

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?

Name	Marriage Place
Birth Date (actual or calculated) and place	Religious Affiliation
Death Date and place	Military Service
Age	Membership in Fraternal or Service Organizations
Relationships	Vocation or Avocation
Marriage Date	Economic Status

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:

Obituary	Death Records
Death Certificate	Family Bible
Church Records	Family Records

Where to Find Cemetery Data

Transcriptions (problems: errors and alphabetizing!)	Genealogical Libraries
Church records	Private individuals
Government Records (deaths)	Actually visiting the cemetery!

Finding Cemetery Information

Plat Maps	Local officials
Topographic Maps	Church Officials

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 wire-bristled brushes or chemicals

Use colored chalk
Remove the stone from the cemetery

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

A Number of Search Options

Unfortunately, information Posted is

often from Other Sources

Many of These May Be Incorrect

Often Difficult to Correct

Verify!

BillionGraves - <https://billiongraves.com/>

Smaller, but more Accurate—it was developed for genealogy

Find A Grave Compared to BillionGraves

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Further Reading

Anson-Cartwright, Tamara. 1998. *Landscapes of Memories: A guide for conserving historic cemeteries, repairing tombstones*. Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, Ontario, Toronto, Canada.

<http://www.mtc.gov.on.ca/en/cemeteries/Landscape%20of%20Memories.pdf>

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)

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Hansen, Holly T., James L. Tanner, and Arlene H. Eakle. 2016. *Cemetery and Sexton Records: A Research Guide*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. 169pp.

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