



SANTA ROSA RURAL CEMETERY

Where History Comes to Life

The Cemeteryian

*A Publication of the Santa Rosa
Rural Cemetery Preservation Committee
—dedicated volunteers working with the City of Santa Rosa
to operate, maintain, and preserve the Rural Cemetery,
including interpretation and education, special projects
and restoration, publicity, and fundraising.*

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2020 Accomplishments

Despite the pandemic—or maybe because of it—2020 was a productive year for our committee: Volunteers logged more than 3,000 hours of service!

The Rose Brigade installed several new three-panel trellises in the Memorial Garden. Dozens of new plants were added to the Native Plant Garden and McDonald Gate slopes, and the City removed two dying Monterrey pines from McDonald Gate.

D.A.R. members adopted and planted two plots and provide ongoing care for them.

Along with ongoing maintenance, the expanded Tombstone Trio cleaned and repaired many headstones, monuments, and plots, installed a bollard at Odd Fellows gateway, repainted the G.A.R. plot's cannons and cannonballs, revamped the storage buildings, and closed an eroding steep pathway—all while working within Santa Rosa's current COVID restrictions. John Dennison may have stepped back from his leadership role, but he assures us he will be back this spring to help with the weeds, and entrusts the care of the 17 acres to good hands: "The current crew is doing a great job and shares the love for our Rural Cemetery that we have all had."

November marked the end of book production for the long-awaited *Rural Cemetery Burial Listing* book. Sandy Frary shipped the pages to the printer!

YouTube features recent videos from two committee members: Eve Goldberg's "The Houses of McDonald Avenue" and Ellen Bowen's "Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery Shelter in Place 2020." Ellen's video features many of our volunteers in period costume—no mere pandemic will stop them from dressing up!

Read all about our Rural Cemetery volunteers' participation in the City of Santa Rosa's Halloween at Howarth Park on pages 2 and 3 of this issue.

Our Facebook followers are up to nearly 1,700 people and our combined coffers approach \$650,000!

Looking Back 100 Years

A small marble grave stone in Healdsburg's Oak Mound Cemetery marks the burial location of former Sonoma County Sheriff James Albert Petray. When I went searching many years ago for Sheriff Petray's grave, I looked for a large monument and was unable to find it. (I had assumed that the sheriff's violent murder 100 years ago last December—and the events that occurred afterwards—afforded this well-respected lawman an elaborate gravestone.) His modest grave marker gives no hint of the shocking story buried with him, a story that in 1920 sent shockwaves throughout the nation.

On December 5 Sheriff Petray and San Francisco Detectives Miles M. Jackson and Lester H. Doman went to a home on 7th Street to arrest three fugitives who fled to Santa Rosa after assaulting two women in San Francisco. The arrest did not go well. Sheriff Petray and the two other lawmen were shot dead by one of the fugitives, all three of whom were then arrested and taken to jail. Just after midnight on December 10, the three—Terrance Fitts, George Boyd, and Charles Valento—were broken out of jail by a mob of masked vigilantes, driven to Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery, and hanged from a black locust tree.

Fitts and Boyd were buried in unmarked graves in Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery. Valento's body was shipped to San Francisco, as were the bodies of the two detectives. And, as you now know, Sheriff Petray was buried in Healdsburg. (Of interest, the sheriff's two-year-old sister, who died in 1877, is buried in Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery in an unknown location.)

You can see a rubbing of Petray's grave stone on our Facebook page, and read this dark event's Coroner's Inquest (transcribed from microfilm) by typing "Inquisition into murders of james a petray" into your web browser, then clicking on the ArchiveGrid entry.—Sandy Frary, *Rural Cemetery Archivist*

Happytimes at Howarth Park

Shannon Twomey first became involved with the Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery Preservation Committee through the Adopt-a-Plot program, then by doing maintenance during monthly Saturday work parties, and finally as a docent and actor in many of the Rural Cemetery events. She is the granddaughter of Dave Twomey, aka “Happy.” Happy was the owner and operator of Happytimes Dog and Pony Circus, a one-ring circus that entertained up and down the West Coast, mostly at county and state fairs. In fact, “he stayed so busy traveling that I didn’t see my grandfather without his clown makeup until I was 14 years old,” said Shannon. “I don’t think of [this] as a bad thing. I think it’s pretty unique. When you have family that perform and travel for a living, any and every opportunity to see them is special. Once, I got to spend the night in the circus tent. When our paths did cross, they were times that are still so near and dear to my heart,” she added.

Soon the opportunity arose to create something happy for the kids of Santa Rosa. Shannon says she sat under the moonlight and pondered peacefully. “I felt the sawdust flowing through my veins,” and the idea of re-creating “Happytimes” as one of the 2020 Drive-Thru Halloween at Howarth Park scenes soon came to her. This idea quickly became a family affair with Shannon’s mother Debbie agreeing to help perform. Shannon’s father Mike, who grew up working in his father’s circus as a slack-wire walker, helped Shannon create an authentic one-ring circus that closely duplicated Happy’s. “My father made a blueprint and helped with the details including the idea to get sawdust from Western Farms for the floor and garden trim for the ring curb,” Shannon said.

Even the family dogs got into the act. Cookie, dressed up like a lion, entertained with hoop jumping and dancing until she became too tired. Halfway through Cookie was replaced by Pepper, the other family pooch. The ring was decorated with Shannon and her mother’s Wonder Horse and Wonder Zebra from their childhoods. Shannon decorated the walls with yellow and red —“Happytimes” colors—and pictures of her grandfather dressed as Happy.

Dave Twomey (Happy) was 13 when he joined a circus near his home in Southern California. Shannon says “he rode a streetcar and got into a clown suit every day after school. His first job was setting up bleachers in exchange for \$2 per day.” Dave continued to work at the circus until he joined the Army

when he was 19. Throughout his time in the Army, Dave went to any circus performances near where he was stationed. After returning to the U.S., he got a job at an air conditioner factory. It lasted three months and he never had another “real job” again. He married his girlfriend Judy (Shannon’s grandmother) in Las Vegas and they were married 47 years. His wife loved traveling with the circus and grooming their show dogs. They had two sons—Mike and Ken, aka Krazy KoKo. By 1966, Dave had his own one-ring circus which he named “Happytimes Dog and Pony Circus,”—“Happytimes” for short.

Shannon, when asked how her grandfather picked the name for his circus, said “It was because people told him he looked like a happy clown.”

As most of us do, Shannon has some regrets. She became a little tearful when she talked about how, as a teenager, she passed up an opportunity to perform with her grandfather in his last show. She felt that being able to re-create his circus for the children of Santa Rosa was a fitting tribute. His motto was always “For the Kids!”

Dave passed away in 2006. The family story is that Happy’s last words were “The Show Must Go On!” And so it was that this past year—amidst the COVID pandemic—Shannon and Debbie entertained thousands of Santa Rosans, adults and children alike, and made them smile.—Kit Conover

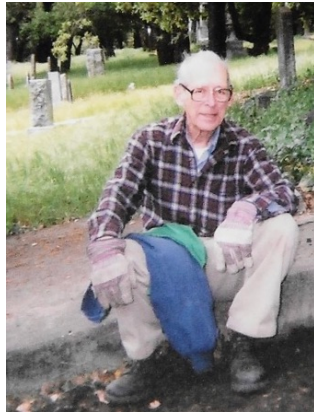


Happy doing what he did best: “For the kids!”

Cemetery Volunteer, Gone but Not Forgotten

Alan Phinney

April 25, 1925–
August 21, 2020



A July 1994 edition of the *Press Democrat* reported that Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery was overgrown and volunteers were needed to reclaim that “old burying ground.” This caught the eye of Alan Phinney, who had retired in 1987 and moved from Chicago to Santa Rosa. After years sitting behind a desk, Alan was intrigued with the idea of trying his hand at physical work. So he signed up and began volunteering at Saturday morning cemetery work parties. He found a beautiful wooded hillside with many loose foot stones and spent many hours there with his shovel cleaning the area and straightening loose stones.

After volunteering at Saturday morning work parties for a while, Alan decided to work year-round on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Soon Dwain Campbell joined him. When Jim Frary joined the duo they became known as “The Tombstone Trio.”

In 1996 Alan learned that the Rural Cemetery burial records compiled by prior volunteer groups were incomplete, missing, or incorrect. Subsequently he organized a row-by-row survey of the Rural Cemetery with the cooperation of the Sonoma County Genealogical Society. The survey yielded hundreds of corrections to dates, spelling of names, and other statistical information. In 1997, Alan and his wife Margaret converted prior data compiled by the Genealogical Society with the information gleaned from the 1996 cemetery survey into a true sortable database, which would become the origin of the Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery Burial Listing book.

On a lighter side, Alan often dressed as the late mortician John Pearson Stanley and greeted cemetery tour goers. He would even pass out business cards printed with the name of the late mortician. And according to his daughter, Gail Fanning, when Alan and Margaret looked after their grandchildren Alan would often take the children on field trips to the cemetery.

Alan Phinney was a dedicated Rural Cemetery volunteer who put in countless hours to maintain the

cemetery and create accurate cemetery burial records. Even after suffering a heart attack while working in the cemetery, after his recovery he was back at work again as caretaker of that old 17-acre pioneer cemetery he loved.

Rest in Peace, Alan.—Sandy Frary

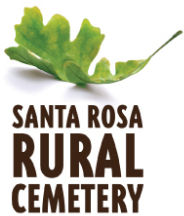
Acting Out for the Kids

This year’s Halloween at Howarth had a special spin due to COVID-19 restrictions. Families enjoyed a socially-distanced, drive-thru Halloween activity. Costumed kids participated in a scavenger hunt and received treat bags—all while safe in their cars. Our main booth had a jack-o-lantern and tombstone theme, staffed by Bill Montgomery, Jonathan Quandt, and Constance Smith. Ellen Bowen held court as Snow White in a second booth, with her handsome prince/husband of 38 years. Debbie Williams was a convincing Wicked Witch of the West and Paige Mitchell her counterpart as Glenda in our third booth. Witch Gina Crozier waved from the train. Costumed Ruth Norman and Kit Conover helped direct traffic. Other Rural Cemetery volunteers created fun Jack-o-lanterns and humorous tombstones for the event.

One of the most popular booths was the brainchild of our very own Shannon Twomey—the re-creation of Happytimes Dog and Pony Circus. Read all about Shannon and the family circus on page 2 of this issue of *The Cemeterian*.

Our volunteers were scheduled to participate in Rec&Park’s Cruisin’ Candy Cane Lane last month, but the event was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. Rec&Park’s Kim Hatch expressed much gratitude for the Preservation Committee’s continued community support: “Your dedication to the maintenance of the Rural Cemetery and its history, and your creativity and commitment to bringing joy and entertainment to our City, is inspiring beyond the borders of the cemetery. Thank you for your participation in the Halloween at Howarth drive-thru activity. Your booths brought smiles and laughter to the residents of Santa Rosa in a year where smiles were needed. The City of Santa Rosa is a better place because of you!”





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Rural Cemetery Preservation Committee
c/o Santa Rosa Recreation & Parks
2060 West College Avenue
Santa Rosa, CA 95401

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The Cemeterian

Page 4

A Farewell Tea

After a 22-year association with the Rural Cemetery Preservation Committee, during which time she produced countless *Cemeterian* newsletters, tour scripts, and events, Rebekah Thomas has stepped back from her much-appreciated role with the group.

On a bright November afternoon, several costumed Cemetery volunteers gathered for tea with Rebekah to present her with a parting gift, an antique parasol from the 1860s. Rebekah sums it up best in her thank-you note to the committee:

It has been my extreme pleasure to have met you all and worked with you over the many years and getting to know and love the residents of the cemetery. Thank you SO much for the absolutely perfect gift. I love the antique parasol. It's perfect in every way.



I have wonderful memories of you all to take with me and will keep them in my heart always.

Love, Rebekah

We wish Rebekah continued success in her future adventures in Pensacola, Florida!

Preservation Committee Meetings

Regular meetings are held the first Wednesday of every month at 6 p.m., currently on Zoom. To participate in meetings, Email volunteersantarosa@srcity.org

Contact Information

Bill Montgomery (City Liaison) 707-573-0103 • montyw2170@gmail.com
Nancy Godfrey (Work Party) 707-544-2332 • ngodfrey@sonic.net
Bill Northcroft (Adopt-a-Plot) Email: bearflag46@icloud.com
Laurie Jacobson (*Cemeterian*) 707-538-9893 • lauriejacobson@juno.com



For accessible meeting information, please call (707) 543-3737

All tours and work parties are currently suspended due to COVID-19. Watch our Facebook page and kiosks for updates!

Subscribe to *The Cemeterian* online at srcity.perfectmind.com by logging in and clicking the "Donations" tab. A basic \$10 donation gets you one year of our newsletter. Larger donations include *The Cemeterian* and contribute to Rural Cemetery projects and events. One-year subscriptions are also available by sending a check for \$10, made payable to "Community Foundation of Sonoma County," to **Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery, c/o Santa Rosa Recreation & Parks, 2060 West College Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA 95401**