

Daggitt cemetery: Historic site ripe for rediscovery

By Christine A. Verstraete

Who owns the historic Daggitt or Brasside cemetery, which is fallen into disrepair? What should be done to fix it up, and who should take responsibility for the burial site on Lake-Cook Rd. east of the Chicago & North Western rail tracks?

These are questions raised by a number of Highland Park and Glencoe residents in the last month. They have contacted Highland Park city and park district officials with information or questions on the cemetery. But nothing definite has been decided.

The park district thinks the city should take over ownership. The Ravinia Garden Club is also waiting for word from city officials before they do any kind of intensive restoration or clean-up.

Marcy Pomerantz, member of the city's corporation counsel staff, said that city officials are interested in the cemetery and will probably look into its being nominated for landmark status, but first the ownership has to be determined. If no owners are located, the city can acquire the cemetery by having it condemned or declared abandoned.

SOME ANSWERS MAY be forthcoming with the help of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency's Preservation Services Division (IHPA).

The Illinois Cemetery Project was launched by the agency in December, 1986 with the intent of locating and recording cemeteries across the state. The information will be tabulated through surveys that were mailed March 15 to more than 1,500 Illinois cemetery associations, genealogical societies and historical groups.

The completed surveys will include details on cemetery locations; ownership; whether they are private or public; burial population and ethnic makeup; accessibility; maintenance; design, condition and number of gravesites; history; whether the cemetery is located on its original site; and other information.

The IHPA plans to use the information to develop a guidebook to Illinois cemeteries and make a computerized record of the existing cemeteries by township, county location and founding dates. A tentative May 1 deadline has been set for completed surveys to be submitted. So far, the agency has file cards developed on 50 area cemeteries and it hopes to have a lot of the information compiled by fall, said Veronica Taylor, IHPA cemetery researcher.

"Finding out information like this, we hope that we can help when people call asking for information," Taylor said. "Hopefully the most we will accomplish is in raising public awareness and to have people know their local history. The best thing we hope to get is volunteers interested in the cemeteries whom we can then teach to rub stones or work on preservation."

THE LAKE COUNTY Genealogical Society, which meets at Libertyville's Cook Library, has been active in compiling information from various local cemeteries in the last 10 years. Members recently copied approximately 180 inscriptions from tombstones in the Daggitt cemetery. Information on the cemeteries is then compiled and published in guidebooks according to township, said Joan Roden, the society's cemetery chairman. Roden said that the information on the Daggitt cemetery is



The historic Daggitt cemetery on Lake-Cook Rd. east of the Chicago & North Western railroad tracks in Highland Park's Brasside neighborhood needs upgrading. It is unclear, however, who is responsible for maintaining the burial site. (Staff photo by Bill Powers)

still being tabulated.

The Daggitt cemetery was founded in the late 1800's by Robert Daggitt, an early pioneer from Yorkshire, England. Both Glencoe and Highland Park claim him as an early settler because of indistinct town boundaries at that time.

In recent years, the cemetery has fallen into disrepair. Since 1982, Highland Park's forestry department has done sporadic clean-up work at the cemetery. In 1985, the city initiated a land title search of the cemetery which indicated that no transactions had been made since 1930. The document listed John V. Fold and Robert Daggitt Jr. as trustees.

While cemetery ownership is often passed on to successive family generations with funds set aside for continuing maintenance, nothing has been found on the cemetery's continuing care.

THE CLOSEST DIRECT relatives, Barrington resident Foster Dennis, 94, and Waukegan resident Nester Daggitt, 84, who expressed concern about the cemetery but said they knew they couldn't care for it and they wondered what could be done. Daggitt, who moved to Waukegan in 1931, with his wife, Thelma, has been active in trying to research his family history.

"I remember that there was a committee of some kind at different times when I was younger. It seemed like it was taken care of by the Dennis family and other associations. I would think that the city would take it and make it a historic place where it would be well-kept," Daggitt said.

Dennis said that he "always understood that the cemetery had a state charter. There's no money for it; it was always kept up by volunteers," he said.

Dennis is related to the original Daggitts on his mother's side: His great-grandmother was Elizabeth Daggitt, daughter of founders Robert and Martha (Lightholder) Daggitt. Dennis' sister, Rose Dennis Booth, was the last relative to be buried in the cemetery in 1984.

NESTER DAGGITT ALSO has two



The late Albert and Ida Daggitt were the parents of Nester Daggitt, who is one of the remaining direct relatives of persons buried at the cemetery.

brothers, Ernest and Ivan who live in Michigan; and a sister, Irene (Daggitt) Bealer who lives in Indiana. Another brother, Earl, is deceased. Nester's father, Albert, was the son of John and Sarah (Richardson) Daggitt. John was one of 10 children born to founders Robert and Martha Daggitt.

Highland Park resident Harold Rudolph, 76, said that his whole family is buried in the Daggitt cemetery. He said that he's tried periodically to keep up his family's plot, but more has to be done.

"Different ones had tried to take care of it, but we're all getting older now," Rudolph said. "A lot of the stones have been moved or the rain has whittled the sandstone markers away. I feel awful about that, like my little sister's stone is gone. If some society or group wanted to oversee it, I wouldn't be against that. At one time the Lutheran Church in Glencoe took care of it, but they closed."

Any improvement would be a lot of improvement."

Glencoe resident John T. Hickey also has expressed concern about the cemetery. Hickey said that his grandparents, Sperry and Evelyn Pope, were Glencoe residents and founding members of the North Shore Methodist Church. The Popes and other family members are buried in the family's plot in the east-center section of the cemetery.

TO HONOR THE memory of the Pope family, Hickey said that he and possibly his sister and brothers, would be interested in participating with others to help finance the cemetery's maintenance. Those who are interested in participating in such an arrangement or can provide other information on the cemetery's ownership can contact the Highland Park office of Pioneer Press.