Emeriti Succeed At Monumental Effort

By Troy Fedderson, '95

Sparked by a sojourn into the group's history, emeriti faculty have raised funds and purchased a gravestone for Zelma Wisherd.

Wisherd died in 1981, bequeathing 20 percent of her estate (more than $36,000) to the University of Nebraska Foundation for the benefit, welfare and comfort of the UNL Emeriti Association. The money was given in honor of Zelma's sister, Maude Wisherd, a former NU employee (Good NUa, Spring 2009).

"The Maude Wisherd Fund was initially used to pay health care insurance premiums for emeriti," said Lowell Moser, president of the association. "Even though the fund has grown nicely, eventually those costs became too expensive. Proceeds from the fund are now used to award grants for health-related items, scholarly activity, special projects and activities of the emeriti."

Research for an Association of Retirement Organizations in Higher Education (AROHE) conference presentation a year ago pulled Moser and Bob Fuller, then president of the association, into the world of the Wisherd clan. Paced by Moser's previous work in genealogy, the duo learned all they could about the family and the large donation — which is uncommon for emeriti associations nationwide.

"Maude was an emeritus," said Moser. "She worked as a librarian with the rank of assistant professor in the University of Nebraska Libraries from 1916 to her retirement at age 65 in 1955. She also worked for an additional 10 years with the state historical society."

Zelma graduated from NU in 1920, and went to Napa, Calif., where she was a teacher. Eventually she moved back to Lincoln to be closer to her family.

Moser and Fuller continued to search for information on the Wisherd family, finding that their parents once owned about 2,300 acres of land near Beatrice, and later the family lived in a home at 1821 Prospect Ave., until Maude's death. Two brothers — Harry and William — served in World War I. Their parents, Samuel and Alice, died in 1932.

Only one of the siblings, William, married. Moser is still searching for census data to see if he had children.

Hoping to add visuals to the conference presentation, Moser began looking for the Wisherd's graves. The search was brief, as answers came at the first stop.

"I stopped out at Wyuka and started looking through records," said Moser. "I located the parents' grave, then found those of the other brothers and sisters, but I could not find Zelma's grave."

Moser ventured back a couple of times before confirming that Zelma was buried next to her siblings.

"We looked through the records again and found that Zelma's grave was simply not marked," said Moser.

Moser and Fuller found no official reason for the unmarked grave. They suspect it was because Zelma was the last of the family to die and left no heirs.

After returning from the presentation at the AROHE national meeting, the emeriti pulled together to purchase the stone for Zelma.

"Members of the emeriti association were shocked that Zelma's grave was unmarked," said Moser. "When we talked about raising money for a marker, everyone was really supportive."

The group quickly collected the $700 necessary from emeriti donations to purchase a stone to match those of Zelma's siblings.

"I wasn't surprised at how quickly the emeriti got behind this proposal," said Moser. "We all know what the interest from the Wisherd donation has meant to the emeriti. In my opinion, it has been the glue that has kept this group together."

"The UNL Emeriti Association simply could not function effectively without the Maude Wisherd Fund."

The grave marker is now in place at Wyuka Cemetery. The UNL Emeriti Association dedicated it in an official ceremony at Wyuka Dec. 1.

Anyone with information about the Wisherd family can contact Moser at lmoser2@necr.net.com.