

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin
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EPITAPHS

Webster's dictionary describes epitaph as "an inscription on or at a tomb or a grave in memory of the one buried there...a brief statement commemorating or epitomizing a deceased person or something past." Such statements were particularly popular during the 18th and 19th centuries. They were sometimes very personal, sometimes witty or even sometimes comical assessments of the deceased. Orleans County cemeteries are not without their share of these memorial tributes. It is most likely however, to find epitaphs on older soft marble monuments. Because of erosion, many of these loving inscriptions are now illegible.

As Memorial Day approaches, I thought it might be of interest to put together a little collection of epitaphs and other statements which can be found on cemetery monuments in Orleans County.

The most typical epitaphs in our area are usually saccharin in nature, being either Biblical quotations or quasi-religious statements. Readily-found examples of this 19th century type are: "God is Love", "At Rest", "At Home With Jesus", "Gone Home", "Gone But Not Forgotten", "Sleeping in the Arms of Jesus", "Asleep in Jesus", "I have loved Thee With an Everlasting Love", "Precious in the Sight of the Lord is the Death of His Saints" and finally, this one from a child's grave, "He shall gather the lambs with his arms and carry them in his bosom."

Moving along from the more typical ones to ones which show more imagination, we find this epitaph on the tombstone of Emily O'Dell Ferguson 1835-1903 in West Kendall cemetery which is as follows:

"Sleep Mother dear, and take thy rest
God called thee home. He thought it best."

From the same cemetery we find on a nearby tombstone this information and epitaph: Clarissa, wife of Stephen Jenks died May 9, 1875 aged 73 yrs. 8 mo. & 19 da's

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord,
for they rest from their labor and their works
do follow them."

Also nearby is this one from the headstone of Almira, wife of Moses Kendrick and daughter of Elisha & Olive Rice. Died June 18, 1867 age 44 years 6 mos.

"He took thee from a world of care
An everlasting bliss to share."

Another monument has simply Herman C. Chuchra 1858-1900

"He has done what he could."

It is of course, harder to find less saccharine and more imaginative and personalized epitaphs which are still legible. Here are three which are written as though the person in the grave were speaking. The first is from the tombstone of Elijah Brown who died in 1803. His is the oldest marked grave in the county and is located at the old Brown cemetery at the Bridges. Mr. Brown seemingly speaks as follows:

"Behold and see as you pass by
As you are now so once was I
As I am now soon you will be
Prepare to die and follow me."

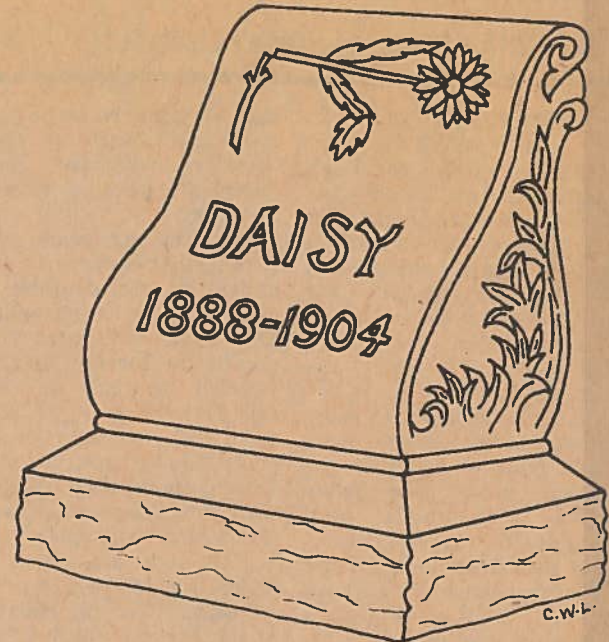
From West Kendall we also find these two epitaphs which seemingly come directly from the deceased. On the headstone of Olive, wife of Elisha Rice who died Oct. 20, 1887 aged 82 years & 25 ds. we find:

"My children all and husband dear
Don't mourn for me as you stand here
For I have gone with Christ to dwell
He who doeth all things well."

On the tombstone of Zebulon Rice who died May 11, 1884 aged 91 yrs. is to be found this amusing epitaph:

"Depart my friends dry up your tears
Here I must lie till Christ appears".

Mr. Rice must have figured the second coming of Christ was going to take awhile.



Perhaps the most personalized and best epitaph to be found in our county is in Mt. Albion Cemetery. The stone contains the following information: Juliette E. wife of Milton Dunning Daughter of J & H Wing Died Feb. 8, 1856 aged 19 yrs. 1 mo. & 6 ds. In very small letters at the base of the monument is this epitaph:

"A weeping husband carved his wife this stone.
A month and six days he called her his own.
Then in her bridal robe they laid her here
So loved and so loving, so kind and so dear.
Her soul all devoted to Jesus before
She spread her bright wings and to heaven did
Soar."

She spread her bright wings and to heaven did soar."

Another personalized monument at Mt. Albion is a very small heart-shaped stone which simple states:

"My Little Mother Mary J. Reed"

In my travels into local cemeteries I have never found but one monument which actually contains advertising. It is located at West Ridgeway Cemetery and is for Alice E. Daughter of U & S.M. Benjamin. Died Feb. 22, 1870 age 9 yrs. 7 m's 10 days. The obverse side of the stone has

"Our Darling Alice"

in rather flowing letters followed in small letters by "L. Downer & Co., Lockport." Well, why not? I think it's interesting to know where the Benjamin's bought this monument.

Another equally unusual bit of information can be found on the Whitmore monument at Mt. Albion. After the names and dates, etc. down near the base in quite noticeable letters is inscribed the statement "Perpetual Care." Evidently the Whitmore's wanted to make certain they got their money's worth by letting the cemetery caretakers know for all time that this lot is under their perpetual care.

Perhaps some of the most imaginative statements to be found in our cemeteries are visual. How well we know that a picture often says a thousand words. Such a monument is pictured. This unique and one-of-a-kind visual statement marks the grave of Daisy Bentham in Hillside Cemetery at Holley. Making use of her name and age the monument's epitaph is an illustration of a broken daisy, symbolizing a young life cut short.