

Introduction

This project began in the fall of 2005 when the Marion Township Clerk, Tammy Beal, expressed interest in forming a group to assess the condition the three township owned cemeteries: Green, Harger, and Lakeside. She recruited a group of volunteers to dedicate their time to caring for these old cemeteries. This group began meeting on a regular basis and established the following goals: cleaning the cemetery grounds of trash and debris, removing excess and over-grown vegetation, cleaning and repairing broken headstones, and updating the burial records of the cemeteries.

This last task seemed to be the most daunting. At the time, the township burial records were stored in several different places and formats. More significantly, most of the old burials were without any records at all. Another challenge was to correlate the burial records to the correct location in each cemetery. This is the task that I felt most compelled by.

I consulted the township records, along with those of the sexton, Tom Lloyd, to come up with a list of what the township already knew. I next looked at the previous cemetery transcriptions (mostly by the D.A.R. in the 1940's) to see what was missing. I quickly discovered that there were many differences between the two sources, as well as burials included in the township records that were not in the D.A.R. transcriptions and vice-versa. It became obvious that the best way to reconcile the two with each other, and to the headstones at the cemeteries, would be to create a new set of transcriptions.

The transcription records for these cemeteries are very good, but were in need of updating. The D.A.R. transcriptions were done in the 1940's, and thus were missing 60 years of burials. These transcriptions also missed several headstones that were present in the 1940's and made many factual errors in the ones that were recorded. In addition, the biggest difficulty in using these transcriptions is that the recorded names are in no real order, and it is impossible to know where in the cemetery each headstone is.

Thus, I decided that the new transcriptions would be "georeferenced," that is, each recorded name would also include the burial location. Thankfully, the township has old maps for its three cemeteries that have numbers for each lot, along with the historical lot owners listed. From here, I could get a good idea of which headstone went with each lot, but uncertainty still existed. The big question was, where exactly did each lot fall on the ground in the cemetery? This task would require updated maps.

In a modern cemetery, the task of locating the lots on the ground would be accomplished by simply measuring the location of the lot markers. However, these cemeteries are quite old, and the lot markers (if they ever existed) have long since been obliterated. For several years, the cemetery sextons have relied on the physical location of headstones and burial vaults to determine the where the graves actually are. This is essentially what I did.

A surveying instrument known as a total station was used to precisely measure the location of every headstone in each cemetery. In addition, the boundary markers for each cemetery were also located in this manner. Once this was done, the headstones were plotted in AutoCAD software to determine where the stones were located relative to the cemetery boundaries. Using the information depicted on the old township maps, I was able to reconcile the location of each headstone to its corresponding lot. I then used AutoCAD to create maps for each cemetery depicting the correct lot location. These are included with the transcriptions.

From a quick visual inspection, one can see that the actual location of the lots does not match the plotted locations of the lots as found on the old township maps. This is because of the inexact nature in which the graves have been laid out over the years. In addition, headstones have been moved, misplaced, or lost. However, the existing headstone locations remain the best evidence of the lot locations available.

It is also apparent that there is a wealth of information available in the township records that are not known simply by examining a headstone. This is especially true if someone was buried without a marker. These new transcriptions were designed to include the vital information found in the township records.

About the Transcriptions

There are separate transcriptions recorded for the three township owned cemeteries. All of the transcriptions have every lot listed on the left side of each page. Each lot includes a historical owner listed with the lot. These names come from the old township maps on record. Most new lots have multiple owners and are shown as such. If no owner is known of record, then such is noted as well. The names of those buried in each lot are listed next. For the most part, these names are listed north to south. The surname of each person listed is shown in capital letters. In some instances names shown on a headstone will just be a given name. If the surname is known, it will be shown with the given name. With the exception of those instances, all information shown is as it appears on the headstones or monuments. Any notes or comments added by the author are shown in parentheses.

In many instances, the older headstones are very difficult to read. If this is so, it is noted and in some cases a question mark is shown to let the reader know that doubt exists. Also, the D.A.R. transcriptions were sometimes used to help clarify what is inscribed in the stones. If this is the case, then "(DAR)" appears in the text.

All information provided by the township records is also shown in parentheses. This includes birth dates, death dates, burial dates, birth locations, death locations, ages at death, cremations, and veteran status. Although this information always appears in parenthesis, the name of the person interred never does. In instances where the burial is without a headstone, such is noted in the record.

At the end of each cemetery transcription there is also a listing of names of those buried for whom a burial location is unknown. These come from the township records and most-likely represent those buried without a headstone. In other instances, perhaps those listed were buried in a different cemetery, but somehow were recorded with Marion Township. Whatever the case may be, these names are shown for the record.

Other Cemeteries

There are also two other cemeteries that are found in Marion Township. These are the Livingston County Poor Farm Cemetery and the Drew Cemetery. These cemeteries are not owned or cared for by the township; however, they are a part of the history of the township and are included herein. There are no historical maps of these cemeteries and there are no burial records. These cemeteries were mapped out just as the other burial grounds and created a lot naming convention to correspond to how the other cemeteries had been done. Again, the D.A.R. transcriptions were used to help decipher the inscriptions on the stones found in these cemeteries.

Marion Township also is home to a mystery cemetery. In the 1895 Atlas of Livingston County, a cemetery is shown in the Southwest quarter of Section 29, on the west side of Hinchey Road, and on land owned by Felix Basing. It is unknown if a cemetery actually exists at this location, or if this is a mapping error. There are no visible grave markers at this location and a search at the county Register of Deeds Office did not find any land record of a cemetery in this section. Also, Felix Basing and his family are buried in Gilkes Cemetery and the cemetery does not appear in any other atlas of Livingston County.

Cemetery Descriptions and Histories

Each cemetery also includes a brief description of the location and layout of the lots. In addition, an in-depth history is included with the description of each cemetery. These histories include all of the recorded information of the past, including first known burials, land transactions, other published histories, and cemetery maps. All facts and quotations are cited and the sources can be found on the Works Cited page.

Master Index

The D.A.R. cemetery transcriptions were performed without the benefit of an index to help quickly find those interred in each cemetery. Pam Rietch has since compiled such an index for the D.A.R. records, but I included a new index as well for these transcriptions. The names included on the index include all of those known to be buried in Marion Township. Each name is listed along with which cemetery and lot the burial occurred. For Harger Cemetery, there are sections and lots for the burials. Thus, these names have two numbers, the first is the section, and the second is the lot. In addition, the names of the lot owners are included only if that person does not appear in any other record. Burials of unknown locations are listed simply as “unk” for unknown.

Acknowledgements

This project would not be possible without the aid of several others, the most notable of which is the Marion Township Preservation Committee. Their weekend cleanup efforts and evening meetings have established a precedent of care that will hopefully benefit the future of the township cemeteries. The committee's membership includes: Brad Beal, Tammy Beal, Bob and Susan Beardsley, Karl Bohn, Bob Brown, Milt Charboneau, Bob Hanvey, Gene Smith, David Thomas, Suzanne Vogel, Tom, Brandyn, and Becca Zielke.

I also need to thank the township sexton, Tom Lloyd for answering countless questions and providing valuable records, as well as Gary Beal for helping to survey the cemeteries. The Howell Area Archives have also provided a wealth of information regarding the history of the cemeteries and those interred there. Special thanks are needed to Milt Charboneau and Duane Zemper for their vast knowledge of local history and enthusiastic support.

Credit also needs to be given to Pam Rietch for her fantastic website livgenmi.com, one of the best genealogy and local history websites on the web. Not only does she have the complete D.A.R. records transcribed and indexed, but she also has images of most of the headstones in Marion Township. Her website also has an index of the death records of Livingston County, as well as the 1880 Ellis History of Livingston County and plat atlases from 1875, 1895, and 1915. Anyone searching for anything remotely related to the history of Livingston County is encouraged to visit her website first.

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