

CSI: CEMETERY SEARCH AND INVESTIGATION

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History of Cemeteries

- The term “cemetery” didn’t enter the lexicon until the start of rural or garden cemeteries. Before then they were graveyard, or burial grounds
- The first “garden cemetery” opened in Paris in 1804. Père Lachaise cemetery forever changed the way the dead would be buried
- “Undertakers” offered themselves up as an alternative to families ‘undertaking’ the task of preparing their loved one for burial. The need grew during the Civil War where embalming became necessary for transferring bodies back home

Types of Cemeteries

National Cemeteries

- Burials occur in chronological order based on date of death or reinterment (reflected on headstone)
- Proof of military service of the deceased or family member is frequently mandatory including: name, rank, branch and state of service
- Date of birth (if known) is available for most burials circa WWII



Public Cemeteries

- Municipal cemeteries are examples of public cemeteries. Most are still active and maintained with collected tax dollars
- Records are the responsibility of the Sexton who is appointed by a government administrator like a county official or town mayor.
- Records typically include date of interment/death, age, next of kin and cause of death

Private cemeteries

- Private cemeteries are run by a governing board/trustees



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- The cemetery sold lots as property owned by the purchaser. These sales are frequently recorded by the Recorder of Deed's office
- "Perpetual Care" or "Endowed Care" was available for families who wanted to pay upfront for maintenance and upkeep for the purchased lot

Church Cemeteries

- Records can kept on the parish, regional synod or diocese level
- Will include date of burial/or last rights, age and person who paid for the burial
- Catholic Cemeteries (in my experience) can be difficult for genealogists. Searching for church records first may help provide the needed information.

Other Types of Cemeteries

- Old Soldiers and Sailors Homes
 - These homes were run at either the state or federal level. If a cemetery was attached to the grounds, records should exist providing death and burial details
- Mental Health Facilities
 - Many of these hospitals had their own cemeteries. Records may exist at the facility, the board of health or the county circuit court
- County Poor Farms
 - Most counties had homes to take care of the elderly and indigent. Some had their own cemetery to bury the dead. Check county histories and local newspapers for additional information
 - If the poor farm did not have its own cemetery, the local cemetery may have a 'paupers' section for burying the poor

Jewish Cemeteries

- Jewish tradition takes burial very seriously. They have specific rules and restrictions for how a body can be handled.
- Records usually include dates of birth and death, date of interment, spouse's name and, occasionally, children's names.
- Dates are often in the Hebrew calendar-www.hebcal.com/converter
- www.jewishgen.org/databases/cemetery/
- Int'l Jewish Cemetery Project: www.iajgsjewishcemeteryproject.org



Epidemics/Pandemics

- Epidemics like the Variola (Smallpox) outbreak during the Civil War (1863-1865) killed millions of women and children; The Spanish Influenza during WWI killed millions worldwide, but don't just look for Spanish Flu as the cause of death, many died from complications like pneumonia
- List of worldwide epidemics
www.eogen.com/Epidemics
- Historic Deaths and illnesses:
www.ldpierce.com/forms3pdf/illnessdisease.pdf

Disasters/Tragedies

- Check with the cemetery to see if they have a specific burial section for the deceased or a file of names involved in the incident
- Look through newspapers for obit announcements for names of undertakers who were responsible for handling the remains and see if records still exist. Also progress forward and look for hearings and investigations
- Contact the Coroner's office in that county for copies of the inquest records



Cemetery Records

- Ledger books
 - Recorded chronologically based on the date of interment. Typically will include a map of the cemetery by section
 - Include age, sex, place of death, cause of death, next of kin
 - May include notes on cemetery transfers, stone replacements etc...
- Cemetery readings
 - Groups walk a cemetery and transcribe the visible/legible stones
 - Do not include missing stones or unmarked graves
 - Includes only headstone information

Funeral Home Records

- All records pertaining to the care and burial of the deceased



- Date and cause of death
- Place of burial
- Date of birth (occasionally)
- Person requesting services (paying funeral bill)
- Records do not always include additional genealogical information like parents or place of birth

County/State Records

- Death Certificates
 - Death certificates vary by state and time period. Illinois did not record deaths on the county until the fall of 1877
- Death Registers
 - Different information than death certificate
 - Will include date of death, cause of death/ length of illness, age, sex, burial location, undertaker, attending physician
- Burial/Transfer Permits
 - Certificates filed in the Clerk' office in both the county where the death occurred and the county where the remains were shipped
 - Certificates vary widely and may not have genealogical data
 - Bodies were shipped to either an undertaker who conducted the funeral or a cemetery official for immediate burial. Each was required to sign off on the delivery and file the paperwork with the county.

Coroner's Inquests

- Some coroner's filed separate death certificates that are not always filed with county death certificates
- Coroner's records will include:
 - Cause of death and personal affects found on the body
 - Next of kin, legal residence



- List of jurors/ verdict
- Coroner's Inquest juries are appointed by the county court. Juries can be appointed to serve one inquest or quarterly.
- Modern inquests may have eyewitness testimony attached

Funeral and Mass Cards

- Cards are usually produced by the undertaker
 - Include date of birth, date of death, age and occasionally their spouse
 - Cemetery name with section and grave location frequently included

City Directories

- City Directories are a great resource for finding businesses associated with the funeral industry in the 19th and 20th centuries.
 - Benevolent societies/secret societies/insurance companies
 - Casket manufacturers and monument dealers
 - Cemeteries and churches
 - Funeral directors/undertakers/morticians

Cemeteries Online: National

- www.findagrave.com
- www.interment.net
- www.billiongraves.com
- Cemetery Junction: www.daddezio.com/cemetery
- <http://www.deathindexes.com/cemeteries.html>
- Veteran's Grave Locator: <http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov>

Cemeteries Online: State and Local:

- Illinois Ancestors Tombstone Project: <http://illinoisancestors.org/cemphotos/main.php>
- Graveyards of Illinois: <http://graveyards.com/>

- Illinois State Genealogical Society Cemetery Project: http://ilgensoc.org/cstm_cemeteryIndex.php
- Aurora Illinois Cemeteries: <http://www.auroracemeteries.com/>
- Will County Cemeteries: <http://usgwarchives.net/il/will/willcem.htm>

Cemeteries Online: Other States:

- San Francisco Colma Cemetery Index: www.sfgenealogy.com/php/cemetery/cemeteryindex.php
- Lincoln Lancaster County Cemetery List: www.llcgs.net/getCemlist.php
- Orange County California Cemetery name index: www.occemeterydistrict.com
- NY City Marble Cemetery: www.nycmc.org/intermentvaults.html

Cemetery Blogs:

- Association of Graveyard Rabbits: www.thegraveyardrabbit.com
- Cemetery Explorers: <http://cemeteryexplorers.blogspot.com>
- Escape to the Silent Cities: www.escapetothsilentcities.blogspot.com
- Under Every Stone: <http://undereverystone.blogspot.com>
- Eastman's Online Genealogical Newsletter: www.eogn.com
- <http://callmetaphy.blogspot.com>

Cemetery Books:

- Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. *Your Guide to Cemetery Research*. Cincinnati, Oh. Better Way Books. 2005.
- Harris, Mark. *Grave Matters: journey through the modern funeral industry to a natural way of burial*. New York. Scribner. 2007.
- Johnson, Marilyn. *The Dead Beat: lost souls, lucky stiffs, and the perverse pleasures of obituaries*. New York. Harper Collins. 2006
- Keister, Douglas. *Stories in Stone: a field guide to cemetery symbolism and iconography*. Salt Lake City. Gibbs Smith. 2004.
- Yalom, Marilyn. *The American Resting Place: four hundred years of history through our cemeteries and burial grounds*. Boston. Houghton Mifflin. 2008.

