

**Cemetery Records Advice**  
Mary Beth Malooly  
Cottontailrabbit52@yahoo.com

From working in sales at Parkwood, Gardens of Faith, Holy Redeemer, and Loudon Park cemeteries over the years, my advice to anyone seeking records from any of these cemeteries or others is \*TO BE PERSISTENT. Cemetery records can be an invaluable source in discovering babies and others buried there who may have died in between censuses without any other records available. In cemeteries, Sales is the department where research requests go through, since this can be a sales tool to get you to buy next to your deceased relatives there. But cemetery sales staff (often called 'family service counselors') change a lot due to frequent turn-over due to money, or more specifically, lack of it, since family service counselors often make minimum wage + commission or no salary at all but commission only. Researching family names for people is a free service, or in some cemeteries, they charge a fee of \$25 per name, which is basically not worth the salespeoples' time, once they know you're not interested in buying spaces. So there are salespeople who are motivated to xerox copies of records and give them to you, and those who are not motivated, since this is considered a complimentary service that takes up time and may not go anywhere for them.

So here's what I'd advise for anyone searching for cemetery records on their deceased relatives:

1) Go in person, if possible, to the cemetery, to see for yourself the deceaseds' gravesites. Yes, more and more cemeteries are finally putting online lists of deceased buried in their cemeteries, which is a good starting point. But you will learn a lot by visiting the gravesites - for instance, by discovering others who may be buried in the same lots, their relationships you may not have known about by terms such as 'son', 'wife', etc. and information carved on tombstones that may not be put on online lists in order to save space. Often, you can get a map of the location from the cemetery, and sometimes even get a salesperson to accompany you, lead you to the site, especially if they think you may want to buy for yourself in that location

2) Find out from the sales counselor who the lot owner is. Ask for a copy of the diagram they have on file of the lot owner's lots so that you can see who is buried in those lots, since in older cemeteries especially, there are often more people - such as relatives/friends buried there you may never have known about. On the chart will be dates of the deceased burials there under their names.

3) Get copies of, at the very least, the lot diagram showing who is buried in the lots with the deceased relative you are researching. But also get copies of the files themselves on all who are buried in your deceased's location. You will learn so much seeing these files, it will be worth your trip. Cemeteries are libraries of information worth their weight in gold on your deceased relatives which the cemeteries will keep forever (which is one reason I hate to see the new trend of families foregoing cemeteries in favor of keeping the ashes themselves in order to save money and "not waste money putting it into the ground"). But 50 years from now, those ashes will be

thrown out and valuable information lost that the cemeteries would have kept on file forever - if even only to be accessed by later generations searching for family buried there.

4) Usually, if a cemetery charges to research names for you, the first two are generally free, and thereafter, a \$25 fee to research one or two names for you. This fee is usually up to the counselor if he wants to charge you. The way to get around this is to not do all the names at once, but call once a week to get two names for free. But if a counselor insists on charging \$25 or more to research names for you, pay this by card or check made out to the cemetery, since if you pay cash, this often goes into the pocket of the counselor with no record that you paid for this service if he leaves the job and you get no results the first time around.

5) My top advice is **\*TO BE PERSISTENT** in asking to get copies of the files on your relatives - direct line ancestors are not an invasion of privacy if you can show a family tree of descendency, should they ask for one. Getting results, file copies, should not take more than a week, two weeks tops. If you don't have them by then, don't waste time continuing to get the run-around from the sales counselor who will never call you back. Ask the manager for them. The manager could put you off as well, because their salary is based upon their salespeoples' sales too. But they hate getting phone calls about this inconvenience, and I've seen managers xerox files themselves to get repeated phone calls off their backs.

6) If all else fails, since turn-over is so high, it's pretty easy to get a job as a sales counselor at cemeteries! I did it, and am glad I did - I had access to files at all times, and made good use of it - xeroxing my family's files after work I would have never gotten otherwise or would have paid a fortune to unscrupulous counselors who would have pocketed it.

7) Know that cemeteries change hands and business practices over time. Some are making it easier to get deceased records now. New Cathedral in West Baltimore has been great for years; now Loudon Park is making files easier for families to get, who weren't at the time I worked there. Others I won't mention are still holding onto the archaic system of restricting their records online, and/or charging fees to discourage people from researching their lines.

Good luck researching family names at cemeteries. You will see that it fills in the gap on so many brick walls, that it'll be worth your time.