

# HERITAGE BULLETIN

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Tips, Ideas & More to Help Preserve Oregon's Heritage

**MARKING UNMARKED GRAVES IN HISTORIC CEMETERIES**

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Most graves in historic cemeteries have – or at one time had – a marker or monument of some sort, but for a variety of reasons many are now unmarked. Markers may have sunken beneath the surface, been vandalized or stolen, wood markers may have deteriorated, or the family may never have made arrangements for placement of a monument.

## **Benefits of marking a burial site include:**

- **Acknowledging the Person:** A gravesite marker is the primary means to acknowledge the presence and lifespan of the individual located there.
- **Recording the Burial Site:** Historic cemeteries may have limited or incomplete information. Markers help in mapping the cemetery and verifying or maintaining cemetery records. Listings on most transcription sites such as Find-a-Grave are usually done only for burials with a marker.
- **Locating the Burial Site for Visitors:** Without a marker, visitors are unlikely to locate the burial site and may assume the person they are looking for is not there.
- **Locating Veterans for Memorial Day:** Flag placements do not usually happen for unmarked graves.
- **Education and Research:** Having most graves in a cemetery marked gives visitors a fuller picture of the history of the community and the family connections there. For genealogy research the location of individuals buried nearby often gives important clues to family lineage and events.
- **Community Involvement:** Having a fuller understanding of community history and connections may encourage more involvement of volunteers and spark engagement in tours and events that emphasize the importance of the site to the community.

## **Issues to consider before marking your unmarked gravesites:**

- **Existing Cemetery Policies:** Check to make sure your plans are compatible with existing cemetery policies for grave markers.
- **Verifying Location:** Written cemetery records are usually the best confirmation of grave locations but often may not be precise. Other sources include death certificates, obituaries, family knowledge, or proximity of other family graves in the cemetery.
- **Information to be Included:** A simple marker might include just the name and birth/death years. More extensive information could include family connections or community involvement.



- **Marker Selection:** Depending on available funds and individual preferences, markers can range from simple metal mortuary markers to upright granite monuments. If you are not confident of the location or information, metal markers are easier than granite to move or edit. Engraved metal and concrete may also be options.
- **Maintenance Considerations:** These could include mowing and trimming issues, as well as maintenance or replacement of the marker itself. Metal mortuary markers can last 10 years or more with cleaning every year or two. Granite markers last the longest.
- **Cost of Markers:** Costs currently range from under \$10 to \$1000+ depending on the type of marker.

## Examples of Markers for Unmarked Graves in Historic Cemeteries

Galvanized steel markers are an inexpensive way to identify unmarked plots. While these are intended to be temporary they are often found in historic cemeteries many years after burials. Quantities can be purchased from funeral supply companies or perhaps your local funeral establishment. A typical cost is under \$10 each for minimum quantities of 25. If you only need a few, you might share an order with another cemetery. Flush and upright styles shown. Rather than using the paper insert provided, you can print your own card with the information and font you choose and then laminate it for longer life. (Source: W.F. Norman Corporation, [www.wfnorman.com](http://www.wfnorman.com))



Simple granite markers can be engraved and installed for under \$300 and may be an option if family members or other funding sources are available.



Embossed cement markers are a midway option in price and longevity.



(Prices mentioned are generally from 2020 and may vary due to location, availability, etc.)