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### Association for Gravestone Studies to Meet at Gardner-Webb in June

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# Association for Gravestone Studies to Meet at Gardner-Webb in June

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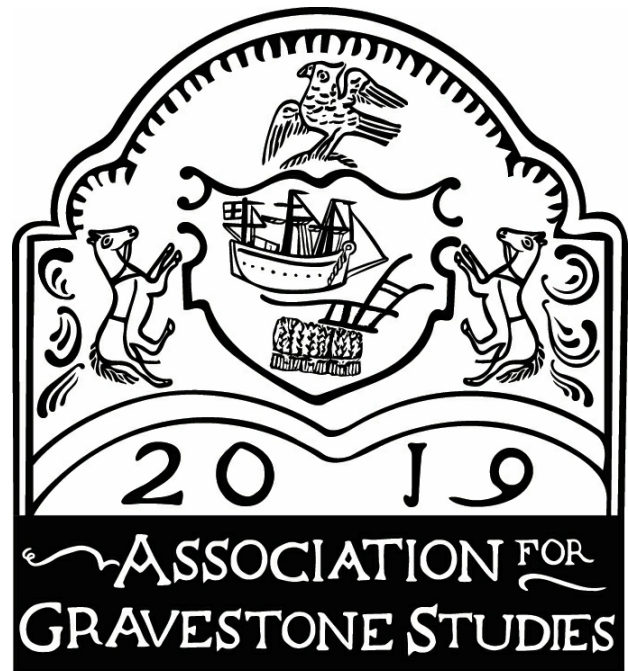
Office of University  
Communications

May 15, 2019

## *International Organization Plans Lectures, Guided Cemetery Tours and Other Activities*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—The Association for Gravestone Studies (AGS), an international organization that promotes the study of gravestones from historical and artistic perspectives, will hold its annual conference at Gardner-Webb University June 25-30. The event includes lectures, an art exhibit, guided cemetery tours, slide presentations, exhibits, classes, and documentation and conservation workshops.

Dr. June Hobbs, GWU professor of English, director of Undergraduate Research and the Fay Webb Gardner Endowed Chair of Student Success, is a member of the association. She submitted a proposal for GWU to host the event and is helping to coordinate speakers and activities. She and conference co-chair, Dr. William Harding, are expecting nearly 125 people to attend and have received reservations from members in Australia and Canada.



**Gardner-Webb University  
Boiling Springs, North Carolina**

“Members of the association are a diverse group,” Hobbs observed. “We have some artists, art historians, literary people like me, and people who just like all this stuff. The greatest living tombstone scholar is a nurse. She has written a great deal and is very knowledgeable.”

Hobbs became a member of AGS in the 1990s, when she was working on a book about hymns by American women. “I took a tour of Sunset Cemetery in Shelby (N.C.), and the most startling thing to me was standing in front of one of the older stones, I saw a slightly revised version of Fannie Crosby’s ‘Safe in the Arms of Jesus,’” she recalled. “I had an epiphany that the culture I was studying via hymns was also the culture of the graveyards.”

She searched the internet for cemetery studies and found the AGS website. “I sent in a proposal for a paper and went to my first conference and made the best friends of my life,” Hobbs shared.

She is a past member of the AGS Board of Trustees and served as editor of “Markers: The Annual Journal of the Association for Gravestone Studies” for eight years. In 2017, she received the AGS Harriette Merrifield Forbes Award, presented annually to an individual for exceptional service to the field of gravestone studies.

Highlights of the AGS Conference at GWU include tours to Oakdale Cemetery in Hendersonville, N.C., and Riverside Cemetery in Asheville, N.C. Oakdale features the angel that inspired the title for Thomas Wolfe’s book, “Look Homeward Angel.” Wolfe’s father was a stone carver, and Riverside has 16 of his carved stones that are signed. The Wolfe family is buried there, and it’s also the resting place of O. Henry.

Tours are also planned to Steele Creek and Elmwood cemeteries in Charlotte, N.C., and to Sunset Cemetery. Participants also have the option of attending a conservation workshop to repair stones at Sunset Cemetery.

Dr. Joyce Brown, GWU professor emerita of English, is the keynote speaker. Lectures throughout the week will explore the symbolism of gravestone carvings, tales about gravesites, and other historical topics. An art exhibit on cemetery imagery, a first for the conference, will be on display. Featured are the works of Anne Tait, a printmaker, painter and stone carver, and Lynne Baggett, a photographer and graphic designer.



Timothy Hardie, a GWU football alumnus, is buried in Sunset Cemetery in Shelby, N.C.



This gravestone, located in Oakdale Cemetery in Hendersonville, N.C., is inscribed with shape-note music.

Conference registration is open to the public, and participants may register for part or all of the event. The afternoon and evening lectures are free to attend and will be held in Tucker Student Center. The full schedule and more information is available at [www.gravestonestudies.org](http://www.gravestonestudies.org). Registration deadline is May 25.

*Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university, Gardner-Webb emphasizes a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics to prepare students to become effective leaders within the global community. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.*