

# Historic cemetery is puzzling

*Clues remain buried as old Broadview Road plot is rededicated*

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Here's a riddle that's puzzling some local history buffs.

When is a cemetery not a cemetery?

There's no Mother Goose, nursery rhyme-type answer, but some residents are seeking a solution.



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*The Historical Society of Old Brooklyn has uncovered several buried grave markers in the Union Burial Ground. Searching for more markers is society member Richard Bowles, as Louise Evans, left, Neil Richardson and Carole Wooten look on. Sun photo by Brad Ruebensaal.*

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Neil Richardson of Brooklyn Heights collected a thick binder of records, documents, maps and so on in an attempt to solve the brain-teaser, at least as it applies to a plot of land that until recently

commonly was known as Broadview Cemetery.

Last month, the tiny burial plot that covers less than an acre along Broadview Road, just north of Spring Road, was given back what most researchers believe was its original name: Brooklyn Union Burial Ground.

The rededication of the cemetery was the result of years of investigation and effort by Richardson and other members of the Historical Society of Old Brooklyn. What the society uncovered is a twisting and somewhat bizarre story that dates back to at least the mid-1800s.

Richardson grew up in the Old Brooklyn area.

"I always knew it was there, but I didn't know it was there," he said of the cemetery, which, over time, apparently slipped out of the minds of a lot of people. At one point, state records listed the cemetery as "abandoned."

"Who knows what that means?" Richardson said. "I'm not sure how you abandon a cemetery."

Ralph Kluender, 74, of Hinckley, wonders the same thing. Two years ago, he placed a marker in the cemetery to honor four family members buried there. Kluender is happy to see the Burial Ground receive some attention.

"It's much better now," he said. "It's much better than it has been for years."

As strange as it might seem, the state sold the cemetery for \$300 to a private party because of delinquent property taxes in 1941. A small gas station went up in one corner of what was the original cemetery.

Like Richardson, Kluender grew up near Old Brooklyn. Both men said there was some debate (or, at the very least, local legend) concerning whether or not anyone was buried on the gas station property. In any case, the ownership of the entire cemetery changed hands a couple of more times in the 1940s and early '50s.

In the '60s, another attempt was made to sell the property. By then, the cemetery had attracted the attention of a local historical society known as the Early Settlers.

Additionally, a Cleveland man, William Fleck, got the attention of the local media when he showed up with a receipt for three plots in the cemetery. Fleck's father died in 1923 and was the last person buried in the cemetery. Fleck eventually wanted to place his mother next to his father and was curious as to why a billboard sat in the middle of the burial plots.

In the end, the whole mess ended up in court. Fleck never got his wish in regard to his mother. A private developer put up a Red Barn fast-food restaurant right where Fleck claimed his plots were located, Richardson said. Barb's Family Restaurant sits on the spot now.

Richardson and the Old Brooklyn historical group got involved with the cemetery about eight years ago, putting in flowers and doing other landscaping work.

"The whole thing just sort of snowballed," Richardson said.

Richardson and Kluender both remember visiting the cemetery as children. Richardson's great, great grandfather, Daniel Fish, is buried there, or at least Richardson thought so until recently. The cemetery started as a private burial plot of which Fish was a trustee. Apparently, as years went by, the trustees died off and no one stepped up to take care of the cemetery.

No one is sure how many people are in the Brooklyn Union Burial Ground. (There is some debate that the original name was "Burying Ground.") After visiting local funeral homes, checking state records and various Web sites, Richardson's best guess is that there are 80 people interred in the cemetery. Many may have been moved to other locations, including, as it turns out, Richardson's great-great-grandfather.

In determining the number of folks buried in the spot, one major problem is that there are very few grave markers remaining in the Burial Ground. Some graves probably never were marked to begin with, noted Barbara Richardson, who helped her husband with the research of the cemetery.

"There were obelisks on top of some the graves, I remember that," said Neil Richardson.

Cleveland city workers began mowing grass in the cemetery some time ago, though the state apparently has ownership of the property. Richardson believes that as markers fell over time, city workers buried them rather than set them up again; the idea was just to get them out of the way.

Richardson hopes the rededication of the cemetery raises public awareness concerning the Burial Ground. The next step, he said, is to persuade the city to formally take over the property. The historical society will continue to maintain the cemetery for now, Richardson added.

"The thing is, when we're gone, what happens then?" he said.