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For immediate release

Care of restored pioneer cemetery now in county's hands

Carved into the stones are names of Rice County's earliest settlers: Zabel, Nelson, Embury and Koch. Among them lie veterans of the Civil War and the War of 1812, local tradesmen and children who never reached their first birthday.

For 15 years, the Friends of Old Prairieville Cemetery unearthed headstones, cut brush and landscaped the knoll just east of Faribault, and tended to the abandoned and nearly forgotten burial grounds. But as members of the Friends have aged, maintaining the property has become increasingly difficult, and citing a provision in state law, they asked Rice County to take over maintenance of the cemetery.

On Tuesday, the Rice County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved the request.

Commissioner Jeff Docken noted the work of the Friends, represented Tuesday by Tim Lloyd and David Zabel.

"Thank you for all work that went into that," he said. "We appreciate that."

State statute allows counties to fund maintenance for abandoned or neglected private cemeteries containing the remains of pioneers, Minnesotans who died before 1875, or veterans of the Civil War or U.S. armed services.

According to research done by Assistant Rice County Attorney Sean McCarthy, at least 37 of those buried at Old Prairieville Cemetery died before 1875. Also buried there are Civil War veteran Edward F. Cosert, a member of Minnesota's 7th Infantry Regiment, and Isaac Barrick, a local blacksmith who served in the War of 1812 and whose descendants still live in Rice County.

When local residents began working at the cemetery in 2007, it was "totally overgrown and abandoned," Lloyd told the board. They organized the Friends, funded the restoration and researched most all buried there.



A pair of Old Prairieville Cemetery tombstones are among those deliberately buried by some of the area's early 20th century settlers and uncovered by members of a nonprofit that over the last 15 years has restored the burial grounds. On Tuesday, the Board of Commissioners agreed to have the county take over its maintenance. (Rice County photo)

“We took on the removal of many trees and stumps (maybe 100), cut away brush, landscaped it for grassing it over, uncovered and restored some 30 stones that had been buried since the 30s, placed signage for historical information and established a 501(c)(3),” he said.

Any remaining funds will be given to the county to assist with the cemetery’s upkeep.

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