

Commissioner's Questions November 12, 2014 - Old Blairsville Cemetery Part 1

Q. What are the pink ribbons that are along the side of many roads in the county?

A. These are marking the location of the new high reflectivity signs that will be located there. The project is part of a federal project providing funding to help bring county roads up to specs of state highways. These will include speed limits, curves ahead and other warning and advisory signage. Georgia DOT had been responsible for working with counties to contract with qualified personnel to assist in this project. The main advantage, other than knowing that the location and type of signage is correct, is that they will be so much easier to identify at night than current signage.

Q. You mentioned in your Q & A several weeks ago that the county, city, Sons of Confederate Veterans and the Union County Historical Society were going to be working together to restore the old Blairsville cemetery behind the Board of Education. How is that project progressing?

A. The cemetery project is going very well and is a fascinating undertaking. However, it will take the entire community to assist in fundraising. As I told you earlier we knew for sure there were 37 graves with inscribed headstones and a few others that we assumed were unmarked graves. We contracted with Mr. Len Strozier to come out about a month ago with his ground penetrating radar and were stunned when he found 105 unmarked graves.

Q. How does he find the graves and what can you see?

A. It is really a fascinating process. No, he can't see bones or bodies as they are either long gone or almost gone years ago. But the machine reads air pockets where the body used to be. As the body decays, the grave may sink some, but it is very rare that there is not an air pocket remaining where the dirt did not actually fall completely in, thus allowing him to find the air pockets. With the crisscross method he used, he was able to find the center of every grave and tell whether it is a baby or an adult.

Q. What is the next step in the restoration of the cemetery?

A. We had a committee meeting recently to discuss this. We plan on having a final grave marker cleanup and repair day on Saturday November 15th with the help of the Boy Scouts. We had hoped to begin this past weekend, but the snow and cold prevented that. We will be aided by Mr. Vince Evans, a cemetery restoration expert, who will provide instruction and oversight on each part of the project, from cleaning the monuments, to straightening those that are leaning and finally to try to repair those markers that are broken, if repairable.

Q. Who owns the cemetery?

A. We had the title searched back and could find no record of this particular parcel ever being titled to anyone. It has been surveyed and a law suit to "quiet the title" will be filed. In this way, the title will be eventually perfected to the City of Blairsville. The Mayor and City of Blairsville have been keeping the cemetery mowed for several years and have agreed to accept the maintenance responsibility going forward.

Q. How can we donate to the restoration of the cemetery?

A. Next week's Q & A will give more detail, but for now, any donations can be made to the Union County Historical Society, P. O. Box 35, Blairsville, GA 30512. Or a cash donation may be paid directly to someone working at the Historic Courthouse in downtown Blairsville.