

Rockton Township Cemetery to restore 60 headstones



GREG STANLEY | RRSTAR.COM

Helen Wildermuth, owner of Stonehugger Cemetery Restoration Inc., repairs a marble headstone from the 1850s Tuesday, Sept. 14, 2010, at the Rockton Township Cemetery. Sixty headstones at the cemetery, dating back to the 1840s, will be repaired this week.

ROCKTON — Broken and fallen headstones at the Rockton Township Cemetery, some of which date back to the 1840s, are being cleaned, repaired and restored this week.

The township has been setting money aside for two years to pay for the restoration project's first phase, which will cost \$10,000.

Stonehugger Cemetery Restoration Inc., based out of Nashville, Ind., will restore the headstones that most urgently need repairs in the oldest section of the 24-acre cemetery. The township will attempt to complete the repair project next fall, or as soon as enough money can be raised.

“Right now we’re really spot working on as many headstones as we can,” said Jerri Noller, sexton and records clerk for the township. “We’re not working on a particular family, and we’re not going row by row. We’re trying to make a visual impact, so people can see that we are sincere in restoring the cemetery.”

This week, 60 marble and sandstone headstones between 100 and 170 years old will be restored. Many of them have to be dug out of the ground, put back into one piece, cleaned and remounted over their original grave.

“Most of them were broken many years ago, some by vandalism and some just through upkeep,” Noller said. “We’ve never been able to fully repair them, and since they mostly are sandstone and marble, it takes a certain cleaning method to make them look nice.”

Some of the oldest headstones have crumbled to a point beyond repair.

“That’s why it’s important to restore as many as we can right away,” said Helen Wildermuth, owner of Stonehugger Cemetery Restoration. “Marble is one of the softest stones that there is, and over time it crumbles.”

The project is turning up history at the site that many didn’t know existed.

“Supposedly the cemetery started in 1857, but we’re finding that they had burials long before that,” Noller said. “They were soldiers, mothers, teachers. There’s a lot of history in this place.”

Township officials will reach out to families and local business to help fund the second phase of the restoration project, which is expected to cost another \$10,000.

For more information on the project, contact the cemetery at 815-624-7659.

