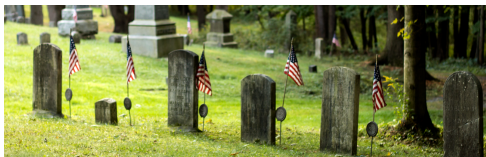

*The History Center in Tompkins County
Presents*

Cemeteries of Tompkins County

History at Home Activity Set



Cemeteries of Tompkins County

pg. 1

All About Our Cemeteries

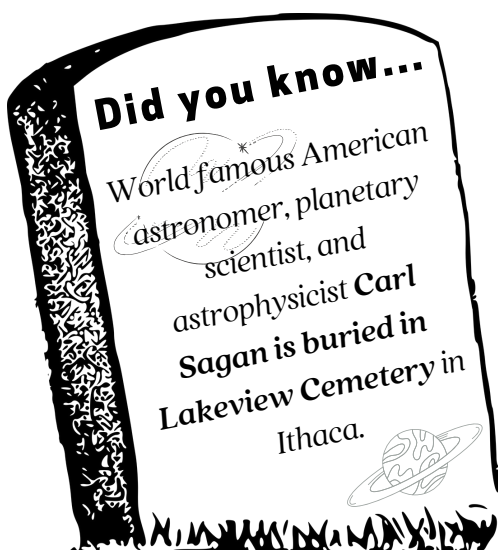
Cemeteries are places to honor and remember the dead in communities throughout the US. Funerary monuments display wealth, insignia of organizations, and symbols of a person's livelihood. Epitaphs carved into the stone speak of religious and political beliefs and the feelings of those left behind.

While the oldest grave sites in Tompkins County are those of the Gayogohónq (Cayuga) Native Americans and their predecessors, the first recorded non-indigenous human burial took place in 1790 or 1791, when only a few families had settled in Ithaca, clustered near the foot of East Hill. Tompkins County has over 100 cemeteries within its borders. They range from small family plots, rural settlement cemeteries, to larger municipality and privately owned cemeteries in each of the nine towns of Tompkins County.

Early grave sites would generally have a handmade marker of wood and piled field stones; the oldest headstones in local cemeteries are made of sandstone and other sedimentary rocks, reflecting local availability and easier materials for carving. However, preferences soon changed to more durable stones such as white marble

from Vermont (when it became affordable) and granite (when technology advanced enough to allow it to be carved easily).

In 1847 the Rural Cemetery Act was passed by the New York Legislature. This law authorized commercial not-for-profit burial grounds in New York State, replacing the common practice of burying family members on private farm lands or in churchyards. Many commercially owned cemeteries were designed as public parks, with landscaped walkways, roads, and organized systems for burial plots.



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Cemeteries of Tompkins County

pg. 2

The Rural Cemetery movement lasted from the 1830's through the 1870's. The emphasis was on creating picturesque cemeteries on sites known for their natural beauty. This design style was followed by the Lawn Park movement which emphasized wide open lawn like spaces, and orderly rows of headstones. Families visiting rural cemeteries in the late-nineteenth century would typically stroll though the grounds or picnic at the site of their loved one's memorial.

Cemeteries are protected places where families and friends can return to remember, or where a sapling planted at the foot of a grave may grow to become a mighty tree. Cemeteries are also quiet libraries for historians. Cemetery research takes the historian and genealogist into the sun to look for lost stories on gravestones. What can you learn, and who can you find in Tompkins County cemeteries?

*Modified from a article by Historic Ithaca on the history of the Ithaca City Cemetery. .
Some passages excerpted from Barbara Ebert, The City Cemetery, Ithaca, New York,
1790 – 1890, Master of Art Thesis, Cornell University, 1992.*

Planning Your Visit

Now that you know a little bit more about cemeteries in New York State, it's time to choose which local one to visit for your Cemetery Scavenger Hunt! **Is there a cemetery near your house? Maybe one you drive past often and wonder about?**

Cemeteries are open to the public so you can feel comfortable visiting any time. If you see a lot of cars parked nearby, please be respectful as there may be a funeral or memorial going on.

If you aren't sure where to go visit <https://bojkib.carto.com/me> for a map of most of the cemeteries in Tompkins County. You can also search "cemetery" in Google Maps.

TO BRING: pen and drawing pencil, clipboard, and this activity booklet.

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Pre-Visit Questions

After you decide which cemetery you want to visit, here are some questions to think about before you go.

- 1.** *Have you ever visited a cemetery before? What do you expect to see?*

- 2.** *What is the role of a cemetery?*

- 3.** *How do different cultures honor the dead? Provide examples.*

Vocabulary

Cenotaph

A memorial marking a grave where there is no body present. Cenotaphs often commemorate the deaths of those lost at sea, in war, or by some other means where recovery or transportation of a body is not possible.

Epitaph

A brief saying or literary note inscribed in a grave marker symbolizing the life of the person buried there. The name, places and dates of birth and death are generally not considered part of the epitaph.

Obelisk

A cemetery obelisk is a narrow four-sided monument with a pyramidal shape at the top that marks a burial plot. Obelisks were popularly used as grave markers during the Victorian era and were meant to represent eternal life.

Flush Grave Marker

A flat, decorative stone used to mark a grave. The stone is flat and embedded in the ground, unlike an upright monument such as a tombstone.

Grave Lamp

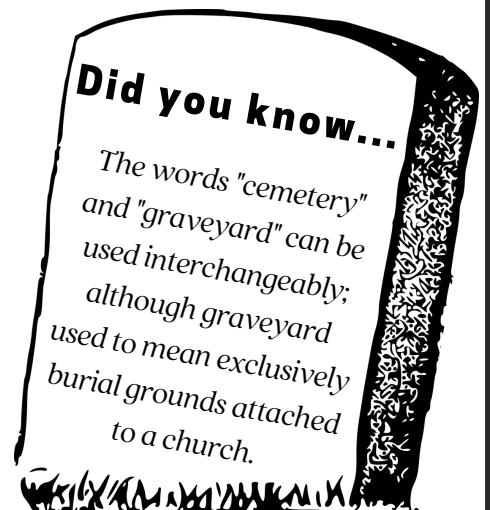
Any type of lighting device placed on a grave. Intended to symbolize eternal light (in the Judeo-Christian tradition); it may be kept lighted or not.

Cemetery

An area of land that contains multiple graves or tombs. Can be used interchangeably with graveyard.

Mausoleum

An above ground structure built to house multiple members of a family, or members of a shared faith or community.



Cemetery Name & Location _____

Cemetery Scavenger Hunt!

pg. 1

What and who can you find in this cemetery? Put a check next to each item you find, and record the name of the person buried there, and the year they died.

Someone who died in the 1800's _____

Flowers on a grave (real or not) _____

A gravestone that is broken _____

The number 20 on a gravestone _____

Engraving of a plant on a gravestone _____

A veteran from a war. Which war? _____

Someone who was born in the 1900's _____

A headstone with more than two names _____

A name you've never seen before _____

The word "mother", does it say whose mother they were?

A religious symbol (eg. cross, angel, Star of David etc.) _____

BONUS: A headstone in a language other than English. Can you guess what language it is?

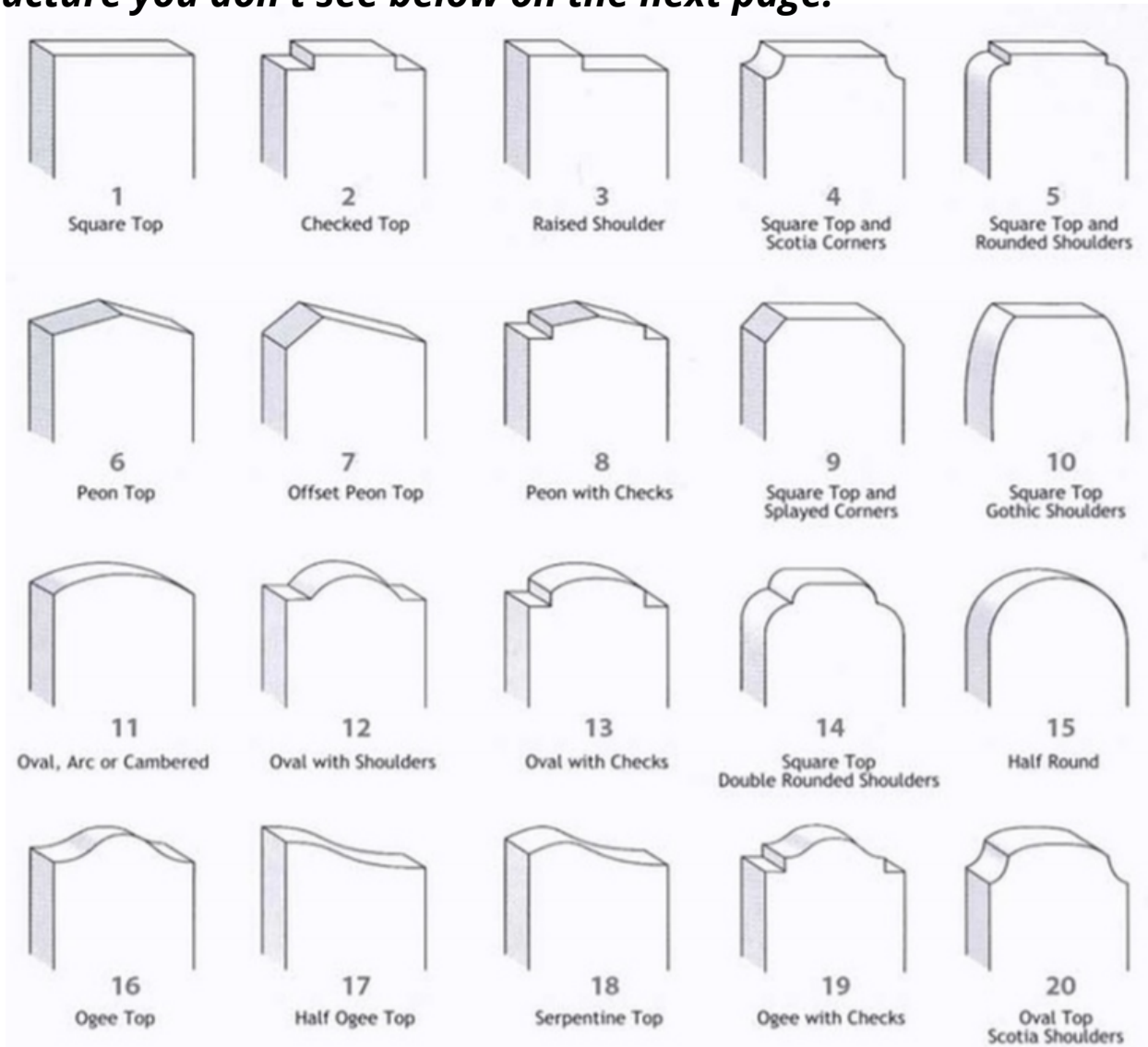
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Cemetery Scavenger Hunt!

Seeking Shapes

Can you find at least 7 of these headstone shapes in the cemetery? Write the name of each person you find on the shape that matches their headstone. Then try your hand at drawing a headstone or structure you don't see below on the next page.



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Cemetery Name & Location _____

Cemetery Scavenger Hunt! All About the Details

pg. 3

What is the most unusual grave marker you found? Can you draw it?

Copy an epitaph word for word from one of the grave markers.

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Cemetery Name & Location _____

Draw a Mausoleum

A mausoleum is an above ground structure in a cemetery that houses multiple graves. Often there will be architectural elements around the door, or a family name on the mantel. Draw one below, and try to include all the architectural details you can see.

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Post-Visit Reflection

***After your visit, think about the questions below.
How was your visit? Did anything surprise you?***

1. *Which cemetery did you go to? Where was it located?*

2. *What can this cemetery teach us about the history of Tompkins County?*

3. *What was your favorite part about visiting the cemetery? What did you learn?*

4. *Are cemeteries worth preserving? Why or why not?*

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Learn More About Tompkins County Cemeteries

Digital Links:

- **Cemeteries of Tompkins County - Self Guided Tours & Maps**
 - www.thehistorycenter.net/tours
- **Interesting Tidbits on Newfield Cemeteries - by Newfield Historical Society President Al Chafee**
 - <https://thehistorycenter.net/blog/8912962>
- **HistoryForge Database**
 - www.historyforge.net - Search for people who lived in Ithaca from the 19th & 20th century through their census records.
- **FindaGrave.com**
 - Learn more about the people whose grave you visited by looking at what other information is recorded about their life and death on a cemetery database.

Related Archival Collections at The History Center in Tompkins County

- **Guide to the Tompkins County, NY Cemeteries Collection V-1-3 -7**
- **Tompkins County Cemetery Research Collection V- 64 - 6 - 6**
- **Rumsey Family Cemetery Photo Collection FBO-0161**

****You can look at these collections by visiting our Research Library.****

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