

8 Keys to Cemetery Success

- 1 SET GOALS.**
Specific goals such as “find Great-grandma’s burial site” will keep you on track, regardless of the fascinating finds and intriguing information you uncover along the way.
- 2 PLAN TRIPS AHEAD OF TIME.**
Which cemeteries are you visiting, which graves, and how do you plan on getting there? Look for an online map of the cemetery. Contact the sexton, courthouse personnel, genealogical society members and anyone else you want to speak with during your trip to set up appointments.
- 3 PACK A CEMETERY BAG.**
Visit a cemetery prepared with a kit of basic supplies—see our Cemetery Packing List below.
- 4 MIND YOUR SAFETY.**
Before your visit, call the cemetery office and ask local researchers about any safety issues. Take someone with you, especially if it’s an unfamiliar area. Bring your phone and pay attention to where you are and what’s going on around you. Stay hydrated, wear sunscreen and bug spray, and don’t overexert yourself. Watch for broken stones in your path and avoid leaning on monuments or sitting on stones. Also be careful when backing up to take photos—watch for sunken graves and concealed critters.

CEMETERY PACKING LIST

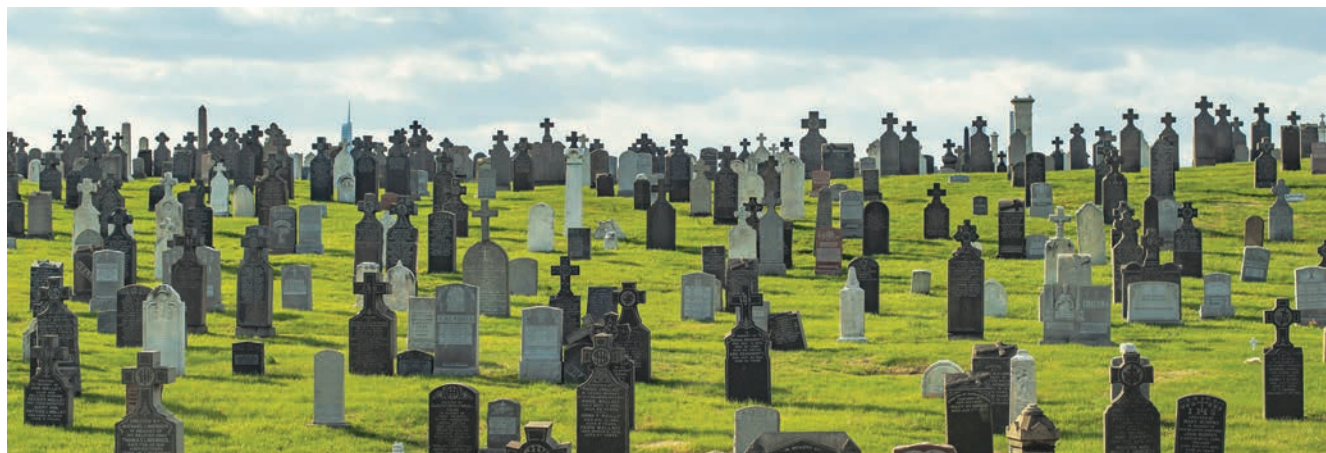
- laptop, mobile device or notepad and pens for notetaking
- cell phone
- digital camera
- extra photo storage card
- batteries and chargers
- light reflector such as a mirror or foil-covered board
- soft brush to clear grass or dirt off stones
- gardening scissors to trim grass from around stones
- spray bottle with water
- kneeling pad
- cemetery recording forms
- drinking water and snacks
- moist towelettes
- first-aid kit
- sunscreen and bug spray
- handwarmers and mufflers
- sturdy boots or shoes with treads
- dowsing rod (if you plan to dowse for unmarked graves)



ANDREW KOCH

- 5 LEARN THE LAY OF THE LAND.**
Photograph the cemetery sign and any structures located at the entrance to help you find your way back. To get a feel for the layout, make a general drive or walk through the cemetery before you start looking for graves.
- 6 RESPECT YOUR SURROUNDINGS.**
Treat gravestones, monuments, landscaping and cemetery staff with respect. If a funeral service is going on nearby, reroute until it’s over. Avoid doing anything that could damage the stones or grounds, and never apply any substance except water to a gravestone. Know and obey any restrictions on activities such as taking photos or gravestone rubbings.
- 7 BE SKEPTICAL.**
Just because something is carved in stone doesn’t make it true. Informants and engravers can make mistakes, so treat gravestones just like any other genealogy record and check them against other sources.
- 8 HAVE FUN.**
Take time to admire the cemetery’s exquisite artwork, interesting architecture, beautiful landscaping, and sense of peace and history. This will amplify your joy over genealogical discoveries.

CEMETERY DO'S AND DON'TS



MICHAL DZIERONSKI/UNSPASH

DO'S

Stop by the office.

Here, you can pick up a map, get directions and ask about old records. Public or historic cemeteries may be administered from an offsite local government office.

Take photos.

Since rubbings are off-limits (see right), snap photos of stones for posterity and to use in your research. Here are just some photos you might consider taking:

- picture showing the full stone
- picture showing just the stone's text
- cemetery entrance and sign
- scenery
- section and/or plot markers
- nearby graves (who may be for relatives)
- historical and interesting features (important monuments, headstones of famous people, etc.)

Use sunlight.

Shoot photos when the sun is at an angle (a 30-degree angle is ideal), not directly hitting the front of the tombstone. This way the lighting will cast some shadows to bring out hidden details. Use a mirror or foil-covered cardboard to reflect light into indentations. Take photos both with and out flash; cover your camera's flash with tape or your finger if you can't turn it off.

Apply only water.

If sunlight is too strong or the stone is light-colored, you can darken an inscription with water.

Use photo-editing software.

Software can make illegible stones readable in photos. Experiment with brightness and contrast, sharpening the image, and switching to negative view. Be sure to save an unedited, original version of the picture.

Write notes.

Write down gravestone locations and inscriptions in case something happens to your photos.

DON'TS

Take rubbings.

Rubbings were popular during the 20th century, but today we know they're damaging to markers. Handling old stones puts unnecessary pressure on them, which can result in hairline cracks that will eventually break. The actual process of rubbing also is abrasive. Any charcoal, chalk or crayon that inadvertently gets on the stone can scratch it and leave a colored residue that doesn't wash off in the rain.

Use shaving cream to bring out worn inscriptions.

Composed of several chemicals, shaving cream acts similarly to acid rain and dissolves a stone bit by bit.

Apply flour, talc, cornstarch, chalk or similar substances.

All will penetrate cracks and crevices in a stone, and once wet, will swell and enlarge the hairline fractures. These products also encourage the growth of lichens, mold and other invasive vegetation on grave markers.

Attempt repairs yourself.

Leave stones as they are and don't attempt to fix them, especially with items like cement. If you're truly concerned about a stone's structural integrity, alert cemetery staff or hire a professional conservator.



Create online memorials for non-family members who have recently died.


Sites like Find a Grave <www.findagrave.com> allow users to contribute tombstone photos, vital information and other details about someone's life to searchable online memorials. Out of respect for grieving loved ones, don't create such memorials unless you yourself are a relative of the deceased.






You should save major tombstone repairs for professionals. But read about what you can do to preserve tombstones at <www.familytreemagazine.com/cemeteries/how-to-clean-and-preserve-tombstones>.

TOMBSTONE SYMBOLISM

Symbol	Meaning
acorn	prosperity; power; triumph of the spirit
angel	rest/protection in the afterlife; spirituality; grief/mourning (when laying flowers on a grave)
baby	youth; innocence; new life
basket	fertility; maternal body
bird	flight of the soul
book	spirituality; scholarship
	
candle	life
cannon/ cannonball	military service
chalice	spirituality
clock	march of time; sometime displaying the time of death
column, broken	life cut short; sudden death
crescent	Islam
cross	Christianity
daffodil	grace; beauty; "deep regard"/ affection
dog	unconditional love; devotion; loyalty
dove	peace; purity; innocence; death of a child or young adult
	

Symbol	Meaning
eagle	power; courage in battle; military career
evergreen shrub	faithfulness; remembrance
fern	sincerity; humility; solitude
flag	military service
flower	frailty of life; beauty
fruit	eternal plenty
foliage	changing nature of life
gun	military service
hands, praying	spirituality
heart	affection; marriage or love (when two hearts are joined)
hourglass	march of time
ivy	faithfulness; deep attachment; undying affection
key	knowledge; entrance into heaven
lamb	innocence; purity; gentleness; death of a child
	
lamp	knowledge; spiritual immortality
lily	innocence and purity/the resurrection (Easter lilies); marriage and fidelity (calla lilies); innocence and humility, particularly of one who died young (Lily of the Valley)
lion	courage; honor; power
menorah	Judaism
oak leaf	strength; stability; endurance
olive tree	peace; reconciliation between God and man
palm	triumph over death/ resurrection
phoenix	resurrection
pillar, broken	life cut short; sudden death

A VERSION OF THIS LIST APPEARED IN *THE FAMILY TREE CEMETERY FIELD GUIDE* (FAMILY TREE BOOKS)

Symbol	Meaning
rose	love; beauty; virtue; strong bond (when two roses are intertwined); dying in youth (as a rosebud or presented when budding)
	
skull (with or without crossbones or wings)	death
sphinx	courage; honor; power
	
tree	changing nature of life
tree stump	life cut short
urn	death
vine	faithfulness; remembrance
weeping willow	sorrow; mourning; immortality
	

VERSIONS OF THESE LISTS APPEARED IN *THE FAMILY TREE CEMETERY FIELD GUIDE* (FAMILY TREE BOOKS)

COMMON GRAVESTONE ABBREVIATIONS

ABB.	MEANING	ABB.	MEANING
AAONMS	Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (Shriners)	ISH	Independent Sons of Honor (Masonic)
AASR	Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite (Masonic)	IUOM	Independent United Order of Mechanics
AMORC	Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (Rosicrucians)	IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
AOH	Ancient Order of Hibernians (Catholic)	K of C	Knights of Columbus (Catholic)
AOKMC	Ancient Order Knights of the Mystic Chain (Masonic)	KGE	Knights of the Golden Eagle
AOUW	Ancient Order of United Workmen	KHC	Knights of the Holy Cross (Catholic)
BBG	brevet brigadier general	K of P	Knights of Pythias
BPOE	Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks	KT	Knights Templar (Masonic)
CDR	commander	LCDR	lieutenant commander
COL	colonel	LGAR	Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic
CPL	corporal	LOM	Loyal Order of Moose
CPT	captain	LT	lieutenant
CSGT	commissary sergeant	1 LT	first lieutenant
DAR	Daughters of the American Revolution	LTC	lieutenant colonel
EBA	Emerald Beneficial Association (Irish)	MAJ	major
ENS	ensign	NCO	non-commissioned officer
FOE	Fraternal Order of Eagles	NSDAR	National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution
FOF	Fraternal Order of Firefighters	OES	Order of the Eastern Star (Masonic)
FOP	Fraternal Order of Police	OGC	Order of the Golden Cross
GAR	Grand Army of the Republic	OSGT	Ordnance Sergeant
IOF	Independent Order of Foresters	PFC	private first class
IOJD	Independent Order of Job's Daughters (Masonic)	PVT	private
IOKP	Independent Order of Knights of Pythias	SAR	Sons of the American Revolution
IOOF	Independent Order of Odd Fellows	SGM	sergeant major
IORG	Independent Order of the Rainbow for Girls (Masonic)	SGT	sergeant
IORM	Independent Order of Red Men (Sons of Liberty)	SPC	specialist
		SR	Scottish Rite (Masonic)
		UCV	United Confederate Veterans
		UDC	United Daughters of the Confederacy
		VFW	Veterans of Foreign Wars
		WCTU	Woman's Christian Temperance Union
		WO	warrant officer

FINDING TOMBSTONES ONLINE

Search Find a Grave

Find a Grave <www.findagrave.com> is an online database of tens of millions of cemetery records from around the world. It provides virtual memorials for the deceased, with information transcribed from tombstones. Memorials often contain photos of stones, and sometimes user-contributed biographies and photos of the deceased. Each memorial is maintained by a volunteer who "owns" it. Note that not every grave is cataloged here, and you should check any genealogical information against other records.

Anyone can search Find a Grave for free, but you must register if you want to contribute information or request a gravestone photo.

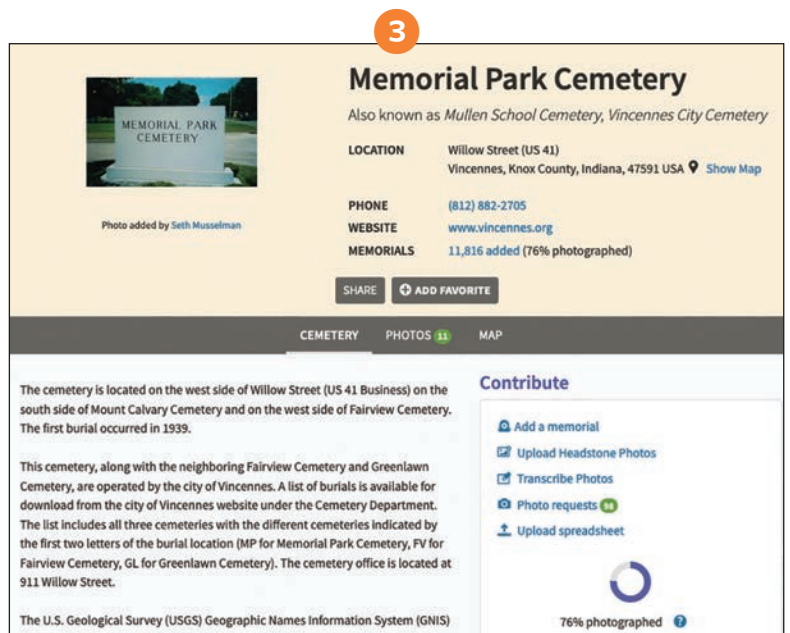
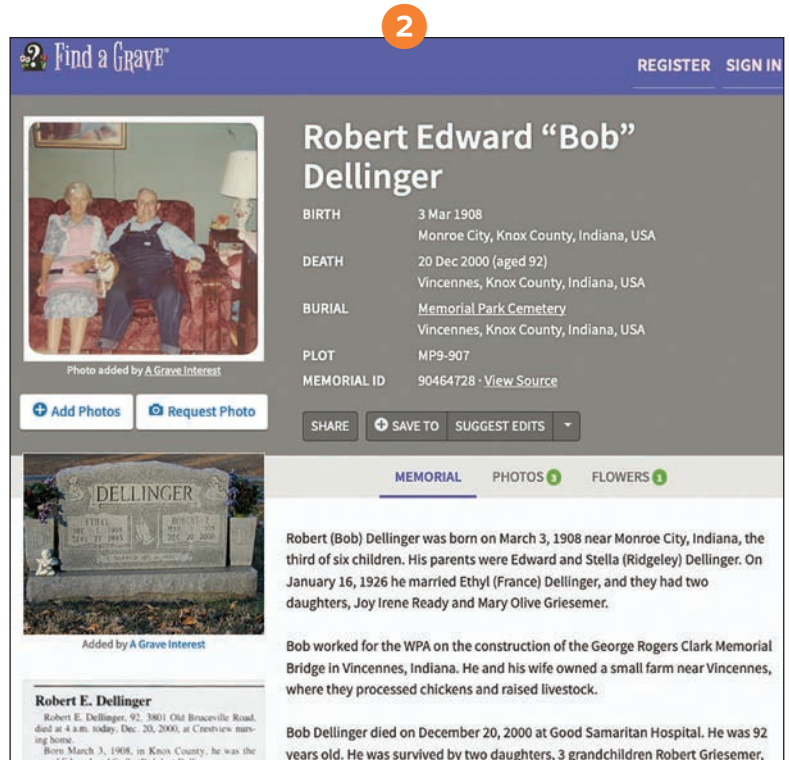
Here's how to search for memorials:

1 Enter your search terms. The home page prominently features a search box. (From other parts of the site, click Memorials from the main menu.) In addition to first, middle and last names, you also can include birth and death years (with options for "exact," "before," "after," and more) and the cemetery location. Click More Search Options to search by memorial types, nickname, maiden name, and more.

2 Review your results. Each search result lists the name on the memorial, plus associated birth and death dates if available, and the name and location of the cemetery. Results include the default photo for that memorial, often a headstone photo. A flower icon means someone has left virtual flowers.

Click the person's name to view the memorial page. You'll see transcribed tombstone details and possibly other information. Rob Dellinger's page has his birth and death dates and places, plus a summary of his life, photos of him and his tombstone, and his wife's name and vital information (with a link to her Find a Grave memorial).

3 Learn more about the cemetery. Click the name of a cemetery to visit its page on Find a Grave. You'll find a brief history of the cemetery, a summary of its burial records on Find a Grave (including what percentage of tombstones have been photographed and how many famous interments it holds), a list of others' requests for photos from the cemetery, and the cemetery's contact information. You also can search that cemetery's Find a Grave memorials from this page. Click the Map tab to view an interactive map of the cemetery and its surrounding community.



Search BillionGraves

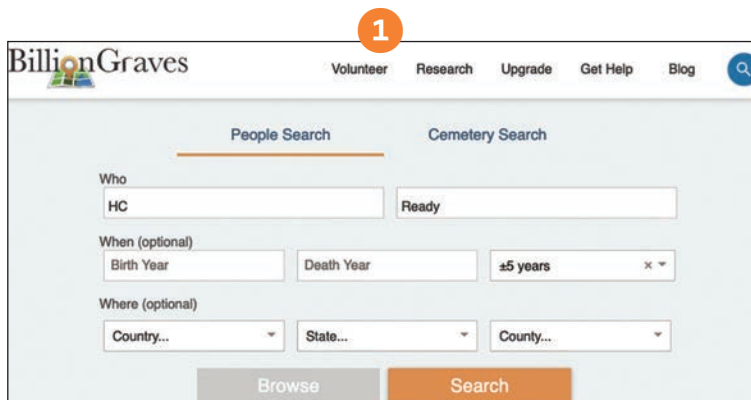
BillionGraves <www.billiongraves.com> is a volunteer-created database of tombstone information and photos. It includes GPS locations, which can help you pinpoint a grave even if it's unmarked. The site is free to use, with a subscription for premium information. You can start your search on the home page (under Discover Your Ancestors), but the search form at <www.billiongraves.com/search> offers more flexibility. Follow these steps:

1 Enter first and last names. The search form also lets you enter birth and death years (with a dropdown box to select a range of years), country, state and county. You also have the option for Cemetery Search, or to browse entries for tombstones that are from a specific time or place.

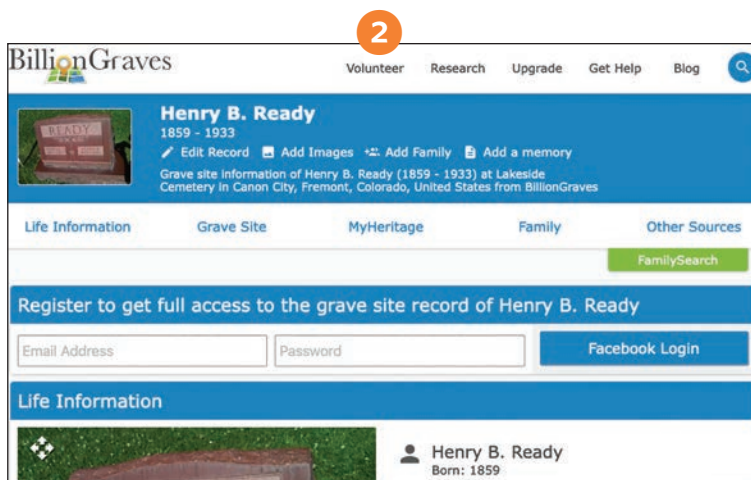
2 Review results. The results list shows the name in each record, an image, birth and death years (if available), and the name and place of the cemetery. You can filter results by Exact Match or Phonetic (results that sound similar to your search terms). Click on a result to view a page detailing the record, with information from the stone, an image and a map. Registered users can edit record details by clicking the pencil, or add information throughout by clicking the + sign. BillionGraves Plus members (about \$10/month or \$60/year) can view nearby family graves, among other benefits.

Toward the bottom of the search results page also are prompts to search for newspapers and other records on third-party sites like Ancestry.com <www.ancestry.com>. When clicked, these may take you to search results on a fee-based site.

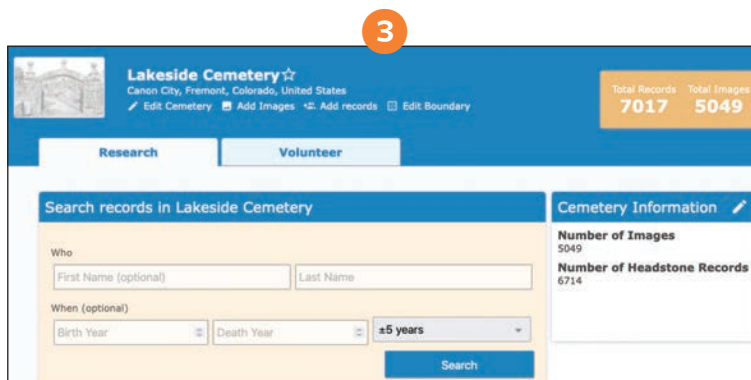
3 View the cemetery. Under the Grave Site section, you'll see the cemetery name and contact information. Click a name to view a cemetery's page, including a search form for other burials there. You can also view an interactive map of the cemetery under the Volunteer tab.



The screenshot shows the BillionGraves search interface. At the top, there are navigation links: Volunteer, Research, Upgrade, Get Help, and Blog. Below this, there are two tabs: "People Search" (selected) and "Cemetery Search". The "People Search" form includes fields for "Who" (with "HC" entered), "When (optional)" (with "Birth Year", "Death Year", and a range of "±5 years"), and "Where (optional)" (with "Country...", "State...", and "County..." dropdowns). There are "Browse" and "Search" buttons at the bottom.



The screenshot shows the profile page for Henry B. Ready (1859 - 1933). It features a profile picture, a "Grave Site" image, and a map. The page includes tabs for "Life Information", "Grave Site", "MyHeritage", "Family", and "Other Sources". A "FamilySearch" button is visible. A prominent blue banner encourages registration for full access to the grave site record. Below this are fields for "Email Address" and "Password", and a "Facebook Login" button. The "Life Information" section shows a photo of the grave and basic details: "Henry B. Ready, Born: 1859".



The screenshot shows the page for Lakeside Cemetery in Canon City, Fremont, Colorado, United States. It features a "Research" and "Volunteer" tab. A summary box shows "Total Records: 7017" and "Total Images: 5049". The "Search records in Lakeside Cemetery" form includes fields for "Who" (First Name (optional) and Last Name), "When (optional)" (Birth Year, Death Year, and range of "±5 years"), and a "Search" button. The "Cemetery Information" section shows "Number of Images: 5049" and "Number of Headstone Records: 6714".

CONTRIBUTING TO FIND A GRAVE OR BILLIONGRAVES

Creating or adding to a memorial in a burial database lets you record your research and share it with others, while paying tribute to your ancestor.

At Find a Grave, search for any existing memorials to avoid creating a duplicate. If you find one, click Suggest Edits to contact the owner about revisions. Otherwise, click Add a Memorial on the home page (or go to <www.findagrave.com/memorial/create/search-cemetery>).

At BillionGraves, if your relative already has a memorial, click the pencil icon on their profile to make edits. To add a headstone photo for an ancestor, look under the Volunteer menu and click Take Photos.

Both sites have mobile apps you can use to quickly add information and photos for multiple burials. Search the site first for the cemetery you plan to visit, to make sure the graves aren't already logged there.

CEMETERY RECORDS AT A GLANCE

Tombstones aren't the only records you can find in cemeteries. Here are just a few of the other resources to keep an eye out for when you visit cemetery offices.

BURIAL CERTIFICATE

This Certificate is to be filed and recorded prior to, or provided by Ordinance 10,725, approved July 17, 1917.

Name of Deceased Chas. Meyler
 Age, 1 Years, 8 Months, 8 Days.
 Sex, Male Race, White Single, Married Widowed
 Occupation _____
 Place of Birth, St. Louis Length of Residence in St. Louis, 20 months
 Place of Death, No. 7 Empire
 Exact Locality of Death: Block, North by _____ St. East by _____ St.
 BOUNDED, West by _____ St. South by _____ St.
 City Ward No. _____
 Date of Death July 20
 Cause of Death* Measles
 I CERTIFY that I attended the person above named in _____ last illness, who died of the disease stated, on the date above named.
 Address C. A. Hans M. D.
213 N. 14th St.
Evansville, Indiana
W. S. Belmont Undertaker.
 Place of Burial _____
 OFFICE HEALTH DEPARTMENT,
 St. Louis, Mo. July 21 1888
 I CERTIFY that I have examined this Certificate, and find it to accord with the requirements of the City.

CEMETERY DEED

This Indenture Witnesseth:
 THAT Ben Mc Williams
 has purchased of the City of Evansville, South West 1/4
 Lot No. 13 in Block No. 19
Locust Hill Cemetery
 for the sum of Fifty DOLLARS,
 said purchase, however, being subject to the following conditions, to-wit:
 1st. That said Lot shall be used as a Burial Ground, and for no other purpose whatever, and subject to such regulations, rules duties and assessments as may be prescribed by the ordinances of said City.
 2d. That if the said purchaser, his heirs or assigns, shall remove from the State of Indiana, without having used said Lot as a Burial Ground, or without disposing of same to some other person resident in the State, and said Lot shall not be claimed by said purchaser, his heirs or assigns, within three years from and after such removal, the said Lot shall revert to the City.
 Now, Therefore, The City of Evansville, by Ben Newman Jr Clerk of the Common Council of said City, in consideration of the premises, hereby conveys and conveys unto the said Ben Mc Williams
 his heirs and assigns, that the said Lot No. South West 1/4
13 in Block No. 19 LOCUST HILL CEMETERY, aforesaid, subject to the conditions aforesaid.
 In Witness Whereof, I, Ben Newman Jr Clerk, as aforesaid, in behalf of said City, have hereunto subscribed my name, and affixed the Seal of said City, this 22 day of Jan A. D., 1917
Ben Newman Jr Clerk.

PLAT MAP



FUNERAL RECORD

No. _____ Date Jan 29 1898
 For the Funeral of John Willms
 To be charged to John Willms estate
 Order given by his Daughters No Secu red _____
 Date of Funeral Jan 29 1898 Shipped to _____
 Place of Death St. Matthews Place of Birth _____
 Date of Death Jan 27 1898 Date of Birth Jan 20 1846
 Occupation of the Deceased attendant Single or Married married Religion Catholic
 Cause of Death Tuberculosis Aged 52 Years, _____ Months, 5 Days.
 Position as Member in Family Father Number of Burial Certificate _____
 Name of Father Henry Willms His Birthplace Germany
 Name of Mother Ann Her Birthplace Germany
 Funeral Services at Church
 Time of Funeral Services 11 AM
 Clergyman Rev. School
 Certifying Physician West
 His Office Cor 4 & Third st
 Number of Pall Bearers 6
 Price of Casket _____ \$ 45.00
 - Metallic Lining _____
 - Outside Box _____
 - Burial Robe _____
 - Burial Shoes _____
 - Embalming Body (with Fluid) _____
 - Washing and Dressing _____
 - Shaving _____
 - Viewing Room _____

PLOT RECORD

SOLD TO	SECTION	CERTIFICATE NO.	DATE	AMOUNT PAID	DEED
<u>Wm. Bedford Sr.</u>	<u>2</u>			<u>12 50</u>	
	LOT NO. <u>4</u>				
		<u>Endowed</u>	<u>cert. 616 June 27/1896</u>	<u>150 00</u>	
BURIAL NO.	GRAVE NO.	INTERMENTS			
<u>16592-717</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>Anna Bedford</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>11453</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>Sarah Bedford</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>2083</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>Sarah Bedford</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>2713</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>Charles</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>8</u>	
<u>12840</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>Mabel Meadows</u>			
<u>2760</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>George Bedford</u>			
<u>23935</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>M. J.</u>			
<u>26622</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>Susan B. Medows</u>			
<u>37743</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>Relix H.</u>			
<u>38579</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>Ida M. Harcross</u>			
<u>47613</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>Ida V. Meadows (Ohio)</u>			
<u>53006</u>	<u>12-A</u>	<u>Isaac H. Windmangel</u>			

#10 - 54 Concrete Vault
11 - 50 Concrete Box
12 - 60 Concrete Vault
13-A - Concrete Monument Vault

4 Places to Look for Cemetery Records

1 Cemetery Office
You may find sexton's records, plat maps, deeds, burial certificates and more. These records may take the form of books, ledgers, notebooks, loose papers in filing cabinets, or index cards in boxes.

2 Online
Check genealogy websites such as Ancestry.com and FamilySearch, as well as the cemetery's website, for digitized or indexed cemetery records. Memorials on burial databases sites such as Find A Grave and BillionGraves sometimes include record images.

Fourteen national cemeteries were established in 1862, when Congress authorized the purchase of cemetery grounds for those who died in service to their country.

3 Libraries, Archives and Genealogical and Historical Societies
A local library (whether public or part of a university system), archive or society may have custody of old cemetery records. Search the online catalog or call and ask. Societies may have published books of record indexes or transcriptions.

4 Microfilm
Look for microfilmed cemetery records at the libraries, archives and societies mentioned in No. 3, as well as at the FamilySearch Family History Library (FHL) in Salt Lake City (search the FHL's online catalog at <www.familysearch.org/search/catalog>).

RESOURCES

Websites

- A Grave Interest** <www.agraveinterest.blogspot.com>
- American Battle Monuments Commission** <www.abmc.gov>
- The Association for Gravestone Studies** <www.gravestonestudies.org>
- BillionGraves** <www.billiongraves.com>
- Cyndi's List: Cemeteries** <www.cyndislist.com/cemeteries>
- Family Tree Magazine: Cemeteries & Gravestones page** <www.familytreemagazine.com/cemetery-gravestone-research>
- Find a Grave** <www.findagrave.com>
- The Graveyard Detective blog** <www.graveyarddetective.blogspot.com>
- Interment.net** <www.interment.net>
- National Park Service: Civil War Cemeteries** <www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-cemeteries.htm>
- National Preservation Institute** <www.npi.org>
- Nationwide Gravesite Locator** <gravelocator.cem.va.gov>
- Saving Graves** <www.savinggraves.net>
- Southern Graves blog** <blog.southerngraves.net>
- TheCemeteryClub** <www.thecemeteryclub.com>
- Tombstone Transcription Project** <www.usgwtombstones.org>

World War I Cemeteries <www.ww1cemeteries.com>

World War II Cemeteries <www.ww2cemeteries.com>

Books

- A Graveyard Preservation Primer**, 2nd ed., by Lynette Strangstad (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers)
- Beautiful Death: The Art of the Cemetery** by Dean Koontz (Penguin Studio)
- Cemetery Art & Symbolism in North America** by D.A. Goodrich (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform)
- Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture** edited by Richard E. Meyer (Utah State University Press)
- Early American Gravestone Art in Photographs** by Francis Y. Duval and Ivan B. Rigby (Dover)
- The Family Tree Cemetery Field Guide** by Joy Neighbors (Family Tree Books)
- Final Thoughts: Eternal Beauty in Stone** by John Thomas Grant (Schiffer Publishing)
- Soul in the Stone: Cemetery Art from America's Heartland** by John Gary Brown (University Press of Kansas)
- Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography** by Douglas Keister (Gibbs Smith)
- The Victorian Book of the Dead** by Chris Woodyard (Kestrel Publications)