Genealogy

The Graves of Pioneers

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The Genealogy Department of the Indiana State Library is the depository for records covering hundreds of graves in old cemeteries of the state. These records represent over the past two decades work both of individuals and of organizations. For example, one of the early and enthusiastic workers presented inscriptions gathered from thirty-five cemeteries in his county during one year and this was only the beginning of the activity in that area. More recently, several local historians co-operated by listing, in one volume, the names and dates of Hoosiers buried in thirty-nine cemeteries of another county. In between these contributions have come others from every corner of the state.

This year the Genealogy Committee of the Indiana Historical Society is making a renewed effort to collect various types of records which will supplement those which have been presented to the Indiana State Library by groups of workers in past years. Among the lists of desiderata are cemetery records which have not yet been collected. If there are those who have been planning to do this work on their own initiative, it is hoped they will contact their county historian and inform him of their plans. Likewise county historians have been encouraged to discover residents who are sufficiently interested in carrying on the task of locating neglected cemeteries in order to copy the inscriptions before it is too late.

The late Harry O. Garman, a former chairman of the Committee on Pioneer Cemeteries and Churches said, in his report made at the Indiana History Conference on December 14, 1940: “Since there are more people in the ground than there are on top of the ground, we cannot expect to preserve all the burial places, but we can collect the names and describe the burial places and file this information . . . where it will be available to everyone as long as public institutions last.” For those who do make the effort to search these abandoned spots, there has been the suggestion that a marker

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telling the public that the records have been copied, by whom, and where deposited would be a further step in preserving our heritage and commemorating the courage of our pioneers.

In every township of our ninety-two counties are found old burial grounds; some are in abandoned church yards and others are in small family plots on farms. Many are full of weeds, briers, and poison ivy with the headstones hidden in the underbrush. Others are badly eroded and the markers, if still there, are partially covered with the soil or are broken into bits. Still other graves have disappeared completely due to their being in the path of progress—buildings, new roads, or plowed under for agricultural purposes.

As described in the New Jersey Genesis¹, there are several groups of historically minded people in the state known as “tombstone hounds.” A small group outfits itself with small shovel; light crowbar; stiff brushes; mirror; light and dark powders; pumice stone; and, of course, pad and pencil. More specific directions include these suggestions: “Rub the pumice across almost obliterated letters and and you will be amazed at what will show. On light stones, dark earth or dust sprayed over lettering and brushed with a flat object, will bring out the figures and the reverse is true on very dark stones by using light powder or chalk. The mirror? To reflect light rays onto stones to read, particularly in dark shaded places. One member writes and one checks the writing while the others make the preparations.” The work certainly progresses more rapidly if it is done in small groups of two or three, with all collaborating in making a map to accompany the records and in making the final copies in triplicate; local historical societies will also appreciate copies of records made. However, lacking a team to do the work, much has been accomplished by one lone worker.

Sometimes only one person in a county can generate sufficient enthusiasm to accomplish whatever remains to be done in gathering records—be it much or little. A news story in the local papers may be the means of producing volunteer workers as well as information as to the location of old burial grounds, especially the family plots known only to a few present-day descendants. A county atlas published in the last century will often indicate the location of old churches

and cemeteries and sometimes the land-owners at the time of publication of the atlas, many of whose families received original land grants.

In respect to efforts of various organizations and of individuals to locate only graves of specific interest to them, it has been pointed out that it is undesirable to discriminate and to exclude any graves from the record—the fathers and mothers because they are the ancestors while the children help to identify the parents. To answer any further questions that may arise, it is wise to transcribe all of the information available upon the headstones though it may be incomplete. Such is the procedure the majority of loyal county workers have followed through the years.

Query

The following communication has been received from Warren A. Reeder, Jr., 260 165th Street, Hammond, Indiana: "Joseph Reeder was born in Pennsylvania, January 25, 1786, married Elenor Stockton in Ross County, Ohio, 1810, migrated to Parke County, Indiana, in 1817, died in Clinton, Vermillion County, December, 1869. Does anyone know his parents or where in Ohio he came from? Will exchange all subsequent data from my files."

Query

The following communication has been received from Dr. Eldon B. Tucker, Jr., 349 Cobun Avenue, Morgantown, West Virginia: "Wanted: descendants of George Tucker of Monongalia County, Virginia, now West Virginia, who was born 1762 in Delaware and died in 1834. He served in the Revolution in Capt. David Kent's Company of Kent County, Maryland, where the following children lived undetermined. James R. (wife was Elizabeth); Thomas; Andrew; Jesse; Aaron; Rachel (married 1830 Ahab Keller); Mary; Phebe (may have married Philip Boor in 1823), and Sarah. George's daughter, Nancy Thompson of Franklin County, Ohio, had the following children whose descendants cannot be located: James; George (resided in Indiana); Miles; Jesse; Rachel, married a Stark or Starks; Sarah, married Armenas Fields and moved to Iowa. A genealogy of this family is being written by Dr. E. B. Tucker, Jr., of 349 Cobun Ave., Morgantown, W. Va."