

Special emblems on tombstones indicate several familiar themes in many faiths. Some examples are:

- [Anchor](#) - Steadfast hope
- [Angel of grief](#) - Sorrow
- [Arch](#) - Rejoined with partner in [Heaven](#)
- [Birds](#) - The [soul](#)
- [Book](#) - Faith, wisdom
- [Cherub](#) - Divine [wisdom](#) or [justice](#)
- [Column](#) - Noble life
- [Broken column](#) - Early [death](#)
- [Conch shell](#) - [Wisdom](#)
- [Cross, anchor and Bible](#) - Trials, victory and reward
- [Crown](#) - Reward and glory
- [Dolphin](#) - Salvation, bearer of souls to Heaven
- [Dove](#) - Purity, love and [Holy Spirit](#)
- [Evergreen](#) - Eternal life
- [Garland](#) - Victory over death
- [Gourds](#) - Deliverance from grief
- [Hands](#) - A relation or partnership (see Reference 3)
- [Heart](#) - [Devotion](#)
- [Horseshoe](#) - Protection against [evil](#)
- [Hourglass](#) - Time and its swift flight
- [Ivy](#) - Faithfulness, memory, and undying friendship
- [Lamb](#) - [Innocence](#)
- [Lamp](#) - [Immortality](#)
- [Laurel](#) - Victory, fame
- [Lily](#) - Purity and [resurrection](#)
- [Lion](#) - Strength, [resurrection](#)
- [Mermaid](#) - Dualism of [Christ](#) - fully [God](#), fully [man](#)
- [Oak](#) - Strength
- [Olive branch](#) - Forgiveness, and peace
- [Palms](#) - [Martyrdom](#), or victory over death
- [Peacock](#) - Eternal life
- [Pillow](#) - a deathbed, eternal sleep
- [Poppy](#) - Eternal sleep
- [Rooster](#) - Awakening, courage and vigilance
- [Shell](#) - [Birth](#) and [resurrection](#)
- [Star of David](#) - The [God](#)
- [Skeleton](#) - Life's brevity
- [Snake in a circle](#) - Everlasting life in Heaven
- [Swallow](#) - [Motherhood](#)
- [Broken sword](#) - Life cut short
- [Crossed swords](#) - Life lost in battle
- [Torch](#) - Eternal life if upturned, death if extinguished
- [Tree trunk](#) - The beauty of life
- [Triangle](#) - Truth, [equality](#) and the [trinity](#)
- [Shattered urn](#) - Old age, mourning if draped
- [Weeping willow](#) - [Mourning](#), grief

Greek letters might also be used:

- [αω](#) ([alpha](#) and [omega](#)) - The beginning and the end
- [χρ](#) ([chi rho](#)) - The first letters spelling the name of Christ
- [IHS](#) - Stylised version of [iota-eta-sigma](#), a Greek abbreviation of Jesus; alternatively treated as an initialism for "in Hoc Signo (VInces)" -- "In this sign you shall conquer."

### *The Obelisk*

The obelisk is, to quote McDowell and Meyer in *The Revival Styles in American Memorial Art*, one of the "most pervasive of all the revival forms" of cemetery art. There is hardly a cemetery founded in the 1840s and 50s without some form of Egyptian influence in the public buildings, gates, tomb art, etc. Napoleon's 1798-99 Egyptian campaigns, the discoveries at the tombs of the Pharaohs, and our new Republic's need to borrow the best of the ancient cultures (Greek revival, classic revival, the prominence of classical studies and dress, etc.) led to a resurgence of interest in the ancient Egyptian culture. Obelisks were considered to be tasteful, with pure uplifting lines, associated with ancient greatness, patriotic, able to be used in relatively small spaces, and, perhaps most importantly, obelisks were less costly than large and elaborate sculpted monuments. There were many cultural reasons for the revival styles of the nineteenth century. Freemasonry, while part of the overall cultural influence, was not responsible for the prevalence of obelisks. If you would like to read more about some of these styles, see *The Egyptian Revival: Its Sources, Monuments and Meaning, 1808-1859*, by Richard Carrott.

### *Headstones facing east*

In many, but by no means all, early New England burying grounds the graves are positioned east/west. This east/west orientation is the most common orientation in other parts of the country and world as well. The earliest settlers had their feet pointing toward the east and the head of the coffin toward the west, ready to rise up and face the "new day" (the sun) when "the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised" or when Christ would appear and they would be reborn. If the body was positioned between the headstone and the footstone, with the inscriptions facing outward, the footstone might actually be facing east and the decorated face of the headstone facing west. If the headstone inscription faces east, the body would most commonly be buried to the east of it. Much depends on the layout of the graveyard -- if there was a church or other building in the center of the burial site, where the high ground was located, the location of access roads, etc. Early graves were seldom in the neat rows that we are used to seeing. Burials were more haphazard, more medieval in their irregularity; families didn't own plots and burial spaces were often reused. The north side of the cemetery was considered less desirable and is often the last part of the burying ground to be used, or you may find the north side set aside for slaves, servants, suicides, "unknowns," etc. In many burial grounds graves face all four points on the compass. Sometimes a hilly site will have stones facing all four directions. With the coming of the Rural Cemetery Movement in the 1830s and 40s, an entirely new style of burial became popular. The ideal of winding roads and irregular terrain dictated the orientation of the monuments to a large degree.