

Stafford County Cemetery Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, September 20, 2023

Meeting called to order at 10 AM, Planning & Zoning Conference Room

In attendance: Anita Dodd, Chair

Debbi Shelton-Scites, Secretary

Vicky Sowers, Administrative Manager, Planning & Zoning

Heather Perdue, Citizens Assistance & Volunteer Services

Barbara Flack, volunteer

Anne Kline, volunteer

Carl Kline

Linda Tague, volunteer

Jennifer Marsh, volunteer

CHAIR REPORT

Anita would like a volunteer for the position of secretary to take notes and record minutes, as we had previously done. Anita nominated Debbi, second by Anne. Debbi will be secretary with Anne as back up.

Anita has been in contact with a citizen who lives in North Carolina concerning relatives buried in unmarked graves at Cedar Run Cemetery on QMCB. Citizen would like to mark the graves and QMCB has approved the placement. Anita has access to sandstone for the markers through Rick & Jerrilyn MacGregor of the SCHS and she is in contact with private citizen, Bill Shelton to do the carving. Anita then discussed the abundance of homemade headstones in Stafford and that there are many similarities between them that indicate that they were done by the same person. Homemade headstones were popular from the mid-1800s through the 1930s.

Anita has been approached by an archaeologist from Prince William County, who would like to survey the cemeteries on QMCB, which the SCCC has already surveyed. She is setting up a meeting with him to share our information and assist him as she can.

OLD BUSINESS

-Update on survey list: Nancy Kotting, Stafford County Cultural Resource Specialist, has been working with Anita to consolidate the database of surveys done. Except for a few discrepancies, the list is complete. There are 431 cemeteries that have been documented by surveys and about 100 more to be surveyed as soon as we can get property owner permission and access to the parcels.

-Update on web site: Vicky Sowers will work with the County IT department to make cemetery database information available to the public on the County website. The current website, www.sccc-va.com, will continue to be maintained by the committee as usual. Debbi will continue to download the transcriptions from the surveys onto the website for public access.

NEW BUSINESS

-Cemetery Ordinance Amendment: The current local ordinance [28-39(o)] applies to a cemetery on property that is to be developed and a cleanup process was not included in in the current language. Anita proposes to submit the following as an amendment:

(NEW BUSINESS: Cemetery Ordinance Amendment- cont'd)

The following should be inserted after the letter f.:

The cemetery, and its buffer, should be cleaned of any downed trees and branches. Care should be taken not to disturb, for any reason, any cemetery markers and/or gravestones and purposely planted vegetation. A county agent should be consulted concerning the recommended cleaning practices for the grounds of the cemetery and for any special cleaning needs of the cemetery.

The following should be inserted within letter i.:

A copy of the Stafford County Cemetery Ordinance is to be given to the designated party responsible for the maintenance of the cemetery. The designated party is to receive contact information for the county agent. The county agent is to receive contact information for the person or organization responsible for the cemetery's maintenance.

The following should be rewritten for letter j.:

The county agent should be contacted for any preservation of grave markers, including repair or cleaning. Any preservation of grave markers shall comply with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources standards.

-Cemetery Committee as County Agent: In the ordinance, the term "County Agent" is used repeatedly. Nancy Kotting will be checking if the term can be defined as the SCCC, as we are the agency that gets contacted when issues arise and although we are a volunteer committee, we are sanctioned by the County.

-Next Survey Dates: In order to update the cemetery database, SCCC volunteers will be going out in the field to recheck cemeteries already surveyed to check on their condition. The following dates have been scheduled:

Friday, September 29, 2023, 10:00 AM

Thursday, October 12, 2023, 10:00 AM

On both dates, the volunteers will meet at the rear of the main Courthouse parking lot, near the Armed Forces Memorial and carpool to cemeteries selected by Anita for review.

-Memorial Day Event: Due to COVID restrictions, our Memorial Event has been cancelled for the past couple years. We would like to start again in 2024. Debbi was contacted by Bruce Perkins, whose son is a cadet at VMI. The son would like to bring a group of VMI cadets to clean the Gray Cemetery at Traveller's Rest on Rt. 3 and then be a part of our Memorial Day event there. Debbi will contact the property owners and Mr. Perkins to get the event scheduled.

Historical significance- The Gray cemetery is the burial place of VMI alumni, John Bowie Gray, who was an 18-year-old cadet at the Battle of New Market, where on May 15, 1864, and against all odds, a makeshift Confederate army of 4,100 men, including VMI cadets, defeated the larger Army of the Shenandoah. The cadets, numbering 257, were called into battle, and organized into a battalion of four companies of Infantry and one section of Artillery. Ten cadets were killed in battle or died later from the effects of their wounds; 45 were wounded. The youngest participating cadet was fifteen; the oldest twenty-five. After the battle, he remained with the VMI cadet corps in the trenches at Richmond and at the Alms House. In 1866, he lost his state cadetship, creating financial difficulty, but he returned after the war to complete his studies and graduate. He finished 9th of 11 graduates in an original class of 295. After graduation, Gray returned to Stafford County and the family home, Travellers' Rest, where he remained in the family business as a respected farmer and stock raiser for the rest of his life. The farm produced "Pure-bred Jersey and Short Horn Cattle...Pure Cotswold Sheep...and Registered Poland China Swine" which were shipped to Germany and Cuba, in addition to the US southern states.

(Above information from the VMI Archives and 'Not For Fame Or Reward: VMI's Civil War Soldiers and Sailors' by Albert Z. Conner.)

Meeting adjourned at 11:35AM