

# Woodlawn 'is not abandoned'

Volunteers, casual laborers helping to restore historic cemetery

BY MALLORY PANUSKA  
TIMES WEST VIRGINIAN

FAIRMONT — Thanks to the work of several dedicated volunteers and casual laborers, Fairmont's Woodlawn Cemetery is slowly starting to shape back up to its once-

attractive historic state.

Cemetery superintendent Gena Wagaman said that significant efforts have been made recently with the minimal amount of resources available to clean up the grounds, which fell into a dismal state over the past months.

Because of a former Supreme Court case over who was in charge of maintaining the cemetery and a series of other issues that came up around the same time, Woodlawn became significantly overrun with high grass and weeds, which

Wagaman said is the number-one issue to be addressed.

"Basically what we're doing at the moment is using a combination of volunteers and casual laborers to address the grass. That is our first concern," she said.

"The good thing about grass is it can be mowed," she added. "It is not a permanent thing."

Many of the older headstones and monuments also need repaired and restored.

SEE WOODLAWN, PAGE 5A



PHOTO BY TAMMY SHREVER

Woodlawn Cemetery volunteers Joe (left) and Brandon Jenkins attend to the high grass in one of the sections on the West Side burial ground. They are two of the several volunteers and casual laborers who have been working up at the property to restore it back to its once-attractive historic state.

## Woodlawn

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

and there are dead trees and overgrown shrubbery looming ground and blocking the historic graves, memorials and pathways, which Wagaman said are being addressed as well.

"We are trying to do it systematically. We are trying to start at one point and go from here," she said.

Of the total 10 sections of the cemetery, Wagaman said last week that the workers have mowed the grass and cleaned up the grounds in about eight. She said work still needs to be done in the most historic district of the cemetery, though.

"Not a lot of families come up and visit these sites," she said of the upper section where some of the area's most famous historic figures are buried. "We haven't had a chance to get to it yet. It is hard because in some places, there are very small stones."

The roads winding around the nearly 43 acres of rolling hills are also in desperate need of paving. Wagaman said there is not enough money to address that right now.

But with a recent Supreme Court ruling officially handing the care of the cemetery over to a five-member board of trustees, all of these problems are now on a list to be addressed soon.

One volunteer, who goes to the cemetery every day and checks things out, said if he were to make a wish list for what to address at the proper-

ty, paving, grounds equipment and more volunteers to do the work would be at the top.

Wagaman said there is also an issue with obtaining the complete records of those buried at the cemetery because the previous caretakers have still not turned some of them over.

Eventually, Wagaman said she would like to have employees on payroll to complete the work at the cemetery, but that the board has to raise funds and establish its status as either a nonprofit or for-profit organization before that can be done.

Wagaman said the board, made up of members John D. Hardesty Jr., William B. Wagner, Frank Clark Jr., Janice Watkins Cosco and Douglas A. Hutchinson, has not met yet as a whole since the court ruling, but has discussed some of the things going on. She said the group is working on getting together in the near future to officially discuss and address the issues.

Wagaman said that she is looking into possibly getting a contractor to mow the grass and do the landscaping, and has also spoken with the Department of Corrections to maybe get some inmate labor. But if the inmates do the work, the equipment has to be supplied for them, and contractors can tend to get pricey, Wagaman said.

But now that the court case is settled and the board can legally begin fundraising and selling plots, Wagaman

expects that they will soon be able to obtain funds.

Family members and friends of those interred at the cemetery, which is the final resting place of many famous historic figures in Fairmont, Marion County and West Virginia, were appalled at what the property had become. Many had taken it upon themselves to mow and clean up around the stones of their loved ones, which Wagaman said was appreciated.

She said that individuals are still welcome to come up and help out by mowing and weeding around their family plots. The board is also accepting monetary donations to P.O. Box 765, Fairmont, as well as equipment and goods and services. This includes pre-loaded gas cards for fuel for the mowers and other equipment, oil for the mowers, weed-eater strings, brakes, and anything else that might be necessary to maintain the grounds and "get the grass cut so it doesn't look unsightly," Wagaman said.

In any case, Wagaman wants people to know that she and the board are fully aware of the problems at the cemetery and are doing everything they can to restore it back to the historic site it once was.

"(Woodlawn) is not abandoned," Wagaman said. "We are aware of the situation and working to get it taken care of."

E-mail Mallory Panuska at [mpanuska@timeswv.com](mailto:mpanuska@timeswv.com).