Planning a Cemetery Visit

May 17, 2018
Corinne Jacox
Do Your Research Before You Go

- Find A Grave
  - Look for photo requests
  - [https://www.findagrave.com/](https://www.findagrave.com/)
- BillionGraves
  - [https://billiongraves.com/](https://billiongraves.com/)
- Nebraska Gravestone Photo Project
  - [https://nebraskagravestones.org/](https://nebraskagravestones.org/)
- Individual Cemeteries
  - Call ahead
  - Burial location and maps
  - Wyuka Cemetery - Lincoln, Nebraska ([https://wyuka.com/](https://wyuka.com/))
  - Linn Grove Cemetery - Greeley, Colorado ([http://greeleygov.com/services/linn-grove](http://greeleygov.com/services/linn-grove))
History

- Before cemeteries, family plots near family home
  - Mostly marked with the deceased’s name, age, and year of death
  - Usually marked with rough stones, rocks, or wood, apparently, as a way to keep the dead from rising
- Churchyards
  - Large, square-shaped tombstones prepared from slate (1650-1900) or sandstone (1650-1890).
- Public cemeteries evolved in the 19th century
  - More importance to memorialize the dead
  - A few words, epitaphs, more details
- Most popular materials were marble (1780-1930), granite (1860-present), iron, and wood.
- Term “gravestone” emerged from a Jewish custom where visitors to a grave placed stones at the head as a way to honor the deceased

History of Gravestones - [https://www.iscga.org/history-of-gravestones.html](https://www.iscga.org/history-of-gravestones.html)
Cemetery Etiquette

- Follow cemetery rules
- Try not to remain after dark
- Follow the roadways and drive slowly, remain off the grass
- If you bring children, keep them nearby and don’t let them play on any of the monuments
- Remember to be respectful by keeping voices down.
- NEVER remove anything from a gravestone, like flowers, coins, stones and other artifacts that have been left by family
- Don’t leave any trash behind in a cemetery
- If a funeral is occurring, consider making another visit at another time; NEVER get in the way of funeral processions
- If it’s not against the rules and you bring your pet make sure to keep them on a leash and clean up after them

Save a Grave - http://saveagrave.net/cemetery-etiquette
Items to Take Along

- Camera
- Knee pads and good shoes
- Large jugs of filtered water (as much as you can take)
- Spray bottles (16-32 oz.)
- Wooden scrapers, craft sticks, tongue depressors, wooden skewers
- Plastic scrapers (various sizes)
- Natural or plastic soft bristle brushes of various shapes and sizes
- Garden sheers and a small trowel
- Rags and old towels
- Large plastic mirror
- Flashlight
- Other suggestions?
Tombstone Care

- **Do No Harm!**
  - Ensure the stone is stable, secure, level and that all sections are securely attached to each other; check that the stone is not in danger of falling if you put pressure on it
    - Do not attempt to clean a broken, cracked or crumbly headstone
  - Clear away any debris, tree limbs, or leaves that obscure the site
  - Remove weeds and unwanted vegetation; trim away vines with garden shears if applicable (do not remove historic vegetation)
    - Do not pull off plants of the Ivy family that are attached to the stone
    - Cut the plants at the base and let them die; if possible, cut the plants about every six inches
  - Cemetery Conservators for United Standards Cleaning Basics - Cleaning basics
    - [http://cemeteryconservatorsunitedstandards.org/standards/cleaning/](http://cemeteryconservatorsunitedstandards.org/standards/cleaning/)
Reading Inscriptions - Don’ts

- Don’t put shaving cream or chalk directly on the grave marker
  - There are chemicals and greasy emollients in shaving cream that are sticky and very difficult to remove from the stone with a simple washing and can discolor the stone

- Don’t put flour on the inscription
  - No matter how carefully the stone is brushed afterward some traces of flour will remain, that, when in contact with water, may become tacky, trapping moisture and accelerating deterioration

- Don’t make a tombstone rubbing
Reading Inscriptions - Taking Pictures

- Spray the engraving with water
  - Water will dry on the stone’s surface faster than in the indentations of the lettering
- Use a large mirror (or other shiny object) to direct bright sunlight diagonally across the face of the gravestone to cast shadows in indentations and make inscriptions more visible
  - In wooded areas, use a flashlight
- Take several pictures: whole tombstone, zoom in, check all sides, step back to include the surroundings, family plot
- Other photo tips?
Symbols

- Gravestone Symbolism
  - [http://www.graveaddiction.com/symbol.html](http://www.graveaddiction.com/symbol.html)
- Common Headstone Symbols and Their Meanings - PDF
GPS Coordinates

- Some day in the future, the cemetery may be lost, or the grave marker gone
- Smartphone
- Hand-held GPS unit
When You Get Home

- Photo editing software
- Difficult to read inscriptions
  - Choose invert colors
  - Image will look like an old 35mm negative and bring out the lettering
- Add citation
  - Add to genealogy software
  - Put into white border at bottom of photo
  - Cemetery of the Seven Sorrows (Sanilac County, Michigan, LAT/LON 43.1873235, -82.8277296, on Galbraith Rd about 1.3 miles west of M-19), Cornelius Gleason marker, photographed by Ann Raymont, 5 May 2015.
  - For a larger cemetery, replace the road information with section and lot numbers