



defiance public library system
Defiance • Sherwood • Hicksville

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Taryn Lawson, communications coordinator

tmlawson@defiancelibrary.org

419-782-1456 ext. 1106

Defiance Public Library

320 Fort St.

Defiance, OH 43512

ph. 419-782-1456

fax. 419-782-6235

Johnson Memorial Library

116 W High St.

Hicksville, OH 43526

ph. 419-542-6200

fax. 419-542-1015

Sherwood Branch Library

117 N Harrison

Sherwood, OH 43556

ph. 419-899-4343

fax. 419-899-3479

www.defiancelibrary.org

Ohio Historic Marker Approved for Worthington Cemetery

[DEFIANCE] – Defiance Public Library System has received word that its application for an Ohio historic marker for Worthington Cemetery, the county's only known historic Black cemetery, has been approved.

Worthington Cemetery is located on Bowman Road in Highland Township, about a quarter mile east of Ohio 15.

"This part of our local history will be marked and remembered," said Sarah Marshall, adult services associate at Defiance Public Library. "Those buried there, although not known by name, will be remembered as living, working, and being part of a community in this rural area."

Marshall came across the little-known cemetery while researching for the library's annual Riverside Cemetery walking history tour. Making use of websites like defiancecountygenealogy.org, findagrave.com, and ancestry.com, as well as local connections, helped paint a fuller picture of the land and its owner, Archibald Worthington. The research process is documented in detail at defiancelibrary.org/blog.

The area was inspected first with dousing rods, then with specially trained search K9s and ground-penetrating radar to confirm the cemetery's location, a necessary step in the multi-step process of obtaining a historical marker.

Many community members and groups (plus some very special dogs) played a role in securing the marker, Marshall said, including DPL Adult, Teen, and Technical Services Manager Renee Hopper; Berne Heilshorn; Nelson Okuley; Kentucky-based KYK9 (Jennifer Jordan Hall, Taylor Bryan, Pocket, & Wick); Eric Hubbard and Chris LaMack of the University of Pennsylvania (GPR surveying); the Defiance Area Foundation (grant funding), the Friends of Defiance Public Library (DPL); Jay Budde; Terry Howarth; and Defiance Citizens in Action. Also assisting were Defiance College affiliates Steven Bare, Ph.D., assistant professor of history; Angela Sosebee; Alexandra Bevins; Caia Bevins; and Tyler Taylor. Many community volunteers aided in the effort, from researching and sharing information, to probing the ground at the site to release scent for the

K9s.

“Richland Township Fire Department let us come out and look at their old records,” Marshall said. “They volunteered that to us; we didn’t even know those records were out there.”

Before convincing proof of the cemetery’s precise location was gathered, the land—owned by the Ayersville Water and Sewer District—was slated to be the site of a lagoon project.

“Archibald Worthington will be known for dedicating a part of his land to hold these individuals in dignity & restful peace,” Marshall said. “Our community came together for a great purpose.”

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Cutline #1: Jennifer Jordan Hall of KYK9 Search Dogs works with K9 Wick in the field at the site of Worthington Cemetery.

Cutline #2: Eric Hubbard uses a ground penetrating radar (GPR) to identify underground anomalies at the site of Worthington Cemetery.