

Stewart-Griesinger Cemetery gains statewide attention

by Joy LeCount

WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP, Noble County, Ind.

— Birds were chirping in the oak, hickory and walnut trees that surround the Stewart-Greisinger Cemetery situated in southwestern Noble County not far from the village of Wilmot. Myrtle covers the ground that just a few months ago was overgrown. Two sides of the cemetery are bordered by field corn. The other two sides are typical woodland. The halfmile driveway back to the cemetery was muddy from nearly three inches of rain that fell the previous night.

Why would an Indianapolis film crew and Indiana's former First Lady Judy O'Bannon leave at 5:30 a.m. last Thursday to drive to a remote area that required them to slip and slide through the mud to access a pioneer cemetery where a Revolutionary War soldier is buried?

It's a long but interesting story about how volunteers working together can achieve success in their community.

O'Bannon is with Communities Building Community, an Indiana Public Television Series which profiles success stories from throughout the Hoosier Heartland. She and a film crew from WFYI Teleplex in Indianapolis were in Noble County to produce a segment for an upcoming show. It focused on the volunteer efforts of Martha and Roger Barnhart and others who have worked to restore the Stewart-Greisinger Cemetery.

On hand for the filming were three generations of descendants of Joseph Galloway one of only two Revolutionary War veterans buried in Noble County. Dorothy Koher of Goshen is a great, great, great, great-granddaughter. Her two nephews, Robert and Sherman Leamon of Cromwell, and Sherm's son Chad Leamon are fifth and sixth generation. With Mrs. O'Bannon, they gathered around the four stones that mark the graves of their ancestors.

Also featured were Helen Wildermuth of Stonehugger Cemetery Restoration located in Martinsville, and Mark Davis of Stonesavers Cemetery Restoration of Hartford City. They had assisted with a seminar held in late October 2003 in the area to teach volunteers how to properly locate grave sites and restore head stones.



Martha Barnhart, left, has a special interest in genealogy which led her to become involved in the restoration of the Stewart-Greisinger Cemetery in Washington Township, Noble County, where her great-great-grandfather is buried. She is at the cemetery talking with Helen Wildermuth, a professional cemetery restorationist; former Indiana First Lady Judy O'Bannon, associated now with Communities Building Community; and Washington Township Trustee Janelle Burnworth. (ANE photo by Joy LeCount)

Also attending the filming were Commissioners Mark Pankop and Hal Stump, and Washington Township Trustee Janelle Burnworth.

It was Martha Barnhart that brought the work at Stewart-Greisinger to the attention of Communities Building Community. Barnhart is an officer in the Indiana Daughters of the American Revolution. Her husband, Roger, is the president of Indiana Sons of the American Revolution. It is through their interest in genealogy that they became interested in the Washington Township cemetery.

Martha Barnhart visited the cemetery for the first time in 1999 with her 87-year-old mother in search of the grave site of her great-great-grandfather, Robert H. Bull.

"We had to walk in from the road through the corn field," Martha Barnhart said. "When my mother couldn't walk any further, we sat down between the corn rows to rest."

What they found was a disgrace and disappointment. The cemetery was in a terrible state of neglect. The cemetery was completely surrounded by private land because roads were changed after the original cemetery and access roads were deeded to the public in 1861.

The Stewart/Greisinger Cemetery gained public attention in June 2000 when Barnhart of Green Township met with Noble County commissioners Mark Pankop, Richard Winebrenner and Hal Stump about the general neglect of the cemetery and the fact that it was completely inaccessible when crops were growing.

The commissioners informed Barnhart that in most cases in Indiana, the maintenance of cemetery plots situated in rural areas are the responsibility of the township in which they are located.

At that time, Commissioner Stump had agreed to talk with Doug Long, the owner of the property to discuss possible easement options.

After more than a year, Barnhart and her husband, Roger, met again with the commissioners on November 26, 2001. They exhibited photographs of the cemetery showing that small trees had been cut down, but little else in the way of maintenance had taken place other than the work Barnharts had done themselves. The Barnharts had also sought the support of the Albion American Legion and Wolf Lake VFW posts.

The commissioners requested that the county's attorney draft a letter to Washington Township Trustee Allan Miller. On December 17, 2001, Miller and two members of the township's Advisory Board did meet with the commissioners. Miller indicated he felt the cemetery was adequately maintained.

On July 10, 2002, Bill Landon, a member of the Noble County Historical Society who has an interest in preserving local history, met with the Board of Commissioners to discuss a solution for accessing the cemetery. With him were Roger Owen, Commander of American Legion Post 246 in Albion; Jim Erdly, Past Commander of VFW Post 4714 in Wolf Lake; Martha Ayers, President of the Historical Society; Margaret Ott, Vice-president of the Society; and Bob Gagen, Noble County Historian.

“Roger and I have discussed the access with Doug Long, and he has agreed to gift a 20-foot wide easement from 1050 W east to the cemetery, and an adjacent wooded area to the appropriate governmental entity,” Landon said.

Landon asked the county to prepare legal documents necessary to transfer the property, and to grade the access land and add fill to a low spot of approximately 100 feet.

Stump, who at that time was president of the Board of Commissioners, told Landon they would take his request under advisement. Stump also noted that Miller was not seeking reelection, and that he believed the only candidate for the position, Janelle (Stump) Burnworth, would have a more positive attitude toward the cemetery.

Behind the scenes, Landon continued to make contact with Doug Long. In a Letter to the Editor that appeared in the Albion New Era on August 13, 2003, Landon informed the public that the deeds to make access to the Stewart-Greisinger Cemetery a reality had been signed and recorded.

In his letter, Landon stated, “Though it has been a long, involved process, I think it is an excellent example of how various groups can work together to achieve a common goal. This was all accomplished with volunteers and at no cost to the general public.”

Landon went on to thank Owen, who set up the initial meeting with Doug Long, owner of Longview Farms. Owen also helped negotiate the settlement. He thanked Scott Zeigler and Mark Ober who performed the research and did the survey on their own time. He thanked Hal Hossinger and his law office for preparing the deeds and paperwork. He thanked Martha Barnhart who originally initiated the project and is now heading the restoration and replacement of gravestones.

Landon mentioned in his letter that assistance also came from the Noble County Genealogical Society which obtained a \$500 grant for this purpose.

In concluding his letter, Landon expressed gratitude to Doug Long and Janelle Burnworth and her advisory board for having the foresight to see this project through to its conclusion.

Unfortunately, Bill Landon was not invited to attend the gathering last week.

As Judy O’Bannon opened the film segment she said, “We come to you today from way up north in Noble County.”

“From the founding of our nation, the Stewart- Greisinger Cemetery has been the final resting place for Noble County Hoosiers, O’Bannon said, reading from a script shown on a TelePrompTer.

“Weathered monuments like these in historical cemeteries all over Indiana bear eloquent witness to the comings and goings of countless generations that have gone before us.”

“Sometimes it seems there can be no greater distance than that which exists between two generations,” O’Bannon said.

She went on to say that Communities Building Community encourages people working together to accomplish great things, and the best way to bridge an age gap is when several generations work together to make their community a safer, more vibrant place for people to call home.

O’Bannon exhibited the same charm and grace that Hoosiers witnessed when she was Indiana’s First Lady. Her keen sense of humor came through on more than on occasion.

As producer Gary Harrison was getting O’Bannon positioned in the cemetery and in front of the camera, Judy stepped into a slight depression and was heard to say, “Oh, my gosh, whose grandmother is there?”

“At least we don’t have semi-drunk motorcyclists driving by like we did in Madison,” she said referring to an earlier filming session. “I have never seen so many bad mufflers.”

On another occasion after Harrison had asked her to show a little more energy and enthusiasm, O’Bannon quipped, “It has something to do with the fact that you had me leaving Indianapolis at 5:30 a.m.”

During her three and one-half hour stay at the Stewart-Greisinger Cemetery, O’Bannon managed to maintain her cool and calm demeanor as she read and reread the script, walked through the muddy, rough terrain of the cemetery and battled Noble County’s mosquitoes.

It seemed fitting at the end when everyone was preparing to leave, that Dorothy Koher shared a story about coming to

visit the cemetery when their son, Clayton (now 58), was a young boy.

“We used to come to the edge of the road, then walk through the cornfield to place our flowers on Joseph Galloway’s grave every Memorial Day,” Koher said. “When we were ready to leave, Clayton would say, ‘God bless you, Joseph.’”

“This has been a delightful day and a dream come true,” Koher continued. “God bless you Judy, and God bless everyone until we meet again.”

Koher then asked for a moment of silence for those there and for those who have gone on before.



Markers indicate the burial of a Revolutionary War soldier at the grave site of Joseph Galloway in the Stewart-Greisinger Cemetery located in Washington Township, Noble County. (ANE photo by Viv Rosswurm)