

Forgotten Chinese Burial Site Reclaimed

Respect finally paid to artifacts and remains

BY KATHERINE BLACKMORE
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

After more than a year of community involvement to pay respect to historic Chinese artifacts and remains at the Lone Fir Cemetery, a resolution has been reached that will hopefully allow the deceased and their loved ones to finally rest in peace.

"These are our ancestors, people who worked really hard to rebuild our community. We need to respect that. I believe we are righting a wrong and are honoring them," said Maria Rojo de Steffey, a Multnomah county commissioner who led actions to restore a neglected and abandoned Chinese burial site.

The issue began in the late 1800s and early 1900s, when deceased Chinese immigrants who'd helped work on the local railroad were buried in a segregated corner of the cemetery, located at Southeast Stark and Morrison between 20th and 26th Streets. In 1948, the graves of 265 immigrants were exhumed and sent back to China to pay the respect of sending the deceased back "home," according to loose records.

In fact, only the deceased men, not the women and children, were exhumed. This was appar-

ently unknown to Multnomah County at the time. A parking lot and office building were built over the land and remained there until recently.

In 2004, when the county announced intent to sell the building property, tear it down and possibly use the space for housing, local organizations such as Friends of the Lone Fir Cemetery, Buckman Neighborhood Association and the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association called for a halt to the decision. Their argument was that there were still Chinese remains beneath the building and they needed to be memorialized.

Crews then used ground-penetrating radar in an attempt to find artifacts. Nine anomalies showed up, so it was then decided that some of the spots would be excavated to see what was beneath.

The artifacts uncovered included headstones, pottery, glass, bones and two coffins. Earlier this month, the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners made the decision to transfer the land to Metro, the regional government overseeing parks, trails and greenspaces, allowing it to become part of the cemetery once again. The items found will be handed over to the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association for storage and inventory.

"The cemetery is complete - we're whole again. To be able to honor the people that played such a significant role in Portland's history, you can't put a value on that," said Susie Bousha, manager of the Lone Fir Cemetery.



PHOTO BY KATHERINE BLACKMORE/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Susie Bousha is the manager of Lone Fir Cemetery, one of Portland's oldest graveyards. She will oversee the reclamation of a former Chinese burial site that was covered up by a county building nearly 60 years ago.



PHOTO BY KATHERINE BLACKMORE/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
A painful sight of vandalism mars the historic Lone Fir Cemetery in southeast Portland.

Historic Cemetery Victim to Vandals

continued **▲** from Front

headstones.

On another weekend, someone used sidewalk chalk to make rubbings of some headstones to read them more clearly. While this is a common practice, Bousha said it damages the monument and maintenance crews must come by to clean off the excess chalk.

Bousha noted that the hours of the cemetery are posted, but there are no gates at the main entrance to keep people from coming in during the later hours. The Portland Police are good about patrolling the area, she said, but their staff is thin.

Pointing to one of the knocked over headstones, Bousha said, "This headstone represented someone's baby, someone's wife, someone's mother."

She also noted that the Lone Fir Cemetery, named for the first, single tree that grew in the middle of converted farmland in 1866, is a "who's who" of Portland, housing monuments to notable political figures, those who gave the city and its streets their names and perhaps most importantly, the pioneers of the land.


For her and those who care for their heritage and loved ones, when a person makes the decision to vandalize, they're not just ruining a piece of stone - they're taking a piece of history and stomping on it.

Anyone with information on vandalism in the Lone Fir Cemetery can contact 503-797-1709.

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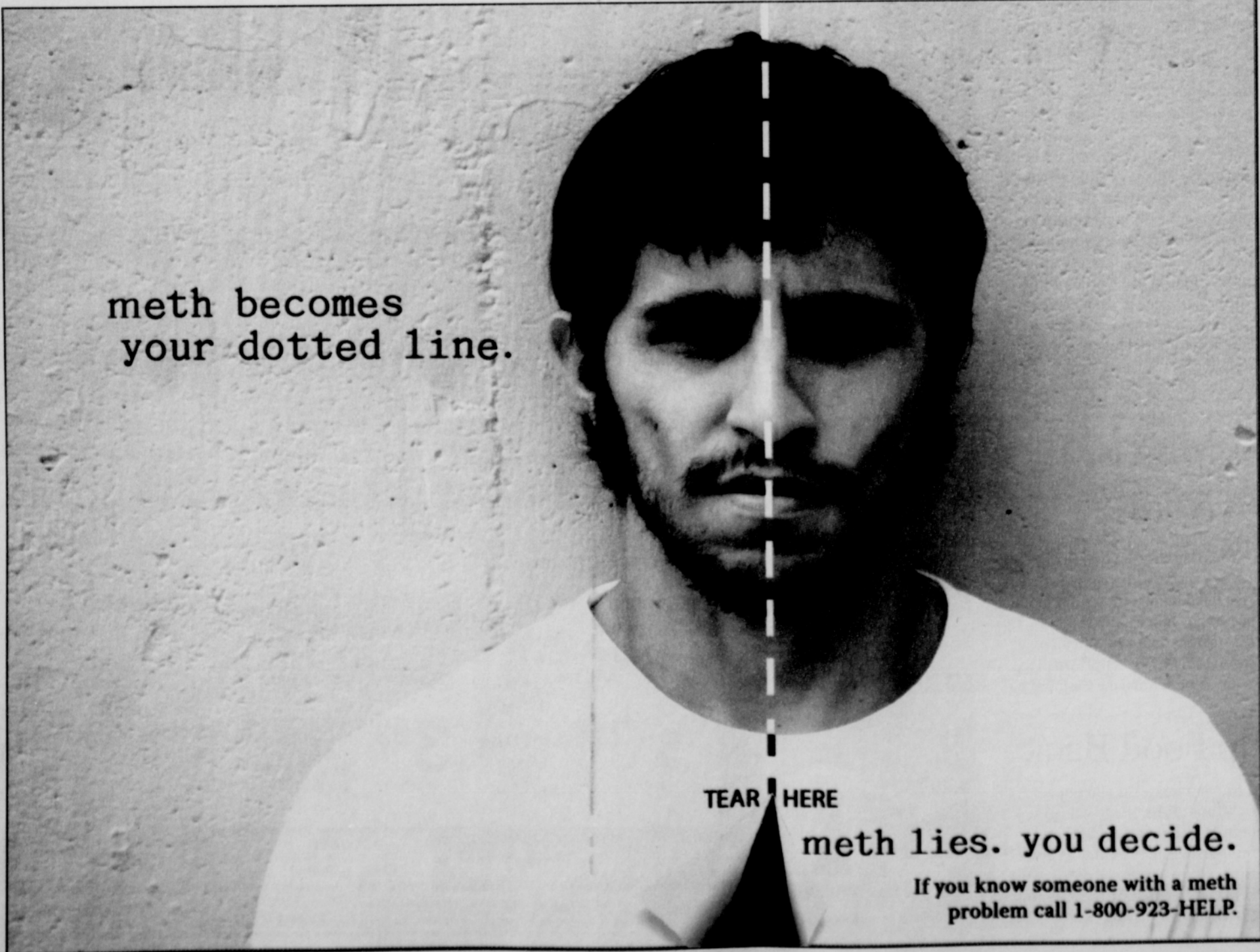
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