United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms



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7. Description

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Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

"Redwood City had been settled for six or seven years before the throng of those that journey to the realms of shade had sufficiently increased to attract attention of citizen's to the necessity of a permanent burial place."1 Until 1859, a makeshift cemetery had sufficed, but when that property changed hands, the new owner declared that a different site must be established, and donated matching funds to that end. Subsequently, 6.4 acres were purchased, surveyed and fenced. The site then, as now, is a near-perfect triangle, with sides approximately measuring 972', 1131', and 672'. These boundaries correspond to a map dating to 1900, and are presumed to be the original dimensions.

Union Cemetery, rural at the time of its founding, is now enclosed by aspects of the modern community of Redwood City. Along the cemetery's "Southern Avenue" (please refer to map), a four foot high hedge (trimmed but suffering from lack of water) and a swath of iceplant separate the site from Woodhde Road, a four-lane divided highway and major business route. Along "Northern Avenue", the cemetery is bordered by a wooden fence, on the other side of which are the backyards of several small houses and two apartment complexes. A cyclone fence borders "Western Avenue" and separates the cemetery from the back of an apartment complex and a plant nursery and its parking lot. The original entrance was at the north end, where Southern and Northern Avenues intersect. The building of an overpass in 1965 caused the entrance to be changed to the intersection of Western and Southern Avenues. The only available parking is at the adjacent nursery, and access is possible only via southbound Woodside Road. The cemetery was well-planned, with a fifteen-foot wide avenue on each perimeter, as well as a central avenue. Two hundred thirty plots of varying shape and size were mapped out, averaging approximately 64 square feet each.

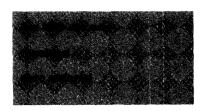
The exact numbers of burials and headstones is unknown, but a review of existing cemetery records indicate between 1700 and 2000 burials. Grave markers are of various materials, including: stone and brick cairns; small and elaborate, though disintegrated, marble paved patios; marble statues; granite slabs; and painted wood markers. Many of the early markers of wood have long since disappeared. Some family plots are enclosed by clipped hedges and other plantings, wrot-iron railings and picket fences. At the original entrance, a plot of approximately 460 square feet was established for the G.A.R. (Union Civil War Veterans). This is the site of an annual Memorial Day ceremony, one of San Mateo County's oldest ongoing traditions. Across the Central Avenue, a plot of approximately 840 square feet was established for the Masonic order. At the intersection of Northern and Western Avenues, a plot of approximately 1400 square feet was established for the I.O.O.F. In the 1880's, a life-sized pot-metal statue of a Civil War soldier was erected. This was the prime feature of the cemetery, and the focal point of the Memorial Day ceremony. Three times this statue has been destroyed. Vandals demolished it in 1957, after which it was restored. In 1968, on Halloween, it was again destroyed, after which a fund-raising made restoration again possible. Within days of its resurrection, vandals destroyed it a third time. The pieces now reside in the San Mateo County Historical Museum. The saga of the statue has been the subject of numerous newspaper articles.

1. Moore & De Pue, The Illustrated History Of San Mateo County, 1878.

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Union Cemetery has been the victim of a great deal of vandalism. Besides the above mentioned destruction, numerous headstones have been knocked down or destroyed, cairns have been broken into, statues de-capitated, and headstones spray-painted. This vandalism is an unworthy encroachment upon the otherwise graceful natural ageing of Union Cemetery.

The plantings in the cemetery are dominated by scores of mature trees, eloquently testifying to the age of the cemetery. Species include: pistache, poplar, willow, aborvitae, oak, cedar, palm and pine (i.e. Pistacia chinensis; Populus nigra; Salix matsudana; Thuja occidentalis; Quercus agrifolia and Q. ilex; Cedrus deodora; Phoenix canariensis; Chamaerops excelsa; and several specias of Pinus. Mature hedges of viburnum and berberus remain well-clipped, and a number of Echium fastuosum were recently planted in the Masonic plot. The above species survive despite a lack of extensive irrigation. Occasional volunteer shrubs and weeds occur, but the site is relatively weed-free.

Union Cemetery dates to the early years of Redwood City. Founders of the local towns of Woodside and Searsville are buried there, along with the "first white child born in Redwood City". Individuals referred to in cemetery records as "Chinaman" and "unknown man found hung" are also interred there, evidencing the cemetery's function on many levels of society. Local residents have demonstrated their interest in personal, local and national history via the medium of Union Cemetery, "Affection clings to that spot of earth where loved ones sleep in the windowless mansion of the dead." 2 Such affection remains today. The traditions, ethnic affiliations and current interest associated with Union Cemetery are discussed in the Statement of Significance.

2. Moore & De Pue, The Illustrated History of San Mateo County, 1878.

8. Significance

Period prehistoric 1400-1499 1500-1599 1600-1699 1700-1799 1800-1899 1900-	Areas of Significance—C		Iandscape architectur Iaw Iiterature Iiteratury Implication Implic	re religion science sculpture _X social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify)
Specific dates	1859 to - 1959	Builder/Architect N	/A	-

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Union Cemetery can be shown to be of importance regarding historic archaeology, settlement patterns, and social considerations. Cemetery records exist which indicate a variety of backgrounds among those interred. These provide ethnic, occupational and geographic information about the nature of the new settlements of the mid-19th century. The historic archaeological value of these records is enhanced by a wealth of information possessed by descendants of both those interred and of later settlers, much of which has been recorded. For decades, the cemetery has been used as the site where an annual Memorial Day celebration culminates. The social importance of the cemetery is underscored by dozens of informants who describe this ongoing traditional event, and also emphasize their concern for the well-being of Union Cemetery. The subject of the state's first cemetery legislation, it is a unique link to the American past for the modern community of Redwood City and the State of California.

Union Cemetery fulfills National Register criteria for cemeteries due to its outstanding attributes of age, association with an historic event and being possessed of considerable local tradition. Founded in 1859, it dates back to the years of the early settling of the area, and it was the subject of California's first cemetery legislation. Demonstrating its founders' beliefs regarding the great national civil strife, it was names "Union" prior to the Civil War, and is a unique frontier symbol of the struggle in the distant East. Redwood City's annual Memorial Day celebration was a substantial enough tradition to have achieved minor historical importance for the community. In this ceremony, citizens, school children, and representatives of the armed forces would watch or participate in a parade through downtown Redwood City, which culminated with a gathering and memorial service at the G.A.R. plot in Union Cemetery. There is no longer a parade, and participation in the event is much reduced, but the American Legion still spearheads an annual Memorial Day gathering.

Redwood City, in the 1850's, was a growing, unincorporated village dependant upon the lumber trade. A local citizen, who wanted the community's improvised burying ground moved off his property, agreed to contribute matching funds toward land to be used for a new cemetery. On March 15, 1859, six acres were purchased for \$500.00 by the newly formed Union Cemetery Association which, not being a corporate body, deeded the title to "John B. Weller, Governor of California and his successors in office... in trust for the use and benefit of the Union Cemetery Association of San Mateo County." At the same time, a bill was introduced into the Assembly of the State Legislature for "An act to authorize the incorporation of Rural Cemetery Associations." This legislation apparently had Union Cemetery as its subject, and was the state's first legislation regarding cemeteries. In 1947, the title was transferred from the Governor's office to the state of California, and in 1962, to the municipality of Redwood City.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Item 8, page 7

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From 1859 and for the next sixty years, burials averaged between twenty and thirty per year. Plots were at first sold for \$10.00, \$15.00 or \$25.00, depending on size, and then gradually increased in price. A prime feature of the cemetery, a Pot-metal statue of a Civil War statue, was installed in the 1880's. While no persons of transcendent importance are buried there, many of San Mateo county's pioneer settlers, rich and poor alike, are interred there, and are very much alive in the minds of local citizens, as is discussed below. The last meeting of Union Cemetery Association was held in 1918, after which the cemetery slid into a period of almost complete neglect. Burials there tended to be those who could not afford to go elsewhere, or who were tied by strong family traditions to plots in this historic burial ground. There have been only scattered burials over the last forty years, the last one being in 1959.

The melting pot nature of early northern California communities of Redwood City and San Mateo County is demonstrated by the existing cemetery records. An incomplete survey of the places of birth of those interred shows at least seventeen foreign countries and twenty-six American states. The records also indicate occupations and ages at death. A preliminary study of these records was started at UC Berkeley, and further demographic and mortality studies of the early community are possible. Further archaeological potential resides in the minds of the descendants of Redwood City's pioneers. A general request for historic information and statements of public interest yielded close to 100 pages of response. Among the information received were accounts of migration to the area, via such means as mule across the Isthmus of Panama, ship around the Cape Horn, and covered wagon along the Oregon Trail. For some, it was a secondary migration to California, after life on Hawaiian plantations proved unpleasant. Problems with anti-Semitism in the new community are also discussed as are other ethnic and financial hardships. Personal interviews of the (mostly aged) informants should yield much more information about the settling of the area, and in greater detail.

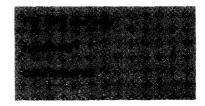
Along with its stated historic and archaeological value, Union Cemetery possesses substantial current social value. It is Redwood City's first California Historic Landmark, and it is the site of the well-renowned annual Memorial Day ceremony, as it has been for the last century. There have recently been voluntary offers for donations to help preserve the cemetery and it has been the subject of an untold number of newspaper articles. The following is a sampling of statements from local citizens and quotes from local papers, evidencing public interest and concern:

"Although we do not believe we have any relatives or friends who are interred in the Union Cemetery in Redwood City, California, We strongly believe that this site should be preserved. Not only are the grounds sacred as the resting place of many, but as a historical site it is important to protect this area...We most strongly urge the inclusion of the Union Cemetery in Redwood City, California in the National Register of Historic Places..."

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- "I am really hoping that the Union Cemetery can gain acceptance to the National Register of Historic Places. I think too much history would be lost if this did not happen."
- "We feel that it is of utmost importance that the cemetery be preserved, cleaned up and new grave markers erected where none exist. Union Cemetery should be accepted into the National Register of Historical Places. As a City Councilman and former Mayor, I am familiar with the procedure and believe it a truly appropriate classification for land of much important historical significance."
- "Historical sites such as the Union Cemetery must be preserved as part of our heritage. It is the final resting place of many of Californias original 49ers."
- "Your efforts to have Union Cemetery accepted in the National Register of Historic Places are encouraging to us... It is my understanding that the legal history of the Cemetery is unique in California, if not in the United States, and on that basis alone should be worthy of preservation."
- "I have never visited Union Cemetery but I feel that these early pioneers should be remebered. Graveyards have no tongue and we can only hope."
- "I would like to see the Cemetery preserved for Historic reasons. There are quite a few Civil War Vets buried there and we need places like that so the future generation can see who fought for our country."
- "I feel very strongly that the Union Cemetery must be preserved. It is a vital part of San Mateo County history."
- "Preserving our country's heritage is very important. We have a responsibility to preserve, not only our roots but our country's roots as well. Because these early settlers were the backbone of our country's expansion. Through their efforts and sacrifices, they enabled us to progress to the great country that we are. It is important to keep our ties with the past so that we do not forget the hardships and struggles that have enabled this generation to enjoy the freedoms and comforts of today. I hope that this important part of our San Mateo County heritage is saved and can be kept for future generations."

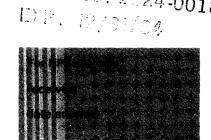
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"Redwood City's Union Cemetery is the granddaddy of all "official" cemeteries in San Mateo County and probably in all of California."

The excessive vandalism suffered by Union Cemetery is painfully obvious, and the deterioration heightens the sense of its being a part of the ever more distant past. But its function as a memorial to that past remains unimpaired, and may take on ever greater significance with the increasing modernization of the city and culture surrounding it.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION BEGINS ON NEXT PAGE

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UNION CEMETERY AND CALIFORNIA'S FIRST CEMETERY LAW

Squatter politics provided the vigor for organization of Union Cemetery in 1859. Angry that a new land owner wanted no more burials in a site they had considered public burial ground, villagers united behind the name "Union", set up a cemetery association, and purchased land which they deeded in trust to the Governor. At the same time, the new land owner, Horace Hawes, probably anxious to avoid the wrath of his rural neighbors, apparently called on an old friend in the Legislature at Sacramento where the first cemetery statute in the State of California was introduced on February 25, 1859. Hawes also offered cash to the Union Cemetery founders which must have had some soothing effect, for Hawes was later remembered as a benefactor. However, Union Cemetery was organized without waiting for the new legislation, in a resolve of town unity, squatter independence, and anger.

This cemetery law, "An Act to Authorize Incorporation of Rural Cemetery Associations," AB 203, was on the statute books for 72 years. Union Cemetery remained the property of the Governor of California for 88 years, held in trust for the Union Cemetery Association. For an additional 15 years, it was held in trust by the People of California.

The site of Union Cemetery, at the crossing of Woodside Road and the San Francisco-San Jose Road, was part of 35,340-acre Rancho de las Pulgas, granted to Governor Luis Arguello during Mexican times. William Carey Jones, who investigated the title for the U.S. Government in 1849, acquired 2200 acres from Arguello's widow on October 22, 1851. A year later, Jones signed a note for \$20,000 with Horace Hawes. The Arguello grant was patented October 2, 1857, and in July the next year, Hawes tookcustody of Jones' property by default.

Hawes first visited California in 1846; three years later he was prefect of the District of San Francisco. Then, in 1856 as a State legislator, he was the author of the Consolidation Bill which effected great reform in the government of San Francisco and established San Mateo County.

After spirited contests at the ballot box and in the courts, Redwood City became the seat of government for San Mateo County. The Hawes' farm was close by the western edge of town. With his lands enhanced by the creation of the new county and his farm in the path of a proposed railroad linking the Atlantic and Pacific shores, Hawes let it be known that he did not want a cemetery on his property.

Since the 1852 rush of squatters to the <u>embarcadero</u> at Redwood Creek, they had used a plot of ground on Hawes' farm whenever someone in the vicinity died, there being no other nearby facility. The previous owner, Jones, had led to a general understanding that the plot was dedicated to the public when he had permitted burials there. Hawes' announcement was not well received.

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As an 1878 writer put it, "Affection clings to that spot of earth where loved ones sleep in the windowless mansion of the dead, and great indignation was felt towards Mr. Hawes for the stand he had taken in the matter."

On January 15, 1859, at a public meeting in the Court House in Redwood City, Secretary Charles N. Fox made the first entry in the minute book that documents the pioneers' response to Mr. Hawes. Fox, W. T. Gough, and James McCrea were named a committee to look up the evidence and report. Soon afterwards, when McCrea resigned, Benjamin Gorton Lathrop, county clerk, recorder and assessor, succeeded him. This committee reported the opinion that it was advisable to abandon the ground, both on account of want of title and impracticability of location. By February 7, another committee of three, including Fox, J. W. Turner, and C. Ayres was appointed "to report a plan of organization for a cemetery association."

A week later, itbrought in a proposal from James Berry, Curtis Baird, and Rachael J. Baird, his wife, who were willing to sell five acres adjoining the southern boundary of Hawes' property for \$500. This was a triangular parcel at the crossroads later known as Five Points.

By February 28, the Union Cemetery Association was ready for formal organization. Berry and the Bairds were caught up in the spirited pace set by Fox et al. Perhaps enthused that \$430 in cash was collected, the sellers agreed to provide six acres for the original price of \$500. John Vinton Diller, Redwood City storekeeper and public official, was elected president. Fox continued as secretary and Turner was named superintendent.

Meanwhile, just three days earlier in Sacramento, Assemblyman James A. Banks of San Francisco who had been Hawes' colleague in the 1856 Consolidation Act legislation, introduced, "An Act to Authorize Incorporation of Rural Cemetery Associations". The bill, AB 203, was limited to cemeteries of six acres or less. The bill was read the first and second times and referred to the Committee on Corporations.

As the race between cemetery advocates continued in Redwood City and Sacramento, on March 3, 1859, friends and family of four-year-old Anna Douglas gathered in the center of Union Cemetery for her interment. Her father, William H. Douglas, owned lot 113, and his daughter's burial was the first recorded in the new cemetery.

On March 16, 1859, sale of land for the new cemetery was completed, disclosing that Maria de las Soledad Arguello, her son Jose Ramon, and S. M. Mezes, attorney and agent for the Arguello heirs, were also grantors. They joined in deeding the land, not to the Union Cemetery Association, but to Governor John B. Weller and his successors, in trust for the association.

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As the deed was filed, AB 203 was moving through the Legislature in Sacramento. On Saturday, March 19, Assemblyman Andrew J. Gregory representing Mariposa and Merced Counties and Chairman of the Committee on Corporations, reported to the Assembly on AB 203 and recommended passage. On the following Tuesday, the Assembly ordered AB 203 engrossed. On April 4, AB 203 was read a third time and passed, but only after Charles H. S. Williams representing San Francisco and San Mateo Counties called for a rules suspension and had the bill taken from unfinished business.

A day later, the Senate heard AB 203 read for the first and second times and made special order of the day for April 6. It was passed Saturday, April 16, in the frantic hours approaching adjournment.

The Legislature was sending bills to the Governor's office faster than he could handle them. On Monday he wrote to the Senate: "Sixty five bills, some of them of great length, were placed in my hands on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Of this number 38 were delivered on yesterday, and notwithstanding I devoted the whole of Sunday to their consideration. I find, this morning, that it is physically impossible to read, much less understand them all." He complained of clerical errors, erasures and substitutions. Some bills he read by title only.

Whatever thoughts the Governor of California may have had when he read the title of "An Act to Authorize Incorporation of Rural Cemetery Associations" as it passed through his hands, he was already the trustee-owner of a rural cemetery in San Mateo County, his acceptance having been countersigned by Secretary of State Ferris Forman on March 20, 1859.

Before the year was out, Weller's career as Governor was ending. He was not considered for reelection. On January 9, 1860, Milton S. Latham became Governor of California and trustee of Union Cemetery for the five days he served before resigning to become U.S. Senator. It was then the turn of Governor John G. Downey to become trustee of this pioneer burial ground that inspired but did not wait for the first cemetery legislation in the state.

So began the custody of Union Cemetery by California Governors. In 1947, title was transferred to "the People of California" through the State. In 1962, the State deeded its six acres to the City of Redwood City.

The Original "Act to Authorize Incorporation of Rural Cemetery Associations", SB 203, with amendments to cover issuance of bonds (1864), deed transfers after disinterment (1891), cremation (1899), and tax exemption (1911) remained in effect until 1931 when it was repealed by passage of new General Cemetery legislation.

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The Union Cemetery Assocation held it last recorded meeting on April 10, 1900. There was another "last meeting" in 1918. The last burial was in 1959.

---Nita R. Spangler March 15, 1983

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Georgetown 1965

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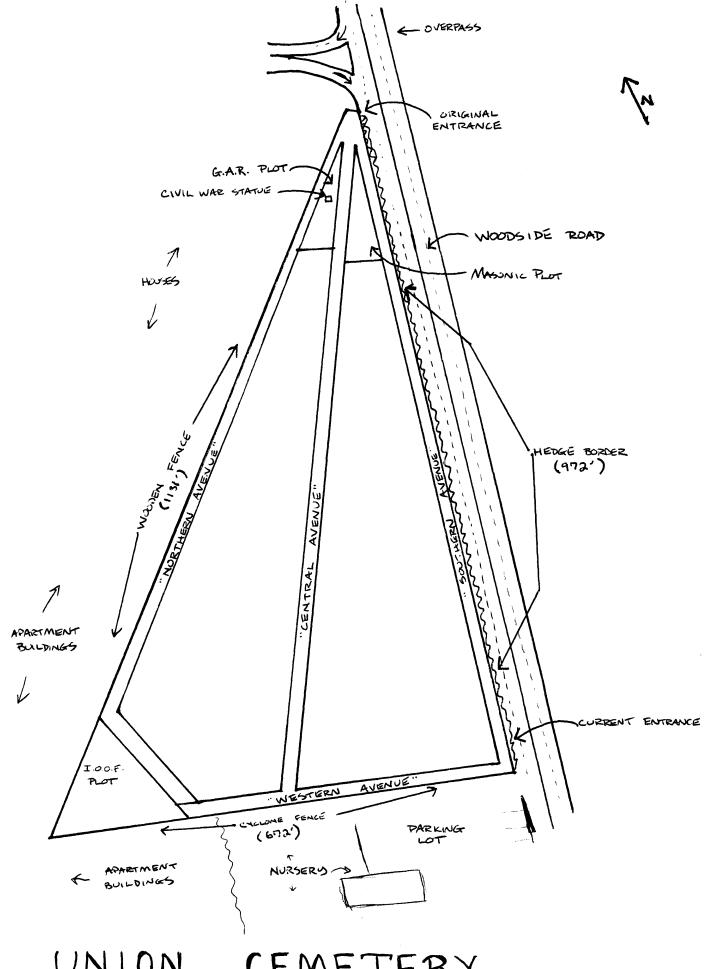
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JOURNAL OF THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA AT THE TENTH SESSION OF THE LEGISLATURE Begun on January 3, 1859 and ended April 19, 1859 at the City of Sacramento

MINUTE BOOK of the Union Cemetery Association, Organized February 28, 1859 at Redwood City. San Mateo County Historical Association Library

DEED, UNION CEMETERY San Mateo County Recorder's Office, Book No. 1, Page 553.



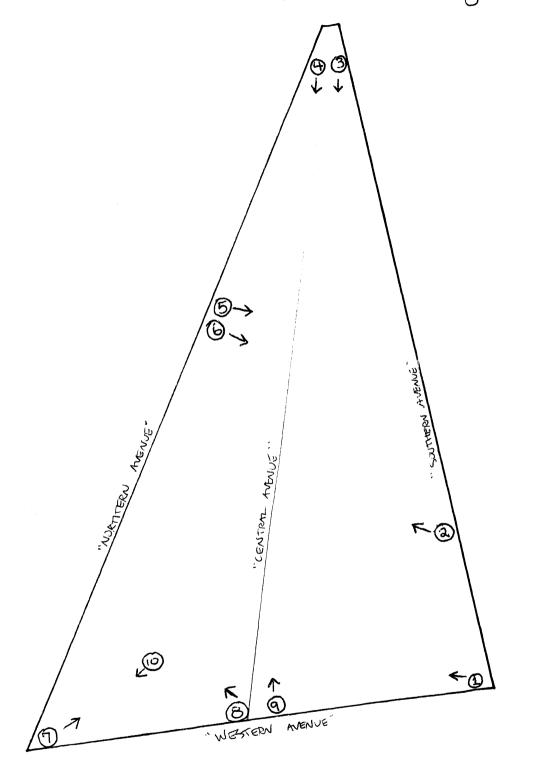
UNION CEMETERY

REDWOOD CITY, CA

San Mateo County

SKETCH MAP

UNION CEMETERY Redwood City, San Mateo County, CA



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