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How NOT to Clean a Tombstone for Photography!

Take a look at the picture below. Do you see something wrong with it? Almost every genealogist will cringe when viewing a picture like this one from FindAGrave.com. Someone apparently used a wire brush to make the engravings on the tombstone easier to read. AAARRRRGGGGHHH!



The above photo is from findagrave.com

Using a wire brush on a tombstone or any other stone memorial causes irreparable damage! In fact, the damage is so severe that most states in the USA and also governments in many other countries have laws prohibiting such actions. Under the laws of many states, unauthorized tampering with or damaging gravestones is a felony.

It is easy to use FindAGrave to track down the person who uploaded the photograph. However, let’s be cautious before making any accusations. There is no evidence to indicate that the person who supplied the photograph is also the same person who used a wire brush to “clean” the tombstone. Perhaps the photographer came by some time after the criminal act took place

and snapped a photograph. Perhaps not. I'll leave that investigation to others who are located near the Thomas Cemetery in Grainger County, Tennessee, to find out.

Once damaged, antique tombstones can rarely be returned to their former appearance. Rough brushing or cleaning with harsh chemicals can further weaken or completely destroy the often illegible inscriptions on stones that are already deteriorated because of age and exposure to the elements.

If you are in a cemetery, please do not touch any tombstone, much less historic ones, unless you know what you are doing. You can find dozens of articles online that describe what to do and what not to do. Start at https://www.google.com/?gws_rd=ssl#q=tombstone+care. I can recommend the Association for Gravestone Studies web site at <https://www.gravestonestudies.org> as an excellent resource although some of the other sites may also be very good.

You also might want to read my earlier article at <https://blog.eogn.com/2014/06/01/use-d2-biological-solution-to-clean-gravestones/>.

Until you have been educated in tombstone preservation, DON'T DO ANYTHING!

My thanks to newsletter reader John Rees for telling about this crime.