

In remembrance

Homage paid to veterans at event in Redwood City's historic cemetery

BY BONNIE ESLINGER
Daily News Staff Writer

John Ammenti and his wife Cathy brought their children, 9-year-old Nathan and 7-year-old Lily, to Redwood City's Historic Union Cemetery for the annual Memorial Day commemoration.

John, of Redwood City, said he's concerned that the historical lessons of war and sacrifice are not being passed on to younger generations.

"This gives us a chance to talk about it," he said Monday morning at the gathering of several hundred people, including veterans and city officials.

Standing next to a statue of a Civil War soldier, Redwood City Mayor Alicia Aguirre said the event is an opportunity to "remember those who have gone; also, those who are coming back."

Retired Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Fenwick Holmes, the morning's keynote speaker, said it's important that wars and those who fell fighting them — the "blood of billions" — not be forgotten.

He also underscored that soldiers on both sides of the Civil War conflict were fighting for their country.

"Despite regional factions and disagreements, we are, under God, the United States of America,"

Holmes said. "That's the legacy we received from the men buried here."

Holmes then turned to the Union soldier statue and slowly raised his hand to his forehead.

"I acknowledge their gifts with a solemn salute," he said.

The one-hour event was a community affair that began with Belmont Boy Scout Troop 301 bringing in the American flag and the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Members of the troop have helped maintain the landmark cemetery; they recently installed a water system under the rose bushes and repainted the fences.

The Carlmonteers, a San Carlos choral group associated with the national Sons in Retirement, sang Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land," as the audience chimed in.

The Slippery Gulch Band, part of the local chapter of the E Clampus Vitus fraternal organization, played several patriotic songs, including taps.

Children also participated, invited by members of the Native Daughters of the Golden West to help place flowers on the nearby graves of Civil War soldiers.

The observance concluded with a "firing of the arvil," a gunpowder blast that provoked shrieks of

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Bonnie Eslinger / Daily News
Redwood City Mayor Alicia Aguirre speaks at the Memorial Day commemoration on Monday at the Historic Union Cemetery in Redwood City.

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delight and alarm from the crowd.

World War II veteran Lloyd Lease, 89, who served in both the Navy and Marine Corps, said he didn't expect others to recognize the sacrifice soldiers have made.

"It's hard for people to understand it," he said.

After the ceremony people wandered

throughout the 153-year-old cemetery, pausing to read the grave markers. Patricia Connor and her husband Linn Johnson, longtime Redwood City residents, said they always look forward to the annual event.

"It helps remind people what the three-day weekend is about," Connor said.

Email Bonnie Eslinger at beslinger@dailynewsgroup.com.

Heritage Homes

UNION CEMETERY

BY THERESE AMBROSI SMITH



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PALO ALTO STANFORD HERITAGE

It later learned that Stanger's research was used to apply for California State Landmark status. No cemetery had ever been given this honor, but the Union Cemetery history was so compelling that the State Office of Historic Preservation felt it was worthy. Union Cemetery was granted California State Landmark #816.

In 1975, the Archives Committee of the library began work to get the cemetery on the National Register of Historic Places.

Today, Union Cemetery looks like many other hundred-year-old graveyards, but its history is unique. Other cemeteries have been named "Union" because they provided burial space for Civil War veterans, but this one was named before the Civil War began. It reflects its founders support of Daniel Webster's famous doctrine of "*liberty and union, now and forever, one and inseparable*", rather than an allegiance to northern states. Secession was already threatened by the Confederacy, and a good number of Californians were in sympathy with them.

The chain of events that led to the cemetery's founding is unusual. The bustling, unincorporated village of Redwood City had sprung up suddenly around the business of shipping lumber, and a few deaths had already occurred. A burying ground was improvised on private property with the consent of the landowner, William Carey Jones. Jones was a prominent citizen and member of the United States Land Commission. He sold the land to Horace Hawes, but Hawes didn't want the cemetery and pressed for its removal. This created a minor, local crisis.

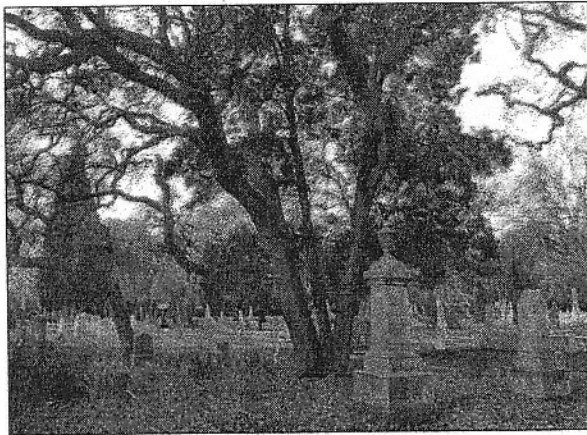
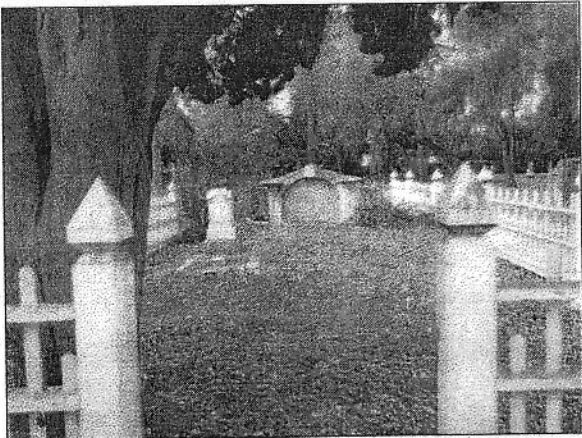
On January 15, 1859, a group of citizens met, "*pursuant to public notice,*" to consider "*our rights and our wants*" in the matter of a "*suitable place for the burial of the dead,*" and by February 28, 1859, the Articles of Association and Bylaws for the Union Cemetery Association were adopted. The plan was to raise money to purchase adjoining land for a proper cemetery, then move the graves. Hawes agreed to match funds raised, up to \$500.

The purchase was consummated on March 16, 1859, with the recording of a deed to six acres of land, but the

Union Cemetery

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF PALO ALTO STANFORD HERITAGE



cemetery association learned that it couldn't take title to the property because it wasn't a corporate body. So the seller deeded the land to "John B. Weller, Governor of California, and his successors in office, in trust for the use and benefit of the Union Cemetery Association of San Mateo County." The association, by virtue of the deed, was to have "control and management" of the cemetery, and was authorized to sell "burial rights". There was no city or county government at the time so the association found a way to use the governor's office

as the holder of trust and wrote their powers into the deed. The trust was promptly accepted.

In the meantime, unbeknownst to the members of the Union Cemetery Association, another approach to the legal problem was being pursued. A bill had been introduced in the state assembly: an "Act to Authorize the Incorporation of Rural Cemetery Associations." Oddly, the bill was introduced - not by a member from San Mateo County or from any other rural area - but by Assemblyman James Banks of urban San Francisco.

The bill received no publicity and encountered no opposition. It sailed through both houses and on April 18, 1859, became California's first law regulating cemeteries. It laid down, in great detail, the procedures for organizing a rural cemetery association and listed the powers, including the right to own property and to sell burial rights to lot-proprietors.

But the Union Cemetery Association of San Mateo County had already formed its organization; there's nothing in their minutes to indicate that they had any knowledge of the law. Their property had already been deeded in trust to the governor, and so it remained for more than a hundred years.

In time, it became evident that state ownership and support was not an arrangement that could go on indefinitely; other communities had cemetery problems too. In 1954, the state gardener visited Redwood City, and after a thorough and unbiased study of the situation, urged state officials to find some way of ending the relationship.

Direct negotiations in Sacramento and that resulted in a simple department of finance releasing the property City. On February 19, 1954, the state legislature voted to accept the deed for the cemetery. A year later, in 1955, the state legislature passed a law that required the removal of year episode in California.

A study of the burial records (showing a disuse about 1916) indicated that about 2000 bodies still lie in the cemetery. There have been some removals, but many are still known.

Among the buried in the cemetery is the builder of Redwood City, Simon Monserrate Meza. He was one of downtown Redwood City's first planners, and he served as judge after the city was formed. Judge George Greer, a founder of the city, was also buried there. "Shingle King" Pharis, John Sears, founder of the city, and others are also buried there.

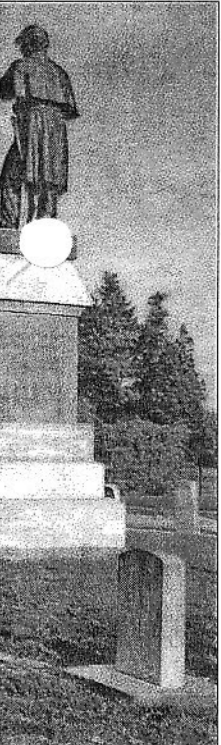
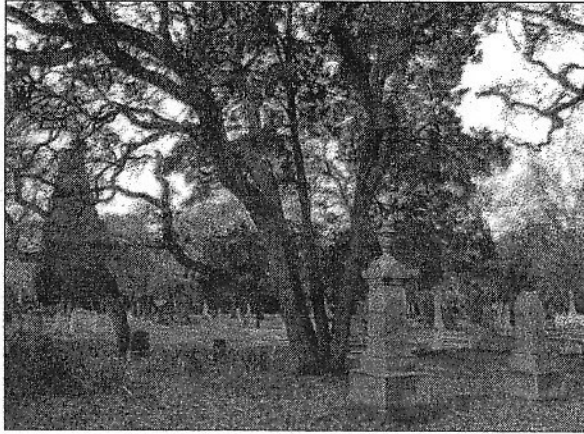
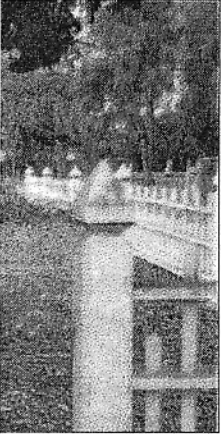
Burials are no longer allowed in the cemetery. The cemetery is listed in the National Register #830. The Union Cemetery is located on Woodside Road and Hill Street in Redwood City. It was founded in 1859.

Therese Ambrosi Spina
a coming of age story of
shipyards during WWII

Note: the information here is largely from a draft project titled "History" composed by me. I found it in the San Mateo County Association archive. It is long and includes many edits. It wasn't dated, but it is fascinating; I can provide a version here.

Union Cemetery

REDWOOD CITY



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Direct negotiations began between officials in Sacramento and those in Redwood City, that resulted in a simple settlement. The state department of finance issued a quit-claim deed, releasing the property to the City of Redwood City. On February 19, 1962, the city council voted to accept the deed and ended a unique, 103 year episode in California history.

A study of the burial register (which fell into disuse about 1916) indicates that approximately 2000 bodies still lie in Union Cemetery. There have been some removals; the exact number is not known.

Among the buried are: William Littlejohn, builder of Redwood City's first creek bridge, Simon Monserrate Mezes, who drew the map of downtown Redwood City and is often called the city's first planner, Horace Templeton, first to serve as judge after San Mateo County was formed, Judge George H. Buck, Captain John Greer, a founder of Woodside, Sheldon Purdy "Shingle King" Pharis, of Kings Mountain, and John Sears, founder of Searsville, later La Honda.

Burials are no longer permitted in Union Cemetery.
 National Register #83001237
 Union Cemetery
 Woodside Road and Hazel Avenue
 Redwood City
 Founded 1859

Therese Ambrosi Smith is the author of "Wax", a coming of age story of women who worked in the shipyards during WWII.

Note: the information in this column is largely from a draft paper: "Union Cemetery, A History" composed by Frank M. Stanger, that I found in the San Mateo County Historical Association archives. The paper is 16 pages long and includes Stanger's hand written edits. It wasn't dated. The entire history is fascinating; I can only present an abridged version here.

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