

INTRODUCTION

Cemeteries are often an invaluable resource for a genealogist: they provide information that might not exist elsewhere and offer family researchers an opportunity to stumble upon new ancestors - sometimes quite literally! The important records found in cemeteries and cemetery offices have never been more readily available than they are at present and, with many community and crowdsourcing movements underway, the number of available records are growing exponentially every day, regardless of where you might live in proximity to them. The advent of the digital age has completely redefined what is possible in terms of genealogical research using cemeteries and cemetery records. Today we will learn how to contribute to these invaluable collections - and learn how to use the most popular graveyard/cemetery websites. We'll explore BillionGraves, Find A Grave, mobile apps, programs and strategies to further your own family history via cemetery research.

What type of information can be found in cemeteries?

- Names
- Dates
- Pictures
- Relationships
- ????

How are cemeteries (currently) indexed?

- Computer databases
- Card catalogs/Register books/Etc.
- They're not

For many decades, determining an ancestor's final resting place could be quite difficult unless certain specifics were already known:

- Where did they die?
- What was their religion?
- Were any cemeteries particularly popular among their branch of the family?
- Etc.

Wouldn't it be great if there were a searchable index of **all** cemeteries, so that you could string together all of the available information efficiently and with ease? Enter: 21st Century Technology!

In order for this new, limitless technology to be effective, however, we must all do our part. To create the richest possible digital future for our descendants, we must employ *Cemetery Crowdsourcing*.

PLATFORMS

The two largest platforms used to index cemeteries at the present time are **BillionGraves** and **Find A Grave**. Both sites offer unique advantages and the wise genealogist employs each ever-expanding database to conduct thorough, high-quality research.

RootsTech 2016
RT2791 – Cemetery Crowdsourcing
Presented by **Michael Cassara**

In today's lecture we will explore both sites in-depth, noting their differences and their unique values while acknowledging that both platforms play a crucial role in the present and future of genealogical research.



<http://www.billiongraves.com>

Requirement: iOS or Android device with a camera and GPS capability
Launched: **2011**

Holdings: over 17 million headstones

FIND A GRAVE



<http://www.findagrave.com>

Requirement: any kind of camera, or use the iOS or Android app
Launched: **1998** | Acquired by Ancestry.com: **2013**

Holdings: over 100 million memorials and 75 million photos

OTHER PLATFORMS

- Military
- Individual Cemeteries/Proprietary Systems
- Etc.

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YOUR PART

What can you do? How can you put the “crowd” into crowdsourcing?

Take pictures

- Group activity
- By yourself
- As a requested “look-up”

Transcribe pictures

- No matter where you’re located, you can help transcribe data from uploaded headstones – either at random, or by focusing on a specific cemetery.

Add rich content to existing memorials

- Add your personal family photos to the public record, by attaching them to an online memorial.

DISCUSSION

Ethics/Privacy


- Not everyone wants their loved ones to be memorialized on the internet. The family’s wishes must always be taken into consideration.
- Cemeteries must remain respectful places at all times. Additionally, some cemeteries may have restrictions on photo-taking – it is always best to understand the rules at hand before beginning any new project.

Ownership/Copyright

- Just because an image exists, doesn’t mean you may use it. Additionally, read each site’s user agreement carefully – just because you take a picture using their app does **not** mean that you own it.

CLOSING

If each of the 20,000+ RootsTech attendees managed to take 1000 headstone pictures a year, we’d be adding over 20 **million** records to genealogical databases each year. Given that this conference’s attendees represent only a small fraction of the world’s genealogical enthusiasts, a much higher number is possible. It is our obligation to continue to augment existing databases and create digital records – in doing so, we not only help each other, but we help ourselves.

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