

New York State Cemeteries: A Finding Aid

By Marian S. Henry

Compared with much of New England, finding vital records in New York State can be challenging. The state's vital records do not begin until 1881, but cemetery records can help to fill the gap. To aid researchers, the Association of Municipal Historians of New York State (AMHNYS) undertook a project in 1997 to survey all of the known cemeteries in the state. This inventory, compiled by municipal and county historians, was the first statewide community service project of AMHNYS. The result is a three-volume set titled *The Association of Municipal Historians of New York State Name/Location Survey Project 1995-1997* (Heritage Books, Bowie, MD, 1999).

Historians were asked to fill out a survey form for each cemetery in their area. The survey asked for the name or names of the cemetery, the status (active, inactive, deserted, unknown), type (family, religious, incorporated, indigent, military, etc.), time frame (year of first and last known interments), location, contact person, and any notes. Family plots are noted as over or under ten, but it is not clear whether the "ten" refers to the number of surnames or the number of gravesites. Entries are listed alphabetically by county, by town within each county, and by cemetery name within each town. If you know your ancestor's location, this finding aid will tell you which cemeteries were active in that town or county at the time of death. Not all of the historians contacted returned the survey. Towns in upstate New York not included in this publication are listed in a table at the end of this article.

The information content can vary widely from one entry to another. Less promising are the cemeteries named "abandoned" (10), "no name" (27), "deserted" (2), "unknown" (31), "unnamed" (34), or "name unknown" (4). For example, there is little to be learned from the two entries shown below.

Name	PLOWED UP	CASTLER FARM PLOT
Type	Family – under 10	Unknown
Stat[us]:	Unknown	Unknown
T[ime]F[rame]	Unknown	Unknown
Loc[ation]:	About 150 ft. west of 19 in field on what is now Dawsen Farm.	Unknown
Cont[act]:	Unknown.	Greene town historian or town clerk

One can only hope that at some earlier time the information was transcribed and may be found in some library or archive. The information returned for a Crossettanner Farm Cemetery, for example, lists the location as "DAR Records. 4 stones."

When browsing through the entries, it becomes apparent that there are many ways in which a cemetery can be destroyed. Here is a sampling:

- Farm barn burned 1910, stones were used in rebuilding foundation.
- Resident owns property for 30 years had no knowledge of cemetery.
- Existed under the junction canal, before construction of route 60.
- In/around 1822 bodies and markers were moved to Fulton street cemetery.
- Family members remember tombstones near fence, but they have long since been removed.
- Roads leading to it are over-grown.
- This cemetery has been plowed up, but was originally located on rte 26 just east of Taylor.
- No info on this cemetery has come up in research.
- Stones removed and relocated for railroad construction 1875-76.
- Historical marker of burials dedicated 9/20/82, stones laid flat and covered over in the driveway
- Stones tumbled in and unreadable.

- In 1914 a road was built and the stone fence & monuments used in the road.
- No visible stones remaining. New construction in area has obliterated all traces.
- Nothing there today to show it was a cemetery.
- Destroyed during the building of new office buildings (1995)
- Only reached by overgrown abandoned roads, stones leaning against trees.

On a more positive note, we find evidence for a clear distinction between “inactive” and “deserted” as a status, as indicated by “Boy Scouts maintain the care of this burial grounds” and “Lions Club of Oxford maintains care of burial grounds.”

Some of the entries provide specific genealogical information. Here are two of the best.

Name	BLESSING CEMETERY	KILLAWOB HILL ROAD BURIAL GROUND
Type:	Other	Other
Stat:	Deserted	Deserted
TF:	1852 1852	1878-unknown
Loc:	Salmon Creek Road, north of Red Bridge, at foot of East Hill, one grave, Homer Blessing.	441 Killawog Hill Road
Cont:	Lansing Town Historian	Lisle Town Historian
Note:	Died of small pox according to history. Death date Sept. 6, 1852.	Two stones Robert Pierce and Hannah, wife of, beside tree.

Many of the cemetery names are strong clues as to who might have been buried there. There are, of course, the family plots, for which you would simply look up your ancestor’s surname in the index. (More about this peculiar index later.) Below is one instance, however, in which the cemetery name comes from the current location, but the responding historian has listed surnames in a note.

Name:	GREGOR FARM CEMETERY
Type:	Family – over 10
Stat:	Inactive
TF	1811 1887
Loc:	one mile south of Morris turnpike (route 13) on county rte 18 (River Road) located behind Everet Gregory residence.
Cont:	Pittsfield town Historian New Berlin.
Note:	Surnames: Matteson, McIntyre, Persons, Spafford.

There are also cemeteries named after religious groups, for example, Baptist Church Cemetery, Adath Israel Jewish Cemetery, Episcopal Church Cemetery, Asbury Methodist Church Cemetery, Catholic Cemetery, Congregational Church Cemetery, Dutch Reformed Cemetery, Evangelical Lutheran Cemetery, Presbyterian Church Cemetery, Friends (Quaker) Cemetery, German Evangelical Lutheran Cemetery, Reformed Church Cemetery, Universalist Church Cemetery. If you know the denomination your ancestors were affiliated with, these entries give you a starting point for cemeteries in your town or county associated with the proper church.

If your ancestors came into the area in the early stages of its settlement, you may look for them in “pioneer” cemeteries (22), “early” cemeteries (3), “old” cemeteries (200), “former” cemeteries (40), or “historic” cemeteries (3). Or look for

the pioneers to bring a place name with them. One note states of the Ridgefield Cemetery, “these were settlers from a town in Conn. known as Ridgefield.”

There are cemeteries attached to poor houses (one actually named “Potters Field”) and to prisons. There is a Civil War cemetery, active from 1864 to 1865, with a section for Confederate prisoners of war. The Burden Mines cemetery “is for people who worked at the mines.” A Black Cemetery is “a old Colored persons burial grounds.”

There are some peculiar entries. It is stated twice in one entry that this is “Not a Cemetery but a burying place.” Two pet cemeteries have been included, one of which is described as “Pet cemetery not known if a person is buried there.” The other “Large Pet Cemetery” has had “8 human burials there” as of 1995. There is a cemetery currently on the grounds of a McGraw School, which was active from 1850 to 1854, that contains “about 6 graves of students from the college who died of smallpox.” In some cases a site visit by a conscientious historian is hinted at. One location contains the parenthetical warning “poison ivy.” Another entry ends with the words “about 200 ft. back in a bed of lilies.”

Another peculiarity is the index. Apparently some of the returns were submitted in all capital letters. This was retained in the data entry. The index distinguishes these entries from the others. In the index all-cap entries are listed, in alphabetical order, before the mixed case entries. For example, entries for the letter K are as follows:

KALES HILL PIKE-HAWKINS
KEENEY SETTLEMENT CEMETERY
KEERYVILLE CEMETERY
...
KNOLL CEMETERY
KNOX CEMETERY
KNOX FAMILY CEMETERY
Kaley Family Plot
Kallmann Ground
Kanona Cemetery
...
Kyle Cemetery
Kysorville

The index is case sensitive. KNOX is not the same entry as Knox. BAPTIST is not the same as Baptist. You must look in both locations in the index.

The book’s introduction provides the following information about this professional organization.

“The Association of Municipal Historians of New York State was founded in 1972 and is the professional organization for the New York State Municipal (City, Town and Village) Historians. The purposes are 1) to encourage local units of government to appoint official historians in compliance with Section 148 of New York State Educational Law; 2) to promote the training and establishment of professional standards for individuals appointed as local historians; and 3) to encourage local units of government to support the collection, preservation, interpretation and dissemination of the history of their communities and to support the work of appointed historians. Membership is open to county historians and through Associate level memberships to all interested in New York State local history. AMHNYS offers conferences including training sessions and workshops with the County Historians Association of New York State (CHANYS) and publishes the Historians Exchange, a bi-annual newsletter. AMHNYS has eight chapters or regions across the state; is a non-profit organization that works closely with the New York State Historian’s Office. For further information, contact your local historian.”

Historians of the following towns in upstate New York did not respond to the request to survey their cemeteries. If you are searching for burials in these towns, this finding aid will be of no use to you.

Berne	Bethlehem	Coeymans	Green Island
Guilderland	Knox	New Scotland	Rensselaerville
Westerlo			
Allegany County			
Belfast	Birdsall	Burns	Caneadea
Centerville	Clarksville	Friendship	Wellsville
West Almond	Wirt		
Broome County			
Fenton			
Cattaraugus County			
Allegany	Ashford	Carrollton	Coldsprint
Conewango	Dayton	East Otto	Ellicottville
Farmersville	Franklinville	Freedom	Great Valley
Humphrey	Ischua	Leon	Little Valley
Machias	Mansfield	Napoli	New Albion
Otto	Perrysburg	Persia	Portville
Randolph	Red House	Salamanca (town)	Salamanca (city)
South Valley			
Chautauqua County			
Arkwright	Busti	Carroll	Charlotte
Chautauqua	Cherry Creek	Clymer	Dunkirk (town)
Dunkirk (city)	Ellery	Ellicott	Ellington
French Creek	Hanover	Harmony	Jamestown
Kiantone	Mina	North Harmony	Poland
Pomfret	Portland	Ripley	Sheridan
Sherman	Stockton	Villanova	Westfield
Chenango County			
New Berlin	North Norwich	Norwich (town)	Norwich (city)
Pharsalia	Pitcher	Plymouth	Preston
Smyrna			
Columbia County			
Austerlitz	Canaan	Claverack	Gallatin
Hillsdale	New Lebanon	Stockport	Styvesant
Taghkanic			
Erie County			

Amherst	Boston	Brant	Buffalo
Clarence	Colden	Eden	Elma
Evans	Grand Island	Hamburg	Holland
Lackawanna	Lancaster	Marilla	North Collins
Orchard Park	Tonawanda (town)	Tonawanda (city)	Wales
Greene County			
Catskill	Williams	Durham	Halcott
Hunter	Jewett	Lexington	
Hamilton County			
Benson	Inlet		
Jefferson County			
Cape Vincent	Champion	Clayton	Ellisburg
Henderson	Hounsfield	Lefray	Lorraine
Pamelia	Philadelphia	Rodman	Worth
Lewis County			
Lowville	Lyonsdale	Martinsburg	
Livingston County			
Mount Morris			
Madison County			
De Ruyter	Georgetown		
Monroe County			
East Rochester			
Oneida County			
Annsville	Augusta	Ava	Boonville
Bridgewater	Camden	Deerfield	Florence
Floyd	Forestport	Kirkland	Lee
Marcy	New Hartford	Rome	Sangerfield
Sherrill	Trenton	Utica	Vernon
Vienna	Western	Whitestown	
Oswego County			
Minetto	Volney		
Otsego County			
Burlington	Plainfield		
Putnam County			
Putnam Valley	Southeast		

Seneca County			
St. Lawrence County			
De Peyster			
Sullivan County			
Bethel	Callicoon	Cohecton	Delaware
Fallsburg	Forestburgh	Lumberland	Mamakating
Neversink	Rockland	Thompson	
Tompkins County			
Ulysses			