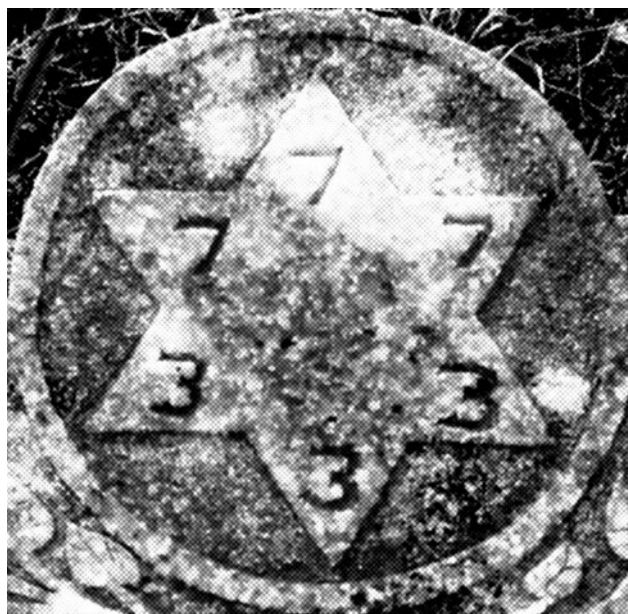
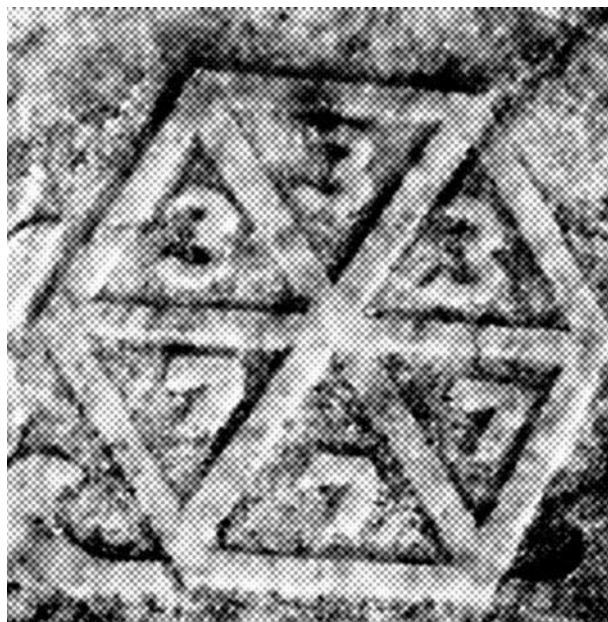


African American Fraternal Headstone Symbols in Arkansas: A Guide

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Draft June 6, 2018

Introduction

This is a guide to African American fraternal headstones in Arkansas. In the first half of the 20th Century dozens of African American fraternal organizations in Arkansas provided burial insurance and other benefits. Owned and operated by African Americans, they provided important services to their communities. Some, like the Prince Hall Masons, Knights of Pythias and Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, had white parallel organizations; while others, like the Supreme Royal Circle of Friends, Knights and Daughters of Tabor, and the Mosaic Templars of America, were distinctive and not directly based on a white organization. The Royal Circle of Friends, Knights and Daughters of Tabor, and the Mosaic Templars of America were likely the largest providers of burial insurance and headstones in Arkansas between 1912 and 1930. They provided standard headstones to hundreds of deceased members—men, women, and, sometimes, children—and are easily identifiable in cemeteries throughout Arkansas.

The Mosaic Templars of America, likely the largest of the three, was founded in Little Rock in 1882 by two former slaves, Chester W. Keatts and John E. Bush for the purpose of providing a means of a “decent burial” with a small membership fee and dues. In 1923 state insurance records reported 20,454 Arkansas members. Its standard markers are known in at least half a dozen states. In Arkansas, the earliest known marker dates to November 1913 and the last to January 1930, a few months before the organization filed for receivership.

The Supreme Royal Circle of Friends, founded in Helena in 1909, by Dr. Richard A. Williams, moved to Chicago in 1919 after the Elaine Massacre. According to 1921 and 1922 RCF advertisements in the *Chicago Defender*, the organization offered a \$150 death benefit and “a Beautiful Marble Monument” for a \$1.25 in monthly dues, \$3.50 joining fee and promised “no rough initiation.” In 1923 state insurance records reported 13,297 Arkansas members. The earliest known RCF marker dates to March 1912 and the last dates to January 1930. While standard RCF markers do turn up in Louisiana, Tennessee, Alabama and even California it is not clear if the order’s markers found their way into Chicago’s cemeteries or if the city just made a friendlier place to do Southern business.

The Knights and Daughters of Tabor, founded in 1871, moved its headquarters from Missouri to Little Rock in 1901. The organization began offering headstones by 1915 and ceased in 1925, when it sold its insurance business. An advertisement in the 1919 *Little Rock City Directory* stated the KDT paid \$50 for funeral expenses and \$20 toward the purchase of a monument. In 1916 the Tabors opened Taborian Hall, a large commercial building, near the 1913 Mosaic Templars of America Building on Little Rock’s West Ninth Street black business district. In 1923 state insurance reports reported 21,079 Arkansas members. While social chapters of the KDT remained active across the country into the mid-20th Century, KDT headstones are known in Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee and at least one in California.

Other African American organizations in Arkansas with white parallels, like the Prince Hall Masons, Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, and Knights of Pythias, also provided burial benefits. However it is not entirely clear if these other organizations provided standard headstones. The Prince Hall Masons do not appear to have provided any standard headstone based on the many variations seen in cemeteries. The record is not clear for organizations like the Knights of Pythias and United Brothers of Friendship and Odd Fellows due to the small number of headstones that have been observed. It does appear the Odd Fellows did provide standard headstones in neighboring Mississippi between ca. 1906 and 1916.

All these organizations began to decline in the 1920s due to the rise of industrial insurance. Finally most were put out of business by the Great Depression as orders paid out to older members at high rates while younger members dropped. In 1923 the Arkansas Insurance Commission reported 25 African American fraternal benefit providers. By 1933 that number had dropped to 5. With few surviving written records of local fraternal orders, Arkansas cemeteries are a remarkable testament to these African American organizations.

Supreme Royal Circle of Friends



Symbol: Circle encompassing a Lion and an Isosceles Triangle with the initials R C F and the numbers 09 (some variation)

- Supreme Royal Circle of Friends founded in 1909 in Helena in by Dr. Richard A. Williams
- Moved headquarters to Chicago ca. 1919 (likely after the Elaine Massacre); state headquarters moved to Forrest City
- Standardized headstones as part of death benefit
 - Styles: Pulpit, Horizontal, Juvenile, Upright (One example)
 - Found between 1912-1930
 - Juvenile markers are rare
- RCF enters receivership in AR in 1934



1912 example, only one known in this style Gum Grove Cem., Newport



Examples of pulpit style (most common), Gum Grove Cem., Newport

Royal Circle of Friends, continued



Juvenile marker (no date?) Pleasant Hill No. 2
Missionary Baptist Church, near Morrilton (Conway
Co.). Juvenile markers are rare.



Horizontal style, (date between 1922-1928) Fraternal Cem., Little Rock
(Pulaski Co.) 1928 example in Abramville Cemetery, Carter Co, OK.

Mosaic Templars of America



Symbol: *Ouroboros* (snake eating its tail), crossing shepherd staffs, initials M T A and “3 V’s” representing the motto, “Veni, Vidi, Veci.”

Standard Mosaic Templars headstone, Miller Cem., Pine Bluff (Jefferson Co.)

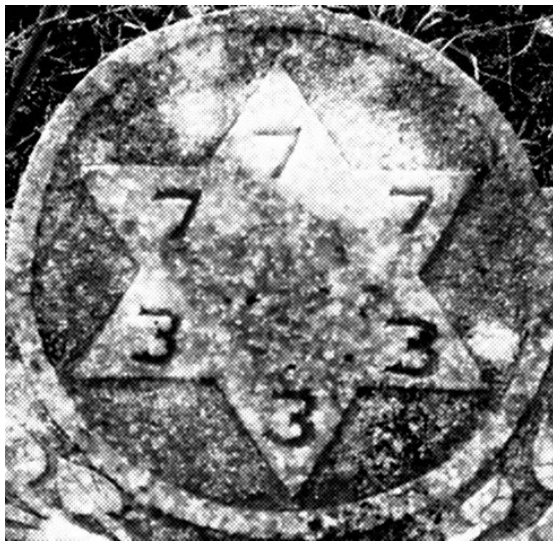
- Mosaic Templars of America founded in Little Rock by Chester Keatts and John E. Bush in 1882
- Standardized headstones part of death benefit
 - Found between 1913-1930
 - A few personalized headstones include MTA symbol
- MTA enter receivership in AR in 1930
- Briefly reorganized as the Modern Mosaic Templars in 1930
 - Some 1931 headstones from MMTA, same design as MTA



Knight and Daughters of Tabor



Symbol: Hexagon with 3s above 7s
(Women's Tabernacle)



Symbol: Six-pointed star with 7s above
3s (Men's Temple)

- Knights and Daughters of Tabor founded in Missouri in 1871 by Moses Dickson
- Headquarters move to Little Rock ca. 1901 under Scipio A. Jordon
- Standardized headstones part of death benefit
 - Found between 1915-1925
 - Styles: Men and women's rectangular, pediment, circular emblem
 - 1908 nonstandard headstone documented in Dixon Cem., Helena (Phillips Co.)
- KDT effectively used numerology in its mystical ritual and symbols, basically
 - 3 represented the trinity, human beings (Body, Soul, Spirit); Life (Earth, Water, Air)
 - 7 represented a perfect number; the number of days for Earth's creation
- KDT enter receivership in AR in 1930
- Continued fraternal work in AR into the 1950s

Knight and Daughters of Tabor, continued..

Tabernacle / Women's headstones



Rectangular headstone with hexagon symbol (1920), Fraternal Cem., Little Rock



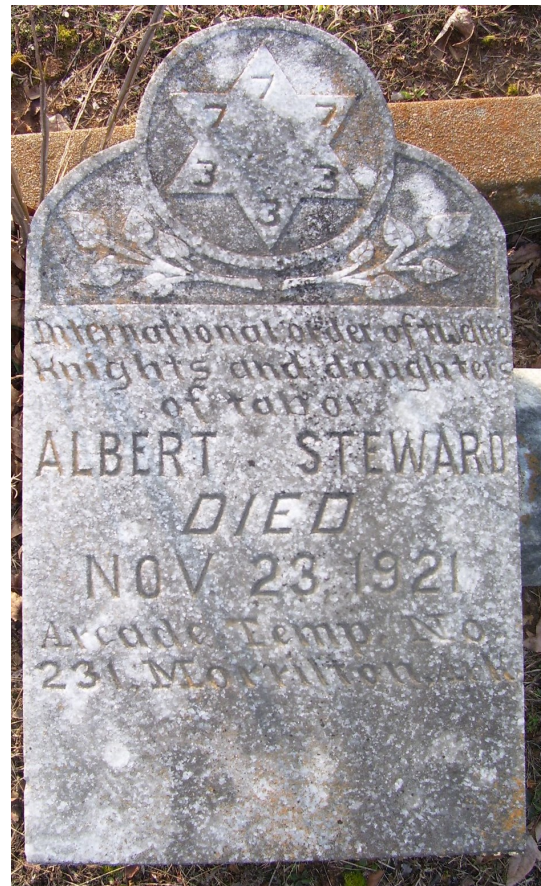
Pediment headstone with hexagon symbol (1920), Lakeside Cem., Des Arc (Prairie Co.)

Knight and Daughters of Tabor, continued..

Temple / Men's headstones

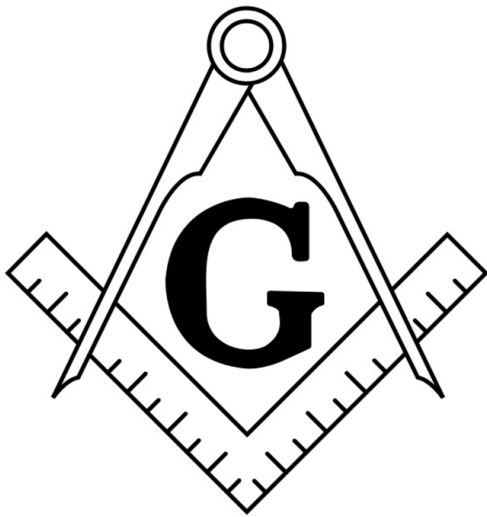


Rectangular with six-pointed star
(1924), Odd Fellows Cem.,
Morrilton (Conway Co.)



Circular emblem with six-pointed
star (1921), Odd Fellows Cem.,
Morrilton (Conway Co.)

Prince Hall Masons / Eastern Star



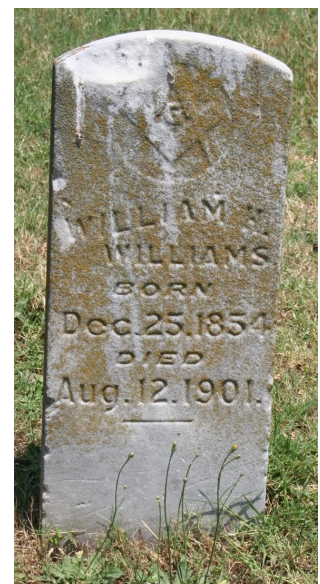
Symbol: Compass and Square



This example of the Eastern Star in Hill Cemetery (Chicot, n.d.) is one of the few examples from the early 20th Century. Modern burials with the Eastern Star are more common.

- Prince Hall Masons chartered in Boston in 1784
- Entered Arkansas in 1866
- Arkansas Masons with the Eastern Star established an “Endowment Department” in 1892 to distribute aid to the needy
- Headstones vary in size and shape
- Headstones with the Eastern Star do not appear to be common
- Earliest headstone in Arkansas?
 - 1888 monument to W. H. Grey, former Prince Hall Grand Master, Magnolia Cem., Helena (Phillips Co.)
 - 1901 example in Little Rock’s Fraternal Cemetery

The compass and square appears on all types of headstones throughout the 20th Century. This Masonic headstone in Fraternal Cem., Little Rock (Pulaski Co.) is one of the earliest.



Grand United Order of Odd Fellows* / Household of Ruth



Symbol: Three interlocking rings and (sometimes) an all-seeing-eye (GUOOF)

This example is from Greenville, MS.



Symbol: Sheaf of Wheat (Household of Ruth) at the top of obelisk

This example is from Greenville, MS.

- Grand United Order of Odd Fellows chartered in Philadelphia in 1843
- Entered Arkansas in 1876
- Women's Order is called "Household of Ruth"
- Headstones can vary in size and shape, but an obelisk may have been a standard headstone as part of a death benefit in some states
 - Obelisk examples in Walnut Grove Cemetery, Marianna (Lee Co.) (n. d.?), Shady Grove Cemetery (Drew Co), 1910, and Auvergne Cemetery (n.d.?) (Jackson Co).
 - Also examples of obelisks in Live Oak Cemetery, Greenville, MS, 1905-1916.
 - 1895 and 1897 stones recorded in 1969 survey of Odd Fellows Cem, Auvergne (Jackson Co), but could not be located in 2007

* Not to be confused with the International Order of Odd Fellows

Knights of Pythias/Grand Order of Calanthe



Symbol: Coat of Arms or Shield with letters for **F**riendship, **B**enevolence and **C**harity with some variation (Pythias).



Symbol: The hand holding a white rose in this modern symbol for the Florida Calanthe Sisters is similar to the symbol on a 1922 headstone in Chicot County.



- Knights of Pythias organized in Washington, D.C. in 1864
- In Arkansas by 1905
- Women's Order is called "Grand Order of Calanthe"
 - Calanthe was the wife of Pythias
- Few known Pythian headstones in AR; not standardized
 - 1915 example in Little Rock's Fraternal Cemetery
 - 1911 & 1915 examples in Old Mound Cemetery, Arkansas City (Desha Co).
- Three examples of Calanthe headstones in Hill Cemetery (Chicot County) dating to 1921, 1922 and 1926; not standardized.
 - Hill Cemetery examples appears to have a circular symbol similar to the modern Calanthe Sisters of Florida
 - Lodge Golden Shield, Court No. 28, F. H. L. [Fidelity, Harmony and Love]
- Knights of Pythias (African American) Cemetery (Jonesboro) has no Pythian headstones

United Brothers of Friendship & Sisters of the Mysterious Ten



Symbol: Isosceles Triangles with initials U B F in corners; Symbol for the Sisters of Mysterious Ten flips the triangle horizontally with the initials S M T in the corners.

- United Brothers of Friendship organized in Lexington, KY in 1861
- In Arkansas by 1905
- Few known AR headstones
- Might be standardized
 - 1915 and 1916 examples in Oak Cemetery, Fort Smith
 - 1915 and 1957 examples in Oak Cemetery, Fayetteville
- Ferd Havis' 1918 headstone, Graceland Cemetery, Pine Bluff, lists him as the National Grand Master (no symbol)

Woodmen of Union



Symbol: Circle with initials W. O. U. on the outer edge. The interior of the circle shows a tree stump with an embedded wedge, an axe, and a sledge hammer with a dove flying above. The stump has initials L. T. & J.; meaning unknown. The only known example is a headstone in Oak Cemetery, Fort Smith. The Woodmen of Union symbol appears on letterhead from the Hot Springs National Park website.

- Woodmen of Union in Arkansas by 1909, but based in Indianola, MS
- Headquartered in Helena in 1916
 - Marianna, 1918
 - Hot Springs, 1919
- Closely associated with John L. Webb, who became the Supreme Custodian in 1913
- Built Woodmen of Union Building in Hot Springs, 1923
- Merged with Century Life Insurance (Little Rock) in 1931
- Likely in receivership by 1932
- 1931 example in Oak Cemetery, Fort Smith is the only known headstone

African American Fraternal Societies and Insurance Providers, 1923¹

Name of Society	Location	No. Members
American Woodmen	Denver, CO	58,180
American Workmen	Washington, D.C.	17,313
Calanthe, Grand Court	Pine Bluff	10,512
Eastern Star Benefit	Pine Bluff	11,442
Great Southern Fraternal Union	Little Rock	3,509
Household of Ruth	Little Rock	6,367
Imperial Council of Jugamos	Forrest City	3,207
Independent Order Immaculates	Forrest City	1,433
Independent Order of Daniel	Little Rock	415
Knights [and Daughters] of Tabor	Little Rock	21,079
Knights of Guiding Star	Morrilton	2,291
Knights of Pythias	Little Rock	Not reported ²
Masonic Benefit AssociationT	Prescott	17,664
Modern Order Magians	Camden	643
Mosaic Templars	Little Rock	20,454
Odd Fellows Benefit	Marianna	4,265
Royal Arch Benefit	Wynne	1,532
Royal Circle of Friends	Forrest City	13,297
Supreme Council of Shepherds	Marianna	1,127
United Brothers of Friendship	Little Rock	4,756
United Brothers African Race	North Little Rock	443
United Friends of America	Little Rock	4,018
United Knights & Ladies	Pine Bluff	1,654
United Order Good Samaritans	Forrest City	3,766
Woodmen of Union	Hot Springs	12,900
Total		222,267

1. Reported in Bruce T. Bullion, et. al., *Condensed Report Fire, Life, Casualty and Fraternal 1923 Business, State of Arkansas Department of Insurance and Fire Preventions, 1923 Business* (Little Rock, AR: 1924), 53
2. The Knights of Pythias reported 9,356 members in 1922 and 12, 210 in 1924. See Bullion, et. al. *Condensed Report Fire, Life, Casualty and Fraternal, 1922 & 1925 Business*, 54 and 55.