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*We typically get quite a few requests from folks looking for funds to undertake restoration efforts, and this month has been no exception so I'm sharing this article.*

# Let's Talk Funding for Pioneer Cemetery Restoration

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A major hurdle of cemeteries that have fallen into poor condition is the funding necessary to make repairs to damaged monuments and to restore the property to a more respectful appearance. Many older cemeteries that are no longer accepting burials often run out of money for perpetual care. Without any source of ongoing income, endowments may become exhausted and, with no means left to foot the bill for maintaining the property, a cemetery may be considered abandoned and ultimately deeded to the township or other municipal body. This can be problematic if a township does not have the tax revenue necessary to allocate monies that will support much more than occasional mowing.

Gravestones that have toppled and or are broken are not only unsightly but leave relatives of the deceased and cemetery visitors with a poor impression of the property and its managers. There may also be hazards when larger or taller tombstones become unlevel and are in danger of falling. Routine maintenance of 19th and early 20th century cemetery monuments is essential in keeping the property in good order and safe for site visitors. Professional restoration of gravestones that have fallen and or are broken can be expensive. Current cemetery stewards may not have the funds or the knowledge and wherewithal to make proper repairs.

So, let's begin a discussion of alternate sources of funding for cemetery repair and restoration. A few ideas to generate significant income over a several year period for annually recurring restoration efforts will be listed here, but there may be many other sources.

Historic preservation grants may be available to augment annual allocations by the trustee or cemetery association. State grants typically require equal matching funds, and some types may require sponsorship by a non-for-profit organization. It is generally necessary to apply for grants well in advance of the need for the funds.

Historic preservation and civic groups may also provide small grants or matching funds for cemetery restoration efforts. This might include state and local historical and genealogical societies, or other local clubs and community organizations.

Most cemeteries have military veteran interments. The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars

(VFW), Sons and Daughters of the Revolution (SAR & DAR) organizations may be willing to support restoration plans with contributions.

Relatives of the deceased who want to make annual endowments or contributions should be explored. Making the public aware of the work being accomplished through newspapers articles and social media may stimulate contributions from relatives and other civic minded individuals, organizations, or local businesses.

In some cases, there may be sizeable apparently vacant areas in a previously abandoned cemetery and some states permit reactivation and sale of new grave plots by township trustees. Property adjacent to a cemetery may become available and an annex including new lots for sale and use may be created as well. Often there are relatives who want to buy plots in a cemetery where they have kin, and this is sometimes the impetus for reactivation. Obviously, the sale of new plots is money found that may be used in the perpetual care of a cemetery.

There are certainly many more potential sources for fundraising. Flea market or community garage sales, bake sales, pancake, and chili dinners, etc. are just a few more potential sources of income derived by a community that could be used in a continuing cemetery restoration project. Use your imagination.



(Photo: Rich Green)