

Discovering a piece of history

Trustee finds lost cemetery

Far off the beaten path, a remote **Pinora Township** (Lake Co.) hilltop is covered in sandy soil and untamed grass. Its only visitors are electrical workers servicing the power lines and the occasional outdoor recreational vehicle rider.

No one guessed that below the surface, a piece of history remained hidden for more than a century.

Four years ago, township Trustee **Sid Woods** discovered a long-forgotten cemetery beneath what is now an electrical maintenance road. A local historian has compiled a list of 17 names of township residents and Native Americans who are believed to have been buried there in the late 1800s.

Today, the township is working to ensure these men, women and children receive the respect they deserve. The state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is busy building a guardrail around the hill, preventing any further vehicle damage. Township Supervisor **Vicki Dennett** is also eagerly anticipating the completion of a large headstone with all 17 names carved on it.

When the monument is finished, Dennett plans to have a small dedication service with relatives of the deceased in attendance.

“We just felt the people who are buried there deserve to be recognized,” Dennett said. “We’re doing it out of respect. We don’t know much about any of the people, but we want to give them the dignity of a proper burial place.”

A mystery leads to discovery

Woods first learned of the cemetery by accident as he sifted through microfilm at the library, one of his favorite hobbies. He stumbled upon an article that mentioned a cemetery donated to the township. As an amateur historian and lifelong

township resident, he knew there was no such cemetery—at least not one that currently existed. The mystery piqued his interest enough to inspire a trip to the courthouse. There, he found a warranty deed from 1877 setting aside three acres in Pinora Township to be used as a cemetery.

It was by far Woods’ most exciting discovery he’d made from looking at microfilm.

“It was just kind of an accident,” he said. “I stumbled on it and followed up. If I see something like that, I follow up on it.”

Further research uncovered that the cemetery originally belonged to township resident William Gould. The family plot was chosen as the final resting place of his daughter, Priscilla. A few years later, Gould donated the

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three-acre cemetery to the township when he sold his 80-acre homesteaded property to a logger, but the person executing the deal forgot to set aside the three acres. Eventually, back taxes forced the state to seize the 80 acres from the logging company, and no one remembered the hilltop cemetery.

But without proof, the township couldn't have the plot recognized as a cemetery following Woods' discovery. Shanna Avery of the Lake County Historical Society poured through old newspapers, looking for any and all mentions of the cemetery. An original list of about 100 names was eventually whittled down to 17.

"It's been a big event for our little township," Dennett said.

Protecting the land

With the presence of graves confirmed, the next step was to protect the land. Today, the ground itself is damaged from years of vehicle use. The sandy soil has eroded to the point that the shallowest grave sits just a foot and a half below the surface.

The DNR is working to make sure the cemetery rests in peace, without any further damage. Trees will be removed, a soil preservationist will visit the site, and the hilltop will be planted with native grasses. A guardrail will also be placed around the hill to allow only electrical maintenance vehicles to use the maintenance road.

Dennett plans to leave the property in the state's hands. The upgrades and maintenance could be too costly for the township's budget. Dennett's primary aim is to make sure the dead are honored. Pinora Township has commissioned a \$2,000 headstone with plans to carve all 17 names on it. The



For more than a century, a long-forgotten cemetery sat on this sandy hilltop in Pinora Township (Lake Co.) before being discovered by a township trustee.

stone will be worded carefully, as the actual identities cannot be confirmed.

When the monument is complete, descendants of William Gould will be invited to a dedication service. Dennett doesn't have any further plans for the property, but she's happy to see that it will finally be a peaceful resting place again.



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