

“Show me the manner in which a nation or community cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender sympathies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to their ideals.”

William E. Gladstone

GUIDELINES FOR CEMETERY RESEARCH

RESEARCH BEFORE YOU SURVEY: You must have a FCPL card.

While in the Virginia Room, inquire at the desk for the FCCPA district binder to locate a cemetery survey and get the FX number of a selected cemetery. Sign out the survey and remove it.

HINT you may want to photo copy an extra copy of the survey, one copy for rough draft and another for the final completed survey.

Part 1

1. Virginia Room cemetery vertical files- The cemetery number, FX___ is located on the survey. With that number inquire at the desk to see the complete cemetery file. These are kept in the workroom and are unavailable to the general public. Ask the librarian at the Virginia Room desk to please bring you the particular file.

2. Virginia Room Cemetery Database:

Search the On line Data base: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/branches/vr/cem

- ❖ This brings you to the main page of the database.
- ❖ You will be working mostly with family cemeteries, so choose that option.
- ❖ Find the cemetery you are investigating, and click on the link. This will bring up general information on the cemetery.

A note of caution: the on-line database is organized by family name. If you do not know the family name of the cemetery you are researching, you will have to look at every site in the area where your cemetery is located, e.g. Herndon, Fairfax Station, etc. Also be aware that some cemeteries in the database are misnamed.

3. Search the Fairfax Genealogical Society Cemetery Volumes REF 929.3755 FAIR

Make copies of all information from the on line search and the vertical file which you find might be helpful to complete the survey. Although the goal is not collecting information on gravestones, just seeing the number listed (one or one hundred) will help in knowing the size of the cemetery.

4. Tax map data and plat:

- ❖ <http://icare.fairfaxcounty.gov/Main/Home.aspx> brings you to the Fairfax County Dept of Tax Administration property search page.
- ❖ Choose an address search.
- ❖ Input the address of the cemetery in the line provided. This will bring up the tax office's information on the property.
- ❖ Write down the Fairfax County Tax Map number in the upper left corner above the owner's name, as this is vital for identification purposes.
- ❖ Click on printable summary and print the page.
- ❖ Click on map to see exactly where the parcel is located. Print this too. Every cemetery file should contain these printed papers.
- ❖ Look at and click on all of the links on the left side of the main property page to see what information you can learn. Take note of the "sales" link. This tells you the last transaction or two (or three...). If there are several sales transactions noted, they don't all generally show up on the printable version. Please record any deed information you see on the sales page that does not show up on the printed version. The deed numbers are essential to determine a chain of title for the property.

Note: If you do not have the address of the cemetery, choose the address of the closest property to the cemetery that you can find. Following the steps above, view the map for that property and locate the cemetery parcel on that map. Zoom in until you can see the cemetery's parcel number, write that number down, and look up the cemetery on the search page using a tax map number search.

Part 2

1. Historical Newspaper Index Instructions:

The Washington Post (historical) from 1877-1990 is available on line.

- ❖ Access the Fairfax County Public Library with a library card.
- ❖ Go to Databases
- ❖ Select newspapers
- ❖ Select ProQuest
- ❖ Log On with your library card number
- ❖ Type in a specific search topic
- ❖ From Multi databases select Historical Washington Post
- ❖ Enter a date range and Search
- ❖ Collect any article or important information about the descendants from articles.
- ❖ Articles can be printed

Local historical newspapers: (Alexandria Gazette, Fairfax Herald, etc)

- ❖ Access the Fairfax County Public Library with a library card.
- ❖ Go to Databases
- ❖ Select Newspapers
- ❖ Select FCPL historical newspaper index
- ❖ Log on
- ❖ Type in topic
- ❖ Check ALL newspaper sources
- ❖ Complete date range
- ❖ Check ALL newspaper types
- ❖ Results will supply: Newspaper, date, page number, headline
- ❖ Search the microfilms for the specific newspapers
- ❖ Copy any pertinent information.

HINTS: Be flexible with search topics.

EXAMPLE-There were no results with “Burke, Silas and Silas Burke”
When “Burke” was tried, 188 search results were found of which six or seven dealt with the death of Silas Burke and/or the family cemetery.

Often times the Fairfax Herald’s “headline” result is all you will find when you read the newspaper. Example: the headline reads “Burke Elementary gets library.” The microfilm copy from the newspaper had no article, only “Burke Elementary gets library.”

2. For census or genealogical research:

Ancestry.com and Heritage Quest are available on line in the Virginia Room.

Often times it is easier to work forward in time rather than backwards.
The most recent census available is 1930.

3. Deed books:

- www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/historic/ihs brings you to the web-site for the Fairfax County Inventory of Historic Sites.
- Click on Research Guidelines for a detailed description as to how to research the history of a site. Pay special attention to #3, Circuit Court Archives. These guidelines are tailored for researching buildings, but you need to take these steps to research the history of your cemetery site. Fortunately, Circuit Court Archives allows public access to its on-line database, CPAN, which includes all Fairfax County deeds, so you don't have to pull out all the big, heavy deed books. Be advised that a few of the very early books are missing. The Virginia Room has many deeds on microfilm, but CPAN is much, much easier to use.

4. Will Books:

These are also available on CPAN. You choose "wills" instead of "deeds." The will indices are organized by year and decedent's last name. Unfortunately, not everyone left a will.

5. Archaeology Vertical Files Cemetery research resources
at Fairfax County Archeology
James Lee Center
2855 Annandale Road
703-534-3881

Please call ahead before you visit.

Resources that can be found at James Lee Center:

Cemetery locations

- ❖ GIS mapping of all cemeteries located by Brian Conley
 - UTM coordinates
- ❖ Address
- ❖ Tax parcel number
- ❖ Owner name

Aerial photographs

- ❖ Current (2007)
- ❖ 1997
- ❖ 1953/54
- ❖ 1937
- ❖ 1943 (only northern quarter of Co.)

Chain of Title

- ❖ Desktop access to Fairfax Co. deeds and wills

- ❖ Site files
- ❖ Data on prior surveys of all cemeteries
- ❖ Desktop access to DHR reports

- ❖ Archeology reports
- ❖ Published reports of previous archeological surveys

- ❖ Atlases – historic maps
- ❖ Civil War Atlas to accompany the Official Records
- ❖ “The Cartography of Northern Virginia”

Guidelines for On Site Cemetery Surveys*

On -site Survey- Allow for two hours minimum.

1. Always work in pairs.
2. Introduce yourself to the neighbors.
3. Carry a clipboard, yard stick and small broom (to remove leaves etc.)
4. Carry drinking water and a cell phone.
5. Bring a digital camera.
6. Wear boots, long sleeves, and gloves.
7. Don't try to clean a marker to get a better look. Do not make rubbings.
8. Be careful not to introduce any foreign matter into the cemetery/burial grounds.
9. Take photos from several different angles.
10. If you feel it is important to understand size or distance in a photo, place a quarter or yard stick in the picture.
11. Record your notes and impressions on site.

Complete the formal check list when you get home.

1. Complete the survey to the best of your ability.
2. Do not use shorthand or abbreviations.
3. Always print, no cursive.
4. Keep your descriptions simple and straightforward.
5. Add any appropriate notes that might help others understand the condition of the cemetery.
6. Keep record of any questions or concerns you may have.
7. Include your recommendations for the cemetery.
8. Share the knowledge from the survey with others.

PHOTOS- Make print copies and/ or a CD to include with the completed survey.
(Eventually the photos will be added to a website. So keep digital copies too.)

*adapted from David Roberts lecture to Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites in Columbia, MD, March 7, 1992

While completing an on site survey and vandalism is noted, please note the information below and act appropriately:

Vandalism –

Record the vandalism, including photographing. Vandalism should be reported to the local law enforcement agency. The current owner should also be contacted. (Does FCCPA want to handle contacting police and owner so volunteer can just survey? I think it would be a good idea.)

Vandalism in progress –

Vandalizing a grave is a felony. Report it to the local law enforcement agency immediately.

Demolished –

If there are no signs of the cemetery still there, it may have been moved. Record it with the survey. (A local court order, or a permit from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, must be obtained before moving graves. FCCPA could research and determine if it was moved and when?)

Demolition in progress –

A local court order, or permit from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, must be obtained before moving graves, including a public legal notice and reasonable efforts to notify descendents. Check with the local law enforcement agency to see if a court order was issued, or contact the Northern Regional Preservation Office of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources at (540) 868-7030 to see if a permit was issued