

# Beyond the Headstone: Finding Ancestors in Cemeteries and Online

## Cemetery Research

Graveyards can be a great source of additional information for your family history. I have found many additional facts about my family just by viewing their headstones. I even found a person I was told was my great-uncle who actually turned out to be a great-aunt. You can also find additional family members by checking the family plot, or surrounding area. This lecture will cover everything from how to find that remote cemetery to taking photographs of those valuable headstones.

The best way to do cemetery research is to go to the actual cemetery and find the location of your ancestors' gravesites. Of course, depending on where the graveyards are located this may not be practical. I have personally walked through many dozens of graveyards where my ancestors were buried, throughout the United States and England. This could be a very big project. The smaller graveyards can be searched very easily, but in larger cemeteries it may take a long time to find where your ancestors' actual headstone is located.

Also, some smaller graveyards can be on private property where you need to have permission to enter. Sometimes they are in isolated areas where it can be very hard to locate them.

And then of course, sometimes there are no headstones or markers for your ancestors at the site. If the cemetery has an office or a sextant, they can have records of where your ancestor is located.

If there is an office, the grave records usually tell you who owns the plot and if other relatives are buried in the same area. If you are going to a cemetery you need to bring water, both for drinking and for washing headstones, a spray bottle for the water, a shovel and a small whisk broom, an angled brush, bug spray, along with a cell phone or camera for taking pictures.

## Locating The Cemetery Where They Are Buried

Sometimes family stories can tell you where your ancestor is buried (of course you may find some of those are incorrect as well). You can check local graveyards in the area where they died. Obituaries are great and often mention the place where the person was buried.

The best method is to look on the bottom of the death certificate, usually it will indicate where the person was buried. On the right is a California Death Certificate, it gives the name of the cemetery, Artesia, and the address of the cemetery.

CORONER'S USE ONLY	1. CERTIFY THAT IN MY OPINION DEATH OCCURRED AT THE HOUR, DATE AND PLACE STATED FROM THE CAUSES STATED.		28A. SIGNATURE AND TITLE	
	29. MANNER OF DEATH—specify one: natural, accident, suicide, homicide, pending investigation or could not be determined		30A. PLACE OF INJURY	
FUNERAL DIRECTOR AND LOCAL REGISTRAR	32. LOCATION (STREET AND NUMBER OR LOCATION AND CITY)			
	34A. DISPOSITION(S) Burial		34B. PLACE OF FINAL DISPOSITION—NAME AND ADDRESS Artesia Cemetery 11142 Artesia Blvd Cerritos CA	
	36A. NAME OF FUNERAL DIRECTOR (OR PERSON ACTING AS SUCH) WHITE'S FUNERAL HOME, INC		36B. LICENSE NO. 750	
STATE REGISTRAR	A.	B.	C.	D.

VS-11 (REV. 7-92) MAKE NO ERASURES, WHITEOUTS, OR C

If they name the funeral home, that is another way of finding the graveyard.

On the right is a Washington state death certificate. It only gives the name of the cemetery, Mt. View, but no address at all.

It does indicate the funeral home and location in South Tacoma.

So, different death certificates will give you different results.

16. (a) Informant's own signature *Hosp. Record*  
(b) Address \_\_\_\_\_

17. (a) *Burial* (b) Date thereof *12/31/45*  
(Burial, cremation, or removal) (Month) (Day) (Year)  
(c) Place: burial or cremation *Mt. View*  
**FIDBT Funeral Home**

18. (a) Signature of funeral director *Maud S. [unclear]*  
(b) Address **So Tacoma**

19. (a) *DEC 31 1945* (b) *C.R. [unclear]*  
(Date received local registrar) (Registrar's signature)

## Online Cemetery Research

Searching for cemetery sites online can be a lot less expensive than traveling around to find the cemeteries where your ancestors are buried. You can also go online to locate the cemetery if you are going to make a visit to the graveyard.

Below is a list of websites that specialize in finding records in cemeteries and graveyards around the globe. Some are well known; some you may have never heard of.

### **BillionGraves** ([billiongraves.com](http://billiongraves.com))

Started in 2010 and has over 17 million GPS – tagged headstone records from over 500,000 cemeteries in over 130 countries.

They try to get people to take photos of headstones in their local cemetery with their cellphone camera app then upload them to their site. Also transcribe information from uploaded headstone photos. You can access their headstone records, photos of headstones, and accurate locations of all the graves. Free to use, but there is a **Fee** for high resolution photos, nearby graves, or the GPS location of graves.

### **FamilySearch** ([familysearch.org/cemeteries](http://familysearch.org/cemeteries))

Started in 2024, an ever-growing database of international cemeteries linked to the world's largest online family tree. Search by location, cemetery name, or name of a relative to find the final resting place of departed family members or another people of interest. If you don't have the cemetery name in the burial location of your ancestor it will not show where they are buried. **Free** to use.

### **Find a Grave** ([findagrave.com](http://findagrave.com))

Started in 1995, they have over 265 million memorials, located in 613,125 cemeteries, in 251 different countries around the world. They have the largest database of cemetery records.

They also have memorials not located in cemeteries for people who were cremated, lost at sea, or have an unknown burial location. Searchable by surname, state, county, etc. Search for a missing family member, add your loved ones, create meaningful, memorials, etc. **Free** to use.

### **Internment.net** (interment.net)

Started in March 1997, this website contains over 25 million cemetery records, transcripts, and burial registers, from tens of thousands of cemeteries across the world, all contributed by genealogists, cemeteries, government agencies, and private organizations. **Free** to use.

**The Association for Gravestone Studies** (AGS) (gravestonestudies.org) was founded in 1977 for the purpose of furthering the study and preservation of gravestones.

### **The Tombstone Transcription Project** (usgwtombstones.org)

Part of The USGenWeb Project (USGenWeb.org), started in 1996, this project is to transcribe tombstone inscriptions and have it easily accessible to all. They later started the Tombstone Photo Project to preserve photos of headstones. **Free** to use.

## **FindaGrave.com vs BillionGraves.com**

**FindaGrave** started in 1995 and has been around a lot longer than BillionGraves, it has over 265 million memorials from around the world. It includes birth and death places, family information: such as parents, siblings, children and often life stories or obituaries. They also include many photographs other than the headstone, such as people's photos, death certificates, obituaries, and many other items. Sometimes, when I find very little information on a person on FindaGrave, I edit the record and add as much information as I have about them and their families. Becoming a member and using FindaGrave is completely **free**.

**BillionGraves** BillionGraves.com started in 2010 and has over 17 million GPS – tagged headstone records. The only personal information they include is the wording on the tombstone. They advertise they have GPS locations for every headstone, but they charge a **fee** to see GPS location, hi-res photos, and nearby graves.

**FamilySearch Cemetery** site is very new but uses information from both FindaGrave and BillionGraves for its site. It is **free** and will show all your family members that are buried in each cemetery. However, if you don't have the cemetery name in the burial address of your ancestor, they will not show up as being buried in that cemetery.

## **Using FindaGrave**

FindaGrave has the largest international graving community in the world. In 2013, Find a Grave became a wholly owned subsidiary of Ancestry® and launched a new iOS mobile app. The Android app was released in 2014. Ancestry redesigned the website and released it in August of 2018. Even though owned by Ancestry they remain completely **free**.

The community continues to add and update memorials every day. FindaGrave.com is the world's largest gravesite record collection with over 265 million memorials in 613,125 cemeteries in 251 different countries around the world and expanding daily. As the largest collection of burial records, it is the best resource for finding the resting places for your family, friends, and famous individuals.

The Find a Grave Community collaborates in this mission to find, record, and present final disposition information from around the world.

Members of this worldwide project continue to add memorials that include photos, biographies and rich information to honor the deceased. They also link other family members together. They are one of the only online sites that allow memorials for people who are not buried. You can add memorials for people lost at sea, cremated, and others not in a cemetery.

FindaGrave has been around since 1995. It was created to document and share burial information. It includes birth and death dates and places, as well as the burial place. Usually there is a photograph of the headstone. Most sites include much more information: such names and links to parents, siblings, and children's gravesites. It often includes life stories or obituaries of the person. I have even found death certificates for people.

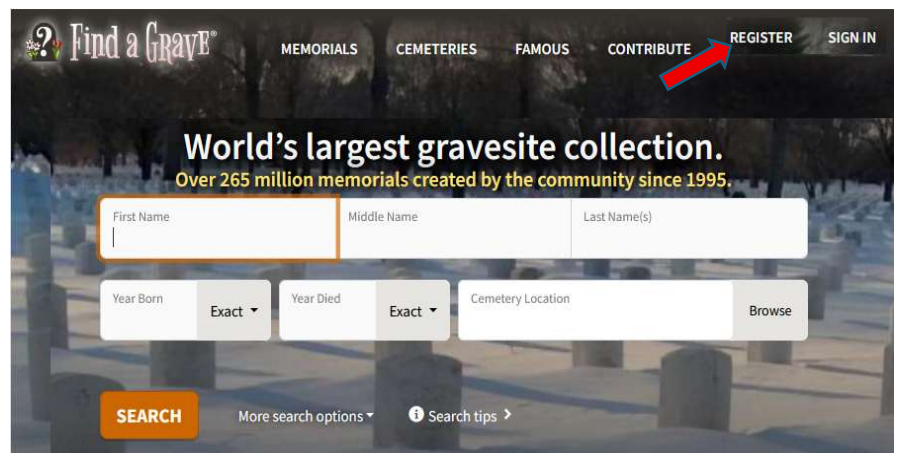
Sometimes, when I find very little information on a person's FindaGrave site, I edit the record and add as much information as I have on them and their families. That way I can help others.

Searching and viewing information is free and no account is required. If you want to edit the information on the site, you will need to have an account, which is also free.

As I said, becoming a member of FindaGrave is **free**.

Go to findagrave.com (image on the right) and select **Register** at the top right.

The image below will open.



Select either **Continue** to create a new account or **Continue with Ancestry** to use your existing Ancestry account. If you select **Continue** a window will open for you to add all the information about yourself and then create your account.

If you selected **Continue with Ancestry** you just sign in with your Ancestry account.

Once you have created an account you can edit any existing Find a Grave memorial, as well as be able to add any new memorials that are not yet on the site. You can also link other family members' gravesites, such as parents, spouses, and siblings. To link children, go to the child's memorial and add their parents. FindaGrave can be a great resource to find out a lot more information about your ancestors.

Below is a Find a Grave site that has not been sponsored. It has an ad at the top and another down the left side, with a suggestion to sponsor the site in the middle. When you sponsor a site, it will no longer show ads to anyone who visits the site.

If you decide to sponsor this page, it will ask for your payment info.

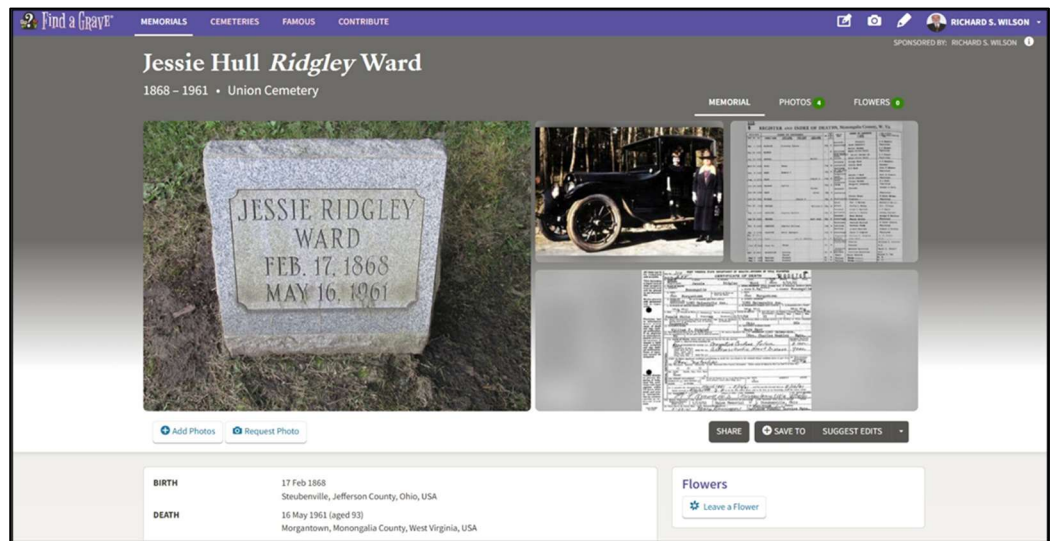
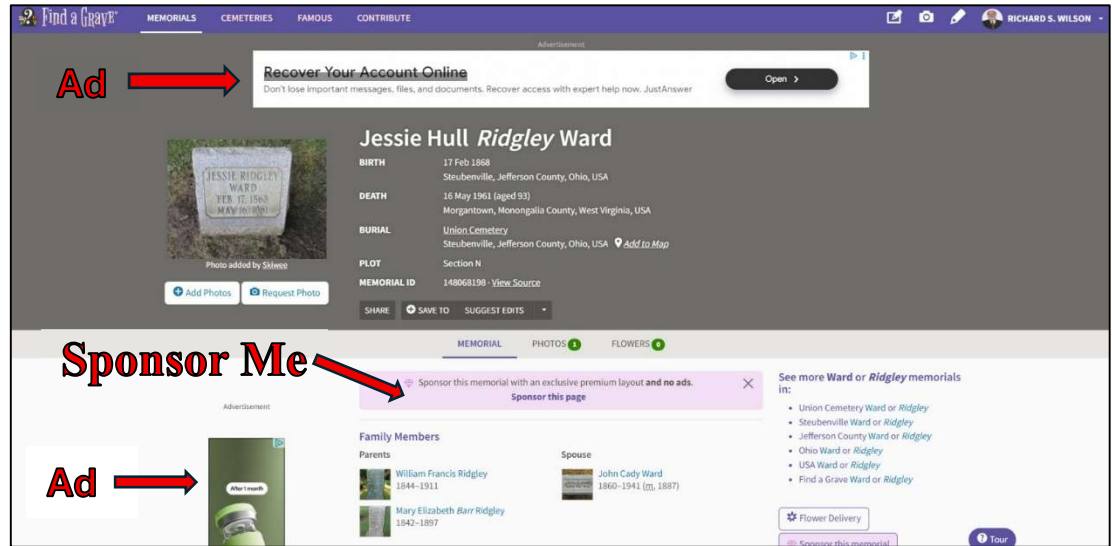
The cost to sponsor a site is a one-time cost of \$10.00.

Once you complete it the site will look completely different.

The sponsored site is shown below this image. It now shows more photos that are much larger than before.

It now says who the sponsor is (if you want it to show) and how many photos and flowers there are. Also, you can add many more photos than the standard site.

If you find a photo that you want to download on a Find a Grave site, you click on the photo, and it will open in a new window. If you want to download the photo, select at the bottom right to get the best copy. Then right click and select **Save Image As**.




## Making Changes to a Find a Grave Site

To make changes to any Find a Grave site you find, you select the **Suggest Edits** button.

You can edit the names, given, nickname, maiden name, etc. You can edit the birth date and place, the death date and place, bio information, the cemetery plot #, section, and the burial coordinates (GPS). You can also add the inscription and the gravesite details.

You can also add family members, the father, mother and spouse. If you want to add a child, go to the child's memorial and add their parents. To add siblings, add the same parents for each of the siblings.

You can also designate the person as a veteran (a small icon V will be placed next to their name denoting their veteran status). You can also add notes about your suggested edits.

You can contact the site manager by selecting the  button.

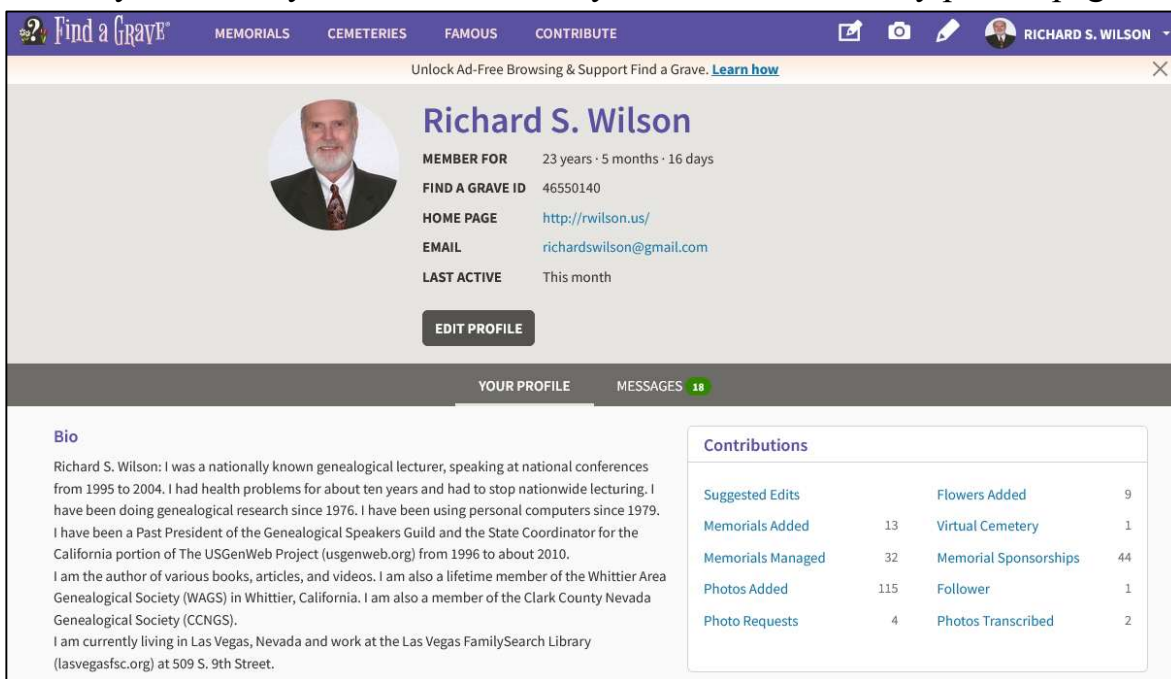
If you are a close relative (if they are your parents, grandparents, etc.) you can request taking over as the manager of the site by contacting the site manager.

When you have finished editing the record select the  button.

## Your Find a Grave Account

To check your account settings, use the pull-down menu on the top right.

From this menu you can see your profile, account settings, memorials, messages sent to you, and any virtual cemeteries you have. Below is my profile page:



The screenshot shows the user profile for Richard S. Wilson on the Find a Grave website. The profile includes a circular profile picture, a bio, and a table of contributions. The bio states that Richard is a nationally known genealogical lecturer and has been doing research since 1976. The contributions table lists various actions and their counts.

Contributions	
Suggested Edits	Flowers Added 9
Memorials Added 13	Virtual Cemetery 1
Memorials Managed 32	Memorial Sponsorships 44
Photos Added 115	Follower 1
Photo Requests 4	Photos Transcribed 2



The screenshot shows the user account pull-down menu for Richard S. Wilson. The menu items are: Profile (highlighted with a red arrow), Account, My Memorials, Messages, Virtual Cemeteries, and Sign out.

From here you can see your info, a bio, Suggested Edits, Memorials Added, Memorials Managed, Photos Added, Photo Requests,

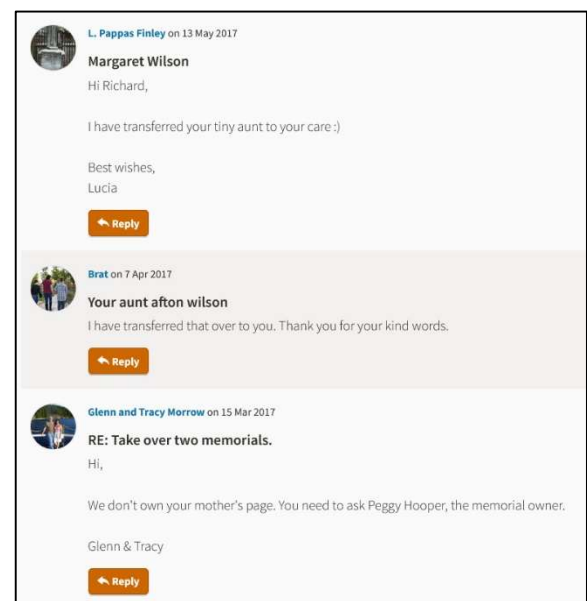
Flowers Added, Memorial Sponsorships, Follower, and Photos Transcribed.

If you select the Messages tab it will show who has sent you messages (see image on the right). Messages are where you will get answers to requests for taking over a memorial or making edits to memorials.

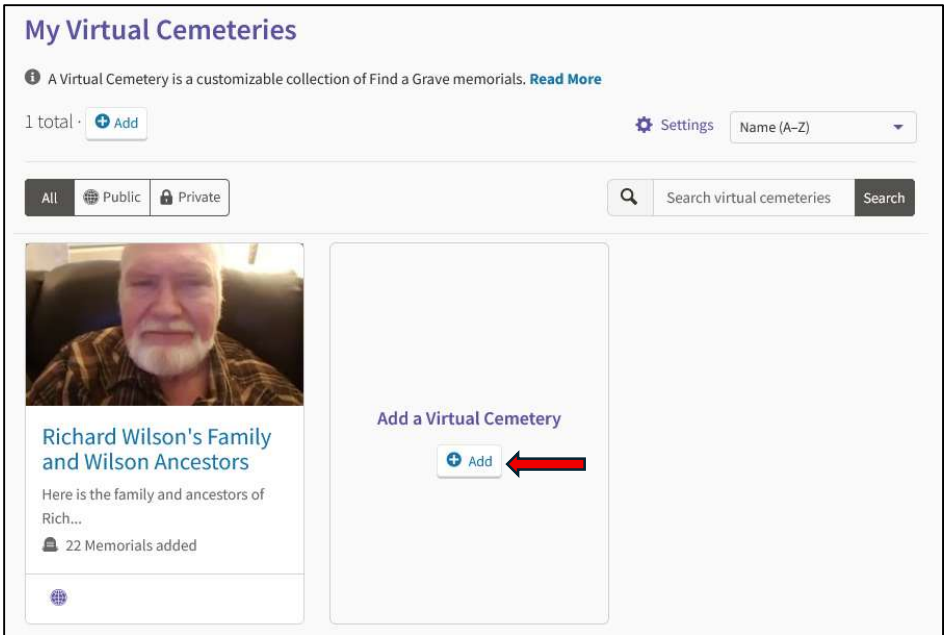
Here are some answers to my request for taking over two of my aunts' and my parents' gravesites.

Sometimes they give them to you and sometimes you find out you asked the wrong person (like I did with my parents).

A site manager may ask for more information about the changes you ask to make.

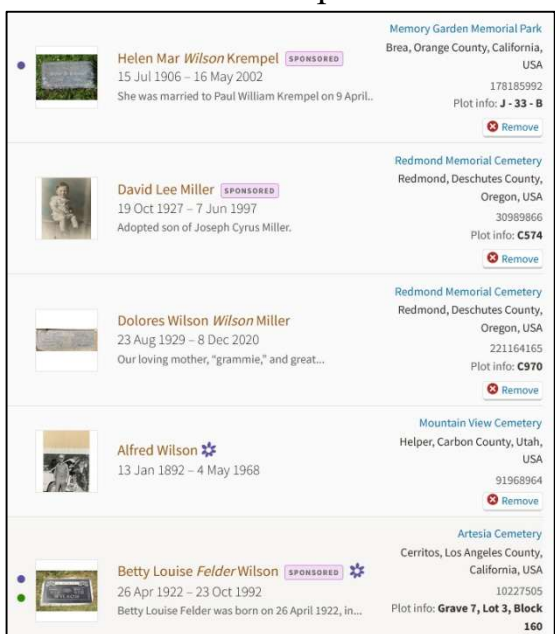


The screenshot shows the Messages tab with three messages. The first message is from L. Pappas Finley on 13 May 2017, regarding Margaret Wilson. The second message is from Brat on 7 Apr 2017, regarding 'Your aunt afton wilson'. The third message is from Glenn and Tracy Morrow on 15 Mar 2017, regarding 'RE: Take over two memorials'.



Select My Virtual Cemeteries and the window on the left will open. Select **Add** under “Add a Virtual Cemetery” and you can create a virtual cemetery.

You can have multiple virtual cemeteries. They let you to see multiple people from many cemeteries all in one place.

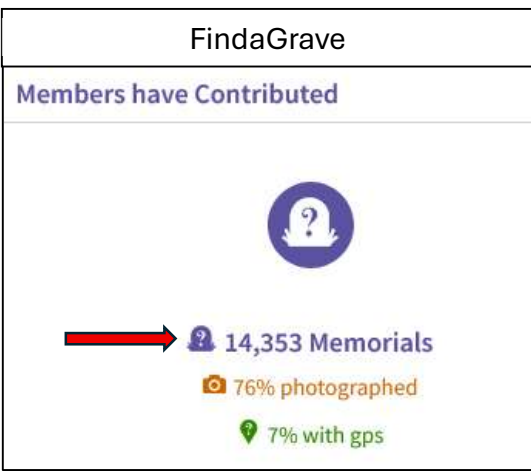
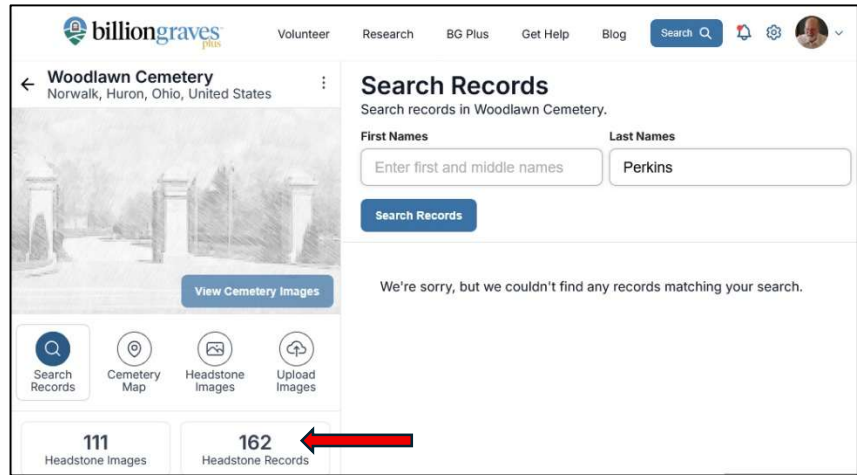


You can create as many virtual cemeteries as you need.

On the right is part of my virtual cemetery list.

There are people from Brea, California, Redmond, Oregon, Helper, Utah and Cerritos, California all in one place. It is an easy way to find your family’s graves without having to find each of their gravesites one at a time.

A reason I like FindaGrave over Billion graves was illustrated when I searched for my ancestor Mary S. (Moon) Perkins. She is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Norwalk, Huron, Ohio, United States with her husband and son. BillionGraves says there are no Perkins in that cemetery. I looked and they only have 162 headstone records with 111 headstone images for that cemetery. I checked the same cemetery on Find a Grave, and they have 14,353 headstones with 76% (about 10,908) photographed and 7% with GPS coordinates.



Need any help: Richard S. Wilson - Cell: 702-831-2157 Email: richardswilson@gmail.com (include the s)