

Have You Worked Cemetery Records?

If you have never really “worked” cemetery records, you have almost surely missed excellent genealogical information. These records can solve many family mysteries. You can find information there that is not on any vital record. The following will give you an idea of what information you can find in cemetery records.

It is important to stress that cemetery records are not the same as death certificates. These are the actual records of a cemetery where one or more of your ancestors are known to be (or believed to be) buried. These records often help fill in blanks on your family tree and reveal spaces that you did not even know existed.

You will most often find cemetery records at the cemetery office, though there are exceptions often depending on whether the cemetery is still active, the ownership of the cemetery and the age of the cemetery.

The following outlines the information you will likely find in cemetery records.

Who is in the Plot?: A plot can include one or more spaces within it.. Cemetery records tell you who is in each space in the plot, and usually the date they were placed there. Importantly, these records inform if there are people in any of the spaces who do not have headstones. In other words, you can learn the burial location of a relative for whom there is no physical marker. It is not uncommon to learn of children born to a family who crossed over young, who you never knew about in the first place. These records can also alert you to the presence of unused spaces in the plot

Who Bought the Plot?: This tells you who was in charge of making those decisions in the family at the time the plot was purchased. It may also reveal relationships between the parties in the plot. It also opens for you a line of descent to trace to who may own (or be able to claim legal ownership through descent) the plots today, especially if there are still open spaces that current family members may want to use.

When Was the Plot Purchased?: Knowing when the plot was purchased can let you compare that date to other dates in your family history to give you an idea of why the plots were purchased when they were. When a death happened in a family, it was common to buy more space than for that one person, so loved ones could be buried with the initial person. But, births and marriages also occasioned the purchasing of cemetery plots, so all of the needs of the family in the future could be taken care of before those things needed to be completed in difficult times.

Who is the Current Owner of the Plot?: If the family has owned the plot for many generations, you may find a new relative, or a new line of your family. It will also give you an insight to family dynamics in the past and present.

Which Cemetery’s Records Should I “Work”?: It goes without saying that any cemetery that you know has members of the family you are researching are buried should be considered for working. But when the burial of a member of the family is unknown it might be even more profitable to make inquiries at all of the local cemeteries that are at all likely. They might provide the most valuable information.