

The West Virginia Cemetery Survey

What is it?

The West Virginia Cemetery Survey is a program designed to help genealogists, archivists, and other interested persons to locate, record, and preserve information about cemeteries within our state.

Initiated in 1995 by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the Survey is designed to assist in the collection of many kinds of data from many types of cemeteries. From small family plots to larger church and municipal burial grounds, cemeteries hold a wealth of information about the people who settled West Virginia and made it what it is today.

One goal of the Survey is to locate cemeteries. As many of the older and smaller burial grounds have been neglected or forgotten over time, this is not always an easy task. Some cemeteries may be found on tax or topographic maps, while the locations of others may only be known by descendants or local residents. Cemetery surveyors are asked to plot the cemetery on a map, and that information is later transferred to master maps kept in the State Historic Preservation Office.

Another goal is to record information about the cemetery and those buried there. The Survey form is designed to include information about the terrain and boundaries of the cemetery, ease of access, and degree of care that the cemetery has received. It also allows for a detailed account of headstone information, such as surnames, dates, decorative styles, and material types. Photographs and sketches of the cemetery layout or interesting headstone decorations are a valuable resource. Information about local contacts and published references to the cemetery or to people buried within completes the record.

Perhaps the most important purpose of the Survey is to preserve information. Cemeteries are all too easily neglected and forgotten, their contours hidden by weeds and overgrowth. Headstones may erode until their inscriptions are unreadable. They may be broken from their bases, removed, and even vandalized. Each time a cemetery is lost in this manner, the irreplaceable information that it contains is also lost. The West Virginia Cemetery Survey is an attempt to gather this data and maintain it in a manner that renders it accessible for research. All of the material gathered in the course of a survey is kept on file, and placed in a computer database.

Who Protects Cemeteries in West Virginia?

A variety of legislation protects human burial sites in West Virginia. Protective agencies range from local sheriffs to divisions of the state government. Specific legislation follows:

W.Va. Code §29-1-8a provides protection for human burials and burial sites of historic significance, including unmarked graves, grave artifacts and grave markers. Cemeteries must have archaeological or historical importance to fall under the protection of this law. Penalties are assessed for excavating, removing or otherwise desecrating such burials without the permission of an ad hoc committee convened at need by the State Historic Preservation Office. Both misdemeanor and felony charges may result, and conviction carries fines up to \$5000 and/or prison terms.

W.Va. Code §37-13-1 through -7 guide the removal, transfer and disposition of human remains found in gravesites on privately-owned land. The circuit court of the county in which the graves are located has jurisdiction over any proposed disturbance, provided that the graves in question are determined to have no archaeological or historical significance. Petitions must be made to and through the court system.

W.Va. Code §16-5-21 through -22 provide guidelines for interment and disinterment. It requires that permits for such actions be obtained from the county circuit court prior to any activity unless authorized to do so by court order. Such permits are required by law to be filed by the local registrar and be open at all times to official inspection. Records must also be kept by the person or persons in charge of interment and of the cemetery or burial ground.

W.Va. Code §61-8-14 provides penalties for the disinterment or displacement of a dead body, and damage to cemetery or graveyard properties. Disinterment or displacement of a dead human body or parts thereof is a felony crime, and is punishable by imprisonment of not less than two or more than five years. Desecration of or damage to a cemetery, graveyard, or cemetery structure is a misdemeanor, conviction of which may result in fines of not more than \$2000, or imprisonment of not more than one year, or both.

W.Va. Code §35-5-1 through -6 and 5A-1 through -8 regulate the governance of cemeteries, including the appointment of trustees, establishment of endowments for perpetual care, etc.

How Can I Get Involved?

The West Virginia Cemetery Survey is dependent upon the involvement of interested persons with a knowledge of local history and an interest in its preservation. Historic and genealogical societies, community groups, Boy and Girl Scout Troops, and other organizations are invited to participate in the survey process. If you know of a cemetery in your area that you believe should become a part of the Survey, contact the Division of Culture and History by telephone or mail. A Survey form will be sent to you at your request. If possible, include in your request the name of the town nearest the cemetery, so that we may send a copy of the topographic map to you as well. Please address your requests to:

West Virginia Cemetery Survey
State Historic Preservation Office
The Cultural Center
1900 Kanawha Blvd., East
Charleston, WV 25305-0300
(304) 558-0220 Ext. 719

Thank you for your interest in the Cemetery Survey, and for helping us to preserve the history of the State of West Virginia.

Cemetery Preservation "Do"s and "Don't"s

DO:

- Photograph headstones and map cemeteries.
- Research and document names and dates.
- Work with church groups, Boy and Girl Scout Troops, and others to clean up cemeteries.
- Call local monument companies - they may know of stone conservators in your area.

- Carefully mow grass, remove garbage, etc. Be sure to use hand clippers around stones to avoid damage.

DON'T:

- Enter a cemetery without permission.
- Use wire brushes, acids or cleansers on headstones.
- Attempt to remove lichens, mosses or other growths.
- Attempt to glue or otherwise restore broken stones.
- Move or remove stones.
- Make rubbings of old inscriptions (this may stain or break the stone).

Preservation References

Strangstad, Lynette

1988 A Graveyard Preservation Primer. American Association for State and Local History.

Association for Gravestone Studies

278 Main Street, Suite 207

Greenfield, MA 01301

Website Address: www.berkshire.net/ags/

1. Site Number (OFFICE USE ONLY): _____

2. Cemetery Name, Historic: _____ Cemetery Name,
Common: _____

3. County: _____ 4. 7.5' Quadrangle Name: _____

5. UTM Zone: _____ Easting: _____
Northing: _____

6. Location: _____

7. Ownership: Public: Municipal _____ County _____ State _____
Federal _____

Private: Family _____ Church _____
Denomination _____

Fraternal _____
Other _____

8. Burial Population:

9. Predominant Surnames:

10. Mass Grave: Yes _____ No _____ Explain:

11. Public Accessibility: Unrestricted _____
Restricted _____
For permission to visit,
contact _____

12. Access into cemetery: By foot _____ By car _____

13. Terrain:

14. Bounded by: Fence _____ Wall _____ Hedge _____
Other _____

15. Condition: Well-maintained _____ Poorly maintained _____ Overgrown, easily identifiable _____ Overgrown, unidentifiable _____ Unidentifiable, but known to exist through tradition or other means (identify source) _____

16. Disturbances:

17. Cemetery Size and Orientation (please give dimensions in feet, and indicate compass direction for long and short axis):

18. Historical Background (use continuation sheet if necessary):

Site Number: _____ Cemetery
Name: _____

19. Gravestones (Please list the number of gravestones that fit in the categories below. If this is guess or an approximation, put "circa" before the number. Include photographs and/or sketches of representative decorative carvings.):

Number of headstones _____ Number of burials _____ Footstones?
Yes _____ No _____

Number of gravestones with burial dates from the 18th century _____ 19th century _____

20th century _____

Please list the earliest headstone date _____ Most recent date _____

Number of gravestones of each material: Slate _____ Marble _____ Granite _____
Sandstone _____ Fieldstone _____
Other _____

Number of gravestones that are: Readable _____ Eroded _____ Badly Tilted _____

Cracked/Broken_____ Broken but standing_____ Broken, no longer
standing_____

Location of stones no longer standing_____

Restoration efforts, if any:

20. Please attach: 1) a copy of the topographic quadrangle map indicating the cemetery's location, and 2) general photograph(s) of the cemetery showing its setting and/or location. If you have any reference information about the cemetery (books, personal communication, etc.) please include a list.

Recorder: _____

Date: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number:

Please return form to:

Historic Preservation Office
The Cultural Center
West Virginia
1900 Kanawha Boulevard East
Charleston, West Virginia 25305-0300

Thank you for your interest in the
Cemetery Survey.