

# Up Close & Personal: Doing On-Site Research

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## I. BEFORE THE TRIP

- A. Things to consider
  - 1. The dates & length of time for the trip
  - 2. The places you plan to visit (then reduce your expectations significantly!)
  - 3. Means of transportation to destination
    - a. By air: Determine airport destination(s), checking on the possibility of arriving & departing from different locations (check on car rental expectations & requirements)
    - b. By vehicle: Plan route in advance but allow for changes
  - 4. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. People to contact
  - 1. Genealogy libraries/librarians
  - 2. Historical society personnel
  - 3. Cemetery sextons
  - 4. Vital records offices
  - 5. Church officials
  - 6. Courthouses
  - 7. Local Family History Centers
  - 8. Possible relatives or former neighbors of ancestors (to interview)
  - 9. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Things to pack
  - 1. Papers and records
    - a. pedigree charts & family group sheets
    - b. copies (not originals) of documents being researched
    - c. Letters (esp. copies of correspondence with on-site personnel, etc.)
    - d. lots of paper, pens/pencils, highlighters
    - e. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2. Technological equipment
    - a. cameras (digital & other backup)
    - b. audio recorder
    - c. video/digital recorder
    - d. walkie-talkies
    - e. netbook or laptop computer, flash drives, extra discs, cables, ?
    - f. scanner
    - g. PDA/pocket computer
    - h. cell phone
    - i. GPS
    - j. \_\_\_\_\_

} smart phone or i-phone

3. Additional equipment for graveyard excursions
  - a. long sleeved shirt(s) & trousers
  - b. boots, high socks
  - c. garden & rubber gloves
  - d. insect repellent & sunscreen
  - e. old towels
  - f. small scissors
  - g. umbrella
  - h. bottled water (with sprayer attachment)
  - i. soft brush
  - j. small reflective mirror or cookie sheet
  - k. corn starch or powder (without additives)
  - l. spiral notebook & pencils
  - m. copy of genealogy on handheld device
  - n. portable GPS (or digital camera with GPS)
  - o. \_\_\_\_\_

II. ON-SITE VISITS (be sure to ask in advance about hours of operation)

- A. Historical Societies & Libraries
  1. Often societies & libraries are open by appointment only or for limited hours; be punctual and don't stay after their posted closing time
  2. Be mindful of the rules of the establishment (signing out material, no food or drink, cotton gloves for document-handling, etc.)
  3. Be considerate, especially when people go out of their way to accommodate your needs
  4. Make donations to the historical societies, churches, & libraries
  5. Offer to send your compiled findings for their files (and follow through)
- B. Vital Records Offices, Courthouses, & Archives (see above suggestions)
- C. Churches (see above suggestions)
- D. Ancestors' Residences (be sure to have permission before entering property)
- E. Cemeteries (recognize that some are on private property & require permission)
- F. Tourist attractions and sights of the area
  1. if this is your ancestors' hometown, visiting the local museum & learning about area history will help you connect with your ancestors' lives
  2. buy some postcards
  3. take photos of the *area* as well as tombstones
  4. meet the residents . . . you might find a distant relative!
- G. \_\_\_\_\_
- H. \_\_\_\_\_
- I. \_\_\_\_\_

*Internal Summary/Hints:*

1. Check the latest carry-on & baggage regulations for the airline you are using.
2. Plan to purchase film, extra batteries, extra tapes, & other misc. items on arrival.
3. Make appointments & arrange stops in an order that culminates in cemetery visits (don't start at the cemetery).
4. Most courthouses & many archives don't allow cameras on site; if you have a camera phone, it may not be permitted inside.
5. Clean up after yourself (at research facilities, cemeteries, and other locations)

III. AFTER THE TRIP

- A. Organize/transcribe notes
- B. File findings
- C. Develop film and catalog photos or transfer photos to your computer
- D. Send thank you notes and promised reports to the contacts you made
- E. Make a list of the things you want to accomplish on your next visit to the area
- F. \_\_\_\_\_
- G. \_\_\_\_\_
- H. \_\_\_\_\_

*Notes:*

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*Short list of Suggested Readings:*

- Carlberg, Nancy Ellen. *Cemetery Research*. Anaheim, CA: Carlberg Press, 1782 Beacon Ave., 92804; 2000.
- Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. *Your Guide to Cemetery Research*. Cincinnati, OH: Betterway Books, 2002.
- Keister, Douglas. *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2004.
- Underhill, Tom. *Dead Men Tell no Tales: How to Record Your Family's Oral History*. Placentia, CA: Creative Continuum, 2002.

*Other Helps:*

- American Automobile Association (AAA; in Calif.: Auto Club of So. Calif.)
- Books on the history of the states, counties, and cities you are interested in.
- Chamber of Commerce in the cities you will be visiting.

Maybe we're related! Check my website for my ancestors under investigation--click on "my people."

