

Choose a sample type of gravestone iconography (e.g. floral / book / hands / urn / drapes/cherub) and consider the nature of their symbolism over time.

In a survey done by Gorman and DiBlasi on New-England colonial graveyards, they recorded the relationship between gravestone iconography and gravestone composition,

The association of motifs with the material composition of gravestones

Motif*																		
Material	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Total
Slate	23	55	1	15	18	1	0	1	0	11	0	2	1	1	1	1	0	131
Granite, Sandstone, Marble	1	15	0	61	1	0	6	4	1	76	1	0	4	2	2	0	4	177
Total																		308

*Motif code:

- 1 = death's head,
- 2 = cherub,
- 3 = birdlike death's head,
- 4 = urn and willow,
- 5 = portrait,
- 6 = hourglass,
- 7 = cross,
- 8 = angel,
- 9 = anchor,
- 10 = plain inscription,
- 11 = wreath/torch,
- 12 = skeleton,
- 13 = skull and crossbones,
- 14 = father time,
- 15 = sunflower rosette,
- 16 = shrouds,
- 17 = masonic emblem.

I will be writing about the symbolism and uses of cherubs on gravestones.

Looking at Cambridge, USA, cherubs seem to arrive and gain popularity in the late 18th century.. From this time onwards, they usually make a solid majority of the gravestone iconography prevalent in american graveyards.. They were most commonly used to signify high status graves, of the rich and powerful. Looking at the regional culture, it is clear that usually the more modernist areas of society make ideas like cherubs on gravestone reality, and the trend is then followed by the more traditional. Taking this

idea, you can see that the population of late 18th century Cambridge vs late 18th century Boston was a more modern, intellectual society, as has been reflected in the greater frequency of cherub stones there. This is probably the case, with the influence of the Harvard intellectual community being reflected in the cemetery. It would appear that even in the early eighteenth century, the university was a place for innovation and liberal thinking. Cambridge intellectuals were more likely to be responsive to English styles, feelings, and tastes, and this could well be what we are seeing in the high number of cherub stones marking high status graves.



An example of
cherubs in a
Boston
Graveyard

Taken from

https://southdakotapolitics.blogs.com/south_dakota_politics/2007/08/skulldugery-in-.html

Bibliography

Gorman, F. J. E., and DiBlasi, M., 'Gravestone Iconography and Mortuary Ideology', *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Winter, 1981), pp. 79-98, Duke University Press.