

- ✎ Compose
- ▢
- MAA Board
- MAA Communications
- MAA Development
- MAA Financial Inform...
- MAA General Corresp...
- MAA Governance
- MAA Membership
- ▾ MAA Professional Dev...
 - ▢ 1 - PD Committee M...
 - ▾ 2022-2023 PD Prog...
 - ▢ 2022 Fall Professi...
 - ▢ Collections Man...
 - ▢ Lunch Bites
 - ▢ Code of Conduct
 - ▢ Conserv
 - ▢ Museum Archives P...
 - ▾ Workshops
 - ▢ 2021 Soft-Packin...
 - ▢ 2020 Soft-Pack...
 - ▢ Exhibit Workshop
 - ▢ VRA Workshop

What Can You Learn from a Cemetery?

Most of us view cemeteries as spooky, haunted places that should be avoided at night, especially during Halloween!

They can also be a place of personal mourning or paying respects to a deceased family member or friend.

But historic cemeteries also hold a wealth of information that historians and archaeologists readily seek. Historic cemeteries are snapshots of entire communities that may be long gone, or ones that have a long history to be revealed.

Cemeteries hold valuable information about individuals buried there:

- Dates on gravestones can answer two questions:
 - When did the person live?
 - And how long did they live?
- The gravestones themselves can give information of the wealth of the person.
 - Wealthier individuals usually have gravestones made of marble or granite.
 - Individuals with more moderate incomes chose sandstone or limestone.
 - Gravestones with fancy carvings, statues or ornate designs carved into them indicate wealth.
- Gravestones can indicate whether a person served in the military during a particular war,
- Or if they belonged to a fraternal organization such as the Masons, Woodmen of the World or the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. (All three organizations had chapters in Tempe during the 1800s.)

Cemeteries can also reveal a lot about the community as a whole. When taken together, information from individual stones are pieces of a puzzle that can be put together to form a picture of the community.

- Researchers can plot the ages of the individuals buried in the cemetery to help answer questions like:
 - What was the average lifespan of people in this community? Did this change over time?
 - Did men and women have different lifespans? If so, who tended to live the longest?
 - A lot of women dying in their child-bearing years (teens and twenties in the

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