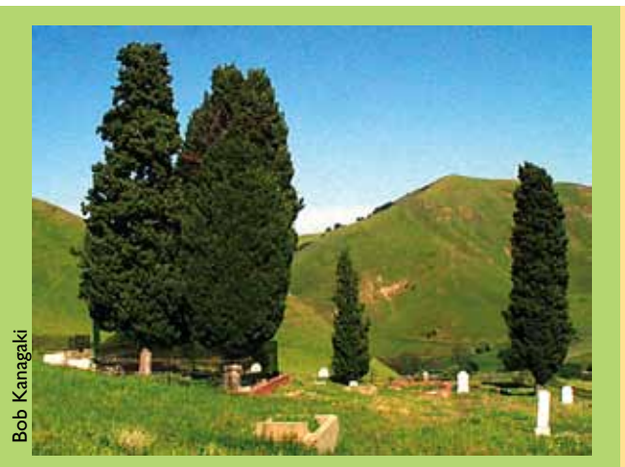


Photographer unknown

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 grave stones. 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.

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.

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.

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.



Nancy McKay



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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.

Text: Traci Parent and Kevin Damstra
Design: Nick Cavagnaro
Cover Photo: Bob Kanagaki



Zelma Myrick

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

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

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Antioch, CA 94509
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Rose Hill Cemetery

Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve

East Bay Regional Park District

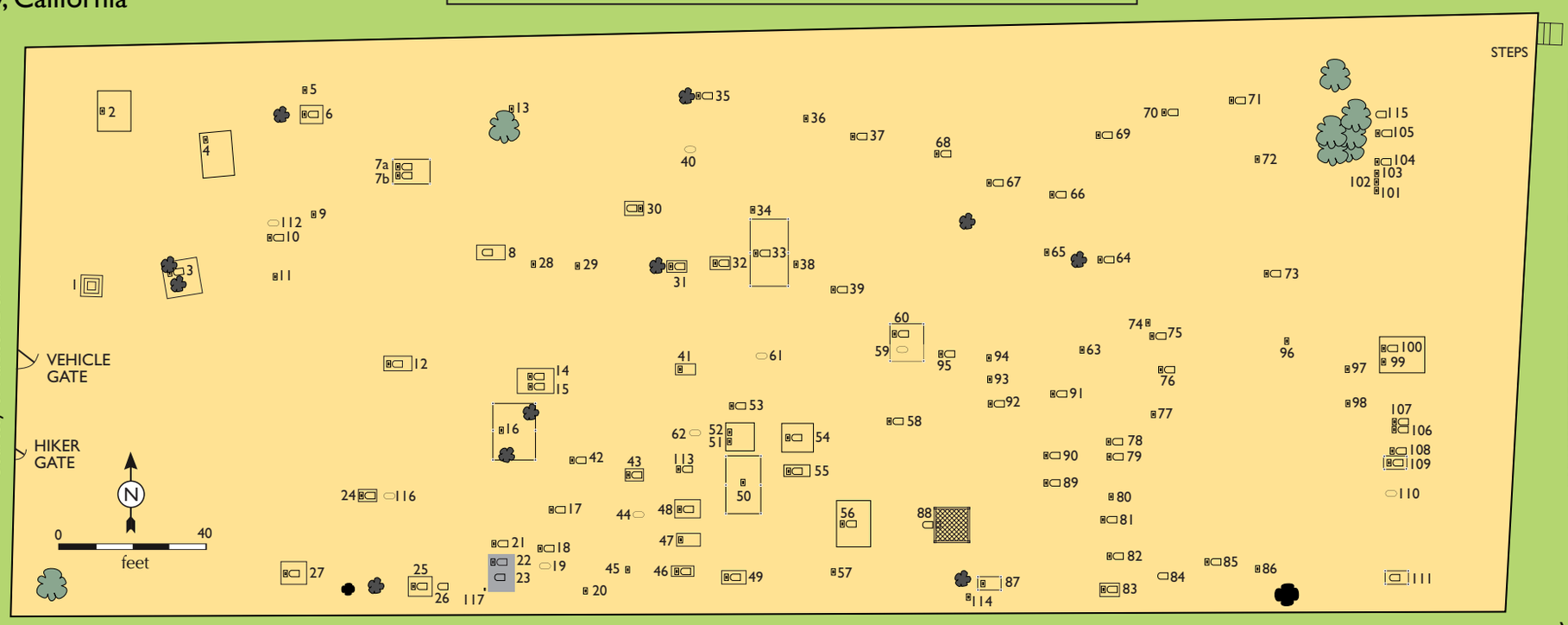
Rose Hill Cemetery

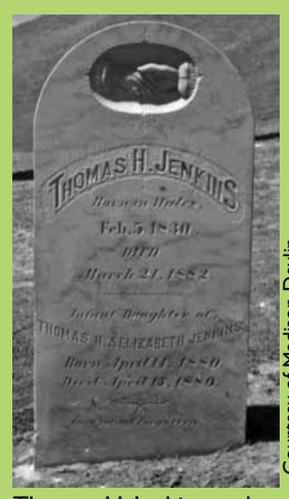
Mount Diablo Coal Field
Contra Costa County, California



William L. Williams, plot 52

Courtesy of Madison Devlin





Courtesy of Madison Devlin

Thomas H. Jenkins and infant daughter, plot 9

Abraham, Rebecca 55
Aitken, Katie 17
Anderson, Robert 24
Banks, Joseph 3
Bowman, Charles H. 75
Bowman, David G. 75
Bowman, Violette I. 75
Bradshaw, John 16
Bryant, Elizabeth Ann 57
Buxton, Alfred W. 60
Buxton, Lulu 60
Buxton, Maggie 25
Cain, Elizabeth O. 2
Clare, Walter E. 112
Clement, Ann 100
Clement, William H. 100
Cooper, George 25
Davies, Evan 53
Davis, Anna 90
Davis, (child) 102
Davis, (child) 103
Davis, Ellen 101
Davis, Peter 111
Davis, Thomas J. 59
Davis, William T. 104
Dawson, Mary A. 106
Dumas, Theophile 47
Edwards, Catherine 31
Edwards, Joseph M. 7a
Eno, Susan J. 71
Evans, John 94
Evans, John R. 94
Evans, Rebecca 27
Evans, William 94
Evans, William Rodrick 93
French, Ruth 115
Gething, William 46
Goulding, Joseph 72
Goulding, Thomas 72
Green, Martha J. 107
Griffith, David E. 7b
Griffiths, David W. 49
Habenicht, Wilhelm C. 4
Havard, Elias 39
Heycock, Richard 35
Holt, Walter L. 10
Hook, Alice J. 108
Hook, George B. 109
Howell, Sarah 8
Howell, Thomas M. 8
Howells, Isaac 73
Hughes, David M. 12
Hughes, Margaret 54
Humphreys, Gwelym 43
James, Mary Ann 28
James, Thomas 50
Jenkins family 88
Jenkins, (infant daughter) 9
Jenkins, Thomas H. 9
Jewett, Milton 105
Jewett, Walter S. 105
Jones, Austin 23
Jones, Catherine 82
Jones, Davied R. 83
Jones, Elizabeth 83
Jones, Ellen 89
Jones, Hugh R. 89
Jones, Isabella 84
Jones, Jennie 117
Jones, John B. 59
Jones, Lewis James 117
Jones, Martha 22
Jones, Mary E. 79
Jones, Thomas 113
Jones, Thomas M. 70
Jones, Thomas S. 69
Leam, Margaret 91
Leam, May 91
Love, John 30
Markley, A. J. 67
Markley, David 67
Markley, Eliza Jane 67
Mills, Charles W. 11
Minett, William C. 66
Morgan, David 92
Morris, Alexander 38
Mortimore, Alvin 21
Mortimore, Harriet 21
Mortimore, Richard 21
Native Sons & Native Daughters of the Golden West monument 1
Norton, Sarah 6
Oliver, Jane 95
Ott, Georg Adam 76
Piercy, Julia Etta 85
Pohl, Dora 110
Pohl, Millie 110
Powell, Mary 42
Prosser, Mary 78
Rees, Elizabeth Ann 19
Richards, Daniel 15
Richards, John 64
Richards, William Timothy 64
Richmond, Anne 80
Richmond, Elizabeth 81
Richmond, Thomas 80
Ritchards (Richards), Mary 14
Smith, Evan 48
Spowart, Annie 68
Thomas, Elvira 56
Thomas, Frederick Elias 5
Thomas, John 5
Thomas, Rees G. 56
Tully, Mary 18
Vaughn family 33
Waters, Edna Bella 116
Waters, John R. 116
Waters, William 116
Watts, David 50
Watts, Theophilus 50
Williams, Annie 55
Williams, David R. 58
Williams, Edward F. 74
Williams, Watkin 51
Williams, William L. 52
Wingate, Robert 37
Witherow, Barbara L. 32
Unknown (adult) 99
Unknown "Infant Babe" 79
Unknown infants (2) 69
Other Unknown Gravesites 13, 20, 29, 34, 36, 40, 41, 44, 45,61, 62, 63, 65, 77, 86, 87, 96, 97, 98, 114

Selected Biographies



Courtesy of Contra Costa County Historical Society

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.

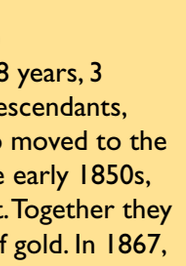
Annie Spowart (plot 68)
Died June 7, 1872. Age 11 years, 6 months. Annie died of smallpox in Somersville. Her parents may have come to Somersville during the Civil War. Her father is believed to have operated a saloon in Somersville. Descendants presume her sister, Eliza, may also be buried in the cemetery.



Courtesy of Alice Wildes

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.

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.



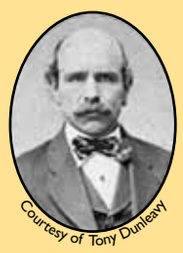
Courtesy of Margaret Santana

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 Margret, 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

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.



Courtesy of Tony Dunleavy

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