

Cemetery

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occupants of the cemetery, and ends with a plea for someone to do something about the condition of the final resting place of the local pioneers who, as he put it, "deserve a better memorial than this cemetery in its present condition."

But just who *does* the Rice cemetery belong to? No one seemed to know in 1961, and now, nearly 40 years later, the question is still unanswered. The cemetery is not affiliated with any particular church; it was originally started by a private individual, possibly a man named Snyder, as a public burial ground at some point around 1810. The last owner is thought to have been one Christian Rice, who died in the late 1800s. "Right now we have our new solicitor, Matt Reinert, looking to see if he can find a trail as to who actually would own it. I believe it's been done before, and we've run into a dead end, but we're going to give it a try again," said Tim Carroll, mayor of Dallas.

Around the time the condition of the cemetery was brought to his attention, Carroll decided to start what will be called the Mayor's Club, which is to be a non-profit organization to benefit various causes in Dallas Borough. It will be run on a donation basis, and Carroll will start it off by donating his \$600 yearly salary as Mayor. John Oliver and William Peiffer have also agreed to start off the fund by making donations. Two citizens, Drew Fitch and Brett Slocum, are also committed to the project. A local business has provided three dozen hats to be sold as fund-raisers.

The monies received will go toward special projects and concerns that taxpayers' money cannot or should not be appropriated for, such as community service projects, youth groups, and maintenance of historic sites. The Mayor's Club is in the process of being set up as a non-profit, charitable organization so that contri-



The past, present and future of Rice Cemetery upkeep. From left: Jim Davis, Sean Smith, Tim Carroll.

"I don't know why we did it. It just seemed like something that needed to be done."

Jim Davis

Took care of the cemetery for many years

butions will be tax-deductible. Carroll is very enthusiastic about it: "It's going to be a community thing," he said. "The money can be used for all kinds of good causes."

One of the first projects to benefit from Mayor's Club funds will be the cleanup of Rice Cemetery. Sean Smith, a Boy Scout in search

of a project to gain Eagle Scout status, approached Mayor Carroll to see about doing something about the state of the cemetery. Carroll agreed with him that it was an excellent idea, but taxpayer funds could not be allocated towards the project.

According to Jim Davis, Rice did have a caretaker once upon a long time ago — until a branch from one of the huge old pines fell on him and killed him (or so goes the legend). New pine trees were planted in 1927 by the Boy Scouts of Troop 281, and then in the early 1930s the Works Progress Administration (WPA) mowed the plots, built the steps leading up to the grounds, and kept the headstones upright. But by the 1960s Rice was virtually abandoned.

There has been one notable effort made in recent years to restore and maintain it. Davis and

his friend Ron Buckman spent more than 100 hours in the summer of 1986 attempting to get the cemetery into a more respectable condition. "I don't know why we did it," Davis said. "It just seemed like something that needed to be done. It's been a mess since I was a kid."

Davis and Buckman bought secondhand lawn mowers and other equipment, and set out to tame the wilderness that had sprung up in the cemetery. "It took us the whole summer to cut down the brush," Davis said. Some days he and Buckman worked from dawn until dusk. "Our wives would come out and bring us our supper in picnic baskets."

The remaining headstones were mostly in poor condition: erosion, neglect and vandalism had taken their toll. "There were only about four stones left standing. We fixed a lot of them with masonry cement and epoxy," Davis said. He said that the Veterans' Administration provided a new tombstone for one of the seven or so Civil War veterans interred at Rice. Davis also attempted to put together a burial record of sorts, since the

original one — if there was one — has long since been lost.

Other aspects of the cemetery have been lost, too. At one time there was a small building on the grounds that served as an observation point during World War II, and later as a voting station. There was also a fire siren mounted on a tower that may have been used during the war as an air-raid alarm.

Davis tried to keep the cemetery in order for some time after the initial cleanup, but health problems forced him to quit. "It was too much to handle," he said. "I would like to see someone take care of it again."

It looks as though someone will. Sean Smith, the Boy Scout who got the ball rolling with his request, has received the necessary permission, and intends to start work on the project by early October. He will enlist the aid of friends and family, including his fellow Scouts from Troop 155 of Trucksville Methodist Church. Smith and his "crew" will first cut down the tangled growth and saw up a tree that has fallen; the borough has promised to haul it away as with any other yard waste. Next Smith plans to get a weed whacker and clear off all the brush around the graves, and then check and catalogue the inscriptions, using the record Jim Davis compiled as a guide.

Smith hopes to be finished with the preliminary cleanup by Thanksgiving. He's excited about the prospect of making order out of the chaos that currently is Rice Cemetery: "I think it will be fun. It'll be interesting to see how many graves we can find, and to see what it will look like when it's done," he said.

But what will be done about Rice Cemetery in the future? Carroll says he would like to allocate Mayor's Club funds towards some annual upkeep to prevent the cemetery from reverting back to its overgrown and decrepit state. "It would be an excellent ongoing community service project," he says.

So perhaps soon Rice Cemetery will be a fitting resting place for local pioneers and Civil War veterans, and remain that way in years to come.

For more information about the Mayor's Club, or to make a donation, contact Drew Fitch of R. N. Fitch & Sons at 675-0646; Brett Slocum of Slocum Insurance at 675-1167; or Tim Carroll at 675-5873.

Group plans showcase for local business

Local business people and members of the public will have an opportunity to rub elbows in a relaxed setting when the Back Mountain Business & Professional Association (BMBPA) presents its first Business Fair and Card Exchange.

The event will be held Thursday, Oct. 26, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Stax & Co. restaurant in the Twin Stacks Center. Member businesses will set up displays in the "Natona Room," adjacent to the main dining area, and will present their products and services for review. Complimentary hors d'oeuvres and soft drinks will be provided and a cash bar will be available. The businesses will also offer door prizes, such as a 1/4 page ad from The Dallas Post, and may free "goodies" will be available.

Major sponsors of the event are Stax & Co., Grange National Bank, The Dallas Post, and the Overbrook restaurant, which will also provide entertainment. About 15 exhibitors have already signed up, including Travel Junction, Lewith & Freeman Real Estate, Mailboxes Etc. and Valentine's.

Display spaces are available only to BMBPA members at \$50 each. Any business that is not presently a member may join the association for 2001 at this time by paying the \$75 annual dues, and may become an exhibitor by paying the \$50 fee. Reservations must be received by Oct. 6.

For more information, call Ron Bartizek at 675-5211. To make a reservation, send your entry fee of \$50 to: BMBPA, P.O. Box 25, Dallas PA 18612. If you are not presently a member, please include the \$75 annual fee and information about how to contact you.

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Rice Cemetery was neat and clean in this 1986 photo taken by Jim Davis during the period when he and Ron Buckman took care of the site on their own time. It is now overgrown and filled with debris. The new "Mayor's Club" will help Eagle Scout candidate Sean Smith reclaim the cemetery's dignity.



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