

History group seeks cemetery info

The Explore Waterford Historic Sites Committee is currently working with the Wisconsin Lutheran College Department of Anthropology to restore Old Settlers Cemetery and honor those laid to rest by sharing their stories with the public.

The historic and sacred site, located on the west side of North Jefferson Street, has long been neglected, with grave markers buried, broken and vandalized. Many are unaware that it is the resting place of Village of Waterford's earliest European settlers.

Volunteers leading the project are seeking information, photos, maps and other documents about the cemetery and its occupants. The committee is especially looking for relatives and friends who can help identify the deceased. Obituaries, family Bibles, journals, photos and vital records are most appreciated, but verbal accounts are also welcome.

Information provided will be scanned to aid in research, then returned, unless providers wish to donate items.

To share, contact Judy Gambrel, committee chairwoman, at rwjudy@aol.com or (815) 289-0003.

For more information about the cemetery, including known burials and reinterments to other cemeteries, visit explorewaterford.com, click on "Community," then "Legacy of Waterford" in the dropdown menu.

About Old Settlers Cemetery

In 1843, this site was surveyed as a public cemetery containing about an acre. It is said that there were burials on the site before it became a dedicated public cemetery, but no records exist. About 1857, a plank road was cut through the eastern part of the plot - the location of the present road, North Jefferson Street. About two-thirds of an acre was left and any burials in the plank road right-of-way had to be relocated to surrounding cemeteries. In March 1870, the State of Wisconsin passed a law assigning the care and maintenance of this cemetery to the Village of Waterford. By the late 1880s, the village's interest in this cemetery waned, leaving it to deteriorate from the ravages of nature and desecration. Since then, many of the remaining bodies were reinterred to other local cemeteries while other headstones were removed by vandals and were lost forever. The committee wishes to embed the few remaining headstone fragments into a brick or stone wall as a testament to the lives of the pioneer settlers who carved a way of life out of the wilderness in the mid 1800s.