

Artz Cemetery facelift celebrated Memorial Day weekend

Cathy Decker
Staff Reporter

Larry Eckhardt of Little York got involved in a project when he was 16 years old that, 32 years later, still interests him.

Every Memorial Day he makes his way out to Artz Cemetery, north of Aledo out in the Sugar Grove area, to make sure there are flowers on the veteran's grave there and that an American flag is flying. The veteran he honors is William H. Ashbaugh, who died July 21, 1868. He was a veteran of the Civil War, serving as a private in Company A of the 30th Illinois Infantry.

"I maintained it fully until 1986," said Eckhardt. Back when he was a teenager there were others he remembered who helped bring the neglected cemetery out of ruins including Izaak "Ike" Long, Robin Whitehall, and Tina Brockett. Eckhardt is just as enthusiastic today as he probably was back then. "It was great. We didn't know anybody there," he added.

"We were the ones that got it started."

The project back then received so much notice that the Mercer County Historical Society, 16 months later, designated the location a historical point of interest and mounted a sign there indicating it as a Mercer County

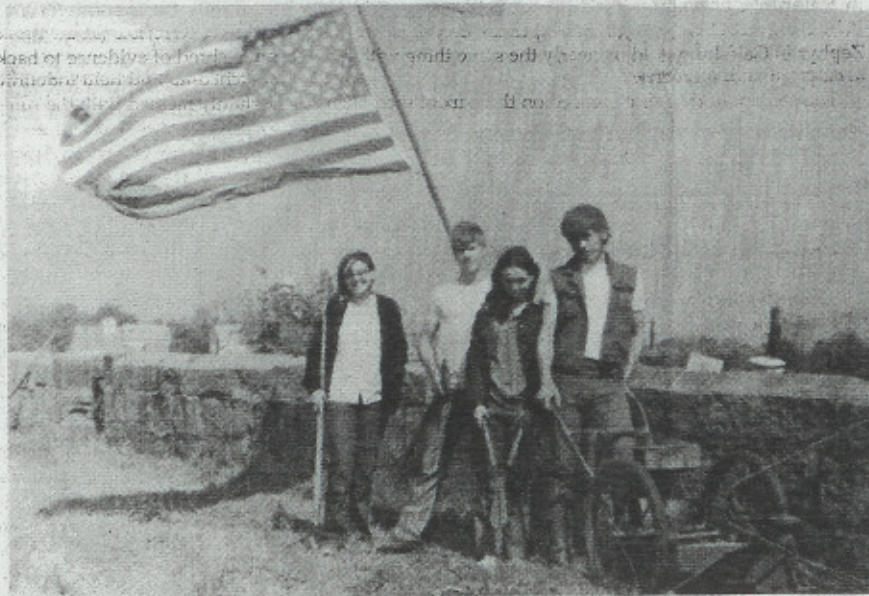


Photo Submitted

A crew of teenagers helped clean up Artz Cemetery back in 1973 and that tradition has extended to some young people today. The 1973 crew shown here included, from left Tina Brockett, Ike Long, Robin Whitehall and Larry Eckhardt.

Landmark.

To this day, Eckhardt still doesn't know any of the people buried in that cemetery, although he did once add a gravestone to the cemetery that he came upon when he was working on a project to gather some Mercer County historical information for a book he was researching - The Historical Atlas of Mercer County. This book was published by Title Atlas Company in 1983.

He said he first came upon Artz cemetery with his father, Lee Eckhardt, who actually made the flagpole that is in the cemetery.

Others who have been involved over the years in restoring the Artz Cemetery included Jim Hemphill, who took photographs of the cemetery and was the Aledo City Clerk at the time, Joe Lemon, who installed a roadside tube at the entrance to the cemetery for visitors to

walk to it. Then there was Kenny Weeks. "Kenny Weeks mowed the roadside banks," he recalled.

"Some of these people are gone now," he added.

"There was also a gentleman down the road who loaned us a weed-eater."

Getting back to the project that was started 32 years ago Eckhardt added, "to us it was an important project."

He said the group of young people took about a

week out of their young lives to bring the cemetery back to life. "We found some William Ashbaugh stones that had been buried."

He said the project was nothing more than something fun to do for the teenagers. "I'd always liked history," he added.

Since that time, Eckhardt has delved into some of the history surrounding that particular cemetery. "It was redone before, back in 1934," he said. "Nobody is left (in the Mercer County area) in the family."

"The Ashbaugh family was very prominent out there," he said.

He tells one story of the family that used to live in the area. "Under the back side of that house (which used to be the Ashbaugh homestead), is a cistern with semiprecious stones in it," said Eckhardt. He said "One of the sisters got mad at her brother and threw some semiprecious stones in it."

A William Ashbaugh saber, as well as another weapon are on exhibit at the Rock Island Arsenal Museum. "The wall around that cemetery is lined with stones from the first Grist Mill built on the east side of the Mississippi," said Eckhardt. The Grist Mill was owned by the Artz family.

Another veteran's stone that made its way to Artz

Cemetery came from Bivens Cemetery, west of Hamlet.

There is a second stone on display at the cemetery that Eckhardt came upon back in 1983. It came from a lady who was originally buried in Preemption Township. "It was being used as a doorstep," he said. He came upon the stone when he was talking to Mercer County residents for the book he was researching.

"There's always been a report of another veteran buried out there, but we've never found it," he said.

He said neighbors in the area have lately become involved with the cemetery. "It's been like a magnet, we've just been able to draw so many."

There's a list of about 15 people who have been involved. Jackie Bertleson took some pictures, Pauline Robinson has planted flowers out there. "She also has put a flag out there from her husband, Howard Robinson.

"Bill Lindquist has been a real magnet out there. He's been working on the wall with his neighbor Richard Fejk. His son, Garrett Fejk has been cutting the grass."

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Times Record
6-1-2005

Artz Cemetery resurrected in 1934

A Times Record article found in the Feb. 21, 1934 issue states that the Old Artz Cemetery was almost forgotten.

"Only a few residents of Mercer Co. may have noticed the low wall of buff-colored sandstone perhaps 60 feet long and four feet high standing along the north side of the highway a few hundred yards east of the Sugar Grove tourist camp.

Recently Lyle Durning has cut away the brush which almost hid it. There may have been a few more who have found that it encloses a tiny cemetery, measuring about 60 by 40 feet. Some of the more curious may have noticed that inside are a few tombstones, some of them broken, some fallen down and a few still standing, although leaning on their bases.

Wall once old mill

But only a few old residents will recall as they glance at that ruin that what was once the beautiful little private burying ground, known as the Artz family cemetery, that the blocks of sandstone used in the wall were once part of the old Artz mill, one of the oldest in Mercer Co. It stood farther east on the Edwards River so many years ago that only a few can point out the location.

In that jumble of torn ground, fallen stones and desolation, one and possibly two veterans of the Civil War are buried.

Can never be abandoned

This alone, will prevent it from ever ceasing to be a cemetery, for the law forbids a cemetery containing the grave of a veteran from ever being abandoned. Every Memorial Day Albert McCreight of Aledo,

American Legion graves recorder, places a small flag beside the rusty BAR marker where it flutters for a few days, giving a touch of life to a spot entirely consecrated to death.

Without the aid of official records, a visitor would have difficulty in making out the name Wm. H. Ashbaugh on the stone, for it is broken in two across the words. It is not difficult to read that he died in July 1868, at the age of 27 years, and a few months.

Poem on veterans marker

However, one of the most interesting things in the little cemetery is the verse across the base of the monument, similar to those so often used 60 years ago:

Here lies the young wife
weeps in sorrow

That no more she hears
thy tread;

That the night which
knows no sorrow
Darkly veils thy laureled
head.

In all there are possibly 14 or 15 graves in the plot, although some of the stones have broken in pieces and the mounds have disappeared. Stumps of some of the trees cut by Mr. Durning are more than a foot in diameter and a groundhog has dug himself a den nearly in the center of the enclosure.

No burials for 50 years

Apparently there have been no burials there for more than a half century, for one of the most recent dates appears on the stone marking the grave of Sarah Lambert, wife of John Artz, who died Feb. 3, 1880 and whose fine monument is still well preserved.

One of the youngest children ever buried in the little

cemetery seems to have been Luly Ashbaugh, daughter of J.M. and M.C. Ashbaugh, who died Dec. 15, 1865 at the age of two months and one day, while another stone marks the resting place of John Ashbaugh, who died Oct. 15, 1853 at the age of 71 years.

The earliest of the graves is that of Caroline, wife of Samuel Artz, who died Jan. 22, 1852.

Family well known

At the time the cemetery was established, the Artz family owned more than 1,000 acres of land in that community, according to Dan W. Twelftree, himself an old resident of the Sugar Grove neighborhood. For almost as long as he can remember, the cemetery has been practically abandoned, although efforts have been made and are still being made to have it cared for.

During his life, the late Andrew Welliver, at one time a well-known resident of Aledo, took care of the graves from time to time and it is recalled that he placed flags on two graves on Memorial Day, which strengthens the belief that there are two veterans buried there.

While Isaac Artz, one of the owners of the old mill, was alive, it was well kept, the evergreens, which have since disappeared, were always trimmed and the wall in repair. But today in many places the wall has fallen and the ornate iron gate has slipped from its hinges, so that it can no longer be opened. It is of little importance, however, for few visit the cemetery anymore. It and its dead are almost forgotten.

Times Record
6-1-2005

Artz Cemetery rededicated

Times
Recorder
6-8-2005



This backside of the Artz Cemetery shows a blending of the old and the new as freshly painted pickets adorn a portion of the north side of the Cemetery, abutted against sandstone slabs from an old gristmill. Around 30 individuals came out for its Memorial Ceremony on Saturday, May 28 at 10 a.m. Clear skies overlooked the vista of this more than 150-year old cemetery in rural Mercer County.

Cathy Decker Staff Reporter

While no burial has taken place in Artz Cemetery for more than 100 years and many of the gravestones are showing more than a just little bit of wear, the 40 by 60 foot cemetery has undergone some recent upgrading. Around 30 people gathered to pay tribute to those who have gone before on the Saturday before Memorial Day, May 28.

Welcoming words from Bill Lindquist included mention of Rosey Artz's gravesite from 1865, "We are all standing on the shoulders of these pioneers," he said.

Pauline Robinson prayed that God's blessings be given to the hallowed

grounds of this cemetery.

Rev. John Theiryoung of St. Catherine's Catholic Church quoted a portion of the book 1776 by David McCullough - "We are shaped by those we have never met," was one line from the book that became the theme of his reflections.

Rev. Web Brower of Hamlet Perryton Presbyterian Church talked about the teaching that has gone on before by the people who have tilled the land, by the people that have come before us. "The folks that made this place a home were industrious and economical people," he said.

Music was provided by Ottis and Rita Eggan on guitars, as visitors that day sang "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "How Great Thou Art."