

Self-Guided Tour

The Ione Public Cemetery has been in operation since 1850, and contains the grave sites of some of the earliest residents of Calaveras/Amador County. One headstone indicates the remains of the “First white child born in Ione Valley” which are buried here. A noted actor and comedian of his day, Albert Theodore William Courtright and his wife, Mary Jan “Jennie Lee” Courtright, a well-known actress as well, are interred in the Ione Public Cemetery. Visitors may also find the headstone of Elizabeth W. Withington, who moved to Ione Valley in 1852. She won awards for her artistic works, some of which can be seen at the Huntington Library and the Amador County Archives. One might also happen upon the burial site of Nathaniel Cecil (“Nat”), who was born into slavery, but who was able to purchase his freedom three years after arriving in California.

The Public Cemetery is divided into two main sections. The older portion contains family plots outlined with concrete curbs and marked with various sizes and styles of upright memorials. The newer section is a grassy lawn area with flat markers. There is also the “Memory Garden” for the burial of cremains and a Mausoleum.









From the cemetery, visitors can gaze upon the famous Preston Castle, in the process of restoration, a reminder of a twentieth century experiment in juvenile corrections. Or, one could look into the adjacent Charles Howard Park, once the site of horse racing which brought dignitaries, including the governor, from Sacramento to watch and wager (Charles Howard was the owner of world-renowned horse, Seabiscuit). The rural setting adds a sense of tranquility to a place devoted to those resting in peace.

It is our hope that this self-guide will aide you in finding some of Ione Public Cemetery’s more notable residents and Ione’s rich history. The general map will assist you in approximate location. The numbers on the map are the section numbers. S-R-P* is the Section-Row-Plot.

We have done our best to be sure the information in this guide is accurate. We apologize if anyone has been neglected or the facts are in error. If you find such an error or think someone you know should be included, please contact us.



Ione Public Cemetery, Township #2 Cemetery District
500 S. Church St., PO Box 1478, Ione CA 95640 ~ (209) 274-0274 ~ www.ionecemetery.org

#	S-R-P*	Name	DOB & DOD (if known)	Notes	Photo of headstone if available
1	7-A-37	Nathaniel Cecil "NAT"	c. 1835-1838 to 1907	Born into slavery, was able to purchase his freedom three years after arriving in California.	
2	7-A-56	Elizabeth "Eliza" W. Withington	Died March 4, 1877 Age ~ 52 years	Moved to Ione Valley in 1852. She won awards for her artistic works, some of which can be seen at the Huntington Library and the Amador County Archives	
3	7-B-33	Ione Harnett	1852-1852	"First white child born Ione Valley"	
4	7-A-23	Nimrod Hamrick	1790 to 1865	Earliest date of birth	 
5	4-4-1	James Richey	1834 to 1909	Son of Thomas Brinley Richey, the founder of Ione (the different spellings are not typos, but how it is recorded)	
6	2-14-9	Albert Courtright	1848-1933	Noted actor and comedian	
7	2-14-9	Mary Courtright "Jennie Lee"	1849-1925	A well-known actress	

Other graves of interest are some of our distinguished veterans

8	6-B-60	Amos Leach	C 1810 - 1900	Union Civil War	
9	4-5-5	R. R. James	1848 – 1920	Civil War 7 th Regiment of Infantry Company C	
10	3-3-6	Robert Scott	1838 – 1917	Civil War 2 nd Regiment of Infantry Company G <i>OR</i> 7 th Regiment of Infantry Company C	
11	3-13-7	William Saxton	1849 – 1922	Civil War 1 st Regiment of Infantry Company F	
12	3-13-1	Joseph Claypoole		Civil War	
13	2-9-3	Stilmon Fairbank	1834 – 1927	Civil War	
14	2-14-6	John Wharff	1838 – 1928	Civil War	
15	1-15-8	Mervin Howdy	2/5/1907 – 10/22/1944	Purple Heart WWII	
16	B-3-11	Robert Freeman	10/11/1921 – 7/7/1988	Purple Heart Silver Star WWII Korea	

As you wander through the cemetery, you may also notice that some monuments are tree-like. Two organizations are given credit for their proliferation: Modern Woodmen of America and Woodmen of the World (WOW).



Joseph Cullen Root originally founded the first group, Modern Woodman of America (MWA), because he wanted to create a fraternal benefit society that would “bind in one association the Jew and the Gentile, the Catholic and the Protestant, the agnostic and the atheist.”

Other “sub” groups also formed throughout the years including women’s auxiliary, Supreme Forest Woodmen Circle, Women of Woodcraft, later changing the name to Neighbors of Woodcraft which eventually merged with WOW in 2001.

Root chose the name “woodman” because he was inspired by a sermon that talked about “woodmen clearing the forest to provide for their families.” Root saw Woodmen of the World as being an organization that would “clear away problems of financial security for its members.”



The Woodmen of the World was probably best known for its gravestones. From 1890 to 1900, WOW’s life insurance policies had a proviso that provided for the grave markers, free of charge for members. By the mid-1920’s they had discontinued the grave marker benefit due to the increased cost of the stones.

The society designed four to five foot high tree trunk monument pattern for adults and three stacked logs for children. WOW would send a copy of the pattern to the local stone carver in the deceased woodman’s home town, so that all of the tree stones would be similar in appearance. But other decorations were added to the tree trunk, thereby making each marker more individual. Many times, the stone pattern was altered; sized differently, cut in a different manner, or branches were added or broken off each time a family member was buried.



Symbols found on the tree stones include axes, mauls, wedges, any type of tool used in woodworking. Doves became popular and are also found on many WOW tree stones. WOW later created a simpler template of a log that would rest atop a regular gravestone. The WOW motto, “Dum Tacet Clamet,” meaning, “Though silent, he speaks” was inscribed on the log.



A woodman emblem is now available and can be attached to a regular gravestone.



Root declared that June 6th of each year to be “Woodmen Memorial Day” and woodmen who had died should be remembered and honored.

Today, Woodmen of the World is the largest fraternal benefit society with open membership in the United States. The organization provides not only insurance, but also investment, bonds, real estate and mortgage loans to its members.

Even though monument benefits have not been included in the WOW package for years, the society makes sure that “no woodman shall rest in an unmarked grave.” A fitting tribute to WOW members, and a brilliant way to augment those striking and outstanding tree stone monuments into cemeteries everywhere.

Information gathered from:

<http://agraveinterest.blogspot.com/2011/06/woodmen-of-world-and-tree-stone-grave.html>