Upper Valley Epitaphs

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Why Epitaphs?

- One sentence
- Verbal folklore
- Cultural Values
- Role of Religion
Why Epitaphs are Folklore

- Oral tradition - families give epitaphs to those passed to represent their lives
- Passed down - Survivors of the dead give epitaphs, in turn their survivors give them epitaphs, etc.
- There is no known inventor of grave markings or gravestones
- Funeral Ritual (rituals are part of folklore)
- Patterns emerge
  - Mostly Religious
  - Common sources - the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Revelations, Psalms, 2 Timothy
  - Ex: 2 Timothy 1:12 appears on multiple gravestones
    “I know whom I have believed...”
How we collected our folklore

1. Parse through graveyards for epitaphs
2. Record those that we find, including data on the dead person
3. Take a picture
4. Perform cursory background check on dead person/family
   a. Usually, not much information was available
5. Record in collection
Social Context: What Gravestones are Used for

- Gravestones describe the deceased
  - Text (explicitly):
    - Name, date of birth, date of death
    - Sometimes more
  - Symbols (implicitly):
    - Social class, religion, occupation, etc.
- Can be used to trace family history
- Comparing gravestones to gain insight into the evolution of social culture
  - poor/rich disparities in how dead are treated
  - Wealthy → everyone!

Grave of Samuel Gilman Brown
- provides name, birth & death dates, occupational history, and basic genealogy
Social Context: Our Sample

- Predominately Christian
- Upper Valley
- Wealthy Families
  - Ex.- Hitchcock, Bissell

(top right) Bissell Hall
(bottom right) Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center
Cultural Context

- Families used rocks and sticks to mark their deceased loved ones graves when they buried them.
- Tombstones became popular in the 1600s.
- Epitaphs and art on tombstones became popular in the 1800s.
Cultural Context (continued)

- Tombstones/Grave Markings are a form of Superstition

2 types

- Prevents dead from rising (unnatural death/vampires)
- Put a symbol on a grave to reflect afterlife beliefs

Shift during 19th Century

Prevent dead from Rising → Memorial

(Superstition) → (Tradition + Ritual)
Notable Findings - The Cobb Family

- Samuel Cobb (1822-1895)
- His 3 successive wives
  - Almira W. Ripley
  - Luella C. Hutchinson
  - Caroline E. Davis
- 2 other family members
  - Relationship unknown
“And what doth the lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy god.”

“With an infant enriched in her arms, he buried you in sorrow and hope.”

“She made the home happy.”
Notable Findings - Nancy Bissell

“Nee Nina Wempe”
Notable Findings - The Campbell Family

- Rev. Gabriel Campbell (1838-1923)
- His wife, Louise McMahon Campbell (1844-1927)
- Their 5 children
  - Anne Louise (1866 – 1867)
  - Robert Argyle (1873 – 1897)
  - Harriet Lee (1870 – 1901)
  - Elizabeth (1879 – 1901)
  - and Edith Celeste (1877 – 1933)

“God’s love is perfect, His will is best.”
Questions?
Works Cited
