

Memorial Types

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THE SARCOPHAGUS

Classical to the greatest extent is the sarcophagus type. Its interesting symbolism as well as its true use has made it a pleasing and desirable choice as a modern cemetery memorial. Primarily the sarcophagus consists of a case used as an enclosure for a coffin.

The word "sarcophagus" is derived from the Greek and means "flesh consuming". The origin of this type of memorial is primarily Greek as far as the great majority of our present abstractions are concerned, although the oldest known sarcophagi are those of Egypt. Some of them are as old as the pyramids.

The ancient Greeks made many of their sarcophagi out of Assius stone. The caustic properties of this stone were of such a nature that the body was consumed in a very short time.

On some occasions these sarcophagi were buried underground, and, in other cases, in tombs above ground. Many of the old sarcophagi that have been recovered are so beautiful in form and sculptured with such skill that they defy all modern effort to parallel them.

The true sarcophagus monument is hollow and has a cap or cover piece which may be removed to entomb the body. However, the more popular modern sarcophagus type of memorial merely simulates the case to contain the body, but in reality the die block is cut solid.

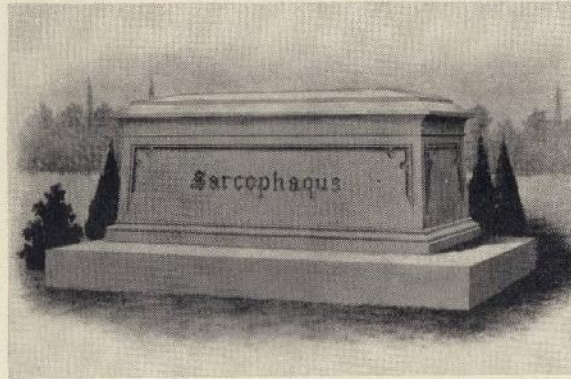
The sarcophagus as a basis of design has probably been more abused by American commercialism than any other type. In its present use as a memorial, the original function of its true use should never be lost sight of, even though it is cut solid and exists only in simulation of its true significance.

Striving to draw a logical conclusion as to what governing characteristics should be recognized, the attention is at once directed to minimum size. Since in its original form the die block was to contain a body, it necessarily follows, even though only in simulation, that the die block should at least be of sufficient size, if hollowed out, to contain a human body. The minimum size permissible to accomplish this end would, therefore, be not less than 6'-6" in length and 2'-2" square on the end.

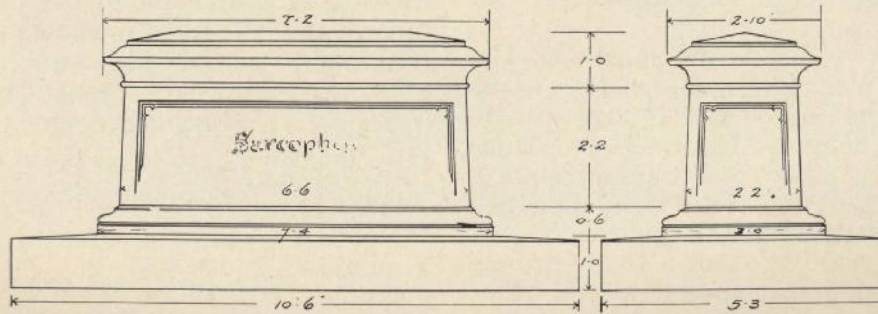
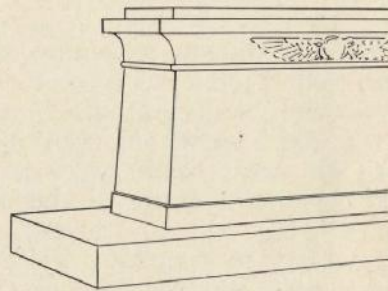
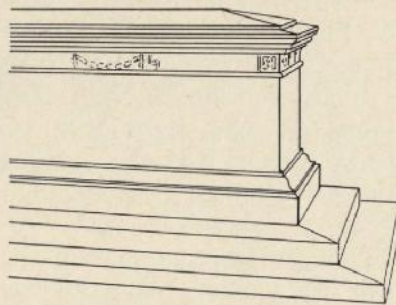
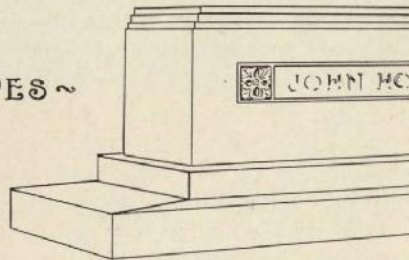
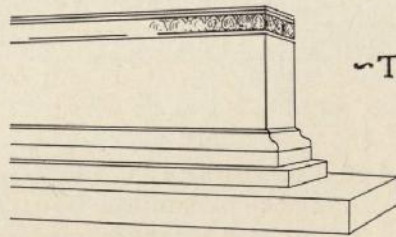
The sarcophagus in its original use did not necessarily carry a projecting base. However, in its modern application as a symbolic outdoor cemetery memorial, it is greatly enhanced in its setting by the application of one, two or even three bases.

To accomplish the best results, the general measurements and proportions should be governed as follows:

The bottom base should be twice as long as it is wide, with a minimum of 10'-6" in length and 5'-3" in width. The die



~TYPES~



block should always be three times as long as the thickness from the front to the back of the end. The rise of the die block should be the same as the thickness from the front to the back of the end, except in an unusually large example, in which case the die block may be a little lower in proportion to its thickness. The graduation in the proportion of three to one in the shape of the die to two to one in the shape of the base is balanced by greater width of the end washes of the bases. Longer end washes very much enhance the setting of the whole composition and since the bases are not an integral part of the actual sarcophagus, it is not material whether they are ornamented or plain or whether they miter at the corners or not. In some cases a modest treatment of mouldings on the wash of the second or third base will lead the eye up in a more gradual sweep to the ornate treatment of the sarcophagus itself.

The sarcophagus may be very plain, extensively sculptured or architecturally decorated. Many of the old sarcophagi were extensively sculptured with bas-relief carving depicting important events in the life of the person whose body was to be enclosed, in some cases completed before the death of the principal.

A previous reference in this chapter is made to the abuse of the sarcophagus type by American commercialism. The principle of the abuse is the extensive production of the type in such ridiculously small dimensions that the simulation of a tomb to hold a body is completely lost. The only possible excuse for an under-size creation of a sarcophagus is

that it might be dedicated to the memory of a child, though this is rarely the case.

The sarcophagus memorial should always be dedicated to one individual and should exhibit only one individual's full name and not merely a family name. The inference here is obvious, since the true sarcophagus would contain only one body, and should the sarcophagi be made extra large, as is occasionally done, with two bodies enclosed, then two names would be applied.

In the event of a sarcophagus being used in the center of a family burial plot as the principal family memorial, it should carry the name of the senior member of the immediate generation, and all other inscriptions of individuals buried in the plot should be carried on individual markers placed at each grave. A marker repeating the name of the senior member of the family and giving the dates of birth and death may also be placed at the individual grave of the person to whom the memorial is dedicated, if desired.

The prevailing custom is to bury the senior parents directly in front of the center of the memorial and all other members of the family to the sides and behind the memorial. It is very unethical to carve numerous inscriptions on a base or on the ends of the sarcophagus.

The preferable setting of this type is on the level, flat ground and it is rarely attractive when placed on a hillside.