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Life Meets the Afterlife in Lafayette

Cathy Dausman



Photos Cathy Dausman

hillside is "not an easy place to walk," so the sedentary lecture is an option.

Both events are fundraisers for the Lafayette Historical Society. The cost for either event is \$10 for members, \$15 for non-members. Those who attend both events are eligible for a \$5 discount.

Lafayette Cemetery had its first burial in 1854, when a neighbor allowed Henrietta Hodges' parents to bury her on a portion of his land. Hodges died of tuberculosis at age 13. Medford Gorham, the neighbor, described the place as, "a pleasing grassy knoll with good drainage and a vista of lovely valleys and hills and hillsides." It's like that still today.

The cemetery officially opened in 1874, when Gorham sold 4.5 acres of land to the newly formed Cemetery Corporation of Lafayette. Over time, a number of notables have been laid to rest there. John Standish, a descendent of Mayflower Pilgrim Myles Standish, is buried there. Relatives of the ill-fated Donner party have a family plot in Lafayette Cemetery (they were the lucky ones-they arrived in California by ship.) At least two Lafayette Cemetery Corporation directors are buried there, along with teachers Jennie Bickerstaff Rosenberg and Benjamin Shreve (who was also a Lafayette postmaster). One plot holds a man buried with his beloved dog. McCosker says a Siamese cat named Ling was also buried in or near the cemetery and legend has it the cat and dog meet at night.

Although both lecture and walking tour fall near Halloween, McCosker says it is purely happenstance. Think more All Hallows Eve than ghosts and goblins. McCosker sees the cemetery as "not spooky, not scary... just part of the Circle of Life."

Additional cemetery information may be found online at:

Lafayette Cemetery:

http://alamolafayettecemetery.net/alcd_docu/pdf/poi.lafayette.map.pdf.

Queen of Heaven:

<http://www.cfcscemeteries.org/locations/queen-of-heaven-lafayette>

Oakmont:

<http://aftercareplanning.com/oakmont-memorial-park/>

For Lafayette Cemetery lecture or tour reservations, call (925) 283-1848 or e-mail Lafayette.history@comcast.net

net

Cemetery Etiquette

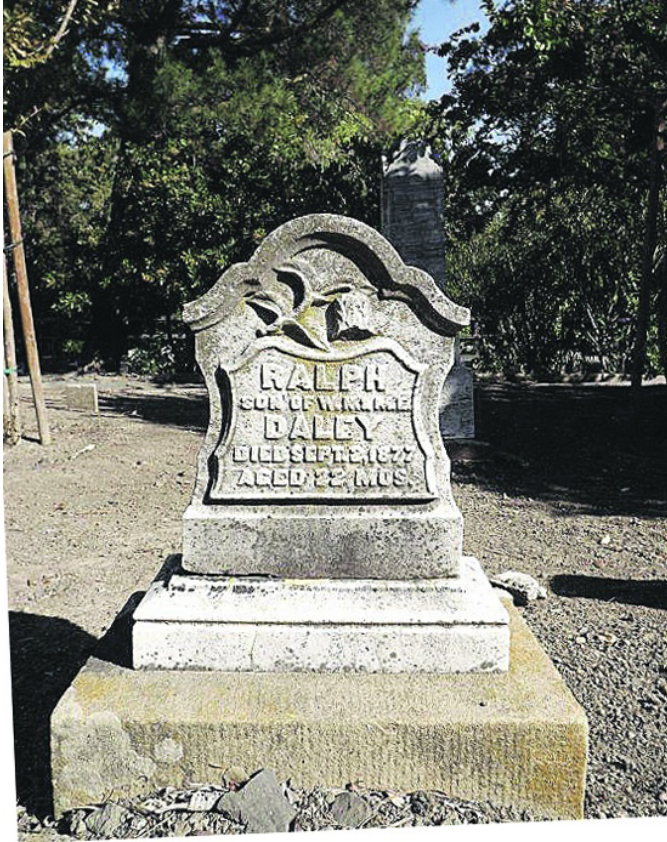
First time visitors to any cemetery may wonder what behavior is expected of them, or if there are any "rules" about being in the presence of those dead and buried. Is it acceptable to walk about the grave sites? What about walking on top of a grave? As for the latter, "you can't avoid that," says Patricia Howard, Superintendent and General Manager for the Alamo-Lafayette Cemetery District. A majority of what looks to be open spaces are actually early burial sites, many of which are without headstones. Early plots measured 4 by 10 feet; in the early 1900's the sites were reduced to 3 by 8 feet. Howard says to her knowledge, the cemetery has never had an issue with unsuitable behavior.

In her 18 plus years at this job, she has come to realize that different cultures have unique ways of memorializing their loved ones. She cites the Jewish custom of leaving a stone at a grave site, and recalls a Korean family who mourned the death of a child in near silence until the arrival of a young and very vocal paid mourner.

Howard says it is fine to make grave rubbings, as long as people realize they need to support upright headstones so they are not loosened or damaged in the process.

She appreciates the work Mary McCosker does with elementary school students from Lafayette, who learn respect for the cemetery while becoming familiar with their city's early history. Howard considers the park-like Lafayette Cemetery "a safe place to be" to remember departed loved ones, and asks only that everyone treat it "as their own home."

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