



## **SPECIAL EDITION**

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*Rick Sedlisky, Editor*

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### ***Shady Lane Cemetery: From an Abandoned Past To a Promising Future***

**By Rick Sedlisky**



*New Cemetery Signage  
Photo courtesy of Srikanth Palle*

*l to r: Tom Tone, Scout Leader, Abhinav Palle and Pravav Palle, Eagle Scout candidates,  
and Bill Lester, Sign Designer*

Abandon is defined as an act or instance of leaving a person or a thing permanently and completely. Reclamation is defined as the process of getting something useful from waste or getting something back that was previously thought of as waste. Since at least 1986, the Shady Lane Cemetery in South Abington Township to many appeared to be 23 acres of abandoned wasteland.

The ownership history from the 1980s forward is a complicated story. Suffice it to say, during the ownership of the late Jack Rogan, in 1986, conditions at Shady Lane began a downhill slide mainly due to lack of maintenance. Under the subsequent ownership of the late Chick Rader and despite increased complaints about lack of maintenance, conditions continued to deteriorate and by approximately 2009, any efforts to operate the cemetery ceased. From that point forward, Shady Lane Cemetery was in a state of abandonment, and any attempts at maintenance were courtesy of family members of people laid to rest there and community volunteers.

At some later point, the cemetery office was looted; records were thrown around the grounds. Thanks to a good Samaritan, the strewn records were gathered and stored for safe keeping. Although records are incomplete, they show that as of 1985, at least 5,243 are laid to rest there. It is estimated that Shady Lane has more than 6,000 graves.

Shady Lane Cemetery is in the Chinchilla part of South Abington Township. The cemetery was established in 1922 and consisted of about 100 acres. Approximately 66 acres, located at the top of the mountain, were sold by Mr. Rogan in 1987, reducing the cemetery's size to about 23 acres.

The cemetery is not far from an area known as "The Notch", which is near North Scranton. Numerous residents of that part of Scranton, as well as people from the city's West Side were laid to rest at Shady Lane, probably due to some savvy, eye-catching advertising. Owners advertised the cemetery to be "free of any mine shafts". Anthracite coal mining was at or near its peak in the 1920s and mine subsidence was a major concern for many who lived in Scranton and its Lackawanna Valley suburbs. We can imagine that being laid to rest at Shady Lane was a comforting thought for many.

As previously mentioned, efforts to maintain Shady Lane from the 1980s into the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century were those of family members, as well as community volunteers. That began to change in August 2021 when Ms. Louise Brennan agreed to help a family member who was researching her genealogy. The two women went to Shady Lane to find conditions that Ms. Brennan described as "horrifying", with a feeling of desolation. Imagine the scene, grave markers covered in a sea of weeds, flat markers buried under soil and overgrowth, piles of trash scattered about, roads almost impassable and on top of that, pardon the pun, "shady" characters lurking in the background.





*Grave markers in a sea of weeds  
Photo courtesy of Carol Wilkerson*

Ms. Brennan knew that with records listing more than 5,000 burials, she couldn't salvage the entire cemetery on her own, but she could rescue perhaps one or two graves at a time. She began spending an hour a day to bring some semblance of order to the sad mess that existed.



*Friends of Shady Lane member Louise Brennan mowing, late December 2021  
Photo courtesy of Carol Wilkerson*

Ms. Brennan needed help, but where to find help? She turned to social media and on *Next Door* she wrote about the conditions at Shady Lane. A friend, Carol Wilkerson, saw the post and offered to join the effort. As what would soon become a major clean-up project began to gather steam, Ms. Wilkerson proceeded to document the effort through photographs and began researching the cemetery's history. The photographs and historical information became the foundation for a Facebook page called, *Friends of Shady Lane Cemetery*.

Unfortunately, over the past few decades, any mention of Shady Lane Cemetery in the media was virtually all negative, but a Facebook page with a positive spin began to attract volunteers. It became obvious, however, that good intentions by volunteers would not be enough to keep the cemetery from returning to the conditions that existed for more than 30 years. Shady Lane needed care in perpetuity, but any perpetual care funds that existed were long gone. It's presumed that the funds were either used or diverted during the last owner's tenure. A long-term solution was needed.

Logic tells us that Shady Lane is not the only cemetery that faced abandonment issues. Many resting places across Pennsylvania are or were in that condition. Ms. Wilkerson and Ms. Brennan researched how other communities dealt with cemetery abandonment and found that the best way to solve the problem was to form a nonprofit corporation, which can also exist in perpetuity.

The idea of a nonprofit was shared with others in the community. That resulted in the recruitment of people who can represent stakeholders with an interest in the cemetery. An eight-member board of directors, including the two women, was formed. Articles of Incorporation were filed on January 13, 2022, and *Friends of Shady Lane Cemetery* became an official nonprofit entity. Form 1023EZ was filed so that the nonprofit's tax-exempt status is officially recognized by the IRS.

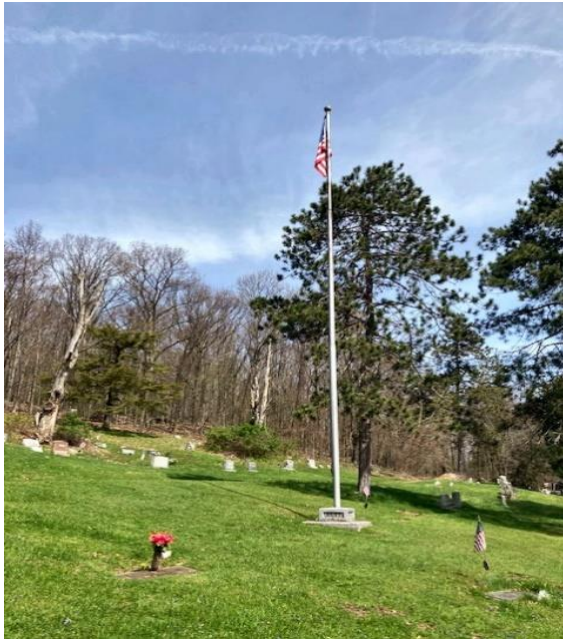
The eight-member board includes four officers; however, all operating decisions are made by the entire board. Those decisions include not only how to raise funds for upkeep of the cemetery, but equally important, how to best meet the organization's mission, which is to maintain and preserve the cemetery, respect those laid to rest there, the opportunity to provide green space to the community, document grave and local history, and educate the public about the past.

The clean-up of graves and the search for others still hidden in the weeds expanded to include documenting graves on the Find-A-Grave website, as well as including burial location specifics as more records are recovered.

As more graves become free of weeds, members of another group are gradually being discovered. The group is better known as "notables," or those who achieved some degree of prominence during their lifetimes. So far, the resting places of three "notables" have been found. They are Brigadier General Fred Russell Evans of the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (1964), Congressman John Richard Farr (1933), and Benjamin F. Maxey (1944), prominent pharmacist and businessman whose brother became the Chief



Justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 1943. The group's Facebook page provides updates of others found.



*Soldiers' Section*  
*Photos courtesy of Louise Brennan*

Shady Lane has a Soldiers' Section that was provided by the cemetery for free burial of all veterans. It was dedicated on Sunday, August 29, 1927, at 1pm. Friends of Shady Lane do not know when the last Memorial Day ceremony was held. The tradition was revived when a ceremony honoring veterans laid to rest there was held on Sunday, May 29, 2022, at 1pm, 95 years to the day and hour of the original dedication. The ceremony will continue as an annual event that will be held on the Sunday before Memorial Day.



*Soldiers' Section*  
*Photos courtesy of Louise Brennan*



As a fundraiser and community service effort, Friends of Shady Lane Cemetery offered the opportunity for flowers to be placed on graves for Memorial Day. This proved to be a popular option, as more than 30 planters were ordered.



*Memorial flowers at recovered graves  
Photo courtesy of Carol Wilkerson*



*Flagpole base  
Repainted by Abhinav Palle  
Photos courtesy of Carol Wilkerson*



*Volunteer Bill Lester  
Speaks at Memorial Program*

Following the renewed Memorial Day remembrance for veterans laid to rest at Shady Lane, perhaps the farthest thing from anyone's mind is a stage production in their honor. Written by Dr. Dawn Schluetz of Clarks Summit University, *Shades of War* is a drama in which veterans and loved ones tell their stories, including life in Scranton, wartime experiences and more. Dr. Schluetz' original work will be presented at the school's Elsewhere Production Hall. For additional information, including the names of veterans who will be featured in the show, please check the Friends of Shady Lane Cemetery Facebook page for updates.

Friends of Shady Lane Cemetery and Clarks Summit University Theater Program present:

# SHADES OF WAR

A PRODUCTION BASED ON THE LIVES OF SCRANTON  
VETERANS BURIED AT SHADY LANE CEMETERY

By Dr. Dawn Schluetz

**Friday, July 22, 7:30**

**Saturday, July 23, 7:30**

**Sunday, July 24, 2:00**

**Elsewhere Production  
Hall, Clarks Summit  
University**

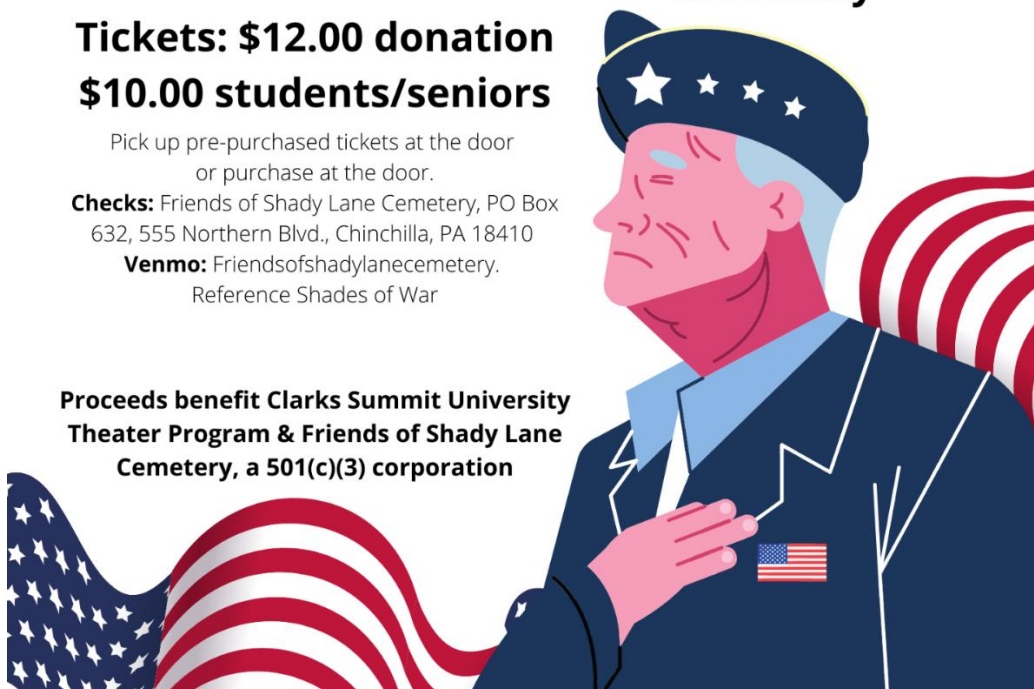
**Tickets: \$12.00 donation  
\$10.00 students/seniors**

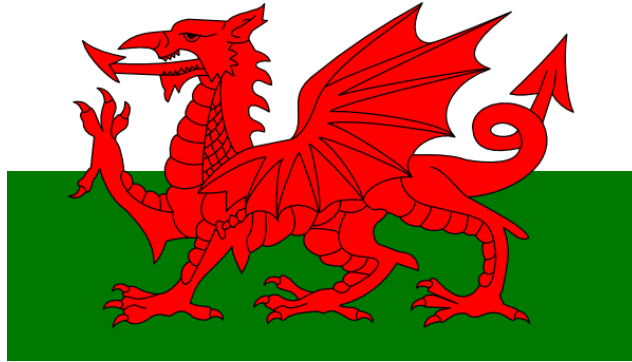
Pick up pre-purchased tickets at the door  
or purchase at the door.

**Checks:** Friends of Shady Lane Cemetery, PO Box  
632, 555 Northern Blvd., Chinchilla, PA 18410

**Venmo:** Friends of Shady Lane Cemetery.  
Reference Shades of War

**Proceeds benefit Clarks Summit University  
Theater Program & Friends of Shady Lane  
Cemetery, a 501(c)(3) corporation**





*Flag of Wales*

*Image source: Clipart Library/Wales Cliparts #307436*

Adjacent to the Soldiers' Section and dedicated on the same day is an area known as the Welsh Woman's Plot. While it wasn't specified exactly what the area was intended for, it is assumed that the Welsh Woman's Plot was established for indigent women and/or women associated with the Welsh Home that was in Scranton.

The Welsh Women's Club of Scranton was involved with the Welsh Home at the time. Club members entertained ladies who lived there, and at one point dedicated a Victrola (record player) to the home.

To date, only one burial record has been found. It documents the passing in 1950 of 79-year-old Winnifred Harris, a resident of the home. Because records are incomplete, it's entirely possible that others are laid to rest in the Welsh Woman's Plot.

Learning about the Welsh Woman's Plot and the Welsh Home prompted this writer to contact Torry Watkins. He is a member of the Lackawanna St. David's Society and is well-versed in the region's Welsh history. Torry, a resident of Mercer County, NJ, grew up in the Hyde Park section of Scranton where many Welsh immigrants settled.

Torry said that his mother, Ruth Helen Davis Watkins, served on the Board of Directors of the Welsh Women's Club for many years and served at least one term as the organization's president. He added that he believes the club had two divisions, one for older and one for younger women.

Torry confirmed that there was indeed a Welsh Home. It was located at 1646 Capouse Ave., in the Green Ridge part of Scranton, and was maintained by the Cambrian Society of Lackawanna County. Torry has a brochure from a 1954 fund-raising concert containing a list of contributors that he said, "Reads like a 'who's who' of local Welsh individuals and organizations." He isn't sure how long after the 1950s the home lasted as an institution, but believes it wasn't very long. That stands to reason as there has been virtually no Welsh migration to Northeast Pennsylvania in the last 75 years. Torry added that although the Green Ridge building still stands, it's no longer affiliated with any Welsh organization.



Nature has a way of hiding things from view. One of those hidden things is a structure that was the cemetery's receiving vault and chapel. Caskets were also kept there if the weather made it impractical to have a burial at the time of death. Small burial services were possibly held there as well. The photographs below show the receiving vault and chapel with a thick covering of vines before clean-up and free of vines afterwards. No one knew that the structure's windows were still intact.



*Receiving Vault and Chapel Before Clean-up*  
*Photo courtesy of Carol Wilkerson*



*Receiving Vault and Chapel After Clean-up*  
*Photo courtesy of Carol Wilkerson*



Although the receiving vault/chapel is no longer used as a place where those being laid to rest were received and services held, it still serves a purpose. It's now used to store artifacts that are a part of Shady Lane's history. One such item is the old cemetery entrance sign.



*Old Sign*

*Image source: Friends of Shady Lane Cemetery Facebook page*



*New Sign*

*Image source: Friends of Shady Lane Cemetery Facebook page*



A great deal of progress has been made at Shady Lane in a rather short period of time, but nature has a never-ending cycle of growth and rebirth. Although great strides have been made to remove weeds, grass, vines and other flora, Nature gladly provides replacements, free of charge, and through attrition, Nature re-takes paved areas that haven't been maintained. The road conditions at the cemetery, like most other things, have seriously deteriorated, but as the accompanying photograph shows, a community volunteer recently provided some needed patchwork at the cemetery entrance.



*Image source: Friends of Shady Lane Cemetery Facebook page*

As the 2022 season progresses, the Friends of Shady Lane Cemetery have been able to keep conditions under control. Community members have donated equipment, including four push lawn mowers to keep the grass and weeds in check. Other volunteers bring their own equipment and tools, all of which, as Ms. Wilkerson stated, “Works towards the goal of not to present a manicured landscape, but to keep graves accessible and prevent unchecked overgrowth. So far, this goal has been met.”



*Paislee*

*Image source: Friends of Shady Lane Cemetery Facebook page*