuary art that was produced during the nineteenth century.

a hodge podge of sections brought together to create the memorial. Examples like that of the Frederick Kohbertz Monument (figures 5 and 6) and the Woolverton Monument (figure 18) typify the period. Monuments for children also flourished in the nineteenth century. The Isabel Bonnell (d. 1891) monument in Whitehouse is a great example of parents' grief translated into stone (figure 19).

Mausoleums

The apex of monument style would perhaps be the mausoleum. Chapter 9 of *New Jersey Cemeteries and Tombstones:*

Figure 19: This monument for Isabel Bonnell was most likely carved by her father Robert Bonnell a Whitehouse New Jersey stonecarver. Known as a cradle grave, the monument features a headstone, side rails and a footstone. Numerous devices are carved upon its surface including a hand with a baby rattle, child's shoes, several likenesses of Isabel and a Viking ship. It is not known where the carver drew his inspiration from, but the scene of the Viking ship also known as a crossing over scene, was reproduced from a popular print and is identical to one made available through the Monumental Bronze Company Catalog crafted by artist Archibald McKellar (*Gabel, 2011 AGS Conference*). The Bonnell monument is an outstanding memorial for a child and is among the best of its type in the state.

History in the Landscape traced the development and evolution of mausoleums in New Jersey. The Krueger Mausoleum in Fairmount Cemetery in Newark epitomized the height of this trend (figure 20).

By the early twentieth century large scale monuments were on the decline. The excess of the Victorian era began to lose appeal as different attitudes towards death took shape. By the time Martin Adams erected his masterpiece in 1916, large monuments in New Jersey were waning.

The Memorial Park Movement of the 1920s and 1930s emphasized smaller flush to the ground memorials. Consumer attitudes also shifted as smaller more modest memorials became the standard, replacing the ostentatious forms from the past. Massed produced memorials placed in standard rows, a perpetual Levittown, became the characteristic of the modern cemetery.

Figure 20: The Gottfried Krueger mausoleum in Newark's Fairmount Cemetery is a spectacular example of a nineteenth-century mausoleum. Designed in a neo-classical style, it towers above its neighbors, reflecting the financial success of Krueger's brewery, which was the first in the nation to successfully can beer. Completed in 1899, the original plans show room for thirty-eight crypts.

Identifying Gravestone Carvers

In *New Jersey Cemeteries and Tombstones: History in the Landscape*, the authors provide a lengthy list of carvers who were active in New Jersey and have attempted to catalog known works. Through historic documents and cataloguing known signatures on markers it is possible to identify many of the artisans actively producing monuments in nineteenth-century New Jersey. Signatures generally appeared near the base of the monument at what has sometimes been called the grass line and were carved using small shallow fonts (figures 21 through 27).

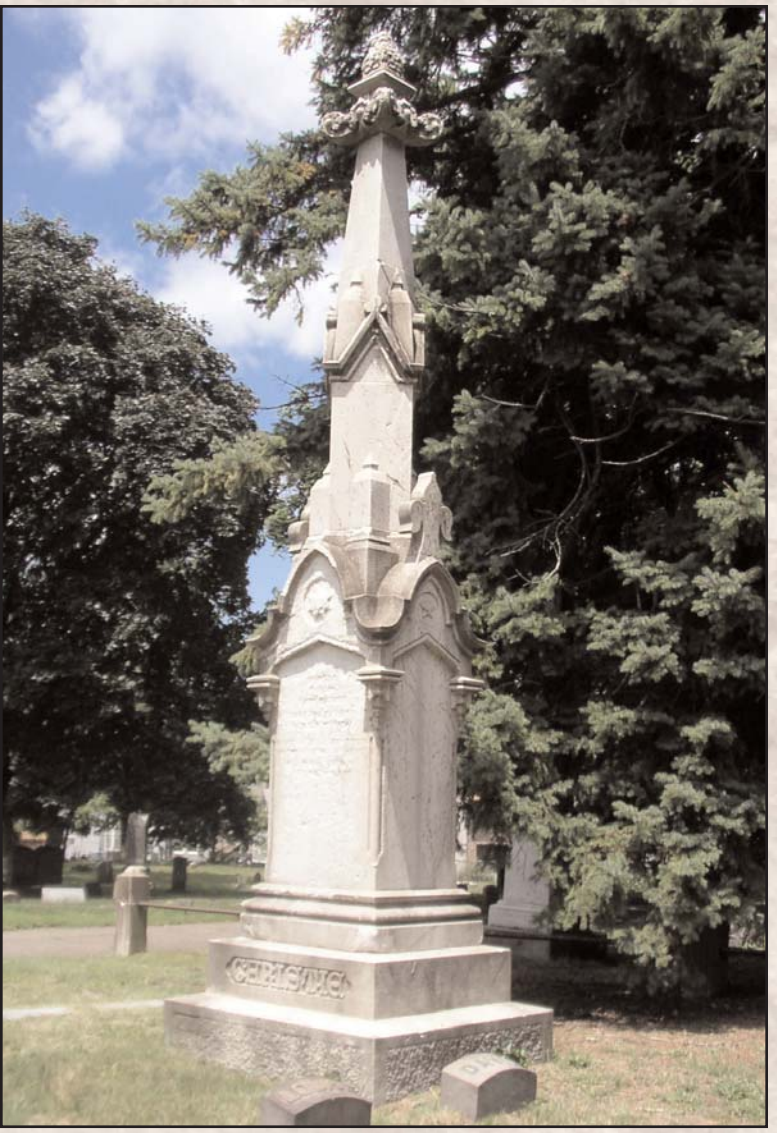

Figure 21 (left): This gothic revival monument is located in Maple Grove Cemetery in Hackensack. It is the work of the New York firm Sinclair and Milne. Their signature also contained the firms address.

Figure 22 (above): Detail of the signature for the monument at left. The firm's address is noted.

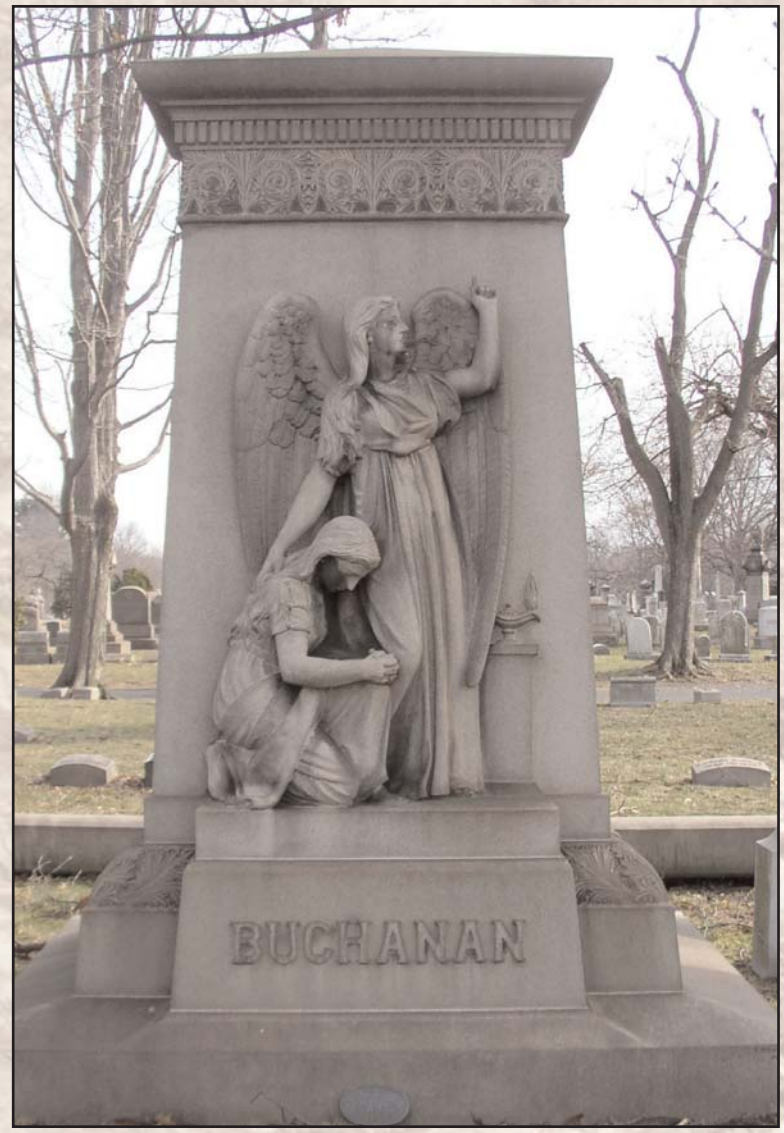

Figure 23: This granite memorial for the Buchanan family is located in Riverview Cemetery in Trenton. It is signed by the Philadelphia firm of T. Delahunty.

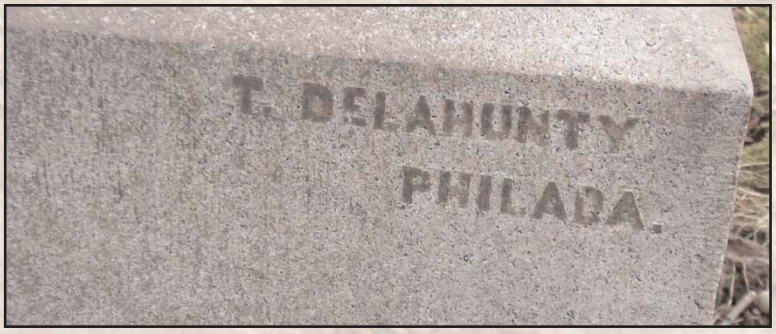

Figure 24: Detail of the signature for Thomas Delahunty.

Figure 25: The signature of Batterson Canfield & Company, Hartford Connecticut on the Roebling monument in Riverview Cemetery in Trenton.

Figure 26: The Speeler monument in Riverview Cemetery in Trenton was carved by John Conroy whose shop was located on Greene Street between State and Front in Trenton.

Figure 27. C. T. Duncomb was a prolific Newark stone carver during the mid-nineteenth century. Duncomb utilized classical motifs and favored inverted torches. Markers carved by Duncomb have been documented as far south as Bonaventure Cemetery in Georgia.

Historic Records

When historic documents survive, they may provide significant insights into the cost and production of historic gravemarkers. Take, for instance, the Gibbons family's graves in Madison's Bottle Hill Cemetery. These are exceptionally high style mid-19th century monuments that are associated with a very wealthy family. In 1802, Thomas Gibbons, a wealthy planter from Savannah Georgia relocated to Elizabeth, New Jersey where he became even wealthier through his association with Hudson River ferries. At his death in 1826 his son William succeeded him in the ferry business. In 1832, William and his wife Abigail Louise Taintor of Windham Connecticut purchased a large property known as the Forest, in Madison, New Jersey. Ultimately, that property would become the home of Drew University. When Mrs. Gibbons died in 1844 her husband purchased a mahogany coffin from Silas Miller for $35.00, had Joseph Burrel dig the grave for $3.00, and hired a horse and carriage for $10.00. The hearse cost an additional $5.00. He also contracted with Amos Wilcox, a Newark stone carver to produce a fitting memorial (figure 28). These letters, quoted at length below, survive in the Gibbons family papers at the Methodist Archives, Drew University. The first, dated January 10th 1845 reads in part:

I am now engaged in making some working drawings for the Monument (Abbey Louise). The principal block I have got and is not under process of sawing at the mill...The cutting process will not commence for some days yet. Therefore all the plans will be maintained and your assent before the artist begins to seek for any ornament or device that may lie concealed within the circumference of the marble section.

A second letter, dated April 14, 1845 reads, "The letters on the Monument will all be capitals only differing in size according to taste as is our usual course when we mean to be particular. In your next communication you will please inform me if I have copied the inscription correct (very important)."

Figure 29: The Abby Louisa Taintor monument, Madison's Bottle Hill Cemetery. A fine example of a mid-nineteenth century monument.

After noting the inscription, the letter continues, "I am not positive whether the name in your inscription is Taintor or Tainter believing it to be tor and also I would call your attention to the name Gibbons after Taintor in as much as it is below." Finally, on August 30th, 1845, Wilcox wrote a third letter, this one was the bill for one thousand dollars for the monument erected to the memory of Mrs. Gibbons in the cemetery at Madison. He noted apologetically, "I am fearful that you may be under the impression that I have charged and received too much for the same. I have gone over all my calculations and find that it is right..." William Gibbons responded on September 2, 1845, noting, "You allude again to the cost of the monument and your calculations upon it. I have not doubted it but I have thought it remarkable when an estimate is given for $600 that the bill should reach $1000. I do not represent to say the monument is not worth $1000 but no management can be made of a man's money matters when he provides for $600 and has to pay $1000."

Conclusion

Monument makers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century filled the cemetery landscape with wonderful examples of their handiwork. Many of these monuments continue to tower over the graves of those they commemorate providing modern historians with a material glimpse of nineteenth century America's social structure. In these gardens of eternal repose, we see markers replaced by monuments, burial grounds replaced by cemeteries and the hopes and aspirations of Victorian New Jerseyan's fossilized in stone. Moreover, these monuments are examples of a unique form of privately commissioned publicly displayed art that in many cases can be associated with known artisans.

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