

Sherene Baugher
and Richard F. Veit

The Archaeology of American Cemeteries and Gravemarkers

★
The American Experience in Archaeological Perspective

"A masterful overview of archaeological work on American gravestones and cemeteries that should be on the shelf of every student and scholar of mortuary studies."—LYNN RAINVILLE, author of *Hidden History: African-American Cemeteries in Virginia*

"A landmark publication that synthesizes for the first time the massive amount of research on historic mortuary archaeology, especially monuments, across America. An essential text for many archaeologists, art historians, and cultural anthropologists."—HAROLD MYTUM, coeditor of *Prisoners of War: Archaeology, Memory, and Heritage of 19th- and 20th-Century Mass Internment*

GRAVESTONES, CEMETERIES, AND MEMORIAL MARKERS offer fixed points in time to examine Americans' changing attitudes toward death and dying. In tracing the evolution of commemorative practices from the seventeenth century to the present, Sherene Baugher and Richard Veit offer insights into America's transformation from a preindustrial and agricultural country to one that is industrial and capitalist.

Paying particular attention to populations often overlooked in the historical record—African Americans, Native Americans, and immigrant groups—the authors also address the legal, logistical, and ethical issues that confront field researchers who conduct cemetery excavations. Baugher and Veit reveal how gender, race, ethnicity, and class have shaped the cultural landscapes of burial grounds and summarize knowledge gleaned from the archaeological study of human remains and the material goods interred with the deceased.

From unmarked graves to mausoleums and from cemeteries landscaped with elaborate monuments to the rise in popularity of green burials today, *The Archaeology of American Cemeteries and Gravemarkers* provides an overview of the many facets of this fascinating topic.

SHERENE BAUGHER, professor of archaeology at Cornell University, is the coeditor of *Archaeology and Preservation of Gendered Landscapes*. **RICHARD F. VEIT** is professor of anthropology at Monmouth University and the coauthor of *New Jersey Cemeteries and Tombstones: History in the Landscape*.

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Front: top, Tarrytown; bottom, gravemarker for John Davis Jr. Photos by Richard F. Veit.

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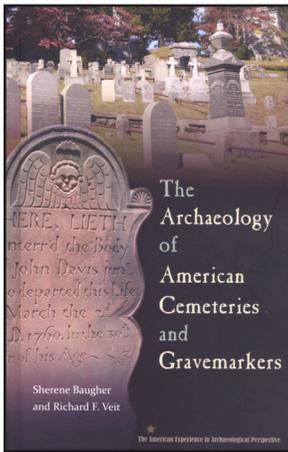
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The Archaeology of American Cemeteries and Gravemarkers

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Reviewed by Dawn Cobb, Illinois State Museum Society, Springfield, Illinois.

Sherene Baugher and Richard Veit make a very important point right up front, cemeteries are for the dead *and* for the living. They illustrate this point throughout the book by demonstrating how this duality has occurred in American cemeteries from the 17th to the 20th centuries. “The decisions that surviving relatives made in the choice of grave site and tombstone for their dead relatives reflects the ethnicity, class, and status of both the living and the dead (p. 16).” While the first part of the book does focus on American archaeology studies of cemeteries and burial grounds, the latter portion of the book largely focuses on markers, monuments, and cemeteries of the eastern United States.

The goal of the book is to present what historical archaeologists have learned about American cemeteries. This is accomplished in a thorough and well-organized manner. Chapter 1 introduces past and present topics of cemetery research. Theoretical perspectives of sociocultural anthropologists, New Archaeology, and postprocessual archaeology are highlighted. But Baugher and Veit point out that there is more to cemetery studies than quantifying data and interpreting the past. Cemetery studies can extend beyond the abstract. Ethical issues relating to the excavation of graves is addressed in Chapter 2. The authors acknowledge that while avoidance of grave excavations is not always possible, we, as archaeologists and anthropologists, should be concerned with and actively coordinate archaeological investigations with descendant populations. The author’s stress that the passage of the 1990 Federal preservation law, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), raised both public and scientific awareness regarding the need to consult with descendant communities before excavation begins. Following this approach acknowledges the importance of the deceased by considering the feelings of the living. Case studies are presented to show changes in attitude toward the excavation of cemeteries from those of artifact seekers to those seeking to understand the people and their history. The third chapter, “The Science in Belowground Archaeology,” informs us about what can be learned from studying the contents of graves. While the grave marker can inform us about an individual’s life, the grave itself also has much to tell. Archaeologists can record burial customs of different ethnic groups by the location and manner in which the deceased was buried. Absent a grave marker, studies of the skeletal remains provide details about a person’s life—their age and sex, their overall health, past traumas and surgical procedures (e.g. hip replacements) and sometimes cause of death. A person’s social status in life can even be inferred from the remains, for example by the presence of gold tooth fillings or false teeth. “Beyond Death’s Heads and Cherubs” is the topic of Chapter 4

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and introduces us to the study of colonial markers. Ethnicity, consumerism, trade networks, and social class have been topics of grave marker studies in attempts to identify patterns in the changing American culture. The authors' note that articles published in the 1960s and 1970s were instrumental in defining and assigning meaning to some of the early motifs and their perceived meanings relative to ethnicity, social class, religion, and gender. Later grave marker studies challenged these early results by providing evidence that motif styles, for example, were not so restricted in their use or meaning. The grave marker became a way for the living to express their social status and wealth even in death. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss differences among the 19th and 20th Century cemeteries. Changes in burial grounds and cemeteries are described and what these changes reflected in American society. The social concept of "race" is explored in cemeteries and memorials to highlight an individual's choice to assimilate to their new country or to maintain cultural traditions. Examples of burial customs and cemeteries of different ethnic groups are provided to show social inequality of American cemeteries but also to show group cohesion among the ethnic groups. The reader is cautioned to consider the particular aspects of what constitutes an ethnic group or a religious group and not to lump all people into one type when studying cemeteries.

The majority of cemetery and grave marker examples and case studies presented in the book are from the eastern United States. While this may seem to be a bias, it is actually very telling that more cemetery studies need to be conducted in other areas of the country. The Midwest certainly has its share of burial grounds and cemeteries but there is a lack of interest among archaeologists in studying them. The majority of archaeological investigations of cemeteries in the Midwest occur as a result of compliance (CRM) projects and the emphasis is on the grave and its contents. Few archaeologists actively study the above ground components of cemeteries. Their information is available to the public and scholars alike.

In summary, this book is a welcome addition to the growing data set of American cemetery studies. Baugher and Veit present a detailed overview of many facets of cemetery studies that include gender, class, ethnicity, social status, religion and the material culture itself including marker styles, marker materials, inscriptions, and motifs. These concepts are interwoven into identifiable patterns of change in American attitudes toward death. Cemetery studies such as this are important additions to the archaeological literature and further advance the field of study.