

## West Point Cemetery District History

*With the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in 1847 California was forever changed. As the world rushed to California it's demographics changed as indicated by the headstones located in Mother Lode cemeteries. Scant records exist of that time as to the ethnicity of the early pioneers and miners. Walking through our cemetery one finds names from all over the world. Spanish, German, Swiss, English, Italian, French, Swedish, Chinese, Irish, Scott, and of course Americans just to name a few. We have veterans from the American Civil War and just about every conflict since. West Point and Sandy Gulch are in what is called the Granite Belt of what became the 260 miles long area known as the Mother Lode. Both West Point and Sandy Gulch were first settled in early 1848 by miners seeking that elusive golden treasure. Sandy Gulch was populated originally by a Me-wok Indian tribe who eventually re-located across the river to West Point. The Calaveras Band of Me-wok Indians still maintain a small cemetery on private property at Sandy Gulch. Like most mining camps the community of Sandy Gulch eventually gave up and gravitated to becoming an area of historical interest.*

*West Point on the other hand prospered and became a town. Sandy Gulch is located between the Middle Fork and South Forks of the Mokelumne River while about 2 miles further east West Point is between the Middle Fork and North Forks of the Mokelumne.*

*The West Point Cemetery District maintains both the West Point and Sandy Gulch cemeteries via both plot sales and a local tax base. There are five directors along with a ground's keeper and a clerk. The earliest head stone in Sandy Gulch shows a date of 1854 while West Point's is 1858. Looking at the amount of open space in West Point's historical section the directors decided to hire a firm specializing in ground penetrating radar. A survey conducted last fall produced 224 unknown graves to go along with the 44 unnamed we knew about. One must keep in mind that the Gold Rush era was highly chaotic with few records kept. Because of the large number of unknown graves discovered at West Point we then surveyed Sandy Gulch finding another 218 graves with some located outside of the cemetery on private property. Fortunately, a local mortuary has opened up their records to us going back to 1870 which allows us to justify their records with our known headstones. Once that is completed, we will place a sign at each cemetery acknowledging the known names of persons in our cemeteries. We do not sell plots in the historical section unless it is to family members of someone already interred there. Plot sales are restricted to residents of our district since those residents support us via their county taxes. We have a very nice and well-maintained cemetery which we are very proud of. Both cemeteries are open to the public year-round.*