

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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ANNUAL FALL TOUR OF MT. ALBION

Our annual fall walking tour of Mt. Albion Cemetery will take place on Saturday, October 18 at 2:00 p.m. The tour will commence at the cemetery chapel with Village of Albion Historian Neil Johnson and myself leading the way upward to the tower. Here we will concentrate on the older grave sites. Historical information about people buried here as well as various symbols and trends in monumental architecture will be pointed out.

Over the years I have come to realize that there is generally a good reason for something to appear the way it does. It was Oscar Wilde who wrote "It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearance."

By the third quarter of the 19th century our Victorian ancestors commissioned monuments which were much more contrived than those simple head stones of earlier times.

My favorite monument in Mt. Albion for all its visual content is the one shown here. Monuments of this configuration became popular in the late 19th century and the early part of this century. They are usually the focal point on a family lot with smaller head stones at the individual graves. The Whitmore monument appears to look like a little building or a house. Notice it stands on a base or foundation. It has a main body with miniature columns at the corners which support a roof with gables on it surmounted with a Greek funeral urn. The overall architectural character is classical in form. You may ask why? In the ancient Minoan culture on the island of Crete, little structures of this nature were erected to house the soul of the deceased. Hence, the eclectic Victorians borrowed this form from pagan culture to give a sense of heritage to relatively new development in this country. Obelisks from ancient Egypt are another example of borrowing something from antiquity for use in local cemeteries.

The Grecian funeral urn on the Whitman monument is still another symbol from a pagan culture. The ancient Greeks cremated their dead and placed ashes in beautiful urns. Hence, the urn, to our ancestors simply symbolized and memorialized death. But there is more here, including oak leaves which appear in two of the gables. The oak was worshiped by the ancient Druids for its strength, endurance and durability. Oak leaves and in this case acorns, as seen to imply the above concepts of sturdiness. Four epitaphs also appear on this monument which are: "He giveth his beloved eternal life", "Nothing can separate us from the love of God", "Love never faileth", "God's Love." Obviously well thought out, as all deal with the love theme.



A monument of this sort speaks well of its time frame and this one speaks most eloquently. In the main body of this "soul house" are the names. His name Samuel S. Whitmore appears first with birth and death dates. Then it states "His wife" Laura A. Nowlin, and her birth and death dates. I notice it doesn't say "Her husband". Now look at the base of the monument. It is his name again in the boldest letters of all. Nowhere on the monument does her name appear in such large letters. Indeed, this monument like many others, expresses quite blatantly the gender bias that was so prevalent years ago.

Finally, there is one more thing of interest here. On the bottom stone of the memorial are inscribed the words: "Perpetual Care", this being an indication that the Whitmores had paid into the perpetual care fund of the cemetery. I guess they wanted to make sure cemetery maintenance men never forgot it as anyone else who passed by.

The Whitmores from the Town of Shelby were both first buried in Millville Cemetery. Around the turn of the century they were removed to Mt. Albion where later their son and daughter-in-law were also in due course of time, buried in the same lot.