Digitizing Mount Hope Cemetery

Sarah Jones, MA MLS
Jackson County Historical Society
Maquoketa, Iowa

UMDCC16, St. Ambrose University,
Davenport, IA, August 9, 2016
Mount Hope Cemetery, Maquoketa, Iowa
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Mount Hope Cemetery – Maquoketa, Jackson County, Iowa
Maquoketa: county seat, population approx. 6000, settled in 1837, platted in 1850 (Iowa statehood=1846)

Mount Hope Cemetery
- On indigenous burial ground
- Settlers established the cemetery in 1850
- Cemetery was platted in 1880 due to a lack of reliable records
- Mount Hope Cemetery Association formed in 1906
- While Mount Hope Cemetery Association maintains records today, the Jackson County Historical Society is the repository for those records
Background

- 1990s/2000s – a lack of reliable records (again) nearly put an end to continued use of the cemetery for contemporary burials
- Volunteers resurveyed the gravestones, entered burial information into a Microsoft Works database and added information for new burials
- Fall 2015 – need for a new volunteer to maintain the burial records database …
- … and I volunteered – reviewing the records, I couldn’t in good conscience not try to modernize and improve them.
Step One: review the existing cemetery records.

The state of the data:
- Approx. 10,000 records
- Obsolete software (Microsoft Works on a donated computer running Windows XP) – no column sorting, no searching
- Nonstandard data formats
- Inconsistent data entry
# State of the Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Post No.</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Date of Death</th>
<th>Other Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A W. Drips</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1861</td>
<td>03/18/1966</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>460 and Lot #461 // Grand Army of the Republic in Memory of Union Soldiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbey</td>
<td>Hulda C</td>
<td>1822</td>
<td>01/01/1909</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>155 S 37 3M 50 // 1867 WED 17 MAY 1957 // H/O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbott</td>
<td>Robert W</td>
<td>09/07/1935</td>
<td>20 FEB 1927</td>
<td>M93</td>
<td>Arlene Redeker Abbott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ackerman</td>
<td>Rosa Mae</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>03/16/1966</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adair</td>
<td>Golda Neva (ch)</td>
<td>21 JUN 1898</td>
<td>08/28/1986</td>
<td>893</td>
<td>William A. &amp; Nellie (Smith) Hardin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adair</td>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>19 JUN 1889</td>
<td>01/18/1965</td>
<td>893</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>Francis E (ch)</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td>16 JUL 1881</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>37 years //</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>Nellie</td>
<td>30 YRS</td>
<td>19 SEP 1893</td>
<td>616 W C &amp; L A Adams</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>W C</td>
<td>30 AUG 1813</td>
<td>18 APR 1891</td>
<td>Old355</td>
<td>GM-75 years // widower // lot purchased 21 SEP 1883 for $15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addison</td>
<td>Albert H</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>137</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addison</td>
<td>Norma W</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>137</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ade</td>
<td>Percy H</td>
<td>08 M</td>
<td>17 JUL 1880</td>
<td>Infant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adell</td>
<td>Martin D</td>
<td>36Y</td>
<td>30 MAR 1897</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alder</td>
<td>Eliza C</td>
<td>26 JUL 1857</td>
<td>27 OCT 1888</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>Nee Billups // W/O H H Alder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airgood</td>
<td>Gertrude Louise</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>752</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airgood</td>
<td>Raymond</td>
<td>1876</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>752</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al</td>
<td>Myrtle</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberry</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>226</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberry</td>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>1843</td>
<td>01/21/2020</td>
<td>1839 76Y 90 240 // died at Marshalltown Soldiers Home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert</td>
<td>Maud</td>
<td>10 MOS</td>
<td>11 FEB 1886</td>
<td>D/O REV J B &amp; H Albert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albright</td>
<td>Fred Garfield</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alden</td>
<td>A Berkine</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alden</td>
<td>Clyde C</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alden</td>
<td>Fred M</td>
<td>02 JAN 1864</td>
<td>04/16/2017</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alden</td>
<td>G R</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>556</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alden</td>
<td>John R</td>
<td>1877</td>
<td>11/19/2000</td>
<td>556</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alden</td>
<td>Lenora H</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>63 Nee Hicks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alden</td>
<td>Mary L</td>
<td>30 SEP 1866</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alden</td>
<td>Norman H &quot;Bobby&quot; (ob)</td>
<td>04 JUL 1888</td>
<td>NOV 1958</td>
<td>63 S/O Fredric M. &amp; Mary (Houston) Alden // H/O Lenora Hicks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alden</td>
<td>William Norman</td>
<td>04/15/2025</td>
<td>01/22/1958</td>
<td>1885-2 Iowa Y 3 Coast Guard Res // WW II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dates are in text format
Export misinterpreted some years into the wrong century
“Mystery people” – Myrtie Al: no birthdate, no death date, no burial plot number, “Al” seems unlikely to be a real surname
While this was nominally a digitization process, the database output was a paper printout, so formatting decisions were made to facilitate reading a printout.
State of the Data

- Fields are not limited to one piece of data
- Cryptic abbreviations
  - \textit{(ch)} indicates that the death record on file at the county Recorder’s Office was viewed
  - \textit{(ob)} indicates that an obituary was viewed
State of the Data

- Inaccurate information (A W Drips)
  - His initials and surname occupy the surname field
  - The lot numbers refer to a Civil War veterans’ monument in the cemetery
  - What looks like a death year occupies the birth date field, except that he died in the Battle of Pea Ridge which was fought in 1862
  - He is not buried at Mount Hope Cemetery

This probably represents the desire to provide a record the death of a notable native son – out of scope for what the project had been.
Scope of the Project

Step Two: Formulate a project plan (See downloadable document at https://umdcc16.sched.org/event/7N7t/digitizing-mount-hope-cemetery)

• Outline the project needs and establish goals
• Establish methodology, metadata, data entry rules
• Sources and references/other digital cemetery projects:
  • East Texas Cemeteries at Stephen F. Austin University
    http://digital.sfasu.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/NacCoCemeter
  • Oak Hill Cemetery, Cedar Rapids, IA
    and http://www.oakhillcemeterycr.com/
  • Memorial Park Cemetery, Moline, IL
Project Plan

Stakeholders & Users
- Jackson County Historical Society
- Mount Hope Cemetery Association
- Jackson County Genealogical Chapter
- Local history researchers
- Funeral Directors

Project needs and goals
- Sustainable
- Future-looking
- Standards-based
- Accessible
- Secure
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metadata</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surname</td>
<td>Veteran Information:</td>
<td>Final rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Given Names</td>
<td>Veteran Information:</td>
<td>Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maiden Name</td>
<td>Veteran Information:</td>
<td>Years of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthdate</td>
<td>Veteran Information:</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death Date</td>
<td>Funeral Home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHCA Date</td>
<td>Funeral Home URL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lot/Crypt Number</td>
<td>Gravestone Photo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPS Coordinates:</td>
<td>Gravestone Inscription</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latitude</td>
<td>Gravestone Symbols</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPS Coordinates:</td>
<td>Portrait Photo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longitude</td>
<td>Record Verification:</td>
<td>MHCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obituary URL</td>
<td>Record Verification:</td>
<td>Gravestone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Record Verification:</td>
<td>Obituary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>Record Verification:</td>
<td>Death Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran Information: Conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran Information: Military branch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
General principles:

- Use upper/lower case, capitalizing the first letter of proper names.
- Use common abbreviations (e.g., Jr., Sr., Lt.) capitalized and followed by a period.
- Use full date: Month Day, 4-Digit Year (e.g., January 24, 1919 OR 1/24/1919). Allow the technology platform to format dates for display (e.g., as Jan. 24, 1919 or 1/24/1919). Never use or display a 2-digit year.
- When a month or day is not available, use “00” (zero zero) (e.g., 00/00/1850 for a birth- or death date given as 1850 with the month and day unknown).
Lot/Crypt Number

- Mausoleum crypt numbers, e.g. cr1A, cr22H) – see Appendix III
  - Mausoleum Chart of Crypts
    - Numbers 1–30 indicate column of crypt, beginning on the right as you enter the building, proceeding south along the west wall, and continuing along the east wall from south to north
    - Letters A, B, C, D, and E are the crypts in each column, from bottom to top, along the west wall
    - Letters H, I, J, K, and L are the crypts in each column, from bottom to top, along the east wall
- Lot numbers
  - Begin with the main lot number (e.g., 926A, 111Mem, 1180)
  - Follow with additional signifiers, if any (e.g., S4’, S8’ W1/2)
  - “Mem” signifies the Memorial Section of the cemetery
GPS Coordinates: Latitude
  • Use decimal notation (use 42.067455 not 42° 4’ 2.8” N)

GPS Coordinates: Longitude
  • Use decimal notation (use –90.667630 not 90° 40’ 3.47” W)

Gravestone Photo Filenaming:
  • Use this pattern: mhc–XXXXXX.ext
    • mhc = Mount Hope Cemetery
    • XXXXX = lot/crypt number (e.g., 121, or 950–2, or 222mem, or crW1a) Use the main lot number when there are additional signifiers (e.g., use 926A, not 926A–S4’).
    • 950–2 = lot number designation 950.2. Use a hyphen to avoid confusion with the dot separator between filename and file extension.
    • mem = memorial section of the cemetery
    • cr = mausoleum crypt
    • ext = file extension
Clean-up and transfer of existing data:

- Export from Microsoft Works to CSV format
- Clean up the existing data
- Add records for new burials

- Use an Excel spreadsheet as a working document
- Final data entry into a Google Sheet in the Historical Society’s Google account
Retrospective enhancement of the data:

- GPS coordinates for graves
- Photographs of gravestones
  - Three versions: high resolution archival images, mid-size display images, thumbnails
- Transcription of gravestone inscription
- Description of symbols used on gravestones
Online access to the data:

- Use hosted Omeka site for temporary display of and access to the records
- Development of a locally-designed database and web site
Project: Phase III

Future wish-list:

• Pending clarification of copyright issues, digitize obituaries (newspaper clippings in the JCHS archives) and link to the cemetery record

• Link digitized material from the JCHS archives to the cemetery records of individuals (photographs, oral histories, correspondence)

• Merge with other records: results of 1940 WPA project; family plot information

• Establish methods and protocols to allow volunteers to help
Additional goals:

• Establish a model for digital records for other area cemeteries, especially the 100+ pioneer cemeteries in the county

• Establish methodology that is extensible, easily trainable, and portable to facilitate the use of volunteers, including casual volunteers
Lessons Learned, So Far...

• Importance of good project planning and documentation
• Stay focused:
  • Avoid getting side-tracked by obstacles
  • Beware of mission creep
• Be realistic, remembering the availability of resources
Questions?

Digitizing Mount Hope Cemetery

Jackson County Historical Society
P O Box 1245
Maquoketa, IA 52060
jciahs.com
Bonnie Mitchell, Curator
museum@jciahs.com

Sarah Jones
sjones@jciahs.com

https://umdcc16.sched.org/event/7N7t/digitizing-mount-hope-cemetery