

The Use of Shaving Cream on Headstones

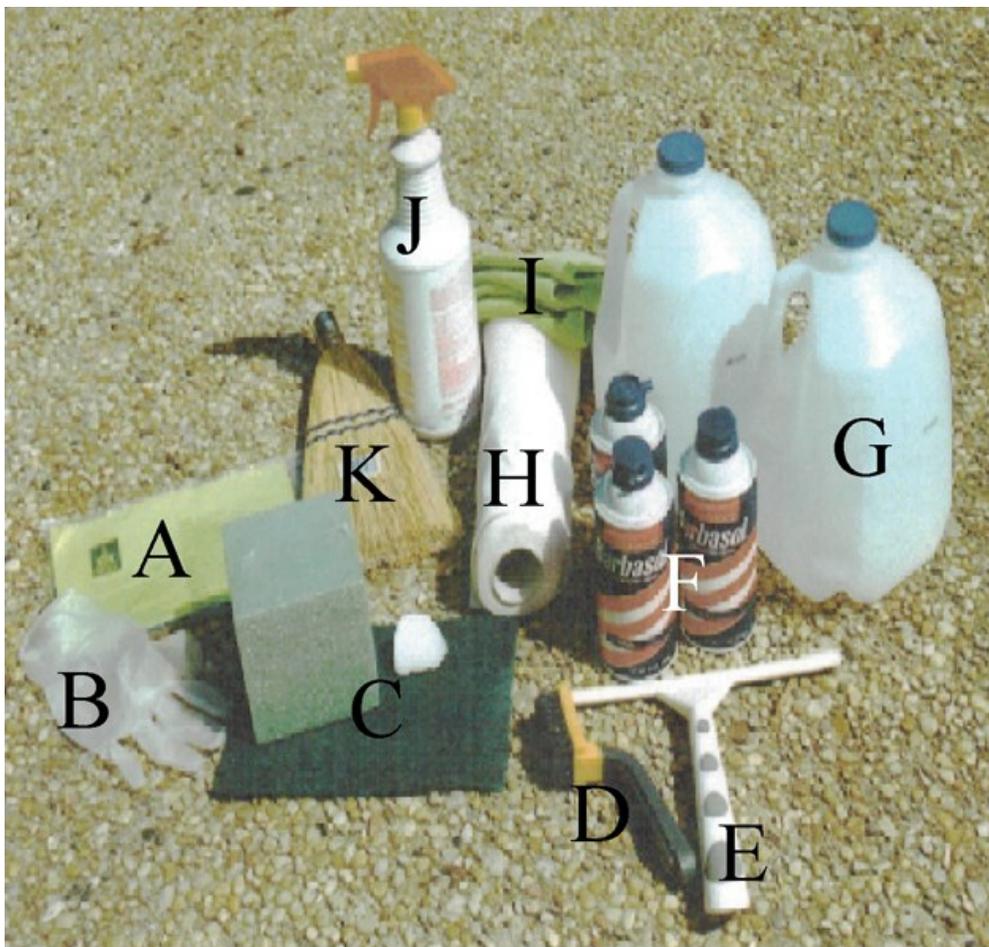
By Shirlee Eddy

Let me begin by saying "the jury is still out on the use of this process".

I have been reading illegible headstones using shaving cream for about 10 years. Several years ago, I was in Massachusetts where my cousin and I were introduced to a family descendant doing research on the same families we were. We were in a cemetery in Salem, Massachusetts and found some family headstones which were no longer readable. My cousin and I had shaving cream in the car, but thought better of bringing it out because the gentleman we were researching with was so intent on preserving headstones and also replacing as many as he could. His family owned a granite company in Colorado and had in fact, just finished a new "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier" to replace the original which was deteriorating.

Imagine our surprise when the gentleman went to his car and came back with shaving cream and we were able to get some very good readings from these early 1800's headstones.

I carry in the trunk of my car at all times, what I call "**My Headstone Reading Kit**".



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| A. Printout of headstone symbols & meanings | G. Gallon jugs of water |
| B. Rubber gloves | H. Paper towels |
| C. Styrofoam | I. Rags |
| D. A small stiff bristle brush (NOT a wire brush) | J. A spray bottle for water |
| E. Squeegee | K. Whisk broom |
| F. Shaving Cream (least expensive brand) | • Camera, Cell Phone, grass clippers, hand rake |

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First, clean the stone. Start with the whisk broom to gently brush away any loose leaves or grass clippings. If the stone has lichens, gently rub the Styrofoam on the stone in a small circular motion. Then use the brush. Now target the bird droppings using water in the spray bottles. The spray bottles allow you to target the specific areas. Then gently use the scrub brush. Rinse as needed with the spray bottle.



If that doesn't produce good results, it's time for the shaving cream. No need to spread it all over the face of the stone, but rather concentrate on the printed part. I use a zig zag motion. Then go over the shaving cream with the squeegee taking off the excess and in nearly all cases, you will be amazed at what has now become very readable

MOST IMPORTANTLY, clean the stone off when you are done using the spray bottle of water, rags and whisk broom, removing as much of the shaving cream as possible.



Shaving creams of years ago did contain harsh chemicals and no doubt would have harmed a headstone especially with repeated use. The shaving creams of today do not harm human skin and contain more inert ingredients. One article I read said acid rain and bird droppings do more harm than shaving cream and I quote from the article "I believe people would agree that recording the stone's inscription for posterity before time and vandals render the stone unreadable, would offset the very small possibility of damaging the stone".

Remember you need only do this process on headstones that are illegible.