



ANTHROPOLOGIST EXPLAINS

Ventura Tombstones Tell Stories

By JOHN A. JONES

A tombstone can tell much more than who lies buried below.

To Dr. James Deetz of the anthropology department of the University of California at Santa Barbara, the stones now being moved from Ventura's old cemetery below Poli Street are good material for research.

They show how people felt about death and about life; how long it takes an idea to travel across the country from east to west; how styles change from time to time and place to place.

"They are an extremely rich source of all sorts of historical material," said Dr. Deetz.

He was in Ventura last week with an assistant to photograph some of the inscriptions on the stones now stored at the city's park department yard. The old cemetery is being cleared for use as a memorial park.

The change in attitude can be traced from the early Puritan view which involved severe images of fire and brimstone, to the later, mellow view that sees the departed resting peacefully.

The design of the stone, whether the mason carved a heart, a dove, gates swinging open or hands clasped in prayer, will vary from place to place at the same period in history. This shows how a change in style moved slowly across country, so a trend found in New England in one year was not seen on the West Coast until

several years later.

The dates on the stones pin these things firmly down, he pointed out. The dates themselves help establish vital statistics by showing the average age at which people died in a given period. Studies in New England, for instance, showed that young people were more likely to die in summer while older people succumbed in the cold winter months.

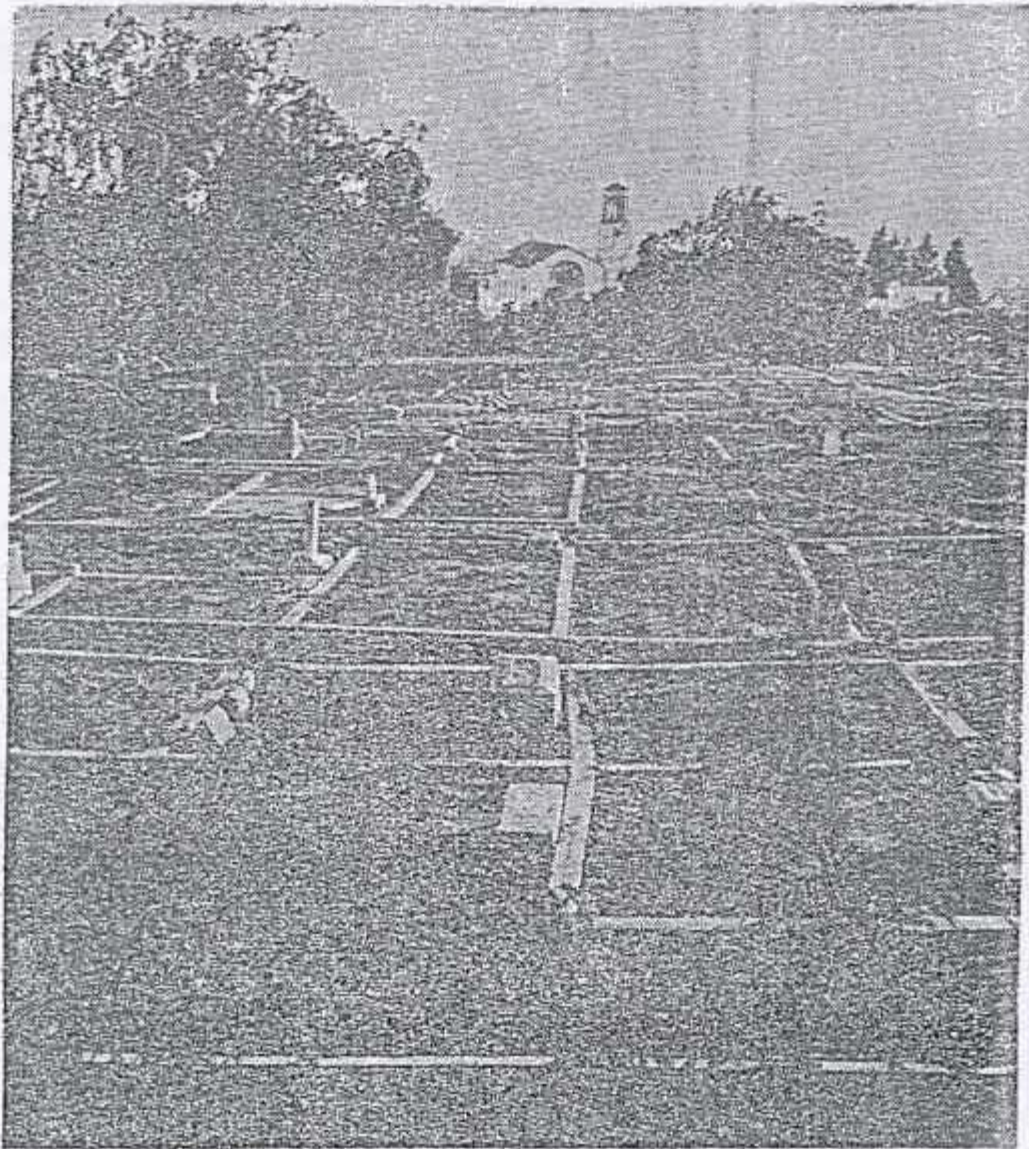
The decline in the dominance of the man as head of the family can also be traced from the record of the tombstones, Dr. Deetz said. In Colonial New England a man's tombstone would say, "Here lies John Smith," with no mention of his kinship. Later, though, the phrase "husband of Mary Smith" would be found, indicating the rise in women's status.

"It is possible to go through this material and say an awful lot about the way they were thinking, and their way of life," Dr. Deetz said.

He said he and a partner in New England are working on a five-year project which began last summer, to photograph and catalogue old tombstone inscriptions and draw deductions from them.

After photographing a selection of the stones from the old Ventura cemetery, Dr. Deetz said he will send a research team from his project to make photographs of every stone there, to be preserved in his records.

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OLD TOMBSTONES WILL BE REMOVED, REPLACED WITH MARKERS
The plan is for a memorial park, uncluttered by old neglected monuments.



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TOMBSTONES HAVE A TALE TO TELL
Dick Humphrey, left, and Dr. James Deetz record their history.

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