

## GUFFEY CEMETERY COMMITTEE

The Guffey cemetery committee held a meeting on Sunday, November 27<sup>th</sup> at Rita's Place in Guffey and included a walk to the cemetery. The purpose of the meeting was to bring all the new members up to speed on what has been done and what still needs to be done to get the cemetery historically designated by the county to help preserve it and to identify and catalogue the people buried there.

The Guffey cemetery project was first started in 2008, when the first cemetery committee was formed under the auspices of the Guffey Community Association and the first task was to find out who actually owned the five acre cemetery plot.

Betty Royse, long-time Guffey resident who was the chairman of the first cemetery committee and soon became the only member, spent countless lunch hours in the county clerks office in Fairplay pouring through the Index of Deeds and Documents in the old county land record books searching for the last known owner of the cemetery parcel.

The town site of Guffey was platted in 1895 and first named Idaville, then Freshwater and finally Guffey, in 1896, when some gold, silver and several minerals were found in the area. The plat map shows that a fairly large town was planned but at most had only 500 residents and about 40 businesses in its heyday of 1896-1902.

According to county records, Royse found that in 1956, a Mr. Dean Johnson sold 16,623.045 acres adjoining the town of Guffey to a Mr. Robert C. Norris (Norris was the original Marlboro man in the commercials on television).

Nine years later, in 1965, Norris sold a large portion of the land adjoining Guffey to a Mr. Jerry Mills, a lawyer and a local resident doing business as Mills Ranches. This parcel contained the cemetery.

Then in May, 1969, Mills Ranches sold what would become the Cover Mt. subdivision to Sports Enterprises, but the five acre Guffey cemetery was excluded from that sale, according to records said Royse.

Royse then went to county assessor Dave Wissell who thought that the cemetery had always belonged to the county since the 1890's and that no taxes have ever been paid on the property.

Somehow in the sale of the property to form the Cover Mt. subdivision, the 5 acre cemetery was exempted and dropped from the county rolls, so no taxes were ever imposed and never will be, said Wissell. No deed was ever given for the property. Wissell explained that all this happened before there were rules governing subdivisions and rules in general.

The 5 acres though, is of very little value, except as a cemetery, and Wissell said the assessed value would only be about \$340.

The story around Fairplay, Royse found, was that for some sort of alleged deal in the Cover Mt. subdivision process, Mills was going to donate the five acre cemetery to the county. Who knows the real story, but Mills never did donate the cemetery to the county and thus continued to own it.

In early 2009, Royse received an obituary notice for Jerry E. Mills from local Guffey resident Charlotte Bumgarner, and passed it along to the community association who then contacted one of Mills' surviving daughters, Linda Mills-Hovance, living in Arvada, Co. Hovance had no knowledge that her father had owned the cemetery plot, as there was no record of it and her father had not left a will.

Wissell has since assigned a county schedule number to the parcel at the request of the Mills heirs, and Wissell and the community association have suggested to the heirs that they deed the cemetery to the county on behalf of the community association or the Park County cemetery committee and receive a tax write-off for it.

According to records said Royse, of the 31 official recorded gravesites in the cemetery, only 14 are identified with other possible unknown sites in the area and Royse has created a plot map of the cemetery.

The first recorded burial in the Guffey cemetery was baby Buford Swope 4/1896 – 8/1897, also the youngest, 15 months old. Baby Buford's tombstone reads "Like the dove to the ark, Thou hast flown to thy rest, from the world sea of strife, to the home of the blest". The last recorded burial is that of Andrew w. Jack, 1881 – 1941, although there is a newer headstone, John Newberry, 1859 – 1945, but it may not be recorded.

There is also a Civil War vet there, W.T. Boutwell, Company B, 13<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire Infantry, with a metal star on his gravesite with the initials GAR, which stands for Grand Army of the Republic.

With the Mills' heirs going through the probate process and deciding what to do with the cemetery plot, the cemetery committee, composed of Guffey area residents Jon Klima, Don Davis, Donavon Johnson, Bill Betz, Betty Royse and Flip Boettcher, are focusing on getting the cemetery parcel surveyed, determining easement access, trying to identify the unknown gravesites and finding possible other unknown sites, and researching the history of the known sites.

The history and pictures of Guffey are almost all lost. Anyone with information, pictures, stories about the cemetery or who have relatives in the cemetery, or any Guffey history, please contact the community association on their website: [www.guffeynews.com](http://www.guffeynews.com), or the Flume.

The ultimate goal of the Guffey cemetery committee is to preserve the cemetery through historic designation, to find out more of its history and more about who is there.