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Churches, club try to map cemetery

Records incomplete at Bonita Springs

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Betty Griffith put flowers on her mother's grave at Bonita Springs Cemetery this past weekend in honor of Memorial Day.

Since Army Gen. John Logan declared May 30 Decoration Day in 1868 to honor the Civil War dead, the holiday has evolved into a day to decorate the graves of all loved ones in remembrance.

It is no different at the Bonita Springs Cemetery — except there are graves that were never marked, headstones that have worn away during the years and records that are incomplete.

More than a century old, the cemetery on Imperial Street, just south of Bonita Beach Road, belongs to the First Baptist Church of Bonita Springs and the First United Methodist Church of Bonita Springs.

Deacon Ernest Harvard of the First Baptist Church recently met with the Bonita Springs Genealogy Club to see if the members can help organize the records onto a computer. He aims to keep files updated by walking through the cemetery to record marked graves and by going through obituaries to see who else might have been buried there.

Wilma Harvard, the deacon's cousin by marriage and treasurer of the Bonita Springs Genealogy Club, said the group was able to piece together who was buried where until 1983 by doing that and interviewing people about funerals they remembered attending.

But records have gotten muddled again.

"I have a vested interest in trying to help with the cemetery," Wilma Harvard said.

Her parents, Charles and Jan McKeown, and her brother are buried there.

Her husband, Cecil Harvard, and his parents and brother are buried there, along with her two premature babies.

When the time comes, Harvard will be buried beside her husband.

"Our stone is there already," she said.

The churches declared a moratorium about three years ago, allowing only those with spouses to be buried there and those who had reserved a spot for themselves.

"Both churches agreed that since it's really too hard to identify where everyone is out there we don't really want to just be digging here and there," Ernest Harvard said.

The cemetery originated as a place for the pioneer Walker family to be buried.

They eventually deeded the cemetery to the two churches as a place for other Bonita pioneers, including



• Betty Griffith, a member of the Bonita Springs Genealogy Club, puts some flowers on her mother's grave Saturday morning at the Bonita Springs Cemetery on Imperial Street in Bonita Springs. *TERRY ALLEN WILLIAMS/The News-Press*

INFORMATION

Some pioneer families buried at Bonita Springs Cemetery

- Barnes
- Glazier
- Harvard
- Hogue
- Kelly
- Liles
- McCormick
- McKeown
- Rehard
- Walker
- Whidden
- Williams

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veterans, to be buried.

Glenn Liles kept a mental record of the people buried there for a time.

Then Arnold and Beverly Glazier started making index cards to record burials.

Ernest Harvard has inherited those cards and wants the Bonita Springs Genealogy Club to help him sort through them and put them on a CD.

"I want to see something done with the cemetery," said Griffith, a member of the genealogy club. "I'd love to see it plotted out who's in there."

<< [Back](#)