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Chester Township Board Funds Local Cemetery Restoration

By Shaun Tilghman, News Editor

The Chester Township Board recently funded the \$9,955 restoration of Krisher Cemetery, located south of North Manchester at the intersection of CR 175 E and CR 1100 N, which is one of the oldest cemeteries in the township

According to Chester Township Trustee Flo Dahlstrom, all five of the township's cemeteries have been affected by repeated vandalism and the Board began discussing what to do around the first of the year. Krisher is probably the smallest of the local cemeteries--with 24 headstones, nine small monuments, six large monuments, and one plot wall--but it had the most visible damage and was most recently affected by vandalism.

Once the Board decided to restore the cemetery, Dahlstrom went online to compare different businesses for the task; she eventually selected Helen Wildermuth and Stonehugger Cemetery Restoration Inc., of Nashville, Ind. They began the restoration on July 21 and finished working in the cemetery just one week later.

"The first thing we did was we took photographs and documented the headstones and markers," explained Wildermuth. "We first came out in May and by the time we came back in July to work there had been more vandalism at the cemetery, which made our job even more difficult.

"The use of concrete was prevalent in this cemetery, which contributed to the bad conditions and added to the difficulty of the restoration. Some of the tablets were in as many as 12 pieces so the repairs were a long process before the leveling and resetting could even be done. In the end the entire cemetery was restored--our crew repaired the stones, cleaned them, and reset them."

According to the company website (stonehugger.com), most of the work done by Stonehugger is in pioneer cemeteries, which are over 100 years old and are the legacy of families residing in the community today.

"[Krisher] is considered a pioneer cemetery because most of the people buried there were the original landowners from that part of the township," Wildermuth added.

As of the end of 2010, Stonehugger had completely restored more than 16,500 gravestones, markers, and monuments. On the website, Wildermuth says, "My goal when I step into a pioneer cemetery is not only to restore the gravestones as close to the condition they were in

when they were first set at the head of the grave, but to create thorough documentation for ongoing perpetual care."

"Cemeteries are an important element of our history and represent a thread through time that connects our pioneer past with the present," she continues. "If we stop caring for this link to our heritage, the history of a community may be lost forever."

Dahlstrom adds, "This project is a vital part of maintaining these local historical sites. It seemed like the right choice and now that the job is completed I am very pleased. Now we're looking into the possibility of having the same type of work done at the remaining cemeteries--especially [Daniels]--as soon as next spring."

Daniels, a pre-Civil War cemetery, is the oldest in the township and is located at the intersection of CR 700 and CR 500 E. The other three local cemeteries include: Greenwood, located on CR 1425 west of SR 13; Concord, located southeast of the intersection of CR 1100 N and CR 700 E; and Swank, located on SR 13 south of Car Recyclers.

While the money needed for this project was already in the Township's funds, Dahlstrom said they might look into some other funding options down the line. "There has been a big movement recently to identify veterans in the pre-Civil War cemeteries with markers and flags, which can cost up to \$50 per veteran," she continued. "With the increased emphasis from the State to restore these cemeteries, hopefully more resources will become available as well."

The Board has also discussed putting up fences around the cemeteries to prevent future damage, and during the meeting on Aug. 10 they will specifically address the possibility of fencing in the recently restored cemetery.

Dahlstrom concluded by saying that in the next few months Stonehugger will be providing a book containing before and after pictures from Krisher, and anyone interested in viewing it should contact the Township Office.