



Pioneer Cemeteries: Sculpture Gardens of the Old West

Prof. Annette Stott PhD

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As pioneers attempted to settle and civilize the “Wild West,” cemeteries became important cultural centers. Filled with carved wooden headboards, inscribed local stones, and Italian marble statues, cemeteries functioned as symbols of stability and progress toward a European-inspired vision of Manifest Destiny. As repositories of art and history, these pioneer cemeteries tell the story of communities and visual culture emerging together within the developing landscape of the Old West.

Annette Stott traces this story through Rocky Mountain towns on the western frontier, from the unkempt “boot hills” of the early mining camps and cattle settlements to the more refined “fair mounts.” She shows how people from Asia, Europe, and the Americas contributed to the visual character of the mountain cemeteries, and how the sepulchral garden functioned as an open-air gallery of public sculpture, at once a site for relaxation, learning, and social ritual. Here, widespread participation in a variety of ceremonies brought mountain communities together with a frequency almost unimaginable today. Illustrated with eighty-three striking photographs, this book shows how the pioneer cemetery emerged as a site of public sculpture and cultural transmission in which each carved or molded monument played dual (and sometimes conflicting) public and private roles, recording the community’s history and values while memorializing individuals and events.

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