

History of the Capay Cemetery District, with a Note on the Older Cemeteries of Capay Valley

by Mark Riley, Capay, California

Stretching along a seasonal stream and shaded by native oaks and pines, the Capay Cemetery has served as a final resting place for residents of western Yolo County since 1876 (entrance).



The cemetery, located on County Road 22 west of Esparto, California, and maintained by the Capay Cemetery District, serves a large area north and west of Esparto, roughly the sections of Yolo County west of I-505 and north of a line extending along State Highway 16 and continuing to the Yolo-Napa County line.



This rural cemetery was first established in 1876 when Capay Lodge No. 230 of the International Order of Odd Fellows bought six acres of land from J. W. Aldrich and B. F. Cross. For many decades the civic project of the

IOOF has been (and still is) the establishment and maintenance of cemeteries in areas which lack such facilities. Even though the earliest records at Capay noted whether the deceased was a member, burials in IOOF cemeteries were not limited to members of the Lodge. The

Capay Lodge began with six acres, added approximately five acres in 1893, then another two and two-thirds in 1894. This area, approximately 14 acres, comprises the current cemetery. Another five acres, currently undeveloped, were purchased in 1980 from David and Ann Scheuring to allow future expansion.

The Capay Lodge No. 230 operated the cemetery until 1923. The Lodge began the original Register of Deaths which listed most interments and was in use until 1989 (113 years!), made a plot map of the cemetery, and in general established the cemetery on a firm foundation. Cemetery lots, each of which contained eight burial plots, were sold for \$10.

Many burials in the small family cemeteries which had originally been on private property in Capay Valley were moved to the Capay Cemetery, including Sylvanus Arnold, whose monument is the oldest in the cemetery.



(See the notes at end for a description of these earlier cemeteries in Capay Valley.)



In the Capay Cemetery many of the early marble or granite headstones remain, but only a few of the original simple wooden markers survive, the rest having been lost to decay and neglect or in the grass fires which formerly swept the area. (One of the few surviving wooden markers stands high above Guinda in the Logan Cemetery.)

In addition many bodies were buried without a marker, indeed without any entry at all in the Register of Deaths. Stories have been told about workers, stillborn children, and others who were buried quietly, without notice, at night.

Before 1920 a large number of Chinese settlers were buried in the northwest section of the cemetery. These bodies were all exhumed and returned to China for proper burial at a later period. No record either of the burials or of the exhumations exist.

Many residents of Japanese descent are buried in the cemetery, with a Buddhist monument commemorating them as a group. A number of burials were made in the Potter's Field section, also in the northwest part of the cemetery. Only two of these were recorded in the Register of Death.



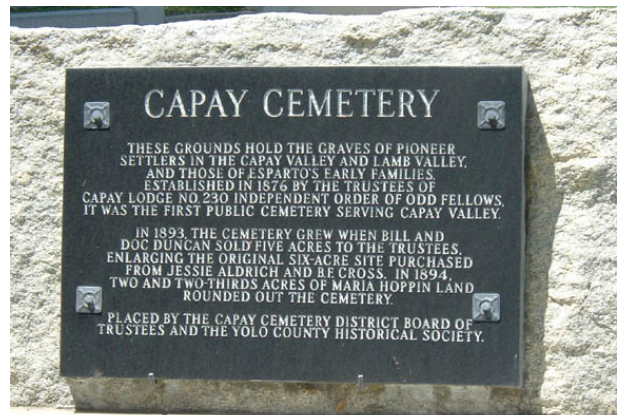
In the early 1900's a large fire in the west end of the town of Capay burned the IOOF Lodge, destroying some records, and more importantly, demoralizing the membership. The Lodge broke up, with the surviving records scattered (according to report) to lodges in Madison,

Arbuckle, Winters, and perhaps elsewhere. None of these records have been found.

In 1921 the California Legislature approved the organization and government of public cemetery districts. In July 1923 a group of 98 electors from the north-west section of Yolo County petitioned the Yolo County Board of Supervisors to establish the Capay Cemetery District. This was accomplished by a resolution of the Board on August 6, 1923. The first trustees were H. J. Taber, A. F. Binde, and J. W. Neilson, who were appointed to a four year term.

Four months later, on January 16, 1924, the trustees of Capay Lodge No. 120 IOOF, who happened to include A. F. Binde and J. W. Neilson, as well as L. E. Dibble, sold the existing cemetery property for ten dollars to the Capay Cemetery District. Since that time the District has been a Special District of Yolo County, governed by a three-person Board of Trustees appointed by the Yolo County Board of Supervisors.

On February 1, 1992, a historical marker listing the crucial events in the cemetery's history was placed at the entrance to the cemetery.



The dedication was accompanied by the reading of a proclamation from the Yolo County Board of Supervisors commemorating the cemetery and commending the efforts of the cemetery's Board of Trustees to maintain and preserve the cemetery.

Special Districts such as water districts or a school districts serve the residents of their districts. Likewise the Capay Cemetery District serves local residents: anyone wishing to be buried in the Capay Cemetery must have some connection to the District, either as a current or former resident, or as the owner of a plot bought by a resident in the past.

Family members of former residents may also be buried here if the family has a lot or plot in the Cemetery. These

restrictions are established by the State of California.

The Trustees meet at least once per month to oversee operations, to establish policies and budgets, to approve purchases, and to discuss whatever issues may arise.

Day-to-day operations of the Cemetery are managed by a secretary, who answers correspondence, sells lots and plots, and keeps records of Cemetery operations. A cemerterian, or custodian, digs the graves and maintains the Cemetery itself.

The records of burials at the Capay Cemetery are available in printed form in the Esparto Public Library. Given the past history of the cemetery, the records are incomplete. Undoubtedly there are burials of which the cemetery has no record, for the reasons mentioned above.

In addition errors may be found in the records: there can be errors in the original entries, illegible entries (indicated by "?" in the transcription), and transcriptional errors when the electronic file was created.

If any reader has information about any burial which is not in the current record or notices any error, please give such information to the secretary of the District.

Note on earlier cemeteries in the Capay Valley

The original cemetery for the Native American inhabitants of the Capay Valley has been in use for hundreds of years, if not longer. Located at the north end of the valley, the site is covered with yerba santa and other shrubby growth, among which can be seen shallow pits, the location of old graves.



The last burial here occurred in the 1950's. No monument marks the site.



Guinda

A cemetery served the settlers in the hills east of Guinda, many of whom (the Logans and the Simpsons) were African-American.

The Logan family first settled there in the 1890's and other families followed. There were enough children to justify the establishment of a school, the Summit School, which was built in 1895 and continued in use until 1912.

The Summit cemetery (or Logan cemetery) lies about 5 miles east of Guinda across Cache Creek and high in the hills. It can be reached by following County Road 57 and continuing on ranch roads.



This cemetery received an infant burial as late as the 1980's.



A cemetery about one and one-half miles to the west of Guinda on Forrest Ave./County Road 53 served this town, once a flourishing center of fruit and almond groves with a railroad depot and a large fruit packing shed.



In the 1980's and 1990's new stones were placed by the Logan family to supplement the still-existing old monuments which were becoming illegible.

Buried there are

1. Father, Green B. Logan Sr., born Oct. 28, 1844, died June 20, 1905, age 60 years, 8 months, 8 days;
2. Daughter, Lorena Logan, Oct. 11, 1879 - Nov. 13, 1895, age 15 years, 1 month, 2 days;
3. Son, John Henry Logan Feb. 7, 1876 - Jan. 43, 1907, age 30 years, 11 months, 3 days.
4. A memorial stone is leaning against a tree: Aaron Logan [born] 1912 [died] 5-29-00. (Aaron Logan is buried in Oakland.) This stone is a sandstone slab with the name and date scratched on by a family member.
5. A memorial stone has recently been placed by her daughter for Emma Estella Logan Earle, Aug. 2, 1916 - Jun. 5, 1995. Her ashes are scattered in the cemetery.
6. Some of the Simpson family were also buried in this cemetery, including Charles H. Simpson (1860-1912); portrait in Merhoff (1986) 212.

The Logan family is listed in Merhoff (1986) 358 and a picture of Green Logan and his daughter Lorena is in Merhoff (1986) 211. The surviving members of the Logan family who now live in Woodland CA have provided information for this note.

The cemetery is marked on the USGS "Guinda Quadrangle" map, 15 minute series.



A dozen or so grave pits can be seen and one surviving stone:

PETER RHOADES
CO. I
25TH MO. INF.



There are no dates on the stone. The stone is barely legible, but at the suggestion of Mr. Mike McBride, who reminded me that gravestones from the Civil War to the present often mention a person's military unit, I re-examined the stone carefully.

I found a Private Peter Rhoades listed in the roster of the 25th Missouri Infantry (Company I), available on-line. This is clearly the same man. A Peter Rhodes (note spelling), born Tennessee, 1820, died California, 1897, is listed in Merhoff (1986) 363, but whether this is the same person is not yet determined.

This cemetery is marked on the USGS "Guinda Quadrangle" map, 15-minute series.



Another cemetery served the settlement of Tancred, between Brooks and Guinda. Located west of State Highway 16 on County Road 70, it contains one visible headstone, which is broken and lying flat on the ground.

The inscription is

Evangeline S.
 dau of
 J. C. and H. A. Cooley
 Born Feb. 1, 1856
 Died Mar. 16, 1875

Evangeline S. was the daughter of Joseph C. Cooley (born 1824 in Illinois) and Hannah A. Cooley (born 1830 in New York). In Merhoff (1986) 350 she is named Eva S.



High in the hills west of Capay Valley on the old toll road, now County Road 78 and its extension onto private land, lay the Parks Cemetery, named for the William Parks family, who ran the toll gate at the crest of the ridge on the Yolo-Napa County line, at a time when this toll road was the primary route to Napa and Lake counties. (The present State Highway 16 north from Capay Valley was completed only in the 1920's.)

A considerable population lived along the toll road at the end of the 19th century. Several were buried in the Parks



Cemetery. See Merhoff (1986) 109 for an old photo of the cemetery.

In May 2005, thanks to the help of local residents, I was able to locate the cemetery on the March Ranch.



The cemetery lies on the crest of a knoll overlooking the original home site. From the site, one can look down on Lake Berryessa and the entire Coast Range to the West.

In another view; the fence posts mark the south side of the cemetery).

The site is completely overgrown and I could see no sign of the original graves, just a few flat stones, which were perhaps used for markers. (It is doubtful if any inscribed



stones were ever placed in this cemetery.) Today cattle seem to be the only visitors to this historic spot.

The largest cemetery in Capay Valley was located west of the intersection of State Highway 16 and County Road 82, on the side of a hill overlooking the highway.



This was the cemetery for the area known as Dogtown or Capay City (not to be confused with the present town of Capay, which was called Langville at that time).



This settlement centered on the present intersection of State Highway 16 and County Road 80. In 1858 the area was subdivided by Sylvanus Arnold and John Gillig, both of Sacramento. Part of this area was later called Cadenasso after the family who settled there in 1877 and whose descendents are buried in Capay. The settlement of Cadenasso centered around the present intersection of State Highway 16 and County Road 79.

Several hundred people were buried in this cemetery, among them Sylvanus Arnold, the co-developer of the area, who drowned in Cache Creek April 4, 1867.



When the IOOF cemetery was organized in Esparto, many burials were transferred there from the Dogtown Cemetery, including Sylvanus Arnold, whose monument is the oldest headstone in the Capay Cemetery.

According to report, 235 people remained buried the old cemetery, but no sign of these burials now remains.

The stones were removed by later farmers and the entire area was plowed over. Today it is pastureland, and oak trees have replaced headstones.



Not in Capay Valley, but worth mentioning because of its historical significance is the Gordon cemetery, which lies northeast of Esparto, about one mile south of the old Clover School (on County Road 19) and north of the irrigation canal.

The large stone is a monument to the first white settler of the area, William Gordon (1801-1876).



The gravestones found at the site have been cemented down to preserve them.



Sources

The main written source for early Capay Valley history is Merhoff, Ada, *Capay Valley: The Land & The People 1846-1900*, (Woodland CA)1986.

Other sources have been the recollections of long-time residents, especially Mr. Dick Russell, former Chief of the Capay Valley Volunteer Fire Department, and Mr. Gilbert Motroni, who was, until his death in 2004, a mainstay of the Capay Cemetery and a fount of knowledge about its history and operations.

All photos were taken by Mark Riley during May-June 2004 and May 2005.