

Mt Carmel Cemetery Bean Blossom Twp, Monroe County, Indiana



Treestone -- see description below



Locomotive stone -- see description below

Cemeteries tell stories if you only know what to look for. The Mt. Carmel Cemetery in northwestern Monroe County is no exception. This beautiful cemetery is easily accessible, located on the north side of Mt. Carmel Road a short distance northwest of Ellettsville and due west of Stinesville, between N. Stinesville Road and County Line Road 450 East. Early Monroe County maps indicate that this is also the site of a former Mt. Carmel church. This cemetery of 134 graves is not laid out in the customary rows one would expect of a church cemetery.

Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography, by Douglas Keister, (Gibbs Smith Publisher, 2004), is a very useful and interesting guide that provides a key to the “elaborate vocabulary of visual symbols” in the cemetery (page 7). The first section of the cemetery includes the large Baker

family memorial visible from the road. This tall memorial illustrates what Keister calls the early 19th century cultural shift away from stark reminders of mortality such as skulls, skeletons and coffins, for example, to this beautiful example of a gentler approach to death with a softly shrouded cinerary urn carved in stone. Keister also observes that the shrouded urn is “probably the most common nineteenth century funerary symbol”, even though the urn was merely symbolic and not functional. Cremation was not common then. The shroud, according to Keister, represents either the veil between heaven and earth or it is merely placed on the urn as a show of reverence (page 131).

Mt. Carmel is organized in roughly four sections punctuated by Cedar trees. Several yards to the north beyond Bakers’ shrouded urn is a cluster of memorial stones including a beautiful example of a carved “treestone” or tree stump (left photo above). Keister believes this is an off-shoot of the Victorian rusticity craze (page 65). This limestone treestone was placed on the grave of William L. Willard, a stone carver who was born in Wales. The tree is chopped off, possibly signifying a life cut short, and is entwined in a leafy vine thought to be the symbol of the relationship between God and man. Keister quotes the Bible, John 15, to illustrate his point: *I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me ye can do nothing.* (pp 59-60) This memorial was carved at a time when it was proper to indicate the deceased’s occupation. A carved mallet like those used by a stone carver rests on the short branch of the tree leaning against the tree stump to indicate that William Willard was a stone carver. Something that looks like a chisel rests on the other side.

Next to the treestone is the sole example in the cemetery of a wrought iron fence enclosing a grave. The fence has become disheveled over time with the root growth of a nearby tree. From the wrought iron fence workshop sponsored by the Cemetery Committee in October, we learned that very old wrought iron fences in cemeteries are frequently damaged by dirt and leaf debris that settles too close to the bottom of the fence. That appears to be the case here.

Just west of the treestone is another example of a memorial reflecting an occupation. The grave of 22 year old railroad worker, Emery Titzel, is topped by a very interesting locomotive carved out of limestone (picture above on right). The locomotive sits atop a large, two-sided shadow box made of glass. Whatever was enclosed in the glass has been lost to the ages.

As you continue on in a circle back to the road, the next set of memorial stones, located apart from the rest and shrouded by the woods beyond, has been disturbed

by what looks like the work of a sink hole in the karst formations below the graves. A tall imposing limestone monument tilts precariously over an assortment of sinking gravestones inside the family plot giving it a feeling of haunted abandonment. A newer grave with a granite monument rounds out the cemetery.

It is not uncommon to find myrtle or Vinca as a ground cover to indicate the existence of a cemetery. Sometimes that is all you can find when the stones have crumbled away. At the Mt. Carmel Cemetery, the grounds are covered with grass, sparse in spots where the clay-like soil comes through. However the myrtle ground cover is thick in the woods surrounding this beautiful cemetery.

October 31, 2011

Carol Seaman

Lou Malcomb

Bob Dodd

For more information about the Harmony or other cemeteries, consult the Cemetery Files at the Genealogy Library at the Monroe County History Center or contact the Cemetery Committee at genealogy@monroehistory.org.