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Richard Tate of Edenborn photographs a tombstone in the Lecky Cemetery in German Township. Tate does research for the genealogy website Pennsylvania Gen Web Project ([www.PaGenWeb.org](http://www.PaGenWeb.org)).

# Documenting history

## Genealogy website charting cemeteries

*Volunteers have taken 130,000 tombstone photos so far*

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There are at least 400 cemeteries in Fayette County, and Jack McNeese is doing his best to document each one.

"There are probably 400 we don't even know about, that are only one or two graves," McNeese said.

McNeese, 71, is the Fayette County coordinator for the [www.PaGenWeb.org](http://www.PaGenWeb.org) project, a genealogical project that is part of a national initiative to document every grave in the country. While McNeese said that goal never may be achieved, he's doing his best to make sure it's done for Fayette County. To date, a team of volunteers has taken 130,000 tombstone photos, most taken by Fayette County native Lanny Golden.

"Lanny went out almost every day when the weather was good, taking pictures," McNeese said. "I've not seen anybody who's got that many photos. We're only shy about 15 cemeteries we haven't done yet."

McNeese envisions having about 150,000 to 160,000 tombstone photos when the Fayette County project is complete, and more volunteer photographers are being sought.

McNeese has made several trips to Fayette County to document cemeteries for the [www.PaGenWeb.org](http://www.PaGenWeb.org) site. Richard Tate, 68, of Edenborn recently accompanied McNeese on the search for 85 Fayette County cemeteries so that driving directions could be updated and GPS coordinates added to the website.

"I've seen places in Fayette County I've never seen before," Tate said.

Tate said he found the website and decided to contact McNeese.

"I told him I could be some help. I've photographed some of the cemeteries for him," Tate said.

McNeese said it was nice to have someone younger along to jump out of the air-conditioned truck to snap a picture or brush aside weeds.

"In some cases, Rich is going to go back out in the fall when the brush has dried up and there's not four feet of green you can't see through," McNeese said.

McNeese said it's not unusual to find old

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cemeteries so overgrown that they are nearly unrecognizable. McNeese said he had hoped to document the cemetery where John Connell, the founder of Connellsville, is buried, but the growth was too thick.

"You couldn't see it because the weeds were so thick, and that's the founder of Connellsville," McNeese said.

Once the photos are taken, McNeese pairs the tombstone photos with

transcripts of the inscriptions on the stones, driving directions, GPS coordinates and an overall photo of the cemetery where they are located.

"I work on it a half-hour to an hour each day, and it will take me about five years," McNeese said.

McNeese, an Ohio native who now lives in South Carolina, has never lived in Fayette County, but has deep roots in Fayette.

"My mother was born in Somerfield, which is under water now. My grandparents were born in Ohio and my

great-great-grandfather was from Indian Head/Mill Run," McNeese said.

McNeese, however, grew up in Ohio, visiting Fayette County to see relatives and developing a strong interest in genealogy from his father's first cousin who researched the family's history for 40 years.

When McNeese went to Seattle for college, the cousin asked if he would contact some relatives in Washington for him.

"I inherited his four drawers of files," McNeese said of his introduction to genealogical research.

When McNeese first got involved with the [www.PaGenWeb.org](http://www.PaGenWeb.org) project, he didn't anticipate just how involved he would become.

"The woman that was the county coordinator before had put out a plea for help. I said I'd alphabetize the tombstone photos," McNeese said.

McNeese said additional help is always welcome, whether it is to photograph tombstones, get driving directions and GPS coordinates or prepare Excel spreadsheets so he can incorporate the information into the website, [www.PaGenWeb.org](http://www.PaGenWeb.org). This summer's excursion was McNeese's third trip to document Fayette County cemeteries. His first trip was six years ago.

"In between, I had a heart attack and bypass surgery. This is probably my last trip. We need to get somebody younger who can hoof it out in the woods and find these places," McNeese said.

McNeese can be contacted directly through the [www.PaGenWeb.org](http://www.PaGenWeb.org) site by clicking on his name in the Fayette County coordinator's listing.