

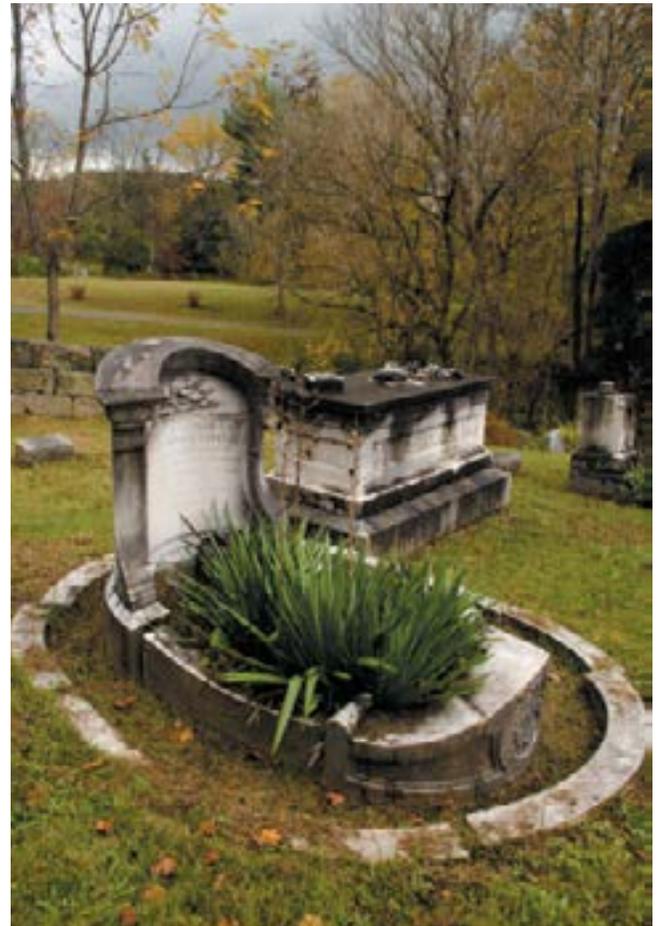
# TOUR HISTORY AMONG THE TOMBSTONES

The state's graves, large and small,  
document West Virginia's history.

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God's Acre in Bethany is one of the many cemeteries in the state where visitors can find monuments to West Virginia's colorful history—from founders to soliders to everyday folk.



**L**eaves crunch underfoot. Brilliantly colored when they fell, strewn among headstones, their shades of red and orange and yellow have gradually faded to brown before disappearing, leaving only the veins of the plant still visible. A brisk wind carries the scents of decay and of life—the earthy aroma of plants receding into themselves for winter and the smell of a wood fire carry far across the trees. Faint laughter and the distant blare of traffic sound from outside the borders of the cemetery. Geese honk overhead. A twig snaps.

A walk through a graveyard heightens the senses. It's a solemn hike, filled with reverence for timeworn things, ancient lives, and long-held customs. From Shepherdstown, West Virginia's oldest town and a site of ancient tombs, to Lewisburg, where Civil War soldiers lie buried beneath rows of simple crosses, dozens of historic relics dot each corner of the state. Some are well-maintained. Others have fallen to ruin.

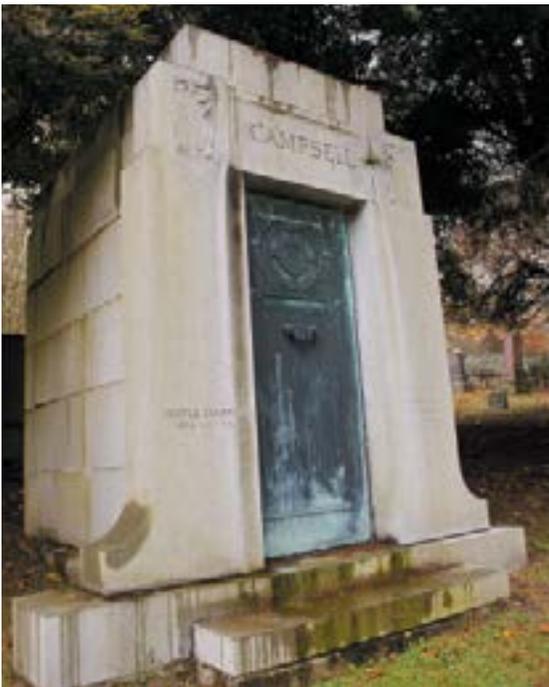
The details tell stories, some centuries old: A family of four died in 1872 from tuberculosis; the little boy was only two months old. A surname has passed through generation

after generation; the first of the line was an immigrant from England before the Revolutionary War. Here lies the bearer of a familiar street name, an industrialist whose life has long been forgotten. There rests a famous pioneer, one whose name graces parks and buildings across the state. It's a tour of the past—war, culture, art, and genealogy—that more and more West Virginians are discovering.

## Bethany

"There's a history," says Larry Grimes, an English professor at Bethany College who has lived in the historic town for nearly 50 years. Past the Gothic arches of the college and the brick buildings of the blink-and-you'll-miss-it downtown, visitors will find a pastoral cemetery called God's Acre. The final resting place of Bethany founder Alexander Campbell, the cemetery sits high on a hill, overlooking the historic Campbell mansion and offering a glimpse into the minds of a family that wanted loved ones near even in death. It was established in 1820 when the Campbell family lost an infant daughter—the family's first experience with burial.

A wall of a dark, inky stone encircles the elaborate family tombstones and mausoleums and those of important Bethany



This Bethany cemetery is known for its unusual wall of dark stone that encircles the cemetery property. There is no door, so visitors must climb over the wall to enter.

residents, benefactors, and members of the non-denominational Christian churches Campbell founded. “Campbell himself was buried there in 1866. In his will he asked that the stone wall be built around the cemetery. By then it was clear it had national significance to followers in the church movement,” Grimes says. Seven feet tall in total, three of those stretching deep underground, the wall has no entrance. To get inside, pallbearers and visitors must climb over stone steps slick and worn with time. “You don’t see walled cemeteries like this in this country, and if you do there’s some kind of entrance,” Grimes says. It’s an odd feeling, he adds, taking those huge steps to the top and then carefully back down to stand among headstones both ornate and plainest of plain. Each has a story to tell and visitors to Bethany College and the cemetery can take tours to learn nearly all.

Campbell’s own stands out. Its design reflects the Gothic arches of Old Main at Bethany College. Others are large and fairly contemporary—the cemetery is owned now by Bethany College and is still in use. “One is a mausoleum with a green copper door riddled with bullet holes that students tell stories about,” Larry says. Why the bullet holes? “Truth is, no one knows.” Legend is a little grimmer.

But legend isn’t why visitors continue to climb the wall year after year. “Aside from the ghost stories themselves, I think the place is primarily a place of peace and not of horror,” Grimes says. “In this cemetery there’s a real quiet. It’s a bucolic scene. Students tell me they go there just to find a place of quiet and peace. I go there myself. It’s a very beautiful place.”

✿ To plan a tour, visit [bethanywv.edu](http://bethanywv.edu) and email [historic@bethanywv.edu](mailto:historic@bethanywv.edu).



## TOURING

Check locally for historic sites near you and contact cemetery offices for information on those interred.

**LEWISBURG:** The Greenbrier Historical Society will host dramatic history events and tours of the Old Stone Cemetery, established in 1797, and the Pointer Cemetery throughout October. Call 304.645.3398 or email [museum@greenbrierhistorical.org](mailto:museum@greenbrierhistorical.org) for more information.

**SHEPHERDSTOWN:** Elmwood Cemetery in Shepherdstown is one of the state's oldest. Veterans from the American Revolution and the Civil War are interred. Visit [elmwoodcemeteryshepww.org](http://elmwoodcemeteryshepww.org) for more information on its history and tours.

**LOGAN COUNTY:** Anderson "Devil Anse" Hatfield, leader of the Hatfield family during the feud with the McCoys, is buried in the Hatfield Cemetery in Logan County. His children commissioned a life-size replica of their father to stand sentry over his grave.

**MARION COUNTY:** Though the cemetery is private, visitors to Prickett's Fort State Park in Fairmont are allowed to visit the Prickett family cemetery established in 1774. There pioneers like Zackquill Morgan and Jacob Prickett are buried.

## Charleston

High above Charleston a king and queen of hearts stand sentry over a couple that loved to play Bridge. “Bye,” read another’s final words, carved forever in stone. “You find all kinds of symbols. Everybody has something to say,” says Perry Cox, superintendent of the Spring Hill Cemetery Park on Farnsworth Drive. Stretching 180 acres with five miles of paved road, the cemetery was founded in the early 1800s and today serves both as a place of recreation—couples walk, children play, visitors come for the views overlooking the gold-domed Capitol building—and as a testament to the city’s long history.

Cox begins in what he calls the “old money” section. “When you’re downtown, you’ll say, ‘I’m coming across Summers Street.’ Well, the Summers are up here. The Quarriers, the Dicksons—all were instrumental in developing the city of Charleston and all are buried here.” In this section, visitors find tombstones as grand as the families they mark. “A black obelisk sits on Judge James Brown’s lot. A team of 22 horses pulled the stone up the hill on a wagon. It has two square blocks of granite it stands on, and you can’t help but wonder how they stood it up there without chipping or breaking it. Today we bring a crane up.”

These head markers are nothing less than art—stone carvings created to encapsulate all that a life held, all that it left behind, and traditions most dear. “There are actually five cemeteries here,” Cox says. “Catholic, Jewish, Mountain View, Confederates, and Spring Hill, all on one mountain. It’s all interlocked. When you go into the Catholic Cemetery there are different monuments. In the Jewish Cemetery you’ll see stones with seashells or pebbles lying on top—it lets a family know that someone came to visit loved ones and that their family isn’t forgotten.”

But not all are so stately or remembered. By Cox’s estimates, nearly 100,000 have been buried in what is claimed as West Virginia’s largest cemetery, though the official burial database attests to only 40,000 graves. “The reason being that long ago the cemetery was segregated and they did not register the black burials. A lot are unmarked. Some could afford markers and others couldn’t. They’d use a rock or make a cross out of a couple pieces of wood.” It’s perhaps that aspect that’s most interesting of all.

A cemetery is a physical time line of a city’s changes—social, economic, and cultural. “We all have a piece of history to tell,” Cox says. “What we have here is a self-guided history tour. It tells you everything from the people who developed the valley and the salt and coal industry to the local stories about moonshiners who’d hide the liquor in a headstone.”

✿ For information on self-guided tours of Spring Hill Cemetery Park, email [springhillcemeterypark@cityofcharleston.org](mailto:springhillcemeterypark@cityofcharleston.org).



Spring Hill Cemetery Park in Charleston contains dozens of unique and artistic

headstones. The Stump family chose markers depicting logs and stumps for

the family plot, while the marker known as the Cotton Angel is artistically complex.

## Wheeling

In the late 1800s a Wheeling native named Edith Lake Wilkinson traveled to New York for art school. She later settled in Provincetown, Massachusetts, in the early 1900s where she became an artist. While she was away, her parents died tragically in a gas leak, leaving the young woman and her nephew as the only remaining family members.

Wilkinson inherited a sum of money, which she gave to a Wheeling lawyer named George Rogers to manage. At some point she was also committed to a mental institution, a relatively nice one where she was able to continue with her art—that is, until it was discovered her money was quickly dwindling. Rogers was indicted on 11 accounts of mismanagement of other estates. Whether Wilkinson's was also mismanaged remains unknown, but her inheritance was soon gone. When the money ran out, she was sent to the state institution in Huntington, West Virginia. Her artwork was boxed up and trucked to her nephew in Wheeling, and Wilkinson lived the remaining 25 years of her life without lifting another paintbrush. She was buried with her parents in Wheeling's Greenwood Cemetery and forgotten.

But her trunk of paintings, groundbreaking for her era, was recently discovered by a documentary filmmaker. Her story, at the same time, was one that the Friends of Wheeling was uncovering for its regular Greenwood Cemetery Tour. "Our primary goal is to make residents and visitors aware of Wheeling's history," says president Jeanne Finstein. Every two or three years the society and the city gather volunteers, research the stories of 14 of the cemetery's interred, dress in period costume, and lead an afternoon of tours through the headstones. Hundreds of visitors show up for the free tours, some coming from as far as New York, to listen to first-person stories of the city's ancestors. Limousines supplied by the local funeral homes truck visitors to the tours.

"It's extremely well-maintained," Finstein says of the cemetery. "The graves go back to when the graveyard was founded right after the Civil War, though there were people moved there who died earlier." The yard's earliest interment dates from 1803 or 1804 after another cemetery closed and remains were moved. Among the site's gigantic trees and meandering wildlife sit monuments large and small. "It's interesting," Finstein says, "to see how, especially in years past, death was portrayed in the tombstones." One of her favorites is an arch. Its keystone has been broken out and placed, as if fallen, on the ground. "This is a father's gravesite and represents that the most important person of the family was lost. You can see it dropped below with the date of the man's death—James Maxwell." His site was on the society's September tour this year, where Finstein portrayed his daughter. In character, Finstein also spoke of the young Maxwell's brother, a World War I fighter pilot who volunteered for the Royal Air Force before the United States joined the war. The young man was shot down over France and his mother had a window installed at Westminster Abbey in London, where visitors will find the West Virginia state seal.

Elsewhere in Greenwood, stone tree stumps represent a life cut short. "There are also quite a few that have either lambs or angels on them and they typically represent a child inside." The



individual tales go on—from Peter Paul Beck, an early beer brewer in Wheeling whose marker is surrounded by those of his wife and children, to early Wheeling patriarch Johann Ludwig Stifel, a 1835 German immigrant who established Stifel Calico Works, amassing a huge fortune, and whose name still graces the annual scholarships given to local school children. "The stories just go on and on," Finstein says. "People love the history."

☞ For information on guided and self-guided tours, visit [facebook.com/friendsofwheeling](https://www.facebook.com/friendsofwheeling).

Wheeling celebrates its history every few years with dramatic tours of Greenwood Cemetery.