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Forest Service Partners with Restoration Experts to Revive Badwell Cemetery

By Michelle Burnett on Nov 11, 2009

A fine example of restoration efforts at Badwell Cemetery

Local cemetery on Sumter National Forest finally gets the respect it deserves

After being plagued for years by vandalism and neglect, the Badwell Cemetery on the Sumter National Forest in McCormick County recently received a much-needed, much-deserved face lift. The U.S. Forest Service, local partners and volunteers, and professional restoration experts recently refurbished several areas of the cemetery including grave markers, the cemetery wall and the famous gate.

"Watching this cemetery fall into disrepair over the years has broken my heart and the hearts of McCormick County residents," said Long Cane District Ranger Anne Kiser. "It is uplifting to restore respect to the people buried in this cemetery and the artisans who created their grave markers, the gate and other significant features."

The cemetery, acquired by the Forest Service in a land exchange with the US Army Corps of Engineers in the 1970s, was severely vandalized in the 1990s (photos below, right). Vandals upturned and broke several monuments, took portions of others, and stole the famous cast-iron grim reaper off the cemetery gate. Fortunately, although in pieces, the grim reaper was recovered later. Segments of the granite block wall surrounding the cemetery were also damaged and collapsed.

John Galligan, President of the McCormick County Historical Society, has long been a strong advocate for the cemetery. Thanks to his persistence, the State Historic Preservation Office approved his restoration plan. Galligan also worked dilligently to round up volunteers, including the Savannah Lakes Village Road Warriors and members of the McCormick County Historical Society, who have maintained the cemetery and removed trash from nearby roads.

In October, Ruedrich Restorations of Louisburg, North Carolina, completed partial restoration of the cemetery including documentation and repair of broken grave markers, replication of portions of stolen marble markers, stabilization of the edges of the collapsed section of the wall, and painting and rust retarding of the cemetery gate.

"The restoration of this cemetery to its rightful condition would have been impossible without the support of so many pillars of our community," said Forest Service Archaeologist Jim Bates. "We are especially grateful for John Galligan of the McCormick County Historical Society; Nancy Lindroth, Former McCormick County Commissioner; Kathy Dulaney of the McCormick County Historical Commission; Ronnie Kidd, McCormick County Court Judge; and, Bobby Edmonds, McCormick County Historian. Because of the efforts of these folks, we are finally going to complete the professional restoration and repair of the broken and stolen marble grave markers."

Badwell, eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, is the historic family cemetery of the once-prominent Gibert-Pettigrew-Allston family. The earliest internment (1773) is to the Reverend Jean Louis Gibert, leader and founding pastor of the French Huguenot settlement of New Bordeaux (1764) and serves as a tangible link to the early settlement of McCormick County

The cemetery features many distinctive mid-19th century design elements and grave monuments, including the cast iron figure of the grim reaper on the gate that dates to the 1860s. Many slave internments surround the walled family cemetery including a marble monument to Daddy Tom, faithful

Badwell monuments before and after restoration

servant.

The Forest Service hopes to acquire additional funding to rebuild the fallen and sagging portions of the cemetery wall, restore or replicate the cast iron grim reaper for the cemetery gate, and develop interpretive signs.