

Tombstone offers clue to deaf education



By JULIA DRAKE
Staff Reporter

Many clues to a community's past can be uncovered in graveyards — and the Belleville Cemetery is no exception to this rule.

Among historically significant markers in the local cemetery is the tombstone at the grave of Samuel Thomas Greene, who died Feb. 17, 1890.

The tombstone's base bears engravings that "fingerspell" the surname "Greene" — offering clues to the man's occupation as a teacher of the deaf.

The markings are a rare find in the Belleville Cemetery, says secretary-

treasurer Marj Miller, who regularly notes some of the more interesting monuments on the grounds.

Greene's tombstone also reads that it was erected by "his mute and hearing friends."

A native of Portland, Maine, Greene attended the Hartford school for the deaf and later obtained his bachelor of arts degree from the National College — later Gallaudet University — in Washington, D.C.

Shortly after his graduation, Greene moved to Belleville to teach at the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, now Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf. He taught at the facility for

about 20 years, until he died of injuries sustained in an ice-boating accident in early February.

The founding president of the Ontario Association of the Deaf, Greene helped launch the organization in 1886 with William Nurse, also a local teacher of the deaf.

The Daily Ontario reported in his obituary Feb. 18, 1890, that Greene had "left a lasting impression on the minds and hearts of the deaf pupils who have passed through classes during the past twenty years."

Picton resident Bill Conley, also a Gallaudet University graduate, journeyed to the cemetery last week to examine the tombstone after learning about it from elderly deaf people

in Toronto.

Conley says the tombstone is "interesting," because of the fingerspelling engravings and because of Greene's important role in education of the deaf in Ontario's past.

Greene's pink granite tombstone is located in Section P of the cemetery, a few meters south of the gravesite of Canadian author Susanna Moodie.

The monument is one of many in the Belleville Cemetery that stand as tributes to famous area residents, says Miller. It's also one of several that offer unique clues regarding the experiences and accomplishments of the past.