

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

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By Damon Veach

DEATH RECORDS: In the last issue of this column, a discussion was given for the use of census records. As was stated therein, it is one of the most important things a researcher can do when they first become involved in genealogical exploration. However, this is only one of the ways to discover information about ancestors.

Another important way to uncover information is to search for death records. This is one of the fundamental research tools, and death notices usually contain a large amount of information on the family. Each country, state, and even individual parishes have different things that are required about the deceased person. In the earlier periods of time, churches seemed to be the major sources of maintaining registers of christenings and burials. This technique was brought to America with the first settlers, but eventually laws were passed requiring others to keep these records. Eventually, keeping accurate records of births and deaths became required by every state.

There are many things that deem the record keeping as important, but the outstanding reason in recent years has been to determine if an infectious disease or foul play was involved. Legal proof is also needed in order to settle an estate or to apply for pensions, probates, insurance claims, and burial. Even going back to the early church records, a lot of data can be found, and sometimes a surprising amount of information can be gleaned from tombstones.

There are many kinds of death records, but the more common ones are the death certificates, records of death, death registers, and even death indices. The death certificate is the actual certified piece of paper which gives all the details of the individual's demise. Summaries of original certificates are usually found in the records of death found in various offices such as vital health offices, health departments in general, archives (both state and local, sometimes in city record vaults), or sometimes historical societies. Newspaper obituaries also have lots of data in them.

Parishes (or counties) also have been known to keep registers of deaths. Basic information is found here, such as name, age, occupation, location of death, and spouses and other living relatives. Death indices are different, and these appear in genealogical publications or on the internet. Some sites have these records which have to be purchased. There are those times when no death record is available, and individual researchers have to complete the proper form to file with the state of residence at the time of death in order to have their ancestor(s) added.

Regardless of the type of record found, that record will include a lot of information for researchers in their search for their family lineages. From here, wherever the death has occurred, one can go to wills, land records, tax records, military records, and even organizational records for more information, just to name a few other sources. It's really a matter of concentrating on that area, and the pieces of the puzzle should lead you both forward and backwards in your research. Being able to go backwards makes this such a nice way to learn about your family history. It really is a giant puzzle that most likely will never be completed, but the enjoyment is doing all that you can to reach that conclusion that you desire.

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CEMETERY RESEARCH: With the availability of so many records on the internet now, many researchers don't have to go to the actual locations to glean data on early ancestors. If it is possible, a visit to the burial sites is encouraged. Seeing things in person is different than seeing the data on the printed page. It also brings you closer to your ancestor, and you can realize the setting as it was at the time of the burial. It is the closest you can ever be to your ancestor.

Even though discoveries have been made, and you have documented the events of the time period for your ancestor, it is still a thrill to be able to observe the tombstone and realize that this is a part of your personal history. Sometimes you can observe the way the burial plots are arranged, and in many cases you can see family connections that you wouldn't have known about when looking at a publication. There are times too when one partner has passed away, and another marriage has taken place. This could possibly mean that a husband or wife is not buried where you might think they would be.

An example of this can be seen in our old family cemetery in DeSoto Parish. My great grandmother, Arminta Sinclair Adams, is buried next to my grandmother, Lillie Adams Foshee. DeSoto Parish and Panola County (Texas) are adjacent to each other, and Arminta's husband is buried by the second wife in the Adams Cemetery at Logan, Texas. The distance between the two spots are only a few miles, but I was told by several relatives that they had searched for years for Arminta's burial place, not realizing it was across the state line in Louisiana. From my own family records, I know that my grandmother cared for her until her death and buried her at Cool Springs Cemetery, located on the Marshall Road, six miles north of Logansport.

It is therefore a nice thing to be both physically and spiritually connected as I learned when I finally located the burial site for my great grandfather, Lorenzo Harris Adams, in the Adams Cemetery in Logan, Texas. He was buried by the second wife.

Finding the burial spots is a great challenge too. That is why the death records are so important. If they were not done properly, it may take a while to uncover what is

needed to locate an ancestor's burial site. Something else I recall from my childhood is the sight of a deceased relative (my grandfather's brother, Simeon Foshee) in the home where he lived – no funeral home, and then directly to the church and cemetery for burial. I've never done research on how this all came about, and there is probably no death record at the state level, but I have recordings in the family Bible, and I also noted things like this when I was interviewing my grandmother for a family record sheet which was a civics assignment when I was in high school.

If at first you don't succeed, then you have to keep checking all the different angles. I do know that while being in Cool Springs Cemetery, I can look around and see a master plan, or at least the beginnings of one. As long as the space was available, the families remained together, and the surname connections began to unfold before me. I have both the recorded form of this cemetery, and I also have a visual image of how things came about. With each cemetery I have visited over the years, I have noticed a plan in the works, and new allied lines immediately came into view.

Tombstones will also reflect the period of time when the burials took place. They range from the simple rounded headstones to the elaborate ones. Many of the newer headstones in recent years are very similar. Like in clothing, headstones have a style all their own. It is another reason for visiting the cemeteries. You can't see this on a recording or listing from a piece of paper. I've also discovered mistakes in dates on tombstones. Just realize that mistakes are always possible when you take someone else's documentation. It is up to you to correct it.

I like to think of headstones as historical artifacts. I can recall some of my family members wanting to buy a new headstone for my grandfather, Elijah James Foshee. They were horrified when I told them they couldn't do it, and if they insisted on doing it, I would put the original in a place of prominence in my home. That ended that discussion. It is one of the most ornate and beautiful headstones in Cool Springs Cemetery - or at least it is to me.



Tombstones of Elijah James Foshee and daughter Myrtle Inez Foshee

You can also learn a lot of military history when visiting a cemetery too. Data on a piece of paper won't show a military symbol, such as those that appear on my ancestor's tombstone for service in the Civil War. That is something I hadn't even thought about when I first started my research. Then, all of sudden, it was right there in front of me. I knew Morris Smith Foshee was in the Civil War, and I even acquired his record from the National Archives, but I had just overlooked that symbol. Visiting cemeteries are lessons in family pride. You become a part of American history through them. Always respect those tombstones just like the American flag. I make sure that a flag and some flowers go on his tombstone whenever I visit the cemetery. He brought the Foshee family members to DeSoto Parish because of a land grant he received, and many of them are right there in near-by plots. What a joyful discovery that was, and to think that I grew up around it, went to church there, but only when I started my research did the importance of these burials come into view.

I now have photographs of all these tombstones and notes about them, and someday I hope to get back to West Virginia and see if the headstones for Benjamin and Mary Ford Veach are still intact in Fairmont. That is a story for another day and connected to one of our former presidents.

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SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS: Be sure to check into all the society publications that are available for research. Many organizations no longer publish these, another sign of the changing times. However, major genealogical collections in libraries and archives will have these on file.

Louisiana still has a number of important genealogical societies that are offering publications as a part of membership fees, but others have either stopped publishing or cut back the number of issues. Many groups have just closed for lack of interest or support. It is sad to recall so many of these formerly active groups and to know that they are now just a part of history.

As long as you can, show your support for these groups. The membership fees are usually small, and it could mean the difference in whether they continue to be successful or go away. Make sure you also check out any of the groups that may support your local libraries or archives. Many volunteers are sometimes involved in these group efforts, and their importance should not be taken for granted or abused in any way. They provide a great service to both the communities and to the groups they support.

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COLUMN INFORMATION: Correspondence to this column should be directed to Damon Veach, 709 Bungalow Lane, Baton Rouge, LA 70802-5337. Books and society publications are reviewed if sample copies are submitted with each request, and queries are published free of charge. These queries can be any length but should have a Louisiana connection by heritage or residence of researchers working on lines in other states or countries. Dated notices should be submitted several weeks prior to the scheduled event. The e-mail address is ancestorslaveach@cox.net.