Cemetery holds clues to early history of county

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LINDSEY; Ohio - If your eye is keen, you can catch a glimpse of Sandusky County history through the cornstalks along County Road 128.

Obscured by crops, the elements, and time, a small rectangular plot of about five dozen weathered headstones sit atop a small clearing in Rice Township.

Figure 1   About five dozen graves dating from the 1850s, '60s, and '70s are scattered about Hineline Cemetery in Rice Township.

No one has been buried since the 1870s, and except for the graveyard's neatly mowed grass, it looks like no one has visited since then, either. Like the Field *of Dreams* of movie fame, Hineline Cemetery appears as though it was carved out of the surrounding corn- fields.
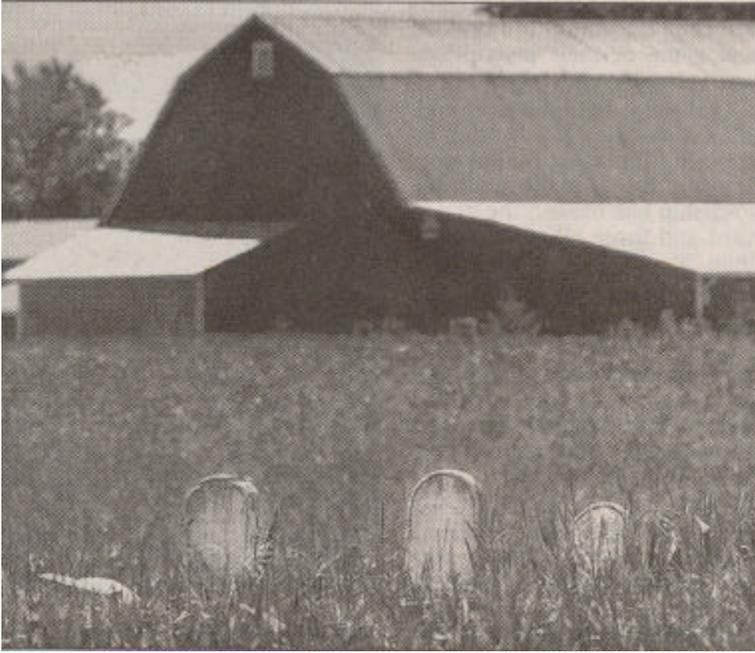
Figure 2   Weathered headstones appear to rise from the cornfield as Hineline Cemetery emerges from among the stalks

Several haphazard rows of worn, graying markers jut out of the dirt at various crooked angles. Many of the gravestones are chipped, others are broken, and some of their inscriptions are faded beyond recall.

Cemetery maintenance consists of weekly grass-cutting by a Rice Township employee. Trustee Ed Lamalie said the township has mowed the graveyard and three others for more than 20 years.

The township lacks the money to do much more.

"Some of these old cemeteries, especially, have fallen into disrepair. At least we've gotten them where they're mowed and people can find them," Mr. Lamalie said. "I'd like to see them cleaned up, the headstones straightened up."

But even in its state of relative neglect, Hineline Cemetery is full of clues about the German-Lutheran farmers who moved into Sandusky County in the mid-19th century.

Just ask Gary Hasselbach. A third-generation owner of Hasselbach Meats on State Rt. 19, Mr. Hasselbach traces his family's arrival in Rice Township to the 1830s. His paternal- great-great grandmother, Caroline Hetrick, is buried in Hineline Cemetery

Mr. Hasselbach, 62, said he didn't stop by the cemetery much when he was younger, but he's made a couple of visits recently.

During one such occasion, he and his wife, Darlene, visited Mr. Lamalie and his wife, Laura, who were researching their family's history. Mr. Hasselbach said he's become more interested in his family tree as he's aged.   "I guess I'm getting older," he said. "I can remember instances when I was much younger, someone would talk about who was married to who, and I'd say, " Who cares?"   But when you get older you start to care about that stuff."

Directing a visitor to the tiny, hidden graveyard, Mr. Hasselbach pulls off County Road 128 just south of Township Road 135.

He walks across the road to a pair of rusted metal strips that form a makeshift bridge over a creek. Stepping gingerly, he crosses the creek and steps into the cornfield, following a narrow dirt path between the stalks.

Figure 4 Metal strips form a makeshift bridge across a creek before a dusty path leads through the corn stalks to the cemetery.

About 20 feet later, the path opens into the old graveyard. Near the northeast corner of the clearing, which measures about 35 feet by 65 feet, he locates the top half of his great-great grand- mother's headstone. The broken, whitewashed stone rests against a base that once may have held it in place. It reads "Caroline, Wife of David Hetrick." Carved above her name, is a pair of clasped hands with the word "Farewell."

Mr. Hasselbach pulls the stone up and finds what he believes is the other half of the grave marker, a brown-stained stone. Some of its lettering is too faded to read, but he can make out part of the inscription: 36Y; 2M, 14D.

Her widower, David Hetrick, soon remarried and had six more children by his second wife, Mary Catherine Crowell. "They had awfully large families back then," Mr. Hasselbach said. "It is not uncommon . . . that the family had five or six children, and then the wife died and the husband remarried and had seven or eight more children."

Childhood death was much more common than today, as some of the stones in Hineline Cemetery attest. Less than a month after burying his first wife, David Hetrick was back at the graveyard, laying to rest their 2-year-old daughter, Emma.

David Hetrick's brother, John, and his family suffered the same sorts of tragedy. Another stone in the cemetery belongs to John Hetrick's first wife, Harriet, who died at the age of 30 on Aug. 27, c 1874. Still another belongs to the couple's 3-year-old son, Charles, who died June 27, 1866.

"There must have been struggles in every generation," Mr. Hasselbach mused.

Jack Hineline, a retired farmer and letter carrier, has often wondered about the lives of those buried in the cemetery named for his family. His great-great grandfather, Abel Hineline, bought the 136-acre farm that surrounds the cemetery in 1854 and donated the land for the burial plot.

But in a historical quirk, Abel Hineline isn't buried in the cemetery that bears his name, and neither is anyone else named Hineline. "They gave the land for it, but they must have outlived it," said Betty Hineline, Jack's wife.

The last recorded burial at Hineline Cemetery was in 1879. Abel Hineline, who died in 1884 at the age of 79, is buried in the Faith Lutheran Cemetery just across County Road 128 to the south.

Jack Hineline, 79, has lived on the farm his entire life, except for 41/2 years spent in the Army during World War II. When he was a boy, Mr. Hineline said, the mysterious cemetery was one of his favorite places on the farm. He recalled finding rusty nails, wood shards, and an occasional bone dug up by woodchucks.

"I used to go over there a lot and just wander around," he said. "I used to think, I'd have liked to have met those guys. It's kind of fun to stand there and read what you can and wonder what it was all about."