



Sequim Prairie Garden Club members, helpers using modern methods to honor the dead

"George is gone but not forgotten," reads the inscription on George W. Caskedy's headstone. The 15-year-old George died July 8, 1904, his exact age meticulously carved into limestone.

volunteers, under guidance from National Historical Preservationist Marion “Mick” Hersey, have been working to ensure that his inscription stays true 117 years later, although all who knew him have now passed on.

A black and white photograph of an elderly woman with short, light-colored hair and glasses, smiling. She is wearing a dark jacket over a turtleneck. In the background, several people are working on a cemetery project, including one person kneeling and working on a headstone.

first created in 1967, the headstones were mortared to improperly matched foundations, and the concrete they were placed in was poured without much preparation of the ground.

Each generation of preservationists did the “best it could,” according to Sequim Prairie Garden Club historian Priscilla Hudson, during the era in which they were responsible for the remains of the cemetery located on the 4 acres deeded in 1888 to Clallam County by John Bell — which over time became the verdant park on East Washington Street.

The Garden Club has been caring for the property for more 70 years, since January 8, 1951, “(when) the club voted to improve the old cemetery grounds ... to give the town of Sequim a park of which to be proud,” according to “Sequim Prairie Garden Club and Pioneer Memorial Park: the Early Years,” a history compiled by Hudson and Laura Singer.

Today's preservationists are working on the possible last phase of a century long intermittent effort to preserve the headstones of Pioneer Memorial Park, following modern methods taught by Hersey.

Using a combination of

hand tools, power tools, Orvus detergent, epoxy and a cleaner called D/2 Biological Solution, they detached headstones from mismatched foundation stones, cleaned them, chipped or ground away old white mortar and epoxied broken pieces together, then epoxied them to matching bases in an effort to preserve the memory of these people who once walked the streets of Sequim — people once known and beloved, whose stones are now a reminder of the passage of time and the transience of human life within the city.

Hersey said that next spring when the air is warm enough, Lithomex will be applied to seal the uneven areas between the headstones and bases.

the headstones that originally had color in spring as well.

Closing time

According to Hudson and Singer's history, by 1909 the little Sequim Cemetery had been Sequim's only cemetery for 20 years. But by 1919 it was closed.

“The high water table at that time was causing problems – caskets would sometimes float to the surface,” the history notes. “The land was next to a field occasionally flooded by run-off from Bell Creek and at times became a marsh.”

The Sequim Cemetery Association decided to close the cemetery and relocate as many of the burials and gravestones as they had family permission and ability to do. Many of those are now

See GARDEN CLUB, A-17

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Garden Club

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at the Sequim View Cemetery just north of city limits.

Caretakers did their best, but some grave markers and remains were left behind, either because the families of that time insisted they stay, or relatives were not located.

“The now abandoned 4-acre plot,” the history records, “became a thicket of blackberry vines, cattle wandered through, and the remaining markers were broken or tumbled over and pieces were scattered all over the deserted cemetery.”

In October 1964, the garden club voted to create a “pioneer memorial using the gravestones that remained in the park,” according to the history. “The stones had been gathered in the southwest corner of the property, moved there as they were found during the years of burning, plowing, and cultivating of the park grounds.”

Between the 1960s and early 1980s, vandals stole and broke parts of the memorial, leading the club to build a fence around it in 1982.

Readable markers

Garden club members are discussing making times in which visitors can enter the memorial to look closely at the headstones, which under Hersey’s tutelage are becoming more and more legible.

Both Hersey and Hudson have been cleaning and honoring graves since they were children.

“Honor and respect is key,” said Hudson, who credits her Polish and German ancestors for their tradition of honoring the dead by keeping cemeteries clean and frequently visited.

“The cemeteries are the most important thing in a community.”

They are our connection to the past Hudson said, and, “they provide invaluable information for genealogists.”

Hersey said he’s been cleaning headstones since he was about 12.

“My grandparents, we used to go out on Memorial Day — back in the old days it was Decoration Day—and you would literally clean up your graves of your ancestors

SPGC funding

The Sequim Prairie Garden Club is accepting donations to help the club’s overall funding, which took a significant hit during the COVID-19 pandemic when members were not able to rent out the Pioneer Memorial Park clubhouse, a primary source of club funding.

To donate or for more information, go to sequimprairiegardenclub.org.

that have passed before you back in South Dakota,” he said.

“And over the years the techniques have changed. We used to use soap and water or bleach. Nowadays they tell you don’t use bleach, don’t use soap. Bleach soaks into all the cracks and fractures your stone and soap leaves a residue. What happens when you have a residue—it molds and mildews. So next year, it’s even worse to try to clean it.”

Hersey credits a man in Florida known as “the Good Cemeterian” with teaching him the “Do No Harm technique,” which features Orvus and D/2. He said he has been teaching the technique for the past five years, but has been restoring memorials for more than a decade.

“I don’t just honor the dead; I honor our veterans,” Hersey said. “And that’s what started me on my quest. I’m a veteran myself — 23 years in the Navy. And what started me was in 2011 in Bremerton.”

According to an article in the *Kitsap Sun* by Ed Friedrich, during a walk three years ago, the East Bremerton man discovered an overgrown memorial at the end of Manette Bridge in Bremerton. The Daughters of the American Revolution had erected it to remember the first school and an Indian lodge that had been on the site.

“He helped the group clear the brush, then cleaned and restored the monument, the article noted. “That escalated to the repainting of 200 faded plaques on the Bremerton Boardwalk. He has since evolved from a one-man show to ringleader, taking on bigger projects such as NAD Park and its jet by rounding up labor, supplies and food.”

Hersey is credited with “refur-



Karla Morgan cleans pieces of headstones broken by either vandalism, weather, or improper care in the more than 100 years they lay in Pioneer Memorial Park in Sequim. Morgan was one of many volunteers who gathered under the guidance of National Historical Preservationist Marion “Mick” Hersey to fix headstones using modern methods, some learned from “The Good Cemeterian” of Florida. Sequim Gazette photos by Emily Matthiessen

bishing every veteran memorial in the County,” wrote Friedrich.

From there he has worked on projects around the state.

“One thing led to the next and next thing I knew people were calling me the Historical Memorial Preservationist,” said Hersey, who received the title in an award.

Hudson said she wants the community to know that garden club members have tried to take care of this part of Sequim’s history.

“It’s important for the future generations to know that there is a cemetery there,” she said.

“The whole park was created by the community – the garden club organized it, but the whole community was involved in creating it. The history of the park is intertwined with the history of the city.”

Editor’s note: Sequim Prairie Garden Club members ask that people who took pieces of the headstones through the years, perhaps funding them scattered throughout the park and taking them as souvenirs, to consider returning them so the club can continue to piece together the markers. — MD



Suzan Mannisto chips away at old mortar during a restoration effort at Sequim’s Pioneer Memorial Park. Mannisto and her husband, Daniel Mannisto, took before and after pictures of the changes made by an all-volunteer crew in a fenced corner of the park.

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