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# Carved In Stone: The Artistry Of Early New England Gravestones



## Synopsis

Gravestones are colonial America's earliest sculpture and they provide a unique physical link to the European people who settled here. *Carved in Stone* book is an elegant collection of over 80 fine duotone photographs, each a personal meditation on an old stone carving, and on New England's past, where these stones tell stories about death at sea, epidemics such as small pox, the loss of children, and a grim view of the afterlife. The essay is a graceful narrative that explores a long personal involvement with the stones and their placement in New England landscape, and attempts to trace the curious and imperfectly documented story of carvers. Brief quotes from early New England writers accompany the images, and captions provide basic information about each stone. These meditative portraits present an intimate view of figures from New England graveyards and will be enjoyed by anyone with an interest in early Americana and fine art photography.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This beautiful book is a treasure of early New England gravestone art. With superb photos by Thomas Gilson, an excellent essay by William Gilson, and historical quotes, the book definitively recreates the unique world of graveyard carvings of the early European settlers in New England. I loved the unique style of the book, and learned so much about the subject in an entertaining way. Written by New England natives, the Gilson brothers, "*Carved in Stone*" is such a high-quality book that you will want to display it on your cocktail table or in your home library to look at again and again.

This beautiful and unique book by Thomas and William Gilson is both informative and entertaining. The carvings of early New England gravestones photographed by Thomas Gilson are thoughtfully selected and beautifully crafted. Accompanied by historical quotations, the photographs provide the reader a unique and fascinating look into the culture and sensibility of the early colonial period. The narrative by William Gilson is personally engaging and heartfelt. *Carved in Stone* impresses the reader as a labor of love. It is a book to return to and enjoy over and over again.

Not your typical coffee table book--a book full of gravestone imagery--but once you open it, it's hard to put down. As a child, I loved cemeteries; my curiosity and appreciation piqued by the many lives that walked this earth before. What moved them? What terrified them? What pieces of wisdom did they leave like bread crumbs? The Gilson brothers offer a deeper look into these questions. Their curiosity led them to a particularly peculiar culture, one perhaps more deeply engaged with death than ours: New England Colonists. In their engravings and words, the colonists reveal a dark humor (which as a fan of *Six Feet Under* and *Donnie Darko* appeals to me greatly), an acceptance of the cycle of life (offering many lessons for our culture), and a deep fear of ending up on the wrong side of eternity (indeed, a fear which remains quite titillating!). This book affirms the deep peace and reflection of cemeteries. It reminds me to look closer at everything and that beauty arises in the most unexpected of places. It is an invitation to be fully alive. Thank you to the Gilsons! And may you all enjoy the book as much as I!

"*Carved in Stone*" is a lovely book. It's a beautiful hardcover book filled with strong, stately images from early New England gravestones. No surprise there! But what makes this book's images stand out is how they almost "pop" off the pages. A number books of featuring these kinds of old stones offer more "clinical" images. Don't get me wrong, I haven't come across a book of gravestones that haven't been interesting. I just really like these photos! Another thing about this book that I like is that it is personal. Rather than an informational-only approach, there are quotes from journals and other writings of the times of the stones. There is also William Gilson's introductory essay. He writes, "The original New England Puritans, those of the first two or three generations, were half in love with death. You can't focus so intently on something, obsess about it with such flexed attention, without some part of you desiring it." I think this is something all taphophiles can relate to on some level. We contemplate death on a more regular basis because we surround ourselves with it. Perhaps we aren't necessarily thinking of our own deaths, but we do have an acute awareness not everyone

has.

I ran across this book by accident while browsing for New England related books. The book is primarily photos of excellent quality of early tombstones. To be more exact, the photos are not of the whole stones, but mostly what might be called the decorative margins--angels, skeletons, skulls, rising suns (which I presume symbolize the Second Coming). Some of the carving is a bit crude and some quite sophisticated, and the photographs of both accentuate the artistry. There are apt and eloquent quotations interspersed throughout the book. This is a neglected folk art. I found the impact to be rather hopeful, not what I'd expected from gravestone carving.

Carved in Stone brings together an artist's eye and a poet's sensibility. Thomas Gilson's photos of early New England funerary art take us to the tactile surface of these stones, some of them time-worn, others still sharply incised, some displaying the formal iconography of the day, others seeming to 21st century eyes quirky, even perversely humorous, and yet again others suggesting a deep sympathy for the bereaved, as though the carver had shared their personal loss. The photographer guides us as we focus on one detail, then another, sometimes stepping back to view a figure and read a text, sometimes drawing nearer to examine an elegant design. Like his brother's photos, William Gilson's introductory essay is honest, perceptive, and personal, leading us into a cultural landscape that is remote to us, yet strangely familiar. Carved in Stone provides a fresh, clear-eyed glimpse into traditional--very traditional--Anglo-American art and religious expression.

I really like this book the more I look at it the more I enjoy it. At first I bought it for the photos .but it has some good info also Could be used as a reference for gravestone styles,carvers and localities.

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