How to Get the Most from Cemetery Research

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Two types of records: Data on Stones
Data in Records kept by cemeteries

What do We Find on Gravestones?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Marriage Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth Date (actual or calculated) and</td>
<td>Religious Affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>place</td>
<td>Military Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death Date and place</td>
<td>Membership in Fraternal or Service Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Vocation or Avocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Economic Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage Date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five types of Cemeteries

1. Churchyard Cemeteries adjacent to church
2. Cemeteries owned by churches
3. Government-owned Cemeteries
4. Privately-owned, Non-church Cemeteries
5. Family or Farm Cemeteries

Biggest Misconceptions about Cemeteries:
There are records for all cemeteries
My ancestor has a gravestone
Cemeteries are cared for by local governments
Gravestone Data are Primary Sources
All cemeteries have been catalogued and inventoried

Finding where your ancestor is buried:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obituary</th>
<th>Death Records</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Death Certificate</td>
<td>Family Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Records</td>
<td>Family Records</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where to Find Cemetery Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcriptions (problems: errors and alphabetizing!)</th>
<th>Genealogical Libraries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church records</td>
<td>Private individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Records (deaths)</td>
<td>Actually visiting the cemetery!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finding Cemetery Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plat Maps</th>
<th>Local officials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topographic Maps</td>
<td>Church Officials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Funeral Directors
Local Historical or Genealogical Societies
Local Histories
Local Residents
Inventories

I Still Can’t Find it!
Is it destroyed?
Are none of the burials marked?
Find out where your ancestor had land, and ask current owners
Query with local genealogical society or newspaper
It may not be possible to find it

Describing Cemetery Locations:
Descriptive directions
U. S. Public Land Locations
Latitude-longitude
Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) Coordinates

To Visit a Cemetery, You Need:
Data forms or paper
Pencil
Camera
Natural or Soft Bristled Brush
Water
Trowel or Small Shovel
Probe
Hand or full-length mirror/flashlight
Proper Clothing
Insect Repellent

Cleaning Gravestones
When all else fails….DON'T
First, assess stone’s condition and type
Then, try plain water and a natural-bristle brush
Lichen removal with a wooden stick if the brush doesn’t work
Non-ionic detergents: Vulpex, Orvus, or Photo-Flo
NEVER strong acids or alkali D2
NEVER seal gravestones
NEVER sandblast!!!

DO NOT!
Smear shaving cream or other non-neutral materials on them
Use colored chalk
Remove the stone from the cemetery
Use wire-bristled brushes or chemicals

DO!
Full length mirror to direct sunlight
Plain water and a soft brush
Bag and flashlight or just a strong flashlight
Aluminum foil-covered cardboard

12-inch tube
Gravestone rubbing
Aluminum foil cast

Transcribing Cemeteries
Record ONLY data on the stone. Any other information should go in [ ] or in the “Comments” field if you are using software
Record in “natural order,” not alphabetically
Record data on the stone also
Construct a map for smaller cemeteries, even a rough sketch map

Problems with Transcribed Cemetery Data:
Errors!
Poor Data on burial location/order

Symbols on Gravestones

Grave Marker Materials
- Wooden marker, “rude” stone
- Carved Field Stone
- Concrete
- Slate/Schist
- Sandstone
- Marble
- Granite
- Bronze
- Cast Zinc

Written Records
- Sexton Records (vary in format and quality)
- Funeral Homes
- County Poor Farm
- Church Records

Find A Grave - https://www.findagrave.com/
Largest Online Cemetery Database
Developer was interested in gravesites of celebrities
Many of These May Be Incorrect
A Number of Search Options
Verify!

Unfortunately, information Posted is often from Other Sources

BillionGraves - https://billiongraves.com/
Smaller, but more Accurate—it was developed for genealogy

Find A Grave Compared to BillionGraves
How to Get the Most from Cemetery Research

Further Reading


Association for Gravestone Studies, 278 Main Street, Suite 207, Greenfield, Massachusetts 01301, http://www.gravestonestudies.org (Publishes Markers, a journal of gravestone studies, and the AGS Quarterly; provides the best information on preservation and restoration.)

Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. 2002. Your guide to cemetery research. Betterway Books, Cincinnati, Ohio. (out of print, but used copies can be found)


