

Weep not for me my children dear...

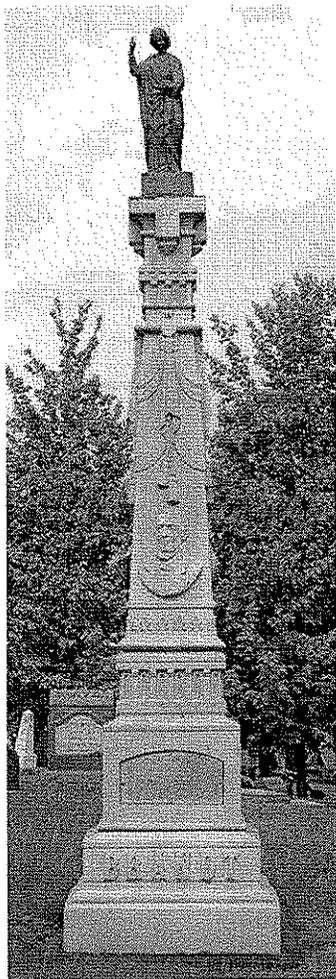
Old Cemeteries Filled with Art and Verse

Older cemeteries are interesting places to explore. Weathered markers not only yield information eagerly sought by family historians, but also reflect how taste and tradition have changed with time.

New England's early colonial markers feature images associated with death. Skulls, skeletons and angels of death were meant to frighten the living into leading more godly lives. Over time, grave art was used to portray grief or make a statement about the person buried beneath.

Six 19th century church cemeteries are scattered throughout Franklin Park. Five are in active use and the sixth, Hopkins Methodist Chapel Cemetery, is an abandoned site that has suffered extensive neglect and vandalism. The newer Tree of Life Memorial Park opened in 1948.

Founded in 1822, Fairmount Presbyterian is Franklin Park's oldest church and cemetery. Its earliest markers are typical of early 19th century design; a vertical stone featuring a sculpted top and unpolished face that is placed directly into the ground. Cut from slate, sandstone or whatever stone was readily available, these markers featured simple inscriptions; usually a name, date and age. Burials dating from the 1820s can be found in both the Fairmount Presbyterian and Little Hill Methodist cemeteries.



By the mid-1800s, when transportation improved and quarried stone from further distances was available, white marble became a popular choice for markers. While easy to carve, marble weathers quickly. Many once beautiful markers are now worn and covered with lichen. By the end of the 1800s, polished granite gained in popularity and is still used today.

It was during the Victorian era of the mid to late 1800s that grave ornamentation became fashionable. No longer content with a simple record of names, dates and ages; the living chose to memorialize the dead with poetic epitaphs and carved images on more elaborate markers.

Crowns represented victory over death; a lamp meant faithfulness; a rose, beauty; wheat a fruitful life. Weeping willows or ivy promised immortality. A broken column or cut tree signified a life too short. Fingers pointing heavenward, clasped and praying hands, doves, books and flowers were all commonly used motifs. Lambs representing innocence were often used to decorate the graves of young children. Emblems of fraternal organizations were often inscribed as well as acknowledgments for military veterans. Often appearing on the base was the name of the skilled craftsman who carved and inscribed the marker.

A walk through any one of Franklin Park's pioneer cemeteries is a trip through history where generations of local families have been memorialized for nearly two hundred years with everything from simple stones to elaborately styled obelisks and with all manner of verse.

(Glenn Lewis)

Zinc column featuring death mask of Philip Brandt in Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church Cemetery where many markers are inscribed in German.

*Weep not for me my children dear
I am not dead, but sleeping here.
My end, you know, my age you see
Therefore prepare to follow me.*
James Montgomery died 1882