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Effort to restore cemetery struggles

Project is long on needs, but short on funds

ANGELA HARNE

THE ENTERPRISE OF FARMVILLE

BRUCE - One Farmville native is asking for the community's support to help restore a cemetery.

The Robert Foreman Cemetery is in a field on the north side of N.C. 43 at the intersection of N.C. 121 and N.C. 43, in the community of Bruce. It is the third oldest cemetery in Pitt County, according to Bob Newton, a member of the Pitt County Historical Society.

Newton has toured cemeteries for as long as he can remember. He is fascinated by their history. He and Pitt County historian Roger Kammerer came across the Robert Foreman Cemetery when they were touring the old steamboat landing located near the site.

Upon arrival, the two men noticed the destruction of the burial plots. They learned that the cemetery was vandalized approximately two years ago. It is believed the unknown suspects broke open the gravesites in hopes of finding jewelry and gold tooth fillings among the bones, Newton said.

"I hate to see any cemetery destroyed, but this one is more than 200 years old," Newton said. "It looks like a bomb hit it. It is a shame this happened."

Seeing the disarray of the cemetery, where 17 Foreman kin are buried, prompted Newton to take up the cause to have it restored.

"In the past, the Pitt County Historical Society has helped restore cemeteries through its graveyard restoration committee," Newton said, explaining typically in those cases family members of those buried in the cemetery contributed funds.

That is not feasible in the case of the Robert Foreman Cemetery, though. The land has been sold, and the heirs of the Foreman family are unknown, Newton said.

"The Foreman heirs can't be traced. In other restorations, heirs helped raise the money, but in this situation there are no relatives. I don't know where they are, and that's the problem," Newton said.

At some point, the Foreman land was sold to Willard and Atlas Wooten. Eleven K.R. Wooten heirs also owned the



ANGELA HARNE/THE DAILY REFLECTOR VIA AP

Bob Newton of Farmville talks about the destruction left behind by vandals at the Robert Foreman Cemetery in the Bruce community of Pitt County. He is working to raise money to repair the site.

land, which is farmed by Worthington Farms.

Sheila Dawn Wooten Forrest, who Newton learned through his genealogy studies is his third cousin, was one of the 11 heirs until recently when her relatives divided the land and gave sole ownership to Woodrow Wooten Jr., who lives on the farm.

The Wooten family has granted Newton permission to restore the cemetery, he said. Worthington Farms has also approved the project, Newton said.

"The historic cemetery ought to be restored," Forrest said. "The tops of the graves were beautiful with the sun beaming down on them. My great-grandfather on my mother's side tended the farm for many years, and my granddad on my dad's side later bought the land. It is very significant to my family."

Newton sought an estimate from Louis Dail, who lives in the Lizzie community

in Greene County and restores cemeteries. Dail has previously helped Newton restore three cemeteries.

The Robert Foreman Cemetery restoration project is estimated to cost \$13,000. To date, Newton has only been able to raise \$300, which is why he is taking the project public.

"The Foreman family is part of Pitt County's early history. They helped start commerce and farming here. They have early roots and our history should be preserved," Newton said.

The Foreman family took "a prominent part in the civic affairs and different official capacities representing Pitt County," according to Kammerer.

John Foreman moved to North Carolina from Norfolk County, Va., in 1780 with his family. They settled on a 100-acre property Foreman purchased, which today is known as Bruce, a crossroads on N.C. 43, located near Falkland.

Foreman built a plantation home called Greenwreath, which still stands today. He accumulated 1,000 acres and ran one of the first cotton gins in Pitt County.

"The Foremans developed this land and gave jobs to people," Newton said. Foreman and his wife, Mary Lawrence, had two children, Ivey and Robert, for whom the cemetery is named after.

Since the vandalism, the Pitt County Sheriff's Office now monitors the cemetery, according to Newton.

To help restore the Robert Foreman Cemetery, donations may be mailed to Foreman Cemetery, c/o Pitt County Historical Society, 202 Churchill Drive, Greenville, NC 27855.

For more information or to help, email Newton at newton2@yahoo.com. Foreman heirs are also encouraged to email Newton.