Restoring a Pottstown jewel

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Edgewood Cemetery looks better than it has in years, if not decades. Last year, Randal Doaty, head of security for The Hill School, took it upon himself to begin the restoration and maintenance of the historic cemetery, located between High and Beech streets near The Hill School. Founded in 1861, the cemetery is the final resting place of more than 2,800 Pottstonians, including Matthew Meigs, the founder of The Hill School, and many of its faculty.

The 12-acre cemetery had fallen on hard times by 2014, after the last functioning board of the non-profit cemetery faded away. Previously, the board had hired a professional cemetery manager, John Bry, who had grand plans to restore the cemetery as a passive park and arboretum. Instead, Bry moved out of state, and the cemetery was left to deteriorate. In 2014, Todd Dawson of Todd’s Tree Service mowed the lawn as a public service after he grew weary of seeing the overgrown grass, fallen tombstones and collapsed graves.

With the support and encouragement of The Hill School, Doaty then organized a committee that plans to formally take possession of the cemetery after it is officially declared abandoned—a long legal process that’s still underway.

Meanwhile, Doaty says, several anonymous donors, including some affiliated with The Hill School, have covered the cost of lawn mowing for last year and this year.

Hill School students, Hobart’s Run residents, and Pottstown CARES volunteers have also participated in cemetery clean-ups.

Doaty says Hill School students have started researching the lives of people buried at Edgewood.

“The cemetery has been a community classroom for both young and old,” Doaty says. “Rather than seeing Edgewood as a repository for dead bodies, it is increasingly seen as a ‘village of memories’ through our efforts.”

Doaty says historian Mike Snyder has been especially helpful by providing biographies of notable people buried at Edgewood. Sandi Gill is helping create a map and registry identifying the location of the graves.

“The philosophical and educational work being done here is the most rewarding and fascinating aspect of Edgewood,” Doaty says.

Cemeteries can be an invaluable resource to provide communities with a sense of place and history. They can be passive parks as well, with paths and benches, a place for tranquility and reflection.

(More Thursday)