

Cemetery Siting in the Bluestone Reservation Area, Summers
County, West Virginia: 1750 - 1997

by

Rebecca K. Cottle

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTERS OF SCIENCE

IN

GEOGRAPHY

Approved:

L. William Carstensen, chair

James B. Campbell

Robert W. Morrill

May 9, 1997

Blacksburg, Virginia

Key words: cemeteries, settlement patterns, transportation patterns, population

Cemetery Siting in the Bluestone Reservation Area, Summers County, West Virginia:
1750 - 1997

by

Rebecca K. Cottle

L. William Carstensen, chair

Department of Geography

(ABSTRACT)

This thesis examines the effects of transportation network changes, settlement pattern changes, population density and terrain characteristics upon cemetery siting. Due to the practically inviolate legal status of cemeteries, they provide a window to the past. Geographic Information Systems technology was used to analyze geophysical attributes of the cemetery sites. As transportation modes changed and improved, the distances from decedent's residences to burial sites increased. Also, cemetery upkeep is somewhat related to ease of accessibility, but other factors enter into this relationship. Personal interviews suggest that family "ties to the land" have an effect upon cemetery utilization and maintenance in rural southern West Virginia. Early cemeteries were sited in river and creek bottoms. More recently sited cemeteries are located at higher elevations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Bill Carstensen, Bob Morrill and James Campbell, for encouraging my efforts in this research and for their insights into this thesis. I would also like to extend a special thanks to Debra Hall for accompanying many field trips, Valarie Robinson, Barbara Keller, Roy Lee Honaker, and D. Wayne Harvey for providing information about the Bluestone Reservation area.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures	v
List of Tables.....	vi
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Study Objectives	1
Chapter Two: Transportation	3
Commercial Traffic	4
Development of the Current Road Network	4
Water Transportation	5
Rail Transport	6
Automobile Transport	7
Transportation and Cemetery Siting	7
Chapter Three: Settlement Patterns	9
Population of Summers County	9
Communities and Post Offices	10
Chapter Four: Cemeteries	16
Early Burials in Study Area	19
Chapter Five: Methodology	20
Study Area	20
Data Collection	20
Data Base Generation	21
GIS Analysis	23
Data Analysis	23
Chapter Six: Results and Summary	25
Cemetery Condition and Accessibility	25
Summary	29
Suggestions for Further Study	30
Bibliography	31
Appendix A	34

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Title	Page
2.1	Indian Trails and Forts in the Study Area	3
2.2	1836 Map of Southwest Virginia	3
2.3	1925 Roads and Communities in the Study Area	6
2.4	1876 Map of Portion of Southwestern Virginia and Southern West Virginia	7
2.5	Distance of Decedent from Family Cemetery Site	8
3.1	Population Density, Summer County, West Virginia	12
3.2	Post Office Openings and Closures in Study Area	13
5.1	Study Area in Summers County, West Virginia	20
5.2	Cemeteries in Bluestone Reservation Area	20
5.3	Example of Abandoned Cemetery	22
5.4	Example of Moderately Maintained Cemetery in Study Area .	22
5.5	Example of Maintained Cemetery in Study Area	22
5.6	Cemetery Condition and Access Roads	22
6.1	Cemetery Site by Time Strata	26
6.2	Average Cemetery Site Elevation by Age Cluster	27

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Title	
	Page	
3.1	Summers County, West Virginia Population: 1880 - 1990	11
3.2	Examples of 1994 High and Low Population Densities in the United States	11
3.3	Community Development Summary of Study Area	14
3.4	Post Office Openings and Closures in the Study Area	15
4.1	Cemetery Classification Table	18
6.1	Descriptive Summary of Key Cemetery Attributes	25