

NEWS

# Long grass, weeds trouble Wadena Cemetery Association

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By Anna Erickson

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The Wadena Cemetery has become overgrown with weeds and tall grass and local residents, along with visitors, have taken notice. The Wadena Cemetery Association is meeting this week to address the issues.

Joy Rickert, of Wahpeton, N.D., contacted the Pioneer Journal last week about the issue because she wanted to raise awareness of the situation at the cemetery in hopes it will improve. Her family lived in Wadena until 1960 when her dad changed jobs and moved. She was 14 years old.

"I've returned several times throughout the years just to look the town over and reminisce," she said. "Those days have always warmed my heart. I drive away thinking how much I like this town."

Rickert visited most recently July 21. She saw businesses that are still in Wadena 55 years later, along with her old house, elementary school and other familiar places. However, she said the one negative experience during her visit was the Wadena Cemetery, which she described as deplorable.

"As I drove and walked through its grounds I spotted many graves of people I'd known and I stopped to remember," Rickert said. "It was shocking, disappointing and sad to see that mowing and trimming around the base of monuments was long overdue."

She saw some older graves that had been covered with topsoil and had all kinds of weeds growing in. Some were 12 inches tall or more. Some flat markers were nearly covered altogether by weeds and one small upright stone for a veteran who passed away in 1937 had broken off from the base.

While Rickert was in the cemetery, she cleaned up some of the flowers and wanted to water them but there was no running water. She also couldn't find a trash can to dispose of the dead leaves.

"I was, and still am, dumbfounded by the poor care," she said.

Wadena resident Toby Pierce was also upset by the poorly maintained cemetery. He thinks the residents of Wadena deserve better. Pierce's wife is buried in the cemetery and when he visits he wants the gravesite to look nice. He planned to talk with members of the Wadena Cemetery Association about the conditions.

Wadena Cemetery Association President Dennis Olson said the committee is meeting this week to address some of the complaints.

"It's a maintenance issue," he said. "We're very concerned as well. We have a private contractor that takes care of the mowing and we need to

talk to him about what the hold up has been."

Mowing is being done this week, he added. Another area of concern is that some new black dirt was spread in parts of the cemetery to fill in some low spots and sinking grave sites.

"It was an improvement, except the weeds in the brand new dirt just jumped like crazy," Olson said. "People see one thing and they don't see the other. They don't see the improvement with the filling in of the dirt, they see the bad thing, which is the weeds. We've had some comments and we're fully aware of it and we're trying to deal with it."

Rickert hopes the cemetery issues can be resolved before her next visit to Wadena.

"I look forward to my next trip to Wadena and hope the Wadena Cemetery is in better shape then," Rickert said.

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Weeds became out of control in parts of the Wadena Cemetery this summer.