

**Monument Maker Has Unique Career
Has Seen Many Changes In His Profession**
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[Misspellings have been corrected]

Not 200 feet from Prairie Grove cemetery there is a low tin-covered structure with a narrow gauge track leading up to it from the street and a number of large slabs of marble and granite set about under the porch roof. One of the slabs, made of white granite has this inscription on it:

Ernest C. Dorman
Born 1859, Died 19—

This is the tombstone of the proprietor and lone operator of this monument works, made by himself. He is probably the oldest tombstone carver in the state, having entered the business 59 years ago. Prairie Grove cemetery has stones put up as far back as 1834. Mr. Dorman reckons that he has put up four-fifths of them.

Dorman was born in Rutlandshire, England, 78 years ago. When seven he came with his parents to Fayetteville. Mr. Dorman began making tombstones when he was 19 and has been at it ever since. His shop was first at Fayetteville, but in 1886 he moved to Prairie Grove. He has made and put up stones for people over much of northwest Arkansas and part of Oklahoma, riding his buggy in former times on trips that sometimes took several days. He recalls that it took four days to go to St. Paul, over 50 miles away, put up a tombstone and return. Now he can make the trip in a day.

Mr. Dorman has bought marble and granite from Vermont, Minnesota, Missouri, Georgia, Alabama, Oklahoma and several other states besides Arkansas. His tools, of which he has a large assortment, have also come from many states. Incidentally, he showed the writer a letter from a Philadelphia firm which makes tombstone workers' tools, some of which he uses, offering to replace any that might have been lost or damaged in the flood.

Until five years ago he carved all tombstones by chisel and hammer, but now he uses a sand blast, covering the face of the stone with a rubber stencil. "I don't know that it saves much time," he said, "since you have to wait a day or so for the stencil to stick on the stone, and you have to be mighty careful when blasting that none of the smaller pieces come off."

Like all other craftsmen, he is also a philosopher. A conversation with him is interspersed with frequent comments on life. He finds that fashions change in tombstones as in everything else. When he began work, people wanted sandstone a good deal. He helped put up the large sandstone slab with the vertical cannon in it, which is in the center of the National cemetery at Fayetteville. But people began to

think granite and marble were better looking than sandstone and began to use it instead of the latter, in spite of the fact that sandstone lasts much longer. The shapes of stones and the carvings on them are somewhat different from what they have been, the flat horizontal stones being more favored today. Decorations are not in vogue – at least not elaborate ones – and inscriptions are of the simplest kind.

In his shop, which is an old photographer's studio which he once rented out, there is a small room littered with tombstone advertisements, suggesting the shapes and inscriptions that people might want. A book of epitaphs included pieces of four-line verse and scriptural quotations, also lines in Latin and German. Asked if he was ever called upon to inscribe in Latin or German, he replied, "Yes – and in Cherokee. I couldn't read Cherokee any more than rabbit tracks, but I was sent the inscription to put on and a copy of a Tahlequah paper published in Cherokee to get the type from and I put it on." Several times he has inscribed Cherokee epitaphs.

By Clifton Paisley, *Arkansas Gazette*