Address Delivered at the Missouri Convention

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MR. CHAIRMAN, members of the Memorial Craftsmen of Missouri, and guests: There is an old proverb that says Jerusalem was clean because the people swept before their own doors. Perhaps, I should do that before I begin to speak.

First, I wish to extend to you the greetings and good wishes of the Association of American Cemetery Superintendents and Cemetery Officials' Association of St. Louis.

Now, what I am about to say is simply a personal opinion and in no way shall voice the sentiments or opinions of the organizations just mentioned. I am here principally as an observer, because I am interested in what you are trying to do to provide finer memorials to the memory of those who have gone before us. This convention, to me has been most interesting because of its informality. I rather prefer it to the usual rule, where a set program of speakers is provided. You had a better opportunity as individuals to express your opinions and you have done just that.

I did not come here to give an address, but when I fathomed the course of the meeting, the thought occurred to me that I might be put on the spot, so I jotted down a few notes during the progress of your deliberations, so that I would not be entirely unprepared. I may digress from my topic from time to time, and I may seem critical at other times but I am going to say what I think, as each thought occurs to me. I hope that you will bear with me.

First of all, it is not for me to tell you how to conduct your business—that's your problem and I do believe that all of you are conscientious in your efforts to elevate your profession before the public. That is why you are attending this convention.

You know and I know that in the past many mistakes have been made. I believe that if you seriously apply the ideas that have been brought out in this convention you will correct them and ultimately profit. Too many of us attend these conventions with a great deal of enthusiasm and with every intention to work out the principles as adopted at these meetings, but because, for some reason or another, we fail in our first attempt to apply these principles, we have a tendency to abandon all these things that we have so energetically decided to do. The result is that in less than six months, all the good that might have been accomplished from a meeting like this has been lost.

Many thoughts that I may say have been voiced by your speakers previous to me, but it may be necessary for me to mention them because I have many ideas about them.

The primary purpose of your industry is to supply and to erect memorials that befit the characters and personalities of the departed, where symbolism, love and beauty should be expressed. It seems that in the very past many of the memorial dealers have failed in this idea. It seems that instead of erecting memorials of significance and symbolism you have gone into the business of selling stone. Perhaps this has been caused by the economic conditions of today, where price seems to be the overbearing feature of modern business. That is a big mistake.

I like to walk around in a cemetery and see the beautiful epitaphs carved in the memorials that tell a story of a beloved one who is laid to rest there. I can recall vividly two such stones that have been erected in the cemetery where I am employed. One epitaph tells the story of a boy who was killed by a batted ball while at play; and the other was written by a nun and placed on the memorial at the head of her brother's grave, reminds those left behind that life is not in vain, but rather a preparation for a grand reunion in the great beyond. It is my opinion that everybody in life has done something, regardless of how small, to deserve a memorial of some kind. I believe that you men should always remember that the departed has been dear to someone and is worthy of a suitable, symbolic memorial. "A memorial is silent, but yet it speaks."

I don't see any objection to using various types of colored stone for use in memorials. I believe that color adds to the beauty of the landscaped surroundings, for after all, nature in itself is very colorful. I can see no reason why a memorial, so long as it has character, beauty, and symbolism, should be condemned because it might lose its original appearance, due to the elements of weather and time. After all, the beauty of the memorial lies in the story that it tells.

Perhaps Mr. Peterson from Kansas is setting out on the right idea. I like the methods he is adopting and I think each and everyone of you should move along the same line.

I believe that if you took time enough to study the desires of your client, you would be able to erect suitable memorials that depict the lives of those they wish to commemorate. I differ with the speaker of the previous day who remarked that all individuals are alike. I am of the opinion that every man living is of a different nature. If you would just take time to find out what his peculiarities in life might have been, you would be able to erect a memorial that will depict the nature and character of the person whose memory you are to commemorate—not saws and tool boxes for all carpenters, nor chisels and hammers for all mechanics, because after all, each individual might have had a different way of using such tools.

From my observations, I believe that you men have become more material, instead of memorial minded. In other words, you have failed to sell the sentimental side of your industry. It is appalling to walk out into some sections of our modern cemeteries today and see the monstrosities you have erected in the form of rock, which look more like checkers and dominoes. Would it not be more beautiful, if such sections looked like a chess board, where you have a difference in design? I would rather go to the hillside, where nature has provided beautifully formed boulders covered with moss. To place these on a lot would depict greater sympathies than some of the hideous blocks of stone that you placed in cemeteries and call "memorials". I think that if you would follow nature you might accomplish something, for after all no one seems to be able to make things more beautiful than the Lord above has provided for us.

In this regard, I would advise you, as retailers, to avoid alliances with producers that will eventually lead to your elimination. That has been done before in other lines of business, and if you are not careful the same thing can happen to you. I should think you would rather keep your business so flexible that you would be able to purchase your materials from any manufacturer or producer that can supply you with the type of memorial that you require or find necessary to erect for your

clients. You know there are many grades of material suitable for use as memorials, furnished by reliable producers.

It might be well that you, as retailers, foster various design contests. In my opinion these designs should belong to you, so that you can submit such designs to your clients for their consideration and then have them executed by the producers according to your specifications. This will eliminate what to me seems plagiarism in the use of designs, eliminating the constant repetition of the same type of memorials in our cemeteries. I imagine that through your national organization of retailers you could sponsor such contests. Of course, this may not meet with the approval of the producer, or the manufacturer, but in all fairness to both parties, I believe that a fair solution to this problem could be worked out.

I have lived in the cemetery practically all my life, which has enabled me to observe the trend of memorials of each generation that has gone before us. You can look at the older parts of the cemetery and see the difference in construction of memorials, depict the change in each era. It is very apparent that in the past, even as now, little effort was given to design, so that section after section resemble mass production of memorials without any regard to symbolism or beauty, as you would have the people believe you are trying to do.

If you men would take the time, when your client calls on you, to bring him to the cemetery and study the location of his lot, you would be in a better position to advise him as to what type of memorial is most suitable for his location. I venture to say that in less than ten per cent of the cases where memorials have been erected, has the purchaser been brought to the lot and properly advised. The result is constant duplication of memorials, without any vision of what it might do to enhance the landscaped beauty which the cemeteries today are trying to foster. The cemetery officials, as a general rule, are more than willing to assist the memorial dealer and his client in the selection of a proper memorial, but in very few cases are the cemetery officials contacted or even asked to make a suggestion.

It has only been during the last few years that some effort has been made to deviate from the regular course of memorial design, that an effort has been made to change the regular scheme of memorials as produced, and that different designs are being erected in our cemeteries. Apparently, you dealers are seeing the handwriting on the wall and realize that you must endeavor to create something different, if you are to stay in business. The public is becoming critical of these things. You know that one of the first things they will do is to go to a non-monument cemetery where nothing like this will be seen, where nature is enhanced with shrubs, and trees, and beautiful flowers, with perhaps only one central memorial. This, to them is beauty. To many people the crowding of memorials is an eyesore, and they abhor it and naturally prefer a more natural setting.

It seems that many of you dealers are of the opinion that when the cemetery man finds out you have a client in the cemetery, he will immediately tip off your competitor, and in a way be responsible for your losing the sale of this memorial. It is my opinion that the cemetery officials should only be there in an advisory capacity. It is his position to see that his cemetery, his grounds, are properly operated and that his lot owners are protected and properly advised. It is not in his position to sell memorials. The practice of some cemetery officials advising a memorial dealer of a prospective client for remuneration should be condemned because it naturally creates a distrust between the parties involved. In many cases these conditions exist to the detriment of both the memorial business and the cemetery. I, for one, can not see how a cemetery official can conscientiously enforce the rules of his cemetery if he, in one way or another, is obligated to a memorial dealer for remunerations that he may have received. I think it would be better if they both would confine themselves to their own circle of endeavor.

I like the resolution you have adopted for national advertising. You memorial dealers, as retailers, should endeavor to carry out such a policy, and I believe that such advertising should be controlled by the National Memorial Retailers of America.

Your local propaganda plans could do wonders for both the memorial men and the cemetery. I think you should put this practice into effect even before you attempt advertising on a national scale, because I believe it would do more good in your local area where your client has come to know you as a respected citizen in your community.

In one of your debates you spoke of the deferred payment plan for the purchase of memorials. This may be a way to stimulate your business. This will have a tendency to enable your prospective purchaser to choose a finer memorial, rather than the ordinary type he might choose because of his limited ready finances.

It might be well that you consider the insurance plan in the sale of your memorials. Just how this could be worked out I am not in a position to state, but it has been done in other lines of endeavor with good success.

You men have been complaining about the so-called "carpetbaggers" in the industry. They are not really memorial dealers, but you have no one to blame for their existence but yourselves. It seems they have arisen in late years due to the fact that you men have been wrangling with each other relative to policy of what should be sold rather than to the sale of design. You have also talked the same type of language that the so-called carpetbaggers use. You have used their design and material methods. You men who have erected suitable plants for production of proper memorials can easily overcome this difficulty by concentrating on design rather than the materials to be used.

Too often people come to us confused because so many dealers have called on them trying to sell them a memorial. It is appalling to know that many of these people have been bothered almost before their loved ones have been laid to rest in the cemetery. This is a very poor policy, and shows poor ethics, lack of sound judgment. You should have some agreement in your association to eliminate such abusive tactics.

Another thing I want to call you men on is your failure to provide the cemetery with details on the foundation order for memorials to be erected in cemeteries. Some of the sketches submitted are certainly not a compliment to men who claim to be memorial artists. Perhaps cemetery people have been too lenient in this respect in not demanding scaled blue print copies of your details. This is being done in many cemeteries in the country.

You may not agree with everything I have said but I have tried to depict the actual occurrences that have confronted both memorial dealers and cemeteries in regard to the erection of suitable memorials. I think you will find that all cemeteries are willing to collaborate with the memorial dealer in the erection of creations that are more beautiful and more interesting in the form of memorial art, so that all concerned can be proud of the accomplishments that have been made in the erection of memorials.

Let me suggest that you depart from the word "monument" and in the future use the word "Memorial" for after all, you are really erecting for posterity a work of art to the memory of our departed citizens.