

MT. WHITNEY CEMETERY DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

SPRING, 2024

Board of Trustees: Chris Langley, Irene Kritz, Bill Fletcher, Marlene Cierniak, Donna Gruenewald
Manager, Linda K. Haun – Sexton, Joe McDonald

Web Site: mtwhitnycemetery.com

Main Cemetery: 1200 Hwy. 395 (north of town)

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 1202, Lone Pine, CA 93545

Phone: 760-876-1863

Office location: 120 S. Main St., Suite 2 (in the courtyard behind the Chamber of Commerce)

The mission statement of the Mt. Whitney Cemetery District Trustees and Management is to affirm to the community the integrity of the District by upholding the Federal, State and County regulations assigned to the running of a Public Cemetery, while at the same time administering to the needs and attitudes of the community. The District is committed to preserving the heritage, beauty, and tranquility of those cemeteries for which it is responsible by providing professional services with respect and compassion.

The Trustees and staff of the Mt. Whitney Cemetery District would like to offer our condolences and best wishes to those of you who have been dealing with the loss of loved ones.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DISTRICT

The first burial in Lone Pine was January 1, 1865, at the Pioneer Cemetery, which was formally established as a town cemetery in 1878. Following the earthquake of 1872, the Earthquake Victims cemetery was created directly across from the current cemetery. Until 1906 when the Pioneer Cemetery was no longer used, the spring water table at that cemetery was so high that burials could not take place, so the town buried individuals NE of town on Narrow Gauge Road. In late summer, they would re-bury them at the Pioneer Cemetery. Sometimes, for various reasons, they decided to leave them where buried, creating what we call the Depot Graves, which now are somewhat protected by a barbed wire enclosure so people can no longer drive through the area, but with an opening at the back so those who wish to visit the graves can do so. In 1884 the Knights of Pythias established the main cemetery on Hwy. 395 on land donated by a local rancher. The Mt. Whitney Cemetery District was formed by the Board of Supervisors in 1959.

MAIN CEMETERY

Weeds: Our unusually harsh 2023 winter months led to a big “melt” that raised the ground water level, which was very important for the Valley. Then we had a very big monsoon season, followed by a first-ever

tropical storm that came up from the south. All of this meant a LOT of rain, and that popped out the weeds like never before. Usually, we have to pay to remove them from the historic dirt section only once. This year we did it twice, and they still grew back more than usual. We simply didn't have the budget to do it a third time. However, we got some help from a few locals who stepped up, as well as our Sexton, Joe, who pulled them out a little at a time.

More Trees Going In: Throughout the spring and summer of 2023 we continued to plant new trees, replacing those lost several years ago due to the beetle infestation and fungus attack that was prevalent in the western states. We worked with the Chalfant Big Trees folks north of Bishop and were able to get good-size trees that are tolerant of our poor soil and extreme weather. The new trees turn wonderful colors in the fall and have been enjoyed by those visiting the cemetery.

We will be putting in more trees this year. If anyone would like to donate money for a tree, the required donation is \$200. For \$50 more, we'll put in a memorial marker at the base of a newly planted tree. Just let us know the name of the individual or family you would like memorialized.

Lawn: We completed the project to lower those sprinkler heads that stood up above the grass. It has made for easier mowing, and also safety for those walking around looking at grave markers.

Speaking of mowing, please know that before mowing we only remove from graves those real flowers that have been dead for some time; silk flowers that have been shredded by the winds; and glass objects that can be shattered in the winds (and which are not allowed on a grave at any time).

Please remember that the lawn and trees may look dead during the winter, but they are not. They are just resting, and they will come back in the spring.

Marker Trimming

It is during the winter that we have time to trim markers, and this project has been completed. We really appreciate those families who do a little trimming during the summer, as we have one sexton/groundsman to do the marker setting, mowing, repairing, tree planting, trash removal, weeding, and hand watering where necessary. And, oh yes, the burials. Consequently, some of the tasks have to wait in line until there is sufficient time or assistance to get them done.

Benches: We have been the grateful recipient of several benches over the past year or so, and they have certainly enhanced the cemetery. They are not only a form of garden art, but also give assistance to those visiting. We don't charge anything for receiving and helping to place benches or other garden art, unless there is some expense related to materials or extra staff time. We do, however, need to approve the bench or garden art, although we're very flexible about it. We may not be able to place it next to a particular grave, but we do try to get it as close as possible to a requested location.

Desert Garden PRE-SALES: Please note that the back area of the cemetery was developed for casket burials only. A gravesite can only be reserved without payment for 30 days, but a payment plan can be set up over a 3 to 6 month period, depending on how many gravesites are being purchased.

DIRECTORY SIGN: When looking for the location of a grave, go to the gray box below the green map of the cemetery. The box contains an Alphabetical Index of Grave Sites that gets up-dated throughout the year. Just note the location on the list, such as 4-160-1. This means Section 4, Plot 160, Grave 1. Use the map above the box to locate that burial site. **PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE ANY PART OF THE LIST.** Anyone wanting a copy of the list can receive one free by simply calling the office and requesting it

SECTION 6 – The Serenity Garden: We continue to develop this area with more plants and trees, garden art, and benches. This section provides for cremation burials at a reduced price from such burials in the lawn area, where only a few cremation type burial sites remain. There is also a scattering garden in the southeast corner. A post has been installed next to the Scattering Garden sign on which is mounted a small gold plaque identifying those individuals whose ashes have been scattered there.

In-Ground Vases: These sell for \$50, and are installed just below the marker in the middle. They are in two pieces, so that the cup portion, when not in use to hold flowers, can be turned over. In this way, water cannot collect in them and attract mosquitoes. Those critters can be a very big problem.

New Irrigation System: When you go out to the cemetery, you'll notice that the big green water tank is gone. We now have a new system that pumps water directly from the well, which allows for more even pressure to the irrigation lines. This has also made possible an extensive drip system, recently completed, to assist in consistent health and growth of the new trees and bushes throughout the cemetery. Our next goal is to get a drip line to the big, old trees on the south side in order to support their continued health.

HISTORICAL DIRT SECTION (Sections 1 and 2 of the Cemetery) Please keep in mind that some of the older coffins (many over 100 years old) have deteriorated, which can create the possibility of a sinking area. Whenever we see an area that is beginning to sink, we do fill it in. However, you may see such an area before we do, so please report any such area to the office phone number. When you are visiting graves in these sections, please stay on the marked paths between the sections as much as possible. **BE SURE NOT TO WALK ON TOP OF A GRAVE** where sinkage is much more likely.

GREEN BURIALS: The cemetery facilitates, in 2 special areas, the ability to have what is popularly called a "green burial". This means the deceased is not embalmed, but is simply placed in a wicker coffin by the funeral home--all of which will in time "become one with the earth". If you would like more information about this type of eco-friendly burial, please call or write the cemetery office.

Pioneer Cemetery Renovation: We will soon be organizing a work party to help us once again renovate this little cemetery. We've done it three times already, but every few years it must be done in order to keep up with the growth of weeds. If you have not already contacted us with your desire to help, and you would like to be contacted when it is scheduled, you can write us a note or call the cemetery phone number and leave word. Besides being productive, these work parties are also a lot of fun.

We are determined to honor those pioneers buried there, as well as the related family members who visit those graves. Many times we have had the front picket fence repaired and painted. Now, after some work on

the inside of the cemetery, we are going to replace the whole front fence with one that is much sturdier, and with a gate easy to close.

We have a handout containing historical information on those pioneers who are buried in this unique cemetery. If you would like a copy, please email manager Linda Haun at lkhaun7@gmail.com. She will email it back to you. If you want a printed copy, please call the office for an appointment to drop by and pick it up, or send a check for \$10 to cover postage and handling if you want it mailed to you.

MISC. SUBJECTS OF INTEREST

Who Owns My Relative's Plot?: We are often asked, "Who owns the plot now that someone is buried in it?" This is important to know if a relative desires to bury the ashes of another relative with a previously deceased person. For the past few years, we have requested a form be signed at the time of burial by the one doing the burying that gives specific options, i.e., specific relatives to be allowed, OR first 3 relatives to request this, OR no one ever allowed. If this form is not on file, we conform to what is set by The Health and Safety Code 9069.25 and Probate Code 6400 to 6413. This sets forth the ownership of the grave, which owner must be the one to give permission for any subsequent burial with a previously deceased person. After the Owner of Record, it descends to the decedent's Agent under Power of Attorney for Health Care, then to Spouse or Registered Domestic Partner, decedent's children, parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles or aunts, etc. If you have any questions about this, please feel free to call the office for guidance.

How long can I keep someone's ashes before I have to bury them? You can hold onto them as long as you wish. If the deceased has a pre-purchased plot, it will be kept for them until burial, or sold back to the owner of the plot, which is the next-in-line legal individual. Just don't lose the burial permit that is attached to the box of ashes, as the cemetery will have to have that in order to bury the ashes.

Cemetery Web Site: We have been receiving a number of inquiries on our web site. Some people are looking for relatives, and some want burial information. Although a requirement for public cemeteries, we're truly happy to make it available. It has information about the cemetery, such as the services we provide, as well as other helpful subjects related to burials, pre-planning and future projects.

PRE-PURCHASE OF BURIAL SITES: To pre-purchase a burial site, all you need do is contact the cemetery office for an appointment, and Linda will be happy to meet with you at your convenience. The cost of the plot and endowment care (and a non-resident fee if it applies) is all you need to pay in order to hold your chosen site for use. You may, of course, pay burial costs also, but that can be left for your estate/relatives to do at the time of burial. You will be given an Indenture Certificate as proof of your right to be buried at the cemetery, and a receipt for monies paid.

If you do have a pre-purchased plot at the cemetery, or know someone who has one, please be sure that those who will be in charge of funeral arrangements know that this plot has been purchased. If a pre-purchased plot is no longer wanted by the original purchaser, or the family member who subsequently owns the plot, decides

to bury somewhere else, we will be happy to buy the plot back for the original purchase price. Just call the office or write a letter of request.

You might want to consider giving your contact information to the coroner in your county, so they know what to do if something should happen to you, even if you don't plan to be buried where you now live. Linda has a form she can send you to help you with this.

FRONT GATE CLOSURES: The cemetery gate is usually kept open, especially during the day. However, we DO from time to time close it while construction is taking place, and then open it first thing the following morning. If this happens, please trust that there is a good reason for our doing so, and we apologize for any inconvenience it may cause.

FLOWER POLICY: Please remember that April to late October is the time when mowing of the lawn takes place. Please keep items on your gravesites to a minimum during this time. The items on a grave must all be removed and replaced during mowing, which is a very time-consuming task. (This does not apply to the historic dirt area.) From November through March we don't mow, so we're not as strict about what is on the graves, as long as it is **NOT alcohol or glass** (which shatters in the winds). We will, however, remove any unsightly items, or items hanging from trees.

At no time should plants or pots be sunk into the ground on top of a grave in the lawn, as this prohibits mowing, tears up the lawn, and creates a tripping hazard. Such items will be removed and discarded.

We prefer that people not leave small rocks (decorated or not), or small objects made of concrete on markers in the lawn. These are easily scattered and hidden in the grass, which damages the mower and creates expensive repairs. **WE REALLY NEED PEOPLE TO RESPECT THIS REQUEST.** Do not leave valuable items on the graves, as it is an open cemetery and we cannot monitor those who visit it. We are therefore not responsible for any missing items put on a grave.

WHAT TO DO AND NOT DO WHEN SOMEONE DIES: It is hoped that the following advice, learned by those who have dealt with the passing of a loved one, will be helpful to those who may have to deal with this for the first time. If at all possible, you should meet with an attorney who is a Certified Specialist in Estate Planning, Trust and Probate Law to develop a plan of action to minimize your costs, obligations, and liabilities. Here are 10 things you might want to consider and discuss with them:

1. Do not tell the deceased's bank immediately. This can result in the account being frozen, which may severely delay automatic-payments and direct deposits they set up, and most importantly, mortgage payments. This also applies to retirement accounts.
2. Do not wait to call Social Security. Delaying calling them can result in overpayments, legal obligations, fines and fees. They will demand any extra payments received to be returned.
3. Do not wait to call their Pension source. Same reasons as in Social Security payments.

4. Do not tell the utility companies until you have been in the house to clean it and clear it. You don't want to do that in the dark and without water.
5. Do not give away or promise any items. Estates need to be settled first.
6. Do not sell any of their personal assets. Until the estate is settled, this can result in legal problems.
7. Do not drive their vehicles. The insurance policy may not cover anyone in an accident in that vehicle after the death of the policyholder. Check with their insurance agent.
8. Do not allow other people to move into their house. Check with an attorney on this, as it can result in a lot of problems. Such as evictions, rent collections, and legal liability on your part for damages, etc.
9. Do not let their homeowner's insurance policy lapse, whether the house is occupied or vacant. Usually, a home is the biggest asset that someone has, and protecting it is important. You don't want to lose the beneficiary's biggest asset to fire, flood, natural disaster, or accident.
10. Do not put off handling things. Delaying the process, handling things incorrectly, or not handling them at all can result in significant financial and legal obligations, not to mention family squabbles. Meeting with their insurance agent(s), as well as an attorney who is a Certified Specialist, within the first couple of months following a death is the best thing you can do to protect yourself legally and financially.

THANK YOU SO MUCH! Any type of donation (e.g., money, plants, trees or benches) helps us financially--while at the same time commemorating loved ones and enhancing the appearance of our country cemetery. We cannot express enough our appreciation and gratitude for the continued support we get from people near and far.

MEMBERSHIP in The Friends of the Mt. Whitney Cemetery

THE MEMBERSHIP FORM TO BE USED TO SIGN UP OR RENEW MEMBERSHIP IS INCLUDED WITH THIS NEWSLETTER. YOUR DONATIONS HAVE HELPED US PUT IN A NEW WATER SYSTEM, ADD NEW FENCING AND REPAIR OLD, REPLACE TREES, REPLACE THE DAMAGED BACK GATE, RE-SEED AND FERTILIZE THE LAWN, AND PAY FOR WEED REMOVAL. WE ARE SO VERY GRATEFUL!!

IF YOU MOVE, PLEASE SEND THE NEW ADDRESS TO US.

If you have received this newsletter in the mail and would prefer to receive it via email, please email lkhaun7@gmail.com or call the office with your request.

Friends of the Mt. Whitney Cemetery District

Enrollment Form

P.O. Box 1202
Lone Pine, CA 93545 (760) 876-1863

I would like to be a member of the Friends of the Mt. Whitney Cemetery District, and have chosen to contribute the following this year:

\$25____ \$50____ \$75____ \$100____ Other____

\$ 1,000 Lifetime Membership_____

Annual Members will receive:

- Annual Newsletter
- Notice of work parties
- 2 raffle tickets during fundraisers
- 10% discount on purchase of brass in-ground vases to be installed on graves at the main cemetery

Lifetime Members will receive the above plus:

- 15% off purchase of brass in-ground vases
- 2 additional raffle tickets during fundraisers
- Name engraved on a permanent plaque at the cemetery directional sign

Name: _____

Business Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ **Zip** _____

Home Phone: _____ **Cell Phone:** _____

EMAIL ADDRESS IF YOU WANT FUTURE NEWSLETTERS EMAILED TO YOU:

(Please mail check made payable to Mt. Whitney Cemetery - along with this form -- to P.O. Box 1202, Lone Pine, CA 93545