

Finding a Burial Place

Many family historians would like to know where ancestors are buried, both for personal reasons and because gravestones can be a rich source of genealogical information. A visit to a grave may reveal the deceased's birth and death dates, town of birth, parents' names, and other information. Although there is no one definitive list of individual burial places, it is possible to locate a previously unknown burial place.

Death Certificate

A death certificate often provides the name of the cemetery where a person is buried. Death certificates are usually found in a city's Bureau of Vital Records or City Clerk's Office. Older records may be found in city or state archives, libraries or historical societies. Often you can visit these repositories and perform the research yourself, but others only accept written requests. The following resources can help:

- [in print] Alice Eichholz, editor, *Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources*, 3rd ed. (Ancestry, 2004). **CGI CS49.A55**
- Online death indexes and records: www.deathindexes.com/
- Online death indexes and records for NYC: www.deathindexes.com/newyork/city.html
- Where to Write for Vital Records: www.cdc.gov/nchs/howto/w2w/w2welcom.htm
- U.S. Vital Records Information (RootsWeb.org and Ancestry.com): <http://vitalrec.com/index.html>
- VitalChek Network (commercial site for ordering records): www.vitalchek.com
- Visit <http://www.deathindexes.com/> for a directory of links to websites with online death indexes, listed by state and county. Included are death records, death certificate indexes, death notices & registers, obituaries, probate indexes, and cemetery & burial records. You can also find information here about searching the Social Security Death Index online.

Obituary Research

Even a brief obituary or death notice can offer clues and information about an individual's burial place. Sometimes a photograph accompanies the article. Once you know the date of death, search for obituaries in local and ethnic newspapers. More and more newspapers are creating online indexes, and online library catalogs are making it easier to locate periodical holdings. "Ancestor Hunt Database" offers newspaper obituary search engine links for each state. To search through these links, please visit http://www.ancestorhunt.com/obituary_search_engines.htm.

The JewishGen USA Database, <http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/USA/>, offers several obituary database from major cities around the United States as well.

ProQuest's Obituaries Online Database of prominent USA newspapers is available at the Center for Jewish History. See the "E-resources" on the public computers available through the Ackman & Ziff Genealogy Institute. The database includes links to the obituaries from the Chicago Tribune, New York Times and Washington Post archives. (If you are not at CJH you can check your local library for the database as well.)

Cemetery Research

Visiting a cemetery plot may also reveal other relatives who are buried nearby, or within the same burial society. Cemeteries and funeral homes often keep records with additional data.

Jewish Data is one of the largest professionally compiled Jewish Genealogical resources of its kind currently available. They have over 500,000 records including images of tombstones, from cemeteries around New York, Massachusetts, Canada and Germany. New records are added on an ongoing basis. This resource is available at the Center for Jewish History's Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute or for a fee at **Jewishdata.com**.

The Virtual Cemetery Project, http://www.ancestralfindings.com/vcem_welcome.htm, is a collection of tombstone photos and a fully searchable archive of transcriptions. Individuals can both contribute photos of tombstones or search the database of tombstones currently available.

To view a free database of cemetery records, cemetery inscriptions and a general list of cemeteries nationwide, please visit <http://www.ancestralfindings.com/cemetery.htm>.

Museum of Family History Database offers more than 105,000 translated gravestone inscriptions located in more than thirty cemeteries in New York and New Jersey. These matzevot (gravestones) are found in nearly seven hundred landsmanshaftn and synagogue plots, and represent societies whose origins lie in more than one-hundred and seventy Eastern European shtetls, towns, and cities. With the addition of other burial data obtained from other sources, the Museum database now contains information for burials not only in New York and New Jersey, but also for Connecticut, Western Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. The current number of burials registered on the Museum database now exceeds 210,000 names. You can visit this site at, <http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/cp-main.htm>.

Social Security Death Index

The Social Security Death Index (SSDI) usually contains the date (or at least the month and year) and place of death, which are helpful in locating a death certificate. The SSDI is a compilation of information about deceased persons who filed for and received Social Security numbers, who were paid Social Security benefits at some point in their lives, and whose death was reported to the Social Security Administration (SSA). The index also provides the deceased's Social Security number, allowing you to request a copy of the person's social security application, which provides father's name, mother's maiden name, and birthplace. Search SSDI from Ancestry.com or RootsWeb.org.

City Directories and Census Records

There are other strategies for determining a person's approximate date of death, or year of death. City directories list city residents and their addresses and occupations. If a person appears in a city directory regularly until a certain year, he or she may have passed away between his or her last appearance and that year. Similarly, a person's disappearance from census records after a certain point also suggests that he or she may have died. Please see our fact sheets on City Directories and the U.S. Census for further details.

Burial Societies

Many Jewish immigrants belonged to landsmanshaftn (societies of immigrants from the same hometown), or to occupational or religious societies. Many such groups purchased burial plots for their members. If you know the name of your immigrant ancestor's hometown or the name of a society to which he or she belonged, you can search for cemeteries with corresponding landsmanshaft burial plots. For the NYC Metropolitan Area, two databases compiled by the Jewish Genealogical Society are extremely helpful:

- www.jgsny.org/searchcity.htm, which provides burial societies in the NY Metro Area, listing the cemeteries where each society has burial plots

- www.jgsny.org/nycem.htm, which provides a directory of Jewish cemeteries in the NY Metro Area

Unclaimed Burials in New York City

Hebrew Free Burial Association

In New York City, when the Medical Examiner's office believes an unclaimed deceased person to be Jewish, they forward the name to the Public Administrator's office, which contacts the Hebrew Free Burial Association (HFBA). HFBA buries the deceased in a Jewish cemetery, in accordance with Jewish ritual law. HFBA has been in operation since 1882 and holds relatively thorough records. Call 212-239-1662, or write to 224 West 35th Street, Room 300, New York, NY 10011. Provide as much information as possible, particularly the deceased's name, date of death, and age.

"Potter's Field"

Potter's Field, officially called City Cemetery, is the burial place for deceased people, not known to be Jewish, who are not claimed by any relative. The cemetery is located on Hart Island and is administered by the Department of Correction. Internment registers, arranged by date of burial, from 1881 to 1956 are located at the New York City Municipal Archives:

31 Chambers Street, Room 103 (between Centre & Elk Streets)
New York, NY 10007
(212) 788-8580; Fax: (212) 385-0984

For more recent records, the Department of Correction will conduct a search in their internment registers. Contact the Department of Correction Deputy Commissioner for Public Information at 646-248-1055.

Cemeteries Outside the U.S.

Locating a burial place outside the U.S. can sometimes present a challenge. Many cemeteries in Central and Eastern Europe and in the former Ottoman lands are in poor condition, and some have been destroyed altogether, but many resources are nevertheless available to assist you in your search.

International Jewish Cemetery Project

The International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies has a listing of Jewish cemeteries around the world. Jewish cemetery or burial sites are listed by country and town name. Some listings include links to other websites with additional information such as burial lists or a name to contact by email or snail-mail. Not every Jewish burial site has been identified.

www.iajgs.org/cemetery/

Regional Special Interest Groups

It is also recommended that you visit the website of the Special Interest Group for the region you are researching, where further cemetery information may be available.

www.jewishgen.org/JewishGen/sigs.htm

JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry

The JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR) is a database of names and other identifying information from cemeteries and burial records worldwide.

www.jewishgen.org/databases/Cemetery/