

Rose is more than a rose in Union Cemetery

By Mike O'Brien
Horticulture Committee Chairperson
Historic Union Cemetery Association, Inc.

Landscaping plays an important part in the history of Union Cemetery.

The site was chosen because of the beautiful grove of oak trees. It appeared to be a shady, peaceful setting. It was ideal because it was close to town and for sale.

Upon the purchase of the plot, the family was responsible for their own landscaping.

The Union Cemetery Association had no guidelines for landscaping and it did not provide a landscaping plan for the common areas. The families used their own, or the deceased's favorite plant, some of which were brought with them to the West Coast.

Some of the more popular plants were Iris, Amaryllis belladonna, Narcissus, Boxwood, Lavender, Forget-me-nots, Red valerian, and Flowering quince. Trees were used as symbolic plantings. Palms were especially popular.

Our national flower, the rose, played the biggest part in family plantings. Rose cuttings could easily survive the wagon train or ocean voyage. Once planted in the area, cuttings could be taken to make more plants.

An old cemetery is an old rose enthusiast's dream.

Many rare or lost roses are to be found. Union Cemetery has a pink *Autumn Damask* sporting a white moss and had a white *Damask* sporting the

famous *York and Lancaster* rose.

The popular *Cecile Brunner*, everybody's grandmother's favorite, remains in three plots. Numerous *Hybrid Perpetuals*, *Bourbons*, *Teas*, and once-blooming roses at one time adorned the cemetery.

In 1980, *Bell's Books* of Palo Alto held a rose symposium and members of the Heritage Rose Group (HRG) came from all over the country.

As part of the symposium, they visited the Union Cemetery on a rose identification and rustling expedition. People took cuttings with them. Some members later witnessed City crews spraying weed killer so as to eradicate the poison oak.

Unfortunately, about two-thirds of the roses were killed.

The roses, bulbs, and bushes that survive today do so because of the heavy adobe soil. Though a gravedigger's nightmare, the adobe retains moisture and nutrients that allow the plants to survive periods of drought and neglect.

Cuttings taken by HRG members grew in backyards and found their way into rose commerce.

Those roses that were killed in the cemetery are now finding their way back. People who took cuttings are now giving the Historic Union Cemetery Association (HUCA) the bushes or cuttings.

Village Gardens, a heritage rose grower in Sebastopol, sells several roses found at Union Cemetery and is donating many plants.

Barbara Worl, an old rose enthusiast, of *Bell's Books*,

took many photographs of the roses in the cemetery starting in 1964. Through these photographs, we will be able to place the grandchildren of the original roses in their original positions. These, and photos from family archives, will be used to recreate original plot landscapes.

Roses are being planted for security on the north and south fences. This will help prevent the use of the cemetery as a thoroughfare and deter vandals.

Climbing heritage roses will be trained a la *Sunset Magazine's* fences on the Woodside Road fence of the cemetery. The roses were donated by *Barbara Blair* (former garden columnist and former Redwood City resident), *Vintage Gardens*, and Mike O'Brien.

Large species and other rambling roses donated by *Barbara Worl* will be used along the north fence to form a beautiful horticultural "barbed wire" barrier.

Everything's coming up roses at the Union Cemetery!

SEQUOIA ART GROUP MEETINGS—The General Meeting of the Sequoia Art Group will be held at 8 P.M., Friday, March 25, at Veterans memorial Senior Center, 1455 Madison Avenue in Redwood City. The Board Meeting will start at 7 P.M. the same evening.

A watercolor demonstration by artist Sonja Hamilton is the evening's program. Hamilton is exhibiting her watercolors at the Port of Redwood City through the month of May. One piece may be found at the Triton Museum in Santa Clara in the juried exhibition which runs through April 17.
