

AROUND THE REGION

PRESERVATION

Bringing a Historic Graveyard Back to Life

By STEWART AIN

THE historic marker reads simply, "Old Burial Hill."

Next to Main Street, or Route 25A, in Huntington, just a block east of Route 110, what was the main cemetery of the Towns of Huntington and Babylon three centuries ago has gone largely unnoticed for decades. It was so neglected that weeds, vines, saplings and trees had taken root.

"It had become so overgrown with trees and vines that you couldn't see the cemetery from Route 25A," said Robert C. Hughes, the historian of the Town of Huntington, which owns the cemetery.

But in the summer of 2005, Mr. Hughes began doing something he said he had wanted to do for a long time — restore the cemetery, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. With the help of several high school and college students, and the expertise of Joel Snodgrass, an architectural conservator from the Historic Construction Management Corporation in Huntington Station, Mr. Hughes removed the overgrowth from the cemetery and began repairing its aging tombstones.

The work, done with \$45,000 from the town and a matching state grant, involved resetting tombstones that had been moved, gluing together pieces that had broken and installing enhanced security lighting and a six-foot chain-link fence to replace one that had rusted and been torn away by vandals.

Of the 1,200 tombstones in the four-acre



R.I.P. Joel Snodgrass and Morgan C. Davey repaired broken tombstones in Huntington this summer. The cemetery restoration work is expected to continue into next year.

cemetery, Mr. Hughes said, 86 were found lying next to where they had been installed, 143 were leaning because the ground had settled and 270 were broken.

"There has been vandalism there for many, many years," Mr. Hughes said, "and three to four dozen of the tombstones" may have been damaged and toppled by vandals.

Mr. Snodgrass said the neglect of the cemetery was simply "an invitation to vandalism."

"There was broken glass all over the site," he said. "When bottles were not picked up in

a timely fashion, it was seen as a sign that no one cared. And so they came back the next week and threw bottles at the stones."

The oldest tombstone is a fieldstone boulder inscribed with the year 1712.

"It's fine and didn't need any work," said Morgan C. Davey, 19, a student who worked on the restoration. Mr. Davey, of Commack and a sophomore at SUNY College at Brockport, said he was struck that the marker had no name on it. "It just had somebody's initials carved into the rock along with the date," he said.



Photographs by Maxine Hicks for The New York Times

To reassemble the broken tombstones, Mr. Davey said the volunteers drilled holes in the sides of the stones, applied a special epoxy to plastic rods, inserted the rods into the holes and pushed stones together.

"When I told my friends that I worked in a cemetery, they said, 'Aren't you scared?'" Mr. Davey said. "I said, 'No, it's pretty cool.'"

Working with him were Louis N. Nucci, 16, of Huntington, a student at Harborfields High School in Greenlawn; and Josheen Wilkerson, 19, of Huntington, a freshman at Suf-

folk County Community College in Selden.

The cemetery was used primarily in the 18th and 19th centuries; there were only a handful of burials in the 20th century as space became limited and new cemeteries opened, Mr. Hughes said. He said that so far, about three dozen broken tombstones had been repaired and that the work would continue this fall and next year.

Several of the tombstones contain epitaphs. One of the most poignant, Mr. Hughes said, was for a 13-year-old boy: "He never gave his father grief but the day he died."

Rain relocates supper crowd

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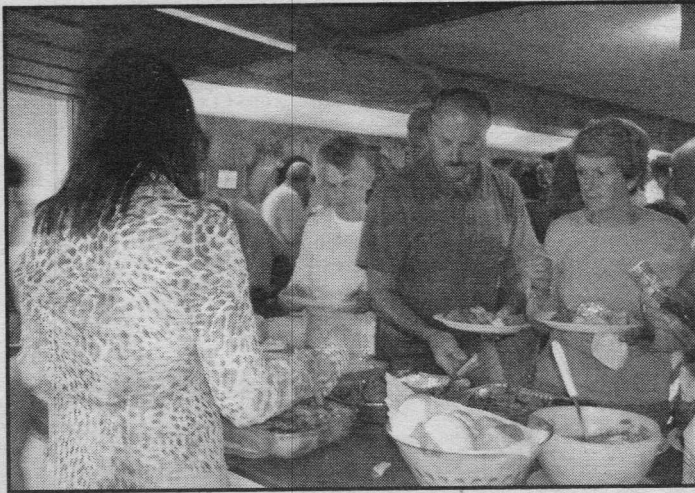
WORTHINGTON—A change of venue did not deter ticket holders for the Historical Society's Annual Beef Roast. It was held last Sunday, but with a change of location due to the rainy weather conditions. So while people were not able to visit the Society's museum building, they were able to walk around the Worthington Rod and Gun Club's building. There were pictures of the building erection back in the 1950s and photographs of past members and typical memorial representatives of the club's history.

Over 120 people attended the supper. Most people stayed indoors, but several small groups of people ate under the Pease

Pavilion. Both Helen Sharron, President of the Society and Bob Randall, Vice-President remarked that it was a fun time for everyone. "People just like to get together and talk and visit and eat good food," he said.

Conversations were flowing. Some were about the past primary elections, while others talked about growing vegetables and the weather conditions of the summer. Still others enjoyed talking about Worthington and its history and what the Society's upcoming projects would be. "People look forward to it," Sharron said.

Upcoming events include a cleaning of stone heads at Brewster Cemetery on Saturday, Oct. 7, starting at 9 a.m. People are asked to bring gloves and plastic scrubbing tools. A rain date has been set for Sunday, Oct. 8. At the annual meeting, on Sunday, Oct. 15 at 6:30 p.m. in the WHS building, George Ashley, Professor of History, Holyoke Community College will speak on "Changes in Farming in the Pioneer Valley form Colonial Times to the Present."



At the Worthington Historical Society Beef Roast, Helen Sharron was checking on the roast beef platter, while Larry and Brenda Mason were serving themselves dinner. There was a long line before them.
Photo by Elodi McBride

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Worthington

Historical gathering rich with story

WORTHINGTON—Bright sunny afternoons were made for sitting around with friends and swapping stories. Members of the Worthington Historical Society did just that last Tuesday afternoon, July 11 at the historical building.

Thirty people or so were seated in a u-shape manner with Bob Randall in the center as a guide. He had a sheet, Seeds for Discussion, which he asked questions from to start a dialogue on wars, farm life, clubs and associations, local taverns and lodges, local industries, coach, and historic families and family homes. It was quite the afternoon.

Many residents shared their stories, such as a casket shop on Old Post Road, or that there might have been a cemetery along that same road, but it was never found. It was suggested that perhaps a local family had a family plot at one time.

Stories sprang from all voices throughout the afternoon, as one person told a story and finished, another would add something else remembered. The measuring wheel, the same device as used by the highway work crew this spring to measure road sections was invented in Worthington. The hemlocks were cut down and sent to New York City to be used for dying. In the early mid-1800s, Worthington boasted of a huge sheep industry, which declined before the Civil War.

The wealth of history between all those people was astonishing. The Society had recorded the session and will be making transcripts to have for references. The Society will continue at a future date with the program of telling of the tales, spinning of the yarn, and sharing wisdom, history, truth and lies about life in Worthington over the years.

Ringville Cemetery gets clean up

WORTHINGTON—The Historical Society returned several weekends ago to Ringville Cemetery to restore the badly stained memorial stones. Having taken several classes on the subject, Pat Kennedy led the effort, instructing participants about the stages of the restoration. Stiff brushes, plastic scrapers and a variety of home chemicals were employed by the volunteers. Kennedy estimated some thirty stones were restored.

Bob Epperly, himself, restored eight stones, concentrating especially upon those of the Higgins family. Sara Upton found that a small but stiff Birkenstock shoe brush was particularly effective on the lichens which encrusted most of the tombstones. After much work, she discovered that the wife of Mr. Thrasher, apparently had the misfortune to have her own stone chiseled with a misspelled "Thresher." The Blair, Mecham and Sanderson family stones were restored by Mike and Diane Meehan. They noted that the Ringville winter crypt had been donated to the ceme-

tery by the Blairs. Bob Randall thought that perhaps they themselves occupied it for a few months until the frozen ground thawed and their gravesites could be dug. As Randall deciphered the details of a set of badly deteriorated stones, he discovered a family tragedy. Parents of Ira and Maria Burleigh, in the years 1855 to 1868, lost five children: Orson (8), Estella Maria (4 months), Lottie Maria (6 months), an unnamed infant son, and an adopted daughter Helena (5). Other stones revealed that many citizens of the nineteenth century lived to a ripe old age. Diem Novo enjoyed supplying the restorers with water on such a hot day.

Kennedy believes that one more day of restoration work will complete work on the limestone gravestones at Ringville. She proposes that if neighbors of a cemetery wish to conduct a stone restoration day, the Worthington Historical Society will work along side and supply tools, supplies and expertise. Call Pat at 238-5560 for information.

Tombstone efforts reveal old messages

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WORTHINGTON — The Worthington Historical Society gathered together a small work party last Saturday, June 24 to restore ancient tombstones at the Ringville Cemetery. Pat Kennedy, who has taken several workshops in the art, led the effort. Participants scrubbed each stone several times, using water and ammonia solution, Photo Flo, and finished the job with a specialize stone cleaning chemical, rinsing between each step. The stones, many unreadable at first, turned from black to white, revealing their messages for the first time in years.

Dian Brenner spent considerable time on a miniature stone with a tiny sculptured lamb perched atop it, a memorial to three-year-old Etta Porter who died in 1861. The stones of Martin and Maranda Conwell attracted the interest of Bob Randall,

because they were the parents of Worthington's own Russell H. Conwell, the founder of Temple University and a famous inspirational educator of his time. A team, Diane and Mike Meehan, were especially diligent as they, neighbors of the Cemetery, had been aware of the deteriorating tombstones for some time. Stones of the Smith family, the Pomeroy family and the Taylor family were chosen to be restored because these stones were of limestone, vulnerable to acid rain and lichens.

Excited by the progress, Kennedy will call for another effort soon. She is requesting donations of vital chemicals and tools; most appreciated would be garden sprayers, Photo Flo, and most important of all, elbow grease. To lend a hand, call her at 238-5560.