



Headstone Symbols: The Anchor and the Cross

The anchor and the cross is an intriguing tombstone symbol. What does it mean?

An anchor often appears on the gravestones of sailors to commemorate a life at sea. But the cross changes its meaning.

The anchor-embellished cross is typically a religious symbol; a reminder to be anchored in faith, hope and love while engaging in God's mission.

The Bible references an anchor in connection with hope in Hebrews 6: 18-19, "Those without hope may be like a ship tossed on the sea, their emotions being carried in every direction."

The combined anchor cross is found on tombs in the ancient Roman catacombs, on gravestones and in Christian art.

Victorian spiritualists tried to soften the emotional impact of death, and felt the anchor should remind family members to hold on to the hope of seeing their loved one again. An anchor with a severed chain represented a premature death.

Secret societies also embraced the anchor. The Masons adopted it to represent a life well-spent, eternal tranquility, and again, hope.

The above anchor and cross is located on the east side of Placerville Union Cemetery. Like many others of its age, it's seen heavy lichen damage. Lichen eats off the lettering of old marble headstones and also weakens the structure. Save the Graves volunteers safely cleaned this headstone, adding many decades to its life.

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