Gravestone Pictures Displayed In Library

By JODY HANKE

What's in a gravestone? To see the answer graphically displayed spend a few minutes at the exhibit on the second floor of the library. Very clear photographs, valued at $3500, reveal the most characteristic and creative effort of colonial art, the colonial gravestone.

All who look at the stones find the same story told again and again, memento mori, remember everyone must die. For the hardy Puritan settlers such a line evoked more than a feeling of direst doom. It re-enforced what they already acknowledged, the finiteness of life.

Of particular note in the exhibit is the John Foster stone from Dorchester. Father Time is stopping the hand of the skeleton who is about to put out the candle signifying life. The globe on which the candle sits is the world, while the sun beaming down on the scene below may be taken as the beneficence of God.

The certainty of death appears in the death's head, sometimes softened by wings, a skull and crossbones, a pick and axe, skeletons, and coffins.

Quite naturally most symbols grew out of the ideals of Christian life. Grapevines, bunches of grapes, and ears of corn pictorially recall "I am the vine and ye are the branches" and could be worked into borders while other figures could dominate the upper portion of the stone.

An interesting development is the combination of classical and Christian motifs, as in one of the stones where the urn and the

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mermaid were used. Many of the photographs illustrate the development of portrait work which was done on the stones. Personal physical details are increasingly reproduced in place of a conventionalized face or deathshead. The urge to be remembered individually influenced even these colonists!