

THE KELL CEMETERY: AN HISTORIC CEMETERY IN SAN JOSE

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The archaeological evaluation of the Kell Cemetery, CA-SCL-804H, was conducted to better understand late-nineteenth-century Catholic funerary practices and their ties to social status. It provides an excellent opportunity to analyze the artifactual remains in order to answer specific questions concerning chronology, trade patterns, human populations, and socio-historic trends. Coffin style and decoration, osteology, clothing, and miscellaneous artifacts are useful elements in forming conclusions about funerary practices and their links to social life.

Archaeological salvage operations at the Kell Cemetery in San Jose provided a rare opportunity and the archaeological data to address revisionist socio-historic trends. Much of what is known about American deathways comes from the writings and mementos left by the literate, landed, and wealthy, producing a somewhat elitist bias in traditional historical analysis (Bell 1987). Archaeological data can provide information pertaining to traditionally underrepresented groups such as the poor, the working class, and minorities. Determining status and social class from archival research and analysis of recovered items from the Kell Cemetery may provide insight into various social phenomena.

Holy Cross Cemetery, locally known as Kell Cemetery, was deeded to Joseph S. Alemany, Archbishop of San Francisco, by Thomas Kell on December 8, 1869; and by separate deed by Thomas and Margaret Kell on September 22, 1870 (Deeds 19:382). The 25.48-acre parcel was blessed by Archbishop Alemany on 18 May 1871. Also present at the dedication were members of St. Joseph's Parish and of the local Catholic clergy. The first burial of record appears to have been on 25 May 1871, and the last on 4 February 1890, although records are incomplete (Buckley 1982). Other cemeteries in the San Jose area were available to local Catholics, such as the Santa Clara Mission Cemetery and the Catholic section of Oak Hill Cemetery on

Curtner Avenue at Monterey Highway. By 1882, another all-Catholic cemetery, Calvary Cemetery, was established at Alum Rock and Capital Avenues.

FUNERARY ARTIFACTS AND FURNISHINGS

Late-nineteenth-century funeral practices in San Jose are not well documented in the historical record. It seems to be an interesting albeit unstudied ritual. Obituaries and death announcements of the period give some insight, and local undertakers have passed on oral histories of the practices, many of which have survived in the current traditions. Christian traditions all appear to be similar, with slight variations between the Protestant and Catholic faiths. The differences seem to be more obvious between socio-economic classes than anything else. The concept of "beautification of death" as evidenced in elaborate mortuary statuary, mausoleums, and other mortuary artifacts seen at the well-documented burial sites of high-status individuals of the Santa Clara County area appear not to have been present at Holy Cross Cemetery. The lack of information in the historical record for most of the persons interred at the site suggests that they were either children or women, historically under-documented members of society, or in the case of adult males, members of lower social and economic classes.

All of the identified graves contained some quantity of coffin remnants and artifactual remains. Most of the burial containers at the Kell Cemetery were hexagonally-shaped and tapered. Average length was under two meters, or approximately 70 inches. Coffin width averaged approximately 38.1 centimeters or 15 inches at the shoulder, or widest portion of the hexagonal container. One grave (Grave 2) was identified with a rectangular burial container. All coffins and liners were constructed of milled redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) lumber and were characterized by an inner coffin or casket resting within a rectangular exterior grave liner or secondary coffin. Many contained or displayed evidence of glass viewing windows in the head area of the coffin, and various collections of decorative and utilitarian hardware. One coffin (Grave 43a/b) displayed evidence of a glass window in the foot area as well as near the head.

In nineteenth-century America, changing attitudes toward death and the dead introduced a movement concerned with burial rituals and customs. Commercialized, funeral-related industries were established to supply mass-produced mortuary artifacts (Bell 1987:61). Rectangular-shaped caskets became the popular style of burial containers, replacing the hexagonal design. This change in burial-container shape, increasing coffin durability, and decorative funeral furnishings were attributed to a new mortuary custom involving presentation of the dead (Adams 1857:15 quoted in Pike 1980:657; Habenstein and Lamers 1955:270-271). Despite ethnic, economic, social, and racial class differences in the treatment of the dead, these groups shared similar attitudes concerning the beautification of death (Kleinberg 1977:202, 204-205). It is thus suggested that the prevalence of decorative hardware at the Kell Cemetery is most likely representative of a general national trend in burial customs and furnishing, apparently related to the beautification of death.

Personal and miscellaneous items consist of a variety of mortuary goods associated with graves and found in coffins. Burial clothing

gives an accurate account of social status, along with buttons used on clothing. Other personal items include belt buckles, clothing fasteners, and textile fragments; miscellaneous items include a firearm cartridge and a crucifix. Buttons, belt buckles, and clothing fabric provide clues to the style of dress worn by the deceased. Sex, age, and social status of the individual can be determined by button design, size, and ornateness. The quantity of buttons located in the graves indicate that a majority of individuals from Kell Cemetery were interred in regular clothing, rather than wrapped in shrouds.

Eighty-two buttons were recovered from the cemetery during the 1996 excavation. The materials used to manufacture the buttons included white and black glass, shell, metal, and cloth-covered metal. These utilitarian buttons provide information on the grave attire of the deceased, who were clothed in garments fastened with plain and simple buttons. The material and button types, as well as the plain woven fabric attached to the buttons, suggest that the individuals buried in this late-nineteenth-century cemetery represent a range in socio-economic status, from lower middle class to upper middle class. The burial clothing of the deceased must be looked at on an individualistic level rather making a broad, generalized assumption regarding social rank.

The burial clothing of three adult males from graves 5, 8, and 19 indicate that these men were laborers of lower-middle class status, as they were buried in overalls. One male from Grave 25, aged approximately 25-35 years, was buried in a vest or coat. The ornate metal crucifix interred in the coffin may represent an individual of middle- to upper-middle class status who was devoted to the priesthood. A young boy, aged 7-14 years, from Grave 41 was buried in a pair of wool knickers. He may have died in the winter season, judging by the heavy fabric of his clothing.

The analyses also provide information concerning the women buried in the Kell Cemetery. For example, the 27 buttons and

a metal buckle from Grave 1 represent a woman of middle-class status who was buried in a white dress shirt, pleated skirt, and short coat. The burial clothing of the female from Grave 7, aged 20-30 years, consisted of a long-sleeved shirt and short coat. Two of her ribs were fused together, and this pathology may have been the result of a healed fracture or developmental anomaly. A female from Grave 12 was approximately 29 years of age and stood approximately 1.52 meters or 5'0" in height. A middle-aged woman of upper-middle class status was buried in Grave 17, as two decorative, black-glass buttons remained in the coffin. Black-glass buttons were worn by women following the trend of Queen Victoria, and these buttons were more expensive than the white-glass, shell, and metal types.

Decorative hardware types incorporate all of the metal ornate or aesthetic trimmings attached or associated with each coffin. They often serve a functional as well as an artistic purpose, as in the case of carrying handles. Plates and caps comprise a variety of styles and serve none other than a decorative, aesthetic purpose. The primary function of lid clasps is the fastening of the removable interior coffin lid to the interior coffin superstructure. Coffin handles serve both a utilitarian and aesthetic function. First, they allow the interior casket to be carried, lifted, and lowered into the coffin liner or grave. Second, their ornate design and workmanship no doubt also served as decoration. Decorative funerary objects from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have been studied by various scholars, including Baker (1977), Pike (1980), and Pike and Armstrong (1980), to understand socio-cultural attitudes toward death and how changing perceptions influenced mortuary customs and designs. Burial furnishings, such as coffins fittings and burial containers, were considered valuable indicators of temporal and perceptual changes in death practices.

SKELETAL REMAINS

The skeletal remains from each grave were examined for pathological lesions, trauma,

nutritional stress markers, degenerative conditions, and developmental anomalies. The most common pathological condition observed in the sample was extreme dental attrition. The association between diet and dentition has consistently been used by researchers to characterize prehistoric diets. In this study, the rate of wear and disease among individuals from Kell Cemetery reveals the quality of diet and dental care in the nineteenth century. Food composition, dental hygiene, and personal habits such as smoking tobacco, had direct influences on dental attrition and decay among the historic sample. Poor dental care and a diet high in carbohydrates may be associated with a lower socio-economic status.

The dental sample was obtained from 11 inhumations (graves 2, 7, 11, 12, 17-20, 25, 43a, and 43b) with only three graves (2, 43a, and 43b) containing both mandibular and maxillary teeth in situ. A variety of dental pathologies, such as tooth wear, plaque, caries, abscesses, and periodontitis, affected the individuals from Kell Cemetery.

Physical attributes of the skeletal population from the cemetery were identified through an osteological analysis of the human remains. In addition, specific information regarding sex and social class was obtained from the evaluation of personal clothing items, such as buttons and buckles. In general, the individual from Grave 2 can be described as an older male, approximately 57 years old. He was affected by extreme dental attrition, including four abscesses, 35 cavities, and calculus buildup on 14 teeth. Extremely robust muscle-attachment sites on the long bones as well as severe arthritis of the spine suggest that this man was probably employed as a laborer.

Two individuals from graves 43a and 43b were buried in the same coffin. Grave 43a has been identified as a female, whereas 43b is male. The woman was 30-45 years of age, and was afflicted with three dental abscesses, 12 caries, and calculus buildup on all 28 teeth present. Two teeth were lost antemortem. The individual from Grave 43b was approximately 60 years of age and had severe dental attrition with 19 abscesses,

four caries, and calculus buildup on all 14 teeth present. Sixteen teeth were lost antemortem. Cartier (1997) hypothesizes that this is a husband and wife buried together in the same coffin.

In sum, the deceased from the Kell Cemetery in San Jose represent varied social classes, with lower-middle class to upper-middle class buried in the Catholic cemetery. Also, individuals over a wide age range from young (7-14 years) to old (55-65 years) were interred at the site. Strict mortuary customs were not enforced at the cemetery, so that individuals could be buried next to each other regardless of gender, age, or status.

COMPARISONS

The large amount of data recovered from salvage operations at the Kell Cemetery provides an excellent opportunity to perform a valid inter-site comparison between cemeteries of similar age. It has been suggested (Laffey 1996) that the Kell salvage and analysis represent the largest study of a cemetery of this age on the West Coast. This analysis focuses on historic cemetery sites dating between A.D. 1850 and 1900. This includes the Nancy Creek Primitive Baptist Cemetery in Georgia, the Uxbridge Almshouse Burial Ground in Massachusetts, and the Talbot County Cemetery, also in Georgia. Local sites include the Madam Felix/Hettick Cemetery in Calaveras County, the Pioneer Cemetery in Mountain View, and the Legion of Honor Cemetery in downtown San Francisco. Data from these sites have led to a significant amount of revisionist historical research and to a re-interpretation of American deathways and socio-historic trends.

The local comparisons have shed some light on the styles that were indicative of this time period. The coffin hardware of the Madam Felix/Hettick Cemetery included square nails, occasional coffin tacks, coffin handles, and thumbscrews (lid clasps) (Costello 1991). Decorative hardware was manufactured out of white metal, as was the case at the Kell Cemetery. The Mountain

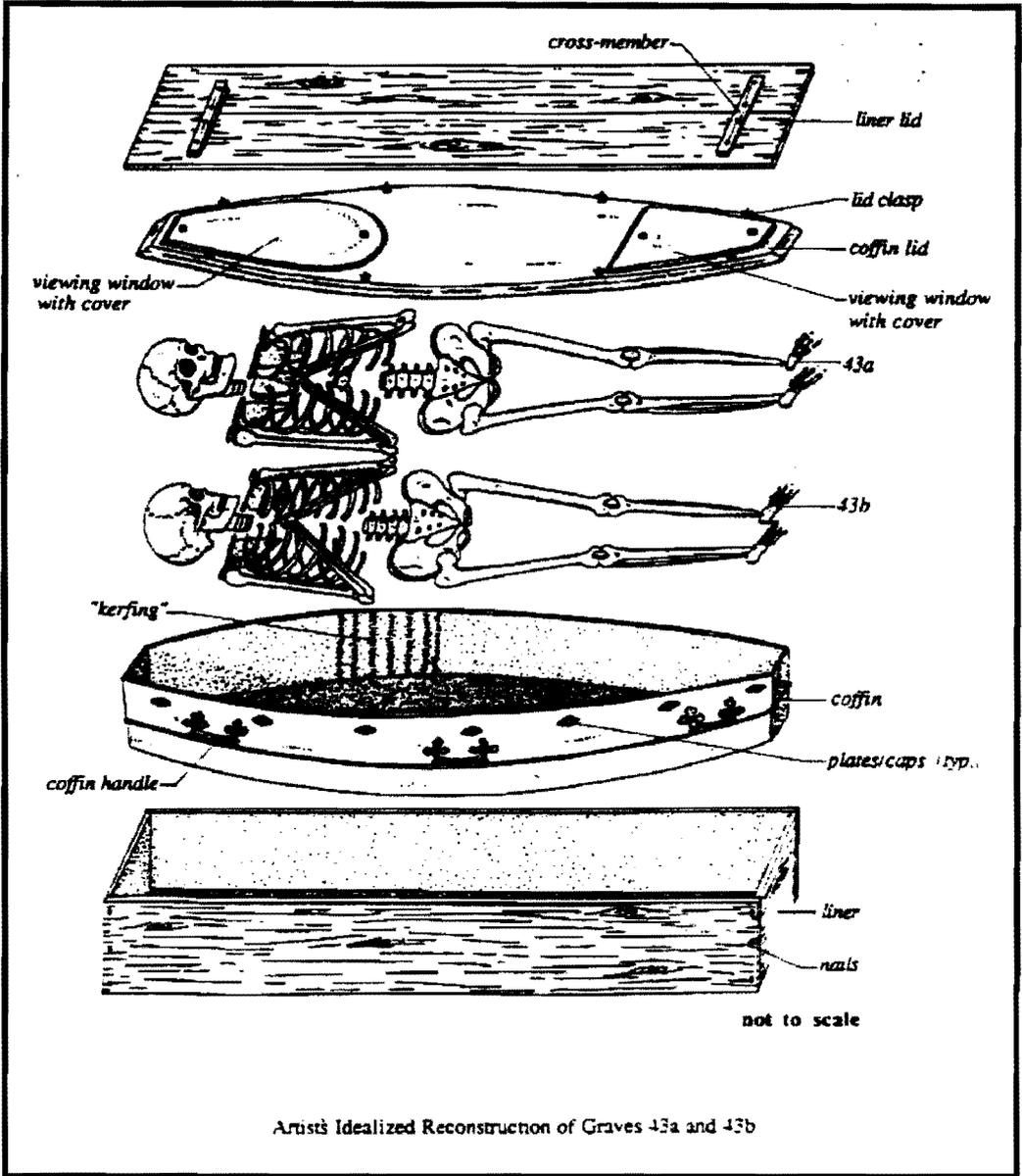
View Pioneer Cemetery also seems to personify this time period with the use of redwood, and the coffin and decorative hardware similar to that found at the Kell site (Pierce 1997). The Legion of Honor Cemetery was basically a pauper's burial ground; coffins were basic redwood boxes with no ornamentation or grave goods. The cemetery was a potter's field and was divided into two sections: Chinese and European-descent. The Chinese section contained coins, jade jewelry, and other goods interred with the human remains. It is believed that this was due to cultural difference in burial practice, rather than economic status differences (Ambrose and Holman 1996; Moore 1997). These local cemeteries seem to show that the national trends were prevalent in these areas, with exception to the Legion of Honor site, in which extreme poverty and economic necessity appear to have outweighed socio-historic trends, and led to far simpler, non-decorative burial practices.

CONCLUSION

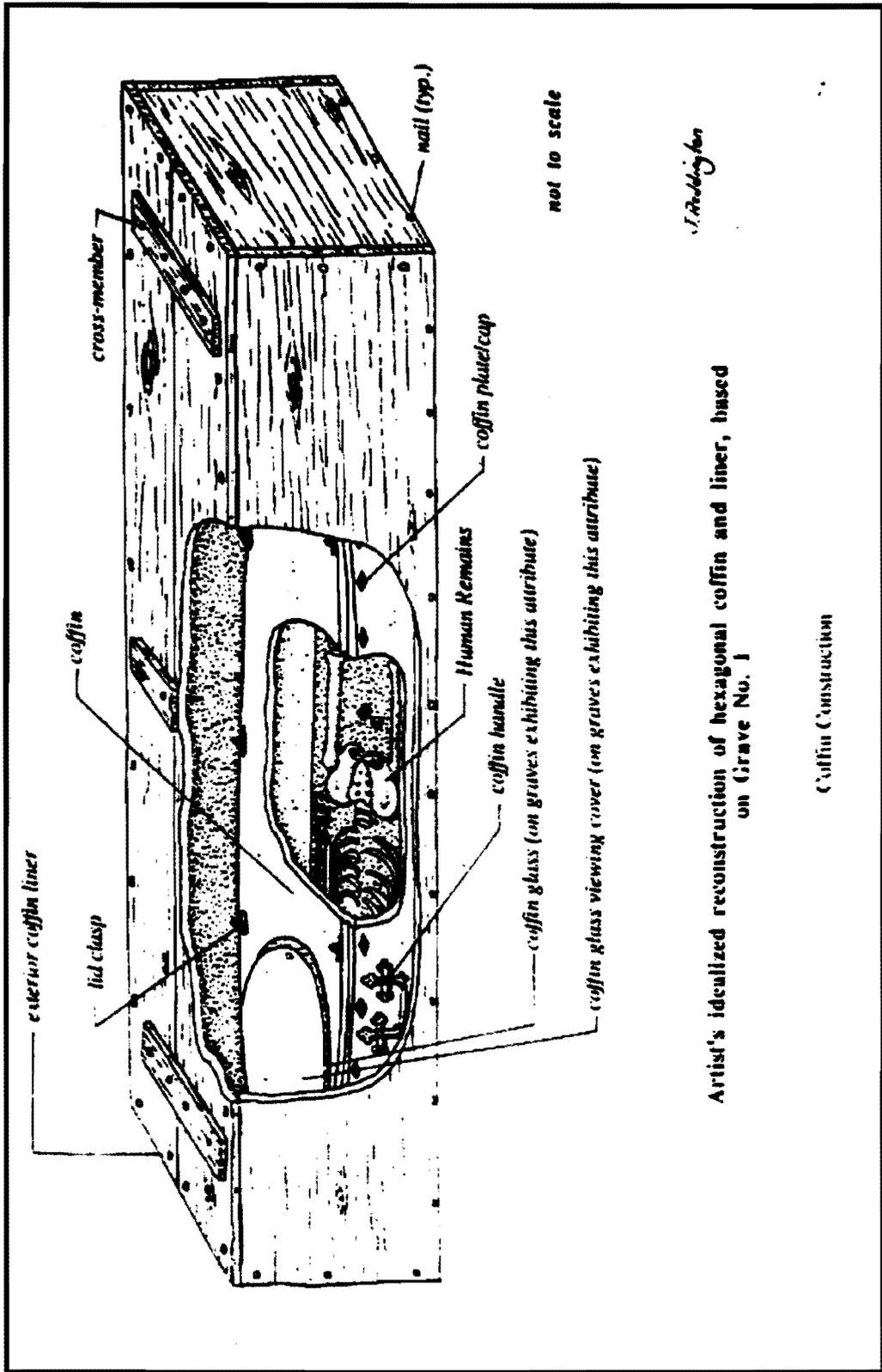
Trade patterns were observed based on inter-site comparison. It appears that burial customs, resource utilization, and material use at the Kell Cemetery are indicative of popular national and regional trends, an indication of extensive contact and communication between various inter-regional populations. Osteological and personal-clothing analyses suggest an equal split between male and female interments. The male population appears to have been mostly comprised of laborers, as indicated by the osteology of the population. Judging by the analysis of burial hardware and personal clothing, it appears that the population at the Kell Cemetery varied from working class to middle class, with some small suggestion of upper-class interments. Based on hardware analysis, grave goods analysis, and coffin design, the objective archaeological data produced by this study support the chronological placement of this site as indicated by historical and archival research.

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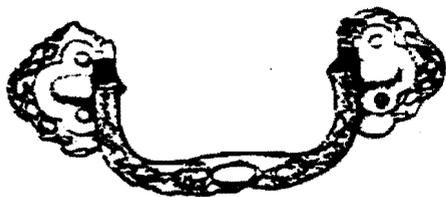
Artist's Idealized Reconstruction of Graves 43a and 43b



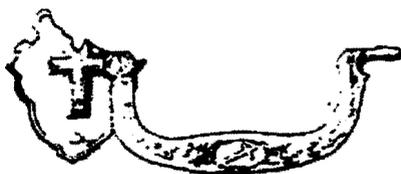
Washington

Artist's idealized reconstruction of hexagonal coffin and liner, based on Grave No. 1

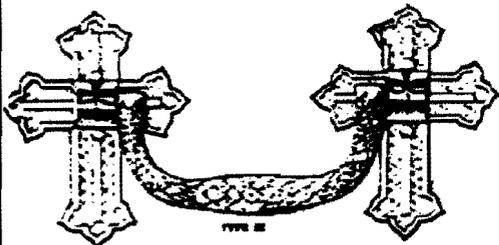
Coffin Construction



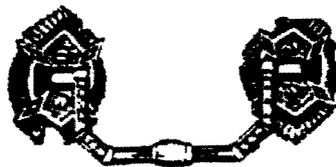
TYPE I



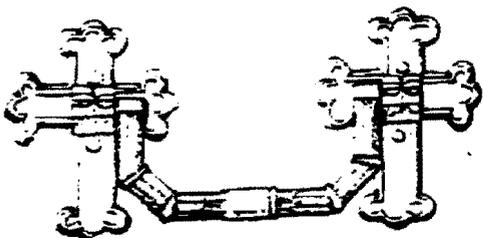
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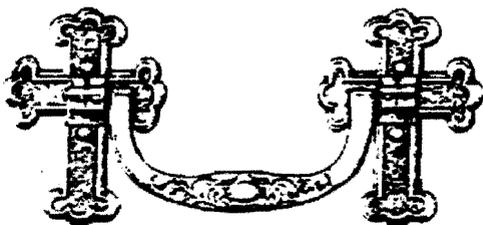
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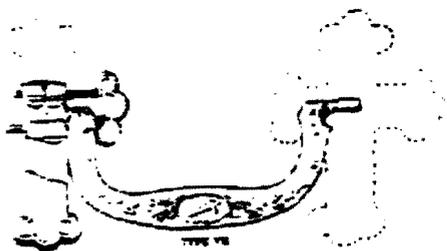
TYPE IV



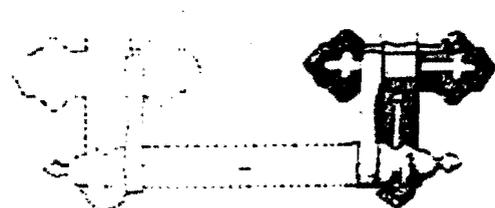
TYPE V



TYPE VI



TYPE VII



TYPE VIII

Burial Hardware Illustrations
COFFIN HANDLE TYPOLOGY