



# Using U.S. Cemetery Records to Fill in Gaps on Your Family Tree

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## OBJECTIVES

- Summarize the history and background of cemeteries and cemetery records in the United States
- Describe the genealogical value of cemetery records
- Review methods of finding cemetery records
- Show how to use cemetery records in your research
- Present a case study using cemetery and related records

## HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

### Types of Cemeteries

<b>Church cemeteries or graveyards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• On church property</li><li>• Governed by church leaders</li><li>• Religious sanctuary</li></ul>
<b>Family cemeteries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Private property</li><li>• Served one or a few related families</li><li>• Sheltered area</li></ul>
<b>City cemeteries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public property</li><li>• Great variety</li><li>• Many unrelated people from various backgrounds</li></ul>
<b>Military cemeteries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Post Cemeteries<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Those who died in a particular battle or war</li><li>• Often disinterred from original burial place and reburied there</li></ul></li><li>• National Cemeteries<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Federally operated</li><li>• Veterans, military personnel, spouses, minor children</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>Memorial parks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Private commercial business property</li><li>• Non-denominational</li><li>• Open areas, trails, benches</li><li>• Flat headstones</li></ul>

## Types of burial sites

<b>Grave</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Underground</li><li>• Typically holds a casket or coffin</li></ul>
<b>Crypt</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Underground, usually under a church</li><li>• Room to hold remains of the deceased</li></ul>
<b>Mausoleum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Above-ground building to house remains</li><li>• May include a chapel</li></ul>
<b>Tomb</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enclosure for remains</li><li>• Above or below ground</li></ul>
<b>Vault</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Metal or concrete enclosure</li><li>• Inside grave to protect casket</li></ul>
<b>Drawer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Above ground</li><li>• Inside wall or mausoleum</li></ul>
<b>Columbarium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Above ground</li><li>• Wall with spaces for urns and cremated remains</li></ul>

## GENEALOGICAL VALUE

### Types of cemetery records and information they may contain

<b>Monuments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Headstone – at head of grave, with inscription</li><li>• Footstone – at foot of grave, some have short inscriptions</li><li>• Cairn – distinctive pile of rocks to mark a place</li><li>• Megalith – large rock to mark a place</li><li>• Ledger – large flat stone covering entire burial plot</li><li>• Box – above-ground coffin, usually stone</li><li>• Cenotaph – memorial for those buried elsewhere</li></ul>
<b>Applications for military headstones</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name</li><li>• Service information</li><li>• Birth and death dates</li><li>• Religion</li><li>• Cemetery</li><li>• Applicant (usually a family member) information and signature</li></ul>
<b>Interment cards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name</li><li>• Birth and death dates</li><li>• Location of grave</li><li>• Funeral director</li><li>• Place of birth</li><li>• Marital status</li><li>• Source of information</li></ul>

<b>Burial ledgers or cemetery books</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name</li> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Race</li> <li>• Date and place of burial</li> <li>• Undertaker</li> <li>• Permit number</li> <li>• Burial costs</li> <li>• Cause of death</li> <li>• Date and place of birth</li> <li>• Parents' names</li> <li>• Other information</li> </ul>
<b>Deeds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of burial plot</li> <li>• Location of plot</li> <li>• Date of purchase</li> <li>• Transfers of plot ownership after first purchase</li> </ul>
<b>Permits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cemetery name</li> <li>• Date of permit</li> <li>• Name of person to be buried</li> <li>• Location of grave</li> <li>• Other details</li> </ul>
<b>Record of funerals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name of deceased</li> <li>• Dated of funeral</li> <li>• Date and place of birth</li> <li>• Parents' names and places of birth</li> <li>• Funeral and burial costs</li> <li>• Residence</li> <li>• Clergyman</li> <li>• Physician</li> <li>• Location of burial plot</li> <li>• Date, time, and location of funeral</li> </ul>

### Other pertinent record types

<b>Obituaries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newspaper articles giving details about deceased persons and their families</li> </ul>
<b>Death certificates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name</li> <li>• Death date and place</li> <li>• Cause of death</li> <li>• Attending physician</li> <li>• Length of last illness or time of last injury</li> <li>• Date and place of birth</li> <li>• Occupation</li> <li>• Parents' names and places of birth</li> <li>• Informant's name and address</li> <li>• Cemetery name and location</li> <li>• Funeral home or undertaker</li> </ul>

<b>Census records</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name</li> <li>• Household members</li> <li>• Residence</li> <li>• Approximate age</li> <li>• Occupation</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Immigration and naturalization</li> <li>• Number of children</li> <li>• Parents' birthplaces</li> <li>• Other information</li> </ul>
<b>Marriage records</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name of bride and groom</li> <li>• Marriage date and place</li> <li>• Age of bride and groom</li> <li>• Residence of bride and groom</li> <li>• Parents of bride and groom</li> <li>• Occupations of bride and groom</li> <li>• Number of marriage for each party</li> <li>• Officiator</li> <li>• Witnesses</li> </ul>

## FINDING CEMETERY RECORDS

**FindAGrave.com** | <https://findagrave.com>

- Photographs of headstones
- Organized by cemetery
- Searchable by name or cemetery
- User-submitted memorials

**BillionGraves.com** | <https://billiongraves.com>

- Photographs of headstones
- GPS Coordinates of gravesites
- Nearby graves
- Searchable by name or cemetery

**Interment.net** | <https://interment.net>

- Transcriptions of headstones from around the world
- Burial records from government agencies, churches, genealogical, and historical groups
- Submissions are not editable except by submitter

**NamesInStone.com** | <https://namesinstone.com>

- Cemetery records
- Interactive maps
- Searchable by name

**Ancestry.com** | <https://ancestry.com>

- Hundreds of collections of cemetery and related records
- Search “Card Catalog” for “U.S.” and “Cemetery”
- Death registers, death certificates, wills and probate records, obituaries, cemetery records, etc.

**FamilySearch.org** | <https://familysearch.org>

- FamilySearch Research Wiki
  - Select “Cemeteries” for record type under name of city, county, and state
  - Select cemetery records under “Online Resources”
- FamilySearch Catalog
  - Search under name of city, county, and state with keyword, “Cemetery”
  - Try other keywords like funeral, death, burial, and obituary

## USING CEMETERY RECORDS

- **Identify the name of the cemetery where your ancestor was buried.** This information can be found at online websites (see above), on death certificates, in newspaper obituaries, and on funeral programs.
- **Discover where the cemetery is/was located.** You can find this on online maps, in county histories, gazetteers, atlases, and on local websites.
- **Find cemetery records.** Check the card catalog at FamilySearch and Ancestry, contact cemetery offices and local historical or genealogical societies.
- **Visit the cemetery, if possible, to extract more evidence.** Many cemeteries have a sexton’s office where staff can assist you in finding graves for your ancestors. Identify those buried next to your family members.
- **Compile evidence from *all* extant cemetery and death records for time and place.** The more information you find, the better the picture of your ancestor’s life you can see.
- **Compare evidence to that in other pertinent records.** You may find conflicting evidence on many different records. Seek to discover which evidence is the most reliable.
- **Reconcile conflicting data.** If new evidence comes to light in the future, don’t be afraid to change your conclusion.