

Historical Ramblings

Lompoc's Final Resting Place

The following is excerpted from a project undertaken by Fran Houston in 1984.

Lompoc's quietest neighborhood also has the best panoramic view of the valley and is home to some of the town's most prominent citizens. It is located in the southeast corner of town and is known as Lompoc's Evergreen Cemetery.

In 1875, the Lompoc Valley Land Company deeded a 10-acre parcel of land to be used as a cemetery. An earlier graveyard, located near the Santa Ynez River adjacent to present Highway 246 was abandoned in November of 1875 in favor of the new location high above the valley. One can only assume that the graveyard's proximity to the river and frequent flooding resulted in the decision for relocation. The original graveyard was offered for sale and, in December 1875, it was requested that anyone interred in that location be removed to the new cemetery. The first official death, funeral and burial in Lompoc was that of Lydia Peck, first wife of Orson Peck on July 4, 1875. She was interred in the original cemetery and later moved to the present site where she rests alongside her husband of 40 years and his other four wives. John Lowe dug the first grave in the new cemetery for the baby of a "grass widow."

In early 1876, one and a half acres in the southwest corner of the new cemetery was donated to Father McNally, to be reserved for a Catholic cemetery. It was not until May 17, 1880, after the property was surveyed, that the southwest quarter of the cemetery was actually donated to the Catholic Church. Other sections were eventually dedicated to Hispanic and Asian pioneers, as well as the IOOF and American Legion.

On July 27, 1880, the Lompoc Valley Land Company conveyed an additional 11.24 acres to the cemetery board for a public burial place for the dead. It wasn't until 1961 that the cemetery district purchased two additional parcels from the Johns-Manville Product Corporation, adding 6.15 acres to the site.

In 1941, William Martin received a grant deed to a portion of the cemetery. In 1960, he surrendered the deed to the cemetery superintendent with the stipulation that unused gravesites in that area be used for the interment of bodies of people who had insufficient funds to cover burial costs. By 1973, all of the sites had been used.

Until 1952, when city drilled wells and pumps became available, the cemetery had no landscaping and grass only grew during the rainy season. Electricity was introduced to the site in 1967. The caretaker's structure, which was built in 1925, had no heat or light for 22 years.

Cemeteries are interesting links to history. One can spend hours strolling through Evergreen Cemetery reading interesting epitaphs on the ornate monuments. Many of Lompoc's founding pioneers are buried on the hill, with their intricately carved headstones providing a glimpse into the past. The most famous of the residents are Orson Peck and his five wives, buried side by side. Lompoc prophet, Gin Chow, rests a short distance away from the Pecks. W.W. Broughton, founder of the Lompoc Temperance Colony and founder and editor of the

Lompoc Record lies beneath an imposing monument. Mary Sargent's headstone boldly states "Murdered by Indians." Ira and Maria H. Porter appear to be the persons born the longest time ago. He was born in 1800 and she in 1807. Next in line are Mary Woodwiss, born in 1801 and Orson Peck, born in 1812. Minnie P. White, wife of D.W. White, died May 13, 1868 at the age of 25. Her body, originally interred in San Francisco, was brought to Lompoc in 1932, 54 years after her death.

The large monuments, headstones and curbs, which identify the older sections of the cemetery, have evolved into simpler, flush mounted grave markers, simplifying landscape maintenance. Today's single gravesites with their simple headstones, however, still have an important role of documenting local history for future generations.