Hidden cemetery predates Civil War

The Wood Cemetery on Nov. 9, 2019. The ground is clear, but several headstones need to be uprighted and made easier to read.

Text & Photo
By KEN CASHMAN

A delegation from New York Military Academy spent most of Saturday reclaiming a cemetery in Black Rock Forest.

The burial place dates back to the 19th century when Ira Wood's first wife was ill and knew she wouldn't recover. She asked him to use a part of his property as a graveyard, where the mountain people could be buried without charge.

She died at age 29 in the spring of 1846, and her husband buried her in the place she requested. Mr. Wood married two more times, and both wives are interred in the same cemetery.

By 1910, there were at least 50 graves on the mountainside. Three of them belonged to Civil War veterans -- Samuel Nathan (died at age 76 in 1902), Vincent O'Dell (died in 1891 at age 76) and a third veteran whose gravestone is no longer legible.

With time, the forest grew around the cemetery. Today, it can't be seen from the road. The Town recently paid to remove a tree that was blown down during a storm. And the NYMA volunteers have removed all the undergrowth. Years ago, the weeds were high enough to hide some of the gravestones.

We know, because members of the American Legion visit the site every year on Memorial Day to decorate the veterans' graves. It was during one of these visits that Ed Flynn took an interest in the cemetery. And when he passed, his wife Brigid continued to look after it.

In another generation, members of the Stillman family (first Ernest and then John) were frequent visitors.

The NYMA contingent spent several hours on Nov. 9 widening the uphill path, putting stones back in the wall and clipping unwanted vegetation. Superintendent John Dolan plans to return with a group and sleep over. One of their projects will be to raise a headstone that toppled over. Mr. Dolan estimates that it weighs 700 pounds. So many hands will be needed.

Mrs. Flynn has additional ambitions -- such as signs leading people to the cemetery, a totally repaired wall, and upright headstones that can easily be read.

It's more than the volunteers can accomplish, but Mrs. Flynn is very pleased with their progress.

Note: Ella Woolsey Wood (Ira's third wife) was the last person buried in the Wood Cemetery. She died on April 21, 1910.