

USING CEMETERIES TO CONDUCT GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

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Cemeteries often contain important and useful information about our ancestors, and therefore should be considered a valuable resource when conducting genealogical research. Information that may be obtained through cemetery documents and tombstones include the dates and places where an ancestor was born and died, where they are buried, and any family members that they may be buried near. Before conducting cemetery research, it is useful to understand the various types of cemeteries and cemetery records.

Sexton Records

A sexton is the caretaker of a cemetery. This is the person who typically oversees the care and maintenance of the cemetery, and maintains records of those who are buried within the cemetery. These records are referred to as sexton records.

Information found on sexton records vary between towns, but often will contain the name of the deceased person (a woman's maiden name may or may not be listed), date of burial, date and cause of death and place of death. Other information that may be contained on these records include the deceased's former residence, the plot's owner, military affiliation, and more.

Sexton records can be obtained through the cemetery's sexton. Depending on the town, sextons may be listed in the yellow pages or information about how to contact the sexton may be posted at the cemetery. In rural locations, it may be possibly to locate the sexton by asking town residents.

Tombstones

Tombstones may provide important information, such as birth and death dates, a maiden name, name of a spouse or parents, and military involvement. The placement of the tombstone is also important to be aware of. Nearby stones may provide the burial location of other ancestors, or the names of ancestors not previously known.

Burial locations may be located on death certificates, which can be found either online, or in town or state archives.

Types of Cemeteries

Public Cemeteries: Cemeteries that are owned & maintained by the town they are located in. Burial records can often be located with the cemetery sexton or town clerk.

Family cemeteries: Cemeteries that are privately owned. Burial records for family cemeteries can be difficult to locate, but sometimes may be kept at a local historical society or library.

Church cemeteries: Cemeteries that are owned and maintained by a church. Ministers often take burial records when they move on, making the records difficult to locate. However, they may be located at the church or a local university.

National Cemeteries: Cemeteries that are maintained by either The US Department of Veteran Affairs or The Department of the Army and the National Park. These cemeteries house the final resting place for veterans and their spouses, and other US military personnel. Burial locations can be obtained at the US Department of Veteran Affairs' website.

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