

GRAVESTONE CLEANING AND PHOTOGRAPHING

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"Over the centuries several different types of stones have been used to create gravestones. Some of the stones are quite porous and fragile, while others are resistant to damage. Be careful when attempting to improve the readability of the inscription.

Types of stone:

Prior to the Nineteenth century: Sandstone or slate

Nineteenth Century: Marble and gray granite

Late nineteenth century to the present: Polished granite or marble."

We all have an ancestor whose gravestone shows the signs of age and weather. Tonight we'll talk a little about cleaning and photographing them.

Some basic things you want to take with you are:

- **A natural or nylon, soft bristle brush, wooden handle.** (colored plastic handles can leach color into the bristles then onto the stone) - NO metal brushes. Particles could break off and if left behind, could rust. While wire brushes, tools or abrasive pads will give immediate results, you may scratch the surface and cause further damage and you would completely ruin a stone that is already flaking or "powdery".
- **Soft, again with natural or nylon bristles, slanted paint brush, wooden handle.** To brush any dirt or "critters" out of the lettering and/or carvings.
- **One or two natural sponges** with which you will do some of the "scrubbing"
- **Water** - Gallon jugs are good. Distilled water is the best as it has no chemicals in it that might affect the stone.
- **Old rags or towels** - These can be used to kneel on or to clean polished surfaces of granite stones. They should be laundered without fabric softener as the softener will keep them from absorbing the water as well.
- **Some kind of clippers or cutting tool** - You will want to trim any grass or weeds away from the stone.
- **1/4" Wooden dowel 6 to 8 inches long** - You want to cut an angle on each end, similar to a cuticle stick. This can be used to loosen lichen and moss.
- **Hand Cleaner** - I prefer the pre-packaged wipes.
- **Pencil & Paper** - These are probably the most important things you will want to take. You want to record information about the stone as follows:
 - (a) whether it is marble, slate, granite or something else.
 - (b) the condition of the stone, worn, flaking, cracked, broken, or even laying down.
 - (c) the stone's place in the cemetery and of course
 - (d) the information ON the stone.
- **A piece of fabric** - maybe 5 feet wide and 6 feet long, which can be used as a back drop for the stone. A neutral color, other than gray is recommended but for some reason, I like to use blue as it's a good contrast to the stones.

Then, for self-preservation, you might want to take these things:

- **Sunscreen**
- **A hat**
- **Long-sleeved shirt Work gloves**
- **Work boots**
- **A "shake stick**
- **Snakebite kit**
- **Insect repellent**

- **Bee and wasp spray**
- **First Aid kit**
- **Any medication needed for allergic reactions**
- **IVY BLOCK** - for poison ivy, poison Oak and Sumac
- **Safety goggles**
- **Cellular phone**
- **And most important of all, plenty of drinking water (besides the water you take for cleaning)**

GENERAL CLEANING

Many experts use Kodak's Photo Flo, with about 1 ounce to 5 gallons of distilled water, as a good neutral cleaning agent. It contains no soap and does not affect the pH (acid-base indicator), nor does it contain or contribute to the formation of soluble salts. What it does do is provide a better overall wetting of the surface of the stone and allows better removal of the dirt.

Remove bird dropping, dirt, moss and Lichen. Lichen and moss can be removed by using the 1/4 inch wooden dowel mentioned earlier. Tongue depressors and craft (popsicle type) sticks work well too.

While cleaning, be very thorough. Before beginning you may want to try your cleaning method on a place that is not so visible. Then, if you're satisfied, you should start at the bottom of the stone to avoid streaking, keeping the stone wet through the whole procedure. Keep a close eye on your stone while working and if you see the stone is eroding as you wash, **STOP** and immediately rinse thoroughly with **LOTS** of clean water. Remember **NO** house hold cleaners!!! The contain damaging chemicals. When you're finished cleaning your stone, rinse it **THOROUGHLY**.

Marble, limestone or sandstone should be cleaned no more than once every 18 months. They are soft and very porous. Rinsing with clear water is acceptable for washing off bird dirt and other buildups.

Pressure washing is not recommended as it slowly, over time, removes the outer layers of the stone, exposing the softer inside. Then there is the possibility those new softer pores will "catch" and hold moisture and dirt from the atmosphere.

STAINS AND STAIN REMOVAL

If the stone is stained, before you ever even consider trying to remove it, you **MUST** know what has caused it. You **DEFINITELY** do **NOT** want to use chemical cleaners unless you KNOW which ones to use. Certain chemicals could interact with the stain and make it even worse that it was to start with. If you are bound and determined the stains must be removed, your best bet would be to consult a stone specialist. Contact your local Memorial Co. If they can't answer your questions or help you, they will know who to recommend.

PHOTOGRAPHING YOUR ANCESTORS' STONES

First of all.... Do **NOT** use shaving cream, flour or chalk. While you may get instant gratification, they can injure the stone in a way you can't see. Even if you use water to rinse them off, you can, in actuality "push" them into the pores of the stones.. **AND** if at all possible, avoid rubbings. They are abrasive and will damage the stone.

My favorite method is using a mirror to direct the sunlight across the face of the stone so there are shadows in the indentations, making reading of the inscriptions easier. It also brings out things you may not have seen before. Should the sun be shining directly on the stone you may want someone to stand and block the direct lighting while you adjust the mirror. Several years ago, I was visiting a cemetery and found the stone I was looking at very difficult to read. I didn't have a mirror with me, but I **DID** have a piece of aluminum foil. It gave me the same results I would have gotten using the mirror. (If you don't have a fairly large mirror, you can cover a piece of cardboard with the foil.) Experiment, see what works best for you. I was reading the stone of

one of my great-grandfathers and I couldn't read one of the numbers in a date, all I had at the time was a small make-up mirror, so I used it. It WORKED!!!

Water... Yes, plain water can help. The surface dries faster than the indented letters and numbers thus enhancing them. With raised surfaces, they will dry faster than the areas just around them. A couple of spray-bottles of water will come in handy here.

You will want to take more than just one picture. If the background is "busy" you might want to be sure to have a buddy with you and the fabric I mentioned above. Of course, you'll want to photograph the stone itself. I try to get as close as I can so the stone fills the viewfinder. If the stone is a bit tilted, just tip your camera till the stone appears straight in the viewfinder.

When taking the picture, always try to be at the same level as the stone or else you will have a distorted picture. Another view might be just the inscription, real up-close and personal. Then too, take a picture of the whole cemetery. Here's where your pencil and paper will come in handy again. Write down the location of the stone, draw a rough map of the cemetery and mark the location of the stone.

If you want to label the picture, number the stones on your drawing, so you know who is where. This is easily done with a marker pen and a folded 5" x 7" index card and placed alongside the project. You'll also want to write down the picture number, the time and the date of when you took the pictures.

Have fun, experiment to see what works best for you.

Sources:

- Cleaning A Gravestone
<http://www.savinggraves.org/education/bookshelf/cleaning.htm>
- How to do Gravestone Rubbings:
<http://www.savinggraves.org/education/print/rubbings.htm>
- Shaving Cream, what's right, what's wrong.
<http://www.savinggraves.org/education/bookshelf/shavingcream.htm>
- Photographing Gravestones: A Few Basic Pointers by Trina Purcell
http://www.rootsweb.com/~nhoga/misc_articles/photographing_gravestones.htm
- Tips for Photographing Gravestones, By Maureen Taylor
http://www.genealogy.com/64_gravestones_print.html
- Suggestions for Your Cemetery Restoration and Stone Repair Toolbox
<http://www.rootsweb.com/~inpcrp/repairtoolbox.html>

A couple of tips from some of the AOL Genealogy Community Civil War chatters:

DWes8825 said while doing a service project at a military cemetery, he learned if the stone is relatively clean and you need more contrast, use a small paintbrush, like the ones that come in a kid's set of watercolor paints and "paint" the letters and numbers with DISTILLED water. He also said that most cemeteries lay out the grave so you face north or south. If you take the time to watch the light conditions, you will figure out what time of day will give you the best lighting for taking photos.

SteveCSA advised there are new regulation regarding getting new grave markers of replacement markers for American Veterans graves. If there is an existing grave marker on a grave that is not military (not provided by the VA or Govt. the Veterans Administration will NOT replace an existing marker with a new Gov't marker...

HOST RL WiIM said to obtain an Application for a Standard Government Headstone or Marker, write to:

Monument Service
Department of Memorial Affairs
Veterans Administration

941 N. Capitol St., N.E.
Room 9320
Washington, DC 20420

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A new innovations in reading stones: BBC NEWS| Techn | Scans reveal lost gravestone text
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/7024672.stm>