



Tombstone Photography: Do's and Don'ts



Anne Mitchell



So you want to photograph tombstones

Before you go, you might want to gather:

1. Camera, extra batteries and memory cards



2. Shovel or small hoe; garden shears or heavy duty scissors (to trim away the weeds and grass)

3. Whisk broom (to brush off the grave)



"Planning a trip to the cemetery," *Ancestry.com*

(http://www.ancestry.com/cs/Satellite?childpagename=USLearningCenter%2FLearning_C%2FPageDefault&pagename=LearningWrapper&cid=1265125520979 : accessed 31 Oct 2012).

"How to Photograph Headstones & Cemeteries," *Rootsweb.ancestry.com*

(http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~sckersha/records/how_to_photograph_headstones.htm accessed : 31 Oct 2012).

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4. Cheap paint brushes (several different sizes for removing dust and debris from the crevasses of the etchings)

5. A spray bottle of ONLY WATER
(makes tombstones more readable)



6. Roll of paper towels and/or box of wipes

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7. Gloves (keeps your hands cleaner)



8. Notebook and pens or pencils or iPad (always copy down the inscription)

9. Mirror (8x10 minimum, but bigger is better); aluminum foil wrapped around cardboard



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10. Gardener's knee pads



11. Sunscreen; insect repellent; first aid kit; Technu

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"How to Photograph Headstones & Cemeteries," *Rootsweb.ancestry.com*

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What pictures should you take?

1. Photos showing the entire cemetery. Different angles are good.



2. Front gates of the cemetery.

“How to Photograph Headstones & Cemeteries,” *Rootsweb.ancestry.com*

(http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~sckersha/records/how_to_photograph_headstones.htm accessed : 31 Oct 2012).

dctim1, “Arlington National Cemetery - 2012-04-05,” *Flickr.com* (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/23165290@N00/7052173977/>), accessed : 28 Oct 2012), Creative Commons Attribution

What pictures should you take?

3. Each headstone.

a) One or more up close.



b) One or more from a distance to show context.



c) If there are surrounding family stones, pictures with those.

"How to Photograph Headstones & Cemeteries," *Rootsweb.ancestry.com*
(http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~sckersha/records/how_to_photograph_headstones.htm accessed : 31 Oct 2012).

Some more Dos!

1. Turn off your flash!

- The light will bounce off the stone and leave bright spots.
- Instead use your mirror or aluminum foil wrapped around cardboard to bounce light off the stone

2. Sidelighting works best.

- If you can take photos early or later in the day, side lighting will create shadows making it easier to read inscription
- If you are there at high noon, use your mirror or aluminum foil
- Try a flashlight at different angles

3. Point of view is important

- Don't shoot while standing
- Get down at "eye level" with the tombstone

Nancy Hendrickson, "5 Tips on Getting Great Cemetery Photos," *Archives.com*

(<http://www.archives.com/experts/hendrickson-nancy/cemetery-photos.html> accessed : 31 Oct 2012).

Do or Don't? Do you need permission?

It depends!

The Legal Genealogist has a great discussion at:

“Cemetery photos: permission required?,” *The Legal Genealogist* (<http://www.legalgenealogist.com/blog/2012/10/22/cemetery-photos-permission-required/> : accessed 31 Oct 2012)

Cemetery photos: permission required?

Posted on October 22, 2012 by Judy G. Russell

Reader Timothy Campbell in Elmira, Ontario, Canada, and a cousin of his in Grand Rapids, Michigan, have encountered some problems in taking gravestone photographs. “As an active genealogist I have taken part in transcribing and photographing headstones in cemeteries,” Tim writes. “I was recently told that I could not photograph headstones in our municipal cemetery without permission from the municipality. ... The same scenario happened to my cousin in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in May. ... What law does this fall under?”



Permission required?

The answer to this question is really basic, but it's one that just about every genealogist — including *The Legal Genealogist* — tends to forget. It's the law of **property rights**.

Now it may seem strange to think of cemeteries as property, particularly when they're owned by a governmental entity, but any landowner — public or private — has certain rights to control what happens on that land. Even when the land is publicly owned and dedicated to a public purpose, such as a park, the landowner is absolutely entitled to impose time, place and manner restrictions as to what can and can't be done on the land.

In both the United States and Canada, property laws — and particularly laws regulating cemeteries — are local laws. In the United States, it's commonly a matter of state law, and state laws may well delegate decision making authority to municipalities or counties.

In Canada, it's commonly a matter of provincial law, and in Ontario,

Some Don'ts!

1. Be Respectful: This is a Cemetery not a genealogy workshop
 - Be respectful of mourners
 - Walk on paths and around graves not over them
 - If you are asked to leave by the caretaker -- leave
2. Don't harm the tombstone.
 - Don't use shaving cream or other chemicals to clean
 - No rubbings – it's 2012, use a digital camera
3. Don't assume you will be back
 - Take multiples and check what you have before you leave
 - Write down what you did and the order and location
4. Don't trespass on private property
 - Get permission first

Where you can find this in PDF form:

<http://finding-forgotten-stories.com/resources/how-to-videos/>