



**SANTA ROSA
RURAL
CEMETERY**

Where History Comes to Life

The Cemeterian

*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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*Our front-page features two stories spanning three centuries, the width of the cemetery,
and many of one extended family's 150-plus Rural Cemetery residents*

Dick Oberg, Fulkerson Descendant



Richard "Dick" Norris Oberg died of natural causes on June 4, 2022, which was his 99th birthday. However, his remains were interred along with those of his wife Patricia

in Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery in Fulkerson plot 53 on June 4, 2023, which would have been Dick's 100th birthday.

Dick worked in the insurance industry in the Bay Area and then in Southern California. But when he turned 40, he passed the California Bar, hung up his shingle, and became a sole practitioner for the next 45 years.

Eventually he and Patricia moved north and settled in Santa Rosa. At the time, they had no knowledge of the Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery. But subsequently, Dick learned about the cemetery, and to his surprise, he discovered that his great-great-great grandparents, Richard Fulkerson and Sallie Shephard Fulkerson, as well as his great-great grandparents, Samuel Harris and Phebe Fulkerson Harris, are buried in the Fulkerson Family Plot with other family members.

Of interest, Dick's great-great grandfather, Samuel Harris, was a veteran of the War of 1812, who at the age of 18 served with Andrew Jackson in the Battle of New Orleans. Additionally, Thompson Mize—the first recorded burial in the cemetery, was the first husband of Dick's great-great aunt, Ruth Fulkerson Harris—directly connecting Dick to the Rural Cemetery's 1854 founding!

Dick volunteered for many years helping maintain the Rural Cemetery grounds. But at the age of 89, as his daughter Lisa so sweetly put it, "his knees no longer allowed him to do so."—Sandy Frary

Key Stones Return, Decades Later

The industrial shelving that lines the back wall of the cemetery's storage crypt is heavy with old, broken tombstones. There are a few clues to whose graves they once marked: A partial name. A partial date. An initial. Thick marble shards. Pieces to puzzles guaranteed to be eternally incomplete.

When a call from City staff said someone wanted to return some broken tombstones, we tempered our expectations. A reference in the message to the name "Fulkerson" was both exciting and daunting: Was it the multi-acre cemetery being cited or the family itself—and from which generation?

Jigsaw puzzles arrive boxed and oftentimes you separate and remix the pieces before you begin. (*That's what makes it a puzzle!*) We expected no box. No connected pieces. No answers—just more questions. And instead, on a sunny Santa Rosa morning we got first and only dibs on the ultimate Rural Cemetery garage sale, laid out for our inspection in a neat row, many years in good-intentioned storage. Free to the original owners. *I'll help you load these in your truck.*

The most frequently asked questions from first time visitors to the Rural Cemetery concern the earliest burial: Who, when, where and why. Knowing the correct answers is Cemetery Volunteer History Lesson #1: *Thompson Mize. 1854. Drowned in a puddle in downtown Santa Rosa. Eastern Half Circle. Let me show you the plot....*

The nearly dozen recently returned headstones and foot stones are all from this extended family's first plots in the Rural Cemetery: Fulkerson. Mize. Harris. Wife. Infants. Children. All essentially complete and prime for restoration and reinstallation, decades after being well-intentionally removed, more than 150 years after the deaths they mark.

We invite you to read and watch Kerry Benefield's "Tombstone Return" features from the July 3 *Press Democrat* for more on this story.—Carole Quandt



Please do not move any tombstones you might come across in the cemetery—broken or not—as current locations are the best indicators of where stones belong! Preserving and restoring the Rural Cemetery remains the primary purpose of the Preservation Committee and returns of all artifacts are sincerely appreciated, no questions asked. Call 707-543-3279.



Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery is comprised of four separate historic cemeteries: the Rural Cemetery, and Fulkerson, Stanley and Moke cemeteries. Moke is the smallest and arguably the remotest of the four cemetery components. And some interesting and perhaps dark side burials took place...

Where Stanley Meets Moke

The Bed Frame

It's not unheard of to find a full-scale bed made of concrete displayed on top of a grave. It's reported that this practice first turned up in 18th century graveyards and signifies "eternal rest" or "eternal slumber." Even Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery has one: The large concrete headstone on 60-year-old Charles Bunz's grave (MC 254) is shaped like the headboard of a bed, and the foot stone resembles a footboard.

But it's most unusual to find an actual metal bed frame displayed on a grave—except, that is, in Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery. Decades ago someone secured a single-size metal bed frame to a grave in the Fountaingrove Plot area in Stanley Cemetery, in the vicinity of plot VII-27.

According to Jonathan Quandt—head of the Tombstone Trio—the steel bed frame was factory made and embellished in an Art Nouveau-style with six sculptural floral ornaments reminiscent of lilies. There's also a sculpture set in a concrete base with the same floral arrangement, all painted with light green paint and a swag of chain connecting the parts. Originally anchored to the grave, over time the frame has broken free and shifted slightly from its original location.

When Jonathan first saw the bed frame he was immediately impressed by the devotional quality of the sculptural embellishments. This, he says, and the fact that the grave adjoins the Fountaingrove Plot, seems to place the bed frame in that similar era of late 19th/early 20th century. Trio members



Greta Sweet and Rachel Ailworth have spent considerable time clearing the ivy that covered the entire Fountaingrove plot area, exposing this "treasure" for all to see.

As for who is buried beneath the bed frame, that is a mystery.

No name or statistical information remains at the grave site to identify the person for whom the bed frame is intended to memorialize. But I do believe the person's name may actually be listed in the Rural Cemetery burial listing database with the notation "burial location unknown," which would make it impossible to connect him or her to the bed frame. Unfortunately, of the 825 people on record as being buried in Stanley Cemetery, the burial location of 147 of them is unknown.—Sandy Frary

Fountaingrove

With its old and gracious palm tree and recent landscape tending, the Fountaingrove plot (Stanley VII) appears quite proper and idyllic. Its 100-year residents however—if looking through sets of 2023 eyes—might disagree.

Thomas Lake Harris, mystic and prophet of the 19th century Brotherhood of Life Church came to Santa Rosa in 1875 to establish a new home center for his devotees, and a winery to finance his ambitions. By 1890 Fountaingrove produced 200,000 gallons of wine, extolled to bring "spiritual qualities" upon the drinker. Harris claimed knowledge of the Deity and had visions—heaven-sent—which could bestow eternal life on earth to his followers.



Here in this small plot, clinging to a cool slope, workers of Fountaingrove Ranch found their eternal rest and believers in Harris ended their quest for immortality.

We encourage you to visit the last vestiges of Fountaingrove's utopian community and conduct your own research so that you might fathom the depths of this sometimes dark piece of Santa Rosa history.—Jonathan Quandt





Terrence Fitts



Crossing the roadway from the bed frame and Fountaingrove plots is Moke plot 234, home to an unassuming plaque atop a concrete-capped plot. Facing away from the roadway, the marker shows but three initials: T.J.F.

Until 2021 the identity of the person buried in Moke 234 was unknown.

That's when our historian Ray Owen picked up the trail and connected the pieces, pinpointing the burial site of Terrence Joseph Fitts, one of three men hanged from a locust tree at the front of the Rural Cemetery in December of 1920—one of the last known vigilante lynchings west of the Mississippi River. And there's every likelihood that George Boyd, a second member of the notorious Howard Street Gang lynched that night in December, is buried next to Fitts in the Moke section of the cemetery.

A bit of background for the few readers who might not be familiar with one of Santa Rosa's most notorious tales: Fitts and his two cohorts had been apprehended and jailed in Santa Rosa for crimes committed in San Francisco and the subsequent murder of Sonoma County Sheriff James Petray during the ensuing Santa Rosa shootout. Late on the night of December 9, a mob of masked vigilantes attacked the local jail, overpowered the officers, and in the wee hours of that Friday morning drove the three to the Rural Cemetery and hanged them all from a single branch of that locust tree.

On December 11, 1920, the day after the lynchings and following a morning and afternoon when more than 3,000 persons (including women and children) filed through Welter Mortuary to view the remains of all three men, Frank Welter announced the bodies of Boyd and Fitts had been buried in an undisclosed location. The remains of the third man, Charles Valento, had been claimed by family members and shipped to San Francisco.

The reason given at the time for not disclosing the grave site of Fitts and Boyd was to comply with the Fitts family's request and because of a concern the graves might be vandalized and the bodies desecrated. (This may well have proven true: The black locust tree from which the three were hanged was chopped down in short order to prevent people from continuing to cut pieces of wood souvenirs from it.)

Visit this often-overlooked part of the Rural Cemetery—where Stanley meets Moke—and perhaps allow in thoughts from our collective history's dark side.—Carole Quandt

Much appreciation to published works from local historians Gaye LeBaron, Jeff Elliott and Ray Owen for Fountaingrove and Fitts information. All have much more info available online.

County Cemetery Shaping Up

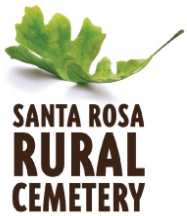
County-sponsored volunteer work parties have taken place twice so far this season in the County Cemetery, continuing the area's rehabilitation after the removal of 100+ eucalyptus trees. On a recent Saturday morning, nearly a dozen volunteers under the guidance of County Park Project Leader Michelle Karle spent several hours pruning and weeding, as well as removing invasive non-native vegetation and ivy patches from outside of the split rail fence area.

"What most excites me," said Michelle, "is the hope that we can restore the space with native plants in a way that enhances it for passersby, provides for wildlife and reduces fire risk. Removing eucalyptus can be such a daunting task, I want the process to become easier for us as a community. Volunteer workdays can be a great way to get to know people and learn about the county, and this group of hard-workers made for a wonderful Saturday morning."

Volunteer Mary Catelani spent time using the hula hoe. "The cool morning was welcome for a rewarding day working at the cemetery. Making new friends and learning about the history of our area was a bonus, which always happens when volunteering. And working up a decent sweat while removing invasive weeds is very rewarding work!"

For more info on this worthwhile project, or to join in the volunteer effort, call or email Sonoma County Parks Volunteer Coordinator John Ryan at 707-548-4424/john.ryan@sonoma-county.org.





The Cemeterian

Rural Cemetery Preservation Committee
c/o Santa Rosa Recreation & Parks
415 Steele Lane
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

88-0910



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Preservation Committee Meetings

Regular meetings are held the first Monday of each month at 5:30 p.m. at Steele Lane Community Center, 415 Steele Lane

Contact Information

Bill Montgomery (City Liaison) 510-735-5026 • montyw2170@gmail.com
Nancy Godfrey (Work Party) 707-544-2332 • ngodfrey@sonic.net
Jonathan Quandt (Adopt-a-Plot) jfaquandt@comcast.net
Laurie Jacobson (*Cemeterian*) 707-538-9893 • lauriejacobson@juno.com

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

Join our 3rd Saturday work parties:

July 15, Aug. 19 and Oct. 21 at 9 a.m. at Franklin Gate.

Final free Saturday morning walking tour in 2023:

“Tapestry of Cultures” Aug. 12. Tours depart from Franklin Gate every 20 minutes from 10–11 a.m.

“**Lamplight Tours**” are Sept. 15 and 16 and a few tickets are still available! For more info and to register for these activities, see Rec & Park’s Activity Guide.

The Continuing Nancy Story

In our last issue we featured this toppled mighty oak: Resting on its root ball in the Stanley section of the Rural Cemetery, its sprawling limbs in our neighbor’s yard across the fence, the downed tree was recently extricated from under the weight of Mary Story’s massive slab. No harm was done to any other plots, and Mary is waiting patiently for her grave marker to be returned to its original location. It will take more than the Tombstone Trio’s combined talents to right this one. The Nancy Story story continues!—*Carole Quandt*

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