

Cleaning up Hillside Cemetery

Written by gallupsun
Sunday, 19 November 2023 20:19

Research comes from the French language meaning to express intensive force to search.

That is a good description of my last few months finding out what I could about the Hillside cemetery, aka, the “Chinese” cemetery, on Gallup’s north side, at the end of Fifth Street and Victoria Avenue.

I had heard about this cemetery for years but hadn’t seen it until the end of 2020, when, as all of us were, I was cooped up at home and needed to get out of the house for some air. My husband and I took our four-wheeler out to the northside desert and were driving along an old dirt road when we came upon the cemetery.

It was obvious that it was a cemetery by the headstones that were and, are, still standing and the grave fences that surround many family plots. It seemed ancient and abandoned and it was very intriguing. One of the stones was completely inscribed in Italian. Some were names I recognized from Gallup businesses and families.

One is for Anton Kuzma - born Jan. 14, 1873, died July 31, 19** (illegible). One grave fence had a paper picture, sealed in plastic hanging on it, and a short description of the man laid to rest there in 1895, John B. Campbell - struck by lightning at age 24 years and 10 months old.

A large marble stone near the entrance, by the road, for Ben Thomas reads, BORN OCT. 5, 1878, KILLED IN THE WRECK OF THE LIMITED JUNE 28, 1908. This was the first stone I researched because it had great information on it. According to *The Tribune-Holbrook-Snowflake-Taylor-Winslow*, in an article from Feb 20, 2015:

"On the night of June 28, 1908, three men lost their lives in the wreck of Engine 1419, also known as the California Limited. The accident occurred between Winslow and Joseph City and was caused by the burning of a bridge over a small arroyo. Engineer Clarence Currin and his fireman, Ben Thomas, ... were two of the men killed."

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This article set in motion an eagerness to find out more about this fascinating cemetery. What was it originally called? Who was buried there? Why was it abandoned? Was this the site commonly referred to as the "Chinese Graveyard?"

I found that the cemetery was privately owned so, I set up an appointment to talk with the property owner. He told me everything he knew about the property. For instance, he believed it had always been privately owned either by mines or estates.

It had been called the Bubany Estates Property or the "Chinese Cemetery." His family came to own it in the 1980's, the cemetery was part of a bigger land purchased. He gave me many ideas as to where to go to research next and who may have answers to my questions. I asked him if I could have permission to semi-restore the cemetery so it's easier to see the marked gravestones and ruins that I noticed there, and he said yes.

The first places I went to research were the City of Gallup and the library.

The Octavia Fellin Public Library Director, Tammi Moe, found a short list of headstones for the Hillside Cemetery at the location of Fifth Street and Victoria Avenue that had been documented at some point, with the last dates of burials being 1913. She was aware of this cemetery and had some leads she could follow up with to get more information. But, as for documents, there really aren't any at the library. She said there may be news articles on microfiche, but that I would have to sit and read each news article, year by year and date by date.

She said that she knew Hillcrest cemetery in the downtown area was established in 1914 and that bodies were alleged to have been moved from Hillside (north side) to Hillcrest (downtown) that year.

So, I did look through the microfiche. I found the 1914 City of Gallup Ordinance #142, which proclaimed the end of the use of the north side Hillside or Catholic cemeteries because the city had opened Hillcrest Cemetery. They asked that no more burials take place at the old grounds and if families or friends wanted, they could have the remains of their loved ones moved to Hillcrest for \$5, Board of Health permitting.

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So, why would headstones remain at Hillside on the north side if all the bodies had been allegedly moved to Hillcrest? Why did someone who knew of John B. Campbell - struck by lightning - still put photos of him on his gravesite if he was moved to Hillcrest? And why would plots still be surrounded by rod-iron fences but the remains be moved without the decorations being moved as well?

I would think these things would be taken to the new gravesite, as they would have been expensive graveside accessories as they still are to this day. It could be the family couldn't afford the re-burial at Hillcrest of loved ones or there may have been no family left to move them. It also could be the family didn't want to move their loved one, it was not required that the deceased be moved in the City of Gallup Ordinance from 1914.

In my previous interview with the Hillside land owner, he made an interesting point that at the time when Gallup was founded in 1881, New Mexico was still a territory of the U.S. The Catholic Church considered it to be a mission field and a Bishop was sent from Santa Fe, to cover an area of 236,000 square miles. According to the web page History of the Diocese of Gallup:

"The only religious resource available to them (Catholic immigrants) was the priest at Seboyeta, (east of Grants), Father Juan B. Brun, who served the entire area from the Rio Puerco of the East to the Grand Canyon...His first visit to Gallup was in 1884 when Gallup had only 12 (Catholic) families." "In 1893, Father George Julliard arrived (in Gallup) to serve as Pastor and remained until 1910."

Father Julliard built the first Catholic Church in Gallup in 1899 and part of it collapsed in 1916. A year later another building replaced it, but it wasn't until 22 years later that the Sacred Heart Cathedral was re-built in 1939, when the Diocese of Gallup was established.

Was the Catholic Church burying the deceased in the Hillside Cemetery from 1913 and earlier? I am not a Catholic myself, but I wondered if The Church may have kept records of death, birth, and marriages. Even if this was a long shot, I searched there next.

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I emailed the Archdiocese of Gallup, the Archdiocese of Santa Fe- Archives, and the Franciscans of Albuquerque. I got two replies, both said no information was available. I thought, "That's ok! No information means look elsewhere."

Then two fortunate things happened. I got an email from the City Clerk's Office with a study from the Archeological Society of New Mexico) field school, undated, that plotted graves of Hillside, graves that still hold bodies. The papers are a grid search analysis of the cemetery and field notes.

I immediately emailed ASNM to ask questions about how to read the information I had and to find out when the archeological team was there doing this search. I got an email back saying it must have been a local chapter that plotted this cemetery because they had no information.

I contacted Martin Link, a Gallup local I had heard was a historian and anthropologist. He said he and a group from Gallup had plotted this study and I will follow up with him to read it together, and hopefully, he will have more field notes on this project.

The second fortunate, perhaps the most exciting, thing was I got a team of 12 men from the jail to remove weeds and trash from the cemetery. They have removed over 10,000 pounds of weeds and a dozen full bags of trash.

One gravesite iron fence rail, of Mr. John B. Campbell, has been set back up and reinforced with rebar, as it had previously, allegedly, been destroyed by a drunk driver who drove through the cemetery quite a long time ago and damaged several plots, headstones, and history there. I am convinced this was not the only vehicle damage to the property. Many headstones no longer sit on the original site of the deceased, and many do not sit upon the bases of their own marble footings. These are marble stones weighing hundreds of pounds with chipped corners and some broken in half, not an easy thing to do by hand.

Of Mr. Thomas, his headstone was at the entrance of the cemetery by a dirt road, where it had been dumped some time ago. Many people say that the headstone, which weighed about 200 pounds, had been stolen at some point and returned, at least to the graveyard, although several yards from where it possibly came from. The base marble lay up the hill from the headstone bearing the inscribed name THOMAS. The men who worked on the weeds and trash couldn't

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abide leaving his stone by the road so they carried it and set it up against the marble base.

They did the same for two sweet little girls, of the last name Show. The girls shared a single headstone with the final words from their loving parents. This stone had laid on its back for too long and the sandstone was weathered and hard to read. These men put the stone right.

They also set Mr. Anton Kuzma's stone back on its base and Mr. Charles A. Harding's stone, which had been knocked off its base and was almost completely buried in the dirt, back on its base.

At the end of two months, I believe the men who worked on the cemetery were very moved by the history they uncovered all along the way and the stories I could tell about those deceased that I found information about. These graves are, to some extent, the people who made Gallup. The people who died on the railroad, in mines, and died in early childhood. The mothers and fathers and children of Gallup, hidden for a hundred years, right in front of us.

They had hard lives and stories of their own, and love, which can be seen in the elaborate decorations of their death, in sandstone and marble and iron. We should not forget these Gallup citizens.

I know some people will be discouraged because this cemetery should never have come to this. Many people over the years have cleared weeds in gravesites there. If that wasn't so I believe the graveyard would have been completely grown over and buried by mud after 110 years.

But there is too much land to keep up for the few remaining family and caretakers. This graveyard is far older than anyone alive today and it is still able to reach the hearts of those of us who see it and are compelled to work on it. When I set out to find information about Hillside, I found people who cared and helped me.

This is a huge project and I want the end result to be respectful of the past, to bear the stories of those still there, and to bring pride to us, as fellow Gallupians who care to memorialize our history, for our posterity. We are all here now because someone made this town. Our

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forebearers may and may not have done things the way we would have, but they strove where we were not, at costs we would not have paid, often with their lives. And often with the prosperity of their children in mind, hoping for a town and a day where those children would have it better than they.

It can be stated without argument, they built this town, and it is now our responsibility to remember that and them, and hundreds more who either immigrated here or were born here and changed the face of these hills.

