Plotting Gillespie City Cemetery Project Completed By Students And Community Members

by Tara L. Cale
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GILLESPIE - Libraries are a community's source of information and all libraries take this job and develop it in various directions. Libraries use books, encyclopedias, magazines, the internet as sources of information. Some libraries have an "in-depth"

collection of genealogical and historical materials. These libraries are blessed with a larger budget and space to house these materials. The Gillespie Public Library has a limited amount of these materials yet is often contacted to see if there is information about persons buried in the Gillespie City Cemetery. Until recently, the library could unfortunately not provide much help to these people, some of whom had traveled quite some distance.

The Gillespie City Cemetery was established around the same time the city was, around 1853. Records of who was buried there, and where, were not kept accurately by any one source. Sometime in the '90s the local genealogical group attempted to remedy this and started a list of persons buried there, but it was only separated by categories.

Due to the high number of requests for more detailed information about friends, relatives, and loved ones that may - or may not - be buried there, current Gillespie Librarian/ Library Director Steve Joyce, came up with an idea, shortly after the pandemic hit in 2020. As a former high school teacher himself, he knew how important it was for kids to keep learning, perhaps now in creative ways, considering that in-school classes had been suspended. Still connected to the school system through his former teaching duties, Joyce reached out to Gillespie High School Current Events Teacher, Casey Sholtis, and asked if his students would be interested in a community project to plot the cemetery - a classroom outdoors.

The project started in the fall of 2020. Students, provided with the primitive categorized list from the genealogical society, and a blank piece of paper, were assigned sections and rows, and started recording all filled plots, and identifying the person buried there if the information was readable on the headstone or marker.

"We ended up with many 'unknowns' due to the age of the cemetery and deterioration of some of the markers," Joyce explained. "But we also made some small accomplishments by piecing together some information and were able to identify some plots that had been previously unknown."

The new part of the cemetery has fairly straight rows, but the old part was more of a challenge, with headstones and markers placed seemingly willy-nilly in some places. So what is indicated as a "row" may actually be a group of primitive rows. Yet it still gives those searching a more pinpointed area in which to search.

Winter weather stopped the project in 2020 before it was finished but in the spring of 2021, a new batch of students came in to finish the documentation. Corrections were made over the summer. With a total of around 40 students involved, the result is now an entirely plotted cemetery, using stones and signs to indicate sections and rows, and a list of those that could be identified, in alphabetical order, as a guideline for those searching the approximate 3,500 graves in the cemetery. A topographical map is posted at the cemetery and online, and the list of those buried can be found on the library's website, www.gillespielibrary.org. A printed list is also available at the library.

The signs and marker for the cemetery cost over $2,000, according to Joyce, for which there were no funds. So Joyce and other community volunteers held a fundraiser to cover that expense. There were also 25 individuals that donated money to the cause. The markers were installed by volunteers.

Joyce said the success of the plotting project has instigated a renewed awareness of the cemetery, its importance in the community, the importance to continue and maintain such records, and the integrity of the grounds themselves. The plotting is now considered Phase I of that effort. Phase II is anticipated to be the cleanup and/or repair of old headstones, and clean-up of the cemetery itself: removing overgrowth, etc. Identifying unknowns will also be included in the second phase. Joyce encourages anyone with information about who is buried in an unmarked plot to contact the library so the information can be updated.

"We know someone knows who is buried in many of the unmarked graves because there is evidence of visitors there," Joyce explained. "We may find flowers, trinkets and the like there. So someone is visiting. Someone knows."

He is hoping that local funeral home Kravanya will also be helpful in identifying some of the unknowns.

In Phase III Joyce hopes to be able to find a way to fund the marking of all unmarked graves.

"It was very gratifying to all involved to see this project come to fruition," Joyce said. "Just weeks after completion we had several calls from people from places such as Tennessee and Las Vegas looking for information on a loved one buried in Gillespie City Cemetery, and this time, we were able to provide it."

Last Name	First Name	MI	Military (Y/N)	Birth Month	Birth Day	Birth Year	Death Month	Death Day	Death Year	Section	Row
Abbott	Cora	S				1875			1940	F	23
Abbott	E Hurd					1870			1951	F	23
Abbott	John	W		9	15	1920	1	4	1968	F	14
Abbott	Martha	L				1870			1941	E	9
Abbott	William	G				1864			1921	E	9
Abelloni	Natalina					1906			1911	C	12
Abrassart	Frank			3	5	1871	3	18	1998	F	14
Ackerman	Dick	O				1898			1965	B	8
Ackerman	Wilhelmina	M				1094			1997	B	8
Adams	Annie	L		3	25	1928			nd	E	3
Adams	Burl	L				1930			1952	E	3
Adams	Edward	A				1892			1937	E	3
Adams	Florence	E				1895			1963	E	3
Adams	James	C				1892			1968	F	18
Adams	Myra					1916			1920	E	3
Adams	Myrtle					1897			1973	F	18
Adams	Roy	W		11	8	1926	4	19	2014	E	3
Admire	Henry	L		8	26	1915	8	14	1997	F	14
Ahrens	Father									B	14
Ahrens	Mother									B	14
Aikman	Florence		Y			1911				DD	3
Aikman	James	M				1849			1918	DD	3
Aikman	Lewis	E				1894			1957	DD	3
Aikman	Melissa	J				1856			1954	DD	3
Akers	James		Y	5	11	1921	5	17	1989	F	8
Albertini	Feda			4	11	1892	5	6	1978	F	12
Albertini	Frank	J		8	13	1883	2	12	1979	F	12
Albertini	Josephine	J		8	6	1912	5	12	1999	F	12
Alexander	Jane	L				1931			2007	F	14
Allan	Betty	J		8	31	1931	9	9	2020	F	20

In addition to requests about persons buried in the cemetery, the library often gets other interesting requests. For example:

Information on Dr. Marvel Thomas: He was a prominent physician and surgeon born in 1855 near Plainview. He graduated from Missouri Medical College in 1884 and opened

a practice in Gillespie in 1889. He was a doctor in town somewhere between 1910 and 1940.

Information on Gillespie Manufacturing Co.: A lady from Arizona bought a well-constructed piece of furniture probably dated 1920-30s from Gillespie, IL. It probably was a very small company or a "private individual" making furniture.

Information on the burial site of ex-mayor (1913-15) LaBerta "Bert" Rice.

Community members with any information about those requests are encouraged to contact the library.

According to Joyce, "The library realizes that our community holds an enormous amount of information in old collectibles that are lying around the house. In most cases, those old items are moved from box to box and from relative to relative until someone throws them away. If you have any old photographs of buildings, especially the downtown area, famous personalities, and dignitaries, or any old organizational photos, we will take them. We would like the pictures to be of some historical value and not just of family members at a cookout. Any documents, yearbooks, programs, diaries, or anything that would historically shed light on events that occurred in the community would be appreciated. You are the last source of this dying information and we need to somehow preserve it. Box it up and give it to the library."

One immediate need is information and photos of the old library on top of the old fire station and Miss Willard, the librarian.

Libraries also often hold events such as Story Times, game nights, and more. You are encouraged to investigate, explore and utilize your own local library for the wealth of information and resources they may provide.

The Gillespie Public Library is located at 201 W. Chestnut Street. Hours are Monday: 2-7 pm, Tuesday: 2-6 pm, Wednesday: 10am-5pm, Thursday: 2-6 pm, Friday: 10am-5pm, Saturday: 9 am-noon. More information and details, including upcoming events, are available by calling 217-839-3614, visiting www.gillespielibrary.org, or you can find them on Facebook.

Anyone wanting to donate to pay for grave markers, the upkeep of the cemetery, etc. should mail donations to the library, earmarked for the "cemetery project."

CIVIL WAR HERO BURIED AT GILLESPIE CITY CEMETERY

David Dickie (July 13, 1841 – August 27, 1904) was a Union Army soldier during the American Civil War. He received the Medal of Honor for gallantry during the Siege of Vicksburg on May 22, 1863. Dickie joined the 97th Illinois Infantry in August 1862 and was mustered out in July 1865.

On May 22, 1863, General Ulysses S. Grant ordered an assault on the Confederate heights at Vicksburg, Mississippi. The plan called for a storming party of volunteers to build a bridge across a moat and plant scaling ladders against the enemy embankment in advance of the main attack.

The volunteers knew the odds were against survival and the mission was called, in nineteenth-century vernacular, a "forlorn hope". Only single men were accepted as volunteers and even then, twice as many men as needed came forward and were turned away. The assault began in the early morning following a naval bombardment.

The Union soldiers came under enemy fire immediately and were pinned down in the ditch they were to cross. Despite repeated attacks by the main Union body, the men of

the forlorn hope were unable to retreat until nightfall. Of the 150 men in the storming party, nearly half were killed. Seventy-nine of the survivors were awarded the Medal of Honor, including David Dickie.