

Tombstone Rubbings

by Mark Bohannon

An interesting and unique aspect of mining artifact collecting-and one that my mother introduced me to many, many years ago-is tombstone rubbings.



To make a tombstone rubbing, you will need some unbleached muslin (about three yards will do for a start), a few graphite sticks, a roll of gray tape, and a pair of scissors.

When you find a tombstone that you want to make a rubbing of, cut a piece of muslin at least ten inches larger than the tombstone. Place the muslin on the tombstone and wrap the sides and top around the tombstone and tape the edges of the muslin to the back of the tombstone with gray tape. Try not to stretch the muslin too much as it will cause distortions in the rubbing after it is removed which will make it more difficult to mount later. Once the muslin is secured to the tombstone, take a graphite stick and evenly rub the face of the tombstone with the flat side of the graphite stick. Using the edge of the graphite stick, outline the edges of the tombstone. The graphite will darken the raised flat areas of the tombstone, but will leave all of the indented areas clear.

After you have finished rubbing the tombstone with the graphite stick, you can spray the muslin with an acrylic spray like that used by artists on pastel and charcoal drawings-if you have the time to wait until it dries-or just remove the muslin from the tombstone and spray it later.

To mount your rubbing, cut a piece of plywood to a size that will accommodate the dimensions of the tombstone rubbing with an inch or so extra on each of the sides. Wrap the muslin around the plywood-again avoiding excessive stretching-and staple the edges of the muslin to the back of the plywood. Of course, this is not the only way to mount the muslin, and you may think of another way of mounting your rubbing. This is a good time to spray the rubbing if you have not already done so.

Tombstone inscription reads: WM HENRY BENNETTS - A Native of ENGLAND.- DIED - In attempting to rescue the lives of his fellow miners in the alta drift. - June 2, 1882 - AGED - 29 yrs & 3 mo's (Virginia City, Nevada cemetery)

After the rubbing has been mounted, it can then be matted and framed, hung on a wall as is, or stored for future use. Rubbings can be done on wooden headstones also.

Collecting tombstone rubbings can be as specific or as diversified as you wish. You can collect rubbings of important people (i.e. mine owners, inventors, etc.), professional people (i.e. doctors, mine superintendents, blacksmiths, etc.), or just nice or unusual looking tombstones. I now mainly collect tombstone rubbings of mine accident victims. It may seem a little morbid, but many of them are very interesting to read, although they are very hard to find.

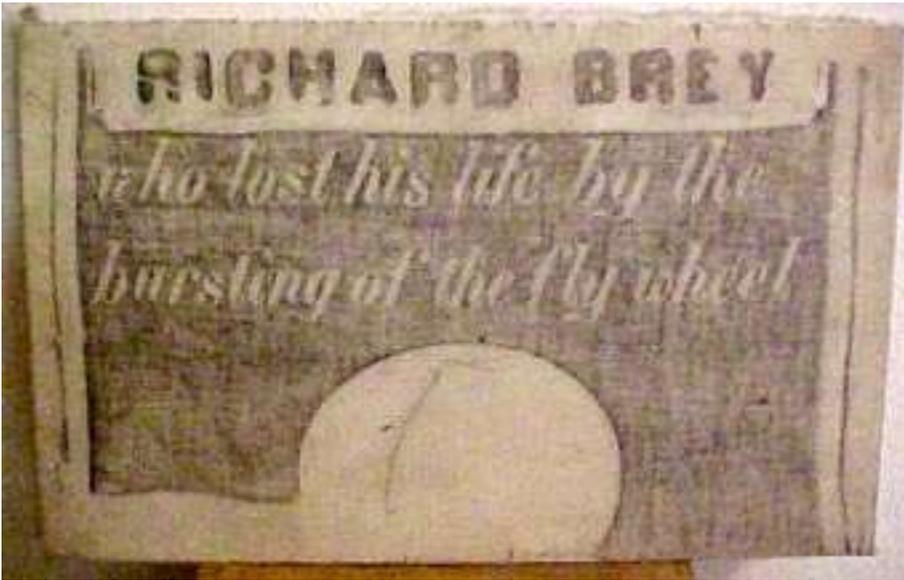


THURLOW A.
HASKELL,
Born in
Lowell, Mass.
May 17, 1832;
Died in
Gold Hill, Nev.
Feb. 17, 1891.
Rest

(Gold Hill cemetery 14" W by 18" H.)



IN MEMORY OF
Dr. JABEZ ROBINSON
BORN
July 9, 1813
DIED
June 22, 1866
(Virginia City, Montana cemetery)



RICHARD BREY
 who lost his life by the
 bursting of the fly wheel
 (Gold Hill, Nevada cemetery.
 This is all that could be found
 of this headstone.)



IN MEMORY OF
 MARY L.
 WIFE OF
 JOHN B.
 COOK
 DIED
 JUNE 3, 1880,
 AGED
 32 YEARS
 (Virginia City, Montana
 cemetery)



IN MEMORY OF
 UNKNOWN
 DIED
 JUNE, 13 1895
 (Wadsworth, Nevada
 cemetery)



HUCK STINSON
 HANGED
 JAN 8, 1864
 (Bannack, Montana
 cemetery)