

Early settlers honored at dedication ceremony

By Louise Oleson - Managing Editor

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A crowd gathered in the tiny Jewish cemetery near Garske, N.D. on Sunday afternoon in spite temperatures hovering at 50 degrees and a brisk North Dakota wind.

They were there to honor early Jewish settlers of the area with the placing of a granite monument in the once abandoned cemetery the settlers had founded.

The cemetery, located approximately 26 miles north of Devils Lake, was founded in the 1800's and holds graves of Jewish settlers and family members, many of them children.

Hal Ettinger, of Lawrence, Kan., led the effort for the monument. While traveling in the state on business a couple of years ago Ettinger decided to see if he could find his great-grandfather's gravesite.

"I knew that my great-grandfather was buried somewhere in North Dakota," he said.

He found the tiny graveyard and his great-grandfather's grave, outlined by a ring of rocks. A crude, rusted metal nameplate with his name and the year he died, 1891, was attached with barbed wire anchored into the ground.

Simon Ettinger arrived at the Garske Colony in 1886. He died just six months after he was issued a land patent free title to 160 acres. His widow, with five young children, then moved away, with a total of \$10 in their pockets.

Hal Ettinger counted a dozen total grave markers, mostly stones gathered from the surrounding countryside. Many had names and dates of those buried, some adults and some children, carved into the stone, many in Hebrew. All were weathered, some barely legible.

After Ettinger returned to Kansas, he made plans to preserve the memory of his great-grandfather and the others, like, him who were part of the colony.

Ettinger researched names and found other descendants and decided that a permanent memorial was needed and started a fund-raising campaign for the \$2,500 granite



Mike Connor, in cap, addresses the crowd Sunday at the dedication of the monument placed in the Jewish Cemetery north and east of Garske, N.D.

monument.

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He contacted people in Devils Lake like Mary Beth Armentrout and Mike Conner, whose families homesteaded near the colony.

"My parents always talked about how tough the Jewish settlers had it at the turn of the century," Conner said. "They went through some times that we couldn't imagine."

Conner manages the Devils Lake Basin Joint Water Resource Board, which became the official sponsor of the monument.



Visitors who came for the ceremony included former Devils Lake business owner Myer Shark, center, and his son, Steve (left) and daughter Jan Frisch.

There was no sign, no marker of any kind to let people know where the cemetery was, just a small grouping of headstones on the prairie enclosed by a fence. The Kitsch family, which owns the land around the cemetery faithfully mowed the property and maintained the fence to keep the cattle out.

Armentrout of Devils Lake was one of those volunteers who has taken the cemetery to heart and worked to see a painted sign erected that now announces this is the Sons of Jacob cemetery.

Janeen Kobrinsky, lay Rabbi from Temple Beth El in Fargo officiated at the ceremony and expressed thanks to volunteers from throughout the area like Armentrout, Connor, and the Kitsch family who have come together to care for the cemetery and to see that the monument was erected.

The monument bears the names of the many Jewish settlers who made the prairie their home.

A fund has been set up to help pay for on-going upkeep of the cemetery through the Devils Lake Basin Joint Board, 524 Fourth Ave. NE, No. 27, Devils Lake, ND 58301-2400 and donations are still welcome.