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Township patriots to be honored

By Heidi Fallon Staff Reporter

SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP - It took Joseph Prell several tries before he could find the overgrown cemetery where his ancestors are buried.

Once he found the graves of the early Finneytown settlers Prell was determined to make sure their final resting place was no longer neglected.

Prell, 42, Symmes Township, has organized a patriotic dedication honoring both Ebenezer Finney and David Sprong, Finney's son-in-law, both of whom fought in the American Revolution.

The ceremony, which includes period dress and a drum and fife duo, will be at 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 4, at the Finneytown Cemetery on Winton Ridge Lane.

New headstones for the two men will be unveiled as well. The faded and cracked original tombstones are being donated to the Finneytown Local School District, Prell said.

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Prell said it's taken him two years to track down and document his family's genealogy.

"I was fascinated with my family history when I was about 10," Prell said. "I was always asking my mom questions about her relatives, but it really wasn't until 911 (the Sept. 9, 2001, terrorist attack) that I really started to track down my roots.

"I think a lot of people started thinking about how important their family is after that."

Once he discovered that his fifth great-grandfather was Ebenezer Finney, one of the original settlers of the Springfield Township community, Prell set out to find where he was buried.

"It was so frustrating," he said. "I kept trying to find what was once called the Old Wesleyan Cemetery.

"I drove past this place many times before I finally saw what I thought was a headstone. It was so overgrown, you couldn't see it from the road."

Not only did he find his own ancestors, but several other American patriots whose graves were going unattended.

"Here they were. All buried in a row, nestled in this quiet little spot and no one knew they were here," Prell said while kneeling under towering maple trees at his fifth great-grandmother's fallen headstone.

Once he found the graves, he contacted the Department of Veterans Affairs which is paying for two new headstones for Finney and Sprong.

The Sons of the American Revolution is donating markers and the Finneytown Garden Club is providing

wreathes for each grave as well.

Area Boy Scout troops have helped him clear the cemetery and he's gotten help in his ancestral quest from his three children and wife, Elizabeth.

He expects about 100 of what he jokingly calls his "on-line cousins" to attend the Sept. 4 ceremony. He's been combing the country, via the Internet, tracking down relatives as he unravels his family history.

He's learned Ebenezer Finney inherited 10,000 acres of land from his paternal grandfather, Ward Finney.

In the late 1700s he brought his family and David Sprong's family from New York to a wilderness that is now Finneytown.

"Ebenezer Ward Finney's fourth great-grandfather, John Phinney, settled in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1642, so, my mother's bloodline goes back over 350 years in America," he said.

Once the spirited ceremony is finished, Prell said he'll continue making sure the cemetery is taken care of, even if he has to take ownership of it himself.

"I don't want any of these American heroes to be forgotten."

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