

History Comes Alive at the Lafayette Cemetery

By Cathy Tyson



Back in 1854, when Franklin Pierce was President, the same year the U.S. Mint opened its San Francisco branch to pay gold rush miners \$16 per ounce for gold, young Henrietta Hodges was the first person buried at the Lafayette Cemetery, before it was even officially opened. She died of tuberculosis at 13. Her parents asked permission of the landowner to bury her on the hillside. The Cemetery, which was privately owned from late 1854, was officially transferred to the City in 1937. It's a little under five acres of trimmed grass and shady oak and pine trees and has a large collection of historical markers for the many original Lafayette settlers laid to rest there.

Some historical notables buried there include, a relative of the Donner party, along with Nathaniel Jones the first sheriff of Contra Costa County. Civil War veteran H.A. Sweet and George W. Hammett, Sr., who came to Lafayette in 1853 by a team of oxen from Wisconsin. Even Clarence William Brown, one of Lafayette's first citizens, and member of the Volunteer Fire Department. He drove the town's first fire engine, "Old Betsey" and owned C.W. Brown Hardware in the 1920's. Margaret Bickerstaff Rosenberg, the first schoolteacher in town, is also laid to rest here.

The Cemetery is unique in that it is a publicly owned asset for the city. Some residents may not have noticed a tax of approximately .000075% per \$1,000 of property value that goes toward supporting the facility. Oddly enough the tax is based on the 1937 school district boundaries, which at that time encompassed Alamo, what is now Blackhawk, Danville, parts of Walnut Creek and Lafayette.

The benefit of this tax is a substantially discounted burial at the Cemetery if the deceased lived in the tax district. At the moment a person can be laid to rest for \$1495 plus a few additional mandatory fees;

\$575 to open and close the site, \$300 for permanent upkeep of the grounds, and \$550 for a liner. For Orinda and Moraga residents, they can only be buried at the Lafayette Cemetery under two circumstances. First if they have a direct relative buried there, mother, father, sister, brother or second, if they have a direct relative that resides in the 1937 school tax district, as noted above. A non-resident fee is added to the usual charges for people who meet the qualifications. Still compared to other privately owned cemeteries it's a bargain.

Patricia Howard, Superintendent/General Manager of the Alamo-Lafayette Cemetery District says, "I love it here, it's very peaceful. It's the living you have to worry about." The Cemetery is located at 3285 Mt. Diablo Boulevard, next to the Lafayette Park Hotel and is open from sun-up to sun down every day of the year.



Headstone - John Standish



Cemetery in bloom

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