

Up Close & Personal: Doing On-Site Research

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Prepared and Presented by Jean Wilcox Hibben – PhD, MA, CGsm;
Riverside County, California; 909-268-5326; <jean@circlemending.org>
<www.circlemending.org> <www.circlemending.blogspot.com>

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I. BEFORE THE TRIP

- A. Things to consider
 - 1. The dates & length of time for the trip
 - 2. The places you plan to visit (then reduce your expectations significantly!)
 - 3. Means of transportation to destination
 - a. By air: Determine airport destination(s), checking on the possibility of arriving & departing from different locations (check on car rental expectations & requirements)
 - b. By vehicle: Plan route in advance but allow for changes
 - 4. _____
- B. People to contact
 - 1. Genealogy libraries/librarians
 - 2. Historical society personnel
 - 3. Cemetery sextons
 - 4. Vital records offices
 - 5. Church officials
 - 6. Courthouses
 - 7. Local Family History Centers
 - 8. Possible relatives or former neighbors of ancestors (to interview)
 - 9. _____
- C. Things to pack
 - 1. Papers and records
 - a. pedigree charts & family group sheets
 - b. copies (not originals) of documents being researched
 - c. Letters (esp. copies of correspondence with on-site personnel, etc.)
 - d. lots of paper, pens/pencils, highlighters
 - e. _____
 - 2. Technological equipment
 - a. cameras (digital & other backup)
 - b. audio recorder
 - c. video/digital recorder
 - d. walkie-talkies
 - e. netbook or laptop computer, flash drives, extra discs, cables, ?
 - f. scanner
 - g. PDA/pocket computer
 - h. cell phone
 - i. GPS
 - j. _____

} smart phone or i-phone

3. Additional equipment for graveyard excursions
 - a. long sleeved shirt(s) & trousers
 - b. boots, high socks
 - c. garden & rubber gloves
 - d. insect repellent & sunscreen
 - e. old towels
 - f. small scissors
 - g. umbrella
 - h. bottled water (with sprayer attachment)
 - i. soft brush
 - j. small reflective mirror or cookie sheet
 - k. corn starch or powder (without additives)
 - l. spiral notebook & pencils
 - m. copy of genealogy on handheld device
 - n. portable GPS (or digital camera with GPS)
 - o. _____

II. ON-SITE VISITS (be sure to ask in advance about hours of operation)

- A. Historical Societies & Libraries
 1. Often societies & libraries are open by appointment only or for limited hours; be punctual and don't stay after their posted closing time
 2. Be mindful of the rules of the establishment (signing out material, no food or drink, cotton gloves for document-handling, etc.)
 3. Be considerate, especially when people go out of their way to accommodate your needs
 4. Make donations to the historical societies, churches, & libraries
 5. Offer to send your compiled findings for their files (and follow through)
- B. Vital Records Offices, Courthouses, & Archives (see above suggestions)
- C. Churches (see above suggestions)
- D. Ancestors' Residences (be sure to have permission before entering property)
- E. Cemeteries (recognize that some are on private property & require permission)
- F. Tourist attractions and sights of the area
 1. if this is your ancestors' hometown, visiting the local museum & learning about area history will help you connect with your ancestors' lives
 2. buy some postcards
 3. take photos of the *area* as well as tombstones
 4. meet the residents . . . you might find a distant relative!
- G. _____
- H. _____
- I. _____

Internal Summary/Hints:

1. Check the latest carry-on & baggage regulations for the airline you are using.
2. Plan to purchase film, extra batteries, extra tapes, & other misc. items on arrival.
3. Make appointments & arrange stops in an order that culminates in cemetery visits (don't start at the cemetery).
4. Most courthouses & many archives don't allow cameras on site; if you have a camera phone, it may not be permitted inside.
5. Clean up after yourself (at research facilities, cemeteries, and other locations)

III. AFTER THE TRIP

- A. Organize/transcribe notes
- B. File findings
- C. Develop film and catalog photos or transfer photos to your computer
- D. Send thank you notes and promised reports to the contacts you made
- E. Make a list of the things you want to accomplish on your next visit to the area
- F. _____
- G. _____
- H. _____

Notes:

Short list of Suggested Readings:

Carlberg, Nancy Ellen. *Cemetery Research*. Anaheim, CA: Carlberg Press, 1782 Beacon Ave., 92804; 2000.

Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. *Your Guide to Cemetery Research*. Cincinnati, OH: Betterway Books, 2002.

Keister, Douglas. *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2004.

Underhill, Tom. *Dead Men Tell no Tales: How to Record Your Family's Oral History*. Placentia, CA: Creative Continuum, 2002.

Other Helps:

American Automobile Association (AAA; in Calif.: Auto Club of So. Calif.)
Books on the history of the states, counties, and cities you are interested in.
Chamber of Commerce in the cities you will be visiting.

Maybe we're related! Check my website for my ancestors under investigation--click on "my people."

