

Adding Memories to Memorial Day: Make the Most of a Cemetery Visit

by Liz Mangum Shellum

for the Joseph Sr. and Polly Knight Family Reunion

Trips to a family cemetery are a great way to share family history. If all you do is show up and stare at a stone, it won't likely be repeated. With effort and planning, cemetery outings can be meaningful family gatherings and an ideal place to pass along personal histories. See page 4 for information about burial locations of Knight family members.

How to Prepare Ahead:

1. Locate the burial site, either by asking family or looking online. (See page 3 for resources.)
2. Search around the burial site to locate additional deceased family members (both online ahead of time and at the cemetery).
3. Contact the cemetery for maps, visiting hours, and decoration rules. Plan ahead! Phone calls are more helpful than emails, although not every cemetery has someone on site during business hours. Ask about events or holiday programs. Cemeteries are generally NOT pet-friendly, and they often close at dusk.
4. Gather historical information to share about the deceased: photos, stories, etc.
5. Prepare any decorations. Don't leave valuable treasures at the gravesite. Dollar stores have great options for Memorial Day starting in March each year, and holiday decorations the rest of the year. All decorations are commonly removed one week after Memorial Day.
6. Observe all parking rules and traffic flow inside the cemetery. Traffic flow may be different on Memorial Day weekend.
7. Be respectful of other groups: music, picnics, kids running around can disturb others.

What to Bring:

- Map of cemetery, plot location information, or full name and dates to search at cemetery
- Hand tools such as grass clippers, hand broom, gloves, and scrub brush
- Extra water, or a container to get water there, for washing stones or for flowers
- A blanket or chair to sit on
- Flowers or other decorations
- Photos and stories about the deceased, fan chart to show relationships
- Camera
- Hats and sunscreen as needed
- Food/drink: cemetery water is often NOT safe to drink
- Container for garbage

What to DO at a Burial Site:

Clean the stone, care for the landscaping. Share biographical information and special memories. Look at photos, match family resemblances in physical features. Sing a family song. Review genealogy: parents, spouse(s), children, siblings. Meditate or pray. Photograph the headstone and your family. Write down any landmarks to find the grave easily again.

How to Care for Headstones:

Do not use pressure washers, bleach, or household detergents. Use only soft-bristled brushes. Wash stones from bottom to top to avoid streaking or staining. DO NOT clean flaking or cracked stones. Contact the cemetery office to correct sinking or uneven stones. For more information, see <https://www.iscga.org/how-to-clean-a-gravestone.html>

How to Photograph Headstones:

Move aside any decorations to show the full stone. If your shadow obscures the stone, take the photo upside down. Create shade with a blanket, towel, or jacket to avoid dappled light. Photograph all sides of the stone. Replace any moved decorations before leaving.

Where to Share Your Photos and Cemetery Information:

1. With your living family! Bring them along, make a cemetery scrapbook to share at the gravesite.
2. Family Search Memories: Upload your photo at familysearch.org and tag with the deceased's name. Include the cemetery name, location, and plot number in the caption, along with any tips in finding the grave. Add the obituary, death certificate, and other biographical information as you find it.
3. Find a Grave: Go to findagrave.com to upload your photo and add a caption with burial location.
4. Billion Graves: Use the Billion Graves app on a smartphone to photograph headstones and tag them with GPS coordinates.

Tips for Bringing Children:

Appropriate clothing is important! Dress for the weather. A treat (or three...) goes a long way. Locate bathroom facilities on maps. Play "find your own name/the oldest person/most recent burial." Make extra copies of maps/lists/photos for them. Involve kids in the decorations. Identify notable people also buried at the cemetery you are visiting. Learn about burial traditions in various cultures: Christian feet to the east, small rocks on a Jewish gravestone, Victorian death masks, etc. Bring children to funerals and viewings to participate in the burial process. If one visit goes badly, don't give up!

Free National Records:

Find a Grave: <https://www.findagrave.com>

Locate photos of headstones, request a photo of a headstone, help transcribe information from photos, create a digital memorial, and follow links to family members' burial sites. Find a Grave is affiliated with Ancestry.com. Plot numbers or coordinates are often incomplete.

Billion Graves: <https://billiongraves.com>

Locate photos of headstones, see marker locations, take photos with GPS coordinates, transcribe information from photos. Basic photos are free, many services require a membership and/or paid account.

Names in Stone: <http://www.namesinstone.com>

Locate grave locations, identify surrounding graves, create a digital memorial. Not as many listings as Find a Grave.

Free Utah Records:

Digital Newspaper Archive 1850-2016: <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/search>

Search all printed news for death notices, obituaries, legal proceedings, etc. Search with date and event type filters ("death") for quickest results. Hosted by the University of Utah.

Utah State Cemeteries and Burials Database: <https://heritage.utah.gov/history/cemeteries>

Obtain burial plot coordinates, as provided by cemeteries. Hosted by the Utah Division of State History.

Veterans with Federal Service buried in Utah 1847-1966:

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1542862>

Search for Utah burials of military veterans. Hosted by FamilySearch.

Death Certificates 1905-1965: <https://archives.utah.gov/research/indexes/20842.htm>

Hosted by the Utah Division of Archives and Records.

Pre-1905 records residing at county level: <https://archives.utah.gov/research/indexes/index.html>

Utah Records Requiring Payment or Membership:

Vital Records for Utah (birth and death certificates since 1905; marriage and divorce records since 1978):

Hosted by the Centers for Disease Control.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w/utah.htm>

Ancestry.com data collections for Utah: <https://search.ancestry.com/Places/US/Utah>

Burial Places of the Knights

Joseph Knight Sr., 1772-1847, age 74: Mount Pisgah Cemetery, Thayer, Iowa

Polly Peck Knight, 1774-1831, age 57: Unmarked grave near Kaw Township, Missouri

Children:

Nahum Knight, 1796-?: unknown burial site as of 2020

Thankful Sarah Williams Knight, 1795-?: unknown burial site as of 2020

Esther Knight Stringham, 1798-1833, age 35: Unmarked grave near Kaw Township, Missouri

William Stringham, 1788-1865, age 77: Manti Cemetery Lot 9 Block 29 Plat B Grave NW6F, Manti, Utah

Newel Knight, 1800-1847, age 46: Mormon Monument, Ponca, Nebraska

Sally Colburn Knight, 1804-1834, age 30: Unmarked grave near Turnham's Landing, Clay County, Missouri

Lydia Goldthwaite Knight, age 71: St. George City Cemetery plot A C 58 2, St. George, Utah

Anna Knight DeMill, 1804-1878, age 74: Manti Cemetery, Manti, Utah

Freeborn DeMill, 1795-1881, age 85: Manti Cemetery Lot 17 Block 15 Plot A, Manti, Utah

Joseph Knight Jr., 1808-1866, age 58: Salt Lake City Cemetery A 7 2 4W, Salt Lake City, Utah

Betsey Covert Knight Van Horn, 1813-1876, age 62: Salt Lake City Cemetery A 7 2 3E, Salt Lake City, Utah

Mary Woolerton Knight, 1826-1876, age 77: Salt Lake City Cemetery A 7 2 3W, Salt Lake City, Utah

Polly Knight Stringham, 1811-1844, age 33: Old Nauvoo Burial Grounds, Nauvoo, Illinois

William Stringham, 1788-1865, age 77: Manti Cemetery Lot 9 Block 29 Plat B Grave NW6F, Manti, Utah

Elizabeth Knight Johnson, 1817-1883, age 66: Salt Lake City Cemetery F 7 14 4W, Salt Lake City, Utah

Joseph Watkins Johnson Jr., 1815-1887, age 71: Salt Lake City Cemetery F 7 14 2E, Salt Lake City, Utah