

The Meadville Tribune

www.meadvilletribune.com

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2010

County honors black troops of Civil War

By Ryan Smith
MEADVILLE TRIBUNE

The large, natural stone is set firmly in the ground, a symbol of permanence.

The newly planted oak tree already stands tall, representing strength, growth and life.

Or, rather, lives — the lives of men like Cpl. Samuel L. Gardner, Pvt. John Hamilton, Sgt. James Henry and others.

Inscribed on the stone is the statement of its purpose: "In Honor of the United States Colored Troops of the Civil War Buried in Crawford County."

Those memorials were dedicated during a special ceremony Sunday in Greendale Cemetery, one of 42 cemeteries throughout Pennsylvania that hosted public services to pay respect to the roles and sacrifices of African-Americans who enlisted and fought

in the Civil War.

The contributions of the United States Colored Troops — approximately 175,000 free men and former slaves across the country who enlisted of their own accord and were heavily engaged in major battles between 1863 and 1865 — were largely unheralded at the time of their service, said local historian Bruce Barrett, one of the speakers at Sunday's event.

Troops

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

County Historical Society, a total of 15 USCT soldiers have been identified as Civil War veterans who were Crawford County residents. Several are buried in Greendale, while others were laid to rest in other cemeteries throughout the county.

Sam Byrd, president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, spoke Sunday on what he and others said is a long-overdue formal recognition of those soldiers and their sacrifices. "Some things that need to be done at the time they should be aren't. But it doesn't negate the fact it should be done," he said.

"We've traveled a long way on the journey (toward racial) equality," Byrd said, and the USCT soldiers "are folks whose shoulders (we)

stand on... They've paved the way, and that paved way has been in blood.

"We are standing on hallowed ground," said Byrd, whose son, Kenneth M. Byrd, is among the local African-American residents currently serving with the U.S. military in Afghanistan.

Sunday's ceremony also included the unveiling of a plaque — framed in authentic century-old wood — that lists the names, military details and burial places of each of Crawford County's USCT veterans. Created by Kevin Parsons of the Crawford County Convention & Visitors Bureau, it's being donated for permanent display at the Crawford County Historical Society.

In further pursuing the history of early African-Americans in Meadville and around Crawford County, "we'd love to know if any of these people still have relatives in the area," said Lynch.

"This is an interesting topic, and one that hasn't really been discussed or explained or talked about in-depth before," Barrett said. Now, in Meadville and across Pennsylvania, "the long-ignored service of these men is finally being acknowledged."

Through research conducted by Annette Lynch of the Crawford

SEE **TROOPS**, PAGE A2