

Rose Hill Cemetery

Black Diamond Mines
Regional Preserve

East Bay 
Regional Park District





Photographer unknown

Rose Hill Cemetery, 1938



Bob Kanagaki

Rose Hill Cemetery— A Brief History

From the early 1860s to the turn of the twentieth century, the Mount Diablo Coal Field was the largest coal mining area in California. Rose Hill Cemetery was established as a Protestant cemetery serving the five towns in the coal field: Nortonville, Somersville, Stewartville, West Hartley, and Judsonville. Many residents were buried in neighboring community cemeteries.

When the coal mines closed in the early 20th century, many of the buildings were dismantled and moved to nearby communities. Others were eventually destroyed by fire or vandals. Among the remnants of that bygone era are the mines, piles of waste rock, exotic plants, and Rose Hill Cemetery.

Alvinza Hayward, president and chief stockholder of the Black Diamond Company, owned the land where the cemetery is located. When Hayward died in 1904, his entire fortune went

to his only child Emma and her husband Andrew Rose (hence the name Rose Hill). In the 1940s, Emma deeded the cemetery to Contra Costa County. The East Bay Regional Park District acquired Rose Hill Cemetery and much of the surrounding land in 1973.

People Interred

Although no original records have been located for the cemetery, it is believed that nearly 250 individuals are at Rose Hill. The cemetery was primarily used between the 1860s and 1900, with most burials occurring in the 1870s when the towns' populations were at their peak and disease outbreaks were common.

Many of those buried in Rose Hill Cemetery were children, a large number of whom died from diseases such as scarlet fever, smallpox, diphtheria, and typhoid. Adults were also prone to deadly illnesses and accidents. A number of men died in mining accidents, while some women died during childbirth.

Over the years, burials have been documented by the presence of a gravestone, photographs showing missing gravestones, family history accounts, historic newspaper articles, and by comparing previous incomplete cemetery lists compiled between 1922 and 1954.

Notable Burials in Rose Hill Cemetery

- Earliest known burial with a gravestone was Elizabeth Richmond; died February 1865 (Plot 81).
- Youngest known person was the one day old unnamed daughter of Thomas H. and Elizabeth Jenkins who was interred with her father; April 15, 1880 (Plot 9).
- Oldest known person, at 81 years old, was Ruth French who died on September 11, 1874 (Plot 116).
- Most recent known burial was William T. Davis who died in 1954 and was buried in the Davis family plot (Plot 104).

Gravesites and Gravestones

Of the nearly 250 burials in the cemetery, only about 80 gravestones remain today. Gravestones were expensive and many people shared them between family and friends. Some individuals' gravesites were marked with wood or were not marked at all.

The majority of gravestones in the cemetery are marble. In the late 1890s, the invention of the pneumatic drill made carving granite easier and it became the material of choice. As with many cemeteries of the

time, gravestones in Rose Hill Cemetery were placed to face east, with the belief that the deceased would be greeted by the rising sun when Resurrection Day comes.

A variety of motifs appear on the gravestones. The images may symbolize many things. Willows express sorrow. Grapes and vines represent Christ. Scalloped shells depict one's journey through life. Young children are symbolized with lambs, or rose buds that were "nipped in the bud" just as life was beginning. Other motifs represent membership in fraternal organizations such as the Masons or Odd Fellows.

Vandalism and Current Preservation

Over the years, vandalism almost destroyed Rose Hill Cemetery. Prior to the area becoming a Regional Preserve, the road to the cemetery remained open, allowing unrestricted access to the site. It was during this time that much of the vandalism occurred. Some visitors broke or stole gravestones and iron fencing. Wooden fences and markers were ravaged by both vandals and fires that swept through the area.

By 1973, when the East Bay Regional Park District acquired Rose Hill, concerned individuals had already begun securing broken gravestones to the ground in concrete in an effort to keep them in the cemetery. Many years of vandalism have

resulted in numerous gravesites marked only by the bases which once held the stones. Some graves are marked only by brick enclosures and the occasional iron fence. Many are not marked at all.

Rose Hill Cemetery is being preserved by the East Bay Regional Park District. Staff have rebuilt brick and wrought iron enclosures, as well as repaired broken gravestones. Burials have been documented by recording all known information for each site and research has been conducted on the individuals interred.



Karen Terhune

Park Rangers installing the repaired gravestone of Sarah Norton.

Exotic Plantings

Like the abandoned mining townsites, Rose Hill Cemetery contains several plant species which had been imported from foreign lands. Some plants may have been introduced for practical uses such as shade, while others may have been planted in the cemetery for their symbolic value.

Although many of the trees in the cemetery grew old and died, a few of the original plantings have survived.

Help Preserve History

Please help us preserve Rose Hill Cemetery and respect those buried here by not walking, standing, or sitting on the gravestones. Most of the stones are over 100 years old. They are precious artifacts that should be protected for future generations. For the protection of gravestones, no rubbings are permitted.

If you or anyone you know ever visited Rose Hill Cemetery prior to 1973, before it became part of Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve, and have photographs, written material or information to share regarding individuals buried there, please contact the staff at Black Diamond Mines. The return of gravestones and iron fences is gladly appreciated, no questions asked.



Nancy McKay

Selected Biographies

Sarah Norton (plot 6)

Died October 5, 1879.

Age 68 years. Sarah was a midwife who reportedly delivered over 600 babies successfully. Widowed in an earlier marriage, she married Noah Norton, for whom the town of Nortonville is named. Sarah was answering a call for her services in Clayton, a town just south of Nortonville, when she was thrown from a buggy, and was killed instantly.



Courtesy of Contra Costa County Historical Society

Annie Spowart (plot 68)

Died June 7, 1872. Age 11 years, 6 months.

Annie died of smallpox in Somersville. Her parents may have come to Somersville during the Civil War. Her father is believed to have operated a saloon in Somersville. Descendants presume her sister, Eliza, may also be buried in the cemetery.

Martha Jones (plot 22)

Died October 27, 1886. Age 18 years, 7 months, 13 days.

Martha's parents, Austin and Celia (Spill) Jones, moved to California from Maryland in the 1860s. Martha was one of nine children in the Jones family. According to coal field descendants, Martha did millinery and dressmaking work, and died of diphtheria—a common disease in the coalfield. She is buried next to her father, two siblings, her brother-in-law, Richard Mortimore, and Richard's two children. Martha's gravestone was broken by vandals prior to the area becoming an East Bay Regional Park. Black Diamond Rangers repaired Martha's stone and returned it to the cemetery in October 2004.



Courtesy of Alice Wildes

Rees G. Thomas, Sr. (plot 56)

Died December 6, 1875. Age 48 years, 3 months, 6 days. According to descendants, Rees was a native of Wales who moved to the coal fields of Pennsylvania in the early 1850s, where he met his wife Margaret. Together they moved to California in search of gold. In 1867, the Thomas' moved to Nortonville, where they homesteaded 160 acres and Rees worked as a miner until his death. Rees's daughter, Elvira, is also buried at this site.

Margaret Leam (plot 91)

Died October 3, 1884. Age 47 years, 9 months, 8 days.

Robert Leam (unknown)

Died February 27, 1900.

Age 64 years. Robert Leam was a coal miner and mine superintendent in the Somersville and Stewartville coal mines. The Leams had eight children, including May who is buried with her mother (plot 91) in Rose Hill Cemetery. After the death of his first wife Margaret, Robert remarried and worked at the Tesla Coal Mines near Livermore, Alameda County, CA. Upon his death, a newspaper reported that he was interred in Rose Hill Cemetery.



Courtesy of Margaret Santana



Courtesy of Margaret Santana

William Gething (plot 4)

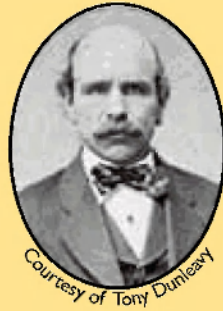
Died July 24, 1876. Age 36 years.

On July 24, 1876, William and nine other men were killed during a mine explosion in the Black Diamond Mine at Nortonville. Buried near William are other men that were killed in the explosion: William Williams, David W. Griffiths, Theophilus Watts, David Watts, Thomas James, Evan Smith, and Theophile Dumas.

John Bradshaw (plot 16)

Died October 25, 1881.

Age 55 years, 4 months, 20 days. John was born in Monmouthshire, Wales. John and his wife, Mary, had at least 15 children. He was a member of the Odd Fellows Lodge and died in Nortonville. His marble gravestone was taken by vandals before the area became a Regional Preserve. The top section of the stone, containing the motif, was returned to the park in 2009. The brick enclosure and iron fence have been repaired by Park staff.



A. J. Markley (plot 67)

Died May 2, 1870. Age 40 years.

Andrew Jackson Markley served as Clerk for Contra Costa County from 1869 to 1870. Markley Creek in Somersville was named for him. He died of heart disease in Martinez, Contra Costa County, California. He shares a gravesite with his two children, Eliza Jane and David, who died in Somersville.

**Individuals Buried In Rose Hill Cemetery
With Burial Location Unknown**

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Banks, Albert | Cooper, John L. |
| Banks, Ann C. | Crowhurst, Elizabeth |
| Bassett, (child) | Daley, James |
| Blackburn, Charles W. | Davis, David B. |
| Bryant, Eva Sitera | Davis, David B. |
| Bryant, Ida Mary | Davis, Margaret |
| Bryant, Margaret | Dennis, John |
| Bussey, Joseph | Dodsworth, George W. |
| Buxton, Thomas | Doulton, George |
| Conner, John T. | Dunton, Clyde C. |

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Dunton, Lulu B. | Riddock, Rob. (d 1865) |
| Easton, Mary | Riddock, Rob. (d 1867) |
| Edwards, Clara | Riddock, William |
| Edwards, Emma | Rogers, Elizabeth |
| Edwards, John | Saddler, (male child) |
| Engler, Annie H. | Saddler, Harriet A. |
| Engler, Charles | Schwartz, (infant #1) |
| Engler, John | Schwartz, (infant #2) |
| Evans, Elizabeth | Shaw, Hazel Beatrice |
| Goulding, Fanny S. | Spowart, Eliza |
| Goulding, Thomas P. | Spratt, Wm. Gladstone |
| Griffith, (infant) | Stine, Catherine |
| Griffith, Emma | Thomas, Charles M. |
| Griffith, Jack | Thomas, Elizabeth Ann |
| Hay, John | Thomas, Handel |
| James, Morgan E. | Thomas, Howell |
| Jewett, Emeline F. | Thomas, John D. |
| Jones, Benjamin A. | Thomas, John H. |
| Jones, David T. | Thomas, Jos. (d 1870) |
| Jones, Elizabeth | Thomas, Jos. (d 1871) |
| Jones, George T. | Thomas, Peter B. |
| Jones, Henry | Tierney, John |
| Jones, John | Tolan, (child #1) |
| Leam, Robert | Tolan, (child #2) |
| Lewis, David John | Tonkins, John |
| Lewis, Meredith | Tregellas, Annie |
| Lewis, Seth John | Tregellas, James |
| MacLeod, John | Tregellas, Joseph |
| Maddin, Ella | Van Amringe, Ellen |
| Malpass, Percival S. | Vestnys, Lorenda A. |
| Morgan, Ann | Williams, Howell M. |
| Muir, Jane Russel | Williams, Mary M. |
| Oliver, Thomas J. | Williams, Sara Elizabeth |
| Parsons, Jeannette | Willis, Mary Blanche |
| Price, Hazel | Wright, Bertie |
| Pritchard, Lupyester | Wright (child) |
| Ramsay, (child) | Wright, John Edmund |
| Rees, Margaret | Wright, Mary Elizabeth |
| Reynolds, George M. | Wright, Minnie |
| Riddock, Mary Jane | |

For more information on Rose Hill Cemetery, please contact a Black Diamond Mines Naturalist.

**BLACK DIAMOND MINES
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Zelma Myrick

Rose Hill Cemetery, *circa* 1939. Courtesy of Tony Dunleavy

Text: Traci Parent and Kevin Damstra
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This brochure is provided as a public service of the Interpretive and Recreation Services Department of the East Bay Regional Park District.



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