



# The BUCKEYE LAKE Beacon

www.buckeyelakebeacon.net

Vol. 16 No. 43

Serving all the communities of the Buckeye Lake Region

Saturday, October 29, 2011

## DIGGIN' GRAVES

### Conservation group restores Somerset cemetery

By Scott Rawdon

**SOMERSET** – A small Somerset cemetery became the focus of a major restoration effort earlier this month as Beth Santore, chair of the Association for Gravestone Studies' Ohio Chapter, worked with village officials to organize a workshop to repair damaged gravestones and even invited a professional gravestone conservator to help. More than 30 people gathered at Somerset's Evangelical Lutheran Church Cemetery Oct. 8, a sunny Saturday morning, to learn the art of gravestone restoration.

The Somerset cemetery wasn't chosen at random.

"In August I received an e-mail from a fellow Association for

Gravestone Studies board



member, Ta Mara Conde," said Santore. Conde, a professional gravestone conservator, owns New Salem Massachusetts' Historic Gravestone Services. "She has family in the Cleveland area, and she wanted to know if I'd be interested in hosting a gravestone conservation workshop since I'm the chair of the AGS Ohio Chapter," said Santore. "I couldn't pass that up!" Conde said the workshop could be anywhere in Ohio. "Since Somerset is my favorite town in the entire state, I e-mailed Mayor Tom Johnson and asked if he'd be okay doing a workshop there on Oct 8." Johnson approved, and Santore's organization partnered with the Perry County Historical Society to make it happen. Conde taught the workshop, which Johnson and Santore organized. Participants arrived from all over Ohio, including Toledo and New Concord.

The group fixed a total of 17 stones. Santore said it was mostly simple resets—straightening leaning or tilted gravestones—as well as repairing shattered stones. "We also cleaned many



more gravestones in addition to the ones repaired," she said.

The group began the day learning about different types of stones and materials, the various styles of gravestones—tablet, obelisk, chest tomb, among others—and how to clean them properly. "It's important to wash from the bottom up to avoid getting dirty streaks down the stone," said Santore. Water and a soft bristle brush are usually sufficient, but if a stone is covered in lichens, a chemical called D/2 is used to kill the lichen without damaging the stone. "Ammonia diluted in water can also be used, but soaps, detergents, and bleach should never be used," she said.

"Gravestones that are a public safety hazard, meaning they could fall and hurt someone, should be some of the first repairs made," said Santore. A professional conservator is recommended for the larger stones, as they can present a safety hazard to those repairing them. "Stone safety is another factor," she said. A gravestone leaning forward or backward, or tilting side-to-side is more susceptible to damage. "Those should get a higher priority," said Santore. And finally, she said, historical value should be taken into consideration. "If it's the gravestone of a famous resident, such as a town founder or war veteran, those stones should also get a higher priority over others," said Santore.

"There are some incredible stones there," said Conde. "Almost every one was unique." She said many of the stones were inscribed in German and some of the participants were related to those buried at the cemetery. Conde said the cemetery hosts a surface box tomb, which is unusual for such a small site. "The body's actually underground," she said. Some "mint condition" stones, which fell over many years ago, were discovered just beneath the grassy soil. The crowd's



enthusiasm impressed Conde, an Ohio native. "We had to stop them at the end of the day so we could go home," she said. "Ohioans are really a pitch-in type of crowd."

The group learned the importance of recording all the information on the gravestones exactly as it was originally inscribed. Santore said a record should always be publicly available if the stones ever become victims of foul weather, age, or vandalism.

"We all agree that the workshop was a huge success!" said Santore, who never dreamed the group would repair so many gravestones. "I talked to Ta Mara after the workshop, and she said she had never worked with such an enthusiastic bunch of people," said Santore. "She was so impressed with the amount of work we accomplished. I've also been involved with several conservation workshops, and this one was by far the best I've attended."

Santore thanked the Somerset Village Council, specifically council members David Snider and Doug Miller, who arranged to have a 275-gallon water tank brought

to the cemetery for the group to use. "Also, thanks to the Perry County Historical Society and Mayor Johnson for allowing us to work in the cemetery, and for providing lots of support for the project," she said.

The Association for Gravestone Studies is a non-profit organization based out of Greenfield, Massachusetts with about 1,000 members. It was formed in 1977. The Ohio Chapter was formed in September 2010, and was the third chapter for the AGS. As well as being chair, Santore began her third two-year term as a trustee for the national organization and serves as treasurer. The organization's web site is [www.gravestonestudies.org](http://www.gravestonestudies.org).

Photos by Scott Rawdon & Beth Santore

