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

National Cemeteries

- Burials occur in chronological order based on date of interment (unless you are going into a spouse's lot or you have a designated spot)

- 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 included for most burials starting with 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

- 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 pre-pay for maintenance and upkeep for the purchased lot

- Historic Map of Graceland Cemetery http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/10442.html

Church Cemeteries

- Records can be kept on the parish, regional or national level

- Will include date of burial/or last rights, age and person who paid for the burial

- Churches often have other records on the individual/family. Be sure to ask about other records.

- Chicago Archdiocese Catholic Cemetery search index www.catholiccemeterieschicago.org/Burial/Access

Jewish Cemeteries

- Jewish tradition has 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

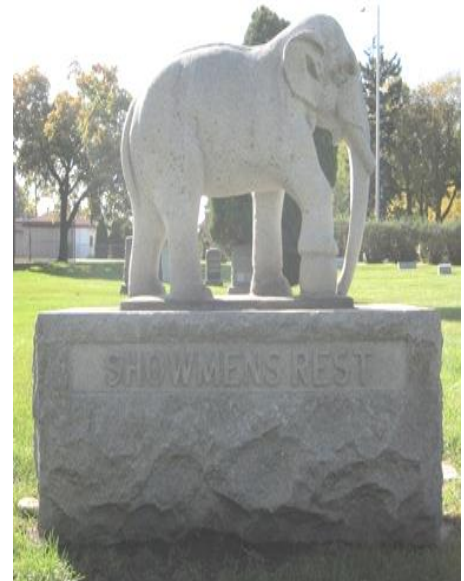- Int'l Jewish Cemetery Project: www.iajgsjewishcemeteryproject.org

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

- By the late 19th Century, most counties had homes to take care of the elderly /indigent. Some had their own cemetery to bury the dead. If the poor farm did not have its own cemetery, the local cemetery may have a pauper's section for burying the poor.

- Check county histories and local newspapers for additional information

- Contact the county/township assessor's office- ask for *Overseer of the Poor* records.

Epidemics/Pandemics

- Do multiple family members have same date of death?

- 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, bronchitis etc.

- List of worldwide epidemics
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_epidemics

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

- Look for lawsuits, 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

- Perpetual Care books and index files

  - 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 request deaths on the county level until November 1,1877. It was not required until 1914.

- 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

    - Permits vary widely & may not have genealogy 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/Medical Examiner Inquests

- Coroner's had the authority to file their own death certificates that are not always interfiled 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 include, autopsy & toxicology reports and eyewitness testimony

Cemeteries Online: National

- www.billiongraves.com

- Cemetery Junction: www.daddezio.com/cemetery

- Death Indexes www.deathindexes.com/cemeteries.html

- Find a Grave www.findagrave.com

- Internment.net www.interment.net

- Veteran's Grave Locator: http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov

- UK National records index Deceased Online www.deceasedonline.com

- Project Ancestry: burials in Slovenia, Austria and Italy www.projectancestry.com/cemetery-grave-websites

Illinois Cemeteries Online: State and Local:

- Cook County Cemeteries https://chicagoandcookcountycemeteries.com

- Illinois State Genealogical Society Cemetery Project: http://ilgensoc.org/cstm_cemeteryIndex.php

- Will County Cemeteries: http://usgwarchives.net/il/will/willcem.htm

- Kane County Cemteries http://usgwarchives.net/il/will/willcem.htm

- Illinois Cemeteries https://graveyards.com/graveyards