

PARTING SHOT FROM DANNY MILLER

A weekly snapshot from The Daily Astorian and Chinook Observer photographers



Seaside players line up for the national anthem before the start of their game against the Clatskanie Tigers in September at Broadway Field in Seaside.

ODDITY

‘Save our souls’

Plan to dig up, move historic Nevada graves angers heirs

By SCOTT SONNER
Associated Press

RENO, Nev. — A pioneer cemetery on the edge of downtown Reno where the remains of Civil War soldiers, city founders and a tribal chief have rested for more than a century has been anything but restful in recent weeks.

The cemetery's owners want to dig up as many as 1,100 graves on one end of the 6-acre site and move them to the other end to make way for a development. Reno residents and heirs of the dead are outraged, calling the cemetery a Nevada historical treasure that should not be disturbed.

“Save our souls,” reads a handwritten note between fluttering ribbons tied to the chain-link fence that encircles Hillside Cemetery. Next to the note is a sign bolted to the fence with a markedly different tone: “Notice of determination for disinterment and removal of human remains.”

‘Grave Robbers Law’

The owners posted the notice, secured health permits to move remains and alerted family members in recent weeks in accordance with a 2001 state law known as the Cemetery Authority Act.

After encountering a groundswell of opposition, the owners said Sunday they've temporarily suspended any plans for exhumations. But critics remain concerned.

“They call it the Cemetery Authority Act. I call it the Grave Robbers Law,” said

Fran Tryon, a retired teacher and genealogist who founded the Hillside Cemetery Preservation Foundation.

The site overlooking Interstate 80 a half-mile from the main casino drag is Reno's oldest cemetery, the final resting place for hundreds who reflect northern Nevada's unique frontier past. Granite tombstones and wooden markers sit atop many of the graves, while others are marked by tiny flags or simply a pile of rocks.

The buried include a former Kentucky congressman who moved to Nevada in 1870 and later was appointed a national bank examiner by President Grover Cleveland. Not far away are the remains of Paiute Chief Johnson Sides, who worked as an interpreter and “peacemaker” for the U.S. Army.

Also interred at Hillside are state lawmakers, saloon keepers, train-hopping hobos and dozens of infant victims of scarlet fever and other epidemics from the early 1900s.

“This is northern Nevada's history,” Tryon told The Associated Press during a recent tour of the property. “These are our founding fathers.”

Digging out

Facing the prospect of hundreds of graves being moved, volunteers have spent months removing weeds and litter, and posting makeshift signs and markers on the blighted grounds that had become overgrown with sagebrush.

Health officials say opponents' fears that exhuming the graves could spread anthrax and other diseases are largely unfounded. The only real threat would be to workers doing the digging, who will wear protective clothing.

“Each set of remains would be relocated in its own container,” the Reno health dis-



AP Photo/Scott Sonner

A sign hangs on the fence that reads “Notice of determination for disinterment and removal of human remains” in Reno, Nev., at Hillside Cemetery. The owners posted the notice, secured health permits to move remains and alerted family members in recent weeks in accordance with a state law known as the Cemetery Authority Act. Reno residents and heirs of the dead are outraged, calling the cemetery a Nevada historical treasure that should not be disturbed.

trict said in a release.

Drew Lawton, owner of another cemetery that controls Hillside, last week assured the Reno City Council exhumation of graves was not imminent. And on Sunday, just before meeting with dozens of heirs of the dead, he issued a statement on behalf of the cemetery that said in view of “a few families’ unfavorable responses,” any potential disinterment is on hold. He declined to elaborate.

Lawton said in a previous statement that any renovation would include appropriate monuments, fencing and financial provisions for the cemetery's ongoing care, and any work would be done by archaeologists and other experts.

Option to buy

Developer Vinton Hawkins has the option to buy the land. His spokesman, Reno lobbyist Greg Ferraro, said earlier they envisioned a “multi-phased project” and that discussion about long-term development was premature.

“The Cemetery Authority has gone above and beyond what Nevada law requires in an effort to connect with families,” Ferraro said in a statement.

Tryon acknowledged past problems with vandalism and dumping at the site. But she said neighboring fraternities and sororities that once partied there have helped with cleanup in recent years. Over Labor Day weekend, they helped fill more than a dozen garbage

bags with weeds and trash.

Jeremy Lambert, a U.S. military veteran who lives across the street, joined the cleanup effort four months ago.

“I didn't like all the weeds,” Lambert said. “Then I saw the foundation's site on Facebook and started to learn about all the veterans here Civil War, Spanish American War, World War I.”

“I think it's disrespectful,” he said. “They fought for their country. They should be left alone.”

Everyday people

Among the heroes, mayors and business leaders laid to rest at the cemetery are everyday people who deserve respect too, Tryon said. The

cloth markers she's tied to the fence with plot numbers and information she's uncovered in researching the dead offer a glimpse into their lives or at least their demise, such as murder victims and one “unknown” who was run over by a train.

Given Hillside's prime location near the University of Nevada, Reno campus, Tryon and others believe construction of an apartment building is the most likely outcome if the disinterment goes forward.

“The purpose was always to develop this. They are going to sell it and put the money in their pocket,” Tryon said. “I wouldn't want to live in those apartments. It would be a very bad vibe.”

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