Exploring Kentucky Cemeteries: An Introduction

Cemeteries mean different things to different people. Some view them as sacred, others avoid them, many see them as a future forever home. There is no right or wrong in what they may mean to you. Perspective is really everything.



Some of our ancestors were planful about their final resting place, while others were not involved at all in planning their burial. And increasingly more and more are choosing alternative methods to dispose of their remains altogether.

For the Kentucky researcher, a cemetery can be a particularly valuable resource.

Similar to its diverse landscape, Kentucky research can be rife with hills and dales. Kentucky has rocky terrain, high peaks, low valleys, caves, and sinkholes. Metaphorically, these landscape elements are good symbols for the challenges that must be traversed in exploring Kentucky cemeteries or conducting any genealogy research in the Commonwealth.

Some burial locations are well known and documented and many others are unknown. Some graves have markers and many others are completely unmarked or have been lost to time.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of Kentucky's cemetery ecosystem is the sheer volume of them. According to Find-A-Grave website statistics, there are currently 43,063 cemeteries in Kentucky, more so, by far, than any other state. And this is likely an undercount as it likely doesn't include numerous cemeteries where enslaved and Native Americans may be buried. The sheer volume of Kentucky cemeteries likely has much to do with the pattern of migration from the Borderlands

A Few Facts:

- Kentucky has the fewest cemeteries with GPS coordinates identified than any other states (less than 42%)
- The largest cemetery in Kentucky is Cave Hill, which was chartered by the General Assembly of Kentucky in 1848. It is the forever home for over 138,000 Kentuckians.
- There are eight national cemeteries maintained by the U.S. Veterans Administration (VA) and six VA funded cemeteries that are operated and maintained by the Commonwealth.
- Five counties with the most cemeteries are: Pike (1981), Floyd (1774), Johnson (1,456), Lawrence (1,000), and Perry (930). Five counties with the least cemeteries are: Robertson (38), Spencer (66), Gallatin (70), Nicholas (78), and Campbell (80).
- Kentucky memorials on Find-A-Grave totals 4,177,243.
- In 2020, the national rate of cremation was 56% and it continues to grow every year

Types of Cemeteries

There are various types of public and private cemeteries including: monument, memorial park, garden/rural cemetery, religious, municipal, Veterans Administration, graveyard or churchyard, family burial ground/farm/estate, mausoleum, niche, grave marker

Visiting a Cemetery (Do's and Don'ts)

- Autumn is a perfect time of the year to visit a cemetery: the light is better, the weather is cooler, and vegetation will start to die back making it easier to see markers.
- Before you visit a cemetery, do research on the cemetery and learn any history about it, where records may be stored, the burial location if it's a large cemetery, find out who purchased the plot and if the grave is part of a family plot. If there is a cemetery office, they may know when the tombstone is placed. See if you can obtain a map. Different cemetery offices maintain different types of information. This information can be helpful to have before you visit. Some may have an obituary, a bill of sale for the plot, and the purchaser of the plot.
- Find-A-Grave is a free and helpful resource to learn about the location of a cemetery. Many Kentucky cemeteries have directional information or GPS coordinates listed. Do research the grave on Find-A-Grave to see what information may already exist about the grave or marker.
- If the cemetery is on private property, do gain permission from the property owner.
- Municipal, church, public cemeteries will likely have posted hours. Note any rules posted at the cemetery. Often there is additional information posted. Do respect the sacred nature of the cemetery when you visit. Do respect any rules.
- If you find a grave marker for the person, capture information. Take photographs – lots of them. Photograph the front, back, side of the marker. Photograph the marker in relation to other markers. Photograph all the markers around the marker as they made be relations. If you find the grave unmarked, photograph the unmarked grave in relation to other markers or landscape features in the cemetery. If you are using a smartphone, be sure to turn on your GPS on your photo app so GPS coordinates can be automatically captured in your photos.
- Upload your photos to Find-A-Grave and/or BillionGraves. This will enable researchers from all over the world to be able to virtually visit a cemetery.

Safe Grave Marker Cleaning Techniques

- A good rule of thumb is just to leave the marker alone. Many well intentioned people have caused serious damage to grave markers by using all manner of products, brushes, tools, etc., to clean markers. Your well intended effort may damage or bring about a breakdown of a grave marker.

Federal Records:

Most Federal records pertaining to Kentucky are held at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). These records can be found in: College Park, MD; Atlanta, GA; Washington, DC; or St. Louis, MO (National Personnel Records Center). To access Federal records, **History Hub** is a good starting point: https://historyhub.history.gov/welcome

Some of the Federal military installations that have been located in Kentucky (past and present) include: Fort Knox, Godman Air Force Base, Fort Campbell, Clarksville Base, Naval Ordinance, Blue Grass Army Depot, Lexington Army Depot, Bowman Field, Camp Breckinridge, and Camp Zachary Taylor.

National Park Service sites include: Abraham Lincoln Birthplace, Big South Fork, Camp Nelson, Cumberland Gap, Fort Donelson, Lewis & Clark National Trail, Mammoth Cave National Park, Mill Springs Battlefield, Trail of Tears

Additional Federal records generated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the U.S. Forest Reserve, U.S. Bullion Depository, Department of Agriculture, and the Civilian Conservation Corps exist pertaining to Kentucky.

Key Source Publications:

Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America
David Hackett Fischer; 1989; Oxford University Press; 984 pages

☆ **Kentucky Ancestry: A Guide to Genealogical and Historical Research**
Roseann Reinemuth Hogan; 1992; Ancestry.com; 388 pages

African Founders: How Enslaved People Expanded American Ideals
David Hackett Fischer; 2022; Simon & Schuster; 960 pages

The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy
Edited by Loretto Szucs & Sandra Luebking; 2006; Ancestry Publishing; 834 pages

Map Guide to American Migration Routes, 1735-1815
William Dollarhide; 2000; Heritage Quest; 41 pages

American Migration Routes Part 1: Indian Paths, Post Roads, & Wagon Roads
William Dollarhide; 2022; Family Roots; 139 pages

Scottish Emigration to Colonial America, 1607-1785
David Dobson; 2004; University Press of Georgia; 266 pages

"FIrst Census" of Kentucky 1790
Charles Brunk Heinkemann; 1940; Gaius Marcus Brumbaugh; 118 pages

History of Augusta County, Virginia
J. Lewis Peyton; 1882; Samuel M. Yost & Son; 395 pages
https://archive.org/details/historyofaugusta00peytuoft/mode/2up

Germanic Genealogy: A Guide to Worldwide Sources and Migration Patterns, Third Edition
Brandt, Bellingham, Cutkomp, Frye, Lowe, & Sternberg for Germanic Genealogy Society; 2013; 658 pages

A Sample of Additional Resources for Exploration:

Find-A-Grave https://www.findagrave.com

Billion Graves https://billiongraves.com/search#

USGeological Survey National Map https://apps.nationalmap.gov/viewer/

Kentucky Heritage Council https://heritage.ky.gov/historic-places/Pages/cemeteries.aspx

County Boundary Changes https://www.randymajors.org

Old Maps https://www.oldmapsonline.org/

Albion's Seed Grows in the Cumberland Gap http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug97/albion/albion2.html

US Geological Survey National Map Viewer https://apps.nationalmap.gov/viewer/

Kentucky's Frontier Trails *https://kygeonet.ky.gov/StoryMaps/KyFrontierTrails/*

Kentucky Land Records https://www.sos.ky.gov/land/non-military/Pages/default.aspx

Gazetteer of Early Kentucky Locations https://web.sos.ky.gov/land/gazetteer.aspx

FamilySearch - Kentucky Cemeteries https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Kentucky_Cemeteries

National Cemeteries in Kentucky (Nicholasville, Louisville, Danville, Lebanon, Lexington, Nancy, Southgate)
https://www.cem.va.gov/find-cemetery/state.asp?STATE=KY

Kentucky Veterans Cemeteries (Frankfort, Radcliff, Williamstown, Grayson, Hyden, Hopkinsville)
https://www.cem.va.gov/find-cemetery/state.asp?STATE=KY

Central Kentucky African American Cemetery Association (Boyle, Casey, Garrard, Lincoln, & Mercer Counties)
https://www.facebook.com/groups/665533650183055/ and https://sites.rootsweb.com/~ckyaaca/

Kentucky GenWeb Tombstone Transcription Project http://www.usgwtombstones.org/kentucky/kentucky.html

Bullitt County Cemeteries https://bullittcountyhistory.org/cem/bullittcem.html

Calvary Cemetery (Lexington) https://cdlex.org/calvary-cemetery/

Cave Hill Cemetery (Louisville) https://www.cavehillcemetery.com/search/

Archdiocese of Louisville (Louisville) https://catholiccemeterieslouisville.org/locate-a-loved-one/

City of Henderson (Henderson) https://www.cemify.com/cem/city-of-henderson/contact

Covington Diocese Cemeteries (Fort Mitchell, Cold Spring, Wilder, Fort Thomas)
https://covdio.org/buildings-properties-2/cemeteries/

Fayette County Cemetery Index https://www.lexpublib.org/fayette-co-cemeteries-index

Fairview Cemetery (Bowling Green) https://bowlinggreen.warren.ky.govern.com

Greenup County Cemetery Locator Guide http://greenupgenealogy.org/cemetery_locator_guide

Pewee Valley Cemetery East https://www.peweevalleyhistory.org/pv-cemetery-east.html

Lexington Cemetery https://lexcem.org/genealogy-records-search/

Louisville Memorial Gardens West (Shively) https://www.louisvillemgwest.com

Louisville Memorial Gardens East (Louisville) https://www.lmgfuneralhomeeast.com

Oak Grove Cemetery (Paducah) http://paducahky.gov/oak-grove-cemetery#burial

Owensboro Diocese Cemeteries (Western Kentucky) https://owensborodiocese.org/catholic-cemeteries/

Resurrection Cemetery (Owensboro) https://www.cemify.com/cem/resurrection/contact

Rose Crest and Versailles Cemetery https://versailles.ky.gov/services/Pages/cemeteries.aspx

Rose Hill (Owensboro) https://www.rosehillcemetery.net/locate-a-loved-one

St. Joseph Cemetery (Leitchfield) https://www.cemify.com/cem/st-joseph-cemetery/contact

Horrible Massacre / African American Cemetery (Shelby County) https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=136842

Four Historic Cemeteries in Oldham County https://touroldham.com/cemeteries/

Kentucky Cemetery Abstracts https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2579610

Browning Genealogy - Western Kentucky Database
https://www.browninggenealogy.org/cm/Databases/Western-Kentucky-Obituary

Kentucky Cemetery Law Overview from Boone County Public Library
https://cbc.bcplhistory.org/doku.php?id=guidelines_for_cemetery_documentation_and_preservation

Free Guide to Cemetery Symbols
https://www.cavehillcemetery.com/assets/pdfs/newsletter/cave-hill-cemetery-guide-to-cemetery-symbols.pdf

Association for Gravestone Studies https://www.gravestonestudies.org

Funeral Directors Association of Kentucky - Trade Group https://www.fdaofky.com

Kentucky Cemetery Association - Trade Group https://www.kentuckycemeteryassociation.org/index.php

Getting the Most Out of Find a Grave https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KlZbXzngsFI

National Cemetery Guidance on Grave Marker Cleaning https://www.cem.va.gov/hmm/cleaning.asp

WorldCat Kentucky Cemeteries Search: https://www.worldcat.org/search?q=kentucky+cemeteries

FamilySearch Books: https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/

Algorithms are at work on Ancestry.com https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Mw1Xeb2A54

USGS Historical Topographic Maps - Preserving the Past
https://www.usgs.gov/programs/national-geospatial-program/historical-topographic-maps-preserving-past

Total number of cemeteries identified by Kentucky county:

Adair (487)
Allen (329)
Anderson (203)
Ballard (98)
Barren (760)
Bath (281)
Bell (603)
Boone (229)
Bourbon (158)
Boyd (354)
Boyle (158)
Bracken (188)
Breathitt (848)
Breckinridge (373)
Bullitt (222)
Butler (274)
Caldwell (251)
Calloway (263)
Campbell (80)
Carlisle (89)
Carroll (176)
Carter (837)
Casey (304)
Christian (511)
Clark (360)
Clay (808)
Clinton (160)
Crittenden (216)
Cumberland (304)
Daviess (180)
Edmonson (200)
Eliott (542)
Estill (399)
Fayette (161)
Fleming (202)
Floyd (1,774)
Franklin (162)
Fulton (92)
Gallatin (70)
Garrard (236)
Grant (161)
Graves (310)
Grayson (340)
Green County (422)
Greenup (646)
Hancock (157)
Hardin (297)
Harlan (499)
Harrison (139)
Hart (409)
Henderson (228)
Henry (230)
Hickman (100)
Hopkins (200)
Jackson (651)
Jefferson (298)
Jessamine (290)
Johnson (1,456)
Kenton (133)
Knott (785)
Knox (806)
LaRue (93)
Laurel (638)
Lawrence (1,000)
Lee (401)
Leslie (672)
Letcher (881)
Lewis (285)
Lincoln (255)
Livingston (260)
Logan (374)
Lyon (102)
McKracken (141)
McCreary (266)
McLean (135)
Madison (513)
Magoffin (961)
Marion (107)
Marshall (254)
Martin (580)
Mason (104)
Meade (158)
Menifee (296)
Mercer (180)
Metcalfe (367)
Monroe (226)
Montgomery (268)
Morgan (786)
Muhlenberg (314)
Nelson (173)
Nicholas (78)
Ohio (351)
Oldham (180)
Owen (273)
Owsley (328)
Pendleton (203)
Perry (930)
Pike (1,981)
Powell (292)
Pulaski (555)
Robertson (38)
Rockcastle (363)
Rowan (326)
Russell (299)
Scott (261)
Shelby (304)
Simpson (228)
Spencer (66)
Taylor (332)
Todd (193)
Trigg (516)
Trimble (151)
Union (83)
Warren (352)
Washington (148)
Wayne (478)
Webster (184)
Whitley (636)
Wolfe (476)
Woodford (130)

**Utilizing county search feature on Find-A-Grave.com on September 25, 2022*

URLs valid as of September 25, 2022 © 2022
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