



Headstone Symbols: The Urn

To Victorians, urns on tombstones represented the body as a container for the soul, which then passes on to the afterlife.

Urn became popular as funerary ornaments after the Civil War. A Greek Revival swept across the US and brought the omnipresent urn with it as a symbol of structure and democracy. Victorians saw the celebration of all things Greek as bringing order, stability, and comfort – all in short supply for a young nation healing from the Civil War.

The Greeks used urns as a repository for cremated ashes. Americans wouldn't embrace cremation for another century. We just liked the urn.

The draped shroud represents either death and mourning or a veil separating earth and heaven. The fringe is the death shroud.

No fringe? The shroud is a veil, a boundary between life and death.

James Akins can be found in Section 17 Row 71, Union Cemetery located at 650 Bee Street, Placerville, CA. No fringe on his shroud, but note the condition of the headstone's peak, where the urn has been reattached.

Also note his date of death: 1868. This cemetery wasn't founded until 1871. Explanation: Akins is buried in the heart of the historic Mason section. Affluent families like his moved the bodies of recently deceased loved ones to the brand new and very grand garden cemetery formed by the Masons, Odd Fellows, Druids and Redmen as a union of four fraternal orders in 1871. The lodges were responding to terrible conditions in the other public cemeteries in town.

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