

2011 Report of the Marion County Pioneer Cemetery Commission

Since receiving our charter in June 2011, the Marion County Pioneer Cemetery Commission (MCPCC) has been very active. Several interested people met the end of June and volunteered their services as officers. These people were later approved as board members by the Marion County Board of Supervisors:

- Val Van Kooten, President, term ends December 2013;
- Stephanie Visser, Vice President, term ends December 2011;
- Janet Ritchie, Treasurer, term ends December 2012;
- Bev Jones, Secretary, term ends December 2012;
- Nancy Schneider, Vicar, term ends December 2011. Nancy asked not to serve again; John Thomsen of Pella asked to serve in this position.

Our first meeting was held the end of August. We have been given the use of the Knoxville Rural Fire Station for our meetings, which are set for the last Monday evening of each month, March through October, at 7 p.m.

Our meetings have had a low of 11 people and a high of 16 attending. This year we have focused our time and energy on five cemeteries, which are described below.

Gibbens Cemetery (SW of Otley, on Lorna De Geus Farm):

Gibbens Cemetery was in terrible condition when we started and was in danger of being completely obliterated.

- On Saturday, Aug. 27, approximately 20 volunteers met at the Otley Coop and proceeded to the farm, about three miles southwest of Otley. A large wild cedar tree had been hit by lightning and had fallen over onto the cemetery. Weeds and vines had grown up around it. Brush was almost chest high. The farmer who owns the land had farmed around this patch for many years and had, in the past, stored machinery in the cemetery.



Gibbens before

- When we started, there were no stones visible, but by crawling inside the weed/tree pile, we could find a couple that were in pieces.
- It took only about two hours using weed eaters, rakes, and other trimmers to clean up the site. A brush chipper was donated to us by Wayne Van Mersbergen of Pella to clean everything up. After clearing off the site, we found the remains of two stones (both in pieces) and another base that had no stone around.
- Two weeks later, on Sept. 10, six of us gathered to fence the area. This took about three hours.
- In October, Larry Davis of Des Moines, an expert in pioneer stone restoration, fixed the two stones in the cemetery. Since we knew the names of those buried there but only two stones remained, we decided to put a sign on the cemetery with the information on those interred. The sign was placed the middle of October.
- This cemetery is finished; we are now looking for a service group who will volunteer to mow it a couple of times a year.



Gibbens Cemetery after

Attica Cemetery (aka Mormon Cemetery), West Edge of Attica:

We had received several phone calls about Attica Cemetery and the need to work on it.

- On Oct. 22, 23 people met at Kin Folks in Attica and then went to the cemetery, which is on the ground of Bobbi Bassett. Mostly what needed to be done was clearing away tall brush. We found several stones in the brush, several of which need to be repaired.
- Larry Davis plans to repair the stones in the spring; we will also discuss at our next meeting what we want to do about fencing. There is fence on one side of the cemetery, as it abuts the neighbor's field.



Attica Cemetery, before



Attica Cemetery, after cleanup

- We consider this cemetery in process; until the fencing and signage is up, it will not be completed. Members of the Attica United Methodist Church Sunday School class have agreed to mow the cemetery a couple of times each year.

Shirey Cemetery (near Pleasantville), on the Kay Harsin Farm:

This is a small cemetery in the back of a field; it is not large—about 15 graves—but it was rough and uncared-for. It was covered with multiflora rose and other weeds. Most of the stones appear to be intact, though some are fallen over or tilting badly.

- On Nov. 5, six of us went out and worked for a couple of hours cleaning up brush and applying Tordon. In making an assessment of the cemetery, the front gate is gone. The cemetery is fenced, but the fence is in poor condition. There is no sign or other indication of the name of the cemetery.

- We consider this cemetery in process and will discuss it at the next meeting.



Shirey Cemetery, Pleasantville, after clearing brush

Welle Cemetery (west of Pella), Bart Elder Farm:

This is a small, family cemetery from the Welle and Nollen farms, with all of the graves dating from the 1850s and '60s. Carl Nollen and his brother Ken Nollen have kept it up for many years, but they sold the property several years ago.

Since then, cattle had knocked over the stones.

- Carl and Ken re-fenced the cemetery in mid-November and re-set the stone. Another stone that had cracked has been repaired and will be set in place next spring. We consider this cemetery completed (below):



Welle Cemetery

Vande Kamp Farm Cemetery. South of Knoxville (aka Ruckman South or Old Ruckman):

This cemetery is located on the land owned by Bill and Jean Vande Kamp; their daughter and their son-in-law live in the house on the property. The Vande Kamps contacted the commission to come out and give them an idea of fencing and signage.

- There are no stones left anymore, just a fence, which is in poor repair and is an eyesore since it sits on the front lawn of the house and directly along the road. We have determined that there are several more graves outside the fence line.
- The Vande Kamp family would like to submit a quote for fencing materials and are willing to do the work if the commission pays for the supplies. They will appear at our next commission meeting to present their information.



Vande Kamp Cemetery

Publicity:

Many news outlets and civic groups have asked members of the MCPCC to speak. Some of these have included speaking for the Pella PEO group, the Pella American Legion group, the Sully Lions Club, a Central College Anthropology class, a county history group “roundup”, and two radio interviews with Dr. Bob Leonard from KNIA-KRLS. One of these radio interviews was during a clean-up day with Pella High School students. Both the **Pella Chronicle** and the **Knoxville Journal-Express** have printed submitted articles about the commission and its work. In addition, several groups of high school and college students have gone into the cemeteries to help record graves for the Iowa Genealogical Society.

In September, President Valerie Van Kooten led a pioneer cemetery tour via school bus with 80 people in attendance (50 in the morning, 30 in the afternoon). There is excitement among the public about this project, and an interest in the pioneer cemeteries of our county.



Central College Grave Recording Day, Price Cemetery, April 2011.



Pella Christian High School Grave Recording Day, Compentine Cemetery, October 2011.

Summary:

We feel we've had a very productive year, considering we really didn't get going until July. At this mid-year point, we've spent less than half of the \$5,000 allocation that the county has given us (complete expenditure report is attached). Projections are that we will probably spend close to the entire amount by the end of the fiscal year.

We respectfully request that the Marion County Supervisors once again allocate \$5,000 to us for the 2012-2013 year. At this point, we have pinpointed close to 10-15 cemeteries that need our help. We will hold an "interim winter" meeting on Monday, Jan. 30, at 7 p.m. to begin setting the agenda for this next year.

Respectfully submitted by,

Valerie Van Kooten

Valerie Van Kooten
MCPCC President

MARION COUNTY PIONEER CEMETERY COMMISSION

06000-06410-447-17 Account

			<u>Cemetery</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Purchaser</u>
	Beginning Balance	\$5,000.00			
<u>Expenses</u>					
Gasoline for brush chipper		18.92	Gibbens	8/27/2011	K. Van Kooten

	Ending Balance 8/29/11				\$4,981.08
Rock for Driveway		\$31.56	Gibbens	9/9/2011	K. Van Kooten
Orange Flags		\$13.90	Gibbens	9/9/2011	K. Van Kooten
Fence Supplies		\$378.85	Gibbens	9/9/2011	K. Van Kooten
	Total	\$424.31			

	Ending Balance 9/26/11				\$4,556.77
Newman Traffic Signs/Gibbens		114.25	Gibbens	10/25/2011	V. VanKooten
Larry Davis/Gravestone Repair		345.00	Gibbens	10/25/2011	V. VanKooten

	Total	459.25			
	Ending Balance 10/31/2011				\$4,097.25
Kenneth Nollen/Walle Cemetery		\$279.39	Walle	11/10/2011	K. Nollen

	Ending Balance 12/31/2011				\$3,818.13