



Lurking in Cemeteries: A Researcher's Guide

by Joyce B. Lohse – April 2009
Columbine Genealogical & Historical Society

Types of Cemeteries:

1. Church graveyard
2. Family burial plot
3. Country cemetery
4. Garden cemetery
5. Urban cemetery
6. Veterans cemetery
7. Memorial or lawn park
8. Potter's field
9. Memorial sections
10. Pet cemetery

Cemetery Bag – Sample Supply List:

Camera – (with charged battery!)

white **chalk**, charcoal, crayons

note **paper and pen**

spray bottle, **water** and a **snack**

Pellon – non-woven interfacing fabric

bug repellent & sunscreen

a hat and sunglasses

directions to gravesite, a GOOD map

cell phone

GPS, compass

Windshield sun reflector

aluminum foil and a brush, or whisk

masking tape

garden clippers, trowel

plastic bag

pouch or apron

Swiss army knife

walking stick

This list in a sheet protector

Data to document:

- Location and type of cemetery
- Location and type of stones
- Plot markers and landmarks
- Orientation of gravesites
- Trees, shrubbery and foliage
- Write down inscription as seen
- Artwork on stones
- Symbols and fraternal markings
- Religious indications
- Grave goods, items from visitors

In a rural style cemetery, nature dominates.

In an urban setting, art dominates nature.

“There is a certain frame of mind to which a cemetery is, if not an antidote, at least an

alleviation. If you are in a fit of blues, go nowhere else.”

– Robert Louis Stevenson

Why we visit cemeteries:

1. To find facts and solve mysteries
2. To view evidence of lives lived
3. To find stories
4. To visit as a tourist
5. For continuity with the past
6. For inspiration
7. To mourn loss and to celebrate life
8. To commune with nature and meditate

Types of Markers

- Before 1650 – wood & field stones
- 1660-1850 – sedimentary rock & slate
- 1830-1880 – marble became popular
- 1880-1910 – carved granite, cast metal
- After 1920 – sandblasted granite

Resources:

Living Among Headstones, Shannon Applegate

www.findagrave.com

Your Guide to Cemetery Research,
by Sharon DeBartolo Carmack

Headstone Symbols



Animals

- Butterfly - the freeing of the spirit
- Dog - loyalty
- Frog - worldly pleasures
- Horse – courage or generosity
- Lamb - purity and innocence
- Lion - the power of God
- Fish – faith

Body Parts

- Arms outstretched - mercy
- Clasped hands - farewell
- Hand pointing up - pathway to heaven
- Hand pointing down - mortality
- Hand holding heart - charity
- Heart – love, mortality, courage

Birds

- Bird in flight - the flight of the soul
- Dove - the Holy Spirit in the Christian Religion
- Eagle - courage or a military career
- Owl - wisdom
- Rooster - awakening

Christian

- Cedar tree - consecration
- Cypress tree - mourning
- Heart encircled with thorns - suffering of Christ
- Olive tree - peace
- Palm: victory, Christ's victory over death
- Angel blowing a trumpet – resurrection, agent of God

Plants

- Daisy - innocence, youth, hope
- Forget-me-not – remembrance
- Ivy – eternal life, friendship
- Lily - Easter, purity, innocence, heavenly bliss, the Blessed Virgin
- Morning Glory - Bonds of love, affection
- Oak - strength
- Pine – fertility, fidelity
- Poppy – peace, rest, consolation
- Rose - love, wisdom, beauty
- Sunflower – adoration
- Thistle – earthly sorrow, Scottish
- Violet - faithfulness, modesty
- Weeping willow - grief, mourning
- Wheat – resurrection, fertility

Objects

- Arch - victory in life or death
- Anchor - hope, a disguised cross
- Book – faith, scholar
- Candle – eternal life
- Columns – noble life
- Cross - Christianity or suffering
- Crossed swords – died in battle
- Crown – reward or glory in afterlife
- Cradle - childhood loss
- Doors, Gates – passage into afterlife
- Horseshoe – protection against evil
- Lamp – knowledge, love of learning
- Scales - judgment of the dead
- Scroll – symbol of life and time
- Skull, Skeleton – mortality, death
- Winged skull – flight of soul from mortal man

Others:

Courtesy of Joyce B. Lohse, CGHS, 2009