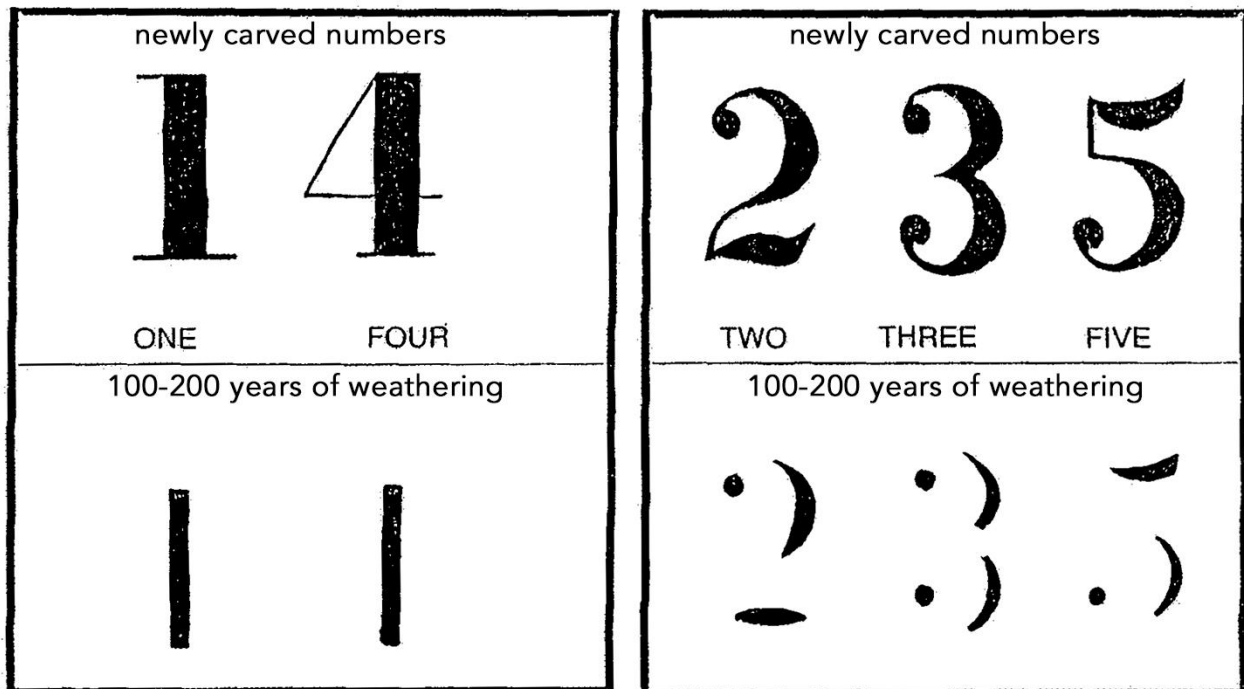


Reading Weathered Marble Gravestones Requires a Knowledge of the Carver's Craft

John E. Sterling

'1' and '4' are the most misread numbers on worn marble gravestones. When you write on paper all strokes on numbers are equal strength but not so when they are carved in marble. The '1' and the '4' are made with heavy downward strokes. The rest of these numbers are carved with very light lines. When these numbers wear, so that the light lines disappear, the '1' and the '4' are indistinguishable. For these situations, it is helpful to look at the spacing. 1811 is spaced much closer than 1841. It is also helpful to look for a possible spouse nearby. If the husband died in 1845, at age 80, it is highly unlikely that the wife died in 1816, at age 79. In this case it is quite possible that her death occurred in 1846 not 1816.

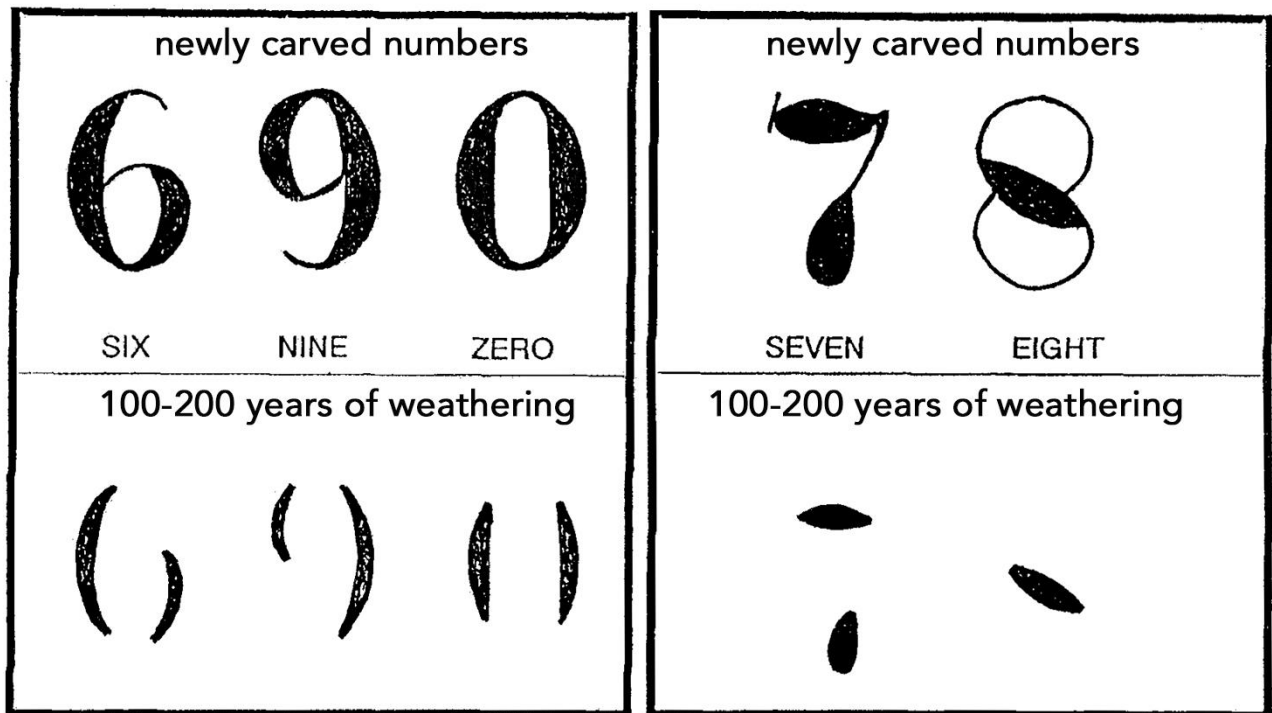
'2', '3', and '5' are all quite similar, but they have their own characteristics. The deep curve on the right side of all three numbers occurs on the top of the '2', the bottom of the '5', and at both the top and bottom of the '3'. There is a deep dot to the left of this curve. The '2' and the '5' also have a straight line at the bottom of the '2' and the top of the '5'. On a weathered stone these characteristics should be looked for.



'6', '9' and '0' are all quite similar. All three numbers have heavy curved lines on the right and the left. On the '0' they are long and equal. The '6' has a similar long line on the left and a shorter line on the right, at the bottom. The '9' has the long line on the right and a shorter line on the left, at the top. Careful study under proper light will improve the accuracy of reading these numbers.

'7' and '8' are truly unique numbers and should never be confused with other numbers. The '8' has a deep diagonal line that makes it unique from all other numbers.

When it has weathered, a small diagonal line is the only clue that this was once an '8'. The '7' has a horizontal line at the top, much like the '5'. The deep, vertical line directly under this horizontal line makes the '7' unique from all other numbers.



Letters used to spell out the name are usually not as much of a problem as numbers, because they are interrelated. If you can read some of the letters, you can usually figure out the name. There are a number of lettering styles used on marble gravestones. You can usually, find a stone using the same style nearby that is in better condition, where you can study the characteristics of the letters. Reading the adjacent gravestones can also give you clues, as related people are usually buried together. The most difficult problem with letters is reading initials since they stand alone with no other letters to help.

To read marble gravestones use a mirror to light the face of the stone or scrub the surface with plain water and a natural bristle brush. Learn the characteristics of the numbers by studying where the carver has cut deep lines so you can recognize what the numbers look like when they are worn.