

PIONEER CEMETERY

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Kaydee Nye is the new manager at Eureka Cemetery in Newport. The best part of her job, she said, is sharing history and helping people find the gravesites of loved ones. (Photos by Steve Card)

Caring for Newport's history

BY STEVE CARD
Of the News-Times

People likely pass by Eureka Cemetery in Newport without giving it a lot of thought. But this first incorporated cemetery in Lincoln County provides a link to the earliest days of the city's history, and many of its pioneers are buried here.

Most local residents and many visitors to the coast are very familiar with the popular Nye Beach. It was named after John Nye, one of the original founders of Newport. In 1866, he obtained a 160-acre land claim in what is now known as Newport's Nye Beach district. Nye's wife was named Olive, which is where the name of Newport's major east-west connector, Olive Street, came from.

John and Olive Nye are buried at Eureka Cemetery, and all these years later, the care of their gravesites, along with all of the others contained within the 22-



Many of Newport's pioneers are buried at Eureka Cemetery, including Olive and John Nye, who have local landmarks named after them.

acre grounds of the cemetery, is being managed by one of their descendants.

Kaydee Nye was hired as the secretary at Eureka Cemetery this past August. In mid-October, she was named manager at the site. "As manager, I take care of

the office and oversee the groundskeepers," she said. The head groundskeeper is Mark White, who is assisted by Arlen Phillips.

"I also do all the accounting, paperwork, computer work," said Nye.

Nye is available in the cemetery office Monday through Friday, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Some people want information about burial services. Other visitors, she said, stop by in their pursuit of history.

NEWPORT PIONEERS

"We have tons of history up here, starting with the people who first started the cemetery by donating some land," said Nye. That initial small parcel of land came from the Jessup family, and the first recorded burial was in 1876, just 10 years after Newport was incorporated as a city.

"We have Sam and Mary Case buried up here," added Nye. Samuel Case, another pioneer and prominent settler, was Newport's first schoolteacher — an elementary school is named after him. He, along with Dr. James Bayley, laid out the plans for the city of Newport. The two also built a hotel called the Ocean House, which was where the Coast Guard Station now stands.

"We also have Royal and Mary Bensell — he was the first mayor," said Nye. "And we have quite a few Nyes out here."

INTERESTING HISTORY

"There's also some out here that people wouldn't really recognize by name, but they have really cool stories," continued Nye. "We have four graves that just have little temporary markers; they're just 'sailor unknowns.' They were on a logging schooner that capsized at Cape Foulweather, and they are buried here. No one knows who they are, where they came from, or what their names are.

The cemetery also contains the graves of many

union soldiers. "They have the Grand Army of the Republic stars on the grave markers," Nye said. "And there's a lady buried in the original cemetery that got permission from Abraham Lincoln to have a United States flag buried with her."

CLEANING HEADSTONES

"We're going through and cleaning up the headstones of all the interesting ones," added Nye. "It's supposed to be the families taking care of them, but we're having a lot more activity up here. Today we had a fourth grade field trip. We offer rubbings, and it's really hard to do when they're covered in moss. So we're in the process of trying to get the more well-known ones that people come up here to see cleaned up."

And along with that effort, "we're actually in the process of putting together a little tour out of everything we all know, a little historical tour," she said.

OFFERING ASSISTANCE

One of her favorite jobs at the cemetery is helping people find the burial site of a family member. "I get to go out and help people find their loved ones. It's always fun, especially the expression on their face when they finally see it. That's one of the favorite parts of my job," said Nye.

"I usually get two or three phone calls a day of people just asking questions. And we work pretty closely with the local Find A Grave — we help him out, he comes up and takes pictures."

Nye said they are in the process of developing a computer database of all those buried at Eureka Cemetery, but for now, they are still relying on written records. "We have a card system we use, going by last name. We give people the information and most times go out and help them try to find them because it can get a little confusing. If by chance we

can't find the card, we'll go through the year of the death and try to find the contract and help them out."

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

Maintaining all aspects of the cemetery is a large task, and Eureka Cemetery is operated by a nonprofit organization. The Eureka Cemetery & Mausoleum Association is governed by a board of directors, and the entire operation relies on donations and proceeds that are generated through the sales of items used for burials.

In an effort of help offset expenses, the association is planning a dinner/silent action fundraiser next spring. "We've never done this before, (but) we're hoping for it to be an annual thing," Nye said.

VOLUNTEERS WELCOME

"We can always use volunteers," she added. "We don't have a lot of volunteers. Shangi-La comes to do volunteer work about once a month, (and) groups set up flags on Memorial Day." People interested in volunteering can call or email Nye. In terms of the types of jobs available for volunteers, "it depends on what they want to do. Some people don't want to be outside working, so there are some things they can do in the office."

Nye can be contacted at 541-265-7282 or ECAKaydee@outlook.com. Or people can stop by the cemetery during office hours to see her. "We're always open to the public for calls, email, pop-ins. Sometimes I'm not in the office, but I usually have a sign on the door that says to look for me on the grounds."

Additional information about Eureka Cemetery can be found online at EurekaCemetery.org

Contact reporter Steve Card at 541-265-8571, ext. 224, or scard@newportnewstimes.com