Community Outreach – Presentation Script – People of Letters

The Tour of the Final Resting Place of Famous Authors

1. **People of Letters – Famous Authors – R.I.P**

* Hello, and welcome to this program on the final resting places for famous authors in history. I am sure that you are all book lovers, and also probably have your own favorite deceased and living authors. If I have omitted your favorites I do apologize, but I have to make some hard choices in putting this program together. I hope you enjoy this experience and for myself and the funeral home I sincerely thank you for this opportunity to speak to your fine group. So let’s begin.

1. **Louisa May Alcott**

* Louisa May Alcott was the daughter of writer and theologian Bronson Alcott. Miss Alcott, who never married, modeled her bestselling book “Little Women” after her own sisters, their mother who they interestingly called “Marmee” and herself as the unforgettable character “Jo.” Miss Alcott, who lived most of her entire life at home, survived her equally famous father by only two days, dying on the day of his funeral. She is buried on a shaded bluff only a few yards from Hawthorne, Emerson and Thoreau in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery’s world famous ‘Authors’ Ridge.”

1. **L. Frank Baum**

* L. Frank Baum was an upstate New York native who wrote a series of children’s fantasies about the Land of Oz, a name he drew from by glancing at his bottom filing cabinet, which was marked O – Z. Interestingly only a small portion of the Oz stories was condensed into the famous 1939 film “The Wizard of Oz.” Mr. Baum did not live to see his work filmed in sound and color, but his wife did, and she highly approved of Hollywood’s treatment of her husband’s brainchild characters. Mrs. Baum was particularly taken with Bert Lahr’s portrayal of the Cowardly Lion. L. Frank Baum also holds the peculiar distinction of being the earliest celebrity to be buried in the world famous Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California.

1. **Pearl S. Buck**

* As the author of the block buster book “The Good Earth” she was the first female winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1938. She died in Vermont but was buried on her Green Hills Farm in Pennsylvania with no religious service. She was placed under ash trees facing east, and as you can see here her grave stone is inscribed with her Chinese name “Precious Gem” in Chinese calligraphy.

1. **Lewis Carol**
   * Lewis Carroll was a clergyman in the Anglican Church at Christ Church College Oxford University. Rev. Carroll created the “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” for the sheer amusement of a little girl in the area and her playmates in the 1860’s. The story line of the book is pure fantasy but as with all classics continues to fascinate and spellbind the reader. The most recent Hollywood release of the movie starring Johnny Depp is good evidence of the stories modern attraction.
2. **Samuel Langhorne Clemens “Mark Twain”**
   * Often referred to as the first original American author with popular appear Samuel L. Clemens was known for his witty and often wicked insightful commentaries on man and the folly of life. However for all the Mark Twain’s good humor and biting comments by the 1890’s his personal life was one sorrow after another. His two year old son died, then a daughter died, and then eight years later his wife died. In his last year he lived with his daughter Jean, but she died from an epileptic seizure in her bath on Christmas Eve morning 1909 at age 29. Clemens had stated before that he would never look on another grave of a loved one and he kept his promise. He did not attend his daughter’s burial. His autobiography concludes with this depressing account and the reference to her death with the words “In the grave? If I can believe it? God rest her sweet spirit!” Mark Twain lived only four months after her death. He died as he had predicted with the coming of Haley’s Comet, which had ushered in his birth in 1835. History however has overlooked the tragedy and sorrow which plagued Mark Twain and has instead focused on his unforgettable characters Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn which continue to entertain and cause controversy.
3. **Ralph Waldo Emerson**
   * Emerson was a leading American transcendentalist and philosopher. He was also a Unitarian clergyman. In his final years Emerson’s great mind was failing, and at one particular friends funeral the “Sage of Concord” as he was known remarked that the person who was dead was a good man but Emerson confessed he could not remember his name. Emerson died at home in Concord, and was buried on Author’s Ridge in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery along with Thoreau, the Alcott’s and Hawthorne.
4. **F. Scott Fitzgerald**
   * This is the story of two tragic yet profoundly talented human beings. F. Scott Fitzgerald was the unquestioned literary spokesman for the Jazz Age in the 1920’s. His personal life was a story of triumphs and defeats. His marriage to Zelda was shaky and Fitzgerald lived with Shelia Graham in Hollywood which only complicated issues. It was there that he suffered three massive heart attacks, the last being fatal. Zelda was placed in a mental institution where she died in a horrible fire in 1948. At Fitzgerald’s death his wish had been to be buried with his family in the Roman Catholic cemetery at Rockville, Maryland, but the Church judged his lifestyle inappropriate so he was buried in a single space left in nearby Rockville Union Cemetery. Upon Zelda’s death he was unearthed and she was placed with him in the same grave. By 1975 they both were deemed acceptable for burial in consecrated ground and were moved to St. Mary’s Cemetery.
5. **Nathaniel Hawthorne**
   * Hawthorne is one of the premier American authors. His better known novels centered on social mores and hypocritical condemnations. He lived in Concord, Massachusetts both at “The Old Manse” and the “Wayside”, and dabbled in transcendental thought and philosophy. Hawthorne was a deep brooding personality who felt great personal shame that one of his ancestors had been one of the infamous judges in the brutal Salem Witch Trials. Hawthorne was a close friend of fellow Bowdoin College graduate President Franklin Pierce whose favorable attitudes towards slavery was very unpopular with Hawthorne’s abolitionist colleagues namely Longfellow and Emerson. Regardless of their disapproval Hawthorne remained a loyal friend, and being a good friend Hawthorne traveled with Pierce on a trip to the White Mountains in New Hampshire to try to improve the cancer afflicted Hawthorne. However during the night Pierce found that his old friend, sleeping in the next room had died. Hawthorne was buried with the unfinished manuscript of this last book in the casket. Longfellow’s poem “Hawthorne, May 23, 1864” is about the funeral and the equally sentimental “Three Friends” also includes Hawthorne as one of the departed college classmates to whom Longfellow refers. The actual grave as you can see is marked only by a small rounded stone inscribed “Hawthorne” which is located on Author’s Ridge near the graves of Thoreau, the Alcott’s and Emerson.
6. **Ernest Hemingway**
   * Hemingway won two Pulitzer Prizes and two Nobel Prizes in Literature. His books dealt usually with men at war with one force or another, and their struggles both within and without. Hemingway suffered from long bouts with severe depression. He had been to the Mayo Clinic twice and had received electro-shock treatments and had tried to kill himself at least twice and once tried walking into the propellers of a plane. On the morning of his suicide he awoke early and took a shotgun and shells from a hiding place into the foyer of his home in Ketchum, Idaho, placed the gun butt on the floor, the barrels against his forehead and pulled the trigger. He was buried near the site where he had frequently gone hunting.
7. **Washington Irving**
   * Along with James Fennimore Cooper’s “Leather Stocking Tales,” Irving’s novels and histories served as the first distinctively American literature. Most all of Irving’s stories occur in the area where he lived, namely in the Hudson Valley and the Catskill region of Upstate New York. His best known tales “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle” exhibit Irving’s keen ability to capture the Old Dutch customs and manners of the Hudson Valley. Irving’s last work was “The Life of George Washington” who had been one of the author’s hero’s. Irving died at his home “Sunnyside” and was buried in Tarrytown’s Sleepy Hollow Cemetery.
8. **C.S. Lewis**
   * Lewis was a particularly gifted writer. As a proponent of conservative Christianity he interestingly wrote some of the most imaginative and unorthodox writings about Christian subjects such as hell in the “Great Divorce” and an open interpretation of religious thought in “Mere Christianity.” C.S. Lewis was the central character of the 1993 film “Shadow lands.” In addition to his religious writings Lewis was a master at fiction, science fiction, and pure fantasy. Lewis, a confirmed bachelor who lived with his brother Warren fell in love with a Jewish woman named Helen Joy Davidson. She was a pro-communist writer, activist and novelist and could not have been more different than her stuffy Oxford glued professor husband. In 1956 she converted to Christianity and married Lewis four years prior to her death from cancer at 45. The classic “A Grief Observed” is the novel that C. S. Lewis wrote about his wife’s death and his grief. It remains a classic to this day in the area of grief psychology.
9. **Jack London**
   * Jack London lived the life of a sailor and hobo and traveled the country extensively riding in box cars on the railroads from San Francisco to Bangor, Maine. He became a Marxist in 1894 and went to the Klondike with the Gold Rush of the 1890’s. His best known works, which almost always reflected his travels, were all written at his ranch in Glen Ellen, California. London smoked up to five packs of cigarettes a day and battled alcoholism his entire adult life. He committed suicide at 40 with an overdose of morphine. He is buried beneath this boulder at this ranch with the epitaph “The stone the builders rejected.”

1. **Herman Melville**
   * Basically unknown during his lifetime, nonetheless Herman Melville has risen over time to a place as one of America’s most skillful novelists. Melville worked quietly and largely unrecognized in his lifetime as a simple clerk in the New York customs house. Interestingly in his obituary the “New York Times” listed his novel “Typee” as his greatest work, and totally ignored “Moby Dick.” Melville works are almost exclusively seafaring tales. He died in New York City from a heart ailment at age 72. His stone, as you can see, has a rolled granite scroll with his name and dates below it. Nothing is mentioned about his literary accomplishments.
2. **Margaret Mitchell**
   * Margaret Mitchell was a former reporter with a newspaper in Atlanta where she spent her entire life which was tragically short. Her only novel “Gone with the Wind” won the 1937 Pulitzer Prize for literature, and later her book become the most anticipated film of the century in 1939. After the spotlight and fanfare of “Gone with the Wind” the author declared publically that she would never write another novel. In 1949 she and her husband John Marsh were crossing Peachtree Street in downtown Atlanta when she was struck by a speeding off duty taxi driver. She died five days later.
3. **Laura Ingalls Wilder**
   * As the author of the extremely popular children’s series “Little House” books which were basically her own autobiography, Laura Ingalls Wilder carved for herself an unintended yet permanent place in American literature. The series was transferred into a popular TV series in the 1970’s. Mrs. Wilder died just before her 90th birthday and was buried with her husband Almanzo (who was the main character in her book “Farmer Boy”) in Mansfield, Missouri.
4. **Edgar Allan Poe**
   * Poe is the dean of American mystery writers. He penned both stories and poems of the macabre and melancholy. Poe lived a mostly impoverished life as a literary critic for several papers and lived in cramped houses in Richmond, Philadelphia, Manhattan, the Bronx and finally Baltimore. Poe suffered deeply from melancholia and from chronic alcoholism. In 1849 he embarked on a ill fated lecture tour, some historians believe no lecture tour even existed, and Poe while on this trip ended up in Baltimore. What happened to him in Baltimore is unclear, but what is known is that he was found outside a political polling station on East Lombard Street, wearing someone else’s clothes, in a state of delirium. Poe was taken to Church Home Hospital where he died two days later at age 40 after suffering fits of delirium tremens. Each year on Poe’s birthday, in the middle of the January night, a visitor, never yet identified and to date never bothered, leaves a flower and a bottle of wine at his grave.
5. **Upton Sinclair**
   * Sinclair’s monumental book “Jungle” written in 1906 gave a gripping expose of the horrible working conditions in the Chicago stockyards and meat packing industry. Sinclair was born in Baltimore and worked as both a writer and reformer in what is now known as the “Muckraking” period. Sinclair later moved to California and continued to champion left wing causes such as End Poverty in California movement.
6. **John Steinbeck**
   * Stern , rough and a man with high convictions, John Steinbeck was a marvelous chronicler of the 20th century west painting unforgettable word pictures of migrant life. Most of Steinbeck’s stories are set in the era of the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, and he gives marvelous accounts of poverty, perseverance, and courage. Upon his death, from heart disease in his Manhattan apartment funeral services were held at St. James Episcopal Church with Henry Fonda (who stared Steinbeck’s “The Grapes of Wrath”) reading some of the authors favorite poems.
7. **Theodore Dreiser**
   * Dreiser’s works most always portray vivid examples of brutal and despondent realism in 20th century American. Dreiser took realism to far reaches with his book “An American Tragedy” based upon the case of Chester Gillette who was convicted of a horrible murder in Upstate New York. This book was later made into a movie called “A Place in the Sun” starring Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Cliff.
8. **Harriett Beecher Stowe**
   * Her one book “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” had more effect and made a most significant contribution by whipping up the fiery abolitionist reader’s feelings in the North which helped ignite the great American Civil War. In fact when Lincoln first was introduced to Stowe the President remarked, “So this is the little lady who wrote the book that started this great big war!” Harriet Beecher Stowe came from a prominent American family. Her father, her husband and her famous brother Henry Ward Beecher were famous American clergymen. When she died at age 85 a wreath from the black citizens of Boston lie on her casket and read “The children of Uncle Tom.” She was buried on the grounds of Philips Andover Academy where her husband had taught. Her monument, as you can see, is made of red scotch granite and reads “Her children rise up and call her blessed.”
9. **Henry David Thoreau**
   * Eccentric and strange, nonetheless Thoreau emerged as the leading voice in transcendentalism. He lived his theory of civil disobedience and spent two years in the wilderness at Walden Pond near Concord, Massachusetts, communicating only with nature and chronicling his thoughts and experiences in “Walden” which was published in 1854. While Thoreau might have lived the simple life and surviving on little income the evidence is clear that he ate most of his daily meals everyday at the home of his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson. He made his last entry in his journal in November 1861 when he was terminally ill with tuberculosis. Thoreau was buried on Author’s Ridge along with Hawthorne, the Alcott’s, and Emerson in Concord’s famous Sleepy Hollow Cemetery.
10. **Conclusion**
    * Thank you for your attention during this program. I am hoping that you enjoyed it, and i am also going to take the risk in thinking that just possibly you have never seen such a program before. Certainly there are many more authors that could easily have been included, and if we missed your favorite I am sorry and please accept my apology, but all programs must come to an end, and if we had tried to cover all the famous authors, well i know you can easily appreciate we would never get home! If there are any questions about this program, or our funeral home, or about funerals i would be happy to try to answer them. Our funeral home has served this community since \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and we are privileged to serve people in a very trying time. We have evaluation forms which i would ask you to fill out, and if you have suggestions for other programs like this please let me know. Again thank you very much for your kind attention.