

## County's lost cemeteries, headstones

**By Jerry Bowen**

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After I wrote the article "Poor House Rich Source of Memories," published March 31, I received an e-mail from Sue Silver in Auburn who asked me where the county hospital cemetery was located.

That sent me to the books, looking for a cemetery related to the newest hospital that was just torn down and as far as I could find, there wasn't one. But, there had been one for the old hospital that was opened in 1877 and closed about 1920.

Then I learned that there had been another county hospital used prior to the one built in 1877.

That one existed in the 1860s and was located somewhere near Suisun City on the then "Benicia Road near the cemetery," as was quoted in a newspaper article. It was described in the Vallejo Evening Chronicle on August 17, 1867, as follows:

"The Solano County Hospital consists of a 10 x 12 shanty, furnished with a pine table, a pine bedstead and a dirty blanket." It rightly earned the name "Pest House," since patients afflicted with plague, smallpox and other contagious diseases were sent there, more than likely to die, safely away from the healthy citizens.

It burned down in 1869, much to the approval of the citizens and a cry went up to build a new facility that was decent.

The new, or second, hospital was built in the vicinity of the northwest corner of today's Tabor Park and a cemetery was located behind it, probably on the school grounds of today's Richardson School.

The 30,000-square-foot cemetery with about 389 bodies was abandoned somewhere about 1917 to 1920 and was used as a sheep grazing area by rancher, William B. O'Connor who bought the land. The few wooden markers that existed eventually disappeared altogether.

The "second" county hospital was closed when the third one on the corner of West Texas Street and Beck Avenue opened in 1920.

In the 1960s, Hoffmann Company bought the Tabor Avenue property to develop homes

on it. But it wasn't until 1965 the company officials learned from an old-timer that there had been a graveyard on the property.

After several contentious meetings between the County Board of Supervisors and Hoffmann Company, they decided to share the cost of removing the bodies and reburying them in a common grave at Fairfield/Suisun Cemetery. Only bits and pieces of bone and wood were found after so many years. The move was completed in May 1966.

A persistent search in the 1990s by Rosalie Cunningham, who established the Solano County Archives, found death certificates and burial records so that at least it is known whose remains are in the common grave.

Thanks to Ron Wear, manager of the Fairfield/Suisun cemetery, I was able to locate the site of the reburial. The site's corners are outlined by four blue-colored, round concrete markers, each with a white star in the center.

Just as I was finishing up my research on the above, Kim Plinovich walked into the Heritage Council looking for information about an unusual object she found in her back yard on East Monte Vista Avenue; a tombstone!

Kim and her friend, Lori Goodrich, found the tombstone while doing yard work. Making a rubbing of the stone, Kim then began a search for answers to the obvious questions; Who was this grave marker made for and why was it in her yard? The rubbing made a barely legible impression, but Kim was off on her hunt.

Kim first stopped at the Vacaville Heritage Council and told me of her mysterious discovery. Our records of the family were very limited so I escorted her upstairs to the Solano County Genealogy Society's Library. The library has a wonderful collection of snippets of information on the vital statistics of the earlier residents of Solano County. Kim and the researchers who assisted her, Ruth Setterquist and Jerry Goggel, hit pay dirt.

The stone was engraved with the name Anna Ariza and years 1868-1932. A cemetery record was found at the library listing Anna, who was buried in the Vacaville-Elmira Cemetery.

So how did her grave marker get out of the cemetery?

Kim followed up her research at the genealogy library with a trip to the Solano County Clerk's office to confirm that Anna was buried in the Vacaville Elmira Cemetery. From there, a visit to the Vacaville-Elmira Cemetery Office gave Kim more answers. Anna

was re-interred in 1990 to be located next to John Ariza and a two-person grave marker was erected. So the old stone of Anna's must have been given to a family member, then inadvertently left behind when that person moved.

Kim then went a step further with her project, and met a family member of the Ariza family, Marjorie, and returned the headstone to her. Kim now has a new friend; a mystery solved, and her own interest has been tweaked to find out about her own ancestry. The Solano County Genealogy Society will have two more Vacaville residents doing research in their library. Marjorie, working on her local Solano family tree, and Kim, working on her family tree that includes people from out of the area. The library and its staff will be able to assist both with their quests.

Another cemetery, located on Stienmetz Hill at the Interstate 80-Lagoon Valley Road overpass was discovered during highway construction and contains the remains of Indian and early Spanish residents. The remains were moved to the Pena Adobe Cemetery, where ceremonies were held when an appropriate marker was put in place.

At one time a cemetery existed at the Andrews Park location. All remains were reburied at the Elmira Cemetery when the area was converted to a city park, or so they thought. In 1972, a headstone was found during park renovation work near the corner of College and Monte Vista Avenue with the name Richard Lewis. Lewis' headstone was placed in the Pena Adobe Cemetery.

Then in 1974, another headstone belonging to George W. Noel, who died in 1858, was unearthed near the same location as Lewis's. His headstone was also placed in the Pena Adobe Cemetery.

There are other graves scattered throughout the county, known and unknown, and who knows when another piece of history will turn up; maybe even in your own back yard.

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