

It's NOT about Zombies: Doing Cemetery Research



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Riverside County, Ca
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GOING TO THE CEMETERY? HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR WHAT TO TAKE, WHAT TO DO (before, during, and after), AND WHAT TO PLAN FOR

I. BEFORE THE TRIP

- A. Things to consider
 - 1. The dates & length of time for the trip
 - 2. The places you plan to visit (then reduce your expectations significantly!)
 - 3. Weather probabilities and possibilities
- B. People to contact
 - 1. Genealogy libraries/librarians
 - 2. Historical society personnel
 - 3. Cemetery sextons
 - 4. Church officials
 - 6. Local Family History Centers
- C. Things to pack
 - 1. Papers and records
 - a. pedigree charts & family group sheets
 - b. copies (not originals) of death records
 - c. Letters (esp. copies of correspondence with on-site personnel, etc.)
 - d. lots of paper, pens/pencils, highlighters
 - 2. Technological equipment
 - a. cameras (digital/cell phone & other backup)
 - b. audio recorder
 - c. video/digital recorder
 - d. walkie-talkies
 - e. netbook or laptop computer, flash drives, extra discs, cables, ?
 - f. tablet or pocket computer
 - g. cell phone
 - h. GPS
 - 3. Additional equipment for graveyard excursions
 - a. long sleeved shirt(s) & trousers
 - b. boots, high socks
 - c. garden & rubber gloves
 - d. insect repellent & sunscreen
 - e. old towels

Expect ground to be uneven and perhaps to have "sunken spots" - walk carefully, take a walking stick (good for moving snakes out of your path), and avoid searching at dusk or after dark (best idea: search with a buddy, a cell phone, and a first aid kit - thorns can cause nasty scratches)

} smart phone or i-phone/i-pad

When taking photos, make your first shot of the Cemetery entrance and sign with its name and established date

- f. small scissors (don't put in your carry-on!)
- g. umbrella
- h. bottled water (with sprayer attachment)
- i. soft brush
- j. small reflective mirror or cookie sheet
- k. corn starch or powder (without additives) to bring out hard-to-read engraving
- l. spiral notebook & pencils to diagram stone placement
- m. copy of genealogy on handheld device
- n. cheap foil and stiff brush

- II. ON-SITE VISITS (be sure to find out in advance about any restrictions)
- A. Closures
 - B. Check the rules in advance (and FOLLOW THEM)
 1. No dogs (I like to take my pup with me)
 2. No photographs (yup, some cemeteries have restrictions)
 3. No tombstone rubbing
 4. No flowers to be left on graves
 5. ???
 - C. Recognize that some cemeteries are on private property & require permission to enter or take photographs
 - D. Locate (in advance) the graveyards you wish to visit (contact organizations listed above for assistance)
 - E. BE RESPECTFUL!
 1. If a funeral is in process, postpone your wanderings anywhere in the vicinity.
 2. If a bereaved is visiting a grave, avoid interfering and wait to access that area
 - F. Do not expect on-site cemetery personnel to be available to help you (you aren't their main concern), but do ask for grave locations in advance of walking all over a mile-square cemetery (note: not all graves have markers and it's nice to know that in advance!)
 1. Some will open their files to you, draw you maps, or even escort you to the gravesite
 2. Some will not allow you access to more than one grave in a single visit
 3. Some will restrict all records from you

Internal Summary/Hints:

1. Plan to purchase film, extra batteries, extra tapes, & other misc. items on arrival.
2. Make appointments & arrange stops in an order that culminates in cemetery visits (don't start at the cemetery, if possible).
3. Clean up after yourself (there may not be trash cans on site so plan to take any empty water bottles, battery packaging, snack wrappers, etc. out with you)
4. Above all: be courteous! If there are restrictions, do not argue. Engage in conversation (ask about the history of the cemetery, mention how devoted to the town your ancestor was, talk about the pioneers of the area . . . if you become an interested "friend," more sextons and other personnel may warm up to your cause).



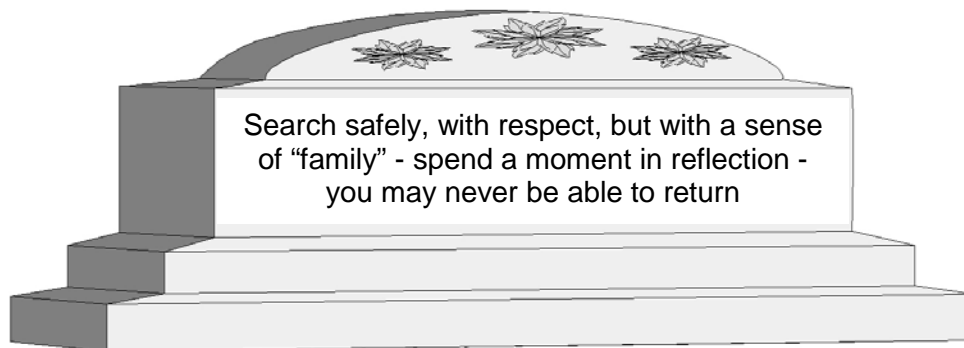
III. AFTER THE TRIP

- A. Organize/transcribe notes
- B. File findings
- C. Develop film and/or catalog photos or transfer photos to your computer
- D. Send thank you notes and promised reports to the contacts you made
- E. Make a list of the things you want to accomplish on your next visit to the area

Lessons engraven in stone

- Spelling doesn't count (the way a name is spelled on a tombstone may not be the way the deceased spelled it)
- Stones are worth a second look (sometimes the information you want is hidden just under the grass at the bottom of the stone or is on a separate plaque or the back-side of the marker)
- Headstones reveal more than names and dates (DAR, Masons, GAR, and other affiliations are often noted on the stones or separate markers - these give hints for other places to look for ancestral information)
- Flowers or mementoes left behind by others may indicate a living relative (a cousin, perhaps) who is interested in your family research
- Check the local history plaques that may be in the cemetery - often they are at the entrance, but sometimes they can be found throughout the grounds (they tell about the history of the area and this was, then, your ancestors' history as well)
- Some markers are memorials and do not indicate the location of a grave
- Not all graves have headstones
- Stones can be placed (or replaced) long after death - consider putting up memorials for ancestors whose graves are unmarked (still record the location of the grave, if you can)
- People are not always buried near where they lived (or died)
- Headstones are often pre-engraved (1912 - 19?? for someone who died in 2001) - check with cemetery officials to find out if the body is actually there and the stone just hasn't been updated
- Relationships can be revealed by studying headstones and the people nearby . . . but
- A body in your ancestor's plot may have no relationship - sometimes plots were shared (with or without exchange of money)
- Do not assume ANYTHING based on a headstone

Cemetery research can bring our deceased ancestors "to life" in our minds and hearts - your family stood in those same places for the celebration of the life of your relative. You are standing on hallowed ground!



Short list of Suggested Readings:

Carlberg, Nancy Ellen. *Cemetery Research*. Anaheim, CA: Carlberg Press, 1782 Beacon Ave., 92804; 2000.

Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. *Your Guide to Cemetery Research*. Cincinnati, OH: Betterway Books, 2002.

Keister, Douglas. *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2004.

Legacy Quick Guide: Cemetery Research. <http://www.legacyfamilytreestore.com/ProductDetails.asp?ProductCode=QDCEMETERY>

Underhill, Tom. *Dead Men Tell no Tales: How to Record Your Family's Oral History*. Placentia, CA: Creative Continuum, 2002.

On-line Cemetery Education:

http://www.ancestry.com/wiki/index.php?title=Cemetery_Records

http://familyresearchlibrary.com/pubs/cemetery_research_guide.pdf

<https://familysearch.org/learningcenter/results.html?q=Cemeteries>

<https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Special:Search?fulltext=true&search=Cemeteries&searchbutton=Search>

http://genealogy.about.com/od/cemetery_records/

Powell, Dae. <http://www.shoestringgenealogy.com/article/Cemetery.htm>

On-line Searching:

<http://billiongraves.com/>

<http://www.findagrave.com/>

<http://www.interment.net/>

Other Helps:

American Automobile Association (AAA; in Calif.: Auto Club of So. Calif.)

Books on the history of the states, counties, and cities you are interested in.

Chamber of Commerce in the cities you will be visiting.

Forms to help in your quest: <http://chicora.org/cemetery-forms.html>

Gravestone symbolism: <http://www.graveaddiction.com/symbol.html>

Gravestone symbols: http://washtenawhistory.org/images/tombstone_symbols_v8.pdf

Use a walker's "mapping" FREE software on your smart phone to determine where you have been (and need to go). Examples:

My Tracks

Run Keeper

Map My Walk



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