

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:

- *Where to Write for Vital Records [Births, Deaths, Marriages and Divorces]*. (Washington: U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, Dec. 1998): www.cdc.gov/nchs/howto/w2w/w2welcom.htm
- Vital Records Information, United States: <http://vitalrec.com/index.html>.
- For links to online vital records indexes, see www.genealogybranches.com/#state.
- For an online index to NYC death records, see www.italiangen.org/NYCDEATH.STM
- Alice Eichholz, editor, *Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources* (Ancestry, 1992).

Please see our Vital Records fact sheet for further details about obtaining birth, marriage, and death records, including New York City vital records.

Social Security Death Index

Knowing the date or approximate date of death can be helpful in finding a death certificate. Sometimes this information can be found in the Social Security Death Index. The Social Security Death Index (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). Date and place of death are often included in the SSDI listing. (The listing 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 Steve Morse's web site: www.stevemorse.org/ssdi/ssdi.html.

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, no longer appearing in state or federal census records also suggests that an individual may have passed away. 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 of these immigrant groups purchased burial plots for their members. If you know the name of your immigrant ancestor's hometown or the name of a burial society to which he or she belonged, you can search for the cemeteries in which the burial society has burial plots.

A database of burial societies in New York City, listing the cemeteries where each society has burial plots, is available from the Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc. (New York). Go to www.JGSNY.org and click on "Burial Societies in the New York Metropolitan Area." A list of all New York cemeteries and their addresses is also available on this website.

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.jewishgen.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/