

Restoring the past; remembering those who have gone before

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Tucked away in a far corner of Marion and Casey counties on the border with Boyle County is the small community of Forkland and a private cemetery.

From Elder Cemetery you can see all three counties, and you must pass through all three counties to reach the hill on which the cemetery sits.

The cemetery was established by Andrew Elder in 1830 as a family cemetery. Elder deeded half an acre of land for a cemetery for Elder heirs. The first to be buried there were two infants, James Spragens in 1850 and Elder's grandson, William W. Elder, in 1863. Elder is buried in the cemetery surrounded by his children.

The size has since increased, and the cemetery is no longer reserved for descendants of Elder. Over the years others have donated or sold land to expand the cemetery. Thousands are now buried there and hundreds of stones need cleaning, re-leveling, and/or repairs. As with many cemeteries, once the immediate family was gone, some of the older graves and headstones fell into disrepair. Headstones get knocked over, settle into the dirt, or get broken over time.

When Elder's descendant Sue Foster visited the cemetery, she knew she wanted to do something about the old headstones. First, she researched how to clean and restore the stones. Then she began cleaning some of the older stones in 2024. Next, she decided to try her hand at repairing one of the damaged stones but "I quickly realized I couldn't do it alone, and decided to hire someone."

"I searched for a year to find someone to do this," Foster said. "Then I found them on the internet." And she was surprised by her find, a family-owned tombstone

repair company not too far away in Somerset. Jill and Jeff Smith, owners of Heritage Tombstone Cleaning and Repair, came to Elder Cemetery to meet with Foster and assess the work required.

Jill Smith said some of the stones just needed cleaning and re-leveling, but others were broken, and in some cases she is still finding pieces to rebuild those stones.

The Smiths cleaned and repaired several stones. Foster said she will continue cleaning stones and will have the Smiths return when there is more money available for the restorations.

Foster is also interested in some of the unmarked graves and a small portion of the cemetery that is



JANE REID KLEYN/The Lebanon Enterprise

The Noe headstone, cleaned and ready to be replaced on the base.



Photo courtesy of Sue Foster

The Noe headstone as it appeared before being cleaned.



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Jill and Jeff Smith, Heritage Tombstone Cleaning and Repair, work on the headstone of cemetery founder Andrew Elder.

enclosed with a stone wall. She said there are tales of a slave cemetery near the back with unmarked graves, while others are marked simply with a flat stone with no writing. She also said legend is the area enclosed with the stone wall may be soldiers killed in the Battle of Perryville. But no one

knows for sure.

To help her, Foster said someone is coming on August 1 with sonar to see what is buried where.

"It is important to remember our ancestors," Foster said, "We have the lives we have because of them and all that they went through."

Foster hopes something can be done to ensure the stones are cared for going forward as moss is not only affecting older stones but also beginning to grow on some of the newer stones as well.

The cemetery is funded by donations and managed by a volunteer cemetery board.



Photo courtesy of Sue Foster

Clamps hold the pieces of the headstone of Lettice Elder together as the bonding agent dries.

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