

Silver Lake Historic Cemetery Undergoes Restoration

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Rob Edling, Seward Township trustee, stands by one of the tombstones restored in Franklin Cemetery during a major restoration project. (Photo by Tim Ashley)

An old country cemetery west of Silver Lake in Seward Township was a “complete wreck,” according by Rob Edling, Seward Township trustee.

Located on SR 14 just east of CR 600 West in a rural area where homes are spread out, Franklin Cemetery was prone to vandalism. Grave markers were broken in half, leaning over or leaning against a nearby fence. Weather and time had taken their toll as some tombstones had become unreadable.

“The cemetery had been neglected for too long,” Edling said. He has been the township trustee for three years.

Franklin is one of three cemeteries in Seward Township maintained by the trustee. Edling decided to do something and chose Franklin as the starting point for a cemetery

overhaul.

Costly it would be to the tune of \$15,120, but Stonehugger Cemetery Restoration Inc., based in Nashville, Ind., came to the rescue. “They up-righted monuments, reset the bases and cleaned the tombstones,” Edling said. “Somehow they were able to find where the stones went. I thought they might be able to find a few, but they found every single one of them.”

It took 10 days for the project to be completed in May. A total of 135 small or large monuments, tablet stones or large footstones were restored in some way.

Franklin is a smaller cemetery with less than 150 grave markers total, but nonetheless it was a major project as nearly every stone received attention. “Nearly all the tombstones were restored in some way,” he said. “They were cleaned or something was done to them.”

The result was a major transformation of the cemetery. Tombstones dating back to the 1860s or earlier were cleaned and the inscriptions are more legible now. Broken stones were put back together, the leaning ones were straightened and there are no longer pieces laying against the fence.

Though he said it was costly, Edling feels it was important to have the stones restored. “It is well worth it to preserve the history of the cemetery and to honor those buried here,” he said. There have been no burials in the cemetery since the late 1990s and many families who lived in the area have either moved away or are no longer living.

More work will be done at Franklin including having the property surveyed. "Apparently it was never officially surveyed and there has been some dispute about the property boundary lines," he said. When the survey is finished, new fencing will be installed, too.



Milo Barber was one of the earliest settlers in Seward Township and the first township trustee. (Photo by Tim Ashley)

Established In 1843

Franklin Cemetery was established in 1843 and by the entrance there is a sign identifying it as one of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources historic cemeteries. The 1879 Kosciusko County Atlas shows there was a Presbyterian church located on the east side of the property. The church is no longer standing, but part of the foundation remains and is visible.

Among those buried at Franklin is Milo Barber, who died Feb. 28, 1900, at the age of 96. He was one of the early settlers in the township and in the early 1840s cleared his own land to build a log cabin after moving to the area from New York. His uncle, Jerred Barber, was a soldier in the Revolutionary War.

Milo was appointed the first trustee of Seward Township in 1859. Milo and his wife, Miranda, had 18 children.

While in his 80s, Milo still worked on his farm and it is said he frequently walked to Silver Lake and back. There and back would equal close to eight miles.

He lived on the same 80-acre tract of ground he cleared until he died. It was located a couple miles west of Franklin Cemetery on what later became SR 14.