

FOCUS

Red Cloud Cemetery

*preserving human
and natural history*

Red Cloud was a thriving community in Cramaha Township at the end of the 1800s with sawmills, gristmills, a shingle mill and sash mill as well as farms, a school and the cemetery.

Today, looking out over the wooded hills in the northwest corner of Cramaha Township, you catch hints of old building foundations overgrown with sod and shrubs. Red Cloud School on Red Cloud School Road burned years ago. But the legacy of the place, from long before the first European settlers, is captured in a wonderful present day history lesson that also includes township settlers at Red Cloud Cemetery.

Red Cloud Cemetery is owned by the Township of Cramaha and managed by the Red Cloud Cemetery Board. It is a small piece of prairie grassland that once covered large parts of southern Ontario and the northeast United States. Prairies were found where the soils were sandy and prone to drought. Thanks to funding from SgHell Canada and Wildlife Habitat Canada, the cemetery, its human and botanical significance are being preserved.

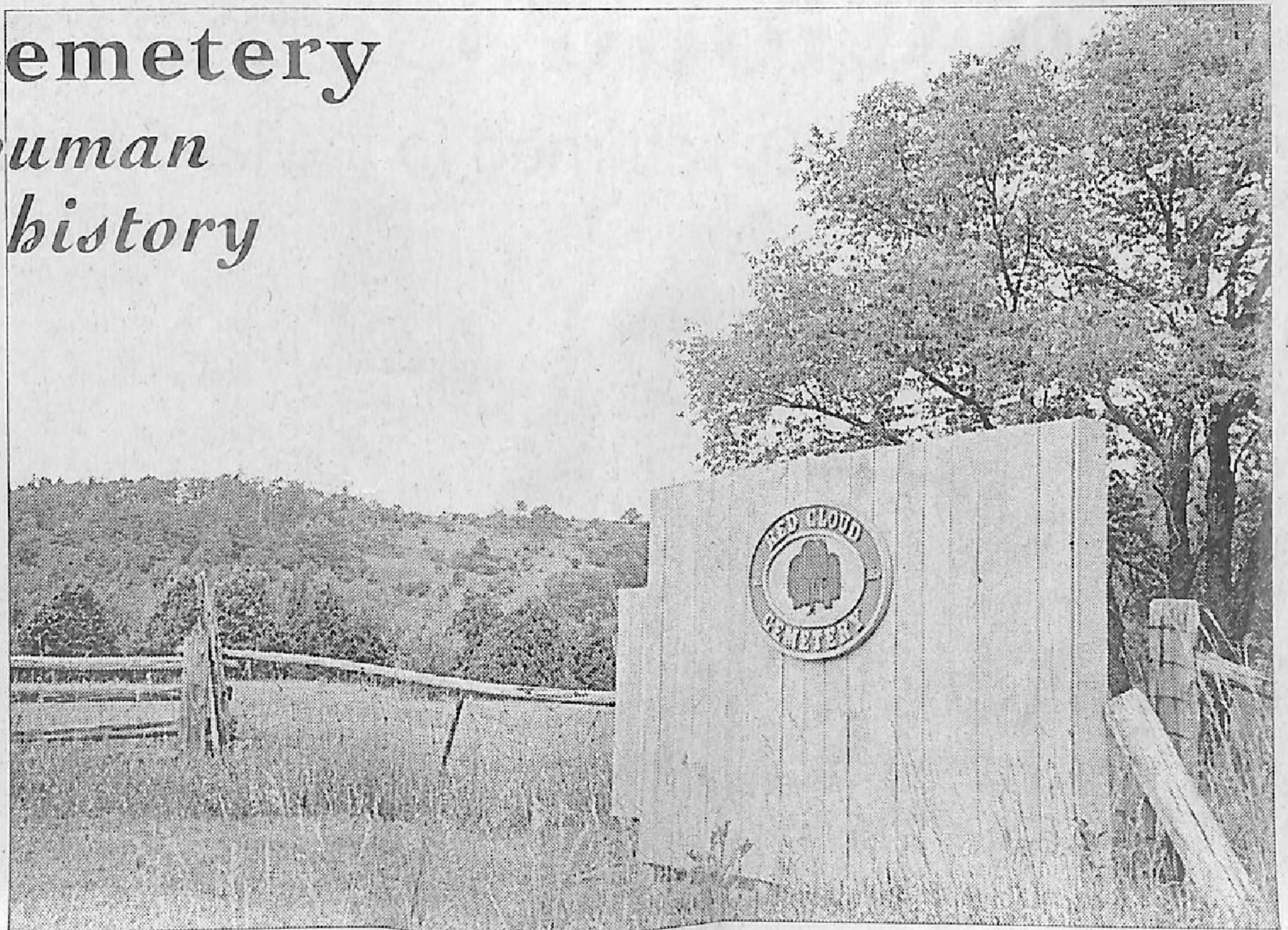
The Rice Lake Plain in Northumberland was once prairie and savanna woodland. Very few areas escaped the plow. Now, less than once per cent is left.

Red Cloud Cemetery is Tall Grass Prairie with such grasses as Big Blue Stem, Little Blue Stem, Indian Grass and beautiful flowers like Butterfly weed, Low Bindweed and Blazing Star. It is part of the Salt Creel complex, an important area of wetlands, thickets, forests, savanna woodlands and tall grass prairie.

The importance of the Red Cloud Prairie was recognized in 1993 by expert botanists.

Pine trees planted in the 1960s had grown up and were shading out the prairie plants. The trees were thinned in 1996 and now, with more sunlight, the prairie species are thriving. Unfortunately, so are other non-prairie species like White Clover and Goat's Beard which have to be carefully controlled.

Catherine Parr Traill described the Rice Lake Plains in 1835:



The entranceway to the Red Cloud Cemetery is clearly marked with wooden gating and carved plaque. The cemetery dates back to the mid-1800s, but the prairie grassland also now preserved for posterity within the cemetery boundaries, is thousands and thousands of years old. Photo by Mandy Martin

"A number of exquisite flowers and shrubs adorn these plains which rival any garden in beauty during the spring and summer months.

"Many of these plants are peculiar to the plains, and are rarely met with in any other situation These plains were formerly famous hunting grounds of the Indians who, to prevent the growth of timbers, burned them year after year."

The cemetery is a fascinating memorial and invaluable source of information about the history of the community. It dates back to at least the 1830s when the area was first settled. The grave stones show the changing style from a lamb and dove through the tree of life to the more formal carved

lettering of the turn of the century. The last burial was in 1940.

Many of the local pioneer families were buried here, like the Bull family, originally from Dutchess County in New York state, who moved to Prince Edward County and on into Cramaha Township.

Other prominent names in history include Brintnell, Ferguson, Walker, Samis, Johnston, Puffer and Tweed.

At Red Cloud Cemetery, the aim is to protect the prairie, and maintain the peace of the burial ground as an historical and cultural site.

