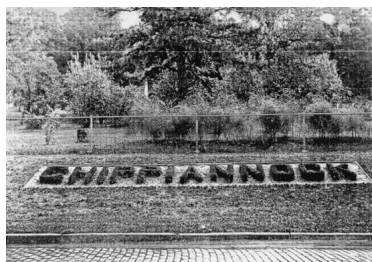


Bringing Out the Dead: Minda Powers-Douglas Offers a Visual History of Chippiannock Cemetery

Written by Jeff Ignatius

Thursday, 18 March 2010 07:57

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Chippiannock Cemetery in Rock Island has its share of impressive monuments, from the elegant resting place of the Cable family to the massive 30-ton boulder (for Edward Burrall) and the six-ton polished-granite sphere (for Dean Tyler Robinson).

But for Minda Powers-Douglas, author of the new *Chippiannock Cemetery* book in [Arcadia Publishing](#)

s "Images of America" series, it's the modest, handmade grave markers that mean the most.



She points to two in particular, featured on pages 78 and 81 of her book and commemorating the lives of children who died at six years old and five months old: small and crafted by people in or close to the family. "The monuments that look like somebody just put them together with

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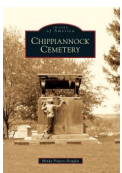
whatever items they had on-hand, those are the ones that broke my heart," Powers-Douglas said. "The ones that someone just put together with their bare hands out of spit and dirt, they're wonderful."

Like all the books in the series, *Chippiannock Cemetery* is foremost a picture book, with captions telling brief stories. Powers-Douglas said this format can be limiting. But it's also ideal for a book about a cemetery; it allows for a breadth of subject matter without straining to tie it all together.

In addition to several contextual chapters, the cemetery's residents are grouped into five basic sections: pioneers, "outstanding citizens," members of the military, children, and "the notorious" - including several "lost souls" associated with famed gangster John Looney. The book strikes a balance between the people and their monuments, and between the "usual suspects" and the relatively unknown. "I ... wanted to show that somebody with a little stone, what a difference they made, too," Powers-Douglas said.

Similar to the cemetery itself, the book is a sampling of local history. "A cemetery is a microcosm of a community, which is a microcosm of how the country developed," Powers-Douglas said. She added that cemeteries tell a lot about a community, and she paraphrased this famous quote from Benjamin Franklin: "One can tell the morals of a culture by the way they treat their dead."

This isn't the first Chppiannock book. The Rock Island Preservation Commission and the Chippiannock Cemetery Heritage Foundation co-published *150 Years of Epitaphs at Chippiannock Cemetery* in 2006, and it has more than twice the pages of the Arcadia book and is physically larger. That doesn't make Powers-Douglas' book redundant; she said it serves as an introduction to the cemetery: "It's a quick and easy way to find out about the people that made our community."



Powers-Douglas had previously self-published the books *Cemetery Walk* (in 2005) and *Translating Tombstones* (in 2008), and she publishes

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Epitaphs

magazine. The prompt for the new book was the wind storm of July 2008, which destroyed more than 125 trees in Chippiannock. She said that while she would consider writing a volume on one of the Iowa Quad Cities cemeteries, she plans to write her next book on important women in American history.

Powers-Douglas knows that her taphophilia (or passion for cemeteries) strikes some people as odd or creepy, but she emphasized that cemeteries were once community centers.

Cemeteries that were developed in the first part of the 19th Century, she said, "were the first national parks." (Chippiannock opened in 1855.) These cemeteries were landscaped with wandering pathways and a variety of trees, and were designed for community use. The people of the 19th Century used them for picnics, swimming, and other social outings. "It was a big social to-do to be in the cemetery, and not just to grieve and mourn and pay your respects; it was like keeping the person alive, keeping them part of the family."

She also said that families of the dead meant for people to visit the cemetery, not avoid it: "They want you to walk in the gates and recognize that this person was important, this person was worthy of love and worthy of being remembered."

Minda Powers-Douglas will appear at several meet-the-author events in the coming month: Saturday, March 20, at 6:30 p.m. at Hauberg Civic Center (1320 24th Street in Rock Island); Saturday, March 27, at 2 p.m. at Borders (4000 East 53rd Street in Davenport); Saturday, April 10, at noon at Trixie Lu's Unique Gifts for You (Pierce School Mall, 2212 East 12th Street in Davenport); and Saturday, April 17, from 1 to 3 p.m. at Barnes & Noble (NorthPark Mall, 320 West Kimberly Road in Davenport).

For more information on Minda Powers-Douglas' work and *Epitaphs* magazine, visit TheCemeteryClub.com

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