

Cemetery: Records are spotty, dead have moved around

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Goodenberger and Lucien Swerdloff, who leads the college's historic restoration program, aren't sure what to expect in terms of community response to a possible name change. But both men think of the debate that erupted in 2019 around dated language on a wooden sign behind Fort George Brewery that commemorates Fort Astoria.

Records are spotty

With the cemetery, language is only a small part of the dilemma.

As many as 700 burials may have occurred at the Astoria Pioneer Cemetery between 1865 and 1897. But records are spotty and the dead have moved around — multiple times.

Some were dug up and moved when the cemetery first opened in 1865. They came from a cemetery farther down the hill that had become more valuable as land to develop rather than as a final resting place. Then, when the city's Ocean View Cemetery opened in Warrenton in 1897, families were encouraged to relocate remains and headstones there. Some bodies went to Greenwood Cemetery off of state Highway 202.

Stories have grown around these frequent disturbances at the hilltop cemetery: a beautiful dead woman found perfectly preserved until her windowed casket is opened and she disintegrates; teenagers break into the Shively family's ivy-covered crypt in the far corner of the cemetery, push aside a casket lid and a skeleton rises up only to — poof! — explode into a cloud of grave dust. Before a small grill on the crypt door was covered, it was actually possible to see bones in the crypt, former park employee Dick Magathan said.

Some members of Astoria's early families once rested at the hilltop cemetery — the Van Dusens, Capt. George Flavel — but they were moved to Ocean View decades ago. One city founder is still up there, though, likely buried somewhere under Niagara Avenue.

Then there are the Chinese bodies that might be buried in the cemetery or, because of prejudices at the time, just outside its boundaries under what are now city streets. One persistent story involves a mass grave or the unmarked graves of hundreds of Chinese workers at the cemetery.

If the story is true, Good-



Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

The Astoria Pioneer Cemetery does not have a sign above the main path entrance.



Old gravestones are scattered at the cemetery.

enberger wrote city leaders, "bone for bone, there are more Chinese people in the cemetery than Euro-Americans."

Though there are only a few grave markers left — many of them difficult to read or damaged — it is likely several hundred bodies are still buried in the cemetery.

Burials prohibited

It's been 124 years since you could die in Astoria and be buried there. The city prohibited burials in city limits beginning in 1897. After it closed, the hilltop cemetery was first neglected, then forgotten.

Magathan, who built a split rail fence around the cemetery in the 1980s, remembers a story of how neighborhood children accidentally kicked a ball into what they thought was a long abandoned lot only to discover gravestones.

Efforts to clear out blackberry bushes and revitalize the cemetery as a park began in the 1950s and '60s. In the late '60s, the cemetery was

renamed Astoria Pioneer Cemetery, complete with a carved wooden entrance sign and a granite monument.

A plea even went out from the chairman of the county historical advisory committee, asking people to return grave markers that had disappeared over the years.

"There are rumors that some have found new use as paving stones in walks and patios about the city," according to a 1968 article in the *The Daily Astorian*. "Dr. (Edward) Harvey said no questions will be asked if the missing stones simply come back."

A positive aspect of the hilltop cemetery's name is that "pioneer" makes it clear the door is shut to future burials.

"It states very clearly: We aren't using that cemetery anymore, don't even ask," Goodenberger noted.

He wonders if changing the name back to Hillside would reignite any inquiries.

But Eric Anderson, the owner of the Hughes-Ransom Mortuary & Crematory in Astoria, said he has

never had to field inquiries about an Astoria burial. Most people go to Ocean View, he said, or Greenwood Cemetery.

Anyway, the number of traditional casket burials is low with cremation rates hovering at around 80% to 85%.

The city records around 70 to 80 burials at Ocean View each year — a mix of casket burials and cremations, but most are cremations, according to city staff.

It is a personal decision, said Anderson, though cost is often a major driver. A cemetery plot for a casket can be expensive and then there are hefty fees to open and close a grave, plus funeral home costs.

To Anderson, however, the dip in traditional casket burials also reflects the evolution of Astoria. More and more, people are moving here from outside the area, he said. They don't have family plots at Ocean View. They don't have ties to the old names.

Despite all the upheavals among the graves and the uncertainty that persists about who is buried there, the hilltop cemetery is an important historical site, Swerdloff and Goodenberger said.

There were once several cemeteries around Astoria, but the hilltop cemetery is the only one that hasn't been paved over or built over. It is still recognizable as a place of burial. The scattered few headstones that remain can only tell visitors a fractured story of the past, but there are still hints to be gleaned.

"I would nominate it as representative of the literary movement of Astoria," Goodenberger said, adding, "As the houses came up the hill, the dead had to keep moving."

Vaccines: As of Friday, 8,967 doses have been administered in county

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Chris Laman, the director of pharmacy and cancer center services at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria, who is leading the vaccine task force, said the roughly 1,100 people who were rescheduled over the past couple of weeks due to weather-related disruptions in vaccine delivery have been vaccinated.

Laman said the disruptions and rescheduling created a lot of confusion and frustration during an already difficult process.

"We're trying to make it as simple as possible with online registration," he said. "But in the age group that we're in, with those 80 and older folks, it's challenging to get through the online registration process. And so to get rescheduled, not just once, but multiple times through this electronic communication, was incredibly frustrating for that group and rightfully so. I was frustrated as the leader of it that we were having to do this."

Going forward, he said, "we have a plan for vaccine supplies so that we're not going to be promising doses to people before we have them at the county health department. So we should not have to reschedule doses for not getting shipments or

'THIS RESPONSE WOULD NOT BE WHAT IT IS WITHOUT THE VOLUNTEERS.'

Margo Lalich | Clatsop County's interim public health director

deliveries.

"But I think at each week, new sort of things develop and come up that the task force has to work through."

Laman said the task force, which includes the the county, Columbia Memorial, Providence Seaside Hospital and Coastal Family Health Center, meets daily to talk through and identify challenges and potential weaknesses in the system.

The task force is in communication with pharmacies at Safeway in Astoria and Seaside and Costco and Walmart in Warrenton, which are also administering vaccines.

In preparation for more vaccines, the task force is starting to plan with hospitals for when they will receive vaccines for their own vaccination events.

"There's point people at each of those entities now who are responsible for planning for how that's going to work in each of their systems," Laman said. "So it's a really strong collaboration that's going on in the county right now."

Margo Lalich, the county's interim public health director, said people may be scheduling appointments for a vaccine at a pharmacy and a county vaccination event and going to whichever one they get into first. However, she said it is important to let the other entity know they will not make their appointment so that a dose is not prepared.

Lalich said the task force is also developing a strategy to reach out to people who can't get to vaccination events, whether because they are homebound or from hard-to-reach populations.

The Sunset Empire Transportation District is providing free transportation for people who have vaccination appointments in the county. People must schedule with the transit district at least 24 hours in advance.

The task force is continuing to invite priority groups to vaccination events. People receiving second doses, teachers and seniors 70 and older were invited to the vaccination events scheduled in the coming week.

Unlike many other states,

Dunes: Friends of the Dunes at Cannon Beach applauded state's decision

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management plan. They hoped to roll back policies that will restrict certain types of dune grading and dune maintenance measures.

In its decision, the appeals board rejected a number of arguments from the homeowners associations, including claims that the inability to grade dunes for views and limits on how much sand can be removed through permitted grading activities will make it impossible to maintain certain public beach accesses or preserve designated residential areas.

The homeowners had also asserted the city's updated policies will lead to unnatural dune growth, while the continued planting of nonnative European dune grass will help form steep dunes and could contribute to unsafe conditions on the beaches.

Tim Ramey, of the Chapman Point Homeowners Association, said he could not provide a comment. The board had not yet had time to discuss the state's decision, he said. Board members for the Breakers Point association could not be reached for comment.

Friends of the Dunes at Cannon Beach applauded the state's decision, calling it a victory for the coastal environment.

In a statement, Dianna Turner, the group's co-chair, said the decision will "reverberate up and down the coast giving strength to other communities who want to protect their dunes and beaches."

With the shifting ocean and storm conditions predicted to intensify with climate change, she said, "We must continue to push for policies to maintain coastal

dunes both for their natural beauty and as a front line of defense from environmental threats."

Cannon Beach began the process of updating its dune management plan in 2016, prompted by requests from residents to remove large amounts of sand and concerns from others about the ecological and visual impacts of these operations. The policies outlined in the new plan were to reflect updated scientific information.

Numerous public meetings and hearings followed. The Planning Commission sent recommendations to the City Council in 2018, which approved a final plan in 2020.

While state guidance allows cities to adopt fore-dune grading management plans and to grade dunes or move sand to maintain views or protect structures, cities are not required to allow these types of actions.

Cannon Beach had previously allowed dune grading for several reasons: to protect building and structures from sand inundation, to maintain beach access and to preserve residential ocean views.

This time, however, city leaders opted to limit dune grading overall and eliminate any grading for views.

Those who previously had been allowed to grade dunes were not grandfathered in.

Now, grading is allowed to clear sand away if the sand is affecting the function of structures, public facilities, utilities or other infrastructure. This type of grading requires a development permit from the city.

The new plan also allows for preservation grading, which requires a conditional use permit, and grading for emergency access issues.

Homeless: 'Housing is our No. 1 issue'

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During a task force meeting on Thursday, Matthews announced that Cheryl Paul, of Astoria, and Shannon Turner, of Texas, will begin in April.

Paul has worked at the Astoria Warming Center for the past several years. She also volunteers at the Beacon Clubhouse in Astoria, which does homeless and mental health outreach.

Turner has worked in social services for over four years, and most recently served at a coronavirus recovery shelter.

Paul and Turner will coordinate with law enforcement and social service agencies. Matthews hopes that in addition to connecting people to services, the work will result in fewer people visiting hospital emergency rooms.

Clatsop Community Action will reach out to local government leaders to be part of an advisory committee to help oversee the homeless liaisons' mission.

Matthews reminded the task force that the root of homelessness is the housing crisis.

"I mean, we'll do the best we can, but please remember, the housing inventory is extremely low — kind of nonexistent right now," she said.

"Housing is our No. 1 issue."

Police Chief Geoff Spalding, who chairs the task force and was part of

the hiring process for the homeless liaisons, called the two positions a significant accomplishment. He said the advisory committee is still a work in progress.

"In addition to reaching out to cities and counties, as we grow this program and we add new financial partners, too, we will definitely be looking to add individuals to the advisory committee outside of the government entities," Spalding said. "So I look forward to having more partners in this on many levels to make sure that we have as much input as possible."

"And I think this program will probably look very different two years from now than it will today, and we will learn from this. And also, we will track our progress and see how effective the program is in our community, which is what I think a lot of people will be looking for."

Assistant County Manager Monica Steele, who also serves on the task force and was involved in the hiring process, thanked Matthews for securing the additional funding to hire two people.

"I think we all knew from the beginning that there's more work than one person can handle," Steele said. "And so from a funding perspective, Viviana really went out and tried to find additional funding so that when we had two good candidates come before us, that we were able to hire both of them."

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