

**MAY 2017**

**VOLUME VI, ISSUE 2**

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## Annual Members Meeting

The annual Members Meeting will be held on Saturday, June 10 at 11:30 in the Fireman's Plot area. All Old City Cemetery Committee members are encouraged to attend. At the meeting, Board members will report on the prior year's activities and outline plans for the following fiscal year (July—June). We will also ask members to elect individuals to fill Board vacancies. A light lunch will be served.

Please plan to join us to learn the latest on upcoming events and activities in the Historic City Cemetery. Please RSVP by email to Connie at [doxiechar@outlook.com](mailto:doxiechar@outlook.com) or phone 266-1013.

## OCCC Board of Directors

The business of the Old City Cemetery Committee is handled by a Board of Directors elected from among members and by the membership at our annual meeting in June. All successful organizations have a group of individuals willing to help carry out the organization's goals, and our Directors work hard to support the Cemetery.

We need members willing to step up and participate as Directors. First, what does a Director do?

- Participate in any and all duties imposed on the Board as regards the business of the OCCC.
- Participate as a chair or member of one or more of the various committees necessary to the success of the OCCC.
- Participate in development and adoption of an annual budget for the OCCC.
- Participate in helping the OCCC to meet stated mission, goals and objectives.
- Attend monthly Board meetings.

Directors serve three year terms, although mid-term vacancies may be filled for a shorter period. Invitation on page 9.



## ANNUAL MEMBERS MEETING

Saturday  
June 10, 2017  
11:30

Fireman's Plot

## President's Message

Volunteers are working hard to make the cemetery beautiful and their efforts have paid off in all parts of the property with beautiful flowering plants and weed removal. This last has not been without exemplary effort as the very rainy winter and warm spring caused even years' old weed seeds to germinate and appear. I want to thank all volunteer efforts on the grounds and note that city staff are working with increasing numbers of Sheriff's workers to clean out weeds, mow lawn and install chips in plots.

June is the month our By-Laws designate for our annual members meeting and I urge all members to attend. You will hear from Board Members and volunteers who will speak of work and activities of the last year and plans for next year. We will also elect Board members.

The Old City Cemetery Committee has undertaken several tasks including caring for gardens and plots, researching historical events and people and communicating the same through tours and events, and providing information to cemetery visitors. If you or someone you know is interested in gardening, history, giving tours and related activities, please consider volunteering. Just call 448-0811 or send an email to [info@oldcitycemetery.com](mailto:info@oldcitycemetery.com) and let us know—we'll find something for you to do!

*Connie Bettencourt, President  
Old City Cemetery Committee*

## In Memoriam



Outstanding Cemetery volunteer Patricia Frey just 67, died at her home in Sacramento, CA on April 24, 2017 with family at her side after her second battle with cancer. She was survived by her husband and two children, brothers, sisters and their children. She was a native of Redwood City, who moved to Sacramento in 1975 when she married James R. Frey and was a 35-year employee of Wells Fargo Bank. Pat had deep interests in gardening and genealogy, and volunteered at the Sacramento City Cemetery.

She worked in the Archives and Visitor's Center. "Pat was a very easy person to have around and I always knew that any visitor was in good hands with her." said Jeanne Baldwin. Pat also took photos for the Restoration Committee and inside the McCormick Mausoleum when it was opened for cleaning. Jeanne added, "She was a delightful person and will be missed."

Pat was a 19-year survivor of breast cancer and volunteered with the American Cancer Society for almost 20 years. The family has requested remembrances be sent to the Cancer Society in her name.

## Call for Lantern Tour Volunteers

It's that time again—no, it's not October yet but we do need to plan for our annual fundraiser. Volunteers are needed now for a variety of activities:

- Ushers will escort guests during the tour, keeping to paved roadways and providing assistance as needed.
- Ticket-takers will greet and assist guests as they arrive.
- Sales – we sell cemetery tee-shirts, books and other items during the evening.
- Refreshments – light refreshments are served to guests.
- Volunteer refreshments – supper is served to participants and volunteers are needed to help serve.
- Set-up and clean-up – chairs, tables and canopies will be in place. Volunteers will be needed to set out sales items, place lanterns, help actors with props, etc. We need to put items away at the end of each evening.
- Greeters – costumed volunteers meet and greet guests at the gate.
- Ghouls & spirits – costumed participants will be stationed throughout the tour route to startle guests and provide atmosphere and general creepiness.
- Actors – costumed participants will tell or act out a story along the tour route.
- Stage Show—actors, sound & lights, etc.

There will be four tours each night of two weekends—October 20-21 and October 27-28. Volunteers are asked to spend an entire evening on site (5:30—10:00 p.m.). Supper will be provided. Volunteers are encouraged to dress in Victorian costume and join in the fun.

Please call 448-0811 and leave a message or send an email to [info@oldcitycemetery.com](mailto:info@oldcitycemetery.com) if you wish to participate. Sign up now, the best tasks fill up fast!



# Cemetery Yews

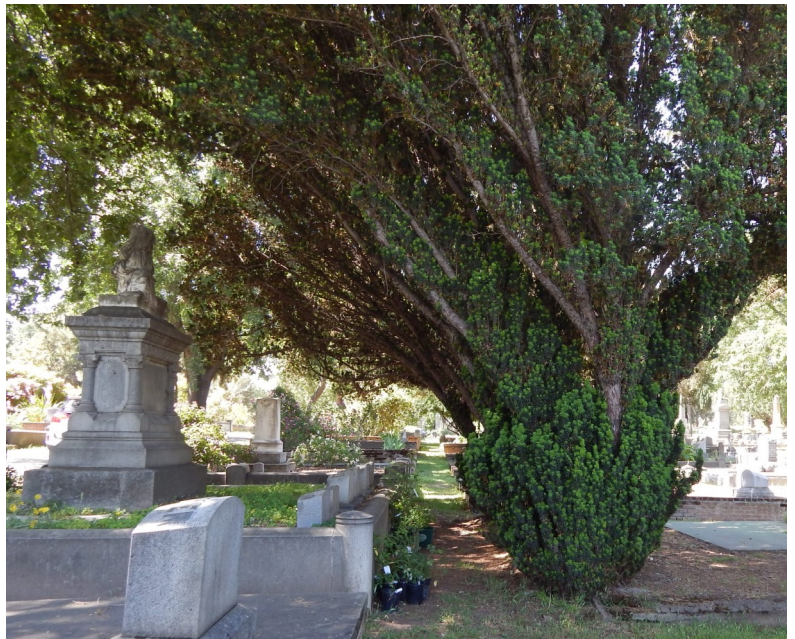
Judy Eitzen

Trees have been an important part of the landscape of rural cemeteries in America from the beginning. When Sacramento's Historic City Cemetery was established, it was a rural cemetery, located some two miles from the heart of Sacramento. Over the years, the city grew and so did the many trees planted in burial plots and throughout the cemetery.

We have seen many elm trees (*Ulmus Americana*) succumb to disease and be removed from the Cemetery while Magnolias (*Magnolia grandiflora*) with similar lifespans remain healthy and beautiful. Working with the Sacramento Tree Foundation, cemetery volunteers maintained an inventory of trees, surveying conditions each year until the City Parks Department staff took responsibility for maintaining the Cemetery grounds. The last survey, taken in 2008, records more than 25 English Yews growing in the Cemetery. At that time, it was noted that some were overcrowded and needed attention. Recently, City Parks staff have addressed these trees. While elms and magnolias are great at providing shade in Sacramento's hot (and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, un-air-conditioned) climate, some may question; why are yews important to the cemetery?

The English Yew (*Taxus baccata*) is a traditional graveyard or cemetery tree in Europe – especially Great Britain – and has been for many centuries. In fact, there are some specimens of yew in graveyards next to Norman churches which were planted at the time of William the Conqueror. (Yews live a very long time.) Early pioneers carried the tradition West by planting yews on graveyard plots in Sacramento.

Historical accounts give various reasons for planting yews in graveyards. William Salmon in *Botanologia* suggested that "If the Yew be set in a place subject to poisonous vapours, the very branches will draw and imbibe them, hence it is conceived that the judicious in former times planted it in churchyards on the west side... being fuller of putrefaction and gross oleaginous vapours exhaled out of the graves by the setting sun." <sup>(1)</sup> Though this hypothesis is not proven



scientifically, yew trees do provide complete shade, and, as virtually every part of the plant is toxic, falling needles may have contributed to health and safety of early burial grounds. Yews also provide protection for buildings by virtue of their dense canopy and many small Norman churches were constructed in the shelter of mature yew trees. And, as churchyards were often fenced or walled, cattle and sheep were kept from nibbling on the poisonous trees.

Yews were also spiritual symbols as a native evergreen in the British Isles where primarily deciduous trees covered the landscape. Reverend John Collinson wrote of the churchyard of Ashill in Somerset in 1656, "Our forefathers were particularly careful in preserving churchyard Yews which by reason of their perpetual verdure were emblematical...of the immortality of the soul." <sup>(2)</sup> Perhaps he took these sentiments from Ancient Greece where both yew and cypress were the usual signals to denote a house in mourning. It was also considered as 'the tree of life' in the Garden of Eden. <sup>(3)</sup> An early statute (1307) under Edward I was titled, 'Ne Rector abores in Cemeterio prosternat.' (The Rector may not remove trees from the graveyard.) <sup>(4)</sup> The implication being that this law principally related to this species of tree and consequently that they had been planted in churchyards well before the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

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Shakespeare, in *Richard II*, called the yew the “double fatal yew” because the leaves of the yew are poison, and the wood is employed for instruments of death. Some historians place yew trees in graveyards so their wood would be available for making bows, but others state that yew wood for bows came primarily from Spain and other European countries and is one reason these trees have vanished from much of Europe.<sup>(5)</sup> With the above statute, it would seem that cutting graveyard yews would not be permitted, even to make bows for the King’s use. Additionally, there were no large plantations of yews in churchyards, just a few which are now reduced to one or two ancient trees.

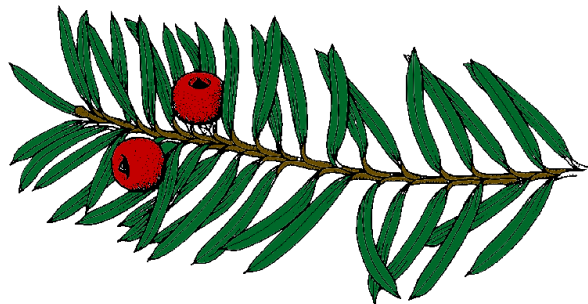
Whether it is the link to immortality – being evergreen and long-lived – or for more practical reasons, the yew became a tradition in American cemeteries as well.

Over the years, some of Sacramento’s cemetery yews have succumbed to disease and been lost. Additionally, some are crowded or were planted at the edge of a plot or have overgrown pathways and require attention. Additionally, English Yews, not native to our climate, may become stressed in our hot, dry summers and consequently may require additional irrigation. In her book, *A Graveyard Preservation Primer*, Lynette Strangstad states, “Choices of vegetation may reflect cultural and spiritual beliefs, as well as illustrating various time periods.”<sup>(6)</sup> Historic City Cemetery yews, long-lived legacy plants, representing an early period in our history should continue to be preserved.



Healthy yew near Restroom one year after pruning.

- 1) *Botanologia; the English herbal, or, History of plants...*, 1710, Printed by Ichabod Dawks, London.
- 2) *Collinson, Reverend John, History of Somersetshire*, 1795, printed by Cruttwell, Bath, England.
- 3) *Hageneder, Fred, Yew: a history*, 2011, The History Press, Stroud, UK
- 4) *White, Gilbert, The Natural history and Antiquities of Selborne*, 1789, Published by Benjamin White, London, p 325
- 5) *Hageneder, op cit.*
- 6) *Second edition*, 2013, AltaMira Press, NY, Toronto, Plymouth UK, p 2



## MASON—NEW AT THE CEMETERY

From time to time, the Cemetery is visited by animals not part of the local ecology. Most often we find stray cats, many of which are feral. A couple of weeks ago, City staff member, Megan Crose, noticed a cat way up in a pine tree in Hamilton Square. It was so high that it couldn't be reached even with the longest ladder. Megan kept an eye on the cat which was lying on a bed of needles, not moving much, and crying for help. The cat did not come down from the tree over a weekend and Megan knew it must be hungry and thirsty. So she enlisted Chris (one of our Security guards) to assist. Megan took a pole saw, duct taped a bowl of food to it, and she and Chris took it up the ladder so the food could reach the cat. The cat began to eat. Chris lowered the bowl to the next branch and the cat followed down. They repeated lowering the bowl until the cat could be reached and brought down from the tree.

Thin as a rail, the cat (who proved to be a he) immediately demonstrated very friendly behavior – not like a feral cat at all. He rubbed against ankles and presented his head for scratching. Leslie Hurlburt says that the cat begs for attention whenever he and his volunteers are down on the ground pulling weeds.

This ginger and white cat is polydactyl – he has six toes on his front paws. Polydactyl cats are sometimes known as “Hemingway Cats” after a colony of cats on Ernest Hemingway’s property on an island off Key West, Florida. Descendants of his original polydactyl cat still live on the island. Polydactyl cats are considered good luck at sea which may explain why such cats can be found around the world.



Megan informally named the friendly feline, “Mason” and he can be found most often in Hamilton Square where he sleeps under a rosemary shrub. He is being cared for, but Mason needs a “forever” home.

He would also benefit from a trip to the vet to check his health – while he appears healthy, he probably needs an inoculation or two. If you or someone you know is looking for an affectionate and beautiful cat, please let us know by calling Megan at 264-5621 (office) or 825-9633 (cell)

## RIVER CATS—PROWLING AT THE CEMETERY

River Cats are committed to making a difference in our Sacramento Communities. Led by Community Relations Coordinator, Kriselle Pons and underwritten by SAFE Credit Union, employees and volunteers spend time on projects throughout the community. Volunteers include front office employees, team players and volunteers who participate in various service initiatives. On Monday, May 1, eighteen River Cats volunteers showed up to help with the Historic Rose Garden's first Deadheading At Dusk of the season.

**Thank You, River Cats!**



## UPCOMING CEMETERY TOURS

**May 27—Memorial Day Commemoration**—This annual event is presented each year by local veteran's associations in conjunction with the Boy Scouts. Flags are placed on the graves of every veteran in the cemetery—an Impressive sight. The ceremony is held near the Chapel.

**June 3—The Lost Graves of New Helvetia.** Explore early history and learn about those moved to the Cemetery from the closed New Helvetia cemetery which was near Sutter's Fort.

**July 1—Cigars and Spittoons.** Mark Twain once stated that you could walk from building to building down J Street through connecting doors and never leave a saloon.

**August 12—Tramps, Scamps and Vagabonds.** Not all early Sacramentans were angelic.

**September 2—A Dozen Ways To Die: Our Favorites from the Crypt.** It's not always easy being dead.

**September 16—From Farm to Fork to Grave.** Sacramento's early agricultural tradition sometimes led to...

**Tours begin at 10 a.m. at the front gate and are free of charge. Donations are welcome and help support the work of the OCCC. Offsite street parking is available.**

# A Large Stone

*Judy Eitzen*

Have you ever noticed the large, simply dressed stone in northeast part of the cemetery? This is the Purkitt/Tiffée memorial and deserves some attention, both for the family represented here and the stone itself.

Theodora Tiffée was born in Bloomfield in Sonoma County in 1856 and raised on a ranch in Glenn county.<sup>(1)</sup> There she learned about agricultural pursuits – an interest she retained throughout her life. Her father encouraged a thorough education for his children and sent her to the Sacramento Seminary.

When she was just 17, she met George Henry Purkitt, a civil engineer and surveyor for the railroad and married in him 1873 in Sacramento. They lived on the ranch inherited from Theodora's father and had six children. At some point, she and her husband were divorced, though personal and printed accounts of the day do not mention it.<sup>(2)</sup> As George was nearly twenty years her senior, and perhaps a heavy drinker – the marriage fell apart.<sup>(3)</sup> To better educate her children, she sold the ranch and moved to Willows, then to San Francisco where she pursued her own further education as well.



Theodora Tiffée Purkitt

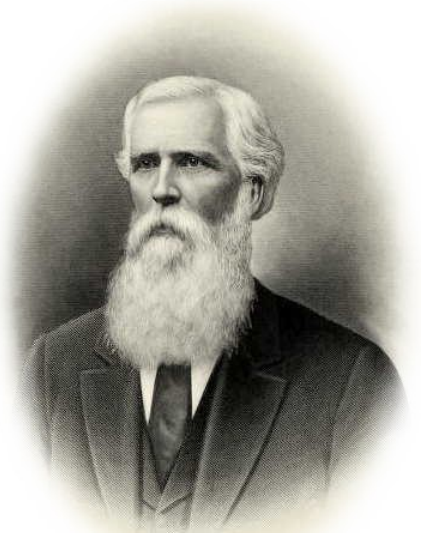
In 1894, Theodora graduated from Cooper Medical School in San Francisco at a time when women had fewer options for education and occupation than today.<sup>(4)</sup> She became one of the first female physicians in California and the first to join the California Medical Association. After graduation, Theodora returned to Willows to practice medicine.

An independent thinker (voter registrations show 'decline to state' for party affiliation) she never lost her love of country life. She purchased land outside town and raised livestock and practiced horticulture, primarily experimenting with fruit trees. Her children were also well educated and successful. All three daughters – Edna, Georgia and Rebecca – became teachers. Son Claude became an attorney who served in the California State Senate and eventually became a Superior Court judge. Son Theodore was a pharmacist. Tragically, her eldest son, Herbert, died of enteric fever – a form of typhoid – at age 27.

Individuals buried in this plot include Theodora, her husband George and son Herbert. Three Tiffées are also interred here, but their stories are for another time.

The stone at this double plot deserves some explanation. In 1924, on the side of a railroad right of way, next to the road in Sites,<sup>(5)</sup> a large stone lay on the ground, having fallen off a rail car some years before. John R. T. Knight worked with his uncle Charles Lambert to remove the stone and take it to Sacramento to place on the Purkitt/Tiffée plot. (John Knight's grandmother was Theodora.)

As the stone was too large for the quarry or the railroad to retrieve – some 17,000 pounds - it had become a sort of local landmark. One hot August morning, John and his Uncle Charles headed for Sites with a chain hoist and large tripod and 100 redwood fence posts to try to move the stone to a low trailer. They were accosted by the



George Henry Purkitt

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rancher on whose property the stone had come to rest, but Charles convinced the rancher that the stone was actually on the county road, had become a safety hazard and he had permission from the County Board of Supervisors to haul it away. He spoke with enough authority that the rancher backed down and work commenced.

They soon ran into difficulties, figured they needed a hydraulic jack and were able to borrow one from a nearby railyard. After some hard work, the stone was loaded onto a many-wheeled low trailer. Riggers were employed to transport the stone to Sacramento, and did so, driving less than twenty miles per hour. (This was 1924, remember, and roads were iffy.) As they

charged \$25/hour, it became an expensive proposition. At last, the stone was conveyed into the Cemetery on the narrow carriageway and placed carefully on the plot.



The stone includes five bronze markers commemorating those buried there and a DAR shield commemorating Theodora's membership in that organization.

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- 1) Bloomfield is a small community located in the hills west of what is now Rohnert Park.
  - 2) 1900 US Census record lists each as "divorced" and living at different addresses in Willows, CA
  - 3) City Cemetery burial record lists his cause of death as cirrhosis of the liver.
  - 4) Cooper Medical School was associated with the University of the Pacific and became Stanford University Medical School in 1909 – source: Stanford University Medical School
  - 5) Sites is a small town in Colusa County

## Apply to Join the OCCC Board

The success of any organization is due to participation by its members in fulfilling the goals of the organization. Our Mission Statement:

To join hands with the community to restore, beautify, preserve and protect the Historic City Cemetery, while maintaining access by descendants of the deceased, and to provide educational services to all visitors to the Historic City Cemetery of Sacramento.

We are looking for Board members willing to help us meet our goals. If you or someone you know would like to participate in the pursuit of these goals, please let us know. Simply send your name and contact information, together with your relevant experience—employment, interests, or special skills. Tell us what interests you in the cemetery and in support of the Board. Where else do you volunteer? What makes the Cemetery important to you?

[info@oldcitycemetery.com](mailto:info@oldcitycemetery.com) or call 916-448-0811 or send a note with this information to:

OCCC Board of Directors,  
1000 Broadway, Sacramento, Ca 95618



**Old City Cemetery  
Committee, Inc.**

1000 Broadway  
Sacramento, CA 95818  
916-448-0811  
[www.oldcitycemetery.com](http://www.oldcitycemetery.com)

***Mission Statement***

*To join hands with the community to restore, beautify, preserve and protect the Historic City Cemetery, while maintaining access by descendants of the deceased, and to provide educational services to all visitors to the Historic City Cemetery of Sacramento.*