

An Analysis of Norwegian-American Mortuary Art in Vernon County, Wisconsin

Jennifer Otto

Faculty Sponsor: Timothy McAndrews, Department of Archaeology

ABSTRACT

The mortuary art displayed on cemetery gravestones serves as a mirror of society at specific points in time, reflecting the values and social structure of the individuals buried there. This paper focuses on nineteenth and twentieth century gravestones of Norwegian-Americans in the Midwest, as demonstrated through the sampling of three Norwegian Lutheran cemeteries within Vernon County, Wisconsin. Components of these gravestones were recorded and analyzed in order to observe the cultural changes that took place in this region over the course of time. This analysis uses the shifting language and motifs on gravestones in Vernon County to evaluate the assimilation of Norwegians into American culture. Recognition of these shifting patterns of assimilation is beneficial to a number of different disciplines, particularly the study of historical archaeology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

INTRODUCTION

A cemetery and the gravestones contained within it can serve as a valuable source of information for individuals of numerous disciplines, providing a glimpse into the lives of individuals and the society in which they lived. Through an examination of the stylistic changes that gravestones have undergone over the years, it is possible to make inferences regarding the religion, values, and social organization that existed among a group of people at a certain period of time. These changes can be especially noteworthy when studying the gravestones within an ethnic cemetery, with the predominance of native languages and national symbolism visible on gravestones eventually giving way to aspects of a new culture. Cemeteries are a unique entity in that they carry along with them a "chronological control," allowing for the specific dating of the gravestones contained within them (Dethlefsen and Deetz 1966). This, unlike most other forms of material culture, gives a high degree of accuracy in comparative studies and provides for an association to be made with the historical and archaeological records.

A number of cemeteries exist within Vernon County, Wisconsin, many of them associated with the Norwegian population residing within the county. Norwegian immigrants viewed Vernon County as a choice location for settlement when they first came to America in the 1840's and 1850's. The landscape was very similar to the one they had left behind in Norway, and for this reason a large numbers of settlers were drawn to the region. The preservation of the Norwegian culture was of utmost importance to these early settlers, especially in relation to their strong religious beliefs. They wanted to ensure that "the faith of the fathers was preserved in its purity," and as a result of this used only the Norwegian language in their congregations for many years (Legreid 1997). These cultural and religious beliefs should therefore be accordingly evident through the gravestones of the individuals buried within these church cemeteries. An attempt to demonstrate this has been done through the sampling of three Lutheran cemeteries within Vernon County, including Country Coon Prairie Lutheran, Lower Coon Valley Lutheran, and Southwest Prairie Lutheran cemeteries. The characteristics of the gravestones within these cemeteries, and the changes evident on them beginning with the first settlers and continuing on with the residents of the area through 1960, show the long-term retention of the Norwegian culture by the people and their very gradual assimilation into American society.

This analysis seeks to answer a number of questions relating to the cultural values of the Norwegian residents of Vernon County as reflected on their gravestones. It specifically observes how these values changed over the course of time. The question of which motifs were most popular was addressed, and it was examined whether these designs differed between the three cemeteries sampled as well. Comparisons were also done to determine if specific motifs on the gravestones could be linked to the areas of Norway from which the settlers emigrated. The main focus of the study, however, was if a specific time period could be determined as to when the assimilation of Norwegians into American culture became widespread, as well as what the nature of this assimilation process was.

Three cemeteries containing burials ranging from the 1850's through 1960 are examined in this study in an effort to develop a picture of Norwegian life in Vernon County, Wisconsin. This study will attempt to provide a perspective on the values of the individuals who lived, worshiped, and died here, focusing on the material culture of the people as seen through their mortuary stones. An analysis of the mortuary art displayed on the gravestones, as well as an examination of the other aspects related to each stone, provide insight into the culture of the settlers of this region and the changes it went through over the course of time. Although the Norwegian people held strong to their native beliefs and customs for a long period of time, an eventual integration of American culture was inevitable. The gravestones of these individuals should be a reflection of these changing values. The data that was utilized to demonstrate this assumption includes the information that is provided from the gravestones themselves, the historical records supplied by the adjoining churches, previous studies done on the residents of this community, as well as the circumstances that existed within the country itself during this time. All of these sources factored into the changing culture of the people, so the combination of them should serve to provide the most complete view possible of the assimilation of the Norwegian settlers of this region into American culture.

IMPORTANCE FOR ARCHAEOLOGY

Material culture studies can hold a great deal of importance to understanding our past, providing a much less biased view of the world than is possible in historical documentation. They are seen by many historical archaeologists as a way to define "covering laws" through the patterns they produce (Deetz 1988). It is believed that the study of material culture in a tightly controlled context, such as the gravestones within a cemetery, will allow for the prediction of patterns in other, more restricted data. Cemeteries can be used as a control for time, space, and form, three dimensions seen within all archaeological data. The precise control of these dimensions allows for the testing of hypotheses related to changes in artifacts and cultures. Gravestones can therefore be used to test and refine commonly used methods and assumptions from prehistoric archaeology (Deetz 1996).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The first Norwegian presence in America came with the arrival of the sloop *Restauration*, which carried 53 individuals from Stavanger, Norway to New York City on a fourteen-week voyage in 1825. This group settled along Lake Ontario in New York until the mid-1830's, but they were disappointed with this land and therefore decided to move west upon the advice of fellow Norwegian Cleng Peerson (Holand 1977). This group came to settle in the Fox River Valley in Illinois, and many of these individuals sent letters back to Norway in which they described the rich land and the many opportunities that existed in America. This encouragement from friends and relatives, coupled with the hardships faced throughout Norway at this time, influenced large numbers to leave for America in search of a better life. Four more ships left Norway from Stavanger and Bergen between 1836 and 1837, carrying a total of 350 individuals. This was only the beginning of the mass migration of Norwegian immigrants, with over 18,000 leaving Norway for America between this time and 1850, and close to 80,000 by the year 1865 (Lovoll 1998).

The Fox River settlement in Illinois became the American destination for the majority of these immigrants, and because of this the land here soon began to become overcrowded. This forced settlers in search of new areas to make their homes, and many therefore began to move into the states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa at this time. The first Norwegian settlement in Wisconsin was established in 1838 at Jefferson Prairie, and two additional settlements, Muskego and Koshkonong, were founded in the state by 1840. Muskego and Koshkonong were the destinations of choice for Norwegians for close to ten years, but this land also began to eventually fill up. Individual settlers and small groups began to move farther west into Wisconsin, and it was at this time that Vernon County was discovered by the Norwegian people.

Coon Prairie

The area around Coon Prairie in Vernon County attracted a large number of settlers between the years of 1850 and 1875. Even Olsen Gullord, a man who emigrated from Biri, Norway, is said to have staked the first claim on Coon Prairie in 1846 (Vernon County Historical Society [VCHS] 1994). Gullord came to this area after having lived and worked at both Koshkonong, Wisconsin and Galena, Illinois. He believed the area surrounding Coon Prairie would be perfect for a Norwegian settlement, and wrote many letters home in which he noted the similarity of Wisconsin's hills and valleys to the rugged landscape of Norway. These letters served to entice hundreds more individuals from Biri to this particular area. While the majority of the settlers of Coon Prairie hailed from Biri, a

Norwegian parish lying on the west side of Lake Mjosen, there were also large populations from Gudbrandsdal, Flekkefjord, South Land, and Upper Telemark (Holand 1977).

Only a handful of Norwegian Lutheran pastors were living in America by 1850, and it was therefore difficult for each of the Norwegian settlements to organize themselves religiously. Visiting ministers came through the area on a few different occasions in 1851 and conducted the first religious services, but the Coon Prairie congregation was not officially organized until July of 1852. The settlers of Coon Prairie held church services in their homes until the construction of the church building was completed in 1857. Upon its completion, Coon Prairie Church became the first Norwegian church in western Wisconsin, and the first church of any kind in Vernon County (Anonymous 1951). This church served all of the settlers in the area surrounding Coon Prairie throughout the early years of the settlement, although a number of families would withdraw from the Coon Prairie Church to form their own congregations during the years to come (Holand 1977).

Coon Valley

Norwegian settlers also began to make their way into Vernon County's Coon Valley in the late 1840's and early 1850's. Helge Gubrandsdal and his wife came to Coon Valley in 1849, and they became the only white settlers in the valley for over a year (VCHS 1994). The first settler to Lower Coon Valley was Mathias Galstad, who came to the valley in 1850 from Biri, Norway. A number of others began to populate the valley, and church services began to be held sporadically here from 1852-1854 when Reverend Nils Brandt would make his way through the area. There was an official congregation organized for the entire valley in 1853, and there were periodic services held over the next few years. There was construction planned for a church building in the middle of the valley in 1858, but those to the west decided to build their own church in Lower Coon Valley so they would not have to travel as far to attend services. The first services in the Lower Coon Valley Lutheran Church were held on September 23, 1859, making it the oldest church in the entire valley (Grimsrud 1960). This original building is still in use today, although there have been a number of additions and updates made to it over the years.

West Prairie

A man named Ingebret Ness came with his family to Coon Prairie in 1851, but they were not happy with the area and decided to move twenty-five miles to the southwest to the area surrounding West Prairie. They were soon joined by a number of other settlers, coming from areas in Norway such as Sogn, Lyster, and Aardal (VCHS 1994). Reverend H.A. Stub visited the area on a number of occasions in 1855, conducting six services in settler's homes and baptizing ten children over the course of the year (Anonymous 1955). The donation of materials and labor by the settlers over the next three years allowed the construction of a church for the settlers of the region. This building was dedicated as the West Prairie Lutheran Church on June 26, 1858, but was later renamed the Southwest Prairie Lutheran Church when another church was established in the area in 1875.

METHODOLOGY

The widespread presence of Norwegian settlers within the Upper Midwest in the middle of the nineteenth century, as well as their strong influence that continues to exist in the area today, led to this examination of Norwegian-American mortuary art in Vernon County, Wisconsin. Norwegian immigrants chose to settle in this portion of the United States because it was very similar to the land they had come from in Norway. Vernon County had an especially large number of settlers from the earliest waves of Norwegian immigrants, and their influence was integral to the development of the region.

Norwegian settlers established a number of churches within Vernon County by early Norwegian settlers, and many of these churches included a cemetery on their property. Judy Mathison's *Vernon County cemetery locations and histories* helped to determine which cemeteries were Norwegian-Lutheran in nature, and each one was then visited to decide which would be most useful for this analysis (Mathison 2000). The criteria used to make this decision included the size and age of the cemetery, as well as the degree of preservation. An analysis of three Norwegian Lutheran cemeteries located throughout the county should provide a complete look into the degree of assimilation experienced by these Norwegian settlers. The older cemeteries are more likely to contain remnants of the original Norwegian culture, and this was therefore another important factor to consider. Preservation of the gravestones was also an important component, as this would provide the most detailed information about the individuals buried there.

Each of the three cemeteries examined were divided into a grid system, with every block within this grid containing twenty-five gravestones. This was done by a map created with each of the gravestones represented on it, while also referencing maps of the cemeteries obtained from the church records. Stratified random sampling was

used to choose a specific number of gravestones from each block within the grid. Five gravestones (20%) were chosen from each section at both the Lower Coon Valley Lutheran Cemetery and the Southwest Prairie Cemetery, while only one (2%) will be taken from every fifty gravestones at the Country Coon Prairie Cemetery because of its larger size. This sampling strategy was designed to yield a representative sample of gravestones from each cemetery. Additional gravestones that were not included in the stratified random sample, but that appear to demonstrate representative motifs will also be noted. The portions of the cemeteries from this sample that date after 1960 will be excluded from this analysis, as the majority of changes should be visible by this time.

An assessment form was designed to record information from each gravestone, using the same form for every gravestone in order to obtain identical information throughout the analysis. The categories that are included upon this form consist of name, date of birth, date of death, place of birth, place of death, type of gravestone, language, inscription, and design motifs. Richard V. Francaviglia's 1971 study of cemeteries was used to assign types to the gravestones identified within this sample, although all obelisk shapes were placed in one category for this study (Francaviglia 1971). The back of each form was available for a sketch of each gravestone, as well as for any additional specific comments related to it. Photographs were also taken of the gravestones that appear to be the most representative of specific time periods within the cemeteries. Gravestones that contained unique elements as compared to the others sampled were also photographed.

After the data was collected, different aspects of the gravestones were compared in relation to the date they were erected. By plotting the most popular motifs against time, it was possible to see if any patterns emerge as to when certain mortuary art was used on gravestones. There was also an attempt to demonstrate correlation between motifs and the exact place of birth for those who were born in Norway through the use of historical documents. A comparison between popular mortuary motifs in Norway, as well as ones here in the United States, should help to show the assimilation of these Norwegians into American culture.

RESULTS

A total of 132 gravestones were examined and recorded with stratified random sampling from three cemeteries within Vernon County, Wisconsin. This sample included forty-nine gravestones from Lower Coon Valley Lutheran Cemetery, thirty-five gravestones from Country Coon Prairie Cemetery, and forty-eight gravestones from Southwest Prairie Lutheran Cemetery. An additional six gravestones not included within the sample were also examined from each cemetery. These were chosen because they appear to contain the most popular motifs, designs that are seen repeatedly throughout the cemetery, but were not represented within the random sample. These particular gravestones will be discussed separately from those included within stratified random sample, but were taken into consideration when conclusions were drawn regarding the cemetery. There were noticeable similarities in the styles of the gravestones and the designs upon them within all three cemeteries, but each cemetery also appeared to contain its own unique elements.

Lower Coon Valley Lutheran Cemetery

The dates of the gravestones sampled from Lower Coon Valley Lutheran Cemetery ranged from 1872 through 1958, with stones being present in both the Norwegian and English languages. Eleven of the forty-nine gravestones (22%) were in the Norwegian language, and the latest date inscribed on these was 1907. The possibility exists, however, that Norwegian-speaking individuals could have erected more of these gravestones, because a specific language cannot be determined on ten of the monuments. These gravestones contained a variety of different styles of mortuary art, including doves, lambs, palm leaves, Bibles, clasped hands, and hands pointed upwards. A few of these motifs were seen multiple times, although none appear to predominate over the others. There was also some variety seen in the types of monuments with Norwegian inscriptions in this cemetery, with examples of blocks, obelisks, pulpits, and tablets being present. Eight out of eleven gravestones, or 73% of them, also included some type of inscription. A number of them contain a variation of a particular phrase upon them, an example of which reads, "Fred med stovet velsignet vaere deres minde." According to Dr. Kathleen Stokker, Director of Scandinavian Studies at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, this inscription is also extremely common on gravestones in Norway, and the translation of this phrase literally means, "Peace with your dust, blessed be your memory" (personal communication 2004).

Twenty-eight of the gravestones (57%) are inscribed in English, although this number also could potentially be higher because of the ten unknown stones. The dates of these gravestones range from 1895 through 1958, and the majority of them (75%) contain either motifs of forget-me-nots or no mortuary art at all. There is a time period that extended from about 1910 through 1930 where it appears that it was most common to not include any type of motifs upon the gravestones. The few gravestones during this period that did include decorations had either roses or

photographs of the deceased. After 1930, the predominant type of mortuary art was a type of flower that appears to be a forget-me-not. The vast majority of the gravestones that were inscribed in the English language (89%) was of either the block or raised top type of monument. The most common inscription upon the gravestones referred to the relationship of the deceased to the living, such as Mother, Father, Son, or Sister, although there were also a number of stones that included the phrase “The Lord is My Shepherd” upon them.

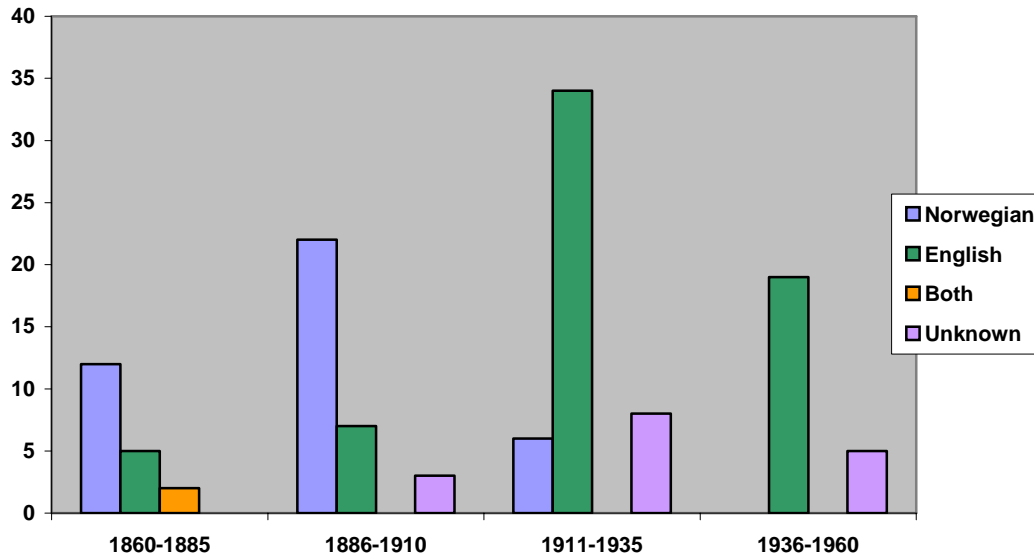


Figure 1. The distribution of language types by date of occurrence

Country Coon Prairie Lutheran Cemetery

The Country Coon Prairie Cemetery was much larger in size than either of the other two cemeteries sampled, and it can therefore be thought to present a broader array of examples of the Norwegian population from this region. Of this sample, 34% had inscriptions written in the Norwegian language, while 46% were entirely in the English language. The language was unknown in 17% of the sample, and both languages were inscribed in 3% of it. The dates of death for the gravestones in Norwegian range between the years of 1878 and 1934, although the stone that was written in both Norwegian and English dated to the year 1860. The range for the stones inscribed in English date from 1861 to 1959. Slightly over half of the gravestones contained no mortuary art, while the remainder of the sample included a variety of different motifs. These included designs such as branches, clasped hands, forget-me-nots, and palm leaves. A much higher percentage of the gravestones inscribed in Norwegian contain some type of mortuary art, specifically 75% as opposed to 31% seen in the stones in English. Five different types of monuments are represented at Country Coon Prairie Lutheran Cemetery, with the majority of them (37%) being a block monument type. Block and obelisk shapes are represented in both gravestones of Norwegian and of English inscriptions. Those written in the Norwegian language also include pulpits and tablets, while the additional stones inscribed in English are of the raised top type. There are inscriptions included on eleven of the thirty-five gravestones, with seven in Norwegian and four in English. The most common Norwegian inscription is once again a variation of the phrase “Fred med stovet velsignet vaere deres minde,” while there are a variety of different English inscriptions.

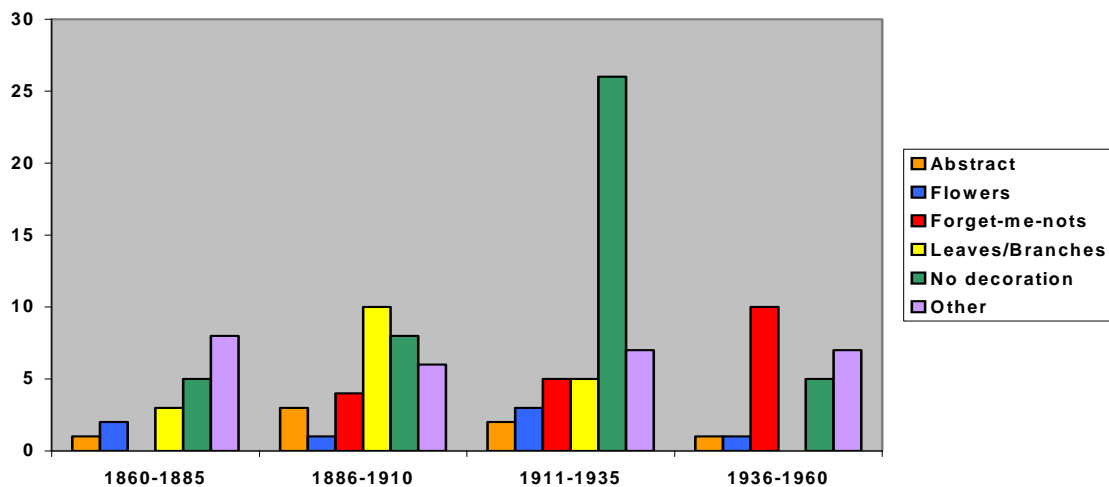


Figure 2. The frequency of design motifs by date of occurrence

Southwest Prairie Lutheran Cemetery

The dates of the forty-eight gravestones sampled from Southwest Prairie Lutheran Cemetery range between the years of 1867 and 1959. There are a total of nineteen (40%) of these stones that can be identified as being written in the Norwegian language, and the dates on them cover the years 1876 through 1933. There is also a stone that dates to the year 1868 that includes elements of both the Norwegian and English language upon it. A wide variety of design motifs can be seen upon these gravestones, although palm leaves, abstract art, and branches with leaves are the most common. These three categories comprise 53% of the motifs seen, while the other 47% includes designs such as forget-me-nots, angels, willow trees, roses, doves, or no decoration. The majority of these Norwegian inscribed gravestones (42%) are an obelisk type of monument, while the remaining shapes include tablets, blocks, and raised tops. The most common inscription on the Norwegian language gravestones in this cemetery is a variation of the “Fred med stovet velsignet vaere deres minde” quotation, comprising 47% of the stones. There is no inscription on six of the gravestones, and there are a variety of other Norwegian phrases on the remaining four.

The first gravestone from Southwest Prairie Lutheran Cemetery that contains elements of the English language dates to the year 1867. There are a total of twenty-two stones that are written in English, six in which the language is unknown because only a name and year are included, and one in which both Norwegian and English are used. The majority (59%) of the English inscribed gravestones include no decoration, while 18% of them feature forget-me-nots as the main decorative motif. The remaining 23% of these gravestones include a variety of design motifs such as doves, willow trees, and hands pointed upwards. The gravestones where the language is unknown contain no decoration, palm leaves, or forget-me-nots, and there is no decoration on the gravestone inscribed in both English and Norwegian. The most common monument types for gravestones inscribed in English were block and raised top, which each comprised 37% of the monuments. One element of this cemetery that differed from the two previous cemeteries was that there were new types of monument shapes seen. The scroll monument shape made up 6% of the total sample in this cemetery, and 14% of the sample of the English gravestones. There was also a gravestone carved in the shape of a tree that was included within this sample. The other 9% of the gravestones inscribed in English are of the tablet shape. The inscriptions on ten of these gravestones refer to the relationship of the deceased with the living, while seven of the twenty-two have no inscription, and five contain quotations such as “In Remembrance of”, “Gone to Rest”, or “The Lord is my Shepherd”. The gravestones of an unknown language are in the block, raised top, or tablet shape and contain no inscription.

Additional gravestones not included in sample

An additional eighteen gravestones were sampled from the three cemeteries in a non-random manner, six from each cemetery. They were chosen because they appeared to represent the most popular styles throughout the cemeteries, with monument type, motifs, and inscriptions all taken into consideration. The gravestones selected from Lower Coon Valley Lutheran Cemetery ranged in date from 1857 through 1929 and included five in

Norwegian and one in English. Two of the gravestones were tablets, two were obelisks, one was of the block type, and one was a pulpit. This pulpit was different than those seen within the random sample, however, in that there was not a Bible resting on top of it. There was no mortuary art included on two of the gravestones, but the others contained motifs of hands pointed up, palm leaves, sunflowers, or clasped hands. The phrase "Fred med dit stovet" was inscribed on two of the gravestones, and a quotation in Norwegian from the book of Hebrews was included on one of the other stones.

The dates of death on the gravestones from Country Coon Prairie Lutheran Cemetery ranged from 1871 through 1941, with four inscribed in Norwegian and two in English. The monument types seen in this cemetery's sample included two blocks, two tablets, one obelisk, and one pulpit. There was a large round ball resting on the top of one of the block monuments, a style that was quite common within this cemetery, but was not represented in the random sample. One of the gravestones did not contain any mortuary art, but two of them had palm leaves, one had a lamb, one had clasped hands, and the other had a Bible. The gravestone that included the lamb was unique in that it was a molded shape of a lamb, rather than merely one carved into the stone. There was a Norwegian inscription carved on two of the stones, but they were illegible due to weathering.

The gravestones from Southwest Prairie Lutheran Cemetery included within this non-random sample dated within a smaller range of time, from 1888 to 1907. Four of the stones were in Norwegian, one was in English, and the language on the last one was unknown. The shapes of the gravestones included two blocks, two obelisks, one scroll, and one tablet. Four of these stones were without decoration of any kind, and the other two included leaf motifs. "Fred med stovet" was once again seen on one of the gravestones, but the other five carried no inscriptions.

This non-random sampling was undertaken in an attempt to demonstrate that there were a number of motifs, inscriptions, and monument styles that were not included within the stratified random sampling of the cemeteries. While the six gravestones cannot obviously be taken as a representation of the entire cemetery, they were chosen because it was felt that they represented the most popular styles and motifs.

CONCLUSIONS

The gravestones within a cemetery serve as a valuable source of information regarding the lives of individuals within a community. The values of these people are emphasized upon their gravestones, and the chronologically controlled setting of a cemetery makes it possible to link the stones to a specific period of time. This allows for the most important aspects of a society to be traced over time. In the case of the cemeteries examined within Vernon County, Wisconsin, the values of the highest importance would be those related to the religious beliefs of the people. These communities were centered on the church, and this is reflected in the mortuary art on their gravestones. While the motifs seen within the cemetery appear to be continuously related to religion, there are clear changes that are demonstrated upon the gravestones. These stylistic changes have served to provide a great deal of insight into the lives of the Norwegian-Americans within this region.

The degree of retention seen in the Norwegian culture when examining the gravestones appears to be quite similar in each of the cemeteries analyzed, although there are some outliers present. By 1915, the majority of the gravestones included in the sample were inscribed in English, although examples of stones in Norwegian that dated to the mid-1930's were seen at both Country Coon Prairie Lutheran Cemetery and Southwest Prairie Lutheran Cemetery. Since the Norwegian language was still used quite frequently within church services in the area throughout the 1930's, it was expected that a higher percentage of gravestones dating to this period would be inscribed in Norwegian (Haugen 1969). This apparent lack of Norwegian inscribed gravestones appears to demonstrate that the Norwegian language was not in regular use by the inhabitants of these regions, although it may in fact be attributed to other factors. The language may have still held great importance to many of the people in the region, but it may have become more difficult over time to locate individuals who would carve it into the gravestones.

A number of similarities appear in the distribution of the most popular types of mortuary art that were seen in the three cemeteries sampled for this analysis. There are a variety of different motifs that are present on the gravestones that are inscribed in the Norwegian language, including doves, lambs, willow trees, and hands pointed upwards. Many of these motifs have been given meanings that relate to heaven or resurrection, demonstrating the religious beliefs held by the people of these communities. These particular designs can be seen throughout the late 1800's and into the early 1900's, but their popularity appears to decrease at this time, and they are rarely seen after 1910. Beginning by the year 1910, it becomes most common for the gravestones to contain no mortuary art at all. This trend, with the majority of gravestones containing only a name and a date, lasts until the early 1930's, but makes it difficult to differentiate whether some of the gravestones from this time period were written in the Norwegian or English language. There are a few stones during this period of time that have some mortuary art

upon them, but there does not appear to be one design that is more popular than the others. This lack of decoration may be related to the economy of the times, an indication that the people of the region were forced to place less of an importance on the gravestones of their loved ones because of the economic hardships faced throughout the country. After this period of time with no decorations comes to an end, the majority of the gravestones then include motifs of forget-me-nots. This tendency, coupled with the inclusion of familial terms upon the gravestones, shows that highest focus of the people at this time was connected to the remembrance of the deceased. There are also other motifs present at this time, although few of them are like those seen on the Norwegian inscribed tombstones within the cemeteries.

An examination of the relationship between the place of emigration of these Norwegian immigrants and specific examples of design motifs produced inconclusive results. There was insufficient historical data available to obtain these places of origin, and it was also difficult because a great number of these individuals came from the same areas of Norway as well. However, the motifs observed for this purpose did appear to be quite similar for all of the various areas. A sample made available from a Norwegian cemetery for comparison with motifs in the Vernon County was quite small and included gravestones from a number of affluent individuals in the area. This was therefore not useful for comparison with the gravestones of pioneer settlers analyzed in this study.

The assimilation of the Norwegian people into American culture occurs quite early upon an examination of their gravestones within the different cemeteries in Vernon County. While there do not appear to be many gravestones containing elements of the Norwegian language after 1915, there are other sources of information that indicate that the language continued to be in use after this time. Besides historical documentation of Norwegian language use within the local church services, there are church records that contain written Norwegian much later than this, as well as studies that record Norwegian language and customs being well-preserved at a later date. An example of this is in the 1949 essay titled, "Social Adjustment among Wisconsin Norwegians", in which the Norwegian language is observed to be spoken by third and fourth generation Norwegians in Coon Prairie, in a community that appears to have relatively little influence from the American culture (Munch 1949). Another factor that should be considered is that many of the gravestones that are present in these cemeteries would have been erected by younger generations of people. Many of the deceased were older individuals, and it can be assumed to be likely that their children would have played a part in getting the gravestones made. It is often easier for the younger generations of people to become more adjusted to their surroundings, and these individuals would have most likely adopted elements of the American culture that the older generations would not have. A consideration of all of these factors makes it difficult to use the date given from the gravestones as the only basis for a Norwegian assimilation into American culture. The date of about 1915 that is given from the gravestones within the sampled cemeteries can, however, be used as a starting point for further investigations into this subject matter.

REFERENCES

- Anonymous 1951 *One Hundredth Anniversary of the Westby-Coon Prairie Lutheran Church*. Westby-Coon Prairie Lutheran Church, Westby, Wisconsin.
- Anonymous 1955 *One Hundredth Anniversary of the West Prairie Lutheran Church*. West Prairie Lutheran Church, West Prairie, Wisconsin.
- Deetz, James 1996 *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life*. Doubleday, New York.
- Deetz, James 1988 Material Culture and Worldview in Colonial Anglo-America. In *The Recovery of Meaning: Historical Archaeology in the Eastern United States*, edited by Mark P. Leone and Parker B. Potter, Jr., pp.219-233. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington.
- Dethlefsen, Edwin S. and James Deetz 1966 Death's Heads, Cherubs, and Willow Trees: Experimental Archaeology in Colonial Cemeteries. *American Antiquity* 31(4):502-510.
- Francaviglia, Richard V. 1971 The Cemetery as an Evolving Cultural Landscape. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 61(3):501-509.
- Grimsrud, Elida 1960 *History of Lower Coon Valley Lutheran Congregation, 1859-1959*. Manuscript on file, Murphy Library Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, La Crosse, Wisconsin.
- Haugen, Einar 1969 *The Norwegian Language in America: A Study in Bilingual Behavior*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana.
- Holand, Hjalmar R. 1977 *Coon Prairie: An Historical Report of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation at Coon Prairie*. Written on the Occasion of Its 75th Anniversary in 1927. Translated by Oivind M. Hovde. Decorah, Iowa.
- Legreid, Anne Marie 1997 Community Building, Conflict, and Change: Geographic Perspectives on the Norwegian-American Experience in Frontier Wisconsin. In *Wisconsin Land and Life*, edited by Robert C. Ostergren and Thomas R. Vale, pp.300-319. The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin.
- Lovoll, Odd S. 1998 *The Promise Fulfilled: A Portrait of Norwegian Americans Today*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- Mathison, Judy 2000 *Vernon County cemetery locations and histories*. Vernon County Historical Society, Viroqua, WI.
- Munch, Peter A. 1949 Social Adjustment among Wisconsin Norwegians. *American Sociological Review* 14(6):780-787.
- Vernon County Historical Society 1994 *Vernon County Heritage*. Taylor Publishing Company, Dallas, Texas.