

Cemetery rehab is a labor of love

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There's a lot going on at the Balltown Cemetery and the activity can be credited to Robert Seater, a retired naval officer who has adopted the cemetery as a multi-year project. A new monument and flagpole honor veterans of all branches and eras of service, a research project brought in a ground penetrating radar to investigate the Grand Army of the Republic area of the cemetery to locate potential graves west of the known grave sites and the GAR space is being rehabilitated with new granite curbing and posts that copy the original limestone and the markers are being repaired and set upright once more.

"I grew up around here and I'll be buried here," Seater said. "I guess I'm doing it for myself."

It isn't a one-man job, Seater has the assistance of Steve "Tex" McKinley for most of the work. He and McKinley have been working for several years on the cemetery and the results of their labors are evident, but they still have quite a bit of work ahead of them.

"We've been working the southern area for about three years," Seater said. "We've still got a lot of gravestones to set straight and the veterans monument still needs a little electrical work. We have to dig a trench and run some conduit, then we



One man -- Robert Seater -- has made it his mission to clean, rehabilitate and improve the Balltown Cemetery, the final resting place for many veterans of the Civil War. --Steve Moyer/Daily Mail

can light up the flag and have it up at night. When we get all that done, we can move up to the northern area. That will take four or five years up there."

Seater said that while they were putting in new curbing and corner posts in the GAR section, none of the old stones were discarded.

"The old stones were deteriorating because they were limestone, but the new ones are granite and should last quite awhile," Seater said. "We didn't destroy anything, all the original stone is there. The new curbing is on the outside and the old is on the inside. We took a carbon tracing of the corner posts and had the new granite ones carved with the same design. There is an eagle, holding a sword over a flag with 13 stars representing the 13 original states and below that is a circle. We did add the dates of the Civil War in the circle."

The GAR section is now owned by the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War and Seater said they were going to continue to bury veterans in the remaining open space.

"The Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War said that any veteran can be buried here that doesn't have a burial plot," Seater said.

Seater said that one of the reasons he is interested in the cemetery is the history attached to it.

"There is a lot of history here," Seater said. "The first white settler killed by Indians in Vernon County is buried here."

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