Adhesives Restore Eighteenth-Century Pennsylvania Cemetery

Situation
At some point in life, it’s common for people to wonder about their family heritage. For some, that leads to ancestry websites, internet searches or DNA tests, but for others, this can mean a 15 year journey to discover one’s family history.

For Conestoga Tile founder Jack Vogel, it was the latter. After discovering 23 of his ancestors were buried at Lehn’s Cemetery between 1776 and 1912, Vogel spent the next 15 years tracking down the exact location of the cemetery, which wound up being in a cornfield on an Amish farm in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, only a few miles from where he lived.

To his dismay, the small, 150 grave cemetery was in shambles. Over the years, sheep were used on the farm to help keep the grass down, but the animals’ enclosure in the cemetery also resulted in many broken headstones — some into numerous pieces.

“In talking to Jacob King, the Amish man who owns the farm, he told me that he would like to re-open the cemetery for his Amish community because they have had to travel to the next township to bury,” said Vogel. “To kick off the project and assist Mr. King with re-establishing the cemetery, I entrusted LATICRETE® products to get the job done.”

Challenge
Maintenance: Aside from mowing the grass, it had been years since the cemetery underwent any maintenance. The product used to repair the headstones needed to be strong enough to reverse years of damages and hold up to several more years of use without the need for regular care.

LOCATION: Lancaster, Pennsylvania
OWNER: Jacob King, Lancaster, Pennsylvania
INSTALLER: Conestoga Tile, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
Vertical outdoor installation: With the repair work needed being outside and vertical, it was vital that the product used have incredible non-sag performance and create a strong bond that would not break down over time. Additionally, the product would need to be able to withstand a range of temperatures to keep up with Pennsylvania’s four seasons.

A LATICRETE Solution

Vogel and his sons, Jim and Steve, organized a workday with 15 Amish men to pull vines, cut back weeds and repair the fence surrounding the cemetery.

To stand up leaning headstones and mend those that were broken, the team secured pieces of wood measuring 2 inches (51 mm) by 4 inches (102 mm) vertically on both sides of each headstone and then fastened each with a cross-section held together with bolts. At the bottom of each headstone, a brace was installed loosely to hold the structure in place while LATAPOXY® 310 Stone Adhesive, a two-component, high-strength epoxy adhesive, was applied.

The broken edges of the stones were wire-brushed, and the epoxy was applied as the broken pieces were stacked in place and bolts were drawn tight to keep the newly formed headstones in place. The result was complete headstones built stronger than the originals.

LATAPOXY 310 Stone Adhesive was perfectly suited for this project because of its high-strength formulation that easily bonds tile and stone installation on vertical surfaces that will not deteriorate over time. Additionally, this product maintains its non-sag consistency at temperatures up to 95°F (35°C), making it ideal for year-round use whether indoors or out. The rapid setting version will set up in less than 10 minutes, making it ideal for installations where a fast initial set and hold is required.

Outcome

“LATAPOXY 310 Stone Adhesive performed exactly as expected to completely alter the appearance of the once distressed headstones. I can rest easy now knowing my ancestors have had honor restored to their final resting place,” added Vogel.

Within months of Lehn’s Cemetery’s re-opening in August 2018, the first burials were held in more than a century.