

Cemetery Research

Building and Researching Your Family Tree, a Twelve Part Series

Prepared by Hannah Kubacak, Bill Buckner, & Ron Dearth

Genealogical Value

Information found in cemeteries includes:

Vital dates

Birth and death dates are standard on headstones. Some may list only years rather than exact dates. Double headstones shared by married couples may include their wedding anniversary.

Relationships

Headstones may name relatives and relationships. The most common example of this is double headstones shared by a married couple. Other notations seen include statements such as "Child of [Parents Name]." Family members are also commonly buried near one another. Look for other names within the same cemetery to identify potential relationships.

Nicknames

Nicknames are often included on headstones. These may be familial terms such as a grandparent name (ex: "Papa Hank") or names that were more commonly used (ex: Cyndy instead of Cynthia). Make a note of name alternatives as you find them. Use both given names and nicknames in future record searches.

Occupations

Imagery and inscriptions found on burial markers can provide clues about a person's occupation, interests, hobbies, etc.

Photographs

Some burial markers have an inlaid photograph plaque.

Where to Find Clues for Burial Information

- Cemetery Records
 - Sexton
 - Pavilion/Kiosk
 - Affiliated church/organization
- Death Certificate
- Funeral Home
- Obituary
- Necrology
- Military Headstone Application
- Burial location of spouse or other family members
- Occupational / Organization cemetery plots
- Cemetery Inventory
 - Print
 - Online

Cemetery Records vs. Cemetery Inventory

Cemetery Record	Cemetery Inventory
A record is any information created and maintained about burials. Records are often created by the cemetery administrators (church, association, county, or other). Unfortunately, burial records are not available for all cemeteries.	An inventory records information collected from headstones or markers. Only information that is visible at the time of the inventory's creation is recorded. Unfortunately, any burials that do not have a legible marker will not be identified in an inventory.

Symbolism and Iconography

The imagery found on headstones often has meaning that can lead to further insight about the life of the deceased. There are many resources for deciphering cemetery symbols.

- *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography* by Keister, Douglas
- *The Family Tree Cemetery Field Guide: How to Find, Record, & Preserve Your Ancestors' Graves* by Joy Neighbors

Cenotaph

A cenotaph is a monument memorializing a person who is buried elsewhere. These are often created for an individual who died in war or were cremated. This differs from a war memorial which is a monument (typically wall or pillar) which lists many names.

Research Strategies

- Use a variety of resources in your research. Never rely on one type of record.
- Do not rely on online resources only. Look at print and field records also.
- The county of death and the county of burial are not necessarily the same place.
- Remember the difference between primary and secondary sources. Always look for the original.
- Look at multiple cemetery inventories when available. Something that was missed in one may be visible in another.

Genealogy Links

Cemetery Inventories

Internment www.internment.net

Billion Graves www.billiongraves.com

Find-A-Grave www.findagrave.com

Newspapers

Elephind www.elephind.com

Newspapers.com (\$ or FREE with WMCL library card) www.newspapers.com

Portal to Texas History texashistory.unt.edu

Chronicling America chroniclingamerica.loc.gov

Other

National Cemetery Symbols www.cem.va.gov/cem/hmm/emblesms.asp