

The Dead & The Dying : Cemeteries & Funeral Home Research

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Records of Death

- Death Certificates
- Burial Permits
- City Directories
- Coroner's & Medical Examiners Records
- City Interments of Paupers
- Death Registers
- Mortality Schedules (federal census)
- State Censuses
- Military Records (pensions & service records)
- Voter Registrations
- Wills & Probate
- Family Files (letters, photos, etc.)
- Family Bibles & Registers
- Funeral Homes
- Cemeteries

Funeral Home Records

- *Funeral Home records are private business records, and they have the right to restrict access.*
- Information varies from business to business.
- May include copies of the death certificate, obituary, will, names of family, costs of the funeral, etc.
- Check online at www.funeralnet.com.
- Ask about **Tombstone Carver or Monument Maker's** records for your locality.

Cemeteries

- Know last place of residence and approximate date of death.
- Know ancestor's religious preference
- www.usgenweb.org for cemetery indexes
- Call the County or Town Historian for a local cemetery index book look-up.
- Check church records/minutes for funerals

Online Cemetery Sources

- www.headstonehunter.com
- www.savinggraves.com
- www.cyndislist.com
- www.findagrave.com
- www.internment.net
- www.cemetery.org/index.html

Headstone Iconography

- The meaning of cemetery symbols change over time. (Swastikas once represented high spirituality.)
- Pineapple/Pine Tree = immortality
- Calla Lily = majestic beauty or marriage
- Doors = hope and opportunity
- Wheels = endless force of divine power
- Lamb = innocence, used for children
- Vacant Chair = death of a child
- Broken Column = life cut short

Recording Headstones

- Notebook – always transcribe & source location
- Garden shears to trim tall grass
- Soft broom and/or old toothbrush
- Sprayer Water Bottle
- White Chalk (not colored!) - shows up better
- Camera & extra batteries
- Reflective screen – cardboard & aluminum foil work!
- Fabric interfacing (medium-weight, non-fusible) and giant crayons or rubbing wax & masking tape

Headstone Do's and Don'ts

- DO ask permission before rubbing
- DO check that the headstone is strong enough to touch, if in doubt, DON'T!
- DO get the lot & space number and a map or make detailed directions to this stone & cemetery.
- DON'T use chemical cleaners, shaving cream, vinegar, talcum, flour, or anything but distilled water!
- DON'T try and lift a fallen stone.
- DON'T use any chalk, it scratches.

Photography Tips

- Overcast days are best!
- Digital cameras are worth the money.
- Take many shots with and without the flash.
- Take some shots before cleaning the stone or wetting it.
- Take a shot from the road to get a sense of the placement of the stone.
- Photograph at eye-level, squat or sit down.

Bibliography & Websites

- Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. *Your Guide to Cemetery Research*. Betterway Books: Cincinnati, OH (2002).
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- Kiester, Douglas. *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*. Smith Publishers: Salt Lake City, UT (2004).
- National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections: Catalog of over 72,000 manuscript collections from thousands of collections; includes manuscript holdings such as family bibles, letters, diaries, etc., www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc/.