

Winfield Cemeteries Tell a Civil War Story

by Joe Chrisman

How many Civil War veterans are buried in Winfield? That was the question of the day fifteen-plus years ago and the question started what more than likely will be a lifetime journey. How does one go about finding this answer? What should be the first step of this mighty endeavor? Why did this question pop into my brain and do I even want to know?

Those were the thoughts running through my mind many years ago that started my quest for answers.

My first step in the documentation of Civil War veterans was to walk Union/Graham Cemetery recording the name of the veteran, rank, and company the veteran served with and the location of the white marble military markers. About halfway through this process, I noticed that several non-military (or civilian) headstones had clues that the person buried there was a Civil War veteran. Some civilian headstones had the company the veteran served with inscribed into the granite; for example: Co. F, 5 N.Y. Cav. There were some that had the Grand Army of the Republic star or GAR symbol inscribed on the stone, and one or two that simply said "Civil War Veteran." Several private headstones had a GAR grave marker next to the stone. I finished documenting the remaining military markers and knew I had to start over. So I walked Union/Graham Cemetery again, looking at every headstone for evidence of Civil War participation. Once I finished walking Union/Graham, I repeated the process at Highland and St. Marys Cemeteries. The last step of this process continues still today, looking at the birth and death dates on a headstone and researching to determine if the man buried was a veteran. I have found a few Civil War veterans that did not have a military marker, GAR grave marker, or any clues on his private headstone to indicate he was a veteran. As of today there are 384 Union veterans, one Army nurse and three Confederate veterans buried in Winfield cemeteries.

Some of the stones were almost unreadable due to the black mold and green algae growing on the headstones. Cemeteries are one of our greatest resources for historical and genealogical research. Sometimes headstones are the only thing remaining that offers a glimpse into the past. In order for a headstone to tell a tale, it first must be readable and free of biological growth like algae, mold, and lichens.

Step two in the documentation of Civil War veterans was to clean all the white marble military markers. I did a considerable amount of research before jumping head first into what would soon become a passion. All the experts agreed that the first step in the cleaning and preservation of headstones is "First Do No Harm!" After that everyone seems to go their own direction in cleaning headstones-from using warm water and natural bristle brushes with lots of elbow grease to using soap made for livestock.

After countless hours of research, my approach to cleaning headstones was to work