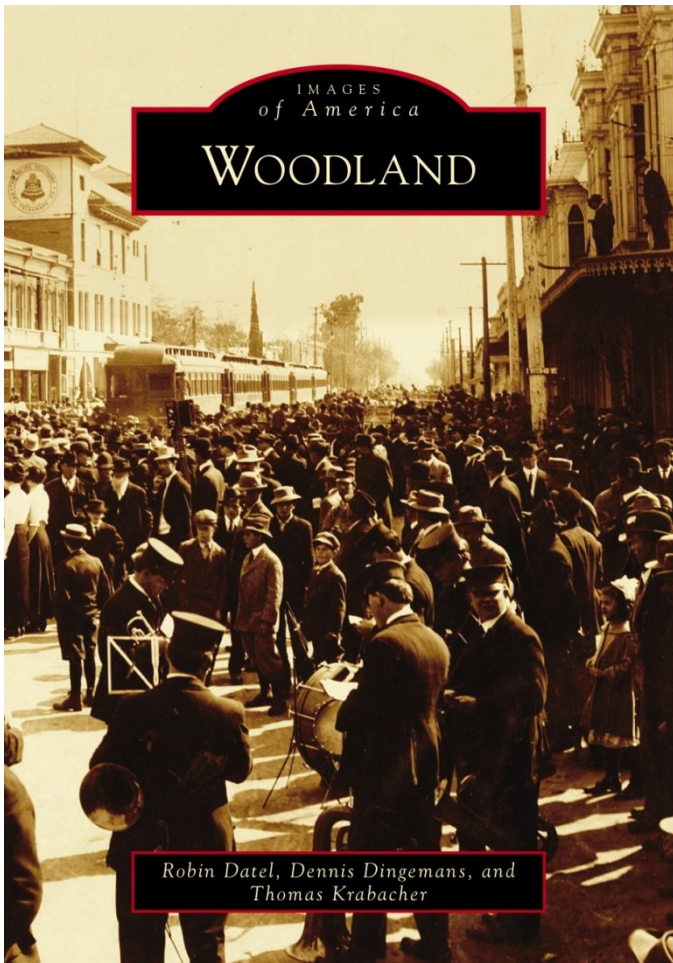


Yolo County Historical Society



January 2012



Join Us for a Book Signing!

Authors' Lecture
Sunday, January 15, 2012 2:00 P.M.
Gibson Museum
512 Gibson Rd. Woodland, CA

Refreshments to follow..... museum docents will also be available for tours

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Society Board is looking forward to the new year with exciting programs and a couple of day long tours. We have two exciting new books "Hollywood Comes to Woodland" and the Arcadia published book on Woodland. We continue to be a conduit to the Yolo County Archives for persons looking for information which they think we have and we will continue supporting other historic groups in Yolo County. The Spring Lake Schoolhouse will continue to be open for visitation of school children and also for fairgoers during the summer.

Our monthly meetings will be announced through this newsletter and area newspapers.

Peace,

BJ Ford, President

bjford@pacbell.net or 662-0952

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Society publications available for sale at a variety of locations. For more information on book sales, contact Mary Aulman at 666-0743

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NEWSLETTER ARTICLES DEADLINE: Articles for the newsletter will be accepted until the 20th of each month. Please either email B J Ford at: bjford@pacbell.net or mail to the YCHS at P.O. Box 1447 Woodland, CA 95776

When Marcia Reemts recently attended the society's "Cemetery Tour" in October, she was reminded of early times with her family in the Old Historic Sacramento City Cemetery and wrote this story about that time and that place.

The Old Sacramento City Cemetery

The tradition had been well established before I was born. Every year, two days before Memorial Day, my great-grandmother and my great-aunt would visit the Old City Cemetery in Sacramento to pay homage to family and friends who were buried there. By the time I was born, my great-grandmother was very elderly and my mother was now accompanying Aunt Dorothy to the cemetery.

For some reason that I now cannot remember, I always wanted to be involved in this seemingly important event and pleaded my case days beforehand. My mother, being the clever woman that she was, made me wait for her answer so as to make this seem as though it was quite the honor. Finally she would announce that as long as I didn't whine and become impatient I would be allowed to join them. Looking back, I now realize that I didn't sway her with my persuasive arguments, but rather they were grooming me for the day when I would inherit this responsibility.

On the appointed day, my mother spent the early morning hours cutting armfuls of pink and red geraniums from the yard and loading them into the trunk of the Oldsmobile. Buckets, brooms, rags, and hand pruners were also included. After my mother was satisfied that she had all the

necessary equipment, she would announce that it was time to get going. I'd sit in the backseat and we would head out to pick up Aunt Dorothy before it got too late. Our goal was to beat both the heat of the day and the crowds of people that my aunt always believed would descend on the cemetery to do the same thing we would be doing. In reality, even then, very few people attended to graves in this old and mostly forgotten cemetery. It had not yet become the historical showplace that it is now. In those days, it was an overgrown and neglected cemetery with vandalized headstones.

However, Aunt Dorothy was determined that our family plots would be kept clean and neat and would sport bright, cheerful flowers every year, if only for a day or so. Once we arrived at the cemetery my mother would drive the car slowly over the narrow paved, winding roads, always hoping that another car would not be coming from the opposite direction. But since there were so few people there, this was seldom a problem.

This was when great patience came into play. It seemed to me that this pilgrimage through the cemetery and the attendant detail spent on each plot was interminable. The headstones had to be cleaned off, swept, and sometimes washed. Weeds had to be pulled and of course the flowers had to be arranged in the attached vase. When I first began to accompany my mother and aunt, I wasn't even sure who all these people were. Aunt Dorothy patiently explained who these distant relatives were and how I was related to them. Among them were my great, great, great-

grandparents, the Parkers, who came to Sacramento in October 1850, during the gold rush. First stop was Hangtown (Placerville) where they were married before arriving in Sacramento. The news that California had been admitted as a state had not reached them, so they were first married by a Spanish official and later by a Methodist minister. Settling in Sacramento, they eventually opened a boarding house at 7th and K Street called the Schyler House, which later became the Capital Hotel.

My other great, great-grandparents also have their family plot nearby. My great, great, Grandmother Brown was a schoolteacher from New York who met her husband, an agent for the Southern Pacific Railroad, after arriving in Sacramento in 1866. In this plot are the graves of their children, Lottie and Robbie, aged 3 and 4, who both died of diphtheria or diphtheritic croup as stated in the archives.

After we attended to the graves of relatives, we would wind our way through the weed choked roads searching for the “others” as I called them. The “others” included people who my great-grandmother had known and in one case, didn’t know. There was the grave of the Chinese cook, who worked for the family during the 20s when they spent the summers in Lake Tahoe; Phillip, the gardener who worked for the family during the depression years; various family friends; and in one curious case, a grave of someone we didn’t even know. It was explained to me that my great-grandmother felt sorry for this person because she never saw anyone come to his grave. So she decided to add him to the list, and years later we

were still attending to this man’s grave, whoever he was.

While my mother and aunt attended to their work, meticulously cleaning the stones and surrounding area, I would wander off and explore on my own. The cemetery was never a depressing or scary place for me as it is for some. Even in its dilapidated condition, I thought of it as a graceful and peaceful place. My aunt told me stories of how people in the old days would come from far away to visit their deceased family members and would have picnics on the grass next to the graves before making the journey home. At the time I thought it a rather unusual thing to do and couldn’t imagine people in present day times wanting to picnic in a cemetery; but interestingly enough, if you visit the cemetery now, you will find picnic tables scattered throughout the grounds for just that purpose. As I wandered, I found interesting gravestones, artistically carved, and wondered about the lives of all these people who lived in a very different time. I was especially fascinated by the impressive mausoleums and crypts--monuments to wealthy Sacramento families.

As time went on, I became Aunt Dorothy’s companion at the cemetery. My mother was happy to abdicate to me as she felt she had put in her time, and I came to look forward to the visits. Eventually Aunt Dorothy, worrying about who would keep the family plots weeded into perpetuity, made the decision to cement over the ground surrounding the headstones. The cemetery had become a neglected mess and she worried about this. I remember that she approached a person who was a

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relative of a family who shared one of our plots to see if he would be willing to pay for part of this project. He said no, that they were all dead, so who cares what it looks like. That was certainly not Aunt Dorothy's viewpoint, so she paid for it herself.

Now the Old Historic Sacramento City Cemetery is a lovely place to behold. In the 1980s a committee was formed to save the cemetery and to restore it to its original Victorian elegance. The Historical Society, The Native Plant Society, as well as other groups and individual patrons have worked to turn it back into the gracious historical monument that it is. "Adopt a Plot" programs have been established and now heritage roses and irises thrive where weeds once dominated, and tours of historical interest are frequent and well attended. I wish my aunt could have lived long enough to see this transformation and know of the renewed interest in the history of Sacramento.

I still check in with my great, great, great-grandparents and the other relatives when I visit Sacramento, although I have long forgotten the location of the "others". I think my great-grandmother would forgive me for that, however, because after all the years of neglect, the entire cemetery is now a lovely monument to all who are buried there.

Vision Statement *The Yolo County Historical Society strives to preserve, protect and acknowledge the diverse history of Yolo County through education, communication, and advocacy*