

The Plight of Many Seneca County Cemeteries

A visit to the “abandoned” Scott and Weed cemeteries on May 27, 200, greatly raised my concern about the future of many of our old cemeteries in Seneca County. I say this because of what I saw that had happened to one huge gravestone in the Weed cemetery. Kate Lynch, a major local history buff who lives in New York City and is currently doing some research on the Scott family, had offered to take me to these two cemeteries, as Dale Theetge had taken her there about two weeks earlier. After struggling our way through the brush and undergrowth to get to the Scott cemetery just east of Route 96 north of Interlaken, we proceeded with difficulty to cross a short distance over to the area where several members of the Weed family are buried. After looking at a few stones, Kate turned to me and said that somewhere there was this huge gravestone—of Mrs. Ephraim Weed--near the creek bank, being held up by a small tree. After a couple minutes of searching, she sensed that something bad must have happened in the time since she had been there. Searching a little further, she cried out that the big gravestone she was looking for was down the bank next to the small stream of water. We were both rather shocked to realize that something so tragic could happen in such a short time. We went back this past fall with, taking Ovid Historian Gail Snyder with us, to get the gravestone out of the creek bank. We managed to get the stone up on the west bank and leaned it up against a tree. While at the cemetery we also dug the gravestone of Ephraim Weed out of the ground and propped it up against a tree.

On page 22 of *Bits and Pieces of Two Hundred Years*, a 1994 publication of the Ovid Bicentennial Committee, the Scott Cemetery is described as follows:

This cemetery is located in the woods to the east of a parking area along Rte. 96 about a half mile north of the Rte. 96, and County Rd. 139, intersection. This cemetery was established by Gideon Scott on his land when his wife Anne died in 1815. Names included in this cemetery are Bloomer, Sayer, Scott, and Vanliew. At the east side of this cemetery is a swale and to the east of that are headstones of the Weed family.

Kate and I saw the Gideon Scott gravestone and those of several other Scotts and Vanliewes. Some of these stones were flat to the ground with dirt and small vegetation nearly covering them up. Most of the stones were slate but a few were marble or granite. Although there was much vegetation growth in addition to the many stones that were not standing up like they should be, I sensed that this old cemetery had been cared for until fairly recently. Kate confirmed this by telling me that Dale Theetge had told her that a Scott family descendant by the name of Powell had cared for this cemetery for many years until his death.

The Weed family portion of the cemetery was clearly in a more serious state of neglect and decline. The *Between the Lakes Cemeteries* book describes “The Weed Plot” as “located across a swale from the Old Scott Farm Plot. The Weeds were neighbors of the Scotts.” In a conversation with Naomi Brewer, president of the Ovid Historical Society, I learned why the Weed portion had probably been less cared for from the beginning of burial of Weed family members. Naomi Brewer told me that several members of the Weed family died of diphtheria and, reflecting the fears of the times, that a ditch was deliberately dug to separate their burial area from that of the Scotts.

What is true of the Scott and Weed cemeteries is itself a tragedy. Unfortunately, however, there are merely an example of the serious state of neglect and decline in many of our old

cemeteries in the county. The Mandeville Cemetery is another example. Quoting from the previously mentioned 1994 book, this cemetery is described as

on the north side of County Rd. 139, not far above the intersection with Potter Rd. Stones have sunken or are broken and some are unreadable. Sumac has taken over. Some years ago the Scouts cleared it off, but nature has taken over again. Capt. John Mandeville, a Revolutionary War soldier, is buried there along with his family members. Others are buried there with names such as Holton, White, Craven, Blue, and Osborn.

The burial place of a Revolutionary War soldier is reason enough for this cemetery to be suitably maintained. Several other cemeteries in the county are the burial sites of Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and/or Civil War veterans.

The Finger Lakes National Forest and the Backbone Ridge History Group has been involved in the cleanup of some cemeteries and are to be commended for their efforts. Much work remains to be done even in those cemeteries.

It is clear that many volunteers need to come forward as well as our local governments if many of our deteriorating cemeteries are to be made accessible in fitting respect to those who have been buried there.