

Researching Tippecanoe County Cemeteries

Notes from a presentation by Marlene Mattox, a Technician with the Area Plan Commission of Tippecanoe County, Indiana; published with her permission.

I. How the Area Plan got involved and did its study.

- A. Our office (Area Plan Commission of Tippecanoe County) became involved in locating cemeteries in 1988 due to the fact that our office had been instrumental in authorizing a subdivision plat that evidently included a pioneer cemetery. As a result of the subdivision being built, the cemetery was destroyed. In retrospect, the surveyor had no notation on the plat or in the filing that showed a cemetery at that site, so our office had no knowledge of that cemetery. Local historical maps at that time reflected only 60 cemeteries in the county. Those maps were not consulted in the planning process at that time and this cemetery did not show on those maps, anyway.

Because our Executive Director wished that not happen again, he asked me to do a land use study to verify the location of county cemeteries. Being a professional genealogist and under contract with a Boston company for work I did on my own at that time, my boss felt I should be the one to do this work. When the task was assigned to me, I felt that this would be a relatively simple feat, as I expected the local historical association would have already recorded cemeteries in Tippecanoe County. I figured it was just a matter of going down to Tippecanoe Co. Historical Association (“TCHA”) and picking up the information. When I gathered information from TCHA and compared it with other existing information, we found we had a great problem. We had cemeteries with no names and no records. It became my task at that time to identify, verify with written documentation and map those cemeteries. That was in 1988.

- B. There were a variety of ways that I used to try to locate cemeteries. The USGS (United States Geological Survey) topographical maps identify many cemeteries and were extremely helpful. A difficulty with this is that it did not name them or had incorrect names in certain instances. It also did not show all the cemeteries, only established ones. Another type of topographical map, done by the US Army Corp of Engineers, was also used along riverbanks and streams.
- C. Soil maps from the County Health Department were also used. They usually did not use a name on the cemetery, but only the word “cemetery” was designated.

- D. One good way to locate these older cemeteries was to reference the oldest county survey records, which in this county lay in the County Surveyor's office and have been copied and downsized into book form. Those books are called Survey Books A to E. They are red books and are located in the County Surveyors Office on the first floor of the County Office Building. I spent weeks going through those books page by page.
- E. Another way I used to locate cemeteries was to use newer survey records. Most surveyors are very good about noting monumentation on their surveys -- whether that monumentation is downed tombstones or complete cemeteries. Also surveys are good at referencing deeds. I spent more weeks going over recorded surveys.
- F. In the County Records Office, there is a cemetery ledger. It had some leads in it, but not as many as I had hoped. It mostly contained individual plots where they had those deeds for plots recorded. It was not as helpful as I hoped. I spent an afternoon with those records.
- G. Records from the County Veteran Service office were sketchy in 1988. VFW or American Legion groups did most Memorial Day flag observations. The Veterans Service Officer at the time I did the study was Harry Holt and his words were that he considered a Veteran of some war, to be buried in each and every cemetery. The present Veterans Service Officer, Randy Fairchild, has turned over all maps to me, most of which I passed on to TCHA after recording information needed. Some Veterans maps remain in the files.
- H. In the County Auditors Office are transfer books, plat books and commissioners books. Older plat books were donated to TCHA and I believe they now rest in the basement of the Wetherill Center. These were the most helpful and I spent months and months (days at a time) in this office, researching. Let me explain each:
 - 1. Transfer Books are records of transfer of deeds. To look up a property in these books, you need to know the name of the property owners and the one-line legal description. Transfer Books (at the time I did the research) went back to about 1890, some earlier and some later. I will explain later how to use these. These also show where a property had a tax break for areas unable to be used because of a cemetery.
 - 2. Plat Books show the property and help you locate who the current owners are. Only current plat books are kept in the Auditors office; I believe all the others are with TCHA. If you think there is a cemetery on a certain area, go to these books, locate the property (or properties) it could be on and find the property owner of record (not necessarily the person listed here, see explanation later). Cemeteries as a rule do not show on these books. The Assessor's Office has tax records and codes.

3. County Commissioners' minutes are not indexed, however; some contain vital information concerning cemeteries including right-of-way grants, easements granted, etc.
- I. Another avenue in my research was to talk to all the funeral directors in town. I did this and located several old maps, which I copied and retained for our study. All were extremely helpful; however, usually only had maps showing locations where they currently buried. Only at one funeral home did I find a map of places where they "used" to bury.
- J. I also talked to local vault and monument companies and found 2 cemeteries on their old maps. Arrow Vault Company was extremely helpful.
- K. Township Trustees and Advisory Boards were also of assistance. Not all of the Trustees wanted to know about cemeteries, some had the feeling that if they knew about them, they would have to take care of them, and would rather not know.
- L. Tax records became helpful also. Persons who had a cemetery on their property were given a tax break for not being able to use their land in that area. Assessors usually use a special code for cemeteries or for unusable land, even the way tillable land is coded differently from farmland. Assessor's records were very helpful.
- M. Circuit Court Order Books will need to be referenced in certain instances. When a property is divided by a probate or in a family situation, the records are in the Circuit Court. References to these are usually in the Auditors Office plat or transfer books.
- N. Historical Association records were used to back up our research. We found the 1878 atlas very helpful, as it shows crosses anywhere there is a cemetery. Information from the Indiana State Historical Society was most helpful in their Interim Report for Tippecanoe County, where cemeteries were coded and charted. Written township histories also proved helpful. David Cheeseman had just started his series at that time.
- O. SAR and DAR records were also used; however, one DAR record for a Julian Cemetery could not be documented. Theodore Williams of the SAR was most helpful in coming into the office and working with us on this study, since they have a project going to commemorate the gravesites of Revolutionary War Veterans buried in Tippecanoe County. He was extremely helpful, as he had been to many sites.
- P. Ways that I used to find some were to look at where they *should* be by taking an historic map of Tippecanoe, locating the early platted towns and then taking a long look at aerials and talking to people in that area. It only makes sense that if a

group of people lived in an area for any length of time, there must be a cemetery close-by.

- Q. The famous word-of-mouth method was also used. Once the public got wind of what we were doing, hundreds and hundreds of calls and visits were made to our office with information. So much so, that we had to create a form for people to fill out.

II. Deeds, etc.

A. The best way to do deed research in this county:

1. Use the existing plat books in the Auditor's office to locate the current property. Find the one-line legal (not the metes and bounds) for the area. Many already list deed record numbers. Use the Auditor's computer to find when area was transferred last, if no deed is listed in the current plat book. If it is, go to the Recorders Office and pull that deed. That Deed will give you the previous owner's names.

Example of a "one-line legal description":

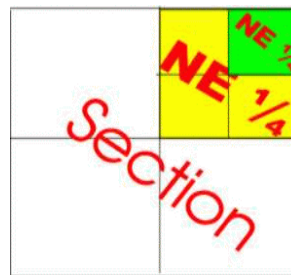
1 ac NE Q of the NW Q of 16-23-5

2. Go back to the Auditor's Office and find that owner in one of the appropriate Transfer Books by date. Continue searching that name along with that one-line legal in each book back, until a transfer is noted. Usually a deed number is given along with the transfer information. Go back to Recorders Office and pull that deed.
3. Repeat this process until you have gone back as far as possible. Be careful not to "lose" the appropriate piece in multi-transfers. You will be amazed at how the area changes, even the cemetery area.
4. It is suggested that you take a section chart and a highlighter with you as you research deed transfers; it makes it easier to keep track of the right piece of property.
5. Deeds are always available for cemeteries created around the time of WW2.
6. Deed work is long and tentative work. It requires a great deal of attention to detail. A farmer could own 160 acres in 1840 and sell it off into two 80-acre plots in 1865. Those could be sold off in "Forties" which is famous after the Civil War. Those could be broken down into 10-acre

pieces for the children in a probate hearing. Those 10-acre pieces could have been subdivided.

Following the same tract of land is not always easy. It takes great care and persistence. Deed research is not for the faint-hearted researcher. It takes diligence, time and luck. In many instances, I needed to resort back to the original land grant in my deed record and work forward instead of working back, which was the easiest way.

The oldest deed records for “graveyards” usually say “an acre has been set aside in the Northeast quarter of the Northeast quarter of section so-and-so, range so-and-so, township so-and-so for a public burying ground.”



7. Township lines changed 16 times in Tippecanoe County between 1826-1933. In 1826, there were only 3 townships in Tippecanoe County; there are now 13 townships.

If you cannot find the proper area in a Transfer Book, double-check the timeline for the townships. It may be in an entirely different township at the time period you are looking at, and you will need to resort back to another township transfer book.

8. While an old deed may say an acre has been set aside, newer deeds may not carry that wording. Cemeteries often “disappeared” from deeds, title and abstract work, mainly between 1925-1900 (a few earlier). Most are “exceptions” on the deed of the surrounding property.
9. Don’t worry about not being able to find the deed for a very old cemetery. Chances are 99-to-1 that a deed doesn’t exist, especially those created before 1826, when Tippecanoe County was officially formed.

Our pioneer fathers believed once they had set aside an acre for a graveyard, that nothing else needed to be done. There may be no deed showing ownership for the majority of the very old cemeteries. With luck you can find an exception on a surrounding deed, which shows it is not in

personal ownership. Our pioneer ancestors never imagined in their wildest dreams that a cemetery could “disappear”.

III. How the records were compiled, recorded and mapped.

- A. In researching we found an enormous amount of information and leads. I remember at one time being so buried in paperwork on my desk my boss couldn't find me. I sorted and correlated the information and arranged it into townships. We created a cemetery file, by township, with records on each cemetery. Each township had a file, and then a listing of cemeteries I called a record. I include the same information with each record: a map, an aerial and an information sheet. If I had additional information, it was also included into the files.

In the mid-1989 we went public with the list of 127 sites we had verified at that time. It has since grown to 133 verified cemeteries in Tippecanoe County.

- B. In 1990 we created a database that was updated in 1993, 1996 and again in 1998. Though the database is not available to the public at the present time, it is accessible by the public in hard-copy form through the Area Plan's office in Lafayette.

Each Cemetery database printout from the database is about a page long and is in Microsoft Access form. Generally it is not available to the public, but hopefully it will be some day. We are also working on installing the information on the County Web site in the future. The County GIS (Geographic Information Service) -- using the map I created in 1988 -- has already mapped cemeteries and that information is available on the county web site.

IV. Miscellaneous Information about Cemetery Research, and some interesting facts I learned (the hard way)

- A. The Catholic cemetery deeds are listed and recorded in the name of the person who was the Bishop of the diocese at the time. To find the original deeds for these, I first had to research the dated list of Catholic Bishops over the Lafayette dioceses.
- B. One gravesite constitutes a cemetery. If Aunt Martha was buried in the back forty, you have a cemetery on your property.

- C. The County Recorder held the original documents for cemeteries, such as Articles of Incorporation, Original Trustee meeting reports, original plats and renderings. These were microfilmed about 1990 and the original documents were destroyed. I saved those documents and now have the original in our Area Plan files.

V. Tippecanoe County Cemeteries

For detailed information on the Area Plan Commission's exhaustive efforts in Tippecanoe County, see the Lafayette Journal and Courier for a series of articles published on 08/15/1999, written by Jeff Parrott. We have reproduced those in Adobe Acrobat PDF format on the INPCRP website, with the permission of the newspaper. Bear in mind, however, that the following are large files and you must have the FREE ADOBE ACROBAT READER installed on your system in order to open them. All of the following 8/15/1999 Lafayette Journal and Courier articles are available on-line at:

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~inpcrp/inthenews.html>

"Growth sparring with respect for the dead -- Legislature listening to cemetery preservationists"

"Development, old cemeteries have clashed in Tippecanoe"

"Advocate calls for cemetery commission"

"More changes in laws proposed"

"Tippecanoe Co. places of rest" (map)

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Marlene has graciously granted permission to the INPCRP to reprint the above outline of a recent presentation that she made concerning the efforts of the Area Plan Commission of Tippecanoe County to identify all of the cemeteries in that county. It is hoped that, by sharing some of Marlene's suggestions, others can more easily research cemeteries in their counties.

Marlene is a member of the Indiana Pioneer Cemeteries Restoration Project's e-mail discussion group. To visit the INPCRP website and/or to join the e-mail group, visit www.rootsweb.com/~inpcrp.