

Monumental Meaning-making: Interpreting Westport,  
Ontario's Cemeteries

by

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## **Abstract**

Geertz's interpretation and Blumer's symbolic interactionism, along with narrative and memory theories, provide a theoretical framework from which to apprehend the cemetery as a place reflecting the changing needs and beliefs of the living and the dead. A literature review furnishes a context for the meanings ascribed to the cemetery as a place, the stones, their symbols, and what people do in cemeteries, but also identifies a lack of academic research specific to Ontario, Canada. In 2015, I studied symbolism in Canada's Christian cemeteries in Westport, Ontario, noting commonalities and differences. Connections between the living and dead, family and community are made in the cemetery and are maintained by what people do and the objects they deposit. Variations over time identify new concerns, focusing less on death and more on the individual. This research offers a snapshot of the state of monumental meaning making in rural Ontario in 2015.

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## **Introduction**

I have observed that the symbolism used on Ontario's gravestones post 1980s is quite different than in the preceding 150 years of European settlement. What do the messages on gravestones do and what do these changes signify? How do the stones affect people, their memories, their practices, and their communities? The enduring quality of gravestones is such that their messages and symbols last for centuries, yet there are few academic resources on cemetery symbolism in Ontario. There is, therefore, an opportunity to expand our knowledge of cemetery symbolism, tracking change from the arrival of European settlers to 2015, to investigate what changes have occurred and why they are significant. To address these questions, I studied cemetery symbolism from the 1840s to 2015 additions, I asked people about their choices of stones for their loved ones, I took notice of the objects that visitors deposit on gravesites, and observed how people behave in relation to cemeteries and gravestones.

### **Why Cemetery Symbolism?**

The burial of a human body or its cremated remains in community cemeteries is a common practice in Ontario. Located amidst the population served, the cemetery continues to serve the needs of the living as a place of contact with the deceased. The graves within are part of a liminal space made sacred by ritual. Monuments inscribed with symbols imbedded with layers of meaning await the visitor's interpretation.

Understanding those symbols and their meanings are inescapably interpretive. Ontario's cemeteries are filled with the symbols chosen by generations of people and often engender strong emotions among visitors. Personal, familial and community narratives are transmitted in cemeteries from one generation through embodied rituals, engraved tombstones, and objects of remembrance. Ritual creates and reinforces community, sanctifies landscape, provides comfort, and creates a formally delineated space for memory. As a site in which monuments, rituals, objects, and the meanings these have for the community intersect, the cemetery is a place particularly worthy of anthropological study.

Ontario's cemeteries do not appear to have been much studied from a cultural anthropological perspective. The province's historical cemeteries have been studied by architects, who tended to focus on markers of architectural importance or belonging to graves of individuals important to the community, and archaeologists, who were most interested in the contents of graves. This study will examine a group of cemeteries that serve an entire Ontario village community, and will include the monuments and objects of the rich and poor alike. Extending the study of monuments from the opening of the cemetery to the present was a deliberately inclusive decision that was intended to gather data, while possible, from family members and friends to better inform our understanding of how they memorialize their dead. While anthropologists have long studied the memorialization practices of 'Others', this study will apply the anthropological lens to an area close to my home. In addition to the symbols and text found on the monuments themselves, I also examine the ways people behave in cemeteries and the objects they leave behind. Families and friends visit cemeteries, moving through the cemetery space

in a culturally prescribed manner, and bringing objects such as flowers or figurines to leave on the grave. Few scholars have studied the items left in Canadian cemeteries by visitors; this is an area to which my research adds much detail.

In the last few years I have visited dozens of Christian cemeteries in Ontario and have noticed that the way Christians are choosing to memorialize their dead has changed dramatically. Where 19<sup>th</sup> century and most early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century gravestones feature traditionally religious motifs such as lambs and angels, increasingly individualized and secular motifs begin to appear in the 1970s and in these first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have become common, in part because of changes in technology. Individualized and secular motifs observed in Ontario cemeteries include aerial photographs of farms, pictures of family pets, wild animals/nature, and photographs of the deceased. Beyond the gravestones themselves, the area around the stone can also be decorated quite elaborately with items such as floral arrangements, cupid statues, poetry, and sometimes offerings of drink, tobacco, or companion animal effigies. There still are traditional motifs and messages in use and there are graves with no markers at all. The differences between traditional and individualized symbols are significant because they may well be indicative of larger societal trends such as the celebration of the individual or reduced attachment to community groups. What factors lead to the selection of a particular stone or motif? What meanings are being made when people choose stones for themselves or their loved ones? How do these stones connect the living to the dead, the dead to the community, and both to the heavens? How are kinship and social relations inscribed in stone? How do people act around the stones and in the cemetery? How do the stones shape the processes of memory, grieving, and identity? How does the cemetery fit into its

community? These are some of the questions that prompted my exploration of the perceived changes in mortuary symbolism.

In order to address these questions, I conducted a survey of four cemeteries, grave markers, and associated objects in a methodical fashion, and where possible, spoke to people involved in the process of the selection and design of stones. My intent was to study all of the cemeteries serving a village, and the monuments of everyday Canadians to learn about what was and is important to them. Because they are sacred and yet at the same time commonplace, personally significant and yet often generic, cemeteries and the messages they hold reveal much about beliefs, behaviour and social norms. My single most important research finding was the importance of connection. I learned that the cemetery is a place where connections are made and maintained, knitting social networks together across time through text, image, and action. In cemeteries and around gravesites, family bonds are renewed and reaffirmed. Faith and friendship, associations and service are recorded in stone for the world to see. Connections are also made between the past and the present with a view to the future. Gifts of flowers and poetry, angels and lights are left at the graveside to maintain the ties of love and hope for eventual reunification. Another important observation was how the emphasis of recorded messages and images has changed from group and religious affiliation to the individual and secular. Marital survival is stressed in the increased inclusion of wedding dates, overlapped rings, and paired roses. Decreased infant mortality is a significant health improvement that is readily visible in Westport's cemeteries, this trend can be seen in the reduced number of individuals less than 18 years of age interred after the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The standardization of grammar and name spellings illustrates a greater access to education.

The cemeteries of Westport offer a rich record of the importance of all of these themes in the deliberately deposited gifts left at gravesides and the physical stone, statue, or structure placed by or over a grave in memory of deceased individuals, couples or families.

Some terms used throughout this paper may have different meanings to other writers therefore I offer the following clarifications. I define a *monument* as long lasting devices such as head stones or wooden crosses used to mark the graves of individuals, couples, or families. Grave markers, gravestones, and tombstones are other terms used in this paper as synonyms to monument. The term *memorial* is often used synonymously with monument, but can also refer to sites of national importance such as the Vietnam War Memorial. Other uses include roadside memorials such as ghost bicycles, some of which are permanent installations and others temporary, but do not necessarily mark a grave. Unless otherwise specified, I have limited my use of the word *memorial* to sites of national importance.

*Community* is another term that I use throughout this work. Steven Brint (2001), a sociologist at the University of California, Riverside, defines communities as “aggregates of people who share common activities and or beliefs and who are bound together principally by relations of affect, loyalty, common values and/or personal concern” (p. 8). Brint (2001) lists eight community subtypes including “communities of place, communes and collectives, localized friendship networks, dispersed friendship networks, activity-based elective communities, belief-based elective communities, imagined communities and virtual communities” (p.11). The population of the village and the area it serves forms the larger community within which there are many other overlapping and

intersecting communities. Churches and their parishioners form communities of worship. There are communities identified by their ethnicity and communities that are centered around service groups. Age cohorts also form their own communities. Year-round residents are a community as is the community of summer residents who return year after year. People will identify with a number of different communities within the larger community as well as communities outside, all of which have differing standards of commitment and expectation (personal communication, T. Sherwood, 22 September, 2016).

It is also important to clarify my differentiation between religious and secular imagery and references. According to Victor Turner (1967, p. 50), and as will be seen in the discussion that follows, many symbols are multi-vocal, and have multiple meanings (Turner, 1967, p.50). Therefore, it is possible that a secular image may have religious meanings as well. Overtly religious symbols such as the cross or themes such as the phrase “asleep in the arms of Jesus” cannot be mistaken for secular. For the purposes of this paper, secular imagery and references are described as those that are not overtly religious. Therefore, “Rest in peace”, because it is commonly used in religiously-affiliated burial rituals, is considered to be a religious phrase. “Gone Fishin’” is secular. The sun shines on Christians and atheists alike, therefore the sun shining through trees is not solely or overtly a religious symbol. A cross with rays of light streaming from it is religious. These differentiations are imperfect and not absolute, but they do form a useful framework for identifying and understanding some of the changes observed in late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century grave markers.

## **Chapter 1: Methodology**

In the months of June, July, and August 2015, I studied the symbolism within four cemeteries in Westport, Ontario. It rapidly became apparent that such a study entails understanding the cemetery as a place, the cemetery as a collection of material objects, the people who visit cemeteries, and what they do while in the cemetery. Reading headstones, talking with participants about those stones, and understanding the cemetery in its cultural landscape are activities interpretive in nature and thus my primary theoretical influence was Clifford Geertz. Geertz (1973, p. 5) argues for the pre-eminence of interpretation, which is crucial to the search for meaning in anthropology, and best discovered through a process of “thick description” in the writing of ethnography. Thick description is a close reading and detailed account of observed behavior and its cultural context. Employing Geertz’ notion of thick description, I have described for the reader my observations of the cemeteries as places, how people behaved in the cemeteries, the objects people left in the cemeteries, and what people told me was important about the cemetery and its contents. Arnold van Gennep’s (1908/1960) discussion of funerals and rites of passage in his study of cultural celebrations directly applies to my research on cemetery symbolism as does that of Victor Turner (1967) whose work in ritual and symbolism, the use of colour and rites of passage, built on the work of van Gennep. Symbolic interactionism, the theory that people behave toward things and others based on the meaning given to them (Blumer, 1969), provides a framework from which to study the meanings of my participants’ behaviour in the cemetery and interactions with gravestones. Theories of collective memory offered insights into the shaping role of gender, diaspora, and other aspects of identity in the processes of meaning-making

through memory, and aided in interpreting the stones, the choices and responses of participants such as the transmission of stories by participants to myself. Narrative theory advances the understanding of how the gravestones, as recorders of the stories we tell about our dead, and the stories themselves are always open to interpretation. For example, prompted by the sight of specific stones, several informants told me the same story, but the details provided varied considerably as did the emphasis, suggesting the ways in which individuals transmit stories depends on the storyteller and what he or she considers important to impart.

### **1.1 Research Site Selection**

Westport is located in Eastern Ontario and is situated at the west end of Upper Rideau Lake on the Rideau Canal system between Kingston and Ottawa and was an ideal site for investigating cemetery symbolism for several reasons. First, Westport is a relatively old village with cemeteries and headstones covering a 200-year period. Second, Westport has a stable population of 645 (Statistics Canada, 2006) with many families going back many generations. Third, for more than 150 years the different churches had separate cemeteries which permitted the comparison of commemoration styles by denomination, the exception being pre-1850 when there was only the Baptist Cemetery, and after the closure of the Baptist Cemetery in the 1970s. Fourth, Westport's cemeteries are of a manageable size for surveying and thus allow for close analysis. The study of Westport's cemeteries and gravestones offered insights specific to Westport but also suggest broader trends relevant to the thousands of small towns and rural cemeteries all over Ontario.

## 1.2 Investigating the Sites

In order to write an ethnohistorical analysis of cemetery symbolism, qualitative research methods were employed. To begin, I researched the village of Westport and its cemeteries in the local history section at the Westport Public Library. There I found Putnam and Wallin's 1861-2 (1973) *Historical Atlas of Leeds and Grenville, Ontario*, Leavitt's *History Leeds and Grenville*, originally published 1879 (1972), several locally written histories of the village compiled by John Adams (1937), and the Westport Branch of the Women's Institute (no date), and its churches by Presbyterian minister Bruce Cossar (2003), St Edward's Father Edward Jackman (1978), and lay historian Lucille Bresee (1994).

I next requested permission from the appropriate church authorities to study the cemeteries of Westport, Ontario. I was fortunate to secure permission to do my research in four of the Westport's five cemeteries: Presbyterian Cemetery, United Cemetery, Baptist Cemetery, and St. Edward the Confessor Roman Catholic Cemetery. Several attempts were made to secure permission to work in St. Paul's Anglican Cemetery but permission was not granted, nor was a reason given for the refusal of permission. The inclusion of St. Paul's Anglican Cemetery would have ensured a comprehensive overview of Westport's Cemeteries and its omission is regrettable. However, I did look at The Ontario Gravemarkers Gallery (Dillon, 2010) web page for St. Paul's Anglican Cemetery; the headstones at St. Paul's are similar to stones found in other Protestant cemeteries in style and content. The details available online were limited, however, and

lacked contextual information and visibility of deposited objects, therefore St Paul's Anglican Cemetery has largely been left out of the discussion.

I visited each cemetery and took photographs and notes regarding the size, shape, materials, symbols, and messages recorded on the monuments and the objects placed on or near graves and stones. I also compared the symbols and messages from one denomination to another to see if noted changes were particular to one group or another or if they were secular and individual. My fieldwork was completed in order of the permissions received, beginning on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June in Presbyterian Cemetery. I completed work there 15 July 2015, having recorded 333 grave markers. Within days of completing this first cemetery I sent out, via church bulletins, a call for participants willing to discuss their choices of grave markers for their loved ones. I surveyed the gravestones first before soliciting research participants so that I could analyze the cemetery in its everyday form, in case my interest prompted participants or community members to clean up or alter the site in any way. This does appear to have happened in some places for a number of changes took place in the cemeteries directly after my appeal for participants. Within days of my call for participants, worn offerings were removed, and fresh items deposited; live flowers were added and wilted ones taken away. Had I not already spent considerable time on site I might not have noticed these changes. My search for participants initiated, I went on to subsequently document 318 grave markers at United Cemetery, 86 grave markers at Baptist Cemetery, and 172 grave markers at St. Edward the Confessor Roman Catholic Cemetery over the months of July and August, 2016. St. Edward's is considerably larger than the other three cemeteries, so I recorded every 4<sup>th</sup> stone. However, I examined every stone at St. Edwards to be sure I

was not missing important trends. I was not able to record all of the stones at Baptist Cemetery because of dense undergrowth and noxious weeds. In total, I recorded 909 grave markers in four cemeteries. In all cases, burials that took place after I had been through a cemetery were not recorded thus preserving the snapshot in time that my efforts represent.

### **1.3 Recruiting Participants**

Recruiting participants to discuss cemetery symbolism was intended to be a key part of my research and much effort was put into securing ethics approval, question design, and making contact within the community. My calls for participants were made through church bulletins, an article in the local newspaper, and through half page handouts left in strategic places around the village. Examples of each can be found in the appendices. Cumulatively these efforts gained me three participants over a period of three months. I encountered great difficulty securing research participants, as have others. Kay Woodthorpe (2011, p. 100), a sociologist at the University of Bath, studied the City of London Cemetery and Crematoria (CLCC), its staff, its visitors and its local community. Woodthorpe (2009, p. 78) used the snowball technique to recruit staff and stakeholders for semi-structured interviews but had great difficulty recruiting other participants. Westport's cemeteries are small and do not have permanent staff that might have been willing to be interviewed. Cemetery visitors that I spoke to preferred to speak about the cemetery and the headstones 'off the record' therefore I can only use their input in a general sense. In all, I had five participants from the local population who agreed to be formally interviewed. I had originally intended to interview a large number of people

about their choices of monuments for their friends and loved ones. The few I had makes it impossible to generalize, however, their interviews provided valuable insights into the intersecting process of memory and meaning-making. While in Westport's cemeteries I observed the behaviours of visitors. I did not approach anyone in the cemeteries themselves for I found people would usually come to me to see what I was doing. My wide hat, camera and notebook generated interest in what I was doing and opened roughly 15 conversations. In some cases, it was these moments that led to signed permission forms.

Participant observation was the most fruitful avenue of investigation for my project because people visited the cemeteries regularly, sometimes to tend flowers and leave gifts or just to be near their loved ones. I was also able to attend an annual memorial event attended by approximately 50 local community members. Left objects, such as angels, flowers, fishing lures and stuffed animals, are valuable to analyze because reflect the emotions of the giving visitor or evoke the memory of the deceased and were deliberately selected and deposited at the graveside.

#### **1.4 Interpretation and Symbolic Interactionism**

Geertz argues that to study symbolic systems, we must maintain the links between the actor, the action, and the context (1973, p 14). For example, after the death of an individual, his or her living family members, most often the spouse, chooses the headstone (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). Women are more likely to insist on marriage imagery (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015) such as overlapping wedding rings for the dominant graphic image. Ritual symbolism,

anthropologist Edith Turner (1992, p. 4) argued, has esthetic, intellectual, and symbolic depth. Visitors often bring objects to leave at the graveside; leaving these objects is a very important ritual to many and has a meaning that adds to that of the grave and stone. Some participants also described deeply spiritual experiences at the cemetery and others did not. E. Turner (1992, p. 4) argues that anthropology accepts the experiences and realities described by participants. As ethnographers, we can never read the minds of our informants, nor can we ever entirely become a full member of their community, therefore we record what we learn and what we figure out as best we can with the incomplete information we have gathered (Geertz, 1973, p. 19, 20). This is especially true when many of the decision makers and action takers are unavailable for question or comment, as was the case for my study. The point of studying symbolic systems is not to generalize them to the entirety of human experience but rather to find generalities in the particular case (Geertz, 1973, p. 26).

According to sociologist Herbert Blumer (1969), “the meanings that things have for human beings are central in their own right” (p. 3) and are as important an area of study as is the study of behaviour. He maintains that the two, behaviour and meaning, cannot be separated (Blumer, 1969, p. 5). Blumer (1969) proposed a way of examining how humans live and behave called symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is based on three premises, first, “that human beings act towards things based on the meanings that the things have for them”, second, “the meaning of such things is derived from, or arise out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows” and, third, that “these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). Meanings

are therefore created, maintained, negotiated, or indeed discarded in a process that is inherently social (Blumer, 1969, p. 5).

According to symbolic interactionism the worlds that exist for human beings and for their groups are made up of objects and these objects are the result of symbolic interaction. According to Blumer (1969, p. 5), anything that one can name or point to such as an idea, a ritual, a tree, or a tree spirit is an object. Objects can be tangible, touchable things; social, such as a social status or position; or abstractions such as values, morals, ideas of kindness or cruelty, religious dogma, or philosophical musings (Blumer, 1969, p. 10, 11). Our world can only consist of things of which we can conceive; it is through the sharing of indications and the negotiation of definitions that objects are themselves created (Blumer, 1969, p. 11). We are, in fact, objects to ourselves; we indicate to ourselves and respond to ourselves (Blumer, 1969, p. 13).

When a person acts, that individual does so within the context of the situation which, most of the time, is social (Blumer, 1969, p. 7). Society consists of people in action and in order for society to work one must tailor one's activities to respond to and accommodate the actions of others (Blumer, 1969, p. 7-8). In order to study behaviour, Blumer (1969, p. 39) asserts, it is necessary to study behaviour in the empirical world for the observant participant will learn more out in the field, despite the trials and the limitations, than one can in the laboratory. No one will ever understand everything that takes place in any moment for none of the participants in any given situation is aware of all the levels or layers of experience that are occurring simultaneously.

Symbolic interactionism is best studied through naturalistic inquiry employing exploration and inspection (Blumer, 1969, p. 40). Exploration can include anything

ethically permitted such as “direct observation, interviewing people, listening to their conversations, securing life-history accounts, using letters and diaries, consulting public records, arranging for group discussions, and making counts of an item if this appears worthwhile” (Blumer, 1969, p. 41). The researcher’s methods and focus will shift and sharpen in response to the challenges, opportunities and realities of fieldwork (Blumer, 1969, p. 40). Inspection entails the direct examination of analytical elements, by studying them in different lights and from different sides, asking different questions as they arise and then coming back to the direct examination taking these into account (Blumer, 1969, p. 43-45). By inspecting elements naturalistically, out in the field, the closeness to the empirical domain, reality, is maintained and thus qualifies, Blumer (1969, p. 47) argues, as scientific inquiry. Methodologically, symbolic interactionism is the real-world scientific study of people in groups and what they do. Symbolic interactionism identifies, studies and develops interpretations from the living, in context, social world (Blumer, 1969, p. 48). Whatever meanings for things we scholars might have, people have their own and we get at these through descriptive accounts, observed actions, and what people say to each other (Blumer, 1969, p. 51).

In studying Westport’s cemeteries, observation and investigation have proven most valuable. Historical records set the village, its cemeteries, and the community in context temporally, socially, and geographically. The cemeteries themselves, grave markers with their inscriptions and images, and the objects left by visitors at different times are evidence of deliberate, meaningful actions of family and friends. Participant observation revealed the different ways visitors behave in cemeteries, particularly in interactions with graves and stones reflecting comfort and discomfort with the location

and social situation. Participants, while far too few, spoke of community, connection, and the meaning of the cemeteries in their community.

Grave markers offer selected information only, information such as birth and death dates, and family connections. The reader cannot learn about personal triumphs or tragedy from reading the stones alone, and thus most personal histories are silenced. Visitors to Westport's cemeteries told me many stories of scandalous behaviour, none of which were recorded in stone. Tragic or accidental death was rarely mentioned on stones but according to my informants all too common. It can be quite painful to recount a traumatic event such as the loss of a loved one, a personal betrayal or an event, such as war, of such scale that it is simply too overwhelming for survivors to discuss. When a person does decide to speak it may be to an interviewer and not a friend, family member, or doctor (Klempner, 2006, p. 201). In the telling, the teller has the chance to revisit the event at the pace and to the extent that they wish, to absorb the re-evaluated life experience, and perhaps even reduce some of the suffering that remains (Klempner, 2006, p. 201). Empathy on the part of the interviewer is essential to avoid pushing the telling beyond remembering and into reliving (Klempner, 2006, p. 203). The truth of death is unavoidable, no matter how uncomfortable it might make one, and it is up to the interviewer to prepare themselves for the discussion otherwise they risk losing the cooperation of the participant (Klempner, 2006, p. 206). Depending on what is being imparted, the interviewer must be aware of her own reactions to disclosures both pleasant and remarkably unpleasant and to the heightened emotional state of the participant (Klempner, 2006, p. 208). With sensitivity and consideration on the part of the interviewer, and under the right circumstances, the interview process may prove to be

healing for the narrator (Klempner, 2006, p. 208). Unfortunately, efforts to engage with participants were of limited fruitfulness, perhaps because of the sensitive nature of the research and the strong feelings associated with both cemeteries and their occupants. Anonymity might well have been a concern, for Westport, Ontario is a small village. Perhaps people simply did not want to take part in the study or were intimidated by the research process. A number of people declined to sign permission forms but were willing to talk off the record. Perhaps I am not well enough known in Westport to have earned the trust of local people.

### **1.5 A Short History of Westport, Ontario and Its Cemeteries**

Like most population centers, there have been a number of histories written about Westport. Some focus on a particular group, such as the histories written of the different churches and their parishes, often written by clerics or interested parishioners. Westport's village histories, compiled by citizens and service groups, rely heavily upon Thad. W. H. Leavitt's *History of Leeds and Grenville*, first published in 1879 and later edited and published in 1972 by Mika Publishing, and written within living memory of some of the first settlers. Another useful early source is the *Historical Atlas of the County of Leeds and Grenville* (Mika Publishing, 1973), first published in 1862 by Putnam and Wallins. Mika Publishing's 1972 limited edition incorporates much from Leavitt (1879) and news sources of the 1870s. Local newspaper articles and early photographs proved of limited usefulness as dates of publication had not been included with clippings. Together, these sources situate the village of Westport, Ontario, in the landscape, populate it with its settling groups, and describe the forces that shaped the community.

The township of North Crosby was surveyed by Reuben Sherwood who received the grant of land upon which Westport was built from the crown in 1803 (Leavitt, 1972, p. 180). Sherwood sold the land to Sheldon Stoddard and the Manhard brothers (Leavitt, 1972, p. 180). Early settlers included Sheldon Stoddard, the Manhard brothers, Obadiah Reed, Robert Rorison and a Mr. Deacon who took credit for felling the first tree in the village (Leavitt, 1972, p. 179). The building of the Rideau Canal brought a lot of workers to the area, many of whom settled along its route. Irish labourers arrived between 1826-32, their wives and children soon followed (Jackman, 1978, p. 5). The Potato Famine of 1845-46 sent a flood of desperate Irish out of Ireland, many of whom came to Canada and Westport. By 1840 the Township of North Crosby had a population of 500, of whom 30% were Catholic (Jackman, 1978, p. 5). The township's population climbed to 2000 by 1860, over 50% of whom were Catholic according to Fr. Edward Jackman (1978, p. 5). By 1860 the land suitable for agriculture was largely settled and the influx of new settlers slowed (Jackman, 1978, p.5). To serve the growing population, coopers and smiths; grist, saw, and woolen mills workers; boat builders and blacksmiths; hoteliers and grocers soon established thriving businesses in Westport (Putnam and Wallins, 1973, p. 75). In telling the stories of early Westport, the writers emphasized hard work, success in business, the hardiness of the settlers and the transformation of the wild woods to "smiling fields" and a mountain "denuded of timber" (Leavitt, 1972, p. 180). Aaron Chambers and Lewis Cameron are credited with naming the village Westport, but the date is not given in the Leavitt (1972) account. According to Bruce Cossar (2003, p. 1), the Westport Post Office was established in the 1840s. The village of Westport withdrew from North Crosby Township on December 31, 1903 (Adams, 1937, p. 21) and became the independent

municipality it remains today. Westport is well connected by roads and water but has lost its namesake railway, the Brockville, Westport and Sault Ste. Marie Railway. The railway, which commenced service on Feb 29, 1888 (Adams, 1937, p. 15) served the area from 1888 until August 30, 1952 according to the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board of Ontario plaque which today marks the location of the village's station. Two centuries have passed since European immigrants arrived; there have been significant changes post World War II. Many families have been in Westport for generations, some are relative newcomers, and other families have left the area. The mills no longer mill but are repurposed as art galleries and residences. Today, 2015, there is no manufacturing within the village. The majority of jobs are in the service industry or schools. The Catholic high school, convent, and seniors' facility have been demolished. Westport's economy has changed; its future and fortunes now lie in tourism and retail. The fortunes of the village and its residents are reflected in its cemeteries.

Sheldon Stoddard, J. Deacon, Eleazar Hastings and the Manhards erected the first house of worship, and like many early churches, the frame building also served as the first school in the area (Leavitt, 1972, p. 179). The description of its location, across the street from the Roman Catholic Church (Leavitt, 1972, p 179), indicates this first church was sited in what is now the Baptist Cemetery. John D. Adams, lay historian, (1937, p. 39) concurs, identifying this as the first Olivet Baptist Church, built in 1830, which served the community for 40 years. Adams (1937, p. 39) indicates services moved to the Old Methodist Church in 1870 until the new Olivet Baptist Church was ready in 1884. No building stands in Baptist Cemetery today, but there is a large area which contains no obvious burials; this is likely where the church once stood. The oldest stones at Baptist

Cemetery cluster along the eastern edge of this empty zone. According to several of my informants, and some early inscriptions, United Empire Loyalists are among those earliest settlers and interments, at Baptist Cemetery and in other Westport and area cemeteries.

The Methodist Church was established in the 1840s and was soon relocated to the Bedford Street site. The Methodist Church, as seen on the historical map of 1861 (Putnam and Wallins, 1973, p. 75), was located directly beside what is today called the United Cemetery. The existing United Cemetery sits on the triangle of land also occupied by the old Methodist Church, therefore it was likely a Methodist Cemetery and existed at least as early as 1860, according to the historical atlas (Putnam and Wallins, 1973, p. 75). Dates on the existing headstones indicate the cemetery was in use by the 1850s. The name of the cemetery was likely changed after the union of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches in the 1920s.

Knox Presbyterian Cemetery was first contemplated in 1895 in response to a need for a Presbyterian burial ground (Bresee, 1994, p.1). The two-acre plot of land was purchased from Richard and Eliza Grothier. Within its area is a stone vault built in 1889 by Hiram Lockwood to store the dead when conditions prevented burial (Bresee, 1994, p .1). In 1896 the lot was cleared, fenced and gated (Bresee, 1994, p. 1). A century later those fences and gates had been removed and replaced with a chain strand fence along County Road 10, and a locally sourced stone sign erected naming it as Presbyterian Cemetery (Bresee, 1994, p. 1). Presbyterian Cemetery is the latest of Westport's five cemeteries to be established and still has much of its area available for use.

The deed for the Bedford Cemetery, known today as St. Edward's Roman Catholic Cemetery, is dated 1848 (Jackman, 1972, p. 9). The cemetery has been considerably enlarged over the years thanks to the donation of land by parishioners (personal communication, name withheld on request, 2015). In Westport today there remains a large segment of the population who self-identify as Irish Catholic. St. Edward's Roman Catholic Cemetery lies six kilometers west of Westport on County Road 12.

There are a number of other cemeteries near Westport, including an older Catholic cemetery up on the mountain and a number of family cemeteries on nearby farms. In the interest of keeping this effort manageable I have limited my work to cemeteries within Westport's village limits or serving Westport, in the case of St. Edwards. As discussed, permission was not received to do research in St. Paul's Anglican Cemetery, but it too serves Westport.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical and Literature Review**

Cemeteries, as sites, are symbolic in and of themselves, and contain within them features and items that are also symbolic. People do things in cemeteries, they enact formal and personal rituals within their boundaries and in preparation for their visit. There are many layers of meaning piled on other layers of meaning and it makes the discussion of such places complex. First I will touch upon culture, symbols, and ritual. Then I will introduce the cemetery as an exceptional place, bounded and imbedded in the

community. Next I will discuss the symbolism of monuments. I will conclude the discussion by addressing what people do in cemeteries.

## **2.1 Culture, Symbols and Ritual**

Every group of humans has culture and each culture has symbols upon which it relies. The culture concept, according to Geertz (1973) “denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (p. 89). Ritual, myth, and art lend the images necessary to help people ascertain what and how to feel about objects or situations (Geertz, 1973, p. 82). From the moment of birth, individuals are surrounded by the symbols of their culture and community, they live with those symbols, they may effect change in them over their lives and when they die those symbols will go on in one form or another (Geertz, 1973, p. 45). What we think and feel are culturally conditioned and the symbols we turn to for direction are also cultural. Symbols are necessary for human life because they are the tools we use to organize our social life, to express ourselves and produce artifacts; we literally cannot survive as human beings without symbols (Geertz, 1973, p. 48).

In 1973 Geertz introduced the interpretive theory of culture. He asserted that “the study of culture is not an experimental science in search of a law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (p 5), and that it consists of “piled up structures of inference and implication through which an ethnographer is continually trying to pick his (sic) way” (p. 7). Geertz (1973, p. 10) described culture as a publicly acted document and human

behaviour as symbolic action. Particular peoples have their own ways of managing the trials and tribulations of life and the things that they can neither affect nor avoid so as to render them “comprehensible and meaningful” (Geertz, 1973, p. 30). As sites dense with symbolism frequented by people engaging in a range of symbolic rituals, cemeteries offer a productive focus for exploring the relationship between symbols, affect, and meaning-making from an anthropological perspective.

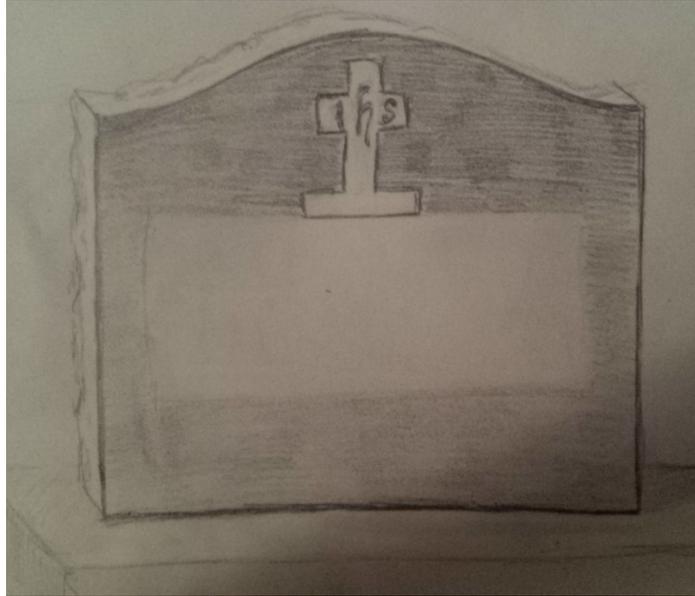
Death is universal. We all will die, we have all lost people significant to us to death, and we have all had to make sense of the experience. Charles Laughlin, John McManus, and Eugene d’Aquili (1990, p. 337), biogenetic structuralists, argued that it is through the mediation of the human brain that experience is understood. According to Edward M. Bruner (1986), anthropologist, “our lived experience... is the primary reality” (p. 5). We, as individuals or as a group, live, we experience, we reflect, we craft and we act and in doing so we form our own understanding of our world (Bruner, 1986, p. 5). When we communicate our experiences to others we communicate not only the simple facts of the experience but also our feelings and what we have learned (Bruner, 1986, p. 5). What we read into a situation, what we learn from it, and what we communicate to others are all mediated by culture. Therefore, when someone dies and the family or friends erect a stone to commemorate that individual, it is an act steeped in culture and experience and is intended as a lasting communication available to future audiences as well as present.

When we communicate something, the interpretation of our communication takes place in the mind of the receiving party; each person will have their own interpretation of any given message (Bruner, 1986, p. 10). In expressing an experience, we are creating a

text that is read by the receiving party, even if that text is written on our face or in a posture (Bruner, 1986, p. 5). When we create that text and perform it for others we tailor it to the audience and to the moment, we impose meanings how and where we see fit and in doing so transmit new interpretations with every telling (Bruner, 1986, p. 7). As “life consists of the retellings” (Bruner, 1986, p. 12), our lives are based on the experiences of ourselves and others, shared and modified, interpreted and acted upon in a chain that goes back beyond memory and that will carry forward as long as there are ears to listen and eyes to look. Culture and experience are inextricably intertwined and contribute to that hermeneutic circle that helps us make sense of our world (Gadamer, 1988, p. 68).

Human beings around the world share a number of symbols that may be based on their experiences of the world around them; such symbols include circular suns, crescent moons, and the prints of hands. Some images, Fernandez (1986, p. 169-170) held, are elemental and primordial; our ideas emerge from embeddedness, experience, and relatedness. Laughlin, McManus and d’Aquili (1990, p. 203) also argued that there are deep universal symbols which we can access through mental training. Ritual is rife with symbolism and meaning (Laughlin, McManus & d’Aquili, 1990, p. 176). Recurring tropes are performed by religious communities and this “acting out of images is cosmological”, even if at times they appear to mix their metaphors (Fernandez, 1986, p. 170, 172, 175). We have a great many images hidden away in forgotten experiences which we can access when the need arises (Fernandez, 1986, p. 1840). A group of people taking part in any ritual will have been exposed to the same symbols but may well individually take away from the experience different meanings; this is because symbols work at many levels (Laughlin, McManus & d’Aquili, 1990, p. 177).

Some symbols have existed for millennia. Recent investigations into Paleolithic rock art graphic communication indicate that 32 common symbols used by Ice Age people from areas ranging from Spain to Australia have a common origin in Africa (von Petzinger, 2015, 7:50). With the distances involved it is unlikely that these symbols were shared across that distance contemporaneously or even remotely so. Three of those earliest and widest spread of symbols are the cruciform, the cordiform, and the half circle (von Petzinger, 2015, 7:50) all of which are seen in Ontario's rural cemeteries in the forms of the cross, the heart and the arch. Most of the headstones in Westport's cemeteries have an arched top. The cross is a symbol commonly featured on Christian grave markers, particularly Catholic grave markers. Heart shaped stones were used in the 1910s and 1920s; no heart shaped stones were recorded between 1920 and the early 1980s, but, in the mid-1980s once again became a common stone shape. Any observer of the cross, heart, and arch will have an understanding of these symbols that is defined by their particular culture(s) and personal experiences. Consider the dot, line, crossed lines, circle, and arch, all of which are ancient (von Petzinger, 2015, 7:50) and still in use. The font of this text is composed of such symbols arranged in different ways to create new symbols in the form of letters, words, and punctuation that can transmit different meanings in different languages. The swastika is a religious symbol to Hindus, and a symbol of Neo-Nazis and white supremacist movements in numerous countries. These basic symbols hold meaning across time and space, but their meanings also change and depend on context.



**Illustration 1 Arch Top and Cross, sketch courtesy of N. Gardiner Jones, 2016.**

Humans think in symbols; the images and words we use to summon a concept, a time or place to mind, even thoughts of the people we know are symbols (Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili (1990, p. 232). In most situations people rely on images to communicate, to create and to understand what is going on around them (Fernandez, 1986, p. 165). Funerary rites are rites of passage that mark the transition of the individual from the world of the living to the world of the dead (van Gennep, 1908/1960, p. 10). The point at which the individual is between worlds is a liminal stage (van Gennep, 1908/1960, p. 157). Liminal places, Turner (1967, p. 98) wrote, are seclusion sites, places out of every day experience. Cemeteries are such liminal places, where the world of the living meets the world of the dead. Turner (1967, p. 98) argued that the symbols connected to liminal stages are based on mortality, decay, catabolism, and menses. Concepts that are opposites, such as death and growth, may be indicated by the same symbols (Turner, 1967, p. 99). Liminal symbols commonly seen in cemeteries include

undying flowers in plastic arrangements or carved in stone, and the placement of perennial plants and deciduous trees. Huts and tunnels may symbolize tombs and wombs in a liminal space between one perceived reality and another and where either can be neither and both (Turner, 1967, p. 99). Perhaps the arches seen in many cemeteries have the same meaning.

According to Victor Turner (1986) “all human act is impregnated with meaning” (p. 33). In any given situation we apply cultural perspectives to understand the meaning of acts, interactions, and things for us as a group or as individuals (Turner, 1986, p. 33). The traditions we draw from to construct these meanings are full of contradictions (Turner, 1986, p. 33), however, and there are multiple meanings and interpretations culturally available in any given situation. For example, social dramas, funerals, and burials affect more than just the individual, always have an aspect of redress to them, and are intended and lay the ground work for the new reality the group faces (Turner, 1986, p. 41). It is through the symbols and rites, especially those religious in nature, that people are eased and socialized into the new order (Turner, 1986, p. 41). Turner (1986) writes, “but ritual and its progeny, notably the performance arts, derive from the subjunctive, liminal, reflexive, exploratory heart of social drama, where the structures of group experience are replicated, dismembered, re-membered, refashioned, and mutely or vocally made meaningful” (p. 43).

People live in groups, we all interact with others on a daily basis, and we are all related in some way or another to those around us (Turner, 1967, p. 7). Turner (1967, p. 7) argued that when something momentous happens to one of us, it happens to everyone. Turner’s observations were based on those made in small African villages, whereas my

study was done in a small Ontario village. When a person dies, “ties are snapped” (Turner, 1967, p. 8-9) for everyone involved and in the period that follows everyone must adjust to the new reality. Rituals are intended to make things happen such as healing or going from one state to the next (Turner, 1967, p. 95) and mark significant life junctures. Bell (1992, p. 31-35) argued that ritual is an inseparable combination of what is done and what is thought, an integration of worldview and ethos, and the way that the viewer or theorist understands these concepts. Ritual, it will be seen, affects what goes on in cemeteries at many levels at different times and is performed in various ways by the religious and secular alike. Cemeteries, therefore, are ritual spaces.

## **2.2 The Cemetery as A Place**

Cemeteries are also a community of the dead: in being buried they have passed from the world of the living, and according to Christian doctrine, are awaiting the life everlasting. The deceased, therefore, are a liminal group. Regarding the afterlife, van Gennep (1908/1960) wrote “the most widespread idea is that of a world analogous to ours, but more pleasant, and of a society organized in the same way as it is here” (p. 152). This might explain the many mansions or places that heaven is said to contain in the gospel according to St. John (14:2-3). Turner (1967, p. 100) argued that there is no status in the liminal group. There is, I argue, status in the cemetery and its liminal group, for if a cemetery is a liminal space, connecting the living and the supernatural, the visible aspects of the cemetery contain many markers of social status. Cemeteries are arranged both temporally and spatially, according to social status with the prime locations, such as

those overlooking water or near roadsides going early to the wealthier patrons, as will be discussed later.

According to geographer Richard Francaviglia (1971, p. 505), the earliest cemeteries were located on hill tops; this choice was deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian belief in hills as spiritual locations. I would argue that it goes back further still, possibly to the ancient Sumerian (circa 2100 BC) belief that mountains were the dwelling places of the gods (Janson and Janson, 2004, p 72.). Francaviglia (1971, p. 508) noted that the oldest parts of cemeteries were at the top, with successively newer rings descending downhill from the top. This too was noted at United and Baptist cemeteries, however there are exceptions, for United Cemetery has many later, infilled graves and other factors such as visibility and proximity to the church affected early grave location at Baptist Cemetery.

Places become symbolic once people assign to them meaning. As long as a cemetery is in use, the cemetery remains a powerful symbol of life and death to the community it serves (Warner, 2011, p. 164). We all exist in communities of memory that give our lives context; these memories link us to our past and direct us to our future by providing examples of lives well lived and by reinforcing the practices that hold communities (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 2011, p. 229, 230) and families together. People have always looked to the past, to their forbearers, with nostalgia, because by linking oneself with those remembered, one hopes to be remembered as well by successive generations (Smith, 2011, p 232). Thus family plots are often grouped together as much as possible and associations with past and future generations deliberately inscribed.

Elizabeth Wright (2005), a rhetorician at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, noted that the cemetery is a place of memory, one that is both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. Cemeteries are sacred and often consecrated spaces, they are rhetorical spaces with deliberately selected messages inscribed, and inclusive spaces with family and friends closely assembled (Wright, 2005, p. 53). Cemeteries are also exclusive spaces (McDannell, 1987, p. 278) with religious and socioeconomic differences underlined. Francaviglia (1971) wrote: “in the cemetery, architecture, town planning, display of social status and racial segregation, all mirror the living, not the dead. Cemeteries, as the visual and spatial expression of death, may tell us a great deal about the living people who created them” (p. 509). Graves and cemeteries are situated; they may be in a town, a city, in the country or on a family farm (Rainville, 1999, p. 546), and as such they reflect the feelings of the day and the particularities of the actual location. People were usually buried in the closest cemetery to home (Rainville, 1999, p. 551), or the closest cemetery of their family’s religious denomination. Francaviglia (1971, p. 501) and Rainville (1999, p. 542) argue that cemeteries reflect their communities. I argue that cemeteries, especially in older communities, are physically embedded in their surroundings and thus are an ongoing part of the living cultural landscape. Cemeteries are constructed landscapes; they are smoothed and tended, planted and populated, fenced and decorated according to the needs and preferences of the community they serve (Jones, 2011, p. 227). According to Diane Jones, a landscape architect, cemeteries are surrounded by community institutions which define them (Jones, 2011, p. 226), this is quite literally the case in Westport where schools and churches abut graveyards. Sacred spaces, particularly cemeteries, are places where people can connect with their past and their future (Jones, 2011, p. 236). One

aspect of constructed landscapes like cemeteries is that authorities, such as cemetery boards or clergy members, selectively chose who or what is included and excluded (Jones, 2011, p. 226). In this, the cemetery becomes “a venue to express and preserve culture” (Jones, 2011, p. 236). Thistles and shamrocks, windmills and flags along with the nation of origin are recorded for future family and visitors, to maintain connections and culture.

Cemeteries reproduce an idealization of the community; the words and the symbols as well as the arrangement of cemeteries are therefore tailored to suit a socially preferred image and may not reflect reality (Wright, 2005, page 53). In the Victorian era, the virtue of domestic piety was represented in the motif of women as angels of the home (McDannell, 1987, p. 295). Family monuments became statements of power and social position; the cemetery was a common mother who received all of her children into her sheltering arms (McDannell, 1987, p. 303). Colleen McDannell (1987, p. 283), an historian and religious scholar, noted that single people were often interred in single plots, well away from the fenced and gated family areas. For those of little means, the indignity and anonymity of the mass paupers’ grave or potters’ field served as a warning to the living to work hard to avoid such a fate (Wright, 2005, p. 59). Certainly a number of unmarked graves exist in Westport’s cemeteries, however no area appeared to be set aside for the impoverished, nor in any of the documentation so far encountered has there been any mention of a potter’s field. However, unmarked graves and those with very modest markers are often found along the margins of the cemetery. The inscriptions on headstones is concise and generically positive. There is not a single instance of a monument in Westport’s cemeteries where anyone was described in negative terms. As it

is unlikely that only paragons of virtue inhabit any given town, this exclusion of all things negative is normative and illustrates the powerful conventions against speaking ill of the dead.

The importance of a place is strengthened when schools, churches, and community identify with that location; when it is a place of the dead it invokes memories of lives lived and a time gone by (Hay, 2011, p. 302, 309). Monuments have long been used to establish and reinforce the importance of a place, be it religious or social (Miller and Rivera, 2006, p. 335). DeMond Miller, sociologist, and Jason Rivera (2006), research assistant, wrote “whether the bodies of the deceased are placed in the ground, within elaborate tombs, or simply in the presence of ancient or contemporary monuments, their location holds symbolic meaning as well as a practical historical meaning for the surrounding living community” (p. 206). The existence of graveyards gives the living a particular place to go, to remember their dead (Miller and Rivera, 2006, p. 335), and to enact various rituals to mark the significance of those who have passed on. The physicality of the grave located within a graveyard lends it social significance, sanctifies the grave, and lends authority to the story encoded on the grave marker (Wright, 2005, p. 70). The ways that social relationships such as kin and group memberships are recorded and reinforced through time make the cemetery a social map with an added temporal dimension. In cemeteries, Wright (2005, p. 57) notes, women are given a public place of their own, and acknowledgment of their individual existence even if only as “wife of” or “daughter of” a man; such public recognition may have been largely denied in their lifetimes. The cemetery, therefore, as a rhetorical space is unusually open to women (Wright, 2005, p. 57). The existence of a marked grave with its epitaphs and biographical

information, its shape, size, and visual symbols make it perhaps the only memory, the only *lieu de memoir* of an individual otherwise long forgotten (Wright, 2005, p. 51) particularly for those who left behind no photographs or letters, or whose families have left the area. When cemeteries are closed they slowly lose their sense of sacredness and become historical monuments (Warner, 2011, p. 164). Inactive cemeteries, to which no new graves are being added, are often neglected and eventually abandoned as the individuals buried there fade from memory. The importance of the cemetery as symbol then is temporal (Warner, 2011, p. 164), waxing during the living memory of the bereaved and waning as grief is itself extinguished by death.

In places where there is diversity of religion, there are often specific areas set aside to serve the burial needs of each denomination. Cemeteries are often segregated by religion as shown by the work of Miller and Rivera in New Orleans (2006, p.340) and as can be seen at Cataraqui Cemetery in Kingston, Ontario which has a separate section for Jewish burials. In Westport the churches that could afford it had their own burial grounds, thus five cemeteries have served a village of 650. As in New Orleans (Miller and Rivera, 2006, p. 349), the cemeteries reflect the social structure and realities of Westport. For example, the Union of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches led to the renaming of the Methodist Cemetery to the United Cemetery; it serves United and Free Methodist congregations. The Presbyterian Cemetery serves not only Presbyterians but is also open to others. The Baptist Cemetery, the first cemetery to serve the community, is full and largely closed to further interments. The Roman Catholic cemetery, already considerably larger than the others, may need to expand yet again. Connor Graham, Michael Arnold, Tamara Kohn, and Martin Gibbs (2015, p. 42) discussed the durable context of the grave

marker in an Australian cemetery. The dead take their place among deceased family and friends, surrounded by those of the same religion and in an organization that mirrors the way society was organized in their lifetimes (Graham, Arnold, Kohn and Gibbs, 2015, p. 37, 49).

Change is inevitable, and change is often difficult. We have no idea what form the future will take, nor what kind of people we will become or what we should be telling our descendants about ourselves so that they can make sense of their lives (Nora, 2011, p. 438). Pierre Nora (2011, p. 439) argued that we really do not live surrounded by the past as we once did and it has become strange to us. Such distancing might be the result of a population shift from rural to urban settings. Small towns and their cemeteries might be an exception to this trend because context and connections are maintained; they are in sight and under foot. Some groups have used the recent surge in memorial interest to rehabilitate their ethnic or class identity and past (Nora, 2011, p. 439). When times are tough, or there is a general anxiety about life, nostalgia serves for many groups to reinforce a sense of continuity (Davis, 2011, p. 446). A sudden change, be it historic or social, may cause people to look back with fondness on a better time (Davis, 2011, p. 448). This collective period of nostalgia may afford the necessary time for the change to be absorbed and for the society to adjust (Davis, 2011, p. 449). Members of the same generation will often seek solace in a shared golden era when faced with threats (Davis, 2011, p. 448) that different generations may not apprehend. For a while, at least, while reminiscing about days gone by, nostalgia “reenchants” and if only for a short while, offers sanctuary from the inevitable (Davis, 2011, p 451). Discussions with visitors to

Westport's cemeteries were often tinged with nostalgia, a harkening back to when things were believed to have been better or simpler.

### **2.3 The Monuments: symbols, imagery and meaning**

Monuments in stone are a stable group of memory objects whose messages may be read entirely differently than intended, depending on who is receiving the message and doing the interpreting (Rossington & Whitehead, 2007, p. 11). A rock has no meaning on its own, but when shaped and incised it takes on a significance that is readily recognized; that significance is amplified through association with like monuments in the sacred space of the cemetery. The traditional tombstone can function as a mourning site for the bereaved (Young, 2007, p. 181) but also a place where one can remember the good times as well. Ceremonies and rituals are fleeting but the stone remains as a permanent monument (Young, 2007, p. 170) long after the physical body has gone. James E. Young (2007, p. 181), professor of English and Judaic studies at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, wrote that once the monument is in place we leave the burden of memory to it, to be visited from time to time, and that we have become more forgetful because the stone remembers for us. Monuments create common spaces for memory and in doing so create the illusion of common memory (Young, 2007, p. 181). Once a monument has been erected, the spot where it sits is changed as is its meaning in its surroundings (Young, 2007, p. 182, 183). The monument, and its site, become a landmark and its story is incorporated into the geography of the area (Young, 2007, p. 183) and the narratives of its inhabitants.

Some graves have little by way of markers save a simple unembellished stone (Little, Lamphear, and Owsley, 1992, p. 398). A great many monuments record little, sometimes just a name, birth and death date, while others may wax poetic about the virtues, the achievements, and the worthiness of the deceased (Wright, 2005, p. 61). From what I observed, there are some differences that may be related to religious denomination or indeed secularism, but cost may well be what decides how much detail is recorded. James Deetz (1977), an archaeologist, studied the tombstones of early colonial Anglo-America. Deetz approached the study of grave markers through three dimensions: space, time, and form (Deetz, 1977, p. 64). Deetz (1977) was able to document the changes in style use throughout New England across multiple time periods and through these changing societal attitudes towards death. In addition, Deetz (1977, p. 66) consulted the available local records such as probate records and the account books and diaries of stone carvers in order to better inform his understanding of the motifs inscribed on commemorative stones. Deetz traced the identity of carvers across decades to document the changes, large and small, as well as the places of interment (for example, the proximity of the burial in regards to the residents of the deceased, and the time in which the stone was created). By identifying carvers, Deetz (1977) was able to trace the dissemination and acceptance of changing forms as symbols across space and through time. Deetz (1977) held that “gravestones are prime examples of ideal technique artifacts” (p. 66): in other words, grave markers are lasting physical records of how they were made, information and images that people wanted included on them, when and for how long the image was used. As every religion appears to have an ongoing concern with death and the soul (Deetz, 1977, p. 66), grave markers take on a specific and illustrative

importance. There are issues, however, with assuming that the commemorations found in any cemetery tell the whole story. Harold Mytum (1989, p. 283), an archaeologist, notes that the tombstones in any given graveyard commemorate only a portion of the burials, and cannot be considered a representative cross section. Where burial records are no longer extant grave markers may be the only way to learn about the interred (Mytum, 1989, p. 283).

The marking of social status is particularly obvious in the cemetery. The location of the grave and marker within the cemetery is as much a marker of social status as is the size or type of stone. In the Victorian era, expensive grave goods such as elaborate coffins and towering monuments were intended to indicate high status. However, when the lower classes incorporated these fancier, more expensive goods into their gravesites, the upper classes changed how they commemorated the dead and went for simpler commemorations (Little, Lamphear and Owsley, 1992, p. 398). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the epitaphs recorded on grave markers could be quite lengthy in extolling the virtues of the deceased; these became shorter over time (Little, Lamphear, and Owsley, 1992, p. 400). Today's epitaphs are largely limited to short phrases such as 'rest in peace' or 'gone but not forgotten'.

Symbols rarely have but one meaning. Any given symbol will have layers of meanings and will mean different things to different groups of people at different times and contexts. For example, the meaning of the rose has changed over time. Century old marble monuments in Westport often feature flowers of various kinds and in particular, the rose. The rose largely disappeared in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to reappear in the 1970s and is once more very popular. Roses have meant different things to

different peoples at different times. To early Christians the rose was a symbol of worldly pleasures (Touw, 1982, p. 75) and thus for many years was not used in Christian burials. In Islamic countries of the Near East the rose was a symbol of holiness, faithfulness, and love that lasts after death (Touw, 1982, p. 75). Islamic poets used the beauty of the rose to describe that of their beloved (Touw, 1982, p. 72). Over time, a more positive view of roses developed in the Christian world. Christian saints, the love of God, and Christ all have been symbolically represented by roses (Touw, 1982, p. 75, 76). Roses are also linked to miracles, including the origin myth of the rosary as the tears of Mary (Joret, 1970, p. 277). Brides often carry roses to symbolize their purity and comeliness (Touw, 1982, p. 78). The crucified rose is a symbol used by the Rosicrucians (Touw, 1982, p. 77) who today are offshoots of Freemasons (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2016). In Westport's cemeteries, the rose is often used as a symbol of both familial and romantic love. For example, stones with two roses usually mark the grave of a couple. In this one symbol there are a multitude of meanings that depend on time, place, and person.

Francis Clegg (1984), of the Institute of Psychiatry at London University, wrote "when we examine individual gravestones we must bear in mind that their choice was not purely a matter of individual taste, unless that person was wealthy...the average purchaser of a monument would be restricted to the selection which the local monumental masons were able to offer" (p. 307). Cost and conformity to local preferences would also be factors (Clegg, 1984, p. 308). Imagery also would largely conform to the socially accepted themes of mortality, mourning, piety and life everlasting, sterling attributes of the deceased, their personal achievements, and affiliations (Clegg, 1984, p. 308). The use of flowers to convey specific meanings, called

the language of flowers, was well understood in the Victorian era, but is no longer accessible to many who look at gravestones (Clegg, 1984, p. 308). For example, the rose is a symbol of love, the lily purity, the daffodil rebirth and resurrection (Keister, 2004, p. 45, 50, 54). The butterfly was noted on some late 20<sup>th</sup> century grave markers, but it may no longer be understood as the soul departing (Clegg, 1984, p. 314) as it was in the Victorian era. When looking at older markers the viewer cannot be certain that what is understood now is what was intended at the time the stone was commissioned (Clegg, 1984, p. 310).

The power of the symbols of death depend on memory and transmission, they are modified and condensed as meanings fade, are added, or changed beyond recognition (Warner, 2011, p. 164). The symbols, both those we recognize and those we do not, are “present expressions of past experiences, related and adapted to the ongoing life of the species, the society, and each individual” (Warner, 2011, p. 166). People looking at the symbols on such public commemorations as a gravestone will apply the meanings they have available to them to form their interpretation (Olick, 2011, p. 225) regardless of any original intended meaning. Institutions such as the state or church prescribe preferred narratives for community members to remember, record, and replicate (Olick, 2011, p. 227). The pious Christian may see the lamb as a symbol of Christ’s sacrifice, for example. Others may see the lamb as a symbol of childlike innocence. The symbols of the Victorian cemetery have in common a “hope for something beyond the present” (McKendry, 2003, p. vii). These preferred narratives form the basis of our myths, the traditions we pass on to our young and the heritage we choose to conserve (Olick, 2011, p. 227).

In his book, *The Forest of Symbols*, Victor Turner (1967) described the cross-cultural occurrences of red, black, and white colour symbolism. He argued that these colours were associated with the magico-religious, and that they were prized for their meaning more than rarity (Turner, 1967, p. 87). These are the main colours found both in existing cultures and archaeologically, although other colours such as yellow, brown, and blue are also found (Turner, 1967, p. 84, 87). In a mass grave in Halifax, for example, the remains of a First Nations person were identified, in part, because of the presence of ochre symbols (Williams, 2003, para. 1). Turner (1967, p. 89) listed many reasons for the use of these colours in burial rites, including that black, red, and white represent products and fluids of the human body; they often represent the triumph of the sacred over the profane; and they are associated with social relationships, human experiences, and emotion. This calls to mind phrases such as “seeing red,” “white as a ghost,” or the “blackness of depression”. The triad, Turner (1967, p. 90) argues, represents life forces that, handled the right way, give people a way to control those forces. The predominant colours of stones seen in most cemeteries, at least in rural Ontario, are red/pink, white/light grey, and black/dark grey. If we draw upon Turner’s association of colours with the body, red would represent blood, continuity and healing, white, bone and purification, and black with loss and returning to the earth. A participant was very clear that family members favoured a pink granite stone because they associate it with the stone in the Westport area, even if the actual grave stone was not mined locally. This association with the rock of the area does not comfortably fit with Turner’s association of colour with the body but the triad of colours remains. Are these colours used because those are the colours of available stones? This question was put to retired monument

maker, B. Thake (personal communication, 7 October, 2015) who said that there are other colours of stones, however the red/pinks, white/light grey and black/dark grey are the most popular. Thake's clients had a preference for the same main colour groupings of red, white, and black, however he did not specify their choice was symbolic. The fact that there are other colours of stones available and yet the predominance of stones fall within Turner's white/red/black colour triad is interesting, however there were not enough comments from participants to ascertain what those colours meant to the selectors of stones.

Grave markers often bear the phrase 'passed on' or 'passed away'. Arnold van Gennep (1908/1960, p. 19) argued that in rites where one passes between something that has been split, or between two tree branches, or under an object, the person departs one world and enters another. Such symbols may be simplified to the point that their meaning is represented by a "simple stone, a beam or a threshold" (van Gennep, 1908/1960, p. 19), such as a gravestone. These portals between worlds can also be intended to prevent flow in the opposite direction, from the next world to the present (van Gennep, 1908/1960, p. 20). Often depicted as a door in a house, the door is a boundary between the interior and exterior worlds, the familiar and the unknown, the sacred and the profane; to go through that door is to embrace the next world (van Gennep, 1908/1960, p. 20). Crossing the threshold is important in marriage and funeral ceremonies (van Gennep, 1908/1960, p. 20). The moment in the threshold is a pre-liminal moment according to van Gennep (1908/1960, p. 21) for the separation has been enacted but the person has not entirely completed entry into the liminal stage of the rite of passage. Arches of stone in the Roman era separated the victorious general from the rigors of war, and along with a

number of other rites, prepared him and his army for reintegration into the *Pax Romana* (van Gennep, 1908/1960, p. 21). Arches of stone, windows, doors and pathways carved on tombstones carry these symbols into the rural cemetery where, some believe, the dead await their ascension into Heaven. Others would appear to believe that the deceased has passed through the arched portal, crossed the threshold and moved on, hopefully to a better place. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ontario cemetery, death was “a portal to the future” (McKendry, 2003, p. 3).



**Illustration 2 Portal Imagery, sketch courtesy of N. Gardiner Jones, 2016.**

According to George MacDonald, John L. Cove, Charles D. Laughlin Jr. and John McManus (1989, p 40), biogenetic structuralists, a portal is where one enters or exits a place; they exist where “the ordinary and nonordinary realities” meet. The concepts of moving between one reality and another, one plane of existence or another, through a portal, is a central idea in cultures with multiple cosmologies (MacDonald, Cove,

Laughlin Jr., and McManus, 1989, p. 39). The Christian belief in concurrently existing heaven, hell, and life on Earth, I believe, is an example of such a multiple cosmology in a traditional culture. MacDonald, Cove, Laughlin Jr., and McManus (1989) discussed the purposeful use of portalling devices to cross from one reality to another. Such portalling devices, they write, can take the form of “a tunnel, door, aperture, hole or the like” (MacDonald, Cove, Laughlin Jr., and McManus, 1989, p. 39). Medieval churches were deliberately designed to incorporate windows and doors as portals (MacDonald, Cove, Laughlin Jr., and McManus, 1989, p. 41). Cemeteries and the grave markers within them draw heavily on church and domestic architecture for shapes and design, for example most grave markers look like doors and many have windows and gates carved into their surfaces. The dead have passed from this life, through the portal, and into the next. But is the grave marker as portal a one-way only device, marking the passage and sealing it closed, or is it permeable?

MacDonald, Cove, Laughlin Jr., and McManus (1989, p. 40) wrote that portals can permit passage to and from a direction, that such movement can be intentional or unintentional, and it may or may not happen under controlled circumstances. They further argue that portals are frequently accompanied by warnings of danger (MacDonald, Cove, Laughlin Jr., and McManus, 1989, p. 46). Decorations around the portal might portray what is on the other side (MacDonald, Cove, Laughlin Jr., and McManus, 1989, p. 46). Angels may represent guides and protectors and the cross with an aura a symbol of the divine. The possible ways that people can experience multiple realities are culturally defined and conditioned (MacDonald et al, 1989, p 49). There is, in the Christian belief system, the possibility of being visited by angels, having visions, and being raised from

the dead. Stories of ghosts and hauntings are common in myth and folklore, in the written and broadcast media. If the dead become angels, it follows that they can portal from the other world to this one. Perhaps people genuinely are closer to their loved ones at the grave. If, on the other hand, the experience of portalling is to go deeper into one's mind as posited by MacDonald, Cove, Laughlin Jr., and McManus (1989), perhaps it is the memory that is being brought closer to the surface by the image of the portal.

Much of the process of portalling as described by MacDonald, Cove, Laughlin Jr., and McManus, (1989) pertains to the practices of shamans and meditating monks; adepts who are skilled and seeking the experiences. This is not directly analogous to a visit to a loved one's grave for the visitor is rarely trained in such ways, nor necessarily aware of their possibility. Informants have said that being at the grave allows them to access memories differently. People do talk to the dead, at the site of their interment, and they do interact with the stone and other features of the site such as plants or objects. Informants report feeling closer to their loved ones at the graveside. The concept of portals did not come up in discussions with my informants. My informants were not trained in meditation or on the concept of portalling, and perhaps no breaches were made between realities, but their feelings of closeness and access to memories is worth noting. It is clear from the messages on the stones and in articles left behind, and in the words of some visitors, that people wish they could see or speak to their loved ones again, but there was no stated expectation that this was actually possible. Perhaps the medieval portal is one of those symbols whose meaning has changed over time so that the portal loses its permeability and becomes symbolic of the passing of an individual from this life to the next.

In 1999 archaeologist and historian Lynn Rainville (p. 451) studied socioeconomic status and 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century mortuary practices in Hanover, New Hampshire. Rainville (1999) wrote that, having studied the gravestones of an area spanning a 150-year period, she found “the beliefs about death, rather than individual social status or ethnic identity, often dictated the style, material, and form of the gravestone” (p. 541). Cemeteries and the gravestones found within them speak to how community members were expected to behave in a time of bereavement and also how a community and individuals expressed identity (Rainville, 1999, p. 542). For example, the placement of an expensive stone ensures that the name of that individual will not be forgotten for as long as the stone lasts. The elaborate grave markers of the Victorian era, with their poems of lamentation, document a greater preoccupation with death than do the stones dating after 1950 which rarely mention death. From the eulogies given at funerals to the epitaphs carved in tombstones, Rainville (1999, p. 550) argued that the entire process of honouring the dead reflects prevailing attitudes toward family and community. She (1999, p. 551) further noted that large sums of money were spent in the 18th century to give the dead a suitable funeral with all the social and material trimmings. Eulogies, often published, extolled the virtues of the deceased using the socially defined parameters that emphasized virtue, purity, and devotion for women and portrayed men as pillars of the community (Rainville, 1999, p. 553). The Victorian era saw the emergence of a “cult of the dead” with the increased embellishments of coffins, elaborate eulogies, extended periods of mourning (Rainville, 1999, p. 551), and increasingly ostentatious grave markers. This ostentation, often in the form of great arches or towering obelisks of marble or granite, topped with crosses or urns, and expensive decorative carving, was not

limited to the upper and middle classes; the lower classes also spent considerable sums on large monuments (Rainville, 1999, p. 578) which represented a significantly higher investment for the family. Architectural historian Jennifer McKendry (2003) wrote, “money spent for the rituals of death and burial and inscriptions and images selected for grave monuments were part of the desperate desire to perpetuate life in another realm” (p. 8). After the early 19<sup>th</sup> century people did not die (Rainville, 1999, p. 556), they went to sleep. The grave was no longer a place of rot or dreadful warning but a place of rest.

McDannell (1987) studied symbolism at Laurel Hill, a Protestant middle-class cemetery located in Philadelphia. A carefully designed park-like rural cemetery, Laurel Hill, in its physicality and exclusiveness serves to record and display the values and sentiments of a specific segment of American society (McDannell, 1987, p. 278). Cataraqui Cemetery in Kingston, Ontario, like Laurel Hill, is a garden cemetery featuring meandering paths, carefully placed trees, and landscaping. Some aspects of the garden cemetery can be seen in Westport’s cemeteries in the form of garden plantings, decorative trees, and the carefully delineated family plots. Lawn cemeteries have smoothed grass surfaces, open views, and groups of trees but do not have railings delineating family plots. (McKendry, 2003, p. 21). Westport’s cemeteries feature some aspects of lawn cemeteries, such as smoothed grass surfaces and open views, but also retain the corner posts or their bases that once supported railings. Westport’s cemeteries are traditional denominational cemeteries; three were formerly adjacent to their churches, two were not.

In the 1820s and 1830s, through inscriptions invoking motherhood and community involvement, gravestones recorded and upheld civic and domestic virtues;

they were intended to provide moral instruction to the reader and comfort to family and friends (McDannell, 1987, p. 277). By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the middle class of America had become deeply pious and sentimental and no longer focused on death as a finality but instead a gateway to an eternity in heaven (McDannell, 1987, p. 277). At Laurel Hill, Quakers, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians alike incorporated motifs of crosses, open Bibles, thorny crowns, and extinguished torches (McDannell, 1987, p. 303). McDannell (1987) notes that monuments were intended to evoke “a sense of history, continuity and patriotism” (p.277).

By the Victorian era the Protestants of Philadelphia had come to incorporate non-Christian symbols into their mortuary symbolism. A fascination with the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome, Egypt, and Asia produced a plethora of obelisks and funerary urns (McDannell, 1987, p. 278) that can be seen in any Victorian era cemetery. These motifs represent immortality, and the idea that death, while inevitable, is not final as a loved one will never be forgotten (McDannell, 1987, p. 286). Unlike most cemeteries in North America and England, Laurel Hill was designed by the laity as a place where the bereaved could express their loss uninhibited by the strictures of church doctrine (McDannell, 1987, p. 285), and therefore the sentiments and preferences of the people had a freedom of expression perhaps unavailable in denomination-specific cemeteries. For example, in a non-denominational cemetery stones may include symbols not welcome in a church run cemetery, such as masonic symbols in a Catholic cemetery or rosaries in a Protestant cemetery. It must be noted, however, that there were no indications that any symbols were specifically required or forbidden in Westport’s cemeteries.

Raf Vanderstraeten (2014, p. 461, 462), sociologist, studying symbolism in Catholic cemeteries in Belgium and France, found that early 20<sup>th</sup> century grave markers emphasized the hope for a life in the hereafter but by mid-century the focus shifted to the worldly and to the individual. Visual imagery too changed, with photography offering new ways to commemorate the dead (Vanderstraeten, 2014, p. 462). Personal photographs incorporated into headstones showed the deceased in happier, living times, often dressed for formal occasions (Vanderstraeten, 2014, p. 462). While religious symbols continued to be used throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were featured less prominently as conventional communal identities gave way to personalized ways of dealing with death (Vanderstraeten, 2014, p. 462,463).



**Illustration 3 Secular Phrase, sketch courtesy of N. Gardiner Jones, 2016.**

The role of religion in Canadian life has diminished over the years, as can be seen by the many churches in Ontario that have been decommissioned and sold. Anthony Smith (2011), British nationalism scholar, argues, “the rise of science, utilitarian philosophies and acquisitive materialism, have eroded traditions and promoted a secular conception of history” (p. 233). That society has become increasingly secular can be best seen in the Westport’s Roman Catholic Cemetery, where the reduction of overtly religious imagery and phrases is clearly associated with the decades after 1980. With

fewer people believing in everlasting life or damnation and more people forming their own belief systems, many rituals have been altered, some have been abandoned, and others have been replaced. 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century grave markers almost always read “Pray for the Soul of [the deceased]”. The use of this phrase gradually decreased in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century until, in the 1980s, it went out of use entirely. In an age of increasing secularism people hark back to ‘the good old days’ and identify themselves more with ethnicity than religion (Smith, 2011, p. 233). This can be seen in the use of flags and national emblems such as the thistle and shamrock on stones and items placed on and around the graves in Westport’s cemeteries. The inclusion on gravestones of photographs of the deceased, of their pets or of favourite possessions, such as aircraft or vintage cars, make many markers observed in Westport’s cemeteries very individual indeed. Wild nature appears in many forms on modern gravestones. Ducks, deer, pine trees, bears, loons, and lakes are regularly depicted on stones erected after 1980. So too are musical notes, domestic animals, and photographs of family farms. Religious symbolism remains common in Westport’s cemeteries, however there are an increasing number with personal and secular imagery and stones with names and dates only. If there is one constant that is seen on all of Westport’s grave markers it is the prominence of the patronym. As I will explore in greater detail below, family is the single most important thing recorded on any gravestone that I have seen, and other than a few 19<sup>th</sup> century stones, the patronym always has the largest lettering.

According to my informants, it was usually the surviving spouse that chose gravestones. Rainville (1999, p. 543) also noted this and emphasized that it is important to separate out the identities of the two. In any given graveyard, not everyone has a

gravestone (Martin, 2005, p. 11), and in most papers written about cemeteries only a small number of the available gravestones are studied (Rainville, 1999, p. 550). The poor might have no marker, or one selected and funded by a benevolent society or public institution (Rainville, 1999, p. 551). Because not everyone receives the same treatment in death, some individuals remain visible in the historical record where others become invisible. Westport's poor sometimes were given a marker but many were not and some lie, unmarked, in donated graves (personal communication, name withheld on request, 2015). Unmarked graves, or communal graves, hide the individual identities of the dead from public view. The unmarked dead therefore are unaccounted for when visitors or scholars discuss cemeteries; this in turn introduces an unintended bias in reporting, favouring the wealthy dead over the poor dead. In the course of my research I was told of several markers for those who had committed suicide in the later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and afterwards, however there is no difference between these markers and any other. I was not informed of earlier suicides therefore I do not know if they were given markers or not, or of what kind.

Tim Reiffenstein, geographer, and Nigel Selig (2013, p. 161), environmental scientist, discuss how the industrial fabrication of tombstones and associated supply channels had an effect on the choices that the families of Prince Edward Island, Canada could make. Harder stone, such as granite, entered the supply chain as new ways of working such stone developed (Reiffenstein and Selig, 2013, p. 160). For over a century now, stones have been mined, shaped and polished *en masse* and sent out to local dealers who would add the appropriate names and dates (Reiffenstein and Selig, 2013, p. 160). Then, and now, when family members go to the local monument retailer, they are

presented with catalogues from which they can order stones of predetermined shapes and a specific range of stone types. This leads to a remarkable homogenization of stones in cemeteries (Reiffenstein and Selig, 2013, p. 163). Tombstones tend to follow architectural trends (Reiffenstein and Selig, 2013, p. 170) as can be seen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century cross topped obelisks, the 1950s windows with Gothic traceries and the ubiquitous 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century arch topped slab grave markers. It is possible to order stones to suit buyers who prefer a singular design, at a price. Also, standardized images are offered, some images such as the rose are frequently selected thus illustrating Reiffenstein and Selig's (2013, p. 171) contention that local tastes are driven by distant suppliers. According to B. Thake (personal communication, 7 October, 2015), a 4th generation monument maker, clients preferred to look through his stock and would then make their selections of image and stone, often choosing stones that were similar to those of family and friends. More individualized selections would become popular in the 1980s, when the ability to transfer pictures to stone became possible, and with the introduction of laser etching, which further enabled a greater clarity of image (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). Reiffenstein and Selig (2013, p. 180) noted that images related to hobbies and livelihood, for example cars or fishing boats, could be added to stock images. In Westport, the overlay of loons, deer, lakes, and cabin imagery over sunbursts appears in the 1980s and continues to increase in popularity. Reiffenstein and Selig (2013, p. 180) also argue that secular imagery had become so common that it outnumbered the religious. Secular imagery is indeed more common than it was in Westport's cemeteries but has not gained ascendance over religious motifs. It is also considerably easier in recent decades to create stones that have shapes previously

unavailable, for example doubled hearts and circles (Reiffenstein and Selig, 2013, p. 17), curved and asymmetrical stones. There are asymmetrical stones in Westport's cemeteries, however the traditional straight sided arch topped slab, or block as Reiffenstein and Selig (2013) call it, remains the single most common shape of stone. Reiffenstein and Selig (2013, p. 180) also discuss how distant manufacturers with their standardized mass production of monuments effectively put Prince Edward Island's local monument manufacturers out of business. As was the case in Prince Edward Island, the loss of business to larger suppliers led to the closing of Westport's Thake's Monuments in 2007 (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015).

Francaviglia (1971) wrote "the cemetery in the US is a microcosm of the real world, and binds a particular generation of men to the architectural and perhaps even spatial preferences and prejudices that accompanied them through life" (p 501). According to Francaviglia (1971, p. 505), early stones were simple and small, approximately 76 cm in height. After the US Civil war, height and ornateness increased and by 1890 the tall obelisk was common (Francaviglia, 1971, p. 505). Post 1905, monuments become more simple and height decreased to less than 76 cm (Francaviglia, 1971, p. 505). Many of Francaviglia's observations would appear to apply to Westport's cemeteries as well, with some modification. There are not many stones dating to pre 1865 in Westport's cemeteries but those that do exist range from 50 cm to 165 cm in height, the most common measure being 114 cm. Monument height does indeed peak between 1890 and 1910. In the 1920s monuments get shorter, thicker, and wider. Francaviglia (1971) does not mention the large granite casques, or boxes, of the 1920s to 1950s. The 1950s sees the beginning of thinner granite slabs, the diminishing of height continued in

this decade and continues, with exceptions, to this day. Francaviglia (1971, p. 505) also noted the increased use of low plate-like markers. Sorensen (2009) discusses the development of urn-only lawn sections in the cemeteries of Denmark. Many cemeteries now include urn-only lawn sections, where no upright monuments are permitted and the interment and name plaques are set at or below the grass surface, because these smooth surfaced sections are faster, easier and less expensive to maintain (Sorenson, 2009, p. 120) than areas with traditional, upright stones. In these types of lawn areas, Sorenson (2009) writes “the forging of identities and meaning of dead individuals are relieved of their material presence and proximity” (p. 110). In my limited experience of urn-only lawn sections their layout may invite one to sit and contemplate, but as there is little to see one is not motivated to move around and read the stones. In my opinion, such featureless lawn sections erase the dead. I have observed that grass slowly encroaches on ground plaques until they disappear entirely from view. Some such ground plaques are carefully excavated but others are lost. As of 2015 there were no dedicated urn-only lawn sections in any of Westport’s cemeteries. Urn burials are often marked with upright stones and full interments are often marked with ground plaques, so one cannot assume a type of burial based on the type of marker. Urn-only lawn sections might yet be used for Westport’s cemeteries in order to save space and money.

## **2.4 People in the Cemetery**

I have observed that being in the cemetery and amongst the stones has an effect on people. To art historian Erika Doss (2009), affect “is perhaps best understood as

physically expressed emotion or feeling” (p. 9). Works of art, Doss (2009, p. 9) argues, embody public affect in their form, the stories they tell, and the way we create and receive them. As our culture shifts more and more toward public feeling, the physical and emotional responses we have to affective stimuli such as monuments are seen as more genuine (Doss, 2009, p. 10). Does this explain the leaving of items of tribute and remembrance at Washington’s Vietnam monument? Would this also explain the meticulously arranged offerings often seen in small town cemeteries? Contemporary American life, Doss (2009, p. 10) writes, is increasingly saturated with attempts to generate affect and emotion. When Doss (2009, p. 10) uses the term ‘landscape of affect’, she refers to the media landscape, but one could look at the way the cultural landscape in the form of a cemetery is also deliberately shaped to produce affect. Jane Bennett (2004), a political scientist at Johns Hopkins University, introduces the concept of thing-power. “Thing-power”, Bennett (2004) writes, “commands attention, exudes a kind of dignity, provokes poetry or inspires fear” (p. 350). Bennett (2004) extends thing-power to both natural and man-made things (Bennett, 2004, p. 349). People behave with restrained respectfulness, and some are fearful, when in proximity to a grave marker, whereas a boulder of the same type of stone might provide a comfortable seat or a place to set down a cup of coffee. Sara Ahmed (2008), in her essay *Sociable Happiness*, writes that “we are touched by what is near” (p. 10). If we like something we move toward it and if we do not like something we move away from it (Ahmed, 2008, p. 10). Thus how we behave, what we do or how we move, is affected by what is at hand and how we feel about it (Ahmed, 2008, p. 10). Where we go and what we do there is also dependent on how we feel, or how we expect to feel, when in a given space (Ahmed, 2008, p. 11).

People who visit cemeteries tend to do so for personal reasons, such as visiting the grave of a family member or seeking genealogical connections. In many cultures, the dead are remembered at specific times and places. Religious festivals or family anniversaries provide the impetus for visitation, for example, by Belgians and Netherlanders (Vanderstraeten, 2014, p. 466), Africa's Shona (Gelfand, no date, p. 72), and India's Toda and Kol (van Gennep, 1908/1960, p 149-151). Rites remain important, as a means of reiterating blood and social relations in ceremonies conducted in cemeteries (Vanderstraeten, 2014, p. 466, Gelfand, no date). In Belgium and the Netherlands practicing and non-practicing Catholics alike attend such occasions out of duty and for comfort (Vanderstraeten, 2014, p. 466). I was privileged to attend one such memorial service at St. Edward's Roman Catholic Cemetery in Westport, Ontario in the summer of 2015; it was an important opportunity to share and meet with the community, and to observe how people behave on such occasions. The gathering of the local community members was a social and religious event. Women outnumbered men six to one, the vast majority of the more than 30 participants were near or past retirement age. A handful of participants were in their twenties or younger and there were a few children in attendance. Most of the men were very quiet and demonstrably uncomfortable in the cemetery, perhaps because of intense emotion, and appeared reluctant to touch the stones or interact in any way with the graveside. Women were much more comfortable in the cemetery, having relaxed conversations with friends and family; women would touch the grave markers, often with both hands. A number of participants brought objects to place at the graveside, particularly freshly cut and potted flowers. Many people stopped to read multiple stones and showed spouses and children markers they felt were important. I was

consulted by several people about care of the stones, an area in which I have some knowledge but am not expert. I am very good at reading old stones, however, and this skill was much sought after. I was pleased to help where I could and to give something of value to the community that permitted my presence.

In general, the modern North American family pays few visits to gravesides, and other than on the day of interment, the visits paid are no longer overseen, moderated or affected by priests or community groups (Lindahl, 1986, p. 166). Increasingly, visits are made in pairs or alone, leaving one free to experience the moment unmitigated by social constraints or expectations (Lindahl, 1986, p. 166). Visitors to cemeteries, especially in cities, are often people out for a walk, courting couples, older couples paying respect to a buried relative (Lindahl 1986:173), or the occasional student studying symbolism. When people visit cemeteries, whether to visit a loved one's grave or simply to enjoy a walk through the grounds, they notice and read more than just one stone for the stories inscribed in stone are durable, concrete, and hard to forget (Wright, 2005, p. 70).

It is common today to see bunches of flowers or white bicycles at the sites of accidents as informal memorials that mark the passing of a life. In my experience, when people come to visit their deceased friends and loved ones, they often come bearing gifts. This behaviour, I argue, is ritual in nature as it often is clearly intended to make and maintain connections between the living and the dead (Turner, 1967, Bell, 1992, Sturken, 2007). There is a marked lack of literature discussing the deposition of objects on graves in everyday cemeteries. Kristin Hass (1998), associate professor of American Culture at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and Marita Sturken (2007), professor of Media, Culture and Communication at New York University, wrote about the placement of

articles at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and the Vietnam War Memorial. Visitors to The Wall, as the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C. is commonly known, often leave objects such as money, rocks, flags, fresh and artificial flowers, and empty liquor bottles near the names of friends and family members killed or missing in the war (Hass, 1998, p. 27-29). Donors are usually anonymous therefore it is difficult to know anything about them or their particular reasons for the placement of their object (Hass, 1998, p. 23). By leaving objects at its base, donors sustain The Wall as a living monument (Hass, 1998, p. 63). Hass (1998, p. 65) links the deposition of objects at the Wall to practices of African-Americans and Catholics of varied ethnicities who maintain a link between the living and the dead so that the living might help the dead find their way to their eternal reward (Hass, 1998, p. 77-80). That so many people leave objects at The Wall does not indicate that the predominance of visitors are Catholic or African-American but rather that these practices are broadly known and fulfill a need (Hass, 1998, p. 88). The urge to leave objects in memory of the dead at The Wall “reflect(s) both a need to negotiate the public meanings of these deaths and a determination on the part of ordinary citizens to do this work themselves” (Hass, 1998, p. 3). Hass (1998, p. 65) describes Protestant cemeteries in the United States as being secular. While there have been considerably fewer overtly religious symbols employed in Westport’s Protestant cemeteries than in the Catholic, this does not in any way seem to extend to the sorts of objects left nor to the incidence of their deposition.

Sturken (2007), wrote about the association of consumption and tragic events, particularly the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and the 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center in New York. After these

events, people of all walks of life, many travelling considerable distances, came to these sites and would often leave objects behind, as has long been the practice of visitors to cemeteries (Sturken, 2007, p. 105). Gift shops and street vendors sold and continue to sell site-related memorabilia including snow globes and teddy bears (Sturken, 2007, p. 4). Sturken (2007, p. 4-6). argues that in these visits, purchases, and giving of gifts there is a convergence of the cultures of fear and paranoia, mourning and memory, as well as comfort and consumerism. The terrorist attacks at these sites created an emotional wound and fear in the American population as can be attested to by anyone who watched the coverage of these events. The negative impact of trauma, it is now believed, can be addressed by revisiting the trauma and replaying the events in an attempt to process and assert agency over the story (Sturken, 2007, p. 27). Westport has not as yet been the target of such an attack, and there are no gift shops at its cemeteries selling bears or snow globes, however any cemetery is a place of trauma for the families and friends of those who have died. In a small village such as Westport any death touches a large portion of the community, but the deaths of the young are particularly devastating, as was remarked upon by several of my informants. Some people may visit a grave only rarely but others visit often, especially in the early years following a death. The early or sudden death particularly has a significantly higher impact as can be seen by the number and variety of items brought to the gravesite and left. Gifts such as teddy bears promise reassurance, comfort, and the recognition of pain (Sturken, 2007, p. 7-13). There are teddy bears in various forms in Westport's cemeteries, but there are far more angels and cupids; these I would argue, invoke images of divine love and in doing so fulfill the same need for reassurance, comfort and recognition of pain. Grief, Sturken (2007, p. 26-31) argues, has

been commodified; the purchase and placement of ready-made objects with known and accepted meanings is seen as suitable and sufficient expression of personal emotion. Other gifts, such as pens or shots of vodka, may have meanings specific to the donor or receiver that may not be obvious (Sturken, 2007, p. 117). Mass produced items similar or identical to those left in Westport's cemeteries are readily available at gift shops, garden centers, hardware and home décor stores. The need or desire to leave something, Sturken (2007, p. 106) notes, is not unlike building a shrine, it is a way to reduce and refute loss. Everyone works through the processes of grief in their own individual way, using aspects of ritual including the deposition of gifts where and when it is felt appropriate (Sturken, 2007, p. 115).

It is a wide-spread practice, in European/Euro-descended communities, to leave objects on gravesites. Flowers and photographs, pebbles and stones were commonly left on Australian graves (Graham, Arnold, Kohn and Gibbs., 2015, p. 44-47). Photographs, as discrete objects, were not in evidence at Westport's cemeteries but there were masses of flowers and a great many pebbles and stones. Graham, Arnold, Kohn and Gibbs (2015) make no mention of the figurines, lights, or perennial plantations so common in Westport. Collier (2003, p. 742) noted that individualized graves not only were decorated with the usual flowers, but also more esoteric items including poems, photos, figurines, packages of cigarettes, and birthday candles (Collier, 2003, p. 742). Visitors to the Netherland's cemeteries often leave objects behind including "personal message(s), cut flowers, burning candles and all kinds of memorabilia", these objects are often appropriate to the season (Vanderstraeten, 2014, p. 466). In traditional Jewish practice, flowers are not placed on graves, but with the influx of immigrants from the former

USSR, this practice is occurring increasingly in Israel's cemeteries (Shay 2004, p. 293). Shay (2004, p. 295) also noted that plants and bushes are grown around increasingly secular graves as gravesites have become private, family affairs rather than the communal and largely undifferentiated traditional Jewish graves. Woodthorpe (2011, p. 31), studying a cemetery in England, noted that the bringing of gifts to the grave was a way for the living to maintain a relationship with the dead and to take care of them. Woodthorpe (2011, p. 31) also noted that family members who did not leave gifts were considered uncaring but those who continued to visit the grave or give gifts for long periods of time were judged as failing to move on with life. None of the many people I spoke to mentioned leaving gifts because of social pressures; they left gifts out of devotion. Extended grief was noted in some cases, but mentioned with great sympathy and sadness. Many of the participants at the memorial service I attended brought objects that they left at the graveside. Is the leaving of objects a private act of devotion that is made public because it takes place in a cemetery? Are objects left, or not left, to please others? I did not pose these questions specifically and thus cannot say if Woodthorpe's observations apply to Westport, Ontario.

Symbolic anthropologist Edith Turner (1992) discusses spirits in her book *Experiencing Ritual* and the healing rituals used to remove unhappy spirits from the bodies of sufferers. Her work builds upon that of her husband, Victor Turner and their combined experiences of Ndembu ritual in the 1960s (Turner, 1967) as well as her own in later visits (Turner, 1992). Personal beliefs vary about the existence of spirits and the ability of the living to communicate with the dead, and Ontario cemeteries contain many symbols of such attempts at connection. The most common message conveyed to the

dead is telling them how much they are missed in the world of the living. People leave a great many things at gravesides including coins and flowers. People also leave effigies of various kinds of beings that are not tied to this earth which I refer to as “Things with Wings.” Things with Wings include angels, cupids, fairies, birds, butterflies, and bees. The dove is the Christian symbol of the Holy Spirit. Blue jays, robins, and loons are less likely to be associated with Christian theology, along with fairies, butterflies, and bees. Fairies have been popularized by various books and movies over the years and there is a significant Celtic population in the Westport burial demographic that may explain the presence of fairies as figurines on graves. Are the bees and common Canadian birds more about the natural world than the spiritual one? Are these expressions of a less religious and a more secular world view? Do they have to be one or the other? Perhaps they are in themselves a symbolic messenger between the two.

Other things that can traverse the distance between the living world and the heavens are smoke and light. According to Barbara A. Weightman (1996), geographer, “the phenomenon of light bridges the interpretation of landscape and religious experience” (p. 59). Light is often used to represent the sacred and may appear as the sun, as fire, as beams of light or as “an attribute of sacred beings and places (Weightman, 1996, p. 59). All of these are commonly seen on grave markers in Westport’s cemeteries in the form of torches, halos, and rays of sunlight bursting through windows and trees, highlighting crosses and religious figures. There are also a number of light emitting devices in the same cemeteries; devices such as solar lights, candles, and lanterns. The smoke of lanterns and candles may evoke the candles in a church often lit alongside prayer in an effort to send messages heavenwards. Light can be seen as the spark of the

divine we are all said to carry within us, a sign of conversion to a faith, and a keeping of vigil (Weightman, 1996, p. 61-67). Solar lights and lanterns may act as a guiding light for the deceased on the journeys after life and the hope that the deceased can see that they have not been forgotten.

### **Chapter 3: Symbolism in Westport, Ontario's Cemeteries**

For the sake of clarity and consistency, I have organized my research findings in the same order as the above literature and methodological discussion. First, I will describe the cemetery as a place. I will explain the location of Westport, Ontario and, in turn, the locations of the cemeteries in reference to the village and its elements. A hand drawn map has been provided as a visual aid; any and all errors are unintentional and my own. I will also describe how individuals are situated within the cemetery as revealed by the preferential selection of burial locations and the erection of prominent monuments. The second part of my research is centered on the monuments. I will describe the monuments in terms of social connections including family, group membership, occupation and religion. Grave markers are also memory devices on which carefully selected personal information is recorded. Monumental meaning making is discussed in terms of technological change, images of flora and fauna, the Great Outdoors, individual pastimes and passions, the inclusion of photographs of individuals and homesteads, and the creation of unique markers. An unwillingness to name death is identified, as is the rise of secular imagery. Portal symbolism is also described as is Egyptian and colour symbolism. I will also identify the social changes noted including a decreased stability of

marriage, secularization and improvements in child survival and literacy. I will complete this monument section by describing how people select gravestones. Here I will use the information provided by my informants, and with their permission, photographs of the markers chosen to identify the symbols used and the meanings they had for participants. The third major section of my research findings are about what people do in cemeteries. I will relay the relationships that my informants describe with Westport's cemeteries as care takers, monument makers, observers, visitors and mourners. I will also examine the different kinds of offerings, or gifts, that I found deposited in Westport's cemeteries.

### **3.1 The Cemetery as a Place**

“It's the last piece of real estate I'll ever buy” (personal communication, J. Murphy, 18 August, 2015).

The village of Westport, like so many villages, is a meeting place. Located at the foot of an ancient mountain (Westport Branch of the Women's Institute, 1939), Westport marks the end of the limestone plains and the rise of the Precambrian Shield. Sand and Upper Rideau Lakes join at Westport, their courses mediated by the dams of saw, carding, and grist mills that once gave employment to many local people (Leavitt, 1973, p. 180). A railroad and station leave their marks in the place names and the physical layout of the village but are no longer extant. Four roads enter Westport bringing local people and visitors into the heart of the village. On the southern edge of the village, the Presbyterian Cemetery is flanked by Rideau Vista Public School and the Royal Canadian Legion, and sits across the road from the local lumber store. The Baptist Cemetery on Concession Street is located directly across from St. Edward the Confessor Roman

Catholic Church and its namesake elementary school. Around the corner, in the western part of the village, is the United Cemetery which faces the Free Methodist Church and the Brewer's Retail. St. Paul's Anglican Cemetery is in the north end of the village, right beside the Lion's Club Beach and on one of two roads leading out of the village to the north. In small villages such as Westport, especially old villages, this intimate integration of cemeteries into communal spaces is common. West of the village six kilometers lies St. Edward the Confessor Roman Catholic Cemetery. The location of the Roman Catholic Cemetery well out of the village is an ongoing reminder of the way lands were preferentially allocated in the early years of the settlement and is unfortunately a very common reminder of religious intolerance.

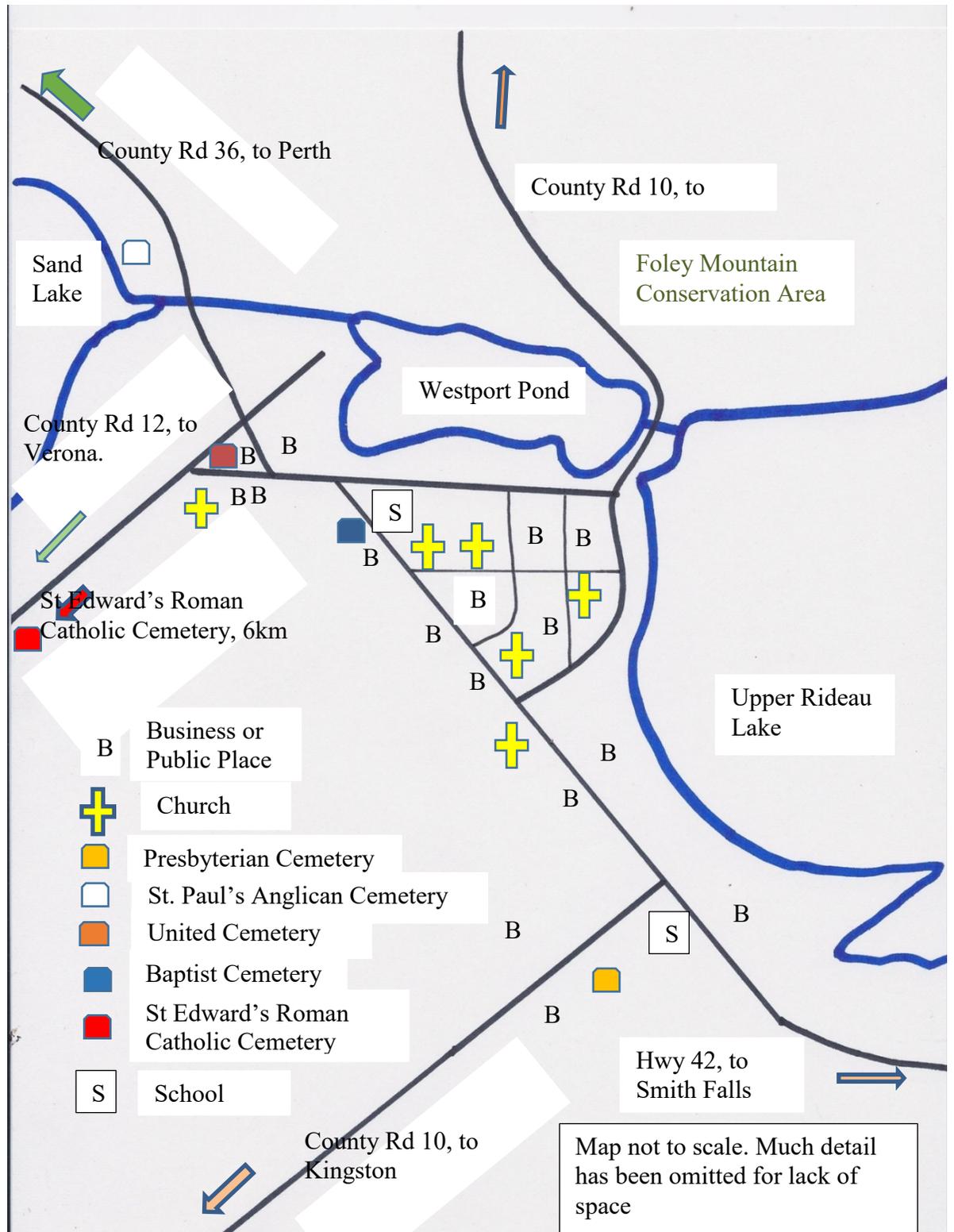


Illustration 4 Map of Westport

Topography is a significant factor in the selection of a site for cemeteries. The preference for locating cemeteries on hills has long been noted (Francaviglia, 1971, Janson and Janson 2004, Mc Kendry, 2003, Rielly, 2012). Presbyterian Cemetery, from its hill on the edge of the village, has a lovely view over Upper Rideau Lake. Baptist and United Cemeteries are also on hills. It is unclear if there was a view from either of these hilly sites to the waterways below but it may have been possible before the village grew up and filled in the areas between. St Paul's Anglican cemetery is idyllically situated beside Westport Pond and at the foot of a mountain. St. Edward the Confessor Roman Catholic Cemetery definitely has no view of water but instead sits atop a hill in rolling countryside which may itself be symbolic of the water crossed by the Irish immigrants whose descendants form a large portion of the village's population. All five of the cemeteries are located in reference to a hillside and possibly water as well.

The location of cemeteries by the roadside or at crossroads may have its basis in practicality. All five of Westport's cemeteries are located on county or village roads. Within the cemeteries themselves there is usually a driveway or path that provides access to the interior of the burial ground. Unlike larger and more famous garden cemeteries such as Kingston, Ontario's Cataraqui Cemetery, there are no meandering paths in Westport's cemeteries, just simple straight or U-shaped paths that facilitate vehicular access.

Location within the cemetery seems to be as important as the location of the cemetery itself in the landscape. It is along the main roads and access paths that the most prominent monuments are usually found. McKendry (2003, p. 36), in her study of Ontario's cemeteries noted the same preferential location of wealthy patrons. The tallest monuments, the richest monuments, and often the earliest monuments are clustered along

road and access paths, often with family names prominently carved into the side of monuments facing these features so that passersby are made aware of to whom the monument belongs. Features of the cemetery also seem to influence the distribution of burials, such as proximity to the cross at St. Edwards, the view of the lake at Presbyterian Cemetery, or the tops of the hills at Baptist and United Cemeteries. At United Cemetery, the older monuments tend to start at the top of the hill in the point between two roads, with newer interments lower down the hill and the newest generally in the flat at the bottom of the hill as was described by Francaviglia (1971, p. 508). At Presbyterian Cemetery the rise adjacent to the vault is crowded with monuments that share a view over the lake. The cross at St. Edward's Roman Catholic Cemetery, I was told, is located on the site where a church once stood but burned down right after completion (Adams, 1937, p. 33). The cross is situated on a rise in that burial grounds, and provides a point about which are clustered a great many graves, many with very prominent markers. Areas furthest from these apparently more desirable locations often have later burials or more modest markers. Areas close to the desired features are rarely unoccupied. There is a section in the Baptist Cemetery, however, that does not appear to have any burials in it at all, suggesting that it may have been the location of the original Olivet Baptist Church. At St. Edwards there is a clear delineation between the oldest part of the cemetery and the newest; this can be seen in the line of trees that marks the old cemetery border. The arrangement of stones in the old section of St. Edwards is unexpectedly neat and tidy. The current tidiness and order is the result of efforts in the 1970s to fix up what was at the time a largely derelict cemetery (personal communication, J. Murphy, 18 August, 2015). Unfortunately, the stones were not necessarily re-erected in their original spots (personal communication, J. Murphy, 18

August, 2015) so one cannot infer anything from the layout of this very old section of the cemetery. It is important to note that there are always exceptions to the rule, the above observations are made based on general trends and are in no way absolute.

### **3.2 The Monuments**

Early monuments were made of locally quarried marble and set into sandstone bases according to an undated local newspaper article published in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These early monuments, dating from as early as the 1850s, tended to be in slab form and of a size that a few men could wrestle into place. The tallest and grandest monuments in Westport's cemeteries cluster in the 1880 to 1930 period, a period that saw the use of marble begin its decline and the use of granite increase due to the frailty of marble and the new technologies permitting the working of granite. Towering obelisks and arched gateways overtime gave way to massive granite casques, or boxes. There are some very large monuments in three of the cemeteries: St. Edwards, Presbyterian, and United. Some of these monuments commemorate multiple family members, some only a single person. Regardless, these impressive monuments are intended to be seen, to be noticed, and to reflect the success of the family along with the depths of its grief. Baptist Cemetery has some large monuments as well but not to the same degree or number. Generally, large stones are markers for males. Women's stones are usually smaller and children's smaller still. Wealthy women and children often have larger stones than those of less prominent males. Over time, the preference for larger stones has given way to smaller, thinner stones that are almost always some kind of granite. In earlier years, the death of a child might warrant a very small stone indeed. But since the 1980s, the death of a child is often

marked by quite large and often ornate stones. There are many reasons that account for the changes in stone size and decoration. Big stones are expensive and may be beyond the means of many. Male preference is seen in many different ways in the cemetery, the size of the memorial being but one way. A number of graves are marked with simple ground plaques. Wives and children may be marked with a ground plaque that is associated with the man's stone. Combined with cremation, these allow more memorials to be fit into smaller plots, thus using space more cost effectively. While the stones for children who died prior to the 1980s tend to be small, these stones often record the deaths of multiple children, which was not an unusual occurrence.

In the four cemeteries in which I worked, there were a large number of unmarked graves. A grave might be left unmarked for many reasons including a lack of money to pay for a stone, the desire of the deceased to not have a stone, or because there was no family around to commission one. If the desire is to be forgotten, the unmarked grave is a successful choice. Without reference to a plot plan of the cemetery, not one person asked could identify the occupant of an unmarked grave.

Grave markers are about recording the fact of existence. Most gravestones give the name of the deceased and a date of death. Often a date of birth or age appears on the stone, along with the name of the spouse or parents. While details included on gravestones such as biblical passages, epitaphs, and sentiments vary somewhat, connections to family, groups, occupations, and religion are consistently recorded and commonly found in all of Westport's cemeteries.

The single most prominent detail on grave markers in Westport is the family name, or patronym, of the deceased. The last name of the male line is always the largest

written component on a gravestone, save for very early examples where the phrases ‘sacred to the memory of’ or ‘in loving memory of’ would sometimes be bigger. Given names are frequently in the same size font but the first name is almost never larger than the last. The family name is carved the most deeply, or raised to the highest degree, for the greatest visibility and prominence, and is commonly placed at the top of the stone so that it is the first thing noticed. The patronym is often recorded on more than one side of the monument, and if there is a roadway nearby, the patronym will frequently be prominently featured on the side facing the road so that all can see it.

A woman’s maiden name, being the last name of her father, is also a patronym. Women who have taken their husband’s patronym on marriage and lived under that name for decades upon death are usually identified once more and finally by their maiden name. One cannot assume, however, that women are always reunited with their father’s name at death, for there are numerous examples, some as late as the 2010s, where the woman is simply recorded as wife of the husband, with no maiden name mentioned. In this case, her identity has become so completely subsumed under that of her husband that it may be difficult to find out who she was before she married. Perhaps this reflects the woman’s personal preference, or perhaps no one knew or could remember her maiden name. These normative patriarchal practices result in the loss or obscuring of a significant part of the woman’s identity which no doubt frustrates the efforts of those researching family ties. Following the patronym, a woman’s name may be next, or it might be the husband’s, indicating perhaps who died and was recorded first. In most cases wives are buried to the left hand side of their husband, which to the viewer is the right side, as Christians are buried face up with toes pointing to the east.

Within a given cemetery, one finds families clustered together as best as they can. People prefer to be buried with kin or those like them. Large patriarchal monuments are often accompanied by the burials of their children and spouses, especially the male children. Sometimes, and more recently, we see siblings buried side by side and flanked by their respective spouses. More recent monuments often include information that permits the viewer to make direct connections between family members. As it is not always possible for family members to be buried together, identifying an individual as the son or daughter of  $x$  establishes and clarifies the degree of relatedness and maintains the family ties. This was the case of James Cawley (see Illustration 11) whose stone identifies his parents who lay some distance away. Unmarried or divorced adult children are frequently found buried beside their parents. Young children are often buried with their grandparents or with a stone awaiting the dates of their still living parents' death. The names of as yet living children, who may or may not be buried close by one day, are also increasingly recorded on stones; this information will be very important to future generations looking to find their roots. Country and county of origin is often recorded as well, thus identifying immigrants. Some monuments also record the names of family members buried in different cemeteries, often in distant cities or countries. Soldiers buried in France and Belgium, for example, are recorded on several stones in Westport's cemeteries. A family may choose to record many names on a single stone regardless of their place of burial, and in doing so reunite the family symbolically if not physically.

At one time or another, most people have belonged to a group or association of some sort. Some of these groups come to assume such importance in a person's life that their membership is recorded on their gravestone. For instance, membership in the

Freemasons may be indicated by a number of different symbols but the most common is the combination of a compass, a square, and the letter G for God. A tip down star indicates that the deceased lady was a member of the Eastern Star. Membership in the Masons and Eastern Star would appear to be declining in recent years for these symbols tend to appear mainly on the graves of older men and women and are seen less frequently than on earlier stones. The cross and shield of the Knights of Columbus continues to be used. Oddfellows symbols have not been recorded in some time, nor have those of the Orange Lodge, which would indicate that these religiously affiliated groups are no longer active in the Westport area. The symbols of civic groups, such as the Kiwanis and Lions Clubs, and the veteran's organization, the Royal Canadian Legion, are beginning to appear, indicating that these organizations are alive and well. Some symbols appear on single stones which would indicate that the member came from a distant locale or that the group is not yet commonly included on grave markers.



**Illustration 5** Masonic Emblem and Shamrocks, sketch courtesy of N. Gardiner Jones, 2016.

If a person held an occupation of significance in the community, it is often recorded on their gravestone. Protector figures such as doctors and pharmacists, nurses

and dentists, and members of the clergy have these credentials clearly recorded, and the stones of Catholic priests include their date of ordination. If we consider that these are also occupations that require extensive education and the cost that goes with that education, we can better understand the emphasis on the status implied and demanded through the inclusion of these details. Prominent business people might also record their occupation, be it the hammer and chisel of the monument maker or an aerial photograph of a family farm.

There are a number of stones in Westport's cemeteries that record police or military service. Some of these stones are of official issue, such being the right of any member who has served. Civilian stones also record military service either explicitly stated or in the badges of regiments and corps. Given the number of people who served in the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it is surprising that there are not more indications of military service.

What has been implicit to this point must now be explicitly discussed. Westport has five cemeteries, each serving a specific denomination. The Anglicans have their own cemetery, as do the Catholics, and the Presbyterians. The Baptist Cemetery is no longer active. The United Church and the Free Methodists share the United Cemetery. Some similarities and differences between denominations were observed. The Baptist Cemetery, being the oldest in the village and dating from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, was the only place for burials for some time, therefore one cannot assume that everyone there interred was a Baptist. The United Cemetery, formerly the Methodist Cemetery, dates from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The Presbyterian Cemetery opened for business in the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and today serves not only Presbyterians but also the general public. Family names

found in the Baptist cemetery are found in the United and Presbyterian Cemeteries as well. Several early 20<sup>th</sup> century grave markers indicate that because of religion couples that were united in life were separated in death by burial in different cemeteries. There are Catholic names in these cemeteries too, though they are admittedly uncommon. The Catholic cemetery also has names that would normally be associated with Protestant denominations. Westport is a small village, where intermarriage happens.

There are denominational differences in the occurrences of certain motifs, and there are also religion specific phrases. IHS, usually written on a cross, is the Latin short form for Jesus, Saviour of Men (personal communication, L. di Rocco, 2015). IHS is seen from time to time in the Protestant cemeteries but is very common, almost as common as the cross itself, in St. Edward's Roman Catholic Cemetery. The inscription directing the reader to "Pray for the Soul of" appears only in St. Edward's where it is ubiquitous in the early years and largely disappears mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In the Protestant cemeteries there are grave markers from the earliest period that do not incorporate any specifically religious motifs whatsoever.

There is limited space on a headstone to record the details of a person's life. Most stones are rather scant on detail, limited to dates and names, perhaps an image or two, and in some cases a biblical verse or a poem. Many stones give no indication of the perceived character of the deceased, while others extoll their virtues, telling us of much loved, saintly individuals. The details that are recorded are there to create an image desired by the person who commissioned the stone, be it the deceased or a mourner. Far more is left unsaid than is recorded on headstones. Stories of joy or betrayal, lives lived well or despair embraced, tragic death or conflict are usually omitted from the text written in

stone for the world to see. These unrecorded stories lie in the collective consciousness of the community, and in family histories passed down through generations, waiting to be recalled and recounted to the attentive and respectful listener. In the course of my research I was told many stories, often going back generations that were brought to the minds of participants by the sight of names on grave markers. The grave marker thus acts as a memory device in two ways; for those who have access to the stories of a community they are a rich archive of memory, and for the visitor an open air record of individual lives.

A large number of grave markers have one or more images on them, as already mentioned. Some symbols have been in common use for a very long time, while others have come and gone in popularity. The selection of specific images for individuals is intentional and meaningful at many levels for different people. The following section will first look at how technology has effected imagery. Second this section will discuss common images of flora, fauna, indicators of personal pastimes and passions, and photographs of people and places. The banishment of death from the cemetery, and the rise of secularism is identified. The ubiquity of portal symbolism is also examined. A discussion of Egyptian influence in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and colour symbolism complete this section.

What can be recorded in stone has been greatly affected by technology for one can do both more and less with grave markers today than was possible in the past. Early stones, being made of marble, offered the carver a marvelous material for expression. Marble is a fine grained, soft stone that is easy to carve, holds detail well and when polished, takes on a glow and luster all its own. These attributes are hard to see when looking at a stone that has been exposed to the elements for a century for the qualities that

made it such a wonderful medium also are its main faults; it is soft and easily destroyed. Marble stones often have beautifully carved flora of many types. Grape vines and oak leaves are often seen together symbolizing the woman's fertility and the man's strength. Glorious bouquets of mixed flowers top arched slab and garland obelisks. Roses, doves, lambs, and in a few cases, Christ on his Cross were enthusiastically carved by hand in bas relief. When marble fell out of favour and the more durable granite took its place, the technology used also changed. Granite is hard, its grain is coarser than that of marble, it takes a high polish and it stands up to the elements far better than the lovely, soft, glowing marbles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Up until very recently granite was carved by blasting it with sand or pellets and details sharpened with a chisel and mallet (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). This necessarily changed what could be done by way of imagery, at least in an attractive and recognizable manner. The kinds of flowers and their style were simplified greatly. The rose, so common on marble markers, largely disappeared for decades, reappearing towards the 1970s as deeply carved outlines and in recent years rendered in bas relief as the ubiquitous symbol of love. There are some generic flower shapes dating from the 1920s through the 1960s that might have been intended to look like roses but fail. But the capacity for detail once again expanded with laser etching, first available in the 1980s. This technique made it possible to execute exquisitely detailed images and photographs and thus expanded the decorative options for gravestones.

The addition of photographs to headstones is not an entirely new phenomenon, however changes in technology have made this a very accessible option. Portraits begin to appear on Westport's gravestones in the 1980s. Etching a person's portrait in stone freezes

them in the visual memory of the community and provides a great deal more information about the deceased. Many of these portraits are of young males. Couples and older males have also been noted but are not numerous. I did not see a photograph of a woman that was not in association with that of a man. How long these stone portraits will last is not certain; some are showing wear but the majority are holding out well, some after 30 years or more.

Some of the most common names found in my research are those of families that have been here for many generations. A recent trend in memorialization among these families is the inclusion of an aerial photograph of the family farm. Etched into stone, these images indicate that the land, the family homestead, and the connection with those who built the farm, are incredibly important to the persons memorialized. I use the present tense in this case because, given how recent these grave markers are, there are a number of people who are yet living whose names are on erected stones. I have not seen aerial photograph emblazoned monuments in urban cemeteries but they may exist.

Greenery of some sort is included on at least half of the stones in any given cemetery, and I doubt this is the case only in Westport. Life, in the form of flowers, leaves, vines, or seeds, is symbolically carved into stone for the dead. Sometimes this is overtly expressed, for example in the marble stumps with vines that form headstones for members of Woodsmen of the World. The poppy, never common in Westport's cemeteries, disappears entirely in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Until quite recently, the majority of flowers carved into granite were simplified lines with a bit of material removed to create depth and curve. If one wanted to spend a significant amount of money it was indeed possible to create foliage in deep relief, with elegant lines, and enhanced with hand

tooled detail. Fanciful acanthus sprays enclose early 20<sup>th</sup> century casques at their corners, promising eternal life in stone leaves. The pine and maple trees of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century lend local flavour, for both varieties of trees are ubiquitous in the area.

Animals play an important part in people's lives and thus it is not surprising that animals also appear on grave markers. Early grave markers often featured a lamb or a bird, particularly the dove. The lamb is no longer seen on stones dating after the 1960s. In the 1980s it became common for companion and wild animals to be included on gravestones. A hunter often has a deer on his or her stone, a fisherman is identified by the inclusion of a bass. Wild birds are also a very common sight on stones dating after 1980. Doves symbolize the heavenly spirit in Christian mythology. Loons and sparrows, jays and cardinals are more regionally appropriate and indicate an affinity with the natural world. Robins symbolize the return of spring and by extension the promise of a new life in heaven. Dogs and horses are also frequently seen and tell us of an affection for members of that species. It was surprising that there were no cats to be seen. This omission may be in part because cats have long been associated with witches. I did not see a single image of a cat on a gravestone.

A particularly popular post 1980 motif, with a few variations, speaks to a love of the Great Outdoors. This image is that of a cabin by a lake surrounded by trees. Usually there is a deer at the water's edge, or a loon swimming in the lake, or both, and often the sun is bursting through a pine tree. This image is particularly appropriate to the Westport area for there are a great many lakes nearby with cabins of all sorts, deer are common sights, and loons are the voice of summer. The cabin might also be a reference to early settlers. All of these elements are meaningful locally for they reflect the familiar local

terrain, fauna, flora and family. This image, and its variations, is also related to individual pastimes and passions of hunters, fishers, and hikers.



**Illustration 6 Outdoor Image with Flora and Fauna**

How people spent at least part of their lives is often noted on gravestones. Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century stones often recorded memberships in publicly recognized groups, and as mentioned previously, memberships in some traditionally recorded groups appears to be declining. In the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century one sees the pastimes and passions of individuals being included on grave markers. Musical instruments indicate a musician; the palette and brush an artist. Car and truck aficionados, book lovers, and philosophers are identified through photos and phrases. There are, apparently, a fair

number of fisherpersons, mostly men according to the inscriptions, in the Westport area. There are a lot of golfers in the area too, and a few hockey and baseball players. Hunting is also a popular pastime. Golf clubs and hockey sticks, baseball bats, bass, and deer are found on headstones everywhere I worked. There are a couple of aircraft as well which is not surprising as there is a flying club in the village.

There are, from time to time, markers unlike any other markers. Westport's cemeteries, like other rural and small town cemeteries, have their share of markers made by individuals for individuals. These markers, so very different from those produced by professional monument makers, show a high degree of uniqueness and personalization and are often made of or include unusual materials. Wood is a commonly used material in such homemade markers, in no small part because it is readily available, inexpensive and easy to work. Homemade wooden crosses are fairly common in rural cemeteries and often feature hand painted details. Composite markers often use wood as the base material to which just about anything can be added including golf paraphernalia, fishing lures, leaves and branches, ribbons and personal notes. These added materials are clearly chosen to reflect the interests of the deceased. Metal, glass, ceramic, and fieldstone are also used, and quite creatively too. Metal, glass, ceramic, and fieldstone are quite durable, thus markers made of these substances are likely to last for a very long time. Pressure treated wood, often used to erect wooden crosses, can last for decades under the right conditions. Other wooden and composite monuments though, are more ephemeral in nature. Were these intended to last only a short time? Perhaps a more permanent marker is for the future, perhaps there was never a desire for a stone, or perhaps a stone is beyond the means of the maker. Regardless of the impetus behind their creation, these unique markers

are quite wonderful in and of themselves, for they show imagination, devotion, and adaptability.

Some of the markers at Baptist Cemetery are unique for having survived or for being quite old. Family plots and individual graves enclosed with marble posts and metal rods or chains still exist at Baptist Cemetery, though many have fallen or been toppled. Such enclosures were also present at United Cemetery, for their bases are still in place, but the posts and connecting rods and chains are no longer extant. It is likely that such also existed at St. Edward's Roman Catholic Cemetery but the rearrangement of the old section has eradicated any traces. At Baptist Cemetery there are also two grave enclosures that feature metal bells, these bells may be relics of a time when the fear of being buried alive was very real. At Baptist Cemetery there also appears to be a bed-shaped monument, complete with headboard, footstone, and side stones. The combination of stones and sizes would indicate that this was not a full sized bed shape, but was instead a smaller version, perhaps because of the cost of stone.



**Illustration 7 Bell on Grave Boundary, sketch courtesy of N. Gardiner Jones, 2016.**

Expressions of religious belief are very common in Westport's cemeteries. Crosses are found in all the cemeteries. This is not surprising as this is a village with six churches and is conservative in nature. While the cross is a common motif in all of these cemeteries, the graves of Catholics are many times more likely to have a cross than not. In St. Edward's Roman Catholic Cemetery, the cross is often a separate piece mounted on top of what would otherwise be a fairly typical stone. These composite stones are not, however, confined to the Catholic cemetery. Does this style of monument necessarily indicate a Catholic burial? Other stones have crosses etched or carved into their surfaces, sometimes upright, with halos or Celtic circles. Other times lying at an angle, some recumbent crosses feature a rose growing up and around it. In addition to crosses, praying hands are also seen in Westport's cemeteries, as are rosaries at St. Edward's Roman Catholic Cemetery. At Baptist Cemetery, three United Empire Loyalist graves dating between 1848 and 1858 feature stylized hands with fingers pointing heavenward accompanied by the words "Yonder is My Home".

Just as the cross is an invitation to contemplate the divine, so too are biblical inscriptions and calls to prayer. Gospel, chapter, and verse are regular inclusions on Westport's grave markers, some frequently used passages refer directly to death or sleep, others refer to seeing or walking with God. Peculiar to the Catholic cemetery are inscriptions that read "Pray for the Soul of". These appear on almost all of the early stones, with very few exceptions. This call to prayer largely disappears in the 1950s, with only the very occasional occurrence after that time, and usually on the gravestone of a very elderly person. In the Protestant cemeteries, long, florid poems of love, devotion, and heaven largely disappear along with the obelisks of the late Victorian era.

Anthropologists are as prone as anyone else to having their own ideas about what they will find before they start their research. In my case, I expected to see a preponderance of Virgins Mary at St. Edward's Roman Catholic Cemetery. I was wrong. There were a number of Virgin Mary images and a few statues, but not in the numbers I had envisioned. I had also read that Catholic priests are usually buried at the foot of the Cross; there is one buried near the foot of the cross at St. Edward's Roman Catholic Cemetery but the others are buried with their families.

Everyone dies, but the reality of death was explicitly acknowledged in the earlier years of Westport's cemeteries. The use of euphemisms for death goes back to the Victorian era but not to the exclusion of the word died. Victorians now "lie asleep in the arms of Jesus"; they are "at peace" or "at rest" in stone-edged graves that resemble beds. Some dearly beloved "departed" but a few simply "died". In the last half century, there is rarely a mention at all of death, not even euphemistically. Dates indicate birth and death but the word is not used openly as it was in the early years of Westport's cemeteries. This avoidance of a simple biological fact and finality and raises some questions. Does the avoidance of the word "dead" or "death" signal an unwillingness to completely sever the connection with the loved one? Is it rooted in fear of what is to come for all of us? When euphemisms are used they may take some of the sting away. But if one believes in another life, another world, another state, another way of being that is contingent on the living leaving this particular life behind, perhaps it is easier to understand the use of the less painful, less final softer wording. The loss and grief that comes with the passing of our loved ones perhaps can only be softened by a hope that the end is not the end.

It is in expressions of piety that one sees the greatest interdenominational differences. The three Protestant cemeteries included in my research do indeed have expressions of piety including crosses, doves, bibles, biblical passages, and written references to God, Jesus, angels, and heaven as does St. Edward's Roman Catholic Cemetery. However, there is a marked difference in the proportion of markers with such sentiments expressed. The vast majority of Catholic gravestones include a pious image or statement; there is a single secular stone dating from the 1920s, a few more in the 1950s, and a significant number of secular stones beginning in the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the Protestant cemeteries there have long been secular stones. The greatest increase in secular stones for Protestant cemeteries appears to have taken place in the 1920s, associated perhaps with the aftermath of The Great War. Images that I consider secular are those that are not specifically religious. For instance, crosses and Virgins Mary are clearly and specifically religious images but flowers and foliage are not. A secular sentiment dating back to the earliest years of Westport's cemeteries reads, "In Loving Memory of" whereas "Sacred to the Memory of" is religious. A number of stones have no obvious image of any sort, save perhaps for their shape, which in the vast majority of cases is of upright and parallel sides with an arched top.

The cemeteries of Westport abound with symbolic portals. What are portals and what makes them symbolic? A portal is that which is between here and there. For example, a window is a portal between inside and outside. A door stands between this room and that, the interior world and the exterior. Gateways invite the viewer to look past swinging doors to glimpse what lies beyond. Gateways are Christian symbols when they invoke the Gates of Heaven or the path to salvation. Windows, usually executed in a style

reminiscent of a Gothic church, again may invoke the religious. An arch, the strongest of dividers in architecture, is strong enough to support the weight of the building while facilitating movement under its curve. A portal marks the passage of the deceased from this life to the next and is the symbolic location of that moment. In all of Westport's cemeteries, carved into the stones, there are windows and gateways, arches and doors. In fact, the portal is the single most common symbol I found if one takes into consideration the shape of stones, and it is to this that I turn next.

The vast majority of the 909 stones I recorded in Westport's cemeteries have upright sides and an arch top. Some arch tops were simple curves. Other arch tops were combinations of curves. A number of arch tops were pointed. All of the arch tops observed were derived from architectural forms such as one would see in churches, public buildings, and private houses. So ubiquitous is the arch that it took most of the summer for me to question what the arch meant. Once I really looked at the arch, in all its simplicity, its meaning became clear. Regardless of the style of arch, these stones all look like doors; they symbolize in their very shape a portal between this world and the next.

My first assumption was that the arch topped slab grave marker was made to look like a church door. If we assume that the arch topped gravestone is invoking the intercession of a Church, then it becomes very hard indeed to say that are many secular stones at all. In this increasingly secular society though, one must ask if arched doors are necessarily associated with churches or religion. Symbols often have contradictory meanings, and meanings can become muddled or forgotten over time. Do people see a church door when they look at a grave marker? Arched doors and windows are seen locally on Victorian drive sheds, arbors, and houses; therefore, the arch shape is

traditional, familiar, and might invoke thoughts of home. Availability and affordability may have been a factor as well. If the majority of stones offered for sale were arch topped it stands to reason that the majority of stones purchased and erected would have arched tops.

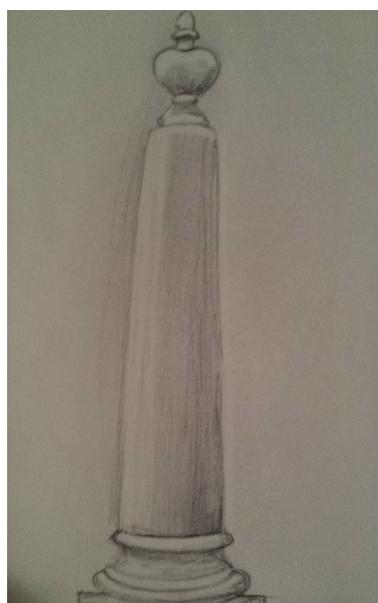
Victorian monuments often combined elements of Christian and Egyptian symbolism, as can be seen in almost any old cemetery in Ontario, Westport included. Egyptian obelisks, modified to suit Victorian tastes, were created with flat sides and arched tops that form a cross, or were topped with a pyramid. A common church floorplan and design element is that of a cross. Pyramidal roofs were fairly common on houses at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century so this addition is in keeping with the tastes of the time. Many church towers are pyramidal in form or were, as in the case of Westport's Knox Presbyterian Church (no date, Pense). Other pyramidal roofs in the village include that of the Post Office tower and the former public school (no date, Pense).



**Illustration 8 Obelisk with Complex Pyramid Top, sketch courtesy of N. Gardiner Jones,**

**2016.**

The word obelisk has come up several times so far in this paper, perhaps because they are so very prominent in the late Victorian sections of the cemeteries. Flat sided obelisks, looking much like small Washington Monuments, made of white marble initially and later pink or red granite, provided plenty of space to record the names of multiple family members. Rounded, tapered obelisks were also popular, and if made in sections could reach heights of more than 3 meters. Obelisks are also phallic symbols. In Egyptian mythology; obelisks are the penis of Osiris and are thus a fertility symbol (van Gennep, 1908/1960, p. 157). These monuments were made of white marble or pink granite. The majority of obelisks in Westport's cemeteries were made in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century from white marble or pink granite; they often include details of individuals that were added decades later. Obelisks are not common after the 1910s, however, there are recent versions of obelisks, some commissioned to resemble older family stones (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015).



**Illustration 9 Pink Granite Obelisk, sketch courtesy of N. Gardiner Jones, 2016.**

Turner's (1967) triad of red, white and black is readily observed in Westport's cemeteries. Early markers that have survived are all white marble, grey and roughened now with age and the effects of exposure to the elements. There are no truly red stones available in the sizes and quality necessary for a gravestone, the closest are the pink granites of which there are many and of varied depth of colour. Black granite is another commonly used stone. Marks etched into black granite also stand out starkly in contrast and, unless altered, are white. But what about all those grey stones? There are no truly white granites, and as marble does not stand up well to Canadian winters and is hardly ever used anymore, the various shades of grey granite have largely taken their place. Lighter greys fall to the white spectrum of this discussion, and the darker to the black. Black granite, for many years imported from South Africa and Zimbabwe, was very expensive up until quite recently when Chinese sources became available at greatly reduced cost (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). While other colours of stones are available (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015) the majority of stones selected are red/pink, white/grey/ or black/dark grey. These colours are important cross-culturally according to V. Turner (1967, p. 84) as previously discussed. Colour symbolism will also be touched upon in reference to offerings.

Several social trends were noted in the course of my research. Marriage, for example, is not as often a permanent state; the increase in divorce can be seen in the cemetery, sometimes in a reverse manner by the clear indication of married status. Secularization of the community can also be seen in all of Westport's cemeteries, but occurring at different times and paces and shown in different ways. Family remains the

glue that holds the community together, for the patronym remains the one unchanging feature of all markers.

A person's marital status can change over a lifetime. People who have clearly been married are frequently found buried without their spouse or are buried with parents. In the case of earlier monuments, a young wife often died and the husband remarried, perhaps to be buried with the later wife. Sometimes the reverse is the case; the husband is buried with his first wife and not the second. These older indicators of marital status change are few however. More recent monuments indicate a considerably larger number of people who have chosen for one reason or another to not be buried with their spouse, perhaps because the marriage has long since ended. Couples who stay married frequently record that feat in overlapped rings, often with a date to ensure the viewer understands theirs was a long term, successful union. Stones are often designed with mirror images, sometimes crosses and often roses, indicating a couple is being memorialized. Groupings of twos, such as pairs of flowers or birds also usually indicate a couple.

A second social trend is that of increased secularity in the population. Nature scenes become increasingly common beginning in the 1980s indicating a desire or preference for connectedness to the natural world. This secular orientation increases as displayed religious symbols decrease. Both religious images and the use of biblical passages have decreased in recent decades, particularly in the Roman Catholic cemetery where the call to prayer has faded away entirely. Stones without specific religious symbolism are common in the Protestant cemeteries going back in particular to the 1920s. Does this mean Protestants have been less pious than Catholics over the years or just less likely to proclaim that piety? Symbols indicating membership in Protestant social groups

such as the Masons, Oddfellows, and Orange Lodge have also fallen off a great deal in recent years and some have not been added to a stone for decades.

The improvements in health care leave their traces in the cemetery as well. Early stones, especially the larger ones, often record the passing of multiple young children. Child deaths do happen today but not with the frequency of a century ago. Most or all of the children families have today survive to adulthood and when a child does die he or she is often buried with grandparents and not parents. While there were a few octogenarians in earlier generations, people are generally living longer today if one goes by the dates on headstones. Infectious disease no longer regularly cuts broad swathes through entire communities. People do still die prematurely, one hears of early deaths from diabetes, alcoholism, and despair; however, these are not obvious from looking at grave markers. Literacy has also improved a great deal for, with some exceptions, the period is rarely abused as it was at the turn of the century and there is a greater standardization in the spelling of family names.

### **3.2 How People Choose Stones**

I had hoped to interview a large number of people to better understand how the grave markers are chosen. Because the number of respondents was so low, definitive conclusions certainly cannot be drawn but I can discuss how a few were chosen. The people I spoke to either chose stones for relatives or were part of the selection process. The stones chosen were for spouses, parents, and an uncle. In two cases the stones were also someday to represent the informant who made the choice. There is a lot of emotion in

such deliberations and that emotion was very clear when people talked to me about the process of selecting grave markers.

Brian Thake is a retired monument maker and lifelong resident in the Westport area. Having made many of the monuments in the area, and being a local person, he had much insight into the selection of stones and a great many memories of those interred. Mr. Thake (personal communication, 7 October, 2015) confirmed that gravestones are usually selected by the surviving spouse and that it is a common practice for people to purchase a plot and grave marker in advance of their own deaths so that their family does not have to worry about making such arrangements when they die. Such pre-need arrangements explain the erection of stones for the still living, as does the sale of Thake's Monuments stock of stones when the business closed in 2007.

For many years Thake's Monuments featured an area in the front of the business where stones of different colours, shapes, and sizes and with a variety of images were erected (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). People would come to wander through this display and would usually select a stone, shape, and image from these examples (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). The rose was an image that was very popular with Mr. Thake's clients (personal communication, 7 October, 2015). Customers could also consult books with patterns to make their selections (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). Individualized stones and images could be made if clients so desired (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). A mid-sized pink granite obelisk like those so commonly commissioned in the 1890s would cost about 30,000 dollars today (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). Inquiries made to stone manufacturers currently in operation indicate that smaller obelisks

can be made for between 4000 and 10,000 dollars, depending on the stone selected, the number of letters, images added and the technology employed.

As discussed above, the technologies available to monument makers changed over time. On the larger pink granite obelisks, the lettering was done by sand blasting that, unless hand tooled as well, is remarkably hard to read (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). Some monument makers add paint, silver, or gold leaf to the incised lettering to make words stand out better (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). Lead lettering was popular for a short while but was labour intensive (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). Etching became available in the 1980s, making it possible to add more precise details and a greater sense of depth (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). Portraits were very popular when it first became possible around 1980, soon so were laser etched photographs of family farms and houses (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015).

The stone available for use has also changed over the years. Red Balmoral, the darkest and most expensive red granite, comes from the United Kingdom and is largely mined out (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). Other pink granites have taken its place, thus the many different shades of pink one sees today (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). Black granite came from South Africa and Zimbabwe before the 1980s, now it is far more cheaply sourced from China and India (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015). Dark grey granite, called Brits, comes from South Africa, mid grey granite comes from the United States and light grey, called Stansted, comes from Quebec (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October,

2015). In 2007 Mr. Thake closed down Thake's Monuments and sold off his existing stock (personal communication, B. Thake, 7 October, 2015).

Mr. Thake's contribution to my research was particularly valuable. His insights on how his clients selected their monuments, the options they had available to them in terms of stone types, technology and imagery provided rich detail and informed my observations.



**Illustration 10 Stone 1, Osmond Palmer and Isobel Bresee**

In the summer of 1987, Osmond Palmer, with the loving support of his daughter, Sandra Myers (personal communication, 26 August, 2015), took a long, quiet drive from cemetery to cemetery to look at stones. His wife had died the previous winter and he was trying to see what he wanted to put on the grave marker that he would share with her one day (personal communication, S. Myers, 26 August, 2015). Mr. Palmer chose an arch-topped black granite stone decorated with a ribbon arch joining mirrored roses and a Bible

on which their names and dates are now inscribed. Below the Bible is an inscription reading “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God”. Mrs. Myers (personal communication, 26 August, 2015) said that her mother was a Christian and loved flowers so the stone is very appropriate for her mother; the stone is what her father wanted and she is happy with her father’s choice. As is almost always the case, the patronym, Palmer, has the largest lettering and is prominently placed. For many years there was a flower arrangement at the base; it was removed and replaced by her father with a stone top arrangement so it would not get in the way of the groundskeepers (personal communication, S. Myers, 26 August, 2015). It has been years since the family kept a flower arrangement at the graves (personal communication, S. Myers, 26 August, 2015).



**Illustration 11 Stone 2, James Cawley**

The arch-topped black granite slab monument for James Cawley was selected by his niece, Jane Cawley Murphy, from stones available at local monument maker, Thake's Monuments. Family members were consulted and agreed that this particular stone was perfect for James because his love of a particular area lake is represented by the lakeside scene of pine trees and deer (personal communication, J. Murphy, 18 August, 2015). This image, with some variations, is fairly common on local grave markers in recent decades. Mr. Cawley is further individualized by the inclusion of his nickname and linked to his parents, buried some distance away, by the inclusion of their names. "Rest in Peace", being part of the burial service, is the sole obvious religious image. The lack of a cross on a Catholic burial is unusual but not exceptional. Again, the patronym is prominently placed and has the largest font.



**Illustration 12 Stone 3, Patrick Murphy and Jane Cawley**

Jane Cawley Murphy chose this asymmetrical, customized stone to mark the grave of her deceased husband, Patrick, that one day she will share. The Celtic Cross represents their shared Irish ethnicity, and the shamrocks represent their children and grandchildren (personal communication, J. Murphy, 18 August, 2015). The preferred names of Paddy and Jane are included at the top followed by birth names, birth, and death dates. Paddy's identification as "loving husband for 49 years to Margaret Jane Cawley" speaks to a successful and enduring marriage. The addition of the names of their children reinforces the link between the generations in a way that will be visible for a very long time. On the reverse of the stone is the name of one of their children who has chosen to be buried with them when the time comes. The patronym, Murphy, is on both sides of the base stone but again is of the largest font. Note the solar light beside the marker. In part the inclusion of the light is intended to prevent careless visitors from driving over the graves, for this grave marker, along with that of James Cawley, is along the U-shaped cemetery access road.



**Illustration 13 Stone 4, Sally Adam and Joseph Sanfilippo**

Joe Sanfilippo selected this stone after the death of his wife of many years, Sally. The light, speckled grey granite appears white in bright sunlight. A typical upright sided, arched top slab stone, this monument is distinguished by its bright colour and the use of ethnically inspired crosses. Sally Adam, having descended from the local Irish Catholic population, is represented by the Celtic cross (personal communication, J. Sanfilippo, 29 August, 2015). Joe Sanfilippo (personal communication, 29 August, 2015), being of Italian descent, is represented on the reverse with a cross of St Francis of Assisi Again, the patronym, Sanfilippo, is the most prominent of the lettering. The identification of their daughters creates a permanent link between generations. The Irish blessing on the reverse is unusual for stones of any age, but recent stones rarely have texts other than biblical passages, therefore this inclusion is in itself remarkable.



**Illustration 14 Cross of St Francis**

Stones were most often chosen after consultation and deliberation with family. Jane and Paddy Murphy had discussed their preferences long before his death, so Mrs. Murphy had much to work with when she was ready to design the stone three years later

(personal communication, 18 August, 2015). Mrs. Murphy and other family members agreed upon a nature scene as being perfect for James Cawley's marker (personal communication, J. Murphy, 18 August, 2015). Sandra Myers (personal communication, 26 August, 2015) spoke of a long, almost silent drive with her father to visit a number of cemeteries to decide what he wanted on the grave marker he would one day share with his wife. Joe Sanfilippo and his children discussed type of stone and colour; both pink and white stones were considered, but white was selected (personal communication, 29 August, 2015). Religion was clearly important in the choices made, for all include religious imagery or text. I would note here that three of the four stones discussed above were located at St. Edward's Roman Catholic Cemetery. Half of the images chosen came from stock imagery and half were designed to suit the couple's ethnic and religious heritage. Many cemeteries have rules about what imagery may be used on grave markers. In Westport's cemeteries there are no such rules, therefore people were free to choose what they wanted or did not want incorporated. Stone shape was for the most part of stock design; however, Jane Murphy's choice was highly individualized with the top line asymmetrically broken by a Celtic cross.

The surviving spouse most often chooses the stone that will one day represent them both. Adult children may provide support in their parent's choices or they may not. Stone imagery may be chosen from stock images or they may be designed and ordered to suit. Some visit the cemetery regularly and appear quite comfortable there and with the stone. Others are not regular visitors and find it very difficult to be there. Length of time since the passing of their family member varied greatly among informants. Time lessened the frequency of visits but not necessarily the intensity of emotion when at the graveside.

For some the cemetery is a positive place, and despite its association with death and loss, it can be a refuge and a place to remember. For others, the cemetery is a more negative place, a place of sorrow not solace.

### **3.3 Peopling the Cemetery**

The cemetery is not simply a place to dispose of the bodies of dead humans. The cemetery is a place of remembrance and community. A surprising range of people visit cemeteries for a variety of reasons. Most people come to visit the graves of their loved ones but it is not only the bereaved who visit the cemetery. Some people visit because they have an interest in genealogy or local history. Others enjoy the setting. Some walk their dogs. A few generous souls take a hand in caring for, maintaining and reversing the damages of time. It is always interesting to take a walk through a cemetery with a local person; it is like a brief history of an area whose delivery is punctuated with ‘I remember’. For them, cemeteries are full of stories waiting to be remembered. The stones act as mnemonics, memory prompts, and the sighting of a familiar name calls forth a myriad of details.

I heard a lot of stories in the summer of 2015. People are remarkably willing to share their memories, their histories, and their feelings when there is an attentive listener. With their stories comes the responsibility to guard the privacy of the living and the dead alike, for some stories are not meant for everyone’s ears and certainly not for print. So why do people tell these stories to a virtual stranger such as myself? Perhaps for the same reason they would tell anyone, to ensure that the story continues in living memory. Perhaps because an outsider, being unrelated to anyone involved in the story, meant I

could hear the story without value judgments rooted in faction. I reiterate here my promise to my informants that their stories are safe with me. Others gave me explicit permission to discuss their experiences and it is their stories that I have incorporated in the most detail.

So what do people do in cemeteries? A lot of people come to visit the graves of their family members. Sometimes the bereavement is recent and sometimes it is not. The visit is a way of maintaining the connection with the deceased. Jane Cawley Murphy, for example, was born and raised in the Westport area and has several generations of family buried at St. Edwards Cemetery (personal communication, 18 August, 2015). Paddy, her husband, was descended from Irish immigrants left on ice flows when their ship, the Hannah, was lost (personal communication, 18 August, 2015). Walter Whelan was Mrs. Murphy's great-great-grandfather and was Westport's postmaster (personal communication, 18 August, 2015). Mrs. Murphy is related to Father Cawley and James Cawley who are both buried near Jane and Paddy's stone (personal communication, 18 August, 2015). Mrs. Murphy is very comfortable walking around in the cemetery as she has been there many times including as a small child (personal communication, 18 August, 2015). She said that she "knows everyone here" and that it is a community (personal communication, J. Murphy, 18 August, 2015). Mrs. Murphy's familiarity with the cemetery and the stones in it are apparent in her identification of stones for those not actually buried at St. Edwards and the facility with which she recalls stories and places associated with the names of the interred.

According to Jane Murphy (18 August, 2015), the cemetery is a place where it is safe to cry. That thought has stayed with me, that it is safe to cry in the cemetery, the inference being that, after a short bit, the bereaved are denied the right to grieve in our

society. As a place of memory, the graveside is where the deceased seems closest. Joe Sanfilippo (personal communication, 29 August, 2015), an American citizen who has been visiting Westport since 1968, visits his wife's grave at St. Edward's and brings her flowers every week during the summer. Mr. Sanfilippo (personal communication, 29 August, 2015) told me that when at St. Edward's he can see his wife, Sally, there with their dog. Mr. Sanfilippo (personal communication, 29 August, 2015) knows she is not there, but the memories of her are so close to the surface there that her image comes readily to mind. The Sanfilippos (personal communication, 29 August, 2015) decided to be buried at St. Edward's because all of her family are buried there, because of the memories he had of visiting the cemetery with his wife, and because the cemetery is in a beautiful place with rolling hills. Since his wife's death, St. Edward's Cemetery has become more meaningful and personal to Mr. Sanfilippo (personal communication, 29 August, 2015).

Sandra Myers used to visit her parents' graves often but has done less so as time goes on; now she visits when the yearly memorial service is held (personal communication, 26 August, 2015). Every time she drives past the United Cemetery, Mrs. Myers (personal communication, 26 August, 2015) is reminded of the days that she buried her parents there and being at the cemetery "brings it all back". Mrs. Myers feels a connection to her parents when she is at their graves; it is a moving experience for her because it brings back memories of them both (personal communication, 26 August, 2015). United Cemetery had no personal meaning to Mrs. Myers before the burial of her parents there because her family is usually buried in its own cemetery (personal communication, 26 August, 2015).

Brian Thake, the retired monument maker, was a fountain of information about Westport's cemeteries, the stones within them, and the people they represent. As it was his job for many years to be in cemeteries, he is obviously more comfortable than most within them and around the grave markers. Mr. Thake knew the stories and the individuals, and has friends and family members buried in these cemeteries (personal communication, 7 October, 2015). The cemetery, for Mr. Thake, holds memories at many levels.

Some people take an interest in a cemetery even when they have no family buried there. I met Gwen Tobin when recording the last of the grave markers at Baptist Cemetery. Mrs. Tobin was interested in my work and volunteered to speak about her interest in the cemetery. Mrs. Tobin (personal communication, 17 August, 2015), born and raised in Westport, has an abiding interest in genealogy and family history that she shared with her mother. Mrs. Tobin (personal communication, 17 August, 2015) joined the Olivet Baptist Church about six years ago and is an active member of that community but has no relatives buried at Baptist Cemetery. Two years ago Mrs. Tobin (personal communication, 17 August, 2015) participated in a cemetery clearance and maintenance day organized by the Olivet Baptist Church. Mrs. Tobin (personal communication, 17 August, 2015) took an interest in the cemetery: she mapped and photographed the grave markers and through consulting the internet and the local library was able to construct genealogies for many of the interred. She remains frustrated that the records of burials are incomplete and is very much interested in finding other sources of information (personal communication, G. Tobin, 17 August, 2015). Her efforts and research have made the Baptist Cemetery personally important to her and its proper care and maintenance is a goal into which she has sunk much time and energy (personal communication, G. Tobin, 17

August, 2015). As Mrs. Tobin's (personal communication, 17 August, 2015) natal family, Myers, has and maintains its own cemetery she has a personal understanding of the significance of cemeteries. Mrs. Tobin is an energetic, community-minded woman who gets things done. She is remarkably comfortable in the Baptist Cemetery having clearly spent much time there and takes an interest in the histories of the interred. To Mrs. Tobin each name has a story to be discovered: she has the willingness, desire, and energy to follow each lead and clearly enjoys the process of learning more about the people who are buried there.

In the weeks after our meeting Mrs. Tobin was instrumental in another clearance and maintenance effort at Baptist Cemetery that saw much brush cleared away, poison ivy poisoned, and several monuments set back into their proper positions.

Over the course of the summer of 2015 I observed many people visiting Westport's cemeteries. The majority of visitors I noted coming to Westport's cemeteries were women, usually middle aged or older. Men were less frequent visitors but of a similar age. This is not surprising as older people have lived long enough to have lost a significant someone, or several someones. Families visited the cemetery and taught their young ones the stories of ancestors, of hardship and loss, and of survival and prosperity. Very few young people visited the cemetery, the exceptions I witnessed being at the memorial service at St. Edward's Roman Catholic Cemetery. Several young people, accompanied by parents and grandparents, attended the mass and visited family graves. Young people may have attended such services at the other cemeteries however I was not present to verify such.

I noted that people act differently in cemeteries than they do outside its boundaries. People generally lowered their voices in respect for the place, and perhaps to avoid waking the dead. There is a tradition of not walking over someone's grave, and most avoided doing so, while others took no notice of where they were walking. Being in a cemetery is an intense experience for most people, there were often tears and sighs, but I noted that women were more likely than men to reach out and touch the stone, to pick off bits of grass, brush away leaves, or straighten the floral arrangement. Men often jammed their hands into their pockets and leaned back, away from the grave and stone in apparent discomfort. There were exceptions, but the visitors' physical comportment and behavior was notable for its highly gendered patterns.

An unfortunate occurrence, perpetrated at three of the four cemeteries, is vandalism. At Baptist, United, and St. Edward's Cemeteries, there is clear evidence of the deliberate destruction of grave markers. Some damage may have been caused by falling tree limbs, spreading roots, speeding lawn tractors, and weed whacker cords, but the vast majority appears to have occurred at the hands of those who have little or no respect for the dead. At United Cemetery, the monuments closest to the main road seem to be most frequently targeted, perhaps because they are so easy to access. Baptist Cemetery had a few toppled monuments, some obviously caused by tree fall, and others with no reasonable or apparent natural cause of toppling; these were located in parts of the cemetery less visible from the road, where one could do the harm without being seen. The worst damage has taken place, again largely along the access and county road, at St. Edwards, perhaps because it is so far out of the village and there are fewer people to see what is going on. Presbyterian Cemetery had no obviously vandalized monuments, likely

because of its entirely exposed nature. One is quite likely to get caught if one tries to topple a headstone there.

A unique form of vandalism may have left its mark in two of Westport's cemeteries. Informants (names withheld on request) spoke of a fear of grave robbers that lasted until the 1920s. At Baptist Cemetery there are several family graves that have been covered with cement pads. There is a similar cement pad at United Cemetery. Some of the graves that are covered with cement date well after the 1920s but are immediately adjacent to graves of that period. The covering of later graves may reflect an appreciation of the tidy appearance and ease of maintenance of the cement pad rather than a fear of body snatchers.

As has been explored above, many people bring things to cemeteries. Anthropologists, observing such behaviour in another culture would call these offerings or gifts. I argue that gifts are a physical manifestation of affect, or how the giver feels about the situation of visiting the grave of a friend or family member. In order to bring a gift, a person must first care enough to think to bring a gift. That person must then seek out and acquire an appropriate gift. Then the gift must be brought to the cemetery and placed on or near the grave. This is a chain of very deliberate and emotionally charged acts. The most common categories of articles deposited are first, floral tributes, second, everyday items including animal and figurines, toys and rocks, third, things with wings, and lastly, light sources. A short description of the changing meanings of the urn, another very common item deposited in cemeteries, concludes this section as an illustration of the different uses and interpretations attached to a single, stable, and ancient form.

Some offerings are highly unusual and others comfortingly familiar. The single most common gift to be seen in cemeteries is flowers. Cut flowers are often seen after memorial services but can be left at any time. Carnations are a particular favourite but one also regularly sees seasonal flowers that have clearly been plucked from a garden. Garden flowers, a very personal gift, are the most likely to be replaced frequently as new ones come into bloom. A large number of graves in all the cemeteries have plantations of hardy perennial flowers including stone crop, daylilies, Asiatic lilies, and carnations. Various shrubs, such as potentillas, peonies, hostas, and roses, are frequently planted. Evergreen trees are also frequently planted in cemeteries and on or beside graves.

Artificial flowers are a very common sight as well. Red and white artificial flower arrangements are particularly common. When one sees blue flowers one is most certainly looking at the grave of a male. Other colours of flowers are not so clearly associated with one sex or the other. Artificial flowers ensure that the grave looks cared for even if the grave is not visited or tended frequently.



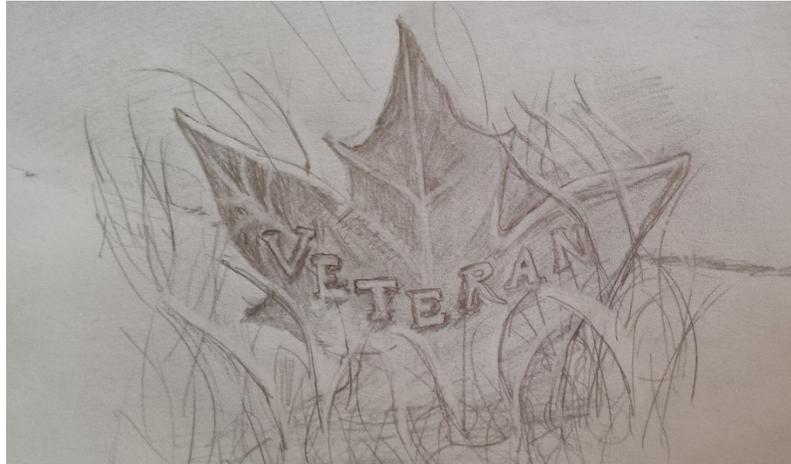
**Illustration 15 Red and White Artificial Flowers, sketch courtesy of N. Gardiner Jones, 2016.**

There were some everyday items left at gravesides in Westport's cemeteries. Coins, usually of small denomination, a penny to a quarter dollar, are gifts that are heirs to a tradition that dates back more than two thousand years, though many will not be aware that the money is to pay for safe passage to the next life (van Gennep, 1908/1960, p. 154). It is more likely that the money is left as a token of luck or to ensure that the deceased is not destitute. These small offerings are sometimes concealed, for fear perhaps that someone might steal them from the graveside. Pebbles or small rocks left on the bases of grave markers.

From time to time one comes across toys in cemeteries. Often these toys are found on the graves of children or infants. Age appropriate play things such as stuffed animals for infants, or toy cars and action figures for older children are left by grieving family and community members. Westport is a fairly conservative community and thus the toys left are usually what is considered socially appropriate for the gender of the child. Adult graves will also have gifts of toys, some representing the occupation of the deceased or a favoured pastime such as golf balls for a golfer.

Visitors often leave figurines of different kinds, usually representing something about the deceased that is important to them to remember. Grandpa and Grandma figurines are common, as are golfing figures. Animal figures including dogs, horses, and deer are left from time to time, as was a single, tiny, cat figurine. Religious figures are also offered. Several Virgin Mary statues were seen at St. Edwards, as one would expect. Figurines of angels and cherubs were fairly common and will be discussed in more detail shortly. In addition to figurines, homemade crosses, ribbons with "Dad" or "Mom" written

on them, and metal maple leaves reading “Veteran” in gold lettering are carefully placed on graves.



**Illustration 16 Deposited Veteran Marker, sketch courtesy of N. Gardiner Jones, 2016.**

There is an intriguing group of offerings that speak to the desire to communicate and maintain connections with the dead; these I call “things with wings”. Things with wings are not bound to this earth but can fly up to the heavens and back again, moving through space and even dimensions. Some things with wings are of the natural world such as birds of all sorts, butterflies, and bees. Made of ceramic or plastic, metal or cement, these were found in all the cemeteries in which I worked. A far larger and more common group was that of cherubs and angels. The word *angel* comes from Greek and means messenger, though the form the messenger takes may vary (personal communication, L. di Rocco, 22 January, 2016). Cherubs are chubby toddlers with wings, *putti*, and are seen on graves belonging to people of all ages, not just children. Angels, as commonly imagined, can be adults with wings but also children beyond the chubby toddler stage. Angels are also seen on graves of all age groups. In recent decades angels and cherubs have enjoyed a

certain resurgence in popular imagination. Television shows about angels have been quite popular and cherubs were fashionable in the decoration of houses in the 1990s and early 2000s. There is also the connection of angels and cherubs to religious art found in churches, family bibles, and the art collections of the world. Does death in this world confer wings in the next? Are the angels and cherubim representative of what many hope is the fate of their beloved? I was told that it brings comfort to people to believe that their dead child or spouse is an angel in heaven, continuing and able to look in on us every now and then (name withheld on request). This in turn means that death is not final, goodbye is not forever, and that suffering in this life leads to joy in the next. If angels and cherubim can look in on us then it may be possible to communicate with them, to let them know they are still loved and are missed tremendously. Perhaps this desire for communication is short term, being intense in the early days of loss and diminishing over time until perhaps the need has passed. Perhaps it never entirely goes away for one never entirely gets over the loss.



**Illustration 17 Things with Wings, sketch courtesy of N. Gardiner Jones, 2016.**

Lights of one sort or another are commonly seen in cemeteries. Solar powered candles and lanterns are a very popular gift to leave the dead; Westport's cemeteries literally twinkle after nightfall. There are a number of religious references for lights: the candle or light as a symbol of Christ, Christ's light illuminating the path to heaven, light as love and zeal, light as warmth and heat (personal communication, L. di Rocco, 22 January, 2016). Solar lights shaped like hummingbirds, birds, angels, and tear drops are very common.

Urns in cemeteries date back to the ancient Greeks, around 800 B.C., who would put an urn with a hole in it over the grave and through that hole one could offer the dead libations (Janson and Janson, 2004, p. 108). Libations are an unusual, but not unheard of gift left for the dead. I saw a number of bottles in Westport's cemeteries. These bottles were empty, perhaps having been poured on to the grave in memory of something the deceased enjoyed. Urns continue to be seen in Westport's cemeteries but it is doubtful that they were or are intended as funnels for alcohol these days. In the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century it was not at all uncommon for an urn to be a prominent feature of a grave marker. Early slab monuments would frequently have an urn carved in bas relief and later obelisks would be topped with elegantly turned urns. Cremation was common in ancient Greece and Rome, but not in the Victorian era so it is more likely that the urn was used a decorative device (Keister, 2004, p. 187) and not a functional container. Today, however, urns frequently serve as receptacles for the ashes of the dead, or as pretty pots for plants.

## **Conclusion**

Sometimes when doing research, it can take a while for the blatantly obvious to be recognized as such. Certain threads kept arising as I was writing about the various things I have seen in Westport's cemeteries. The most common threads that emerge are of community and connection. People choose where to be buried in order to be included in their community of choice, whether it is the community in which they lived or not. Connection to past generations have been extended to future generations, forging and maintaining ties of kith and kin. There are connections within connections within connections. The cemeteries themselves form community connections of religion. Within these communities we find connections of family names and marriage that in turn connects different families to each other. Generations are connected by name and where possible, by proximity as well with children and grandchildren interred together, often with a grand stone serving as a focal point. Roses tell of lasting love and rings of matrimony. Pastimes and memberships are specifically included so that we remember what was important to the deceased and so that we might remember him or her better. People leave gifts to make that connection again, to say, "we were here and wish you were too".

Connections between people do not sever instantly when someone dies. Periods of mourning used to give people a way of expressing, in stages, the gradual loosening of ties. Few people if any go into formal mourning anymore, draping the mirrors and donning black except perhaps for the funeral. Maybe this change is a loss, for the period of mourning gave a period of grace in which people were allowed to feel, passionately, grief and separation. Certainly, it would appear from my observations that those feelings do not

go away in a socially convenient time frame. It takes a long time for some to accept the death of their beloved, and some it would appear never 'get over it', to use the rather dismissive phrase so often employed by those who have not yet experienced significant loss.

A number of questions led to my research into cemetery symbolism. Are individualized symbols a result of secularization or technological advances or both? What factors lead to the selection of a particular stone or motif? What meanings are being made when people choose stones for themselves or their loved ones? How do these stones connect the living to the dead, the dead to the community and both to the heavens? How are kinship and social relations inscribed in stone? How do people act around the stones and in the cemetery? How do the stones shape the processes of memory, grieving and identity? Is the leaving of objects at gravesides a response to the monument itself? Is the increased use of nature images an expression of an increasingly secular world view? How does the cemetery fit into its community? My research provides some answers to these questions. As should be the case, many other questions were raised in the process of performing the research. Is the focus on nature images an attempt to hold onto a disappearing ideal? Why has it taken 60 years longer for secular symbolism to appear on Catholic grave markers than Protestant? Is the avoidance of the words dead or death an unwillingness to sever connections with the deceased or an unwillingness to acknowledge our own mortality? Are grave markers symbolic portals? Do the dead become angels? Are angels guides and protectors for the dead? What do the light sources in cemeteries mean? Many of these questions arose long after the definition of this project and approval of the participant questionnaire, therefore I was not able to pose them

specifically to participants. Hopefully, these questions will stimulate further research in cemetery symbolism.

Time heals all wounds, supposedly, or perhaps the reality of life is that one has no choice really but to get on with it. Recent burials usually show clear signs of visitation. Fresh flowers, the appearance of gifts, the changing of decorations, or the brushing away of bits of grass indicate someone was there not so long ago. Faded flowers and battered offerings indicate visits that took place some time ago. Based on my own observations, I would say that those who are going to visit a grave do so quite often in the early days, perhaps many times per year in the five or so years following interment, but the frequency of these visits usually diminishes over time. After about 20 years, most graves are no longer obviously visited. Fewer of these graves have flowers or offerings and many wear a thick layer of grass clippings on their base. Ground plaques gradually become overgrown and eventually covered with a mat of green. Perhaps the need to maintain a connection with the dead fades over time. Perhaps the visitor has him or herself passed on or is unable to visit for reasons of infirmity or age. Perhaps the visitor has moved away. Whatever the reason, there are many, many graves that have not been visited in a very, very long time. It is always poignant to see the line 'Ever Remembered, Ever Loved' on a stone, thickly covered with dust and grass clippings, flanked by empty planters. But it is the way of things, is it not, that people pass from life and memory in a remarkably short time? It is up to the viewer to see those stones, read those names and in the doing for a moment at least, acknowledge the fact of lives lived. In the making of such connections lies the hope of a remembrance and a shred of immortality.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### Personal Connections

This research was approved by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. The questions asked were also approved by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board prior to my time in the field. Several calls went out for participants, and a few kindly answered those calls. The approved questions were appropriate to three of the informants because they had chosen monuments. The other two informants had different connections to the cemeteries. One is a monument maker and was involved the selection and production of hundreds of stones. Another is a concerned community member with a keen interest in genealogy. All of my formal participants were offered the opportunity to review my interview notes.

Participant observation was included in my ethics approval therefore I observed how people behaved in the cemeteries in general. While I was recording grave markers a number of people also stopped by to see what I was doing. The ideas and information given to me by people who wished to speak “off the record” informed my research but, as per their preference, has been used generically and anonymously. The only people whose exact words are used in this work are those that gave specific permission for their inclusion.

## Appendix B Invitation for Participants



### Graveyard Symbolism: tradition and change in Ontario's rural cemeteries

Date of Ethics Clearance: May 25, 2015

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Barbara Rielly and I am a Masters student in the Sociology and Anthropology department at Carleton University. In the summer and autumn of 2015 it is my intention to study, under the supervision of Dr. Brian Given, the cemeteries of Westport, ON to see what changes have taken place in how we commemorate our dead and what that tells us about our culture.

In order to better understand the way that people commemorate their loved ones it would be very useful to talk to those who have chosen the designs of headstones or who have left offerings at grave sites. People who choose to participate will take part in a 30 minute interview and if possible a visit to the grave site. Notes will be taken at the time, and I may contact you for clarification when I am writing up my report. If you agree, I will also take photographs.

As a participant you may choose what information or photographs you are comfortable with me using and where it might be used. You are not required to answer all my questions and you can quit at any time. If you choose to quit, all data collected specific to your interview will be deleted. If you agree to participate you will be asked to sign a letter of permission before taking part in the research to ensure that you have been informed of how your information will be used, stored or disseminated.

The ethics protocol for this project was reviewed and received clearance by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about your involvement in this study please contact:

Professor Louise Heslop, Chair  
Professor Andy Adler, Vice-Chair  
Research Ethics Board  
Carleton University Research Office  
Carleton University  
511 Tory  
1125 Colonel By Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6  
Tel: 613-520-2517  
E-mail: [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)

People who are interested in helping me with my research can reach me at [barbararielly@cmail.carleton.ca](mailto:barbararielly@cmail.carleton.ca) or 613-520 2600 ext 1436 or 

I look forward to hearing your stories

Barbara Rielly

### **Appendix C Call for Participants, Church Bulletins**

Barb Rielly, a Masters student at Carleton University, is studying symbolism in cemeteries and wants to talk to people who have chosen grave markers for loved ones or themselves. All kinds of markers are interesting! If you would like to help out with her research, please contact Barb at [barbarielly@cmail.carleton.ca](mailto:barbarielly@cmail.carleton.ca) or [REDACTED]. See the community notice board for further details or stop by for a chat if you see her in the United Cemetery!

## Appendix D Call for Participants, Flyer



### Help Needed!

### **Have you had to choose a gravestone or plan a gravesite for a friend or family member?**

Your experiences are vital to a research project on cemetery symbolism taking place in Westport. With your help, Barbara Rielly, a Masters student at Carleton University, can better understand the changing symbols and processes of memorializing loved ones in Westport's cemeteries.

Interviews last roughly half an hour; before the interview you will be asked to sign a consent form that outlines how you control how your information is used. You will have an opportunity to review your contribution before it is finalized. This research has been cleared by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board (May 25, 2015). Further information is available upon request.

If you would like to help contact Barbara Rielly at [barbararielly@cmail.carleton.ca](mailto:barbararielly@cmail.carleton.ca) or call her for no charge at [REDACTED].

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# Rielly seeking help with the meaning of grave markers

People visit cemeteries for a variety of reasons but Barb Rielly has taken a very different interest in local graveyards.

This summer and fall, Rielly has been studying cemeteries in the Westport area to see what changes have taken place over the years in how people commemorate past family members and what that tells us about our culture.

The Bedford resident, a Masters student in the Sociology and Anthropology department at Carleton University, wants to hear from loved ones to learn how they chose the marker and what it means to them.

“I am interested in the cemetery as a whole, stones in particular (or for that matter graves with no markers too as people have many and varied reasons why they might choose to not have a gravemarker, and also the tokens people leave graveside,” she said.

Rielly has a set list of questions but people are free to say what they want, and they control how their information is used. As a



**The style and substance of grave markers has changed considerably since settlers arrived in the Rideau Lakes area over 200 years ago.**

participant you may choose what information or photographs you are comfortable with me using and where it might be used. You are not required to answer all my questions and you can quit at any time.

“There are traditional stones, personalized stones and some markers that are totally unique. I am interested in how people chose the markers and the meaning the markers have for people. I

could take a guess at many meanings but that does not mean my guess is the best or only answer.

“I would rather talk to people and learn from them directly. People also leave things at graves – flowers are a popular token for example. What people leave and why is also really interesting,” she said.

If you are interested, you can contact her at [barbararielly@cmail.carleton.ca](mailto:barbararielly@cmail.carleton.ca) or 343-884-8849.

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