THE MEANING OF AMERICAN PET CEMETERY GRAVESTONES

Stanley Brandes

Abstract

Research on American pet gravestone inscriptions going back more than a century provides ethnographic evidence supporting the widespread observation that many Americans conceive of companion animals as family members, and endow them with cultural characteristics close to those of humans. Pet gravestone inscriptions illustrate three principal developments over the past hundred years: first, the growing use of human names for pets; second, the evolving definition of pets as actual kin to their owners; and third, an enhanced religious and ethnic identity bestowed upon pets. The article's conclusions suggest the reasons for these changes.

Full Text: PDF

His gravestone read simply “Poor Little Prince” with no dates. Nonetheless, the incident was recorded in the Dukes diary on the 29th June 1882, making Prince the second dog to be buried there. Another of Mr. Lewis-Barned’s dogs buried there was Kaiser, who died in April, 1886, and a third was Zoe. Over the following years the Pet Cemetery grew as Mr. Winbridge granted more and more of his garden as a Cemetery. He even took responsibility for the proceedings of the burials when the owners were left too affected by their pet's death. The cemetery was laid out in neat, uniform rows with the majority of the headstones being of the same design with leaded letters being used to denote the epitaph.