

No Harm Methods for Reading Grave Markers



With the creation of things like find a grave and ancestry.com, the number of people interested in reading grave markers has grown significantly and continues to grow. It's an old practice begun by family historians and genealogy groups to document the history of those who are no longer living. Being able to read tombstones and entire cemeteries, is a priceless piece of historical documentation. All too often this is accomplished by using some rather damaging techniques. This section will give you some of the best methods to collect the information you seek in a do no harm manner. These methods may take a little thought and time, but will not damage these priceless artifacts. Thus saving them for future generations to gaze upon. Please visit our section HARMFUL METHODS...Don't read stones with, to better understand the damaging practices that harm grave markers. You may be unknowingly using one of those practices. And for your safety, please always make sure the tombstone or monument you are working with is sound and doesn't present a danger of falling. And for the sake of the stone, please check for sugaring and delamination so you don't inadvertently damage it further or permanently.

Doing It With Mirrors



There are a variety of places to purchase light reflectors on line. They are generally inexpensive and light weight. Even some auto windshield sunshades will work.

Doing It With Artificial Light

Cemetery Marker Photography Test



After learning about using a remote flash to help bring up the engravings on a cemetery marker, we went and purchased a 900 lumen flashlight (\$20, Amazon.com), determined to try for ourselves. We chose a sunny day to try the experiment. Barbara shined the light perpendicular to the stone while Tom was taking the photo. Above on left is the marker without the flashlight; above on right is the same marker with the flashlight. The digital camera was not set on any special settings to achieve these results.

This technique works very well and doesn't rely on sunny conditions, and often works better on cloudy days or in shady areas.

Doing It With Natural Light



Reading stones with natural light doesn't require any special tools, just the right timing according to conditions.



Doing It With Photo Programs



This picture may look quite psychedelic but, if capturing the information in a “do no harm” manner is what is important? Then this is a safe option. Cataloging both of these pictures serves the historical purpose showing the stones actual look & condition. And the other documents its information. Sometimes...this is as good as it gets.

This particular method was done by using Photoshop Elements 11 & playing with different contrasts until it became readable.

With today's wide variety of digital cameras and different photo programs, there are many ways to adjust your pictures to make them legible.

Doing It With A Foil Impression



Using foil to gently make an impression is becoming a popular method for reading stones. This method is harmless once you have determined there is no danger of the stone falling on someone. And after you have evaluated the stone to make sure it is not in a fragile state of extreme sugaring or delamination.

Doing It With Snow



Gently rubbing the stone with some snow and brushing off the excess allowing the snow to collect in the inscription, is another option. This method can produce some very good results. Again: After you have evaluated the stone to make sure it is not in a fragile state of extreme sugaring or delamination.