CUBERO — Headstones have been overturned, buildings covering graves have been smashed, but a small part of Civil War history is preserved in a deep sleep in the “old cemetery” in Cubero. A new one was built around 1915.

Betsy Deltoya, a member of the Cibola County Historical Society, pointed out graves during a July 2016 tour. The skewed headstones of Justo Sabedra and Antonio J. Sabedra from Company D, 2nd New Mexico Infantry, lean against each other in eternal support.

Near them is a weathered brown stone with the partially faded name of Sgt. Samuel H. Kenney. At the foot of the grave, a wooden marble marker celebrates the lives of Kenney, Pvt. E. Thetford and Pvt. George C. Carruthers of the Confederate States of America, Company A, 7th Texas Mounted Volunteers, who died in the 1860s in Cubero.

The marker was placed by the New Mexico Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

“When they ridiculed this, there were 23 Sons of the Confederacy re-enactors that came out here. They were all dressed in period dress. It was so cool — and probably three-fourths of the towns had no clue what was going on,” Deltoya said. For that story, she referred to Dick Cochran, the Civil War “guru.”

Cochran, a member of the historical society and a Civil War re-enactor, gave a brief history Sunday of how Confederate soldiers came to be buried in Cubero.

New Mexico invasion

“During the war of northern aggression, a large number of federal (Union) officers decided to leave the U.S. Army and join the Confederates. One of them was General Henry Hopkins Sibley,” Cochran said. “He left the Army and as the war started, he came up with an idea and a plan of raising his own brigade and invading New Mexico.”

“He told the Confederate high command on the idea of raising an army and going north to New Mexico and into Colorado, with the idea of cutting communications across the United States between the eastern U.S. and California. Another major thing was to try to capture the gold fields in Colorado. For the purpose, obviously, of gaining control of those, cutting off the supply of gold to the Union, and reclaiming the Confederate coffers,” Cochran said.

Sibley put an army together and started marching north in late fall 1861. It included over 1,200 men, Cochran said.

“It was somewhat different from the Federal army, in that everyone was responsible for their own horses, their own weapons, their own uniforms,” Cochran said. “You can forget the picture of the gray-clad troops all in a line sort of thing. Everybody was in civilian uniform. Although some had rifles, the preferred weapon was a shotgun.”

They met the Federal troops at Fort Craig, about 30 miles south of Socorro on the Rio Grande River, where the Confederates won the day at the Battle of Val Verde, capturing all the Federal cannons, Cochran said. Marching on, they engaged in the Battle of Glorieta just past Santa Fe.

Finis Cavanaugh of Cubero, a Confederate sympathizer who worked as a medical doctor in Santa Fe, was very much a “wheel-dealer and man about town,” Cochran said. “He had the post surgery at Cubero as well as what is now Fort Wingate, where he provided supplies to the soldiers, largely hay grown around Cubero and based.”

Although Cubero wasn’t an actual camp, a small group of soldiers was located there, Cochran said.

Cavanaugh and several others got wind that Sibley was coming up the Rio Grande, so he decided that he’s going to take over the post, Cochran said. He gave the captain 10 minutes to decide whether he was going to resist or surrender peacefully. When the captain didn’t respond, Cavanaugh — aided by George Gardenhire, R.P. Thompson, and Richmond Gillespie — took over the post.

Aid from sympathizers

Immediately after the takeover, Cavanaugh sent Gillespie on horseback to Albuquerque to meet Sibley’s men and let them know about their cache of weapons in Cubero.

“There were approximately 20-25 wagons filled with military supplies there at Cubero that they were taking to Fort Wingate and Fort Delaware, along with 60 guns and 3,000 rounds of ammunition which the Confederates had captured,” Cochran said. “That was a real windfall for them.”

While Gillespie and Sibley’s Confederate troops were simultaneously approaching Albuquerque, the Federals were busy piling up their supplies in what is now Old Town Plaza, where they tried to burn them before the Confederates arrived. In Albuquerque, Gillespie met the Confederate commander, who immediately sent a company of 25 men to Cubero to secure the supplies, Cochran said.

“One of the comments was that Cavanaugh met them over at Cubero and opened up the store to the Confederate soldiers — who had come up all the way from San Antonio — and gave them clothes and fed them. The Confederates stayed there in Cubero for one full month,” he said.

There of the soldiers died of “pleurisy,” or what Cochran believes was pneumonia, during that month. “That’s why we have some Confederate graves in Cubero. There was never any battle or anything like that. They were called back and they had to leave several of their men there at Cubero because they were just too sick to travel,” Cochran said.

Cochran said one of his re-enactor friends found the grave marker for Sgt. Kenney around 1992 or so. “The problem that we have here is we know Kenney was the second one to die. Thetford died on March 21, Kenney died five days later on the 26th, and Carruthers died on April 3, nine days later. So essentially, it was just one, two, three,” he said.

“So we are assuming — with all the problems assuming brings — that where Kenney’s marker is, that they are buried on either side of him. But we don’t know that or have anything to base that on other than just our feelings on that,” he said.

There has been no attempt to find the deceased soldiers’ relatives in Texas.