

## Cemetery Stories

For your family search project, the most important thing is to validate birth and death dates of your ancestors. If you don't have documents readily available, then a trip to the cemetery is necessary.

Every community has cemeteries that can help you find your family's history. Hispanics in the southwest settled this land centuries ago before the existence of the United States. Back then, families honored their antecedents by creating resting places that represented life during that time. Some have fancy entrances and manicured lawns with similar stones. Other cemeteries might be on ranches where land was set aside to honor the dead. In the towns and at the missions, sometimes there were multiple cemeteries, often across the street from each other. Some cemeteries are designated for one group of people, such as soldiers, or Catholics, or even different races. History is evident everywhere you look.

Most people will find their ancestors by just walking around the cemetery. In your walk you might see important figures of the region with historic markers and flags or other special designations for members of organizations. It is always a surprise to learn that someone was a Mason or a soldier.



Very old burial places might have stones or wood markers that are worn and difficult to read. In this case you would need to find the registration for those cemeteries in the county list of registered cemeteries. Since many old family cemeteries are not registered, you

might have to dig further to find records at the local churches. Either way, you are a detective on a search to find your ancestors. Knowing their full name, birth and death dates will help you accurately begin your family tree.

## Visit Your Family Cemetary

1. Plan your visit to the cemetery where you think you'll find your ancestors.
2. Wear comfortable shoes (no sandals or heels as sometimes it's uneven terrain) and a hat if it is a sunny day. Carry water, a camera, or smart phone to take photos and a small notebook and pencil to document what you find.
3. If you know where the grave is, you can draw an outline of the cemetery and mark the location of the particular grave you are seeking. You might use this information when you write the history of the person.
4. Take a photo of the stone and another of the grave's position in relation to other graves.
5. Document what the grave marker says. (See example)



Next to Virginia Salinas Garcia and her husband Eusebio , we found Dorotea's grave. We know that Dorotea was Virginia's mother and she lived in Mier, Tamaulipas. This stone suggests that after her husband died, Dorotea moved to Texas to live with her daughter, Virginia, at Cibolo Ranch, over 200 miles away in Duval County. Now we can begin searching immigration records to see if she entered Texas before or after it was part of the U.S. Did she live here during the Civil war? What other interesting facts can we find after just one visit to the cemetery? What secrets and treasures will you find as you explore your family's graves?



## Supplies

- Camera, paper, pencil, pen