

How to Choose a Cemetery in Illinois

There are thousands of cemeteries in Illinois. Most of them have operated for generations and some of them for centuries. Nothing like the events at Burr Oak has ever happened in Illinois before. If you have a loved one in an Illinois cemetery other than Burr Oak, then you can be assured that the cemetery must maintain a record of your loved one's location.

How do I choose a cemetery?

Usually a family considers to bury loved ones where other family members are already located. Consider the location of the cemetery: is it convenient for family visits? Consider whether it meets the requirements of your family's religion. Consider what, if any, restrictions the cemetery places on burial vaults, the type of monuments or memorials it allows, and whether flowers or other remembrances may be placed on graves and when.

Finally consider the care of the cemetery. Does it look well-maintained? What kind of impression do you get from the staff? Are the graves, roads, offices and fences in good shape?

Cost may be a consideration. Interment rights can be expensive, especially in metropolitan areas. At most, but not all, cemeteries you are required to purchase a grave liner, which will cost several hundred dollars. There are typically charges to open and close a grave for an interment. Verify if a cemetery is licensed for future care when you purchase your interment rights. These cemeteries are audited and monitored by the Illinois State Comptroller's Office.

Are all cemeteries alike?

No, there are different kinds of cemeteries. There are religious cemeteries, which are owned by a church or religious organization; there are locally owned cemeteries which are owned by a city, township or county; there are private cemeteries which are owned by business owners; there are fraternal cemeteries, such as those for organizations like Masonic or Jewish fraternal burial associations; and there are veterans' cemeteries, which are dedicated to veterans and their families.

What products and services do cemeteries offer?

Cemeteries offer a number of different arrangements. Interment rights, the traditional in-ground grave, are the most typical product, but there are also lawn crypts, columbarium niches and mausoleums.

Some cemeteries offer more affordable arrangements. One such option, that has been offered for generations, is multi-level burial. In this kind of interment, the deceased are buried in a row, one after the other. The cemetery still maintains the records, for ever, and the marker remains at that grave, forever. Because less maintenance and labor is involved, this arrangement is for those who want an alternative to cremation.

What can I do to make sure things are ok at my loved one's cemetery?

Visit your loved one's grave site. If you didn't buy a memorial, buy one to make it easier for you to find your loved one. Ask to see a copy of the cemetery's rules and regulations. If it is a condensed set, feel free to request and review the entire set.

Be patient. Everyone is very worried right now, and cemetery offices are responding to a flood of inquiries. Cemetery operators and their staffs are caring people who want to be as helpful as possible, but it takes time to respond to all the calls and questions they are receiving.

What if something looks wrong when I visit my loved one?

Ask at the office. Understand that cemeteries are works in progress; every time there is an interment, there will be some disturbance to the landscape. Sometimes the cemetery will temporarily move a marker to prevent damage; the marker may not be replaced for a time until the ground conditions allow.

How can I check out a cemetery to see if there have been problems in the past?

Contact the office of the Illinois Comptroller; this office has responsibility for consumer complaints about cemeteries. Their web site is <http://www.ioc.state.il.us/office/ccbt/> and Consumers within Illinois can call the consumer hot-line toll-free at 1.877.203.3401. If you are calling outside Illinois, please call the general number at 312.814.2451. If consumers prefer, they can e-mail the staff at ccbt@mail.ioc.state.il.us.

Resources

The Federal Trade Commission offers a funeral guide for consumers:

<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/products/pro19.shtm>