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# Preserving the Past: Pine Ridge Cemetery being restored, grave by grave

Wed, 08/31/2011 - 10:45am | [Will Brumleve](#) [1]

LODA — For more than 100 years, the 19th-century tombstones of two young twin boys remained buried beneath their parents' gravestone in one of the oldest parts of Pine Ridge Cemetery.

And surrounding the family's small burial plot were many other gravestones that had shown the signs of decades of aging — their foundations unlevel, their inscriptions barely legible.

Not anymore.

A joint project between the Pine Ridge Cemetery Board and Loda Township Board of Supervisors began in August to restore the oldest gravestones at the cemetery, located near the northwest edge of Loda.

"The way I look at it, we don't have a lot of historical sights left, and the cemetery's kind of a little bit of a hidden treasure out there, and I think well worth preserving," said Tom Mueller, a Loda Township supervisor.

Loda Township and Pine Ridge Cemetery officials recently teamed up to hire Nashville, Ind.-based Stonehugger Cemetery Restoration Inc. to start the cemetery restoration effort, which is expected to continue each summer for years to come.

The first round of restoration was completed about two weeks ago and involved the restoration of about 30 gravestones in one of the oldest parts of the cemetery. Mueller said the township and cemetery board split the \$10,000 cost of the work that was completed this month; and he said they hope to pursue more restoration in other parts of the cemetery in subsequent summers.

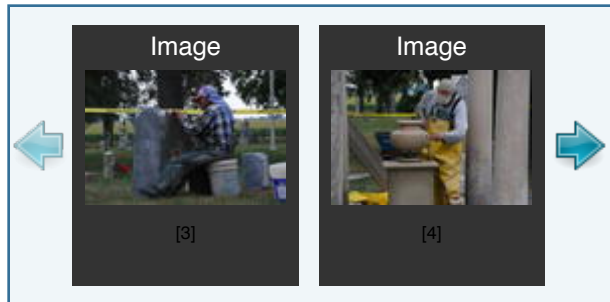
"As long as everything goes well, it's scheduled to be like a four-year project," Mueller said.



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**Photo by: Will Brumleve/Paxton Record**

A subcontractor for Stonehugger Cemetery Restoration restores a gravestone at Pine Ridge Cemetery in Loda recently, where a multi-year project is under way to restore the most aging stones there.



Helen Wildermuth, owner of Stonehugger Cemetery Restoration, said seven workers were at the cemetery during a five-day period in August. The workers were busy resetting the foundations of gravestones, cleaning them, remortaring and repairing them, Wildermuth said. In that part of the cemetery, most of the stones date back to the 1860s, she said.

“That’s the only section we’re doing this year,” Wildermuth said. “We’ll come back every year and do a little more. Basically, we’re just going to be working our way through the cemetery, mainly taking care of the stones that are in the worst condition in the cemetery — those falling on the ground, etc.”

Mueller said the work was needed.

“The reason we did this is we’ve noticed that the monuments are becoming almost unrecognizable, and they’re tilting; they’ve been falling over,” Mueller said.

“If we didn’t do something now, 20 or 30 years from now there won’t be anything left to save.”

To Mueller’s surprise, the restoration not only improved the appearance and condition of graves, it also actually uncovered two lost gravestones.

While leveling the foundation for a grave stone of a married couple, workers uncovered two grave markers for their twin sons, which were found buried next to the parents’ stone. One of the stones read “Our Baby Ray,” Mueller said.

“It was underneath it,” Wildermuth said. “It had been buried for probably a hundred years.”

“The tombstones were covered up, so nobody knew they were there,” Mueller said. “It’s just a great example of the way people were buried in Victorian times.”

Mueller said the tombstones were “cleaned up beautifully and placed on the proper slots that were made for them.”

The graves of many of the “pioneers of Loda” were also restored, Wildermuth said. Mueller said some of the restored stones are among the “most exceptional monuments” in the cemetery.

Mueller said they included the graves of a Civil War general (Israel Stiles), who commanded a brigade based out of Indiana in the Civil War and later was elected an attorney for the City of Chicago. His wife is buried next to him.

“We don’t know the Loda connection,” Mueller said, speculating that there might have been a local link to his wife, who died a few years before he did.

Also restored was the Uriah Copp cemetery plot. Mr. Copp was also a soldier in the Civil War. Mueller said he could not find a listing for Mr. Copp in a Civil War database, but he then discovered that it was because Mr. Copp’s name was misspelled as “Capp.” There was also another error in the database.

“The Civil War database listed him as a deserter, but he didn’t desert,” Mueller said. “He issued a letter of resignation over an argument. They were able to resign any time (in those days).”

Mueller, a self-proclaimed history buff, said he thinks it is important to preserve the past for the benefit of future generations. That is why the restoration is being done.

“I think it’s money well spent in the community,” Mueller said. “We don’t have a lot of little treasurers here, but this certainly is. ... It’s like taking a trip back to the 1860s again.”

One additional reason for the cemetery restoration is to curb vandalism.

“It’s less likely someone’s going to come along and vandalize it if it looks good and not abandoned-looking,” Mueller said.

Mueller said township and cemetery officials are pleased with the work that has already been done.

“All in all, I think everybody’s been delighted with it,” he said.

Stonehugger Cemetery Restoration does cemetery restoration work year-round, Wildermuth said. In the past 10 years, the business has restored nearly 20,000 gravestones nationwide, estimated Wildermuth.

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