

Software and the Smaller Cemeteries

Preserving Family Legacies in Small Parish Cemeteries

— by M. Kim Schooley and Charles Sornig

Small Cemeteries Hold Generations of Family and Community History

There is a treasure trove of history to be gleaned from the small municipal and parish cemeteries wherever one travels. Whether it is the graveyard of the Pohick Church that George Washington attended in Northern VA, the small town cemetery at Wounded Knee, SD, or a local parish cemetery like St Mary's in Hanover Township, Wilkes-Barre, PA, a peaceful walk through the property speaks to the origins, experiences and tributes of and to the loved ones interred within that particular cemetery.

We can learn that awful epidemics decimated entire families; family names were changed in order to *fit in*; wars and conflict claimed too many young, vibrant Americans, and through it all, family members and friends were moved to honor and memorialize their loved ones in compelling and heart wrenching ways.

Cemeteries have provided, and continue to provide grieving loved ones an opportunity to cope with a loss and importantly, celebrate the life of that special person whose passing has been so keenly felt.

Recordkeeping Has Been Inconsistent and Incomplete

While there is a wealth of history in local cemeteries, it is often not easy to uncover that history. Many older cemeteries lack standard layouts, so sites were designated ad hoc, or as interments were done. Site 12 might be in the west section, and site 13 might be in a section far removed from that.

The recordkeeping for burials was dependent on who the record keeper was at the time and how they perceived the property. Section names and orientations change over years. The cemetery may have been expanded or reduced in size, and burial plot markers may have been covered or eroded by sheer force of nature. In some unfortunate cases, natural disasters have destroyed archival records. Given those challenges, it is important that the verbal or written history be preserved in an enduring archive.

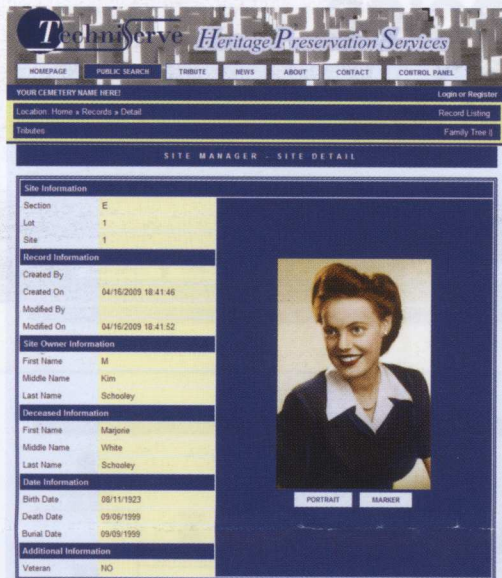
The screenshot shows a web interface for 'TechniServe Heritage Preservation Services'. At the top, there are navigation links: HOME PAGE, PUBLIC SEARCH, TOURS, NEWS, ABOUT, CONTACT, CONTROL PANEL. Below that, there's a search bar with 'YOUR CEMETERY NAME HERE!' and a location dropdown set to 'HPS Family Tree'. The main content area is titled 'HPS Family Tree' and features a 'PRINT FAMILY TREE' button. The tree is organized into columns: Grandchildren, Children, Parents, and Grandparents. Each person is represented by a small photo and their name with birth and death dates. A central 'Census' label is also present. At the bottom, a 'Siblings' section lists several individuals. The footer includes '©2008 - 2010 All Rights Reserved' and the TechniServe logo.

The Challenge To Help Recover and Preserve Cemetery Histories

Protecting the heritage of our families and the vital records entrusted to the care of a small cemetery requires more than just burial cards, map books and our memories in today's busy and often demanding marketplace. It requires software designed to make the cemetery's job more efficient and offer the families of those in our care, access to historical and burial information about their loved ones while protecting confidential information available from the cemetery records.

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Burial Record Information Screen



When searching for the right software for your cemetery there are several questions you'll want to keep in mind.

1) *What's my budget?* – There are many software programs available for cemetery managers, but some of the features may never be used within the smaller property and the costs put them out of reach of the small cemetery budget. It's best to know what your budget is and then research available software.

2) *What are the features I absolutely need?* – At minimum you will need burial recordkeeping, including the Deceased Name, Date of Death, Date of Birth, Burial Date and Time, Next of Kin, Funeral Director, Vault/Box Type, Burial Location, Veteran Status etc.

3) *What other features would I like to have?* – Do I want to offer on-line historical data access? Will I want mapping capabilities? Would a kiosk increase my business? Will I allow families to create family trees with comments and pictures? Do I want to save digital copies of records and pictures of things such as markers and monuments?

There are several companies that offer these services but require the use of outside consultants for training and support. Look for companies that offer you ongoing support. For example, *The Heritage Preservation Services* from TechniServe are designed to help you service your families, provide support and help increase your revenues.

4) *What features are included that will help increase my business?* – Are there options available such as family memorials, family trees and on-line obituaries and memorials that will both benefit our families and help pay for the ongoing software costs?

5) *What are my initial cash requirements to get started and can the software be customized?* – Many software solutions

require you to purchase additional hardware and software to properly use their products. Smaller cemeteries should look for a software provider that offers internet-based services in order to avoid purchasing expensive hardware. Products such as TechniServe's *Heritage Preservation Services* offer on-line software customized to meet your requirements and start as low as \$25 per month for 2500 burial records.

For further consideration, on-line mapping options allow visitors to locate loved ones' graves within the cemetery via the Web, before they actually visit.

An on-site kiosk can provide information to families even if your office is closed or you are out of the office helping with a burial, mowing lawns or handling some of the many other functions required of the small cemetery owner/operator.

As you can see, there are many things to consider and the above questions may be helpful in finding the software that best provides the recordkeeping that will support a small cemetery's needs.

A decision to move your cemetery into the digital world can equally benefit the cemetery manager, and the families that want to preserve their precious legacies.

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TechniServe Inc.
Heritage Preservation Services
The affordable small cemetery solution for burial management and record keeping.
The Cemetery Manager
Integrated Cemetery Management Solutions
Our Cemetery Management Team has over 55 years of combined knowledge in cemetery software design, implementation and service.
To learn more call: (248) 989-0100
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