

HOW TO DO A GRAVESTONE RUBBING USING PELLON (INTERFACING)

Gravestone Rubbings for Beginners

What is a Gravestone Rubbing?

A rubbing is what you did as a child when you placed a scrap of paper over a coin and brought up the coin's design by covering the paper with with pencil strokes. Using different materials, this technique can be used to reproduce the relief of any surface. This is an ancient technique with originated in the Orient and is still used today to make original prints.

A gravestone rubbing is the use of various materials to obtain the relief impression of lettering, carving or designs from a gravestone. Rubbings create a useful record of family information and funerary symbolism. Some rubbings are works of art in their own right and are in the collections of galleries and museums. Sometimes a rubbing becomes the only permanent reproduction of gravestones that deteriorate over time or because of vandalism. This makes them excellent for recording the design and surface condition of the stone life-size.



Because making rubbings has become so popular among genealogists and folklorists, knowing the correct way to handle the materials and stones is the best way to learn from and preserve them for future generations to enjoy.

Materials Needed:

Basic prepackaged rubbing kits are sold at craft stores and on the internet and usually contain paper, rubbing wax and masking tape. The type of gravestone rubbings I will be talking about today use crayon and Pellon interfacing, both common and easy to find materials.

Pellon – interfacing material. The lightest or thinnest works best.

Lumber crayon – chalk can also be used, but requires spraying the finished rubbing with a fixative to prevent smearing. Carpenter/lumber crayon won't melt in a hot car!

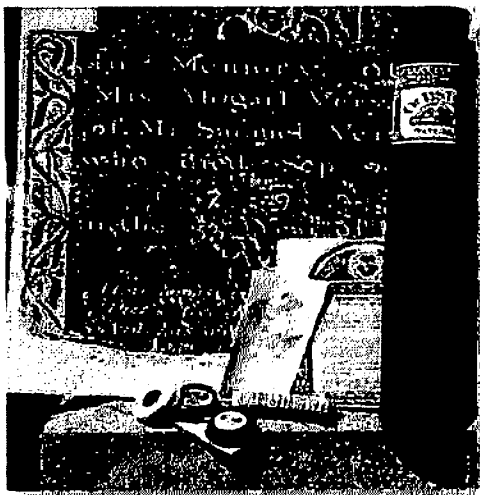
Small, soft paintbrush – to clean debris & critters from lettering or carving.

Small natural bristle brush – to clean lichen and bird droppings off the stone face.

Masking tape – I use the blue trim tape for painting because it is less sticky.

Cardboard tube – for storing clean paper and finished prints. A FedEx or UPS plans mailer is perfect.

Pencil and Notebook – for recording information about the stone or cemetery location. Never take it for granted that a photo will be legible.



Note: common courtesy tells us that we should first ask for permission from the cemetery or graveyard superintendent or sexton prior to doing rubbings or taking photographs. This practice has been regulated or banned in some states and in many cemeteries (particularly in colonial graveyards) due to the damage it can cause to the stone, so please check this information in advance. Because old gravestones are an important part of our national heritage, you should be as careful with them as you are when handling other ancient folk art treasures. ☺

Optional Materials (not necessary but a good idea):

Scissors to cut pellon or tall grass around the base of the stone.

Old towel to kneel on or clean polished granite stones.

Small pail to carry supplies.

Hat, sunscreen, bug repellent, antibacterial waterless hand cleaner.

Camera.

Before Starting:

Practice on a rock at home, or check with a local monuments store to see if you can practice on one of their tombstones, before going to the cemetery.

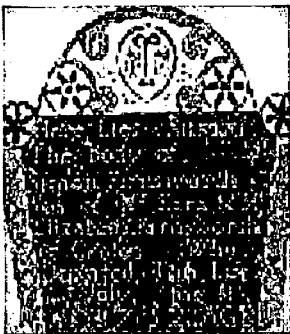
Check with the cemetery to learn if tombstone rubbings are permissible. In case of cemeteries located on private property, remember that you are doing rubbings on someone else's property and get permission from the owner.

Be sure that the tombstone you have chosen is completely stable. If it is wobbly or the surface is crumbling, do not do a rubbing, take a photo instead. If the stone has begun to peel or flake, rubbing can cause more damage. The best choices are polished granite or intact solid slate.

Procedure:

Tape the Pellon to the surface securely and smoothly. Make sure the pellon not only covers the area to be rubbed, but also extends beyond the edges of the sides and top of the stone to avoid making any marks off the pellon. Try to "wrap" the stone with pellon so the tape doesn't make contact with the stone. Every adhesive tape leaves some type of residue behind and we want to leave the stone just as we found it.

Determine the outside edges of the carved areas by filling in the outside edges, creating a "frame" for your rubbing. Then begin in the center using the broad, flat surface of the lumber crayon and making gentle strokes. Keep the strokes uniform in pressure to avoid variations in coloring. **Don't forget to step back once or twice to see if you have completely rubbed all areas before removing the pellon!**



Remove your print and put it where it will be protected from sudden showers or gusts of wind while you are in the cemetery. If you rub only the ornamental carving rather than the whole stone, you may want to copy the stone's full inscription for your record. Carry a small notebook, write the information on a page, tear it out and roll it up with your rubbing. Please don't forget to pick up tape and other trash before leaving.

Finishing your rubbing:

When you have returned home, take out your iron, foil, wax paper and ironing board. Set the pellen on the ironing board with the crayon side up, and put foil under the pellen to protect the ironing board. Then put wax paper (waxy side down) on top of the crayon. Iron on a low setting, just high enough to melt the crayon into the fabric. The end result is a very sturdy and frameable rubbing that could last many lifetimes.

Some people proudly display their rubbings of family ancestors or intricate designs by mounting and framing them. Adding a title with the family name and location the rubbing was made in could make it a delightful conversation piece, can be passed on, and also preserves the inscription and condition of a stone that may deteriorate in the future.

