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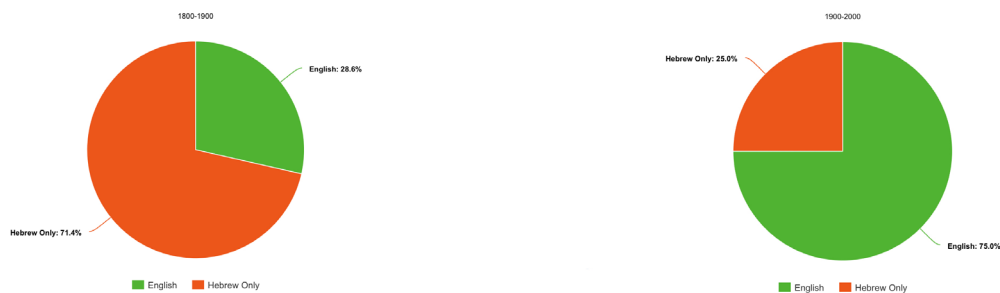
Headstone Archaeology

Intro: Walking through a cemetery, you'll see that almost all headstones are engraved with the name, birthday, and death day of the deceased. On the other hand, some of the other headstones may offer more information with the addition of symbols or additional designs. On the surface, these engravings can be seen just as a piece of remembrance for the dead, but it can be much deeper than that. Symbols on headstones can contain hidden meanings that give more information on the deceased than what first meets the eye, such as a person's beliefs. Knowing this, I took a great interest in the religious symbols in my local cemeteries and discovered that religious headstones vary, but share many similarities throughout periods in Whatcom County.

Background + Method: To understand how religious symbols change, I would need to know what is considered a religious symbol. Multiple normal-appearing designs are denoting a belief in some way. For example, when you look at an anchor, you may think of the ocean or sailing. To those of faith, they will view it more as a sign of "hope in future existence" (Hassett), especially in a cemetery setting. I repeated this research for other symbols, bringing up charts and articles to determine what I would be looking for and comparing at my local cemeteries. With that concluded, I next chose three cemeteries to survey. To acquire a variety of data I picked different sizes of cemeteries and made sure the date of the establishment are old enough to have very old and new graves. The smallest cemetery I visited was Nooksack Cemetery, established in 1886 (Whatcom Genealogical Society) with 1,869 memorials (Tipton). For a decent middle ground, I chose Lynden Cemetery established in 1889 (Whatcom Genealogical Society) containing about 3,402 memorials (Tipton). Finally, I visited the largest known cemetery in Whatcom County, Bayview Cemetery. It was first established in 1887 (Whatcom Genealogical Society) with a large number of 26,533 deceased at rest (Tipton). After having cemeteries chosen for me to take data on, it was time to go obtain said data. I walked around for a few hours at each place and took pictures of any grave with religious symbolism on it. I wasn't able to look at every single grave, so when about two hours were up, I went home. Sitting at my desk, I began compiling the photos into a table with the type of symbol on the side, and the site on top. With that table, I could

compare the change in religious symbols between cemeteries. So I could compare change over time, I compiled the pictures into a table with dates on the top and symbols on the left. Finally, I could begin observing my gathered data more closely.

Main Idea One: Religious headstones in Whatcom have changed with time. With the advancement of technology and our ever-changing society, many things around us change and religious headstones are one of those things. Such as the addition of English translation on newer Jewish graves and an increased amount of symbols on headstones. Jewish graves in Whatcom County are primarily found in Bayview Cemetery in a separate gated area. This is done to follow the Jewish Law of being buried only with others of the same belief and to have all headstones face east since Jerusalem is east of Europe (CBTBI 9). With all of the Jewish graves being in one area, it was easy to begin seeing the pattern that slim to none of the older graves have any English letters on them besides the names. Based on my data, headstones with a birth date between the 1800s and 1900s there was only 28.6% of headstones with English words. Then between the 1900s and 2000s, there was a 46.4% increase in English being used along with Hebrew or other Jewish symbols. This change in Jewish headstones illustrates how as time moves forward, religious headstones change.



Another change I noticed that was across all of the cemeteries, was that there was an increased amount of designs and religious symbols on the newer headstones in comparison to the older ones. This was something I was able to pick up on just by walking around, but was able to later confirm with my data set. I used the same dates as I did with my comparison of Jewish headstones, this time just organizing between graves with one religious symbol and graves with multiple. The results ultimately proved my theory as I hoped. Between the 1800s and 1900's birth dates, there was a low 18.8% of headstones with multiple religious symbols. This 18.8%

shot up to 65.3% in the 1900s. So overall, there was a 46.5% increase in religious symbolism on headstones. This demonstrates that as time passes in Whatcom County, there are more religious symbols engraved onto the deceased's grave markers, as opposed to the older markers typically only using one symbol to represent their belief.



Through the inclusion of adding English alongside Hebrew and the ever-growing amount of religious symbols being added to headstones, this all reveals how throughout all of the cemeteries in Whatcom I was able to visit, they all had indications of altering headstones as the marked birth dates increased.

Main Idea Two: There are only a few ways how religious headstones have stayed the same over time in Whatcom County. The one I observed most was the consistency in veteran grave markers. Many veteran headstones old and new stay the same with crosses and flat headstones. They are also all adorned with the engraving of the veteran's service branch, which is a requirement for veteran headstones according to the *Veteran's Affairs* website. While adding a symbol of belief is an extra option, most of them had one. From the mid-1800s forward, practically all of the memorials honoring the people who protected our country have almost the same plaque. This stayed true at all three cemeteries. Upon research of veteran headstones, "The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) furnishes upon request, at no charge to the applicant, a Government headstone or marker for the unmarked grave of any deceased eligible Veteran in any cemetery around the world, regardless of their date of death (Government Headstone and Markers Faqs)." So because the government offers a grave marker free of charge, this is the likely reason for the lack of deviation in religious veteran headstones. Overall, the large reason for the unchanging style in these religious headstones and plaques is due to the fact that they are

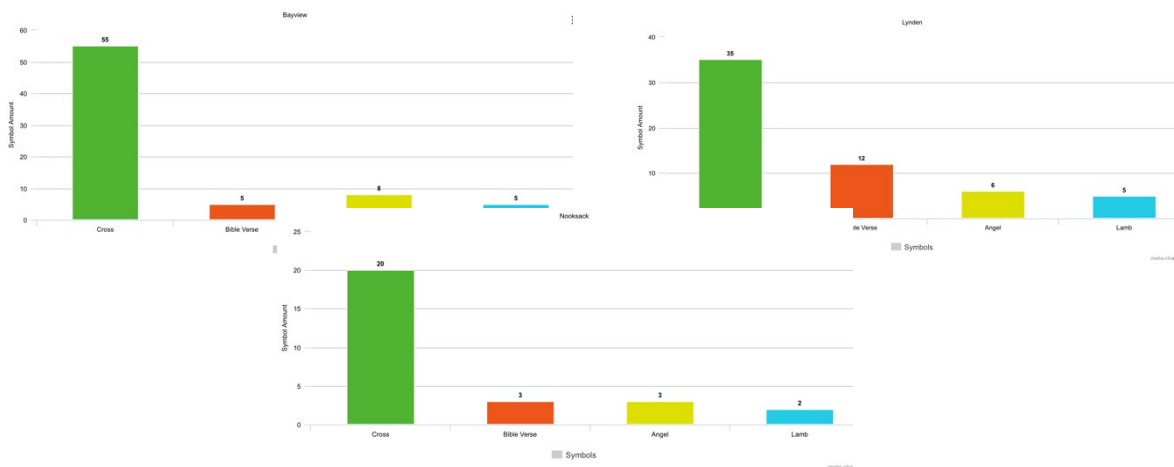
made under a standardized government design, with few options to make them stand out from others. This has made it so that when you visit a different cemetery in Whatcom County or even as time passes, these types of religious grave markers are expected to stay unvarying in appearance even as the ones around them change.



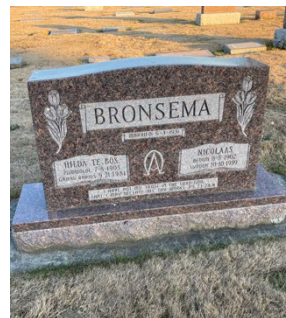
Main Idea Three: All three of the sites I collected data from contained many similar religious symbols. Such as the lamb, cherub, and the symbol which there was the most of; the cross. As first stated, at all sites, almost all of the children's graves have lambs or cherubs which are both religious symbols. A lamb is a symbol of innocence and a representation of following God, as mentioned in the Bible "The Lord is my shepherd (KJV Psalm 23.1)." Meanwhile, a cherub is the symbolism of a guardian angel (Gravely Speaking 3) or a representation of spiritual resurrection, evolved from death's-head imagery, or memento mori (Green 1). This establishes how both the lamb and cherub are symbols of belief. It is never easy when a life is cut short, so to use these symbols to picture a child is safe in the afterlife being protected by a cherub or led by God like a lamb is an ideal shared by multiple cemeteries in Whatcom.



An additional piece of evidence I gathered that suggests the similarities across Whatcom County cemeteries, was that all of the cemeteries I spent time at have crosses as their majority in religious symbolism. When I compare the top four religious symbol categories, which are crosses, bible verses, angels, and lambs; crosses have the highest count at all three places by a large margin. There are a few reasons behind this, many residents in Whatcom are of the Christian religion or a denomination of (TheARDA), and because Christianity shares the cross symbol with over forty-five thousand other denominations (Quick Facts About Global Christianity). When there are so many more options to fall into Christianity, people are bound to be at least one of them. Thus, resulting in more crosses engraved or displayed than any other religious symbol at all three cemeteries. All things considered, the evidence and research gathered have corroborated the use of some of the same religious motifs at separate cemeteries across Whatcom County.



Main Idea Four: The last important thing I noticed about each cemetery, was the religious symbol differences between the sites. Each site has a random religious symbol that is not seen once at another site, or at least not hardly as much. This gives each place I gathered my information from something special about them. Starting with Bayview, there was a very small amount of two Buddhist symbols from what I saw throughout the whole cemetery. Nooksack had a headstone with the engraved design of the nine-pointed star, an important symbol of the Baha'i Faith (Religious Symbols 1). Finally at the Lynden Cemetery was an alpha-omega symbol that represents the Catholic religion, an orthodox of Christianity (Hassett). None of the symbols were represented at any of the other cemeteries, besides the one cemetery where I mentioned they reside. Who knows exactly how these people ended up in the small county of Whatcom, where Christianity and the cross are the foremost religion and symbols for the area. What I do know is that these people who have passed on in Whatcom, have made a truly unique mark in the cemetery they were laid to rest in.



Conclusion: In the final analysis, it can be seen how cemeteries in Whatcom County have had many changes over time and also share more similarities than differences. I was able to come to this conclusion by comparing different dates on religious graves and looking at the similarities of all three cemeteries. This all furthered my ever-growing understanding of my local cemeteries. Understanding what our cemeteries are trying to tell us through the engraved shapes and words, doesn't only give us an idea of who has passed, but also gives information on a community as a whole. I learned a lot from a simple three cemeteries, yet I wish I could have visited more to

solidify my data. Still with that said, the research I could do led to an unforgettable discovery about Whatcom County.

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Zovar for being an exquisite instructor as always. This is the second class I have taken with her and I have learned a lot from both. I didn't realize how much I would enjoy archaeology and how incorporated it is into modern life as well as the past. Learning about Whatcom gravestones was an interesting project that I began to love. Walking through the cemeteries, I had a new appreciation for the symbols that were left behind as I could better understand the stories engraved onto the stones. After researching symbols at home, I would get excited while out in the field when I could point out "Oh I know what this one means!" To whoever accompanied me. This leads me to thank my mother who went with me to cemeteries, and my boyfriend and dad who all supported me on my research journey in any way they could. Even if it was as simple as bringing me a snack as I wrote my paper, they were there.

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