

**Potter Co. Veterans Service Committee (B. Simpson, P. Heimel, D. Wooster)
Conversation with Andrew Lumish, the “good cemeterian.” Feb. 22, 2017**

We spoke with Mr. Lumish for the better part of an hour from his home on Florida’s Gulf Coast. Each of us was very impressed with his dedication to this worthy mission and convinced that he is sincere in wanting to continue helping us as we launch our project. We emerged with the draft of an action plan to launch the Potter County Veterans Gravesite Restoration Project (and we’ll come up with a better name, I assume). We plan to start with a pilot cemetery – the Eulalia Cemetery along Rt. 6 in west Coudersport. It was chosen for numerous reasons, not the least of which was the fact that the Cemetery Board was the first to embrace our plan following the limited publicity.

We have more notes from the conversation with Mr. Lumish for those who want more details. Here are some highlights:

--He will be sending Bill Simpson gravestone-cleaning instructions and related materials soon.

--A dealer of the cleaning solution (which we’ve verified is environmentally friendly and not abrasive to the stones) offers bulk supplies at a discount to those who are referred by Mr. Lumish. We’ll pursue this for some price comparisons.

--His cleaning techniques, supplies, etc., follow the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs guidelines for marker maintenance in national cemeteries. It can take anywhere between 20 minutes and two hours to effectively clean and restore the marker.

--Suggested sources of volunteers include Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts; school students either through class projects or senior graduation requirements; veterans service organizations (American Legion, VFW and others), Probation Department community service men and women; potentially DAR and other organizations dedicated to military history and related topics; and most importantly historical societies/organizations and the cemetery associations themselves.

--He suggests some high-profile public events and effective public relations work.

--One of the most important components Mr. Lumish promotes is using the restoration of a gravestone as an opportunity to develop a biographical record of the military service member. These can be built into a database and a website/social media where the individual can be memorialized.

We do want to go forward with this, but each of us recognizes the enormous challenge.

While pursuing the pilot project (which will not be publicized until we have plans in place), we have begun to build a roster of volunteers and are hoping some would be willing to move into our circle of leadership on this worthy project. We’d like to have a second pilot project lined up fairly soon and there is some interest in the Ulysses area. We are also looking into funding sources and are asking the Commissioners to agree to allot some seed money from the Vassell Account (bequest for the benefit of county veterans). Cost of the cleaning solution is about \$40/gallon; it is available in bulk. An important factor of this solution (D2 Biological Solution) is that, with some stone types, it continues the cleaning process for some time after being initially applied. There is also a need for plastic brushes, sprayers and other equipment/gear to be determined.

In another developments not related to the call with Mr. Lumish, we have been contacted by Mike Wennin, genealogist/historian in Cameron County, who has shared some helpful advice on gravestone cleaning techniques to avoid damaging the markers.

Also, there is the possibility of the Leadership Potter County class becoming involved in this project, and of the Potter County Planning/GIS Department assisting by producing maps or related graphics.

There is a wealth of material available on Andrew Lumish online (using search term Good Cemeterian is helpful; and checking out the Facebook page of that title). The 3.5-minute CBS Sunday Morning segment that is available through YouTube is an especially effective piece. People like Andrew Lumish are a rare breed and it is an honor to have him take a personal interest in our efforts.