

2014-03 Hobbs – A Touching, Beautiful History

A TOUCHING, BEAUTIFUL HISTORY

by Fred Hobbs

Jokes, sometimes morbid, are made about them. Some people are afraid to be around them, especially in the dark. Others are quite matter-of-fact realizing that they and their loved ones may “rest in peace” in one of them some day.

Cemeteries.

A 19th century clergyman, John Anderson offers these thoughts. “A cemetery,” he writes, “is a memorial and a record...a touching and beautiful history. It tells the story of the past, not of its institutions, or its wars or its ideas, but of individual lives. It is silent, but eloquent, it is common, but unique.” Anderson concludes, in a bit of hyperbole common a couple of centuries ago, “We find no such history elsewhere. There are no records in the wide world in which we can discover so much that is suggestive, so much that is pathetic and impressive.”

To that, one could say simply that cemeteries offer great historical insight to those interested in the lives and conditions of the great, near great or obscure of days gone by. Especially fascinating to Colorado history buffs are the cemeteries of the small communities in the mountains near Denver, such as Central City and Nederland.

The grave markers, some elaborate, many crumbling and deteriorating, provide an historic glimpse of the lives and, sadly the deaths of the miners, moguls and madams and their families of the 1860s.

They came to find fortune in the gold mines of “the richest square mile on earth.” More often than not, they encountered not riches, but severe disappointment, economic struggle, disease and early death.

Many, in fact most, of the tombstones or less elaborate markers contain inscriptions noting the passing of men in their 30s and 40s, women of even younger age who perhaps died in childbirth, and most poignant of all, the very young, the babies. “Here lies our beloved Molly, age 2 years and seven months, now with the angels in heaven.”

A walk through these historic cemeteries fuels the imagination. Were these gold rush pioneers only naïve, money-grubbing fortune seekers or were they merely seeking a better life? Writer Kathy Kaiser explored that topic in a recent article on *Front Range Living.com*. She writes: “There is enough sadness and tragedy in Colorado’s historical cemeteries (recorded) in innumerable novels, movies or grand operas, (but also) there is a beauty and stillness that inspire meditation upon life and death.”

Perhaps some of the hundreds of gambling enthusiasts who frequent the mountain casinos can take a few moments away from the slots and Blackjack tables to visit the nearby Central City Cemetery and view a gravesite Kaiser writes about in her article.

Located "amid the dark silence of the pine trees," inscribed in fading letters is this simple memorial to the child buried there: "'tis a little grave, but, oh, have care; for world wide hopes are buried there."