

Written In Stone

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Headstone Materials

Most of the early cemeteries in Conecuh have gravestones made of limestone or marble. The materials used to make gravestones have changed over the years, and can sometimes be used to date the age of the stone found in an old cemetery. In Conecuh County, you're just as likely to find common brick piles; reminiscent of a cairn or crib; beautiful pink or white marble slabs and headstones; crumbling limestone rock; granite or concrete markers indicating the status of the family in the community.

Gravestones made of slate or common field stone were used mainly from 1786 to 1830; while flat topped stones such as hard marble came into use between 1830 and 1845. Round or pointed top soft marble headstones with delicately, carved, cursive inscriptions were most popular between 1845 and 1900. Sometime between 1870 and 1900, pylons, columns and exotic style monuments became popular; while zinc or other metal monuments could be found from 1900 to present day. The granites were used from about 1900 to present day, while concrete markers with bronze plates have been used from about 1920 to present day.

In rare occurrences, one will often find a wooden headstone still standing guard for a place of burial, and though there is no visible sign of writing, one feels the excitement of discovering a petrified piece of wood from the early to mid 1800's still standing. There are as many un-marked graves as marked ones in our cemeteries; and though, the person might be unknown, it doesn't make them any less real to that one seeking information about them. Whole family groups might have died during sickness and with times hard, and quarantine prevalent, it is possible that no one was left to leave a marker behind. I've found a wagon wheel as a marker for a grave; a salesman's sample headstone as a marker; a pile of rock or old glass bottles to mark a loved ones' grave; and distinct shrubbery to locate a gravestone.

Perhaps you've noticed other types of markers or headstones in your local family cemeteries. Please share with me your findings. It might just help date that cemetery, and give us hints on how your ancestors lived.

Remember the Cemetery Preservation Workshop on Saturday, April 14th at The Evergreen Depot. For more information, call me at (251) 578-2670 or email me at canebrakesociety@yahoo.com