

Historical group uncovering past

By Shelley Sutcliffe
Sentinel Westlife writer

A cemetery is generally thought of as a gloomy and sad place and the only time people usually go there are for memorial services.

One group of people, though, go to cemeteries for enjoyment and actually spend hours reading the tombstones.

The Mesa County Genealogical Society, along with other societies in Colorado, are recording cemeteries—trying to discover and record grave sites and names before they are forgotten.

Five members of the local society, armed with paper and pens, met Thursday in Veterans Crown Point Cemetery in Appleton.

Pat Allen, president of the society, said the cemetery has approximately 200 graves—most of them marked.

One of the group's projects is to find the unmarked graves and identify them.

"The majority of the graves here are old-timers and settlers," she said.

The earliest burial recorded was that of May A. Sheley who died in 1895. The most recent is K.O. Renfro who died in 1981.

"Some headstones don't have dates on them, but we know they are very old," she said.

Allen explained they have a master copy of who has purchased plots in the cemetery and their job is to record the people who have been buried there.

"Many children do not have headstones and we want to find them," she said.

"Headstones were expensive back then and the death of children were high, so many children were buried without a headstone or they were buried with a parent or relative."

The Veterans Crown Point Cemetery was incorporated in 1914, but existed many years before then, said Allen. One of the first burials is thought to be in 1882, she added.

When the cemetery was incorporated, the residents of Appleton maintained it. "It's just a neighborhood cemetery," said genealogical member Dorothy Inscho.

About six years ago, the last two elected board members of the cemetery, Frances Gardner and Clyde Gifford, decided the cemetery over to the veterans group.

"We use to have a clean up day every year," said Gifford. "We just couldn't get enough people out here to clean up and I couldn't do it, so let the veterans take care of it."

"The cemetery is not city-owned. We had no one to help take care of the cemetery—we were all getting too old."

Throughout the years the cemetery board members would hire different people to take care of the cemetery.

"I planted the white lilacs and someone else planted the spruce trees around the cemetery. People we would hire would plant different plants and trees," said Gifford.

Allen said the Appleton cemetery is still active.

"There are still open lots. Some people have bought lots who haven't died," she said.

When the society has all of Grand Junction's cemeteries recorded, they plan on submitting the documents to the Museum of Western Colorado.

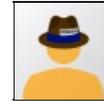
The Mesa County Genealogical Society's goals are to make research material available for persons to locate where and when their ancestors were born, what they did for a living and how many children they had.



Sentinel photo by Robert Grant

Dorothy Inscho records tombstone
...Genealogical Society to publish record of Mesa County cemeteries

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