

"You Do What?"

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Abstract - As part of my baseball related research, I visit and document burial sites of major league baseball players. This paper recounts some of my experiences in this endeavor.

A couple of years ago, I was surfing the web and came across a web site called www.thedeadballera.com. I was not at all surprised that it was about baseball. I was surprised, however, to find that it was not a site about the Dead Ball Era of baseball. Instead, it was "dedicated to all those players who are now safe at home." That is, dedicated to those who are dead. The whole site, run by Frank Russo, dealt with burial sites of ballplayers. Since I live in Arkansas, it was natural that I would look to see if there were any nearby burials. Sure enough, Hall of Fame shortstop Travis Jackson is buried in Waldo, Arkansas. Waldo, about an hour away from us, is one of those "blink your eyes and you'll miss it kind of towns." But my wife, Beth, and I decided to take a ride down there and find Travis Jackson. Little did my wife or I realize that this was the start of something.



"You do what?" That, or just a strange look, is typically the reaction I get from people when I tell them that we visit the graves of baseball players. To this point, we have hunted graves in Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, Arizona, New Mexico, Tennessee, New Jersey and New York. We have been to nearly 400 cemeteries and more than 600 graves. We have visited 25 Hall of Famers. We have visited people like Bob Mavis whose entire major league career was one appearance as a pinch runner (he did not score).

When we go to the graves, we take pictures of the cemetery and the grave. We also find the GPS coordinates so others can more easily find the graves.

One might wonder how we know where to look. Russo's site is one of four main sources I use. The others are Bill Lee's [A Baseball Necrology](#), Bob Bailey's [Baseball Burial Sites](#) and www.retrosheet.org. Between these four sources, I have locations shown for thousands upon thousands of baseball related graves. However, in any endeavor such as this, information is not always going to be complete or, indeed, correct. Though all four sources are amazing in their accuracy, there are errors. Thus we do a service to our sources by helping them find listings that are incorrect. Finding errors, the effort of finding precise locations, the traveling, and some of the interesting things that happen along the way make this a truly delightful research activity.

Be Careful With Your Information

Sometimes we have difficulty, or corrections, because someone has been careless with information. Sometimes that has been someone reporting information that has subsequently been put in a book or web site. Sometimes it is just me not preparing well.

We were looking for Hank "Rube" Robinson in Edgewood Cemetery in North Little Rock, Arkansas. The cemetery worker gave us the location. We went and looked, and looked. And looked. Finally, Beth found a marker for John Henry Roberson that had the right dates and a baseball engraving on the stone.

In my preparation, I had not bothered to notice that Robinson was not his birth name. Even though Robinson appeared in the cemetery records, the birth name was used on the stone.



It is important to have dates of birth and death handy. We have had several cases, such as Howie Williamson, Herschel Bennett and Roy Sanders, in which we found a Sr. and a Jr. buried nearby. Without dates we would not have known who the player was.

Heinz Becker, in Restland Memorial Park in Dallas, Texas was another interesting case. The first time I went there, I went all over the urn garden but could not find him. Turns out to have been a good thing. I later found out that the cemetery had two unrelated Heinz Beckers. The one in the urn garden was not the right one. The second time, armed with the right date, I found my man.

In Kansas City, Missouri, I found John L. Johnson, who died in 1941. Unfortunately I did not find the RIGHT John L. Johnson who died in 1941. The birth dates did not match and I found the wrong one who happens to be 50 feet from the right one.

In Magnolia Memorial Park Cemetery in Magnolia, Arkansas, we read every single stone in the cemetery and could not find Bob Linton. Of course, that is no surprise. He was buried under his actual name of Claud Clarence Linton. Where did they get "Bob" out of that? We found him when we went back armed with more complete information.



I have learned a lot of lessons since I have begun searching for graves. One is "listen to the workers very carefully." I was looking for Al Hollingsworth in Wimberley Cemetery, Wimberley, Texas. The cemetery association president did not think he had Hollingsworth. While he was looking (he eventually found him), he made an off-hand remark about another person who "played ball." I'm not interested in trying to track down every single minor league player of all time. So I ignored the comment. Fortunately, when I called back to get the Hollingsworth information, I asked about the other guy. If I had not, I would have missed out on locating the grave of Harry Gumbert. Gumbert's grave is one of the most interesting ones, featuring a carving of a baseball glove.

You would think, after that one, that I would have learned to listen. Well, you would be wrong. I was in Calvary Cemetery, Little Rock, Arkansas, trying to find Lee Rogers (more about him below). The worker mentioned a guy he had in the mausoleum "who played for the Travelers" (the local minor league team). I mentioned my only interest was major leaguers. Well, I should probably have thought about the fact that a lot of minor leaguers ended up playing major league ball. I later found out Leo Nonnenkamp was in that cemetery. Sure enough, he was the guy "who played for the Travelers" that they had in the mausoleum. I have subsequently resolved to listen better.



Interesting People We Have Met

We have met a few interesting people in our travels. Some of them are people who helped us find graves or people we later met who had connections to the players we sought. Some were well known people buried in the same cemetery. Some were people who were simply not very helpful.

Our son was with me when I tried to find Leo Dickerman in Atkins City Cemetery, Atkins, Arkansas. We drove to the office of the cemetery association president. It is the first time I had been to a combination cemetery monument/furniture store. His cemetery records only showed the owners of the plots, not the names of those buried there. Dickerman had been buried in the family plot of his first wife. My contact could not remember her name. So, he kindly called Mrs. Dickerman number two and asked what the maiden name of Mrs. Dickerman number one was. We got our information and found our grave. Small towns are great.

Another small town experience came when we were looking for George "Rube" Foster (not the Negro League Hall of Famer, Rube Foster). My information showed that he was in Milton Cemetery in Bokoshe, Oklahoma. I called a funeral home in a nearby town. The woman there did not know a contact for the cemetery. But she did know Foster's daughter. She could not remember her name but remembered the daughter was living with a grandson in a nearby town, and she was able to remember the grandson's name. I called the daughter who kindly gave me wonderful instructions for finding her dad ("go to most northeast corner of the cemetery and he's there").

We have met the daughter of Al Williamson (Memorial Gardens Cemetery, Hot Springs, Arkansas). We have met the son and daughter of Lon Warneke (Owley Cemetery, Owley, Arkansas).

In one cemetery in Phoenix, Arizona, the workers were simply "too busy" to give any help while I was there. They promised to get back to me with the information. Apparently they are still "too busy." A funeral home worker in Le Roy, Kansas, was kind enough to look in his records for Loren "King" Bader in Le Roy Cemetery. Could not find him. I asked if there was a cemetery contact I could call. He would not tell me one saying "I have the same information they do." A worker at another funeral home was more cooperative and gave me a cemetery contact. They found Bader easily.

We sometimes are surprised by people we "meet" along the way. While finding the graves of Lou Gehrig and Paul Krichell in Kensico Cemetery in Valhalla, New York, we were fortunate to find Evangeline Booth (daughter of the founders of the Salvation Army) and Danny Kaye (comedian, singer, dancer, actor). Kaye, about whom you will read a little more later, is baseball related since he used to be a part owner of the Seattle Mariners.

We visited the graves of Angel Aragon, William Gilbert, Billy Martin and Babe Ruth in The Cemetery of The Gate Of Heaven in Hawthorne, New York. The worker gave us a map, showing the ballplayers, and also pointed out two other graves we visited, actors Sal Mineo (sadly, very obscured by mud) and Jimmy Cagney.



In Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, we visited several players in Memorial Park Cemetery. While trying to find Red Schillings, we came upon the grave of famed aviator Wylie Post.

Woodman Cemetery in DeKalb, Texas is not a big cemetery. Once you drive in, you pretty much have to drive all the way around the loop since it's not wide enough to turn around easily. So, after finding the grave of umpire Durwood Merrill, we drove around and came upon a grave adorned with a variety of paraphernalia, including a toy six shooter. Looking closer we realized we had found the grave of Dan Blocker, more commonly known as Hoss Cartwright from the old western TV show, "Bonanza."

No Pain, No Gain?

Various things can cause physical discomfort when searching for graves. Sometimes it is simply a matter of the weather. The day I was grave hunting in Phoenix, Arizona, it was about 115°. My photograph of Babe Ruth's grave is a bit obscured by the falling snow.

Sometimes the discomfort comes from natural things other than weather. I usually wear sandals while I wander through cemeteries. It keeps my feet cooler and I generally just find them more comfortable. Generally. In St. Mary's Cemetery, San Antonio, Texas, I was looking for Patrick Newnam and Dick Phelan. My searching was regularly delayed since I had to stop every minute or so to get burrs out of my feet. You know those kinds of burrs that dig in real well? And they are so sharp that when you hold them between your fingers to pull them out of your foot, they get stuck in your finger? I finally thought of using my pocket knife to get them out of my foot and figured out how to walk so I would only have to stop every two minutes instead of every minute.

Elmwood Cemetery in Kansas City, Missouri, is the final resting place of Americus McKim (the Father of Professional Baseball in Kansas City), Pete Compton (his ashes were spread on the grounds of the cemetery chapel), Ren Deagle and Frank Ringo. It is a beautiful, historical cemetery. And apparently one way they handle the "historical" part is by not mowing the lawns regularly. While looking for Ringo, I thought there were virtually no headstones in the section to which I was directed. Apparently, there were a lot of stones there. I kept finding them as I banged into them while wading through the three foot tall weeds and grass. Deagle's section was about the same but at least he was closer to the road and therefore easier to find.

Blackie O'Rourke was hard to find in Graceland Memorial Park, Kenilworth, New Jersey, due to the fact that his marker had been almost completely obscured by the grass growing around and over it. Roy Wood, in Evergreen Cemetery, Fayetteville, Arkansas, and Mack Allison, in Mt. Washington Cemetery, Independence, Missouri, were difficult to find because the beautiful, ornamental plantings that were next to their headstones when they were buried had become huge, overgrown bushes that almost completely obscured the graves. Wood's grave was also difficult to find for another reason. I was looking for the family plot name on a large marker. They did not tell me that Wood's family name was on the back of the marker while another family's name was on the front.

Fred Underwood was very difficult to find in Mount St. Mary's Cemetery in Kansas City, Missouri. There was a good sized tree with branches reaching all the way down to the ground. After looking all over the section, I finally crawled under the branches of the tree. Not only did I find Underwood's grave, I also found a 10-foot tall monument that I had not been able to see previously because it was completely overshadowed by the tree.

The discomfort is not always due to natural causes. We were in the Valence Street Cemetery in New Orleans, Louisiana, trying to find John Peltz. The cemetery was not well maintained. In fact, we later found out that enough family members of those interred there agreed with us that many of them had had their family members disinterred and reburied elsewhere. I have not been to New Orleans since the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. I wonder if this cemetery is in even worse shape now.

I was looking for Tom Seaton in Evergreen Cemetery in El Paso, Texas. Considering how hot and dry El Paso gets, it is not surprising that sprinklers are used to try to help grass survive. There were parts of the cemetery where no attempt was made to grow any grass. Red Hill is buried in a part like that. But Seaton is in a portion where they try to grow grass. The day I was there, they were doing some serious sprinkling. I had the interesting task of trying to read headstones while trying to avoid getting my camera ruined by sprinklers. At least the sprinklers helped keep me cool on a very hot day.

We experienced one case where discomfort actually helped us find someone. My wife and I were in Arlington Memorial Park in El Dorado, Arkansas. This was one of the first graves we tried to find. This was when I was naïve enough to think we would find graves just by wandering around and looking. We drove all over that cemetery and could not find Schoolboy Rowe. At that point, Beth was having some physical problems. That day they manifested themselves by causing her some real pain in her hip. Finally she told me her hip was bothering her so badly that she just wanted to get out of the car and walk a bit. Some might call it luck, we call it divine direction. In either case, she found Rowe's grave very soon after she started walking.

Beautiful Scenery

One appealing aspect to hunting for graves is that cemeteries are often very beautiful, park-like places. Ewing Kauffman, former owner of the Kansas City Royals, is buried along with his wife in the garden of the Kauffman Foundation in Kansas City, Missouri. It is a magnificent garden with beautiful plants and flowers and a wonderful array of pools and fountains.

Mal Eason is buried in Black Oak Cemetery near Canelo, Arizona. Actually, "near" is not a good choice of words. The cemetery is not near anything. It is out in the middle of nowhere. But it is a gorgeous, desert-like area near the Mexican border.

I like Carey Selph's grave for two reasons. One is that he is the nearest major league burial to our home. The second is that he is buried in one of the most beautiful cemeteries I have ever

seen. It is Pleasant Hill Cemetery a couple of miles east of the small town of Donaldson, Arkansas. The name is certainly appropriate since the cemetery sits on top of a hill, across the dirt road from Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, and has a very nice view of much of the surrounding countryside.

Strange Experiences

Some cemetery experiences are a little bit different. In order to visit Peter Donnelly and Nathaniel Hicks in St. Peter's Cemetery in Jersey City, New Jersey, I had to go to another cemetery in order to find someone who would take me to St. Peter's and unlock the gate so I could find the players. That worker was also very helpful in finding the players.

In El Paso, Texas, I had a cemetery that was unlocked when I got there, but locked when I left. I was trying to locate Andy and Syd Cohen in B'nai Zion Cemetery. Just as I pulled up to the cemetery, the workers were closing the gate, preparing to lock it. That would not be a big deal except our travels plans required us to head out of town early the next morning. I explained the situation to the workers. They said there was no problem. I could go in, they would lock the gate and then, with their permission, I would get out by climbing over the four or five foot tall cemetery wall in order to get out. I did so, hoping the whole time that any police officer who happened by would believe me when I said, "They said I could."

Sometimes things can be difficult to find because they are moved. I have dealt with several graves and a cemetery that have moved.

My first experience with this was in looking for George Earnshaw. All of my sources said he was in Memorial Gardens Cemetery in Hot Springs, Arkansas. I called the cemetery to get information on his location along with that of Al Williamson. They gave me Williamson's location pretty quickly but the man had a different tone of voice when he got ready to tell me about Earnshaw. "Well, um, he's not here anymore." I may be unusual but I'm not comfortable with the idea of dead people moving. The man explained, saying that Earnshaw's family had him disinterred. He did not know what they had done with him. After checking with some Society for American Baseball Research colleagues, I was pointed to Bill Lee, who knew the rest of the story. Apparently Earnshaw's second wife had him disinterred and then cremated. The whereabouts of his ashes are unknown.

Restland Memorial Park in Dallas, Texas, was the site of a similar situation. The first time I went there, I was just told that Tom Lovelace was not there. I went back to Restland a second time and asked about him again since sometimes workers can make mistakes when going through thousands of records. This time I got more information. No, Lovelace was not there. Anymore. He had been buried there after being cremated. Eventually, however, his son decided he wanted to do something else with the remains and had them disinterred.

Willie Wells was originally in Evergreen Cemetery in Austin, Texas. When I visited him, however, he had already been moved to his new eternal resting place at the Texas State

Cemetery, also in Austin. Stew Thornley reported that he was moved in October of 2004. The original marker was still used in addition to a larger, nicer stone.



Bill Bradford is buried in Eglantine Cemetery between Fairfield Bay and Shirley in north-central Arkansas. The cemetery in which he was buried used to be several miles away. In 1959, work began on a dam that would eventually create Greers Ferry Lake, inundating the cemetery area. Assuming that people would not be interested in scuba diving in order to visit graves, the cemetery was moved to its present location. Bradford, who died in 2000, was not one of those who had to be moved.

Danny Kaye's grave, while an unexpected target of one of our searches, ended up being one of the most challenging. Kensico Cemetery in Valhalla, New York is a beautiful, carefully maintained cemetery. Beth and I went to the neatly laid out area where the office workers had directed us. We read every grave marker in the area. We probably read them all twice. No Danny Kaye. Since it was nearing closing time, we went back to the office and asked for some help. We were then told "Oh, his name isn't on it." I would have appreciated being told this from the beginning. "It looks like a park bench." Sure enough, we had seen the "park bench" while searching. Notice that the back of the bench has sort of bas-relief kind of pictures. These show various things that were important to Kaye during his lifetime, including (bottom, middle) a baseball bat.



Another interesting thing you can see here is a number of small stones placed on the grave. Our visit to Kaye's grave was fairly early in our grave hunting lives. But this was something I

had noticed on a number of graves on the east coast. I asked my father-in-law if he knew the significance of the custom. He told me that it was a Jewish custom. Placing a stone or pebble on the grave is a way of honoring the deceased by showing that someone had visited the grave. According to the web site "Ask the Rabbi"



(http://ohr.edu/ask_db/ask_main.php/16/Q1/), the custom has its roots in the honoring of a man who lived during the Turkish occupation of Israel.

I have seen quite a number of interesting names in cemeteries. Certainly the most "cemetery appropriate" name is one near the grave of Lloyd Waner in Rose Hill Burial Park, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Just after leaving Waner's grave we passed another marking the location of a person with the last name of D'eath.

My wife likes plants and flowers. Usually people bring plants and flowers into a cemetery. On one occasion, Beth brought one out. We were in the country, west of Bee Branch, Arkansas, looking for Jim McKnight in Blackwell Cemetery. One of the naturally growing plants in this peaceful cemetery was the *della spora*, commonly called an "ice plant." The plant books say it is a "pink composite flower with succulent leaves." Beth liked it so much she took a small clipping from it and has successfully transplanted it in our yard.

New Orleans is a strange place. I have never had anyone question me when I have said that. They may want to know the particular way in which I mean the comment, but they never doubt the premise. Due to the low-lying nature of the city, New Orleans, burials are typically not done, with most interments being in above ground mausoleums. At Metairie Cemetery, we had some of the interesting nature of this arrangement explained to us by one of the workers. She told us that, in some cases, as many as 30 people may be placed in a single family mausoleum. What often happens is that a coffin will be placed in the mausoleum. After a while, the natural processes of the humidity and heat in New Orleans take their toll on the body and the container. When it is time for the next interment, a cemetery worker will open the mausoleum, remove portions of the casket that remain and push the remains of the deceased into a hole in the floor of the mausoleum. Then room is available for the next casket. With so many people in a single mausoleum, it is not unusual that not all of the names of the interred are inscribed on the outside. Therefore, if you do not know the name of the owner of the mausoleum, you may never find the particular burial for which you are searching.

The New Orleans area was also the site of another, less than enjoyable, strange experience. We were in Gretna, Louisiana, in the McDonoghville Cemetery. We went to the office and told them we wanted to find Joseph Spencer. The office worker went through her files and could not find any record of Spencer. She asked if he was family. I told her no, that he was a professional baseball player. She asked if he was black. Since preparation for this trip had been limited to hurriedly grabbing a list of names from Frank Russo's web site, I honestly did not know. The woman then started looking in a different file and said "I'll look in the black part." I had never thought that a cemetery might have a "black part" and a "white part." Spencer, who played in the Negro Leagues, was, indeed, in the McDonoghville Cemetery.



One of the most well known players and strangest "eternal destinations" is Ted Williams. When Williams died on July 5, 2002, his body was flown to the Alcor Life Extension Foundation in Scottsdale, Arizona. There, according to CBS News, "Williams' body was separated from his head in a procedure called neuroseparation." The goal is to preserve Williams until technology allows him to be revived or cloned.



The Kindness of Strangers

I will close with two more stories of interesting help from people we met along the way.

We were near Alto, Texas, trying to find the Berryman Family Cemetery. We drove along the road where it was supposed to be and did not find it. We went to one house where folks were sitting outside. When asked "Do you speak English?" they answered "no." Then we went to another house with five mange covered dogs. No people seemed to be around even though there were about five cars, one of which may have been functional. Finally we went to another house. A woman came to the door with her 3 year old daughter. She mentioned a gate down the road with a B on it. Since we were looking for the Berryman Family Cemetery, that sounded promising, especially since she said she had seen headstones on the property. Ignoring the "no trespassing" sign, I climbed over the cattle gate, which my wife then found was not really locked. We waded through 4 foot high, very thick grass. We saw a chain link fence and got to it, but nothing was inside. At that point we heard someone calling to us from near the gate. The woman who told us about that spot was there. She had called a friend who gave her

some information and then came down on a golf cart to where we were, bringing her daughter along for the ride. She told us about a house further down the road. We had seen that house but thought it was a barn. So we went there. We had to squeeze around a locked gate with a prominent "no trespassing" sign. Then we walked past a VERY old house. We realized it was a house when we noticed it had screened porches and chimneys, but the structure was very barn-like. It was not inhabited but was still structurally sound. Along the other side of the driveway was a stand of at least 20 foot tall bamboo. At the back of the house there was a pathway through the bamboo that someone keeps clear. I looked down there and saw some headstones. We went down that and found the cemetery. It contains a historical marker as the resting place of the person believed to be the first Anglo born in Texas. And it contained my ballplayer.

To say Douglassville, Texas, is small is an understatement. Population is 180 or so. No cemetery was visible in town except Douglassville Cemetery. We stopped in a convenience store and asked for help. George Frost, a retired football coach and former member of St. Williams Catholic Church (which was torn down in 1960) happened to be in the store buying some fried chicken for lunch and offered to take us to the cemetery. He said if he just told us how to find it that we would never find it. He was right about that. You have to take a county road that is more of a grassless ditch than a road. Then you turn off into the woods on some private property on something that probably once resembled a path. The church had been back there, with the cemetery (about 20 graves) next to the church. The front steps of the church are still there. Mr. Frost was probably one of only 10 people in the county who knew where the cemetery was. I hope his fried chicken was still warm when he got home to eat it.



Biographical Sketch

Fred Worth received his B.S. in Mathematics from Evangel College in Springfield, Missouri, in 1982. He received his M.S. in Applied Mathematics in 1987 and his Ph.D. in Mathematics in 1991 from the University of Missouri at Rolla. He has been teaching at Henderson State University since August, 1991. Among his professional affiliations is his membership in the Society for American Baseball Research, home to hundreds of baseball geeks.