
Difficult Task Locating Graves

A feud, a fire, lost records and neglect are creating a puzzling mystery for Tacoma City Light land negotiators.

The Utility officials, investigating land purchases for the Mossyrock Dam project, are dusting off old Riffe town burial records in an attempt to identify and find numerous unmarked graves. The grave sites must be removed before Davisson Lake forms in 1967.

The lake, 18 miles long with 49 miles of shoreline, will cover two cemeteries in addition to the towns of Riffe and Kosmos on the Cowlitz River.

Research indicates that the Riffe Cemetery was established by James Stinson at the turn of the century. He and his wife, Mellissia, sold plots to early settlers in the area. Later the community, under the Stinson Cemetery Association, took the job of maintaining the site, according to City Light sleuths headed by Land Negotiator Gregory D. Smith.

Riffe pioneers have told Smith that work parties were organized and dues assessed to maintain the cemetery. Soon after, however, the care of the area was discontinued and later a fire destroyed the cemetery records.

A bitter feud erupted in the old southwest Washington community which raveled the mystery further.

According to various sources, several young men in the town were killed. Their graves can be found in centrally located plots. But those responsible for the killing were buried at the outer edge of the cemetery and blackberry brambles soon covered their graves.

"As a result it has been necessary to start a tremendous detective job to determine the location of those buried in the cemetery," Smith said.

For more information, please call (continued on page 2)
John M. Deen, Public Information Office, Tacoma City Light,
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"Some graves are well marked, but others are indicated only by a stone or simple wood stake," he explained.

Depressions in the earth, mounds, and clumps of flowers among the weeds point to other possible graves.

Before a grave can be moved City Light must obtain the written permission of the next of kin. Identifications from markers and grave stones show 172 grave sites in Riffe and nearby Smith Cemeteries.

Smith has located 16 additional plots and identified them. Recently 25 more locations have been discovered. These have not been identified, and many more are believed to be in the area.

People who have information concerning the cemeteries are requested to write the Tacoma Department of Public Utilities.

"It would be most helpful if the writer mentions the name of the deceased. He should also include, if possible, the name and address of the surviving husband or wife, children, parents, brothers and sisters in that order," Smith said.

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