

Washington State Cemetery Association

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The National Cemetery Administration Records Verification Project

By Steve Paul Johnson, August 1, 2000

Editor's note: This article first appeared at Cemetery Records Online's "The Cemetery Column" found at <http://www.interment.net/>.

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA), a division of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, has been undertaking an extensive project to verify the burial records in their database. This is a painstaking process of comparing the records in their database with original records of interment. The NCA operates 119 cemeteries in 39 states and territories, including an additional 33 soldiers' lots in private cemeteries, all containing over 2.3 million remains of veterans and their families.

In 1993, the NCA installed a new computerized system of managing interment records. Up until then, records were recorded on ROI forms (Record of Interment), which were later microfilmed. In order to perform a lookup, NCA staff had to browse through microfilms. Looking up records was particularly difficult, as all microfilmed records were organized by year of interment, and then alphabetized from there. Finding a record meant first having to know the interment year, a piece of information which many people did not have. The computer system would allow the NCA to lookup records faster using less information.

All NCA cemeteries began using the new system in 1993 for all new burials moving forward. Adding the prior records to the new system would prove to be a daunting task. To do this, the NCA hired a contractor who digitized each microfilmed ROI form into an image. From there, optical character recognition (OCR) was used to "read" imaged text and then transformed into computer data. All computer data was



stored into a special database that the NCA refers to as "the priors".

The NCA estimates the imaging and OCR process to have yielded an 80% accuracy rate. Some ROI forms were handwritten and required manual transcription. On some forms, the OCR failed due to the type being too faint to read, or the type not being centered in the boxes. Additionally, the ROI forms changed shape and style many times over the years causing even more transformation problems. Some veterans' remains were disinterred and moved to private cemeteries by their families. Obviously, the NCA could not remove these records from microfilm, yet they were still imaged, read, and stored into the priors. Before any of the data from the priors can be added to the new system, each record must be manually verified as being accurate and current. Hence, the verification project.

The NCA placed the priors on a computer system that can be accessed by each of the national cemeteries. Each cemetery has been asked to verify these records. A cemetery staff will get a record from the priors, and compare it with a record that the cemetery itself had maintained locally. In some cases, the staff will actually visit the gravesites to verify that someone is there, and will even use information from the

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tombstones. Some cemeteries have been very active in verifying records, while others have not even started. The NCA currently allocates funds to the cemeteries to pay for overtime and to hire outside workers. The NCA predicts that they will have to hire a contractor to get the verification project completed in a more timely fashion. About 10,000 to 15,000 records are verified each month, and about 30% to 35% of the priors have been verified.

In some cases, the cemeteries are finding that they have interment records that the NCA does not have. Somehow, the original ROI form was misplaced, or destroyed, and was never microfilmed. In this case, the cemeteries are adding their own records to the new computer system.

Cemeteries outside of the NCA have been making use of the new computer system as well. The Army has begun using it for cemeteries they administer, including Arlington National Cemetery. Some state veterans' cemeteries have started using it also. Records of all new burials are being added to those of the NCA, though records previous to the new computer system have yet to be converted over.

Some Web sites have obtained copies of the verified and unverified records and are publishing them online. Interment.net is currently incorporating them, and has marked all unverified records with an asterisk (*). The NCA

was asked if they would encourage the public to come forward to provide verification. However, the NCA indicated that many of these burials occurred over a hundred years ago, and in no way could someone today vouch for such a burial, especially without having copies of original records.

Other Web sites have published these records also, but have failed to indicate which records are unverified. As a result, some users have been shocked with the results. In one case, the mother of a deceased child visited one such website and found her child listed in the wrong cemetery. She thought that the NCA moved her child to a different cemetery without her notification! The NCA had to explain that she found an unverified record and that the website had failed to explain this.

As to when the NCA will complete the project, they could not estimate. A decision still has to be made whether or not to hire a contractor to expedite the verification. Each cemetery has been allotted funds to conduct the verification, but it is not known how they are using the money. Once the verification is completed, the NCA plans to provide a database search utility on its website.

Steve is the editor of The Cemetery Column and Webmaster of Cemetery Records Online at

<http://www.interment.net/>

Source: United States Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration.

National Cemeteries

Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery
Alexandria National Cemetery
Alton National Cemetery
Annapolis National Cemetery
Balls Bluff National Cemetery
Baltimore National Cemetery
Barrancas National Cemetery
Bath National Cemetery
Baton Rouge National Cemetery
Bay Pines National Cemetery
Beaufort National Cemetery
Beverly National Cemetery
Biloxi National Cemetery
Black Hills National Cemetery
Calverton National Cemetery
Camp Butler National Cemetery
Camp Nelson National Cemetery
Cave Hill National Cemetery
Chattanooga National Cemetery
City Point National Cemetery
Cold Harbor National Cemetery
Corinth National Cemetery
Crown Hill National Cemetery
Culpeper National Cemetery
Cypress Hills National Cemetery
Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery
Danville National Cemetery
Dayton National Cemetery
Eagle Point National Cemetery
Fayetteville National Cemetery
Finn's Point National Cemetery
Florence National Cemetery
Florida National Cemetery
Fort Bayard National Cemetery
Fort Bliss National Cemetery
Fort Custer National Cemetery
Fort Gibson National Cemetery
Fort Harrison National Cemetery
Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery
Fort Logan National Cemetery
Fort Lyon National Cemetery
Fort McPherson National Cemetery
Fort Meade National Cemetery
Fort Mitchell National Cemetery
Fort Richardson National Cemetery
Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery
Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery
Fort Scott National Cemetery
Fort Smith National Cemetery
Fort Snelling National Cemetery
Glendale National Cemetery
Golden Gate National Cemetery
Grafton National Cemetery
Hampton National Cemetery
Hot Springs National Cemetery
Houston National Cemetery
Indiantown Gap National Cemetery
Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery
Jefferson City National Cemetery
Keokuk National Cemetery
Kerrville National Cemetery
Knoxville National Cemetery
Leavenworth National Cemetery
Lebanon National Cemetery
Lexington National Cemetery
Little Rock National Cemetery

National Cemeteries continued next page

Sidney Cemetery in Port Orchard back in the news

Sidney Cemetery continues to be in the news. The owners have filed a lawsuit in the Superior Court for Kitsap County asking that the dedication be removed. We have voiced our concern to the Prosecuting Attorney that new state laws have not been complied with in announcing the lawsuit.

According to the new 1999 legislation signed into effect by Governor Locke on 17 May 1999 and becoming law 90 days later, those who intend to file a lawsuit with the intent to have a dedication removed, both the Washington State Cemetery Board and the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation must be notified sixty days before filing the proceedings in superior court. The notice of the proposed removal must also be recorded with the auditor or recording officer of the county where the cemetery is located.

The new legislation was submitted by WSCA as part of a larger plan for the further protection of cemeteries.

A large number of cemeteries in Washington state have been built upon and forgotten in very similar circumstances. The most notorious being the Snohomish Cemetery which is still in litigation after a senior center was built and headstones removed to a private plot and placed in a "fake" cemetery to raise money for the historical society.

Kitsap County officials are trying to comply with cemetery laws in the state. They acted quickly and prop-



Sidney Cemetery made headlines when the owners brought a bulldozer in to clear the overgrowth with the intention of building their new home on the site. County officials quashed the bid to build on the site and the owners are now pursuing legal means to remove the dedication.

erly to subdue planned construction on the Sidney Cemetery site.

Those with comments for Kitsap County officials may voice them through WSCA or by contacting the Kitsap County Prosecuting Attorney's office at 614 Division Street, Port Orchard, WA 98366, (360) 337-7174.

Update: WSCA President and Secretary attended the Kitsap County Commissioners meeting and voiced their concern over the Sidney Cemetery. Representative Patricia Lantz (sponsor of our 1999 legislation to further protect cemeteries) was also contacted.

During the last week of July, the Kitsap County Prosecutor's Office contacted our President and stated they are filing an injunction on the court case. Specifics are unknown at this time. We will keep you posted.

National Cemeteries continued from previous page

Long Island National Cemetery
 Los Angeles National Cemetery
 Loudon Park National Cemetery
 Marietta National Cemetery
 Marion National Cemetery
 Massachusetts National Cemetery
 Memphis National Cemetery
 Mill Springs National Cemetery
 Mobile National Cemetery
 Mound City National Cemetery
 Mountain Home National Cemetery
 Nashville National Cemetery
 Natchez National Cemetery
 National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona
 National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific
 New Albany National Cemetery
 New Bern National Cemetery
 Philadelphia National Cemetery
 Port Hudson National Cemetery
 Prescott National Cemetery
 Puerto Rico National Cemetery
 Quantico National Cemetery
 Quincy National Cemetery
 Raleigh National Cemetery

Richmond National Cemetery
 Riverside National Cemetery
 Rock Island National Cemetery
 Roseburg National Cemetery
 Salisbury National Cemetery
 San Antonio National Cemetery
 San Francisco National Cemetery
 San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery
 Santa Fe National Cemetery
 Saratoga National Cemetery
 Seven Pines National Cemetery
 Sitka National Cemetery
 Springfield National Cemetery
 St. Augustine National Cemetery
 Staunton National Cemetery
**Tahoma National Cemetery, 18600
 Southeast 240th Street, Kent, WA 98042-
 4868, (425) 413-9614**
 Togus National Cemetery
 West Virginia National Cemetery
 Willamette National Cemetery
 Wilmington National Cemetery
 Winchester National Cemetery
 Wood National Cemetery
 Woodlawn National Cemetery
 Zachary Taylor National Cemetery

Visit <http://www.cem.va.gov/listcem.htm> for more info on these cemeteries.

See our web site for more information
<http://www.rootsweb.com/~wapsgs>

Asotin County Cemeteries

Anatone	Joseph Creek
Asotin	Lake
Asotin Creek	McKinzie Graves
Autrey	Montgomery Ridge
Ayers	Mountain View
Babandorf	Myers Grave
Body Place	Neal Grave
Bracken	Pleasant Ridge Catholic
Clarkston	Roupe Graves
Cloverland	Saint Joseph
Craige	Silcott
Critchfield Gulch	Taplan Grave
Grave Place	Theon
Green Place	Vest Grave
Grouse Creek	Vineland
Haberman Grave	Weissenfels Grave
Holy Family	

Benton County Cemeteries

Benton City	Rest Haven
Desert Lawn Memorial Park	Riverview Heights
East Prosser	Sunset Memorial Gardens
Evergreen	Unnamed
Horse Heaven	West Prosser
IOOF	White Bluffs
Kiona-Benton	

Chelan County Cemeteries

Blewett	Manson
Blewett Pass	Meyer, Anna Marie C. E.
Brisky Canyon	Mount Olivet
Brisky-Treadwell	Mountain View
Burgess	North Road
Burgess, John Wesley, Jr.	Old Cashmere
Cashmere	Old Leavenworth
Cashmere City	Ole, Red Mountain
Chelan Fraternal	Parrish, George W.
Chiwaukum	Peshastin
Entiat	Redmond - Mr. or Mrs.?
Episcopal	Riverview
Ericson, Fred	Scotty Creek
Fowler Boy	Shugart
Fraternal	Sieloff, Walter
Henry, Eunice	Stemilt Hill
Hillcrest Haven of Peace	Sunnyslope
Hillcrest Haven of Rest	Tumwater Canyon
Indian Burial Ground	Two Graves
Indian	Unknown Individual
Ingalls Creek	Unnamed
Jacques Toddler	VandeGrift, SI and WW
King, Pat	Wapato Point
Leavenworth	Wenatchee
Leavenworth North Road	Wenatchee City
Malaga	

Upcoming Events to Watch For

Two cemetery workshops are planned for September. The workshops are designed to teach beginning and intermediate cemetery restoration/renovation. A flyer is included in this newsletter. Those who sign up for the class will be contacted with more specific information.

The class in Seattle will be held at Comet Lodge Cemetery. Field work will be the main focus of the workshop. Prior to the field work, there will be classroom discussion on correct methods of cleaning/repairing, and setting headstones/basestones. The class will be September 16th. To sign up, send a \$25 check or money order to Washington State Cemetery Association at P. O. Box 103, Port Orchard, WA 98366.

A similar class will be held in Wenatchee on September 23rd. The first part of the class will be classroom discussion on how to do cemetery transcriptions. Maggie Rail, the Queen of Transcriptions, will be on hand to discuss her methods. Classroom discussion on repairing and setting headstones will follow with lunch and then field work for the rest of the day. To make your reservation, send a \$25 check or money order to Wenatchee Area Genealogical Society, c/o Fred Pflugrath, Box 561, Peshastin, WA 98847.

On October 7th, the Oregon Historic Cemeteries Association, Inc., will sponsor, in Portland, a Victorian Mourning Exhibit. The exhibit will take place at the River View Cemetery complete with costumed guides, a horse-drawn Victorian hearse, and a Lincoln casket replica. The exhibit will be put on the day prior for Portland area school children as an educational field trip. In addition, classes will be provided and a roundtable discussion by members of California, Oregon, and Washington state associations.

Questions about any of these classes may be directed to Andi at 360.871.5694. Information may also be found at our Web site: <<http://www.rootsweb.com/~wapsgs>>.



Comet Lodge Cemetery Update

Final work on the cemetery site is beginning. It is hoped the cemetery will be done by the end of October. Left to do is grade a few of the dangerous spots (to avoid visitors twisting ankles or worse on the slopes), plant more trees and native shrubs, and clean and replace the funerary objects.

A fence is being built across the entire northern boundary. It will be constructed of chain link to discourage vandalism. It is felt that new plantings along the northern boundary, which includes trees and large shrubs, will disguise the fence from the cemetery, and it will disguise the cemetery to the adjoining neighbors.

One adjoining neighbor keeps Rottweilers, which are either kept in an open dog kennel or allowed to roam. Several workers have been charged by the large dogs and it is believed one worker sustained a dog bite. The same owner may be allowed to keep a basketball court which adjoins onto the cemetery property. WSCA has established that the court is not on a cemetery plot, but instead angles in on a pathway on the northern boundary.

Comet Lodge Cemetery was desecrated over 10 years ago by Elyssian Fields who claimed ownership of the cemetery property. Elyssian Fields had almost all headstones/basestones and many other objects bulldozed to the southern end of the property. By the time the Washington State Cemetery Board got to the scene, the entire cemetery was desecrated. The Board was able to slap a stop-work order on Elyssian Fields to halt any further desecration.

Over the years two individuals have worked hard to reconstruct the burial listing. Between both listings, it has been determined that almost 500 individuals are buried on the site. Unfortunately, only a small fraction of those individuals can be placed in a plot corresponding to the original cemetery plat filed in 1897 with King County.

WSCA, through a survey conducted in the early part of this year, found that only 12 of the 26 headstones can be placed back in their original locations. The other 14 belong to individuals buried somewhere on the property. In addition, WSCA found over 40 basestones lacking any corresponding headstone. Those headstones have been stolen, buried under the mounds of dirt Elyssian Fields brought in to the cemetery, or they wound up under the earth while being bulldozed to the southern end.

In July, WSCA and county officials met to discuss a memorial being considered. The memorial will consist of the 14 headstones and 40+ basestones having no home. WSCA feels a learning center for children might be appropriate on the site and the county agrees.



Alice Ann Wilson, great-aunt of Mr. Dan Russell of Chicago, Ill. Alice's headstone was found in plot 105; original plot unknown. It should be noted, however, that several other Wilsons are known to be buried in plot 100. Photo submitted by Mr. Russell.

Dave Preugschat and Nick Masla made many suggestions for improving upon the idea.

The memorial would consist of basestones arranged in semi-circles with a place for a teacher to stand in front. The headstones can be arranged as a tribute to those who are buried at the site. Signage of some sort (still to be determined) will also be used. Children can be taught about the history of Seattle, about protecting cemeteries, about "reading between the lines", about stone composition, how headstones are made, and more--the subject material is endless!

WSCA has contacted the Seattle Public Schools curriculum department to discuss possibilities and to discuss the cemetery being used by the school system to encourage teaching children about the care and preservation of cemeteries. WSCA would carry curriculum materials at their web site for easy downloading by teachers.

The idea was long in coming, but everyone who has heard of the plan feels it is extraordinary. If everything works out, a cemetery rededication could take place before November 1, 2000.

As always, WSCA is hoping to find more descendants of those buried at Comet Lodge. If you know of anyone, please contact WSCA at P. O. Box 103, Port Orchard, WA 98366 or phone 360.871.5694 with the information. WSCA is also accepting photographs of the deceased to add to the history of the cemetery.

Washington State Cemetery Association
 PO Box 103
 Port Orchard, WA 98366

If you have information you would like to share, send it to PO Box 103, Port Orchard WA 98366, for inclusion in the next newsletter.

We are especially looking for items on abandoned or old, unkempt cemeteries, or on cemeteries which have severe problems (such as Jameson Cemetery on page 3).

Volunteers from around the state are needed for a variety of projects including newsletter editor. To volunteer, contact Andi MacDonald at (360) 871-5694 or at andimac@oz.net.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Washington State Cemetery Association (WSCA) is to research, protect, restore, and preserve old and abandoned cemeteries in Washington state, to maintain their history, and to provide education and awareness of old and abandoned cemeteries and their care to the public.

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~wapsgs/>

Washington State Cemetery Association <h2 style="margin: 0;">Membership Form</h2>	
Name	
Address	
City, State, Zip	
Home phone	email address
Membership Type <input type="checkbox"/> Individual: \$12.00 per year <input type="checkbox"/> Student: \$6.00 per year	
Cemetery(ies) you are interested in and their location:	
please place any additional information you would like us to have on the back...	
Members will receive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • membership package by return mail • quarterly newsletter • notification of new laws • assistance with cemetery projects 	Mail completed application and check or money order to Treasurer Washington State Cemetery Association PO Box 103 Port Orchard WA 98366