A VISIT TO THE OLD IRISH CEMETARY

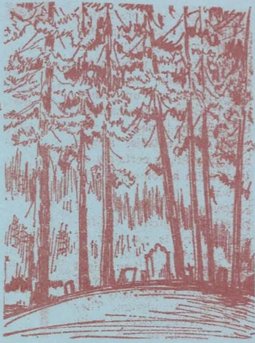
Were a person to travel from Calpine to Beckworth, via alternate highway Twenty Three, he would travel a very pleasantly scenic route indeed. To his right would be the lush farms of Sierra Valley, and to his left would be low hills, covered with evergreen trees or sage brush or both, which gradually build up to the higher mountains. And should a person stop about mid point between the two previously mentioned communities, (seven miles from either town) and scan the mountains to his left, he

would be rewarded with a picturesque view of rolling foothills covered with sagebrush, foothills which quickly and steeply rise into the mountains behind them. Closer scrutiny of the hillside would reveal, about one-half mile up the side of the mountain, several ghostly white objects half hidden behind trees, sage and brush. Most people would dismiss the scene as an optical illusion and pass on.

For those more discriminating lookers, closer inspection will indeed reveal ghostly white objects--grave stones. For the hardy viewer who doesn't mind walking up a steep trail for about a half mile or more, there awaits one of the last examples of a truly "Old West" cemetary.

As one approaches the cemetary site, somewhat out of breath after the climb, he will see a timeworn wooden trestle crudely braced by a teepee of wooden sticks, standing awkwardly at the entrance to the yard. A rusty steel gate guards the entrance to the cemetary which is surrounded by a tumbled-down barbed wire fence supported by old posts. The floor of the cemetary is matted with an overgrowth of mangled sagebrush, and twisted trees border the graveyard. The view of Sierra Valley and the mountains beyond is worth the climb up the hill for anyone, but for the amature historian, the view plus an hour or two wandering through the cemetary makes for a perfect afternoon.

Little is known about the beginning of the cemetary, or graveyard, as it is called in the Sierra Valley region. Few



written records were kept in the 1860's and 70s, and many of these have disappeared. Residents of the area recall stories about the graveyard, and a few direct descendants of people buried in the graveyard live nearby and supply a modicum of valid infofmation.

Putting all the existing stories together, plus adding what printed research exists, it would seem valid to state that a sizeable number of Irish people, either immigrants directly from Ireland or people who had come from Ireland earlier, settled in the East and then later come West, arrived in Sierra Valley in the late 1860's and 1870's. It has been reported that many of these people came first to work in the nearby mines which at that time existed around the Eureka Peak area. After working the mines for a time, the people began to farm in Sierra Valley.

By the mid 1870's there was a sizeable Irish settlement in what today is the area around the France Ranch and the present Marble Hot Springs road. Some accounts state that there was a school and a post office at the end of the Marble Hot Springs road. An excerpt from the California Cultivator states that:

> The central valley (Sierra Valley) was taken up by a colony of old country Irish-the Sharkeys, the O'Haras, the Giblins, the Marbles (of tennis fame), the Caseys, and the McCauleys.

It can be assumed that these Irish were faithful in the practice of theirfaith--the Roman Catholic Faith, because soon after their appearance a Roman Catholic Church was built in this area and a priest was assigned to the church and services were held periodically. This church, built about one mile south of the present France Ranch, was roughly in the center of the area considered the Irish area. It stood for many years and was finally abondoned in favor of a church in Loyalton. It was finally torn down and its timbers were used in many of the surrounding ranch buildings. It can be assumed that the Irish people, once a cemetary was needed, would want one near their church. Why the cemetary was built about a mile and a half from the church, and up a steep hill besides, is open to conjecture.

There are many theories concerning why the Westside Cemetary (as it is now called) was laid out where it was. The question naturally arises as to why the cemetary wasn't constructed nearer the Catholic Church, if not next to it.

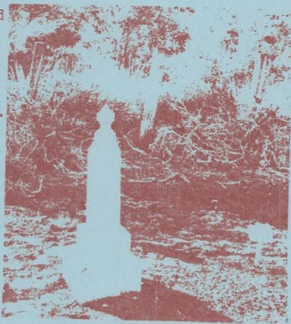
One answer to this seems to be that the Old World practice of locating graveyards within the Church yard was not practiced in the western part of the United States, and so contemporary custom would prohibit locating the graveyard within the Church yard. Church buildings came and went in the rapidly changing existences of western boom towns, but cemetaries were supposed to go on forever.

A view of part of the cemetary-looking east out over Sierra Valley.

Another theory is that the Irish, wishing a "Catholic" cemetary (i.e., a cemetary specifically designated as a Catholic burial place and dedicated as consecrated ground) would frown on using existing cemetaries, since none of them were specifically Catholic cemetaries. They would, instead, found one that was close to the Church, consecrated, and yet in keeping with the local custom, would chose a site on a hill overlooking the settlement. This theory seems to have some validity in relation to the location of the cemetary. Another theory would indicate that the location of the cemetary was chosen much like the location of the Sierraville cemetary and the Loyalton cemetary. In this case there was a death in a particular family,

View of cemetary-looking north towards Beckworth.

and that particular family chose a site which it happened to like. As deaths happened in other families, these also chose the site picked by the first family. In a few years a cemetary just happened.to come into existence. This theory has some validity in that there is a story that the infant daughter of one of the Irish families died. A cemetary was needed and in that particular year no dry land was available in the valley as the year was a particularly wet one. Hence, the bluff on the high hill was chosen.[3] This may well be true, but there is no historical data to substantiate it. Whatever the reason, the cemetary was chosen, and laid out, and was used from 1874 until the 1930s. It was not used again until the early spring of 1970 when Mrs. Elizabeth Turner, one of the very last of the "pioneers" of Sierra Valley, and one of the direct descendendents of the original Irish settlers, was laid to rest.



The headstone which has the oldest recorded date in the cemetary, and which is said to be the marking on the first grave in the cemetary.

Following is a listing of the known graves in the cemetary: (Information taken from headstones)

FARLEY PLOT
Mother 1847--1917
Father 1840--1885

John T. Farley
1877--1935

Herbert Farley
1883--1937

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SHARKEY PLOT
Tom Sharkey 30 July 1890--12 Dec. 1928
Myles Sharkey 9 Sept. 1855--21 Mar. 1921 Native of Sligo, Ireland.

(Sharkey Plot-continued)

Annie P. Sharkey 1858--1935 Native of Sligo, Ireland
Baby May Sharkey 1912
James Sharkey 1819--1898 Native of Sligo, Ireland.
Catharine (Sharkey) Black, wife of Thomas Black, Native of Sligo Co., Ireland Died 9 May 1877 26 years old.

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McElroy Plot

Margaret, wife of Owen McElroy
died 11 Feb. 1882 50 years

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Freeman Plot

Mabel Freeman 1886--1886

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Corecco Plot

Peter Corecco 15 Dec. 1876--18 May 1897

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Ramelli Plot

Mary, daughter of M. and M. Ramelli
d 9 Dec. 1893, aged 3 yrs 5 mos
Louis, son of M. and M. Ramelli
d 21 Sept 1899 aged 2 yrs

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Myers Plot

George F. 1837--1926
Delia M. 1843--1926

Mary F.
d 5 July 1878
2 yrs 8 mos 9 days

Winifred
d 23 Oct 1874
1 yr 8 mos 15 days

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Connolly Plot

Patrick Conolly
d 14 Aug 1903 65 years Native of Ireland

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Merkel Plot

Michael Merkel
d 1 July 1823
81 yrs
Native of Germany

Mary, wife of Michael Merkel
d 7 Oct 1897
aged 38 yrs
Native of Ireland

Hooley Plot

Eddy Hooley	1878--1890
Michael Hooley	1818--1908
Ann Hooley	1835--1915

McGillicudy Plot
Lizzie McGillicudy
d 28 Aug 1888
32 yrs 8 mos
County Cork, Ireland

Mills Plot
Charles M. Mills
d 20 Sep 1892
3 yrs

O'Hara Plot
Michael O'hara
d 4 Jan 1904
77 yrs

Mary O'Hara
d 25 July 1900
79 yrs

Herrican Plot
John Herrican
d 23 Nov 1902
84 yrs
Ireland

Margaret Herrican
d 5 Oct 1903
80 yrs

McMurray Plot
John McMurray, Husband of Agnes
d 26 Oct 1896
48 yrs 4 mos 12 days

Giblin Plot
James Giblin
d 28 Oct 1890
64 years
Co. Sligo, Ire.

Ann M. Giblin, wife of
James
d 14 April 1912
85 yrs

Ireland

James Henry Giblin
b 8 Dec 1866
d 29 Oct 1902

John M. Giblin
d 9 June 1897
27 yrs 8 mos 17 days

Frank P. Giblin
1863---1939

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Keefe Plot

Mary E. Keefe, wife of P.H. Keefe
1 Oct 1865--04 June 1902
36 yrs 7 mos 4 days

Patrick Henry Keefe
July 15, 1851--May 27, 1925

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Gloster Plot

Margaret, mother of D.M. Gloster
died 20 May 1888, aged 31 yrs

Daniel Maurece Gloster
25 Mar 1885--11 Jan 1906

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Turner Plot

Mildred A. Turner
1912--1914

Mrs. Elizabeth Turner, mentioned earlier in this report, was buried in this plot in the Spring of 1970.

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Tom Burner, Nickolus Merkel, Paul Vilmer, Horis Vilmer and Gladys Gould are supposed to be buried in the cemetary, although no headstones exist to mark their graves.

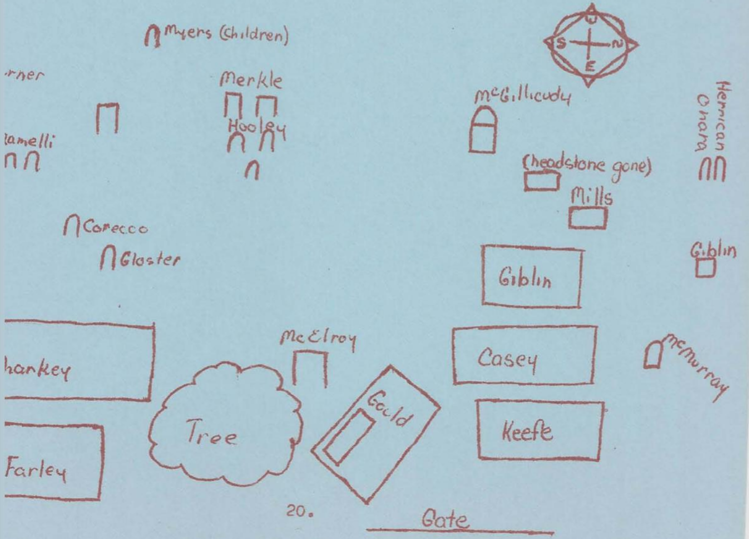
The oldest date registered for death is 1874, for Winifred Myers, a one year old girl.

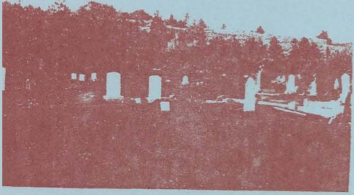
The author wishes to thank the following people for their aid in obtaining valuable information: Mr. Owen P. McGarr of Beckworth, Mr. A. Strang of Sierraville, Mrs. Della Lombardi of Loyalton, and especially Mrs. Harold France of Beckworth. The author also is indebted to the article, "Saga of Sierra Valley" in the California Cultivator.

Notes on the Author:

Miss Janice Nervino was born in Reno, Nevada, in 1952. She attended school in Portola, California, and Loyalton, California. She presently lives with her parents in Beckworth, California, and is a Senior student at Loyalton High. Jan is president of the student body at Loyalton High and was chosen as Girl's State representative and one of the speakers for graduation. She plans to attend Chico State College when she graduates in June, 1970. Jan's initial interest in this subject was the result of an assignment in her history class. She became more interested as she began her research, and the article you have just read is the result of her labors.

Below is a pen drawing of the Cemetary.





Two different scenes

of the Cemetary

There is some information known concerning the many Irish who settled the area and who also rest in the cemetary being discussed, now known as the "Westside Cemetary." While this information doesn't directly bear on the cemetary, it is none the less interesting, as most of the people discussed eventually found their final resting place in the Westside Cemetary.

The early settlers and information about them are as follows:

> James Sharkey became a citizen of the U.S. in the state of New Jersey in Warren County on Jan. 1,1856. Between 1856 and 1878 he was in Downieville,mining. In the early '70s he settled in Sierra Valley and got his deed to 160 acres on July 13,1878. He passed away in 1898.
> Catharine Sharkey, niece of James Charkey, came to live with James Sharkey. She married one Thomas Black. She passed away on May 9,1877.
> Miles Sharkey, a nephew of James Sharkey, came from Ireland in 1877 to live with his Uncle Jim. He homesteaded 160 acres on April 4 1889. He married Annie Plunket of Ireland that year. She had lived in San Francisco before coming to Sierra Valley as a bride. One son was born to this union. He was named Tom Sharkey.
> Tom Sharkey married one Sara McKenzie of La Porte, Plumas County. They had seven girls, six of whom are still living and named Anne, Virginia, Catherine, Lola, Gladys and Evelyn.
> Geroge Myers came to California in 1858. In 1869 he was established in Sierra Valley and married Delia Sharkey. This couple had eight children: Benjamen, Catherine, George,

Elizabeth, Anne, Frances and Winifred and Mary. The Myers ranch is now owned by the Carmichaels. (See notes on Elizabeth Myers Truner at the end of this article)
The Keefes lived for a long time in Sattley. Mary Keefe was a Casey. Both husband and wife are buried in the cemetary.
The McElroy family lived between Sattley and the grave yard. A grove of Lombardi Populars now stands where the ranch once was and can be seen today. A granddaughter of this pioneer family, Vesta Thomas, lives in Sattley.

There were, obviously, many more families than mentioned in the previous paragraphs; however, no information is known about them now, or at least this writer. What happened to many of the ranches settled by the early Irish is known, as these ranchers were purchased, in great part, by a second wave of immagrants, the Swiss Italians. The Swiss Italians tended, for the most part, to be dairy farmers. What happened to many of the early Irish ranches is listed below:

The Freeman ranch was on the road to Sattley and no longer exists as the Freeman fanch.
The Markel ranch was purchased by the Folchi brothers.
The Hooley ranch was above Loyalton, then called Smithneck, and is presently part of a development area of the Monarch Company.
The O'Hara ranch was above the present day Sierra Valley Ranch.
The Merrican property now belongs, for the most part, to the Churches.
Frank Giblin's ranch now is part of the Ghidossi ranch.
The Glosters left Sierra Valley and settled in the Alturas region.
The Turner ranch of Sattley is still owned by a descendent of the original Irish clans, Jim Turner.
The McMurray's ranch now is part of what present day Campbell's Hot Springs.
There was, at one time, a school and a post office at the McElroy ranch which was located roughly where the present day Marble Hot Springs road comes into Alternate Twenty Three.
The Keefe resident is now owned by Gordon Church.