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Life Meets the Afterlife in Lafayette

By Cathy Dausman

Lafayette has no cemeteries within its boundaries, nor does Moraga. Neither does Walnut Creek. So when some Lamorinda residents want their family members buried locally, they turn to Lafayette.

Lafayette is home to three cemeteries: Oakmont and Queen of Heaven, both in unincorporated Lafayette, and Lafayette Cemetery, on Mt. Diablo Boulevard. The latter is part of the Alamo-Lafayette Ceme-

tery District. For those in Alamo, Danville, Blackhawk, Rossmoor, Diablo, San Ramon and parts of Walnut Creek it is a line-item notation on the Contra Costa County tax bill. It is non-denominational, still in use, and plots and urn spaces are available. Visiting hours are sunup to sundown.

Mary McCosker, of the Lafayette Historical Society, and Nancy Flood, Alamo-Lafayette Cemetery District, will share stories of the grave sites on

October 26 at 3:00 p.m. in the Lafayette Library and Learning Center. On October 30 they will also lead the cemetery's first public adult walking tour. McCosker regularly takes groups of Lafayette grade school children through the cemetery as part of their classroom introduction to local history. But the hillside is "not an easy place to walk," so the sedentary lecture is an option.

Both events are fundraisers for the Lafayette Historical Society. The cost for either event is \$10 for members, \$15 for non-members. Those who attend both events are eligible for a \$5 discount.

Lafayette Cemetery had its first burial in 1854, when a neighbor allowed Henrietta Hodges' parents to bury her on a portion of his land. Hodges died of tuberculosis at age 13. Medford Gorham, the neighbor, described the place as, "a pleasing grassy knoll with good drainage and a vista of lovely valleys and hills and hillsides." It's like that still today.

The cemetery officially opened in 1874, when Gorham sold 4.5 acres of land to the newly formed Cemetery Corporation of Lafayette. Over time, a number of notables have been laid to rest there. John Standish, a descendant of Mayflower Pilgrim Myles Standish, is buried there. Relatives of



Photos Cathy Dausman

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the ill-fated Donner party have a family plot in Lafayette Cemetery (they were the lucky ones—they arrived in California by ship.) At least two Lafayette Cemetery Corporation directors are buried there, along with teachers Jennie Bickerstaff Rosenberg and Benjamin Shreve (who was also a Lafayette postmaster). One plot holds a man buried with his beloved dog. McCosker says a Siamese cat named Ling Ling was also buried in or near the cemetery and legend has it the cat and dog meet at night.

Although both lecture and walking tour fall near Halloween, McCosker says it is purely happenstance. Think more All Hallows Eve than

ghosts and goblins. McCosker sees the cemetery as "not spooky, not scary... just part of the Circle of Life." **Additional cemetery information may be found online at:**
Lafayette Cemetery:
http://alamolafayettecemetery.net/alcd_docu/pdf/poi.lafayette.map.pdf
Queen of Heaven:
<http://www.cfcscemeteries.org/locations/queen-of-heaven-lafayette>
Oakmont:
<http://aftercareplanning.com/oakmont-memorial-park/>
For Lafayette Cemetery lecture or tour reservations, call (925) 283-1848 or e-mail Lafayette.history@comcast.net

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Artwork inspired by Mikaela Valerio, Age 9

Sunday, October 30, 2011
8:00am Downtown Lafayette

Parking available at BART

2 Mile Run/Walk (8:00am) • 5K (8:30am) • 10K (8:45am)
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Cemetery Etiquette



First time visitors to any cemetery may wonder what behavior is expected of them, or if there are any "rules" about being in the presence of those dead and buried. Is it acceptable to walk about the grave sites? What about walking on top of a grave? As for the latter, "you can't avoid that," says Patricia Howard, Superintendent and General Manager for the Alamo-Lafayette Cemetery District. A majority of what looks to be open spaces are actually early burial sites, many of which are without headstones. Early plots measured 4 by 10 feet; in the early 1900's the sites were reduced to 3 by 8 feet. Howard says to her knowledge, the cemetery has never had an issue with unsuitable behavior.

In her 18 plus years at this job, she has come to realize that different cultures have unique ways of memorializing their loved ones. She cites the Jewish custom of leaving a stone at a grave site, and recalls a Korean family who mourned the death of a child in near silence until the arrival of a young and very vocal paid mourner.

Howard says it is fine to make grave rubbings, as long as people realize they need to support upright headstones so they are not loosened or damaged in the process.

She appreciates the work Mary McCosker does with elementary school students from Lafayette, who learn respect for the cemetery while becoming familiar with their city's early history. Howard considers the park-like Lafayette Cemetery "a safe place to be" to remember departed loved ones, and asks only that everyone treat it "as their own home."

C. Dausman

THE APP RAP

By Eric Pawlakos

My Tracks
For Iphones, I pads, Android
Price: Free

One of the great things about smart phones is that they all come equipped with GPS sensors. My Tracks is a simple, easy to use app that utilizes GPS to record and map the path you are taking. This is particularly useful for bike riders, runners, hikers, walkers, roller skaters... well you get the idea. Just hit "Record Tracks," and My Tracks automatically finds your location and starts recording your course. A myriad of useful statistics are continually updated on your phone, including your speed, your average speed, your maximum speed, the total distance you have traveled, and the time it took you to travel, including only the time that you were actually moving.

For hill climbers, it monitors your elevation, your elevation gain, and your maximum elevation. The trail you are designing can be viewed on your smart phone. It is really effective for exercise enthusiasts because you can save your recorded route with full statistic listings. Simply send the mapped route to Google's My Maps and log the stats at Google Docs. If you frequent the same way regularly, you will be able to watch your progress with the saved stats. Players on Lamorinda Rugby found this free app a great motivator for keeping track of their playing improvements.