

The History of Modesto Pioneer Cemetery

Modesto Pioneer Cemetery, Stanislaus County CA published by the Genealogical Society of Stanislaus County, Inc., Modesto, California
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INTRODUCTION

Modesto Pioneer Cemetery
formerly Independent Order of Odd Fellows (Willey Lodge) Cemetery

This Modesto Pioneer Cemetery, commonly called the Odd Fellows Cemetery is located at 905 Scenic Drive in Modesto. It is a part of the large area of cemeteries that at one time was known as "The Silent City". The four cemeteries, located there are:
Acacia (Masonic),
Modesto Pioneer Cemetery (Odd Fellows),
Modesto Cemetery Association (Modesto Citizens Cemetery),
St. Stanislaus Catholic Cemetery.

The land for this community burial ground was part of a land grant signed by President Abraham Lincoln

HISTORY:

This cemetery has a history of change. The first burial in 1856 was of the infant girl, Elvira T. McLean. She was soon joined by a brother little William A. McLean, who in 1859 was buried in the same plot. This was the beginning of a family cemetery. Later they were joined by John T. McLean, 1866-1894.

In 1868 the Wildey Lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows was instituted in Tuolumne City. Soon after Modesto was founded, the Lodge was removed to this railroad town. The first IOOF meeting was held in Modesto March 18, 1871. The Wildey Lodge purchased the land that held the early graves in 1872, paying \$150.00 for five (5) acres between the Masonic and the Modesto Cemeteries.

This cemetery declined over the years due to lack of income -- all plots were sold long ago and the only income, besides the interest from a trust fund, was from burial fees. In August 1976, the Cemetery Board resigned 'en mass' and turned the trust fund over to the California State Cemetery Board. A volunteer citizens committee was formed in October 1976. In March 1977, it was incorporated as Modesto Pioneer Cemetery.

HOW THE WORK WAS DONE:

The recording and publishing of all cemetery records in Stanislaus County is a project undertaken by the Genealogical Society of Stanislaus County, CA, Inc., in 1991, under the leadership of President Ouida Fillebrown. This work is ongoing, under Cemetery Committee Chairperson Wayne Hasemeier.

These records for Pioneer Cemetery cover the time period from 1856-1992. Extraction and compilation of the Pioneer Cemetery records were done by Phyllis M. Muirhead and Frances L. Miller. They worked at the cemetery office, copying records. They walked the graves to locate additional information that was not included in the written records, To find any graves that had no records at all. They carried on with extensive research at the McHenry Museum to locate additional data on these folks. The actual on site work took from March 1991 until October 1992. The additional searching took still much more time and dedication

Mrs. Miller and Mrs. Muirhead extend particular thanks to the cemetery caretakers. Rocky Talley and Annie Stewart for their patience, cooperation and help. They noted that for some burials there is some additional information. Usually this was an address of the person making arrangement. It was decided that this was private information and could not be published with the other more public information. If there was a stone the remarks lists the inscription. No inscription listed means there was no stone.

Mary Collins of Sacramento entered all of the more than five thousand entries. Herb Collins proofed the work to be sure she had not missed anyone. Later Mrs. Muirhead and Mrs. Miller again proofed for every word and number and prepared lists of information to be added, thus greatly increasing the value of this work.

Susan Park developed the style of presentation and final work was done by Mildred Starr. Thanks are extended to Phyllis Muirhead, Frances Miller, Mary Collins, Herb Collins, Susan Park, Rocky Talley, and Anne Stewart for their help in making this project such a success. A special thanks to Frances for preparing the history portion of this introduction.

Thanks to all who have been so generous with their time and energies The work you have created will bring joy to the hearts of future researchers. Thanks to all of the members of the Genealogical Society for sponsoring this important project.

Mildred Starr, Editor