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**Joseph Fauntelroy Montgomery,**

**MD**

**1812-1883**

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Dr. Montgomery held two medical degrees: one from the Medical College of Virginia in 1832 at 21 years, and the other from the Philadelphia Medical School in 1834. He came from Virginia, moving to Mississippi where he practiced in Jackson from 1836 to 1842. Little is known of his earlier years or his whereabouts before coming to Sacramento in 1849 where he was soon testing his skills during the devastating cholera epidemic of 1850.

An outstanding leader in medical and civic affairs, Dr. Montgomery was a founding member of four of Sacramento's earliest medical organizations. They were the Medico-Chirurgical Association in 1850, the Sacramento Medical Society in 1853, the first California State Medical Society in 1856 and the Sacramento Society for Medical Improvement 1868. It was at a meeting of the latter group in 1871 that he delivered his memorable presidential essay on Ethics of the Medical Profession, a subject he promoted at every opportunity.

In 1853 Dr. Montgomery was City Physician and became resident physician at the County Hospital from 1856 to 1861. He was appointed to the City Board of Health in 1862, 1868 and 1882, to the State Board of Health in 1870 and to the State Board of Medical Examiners in 1876. He was elected as a city school trustee in 1869 and again in 1874.

Although he gave firm and progressive leadership in medical and public health matters Dr. Montgomery left little information about himself. He was a bachelor described as very modest and reserved. Even his grave marker in the Old Masonic Section of the Sacramento Historic City Cemetery is inconspicuous in contrast to those of most of his medical contemporaries.

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**Charles Duncombe, MD**  
**1787 - 1867**

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Charles Duncombe MD

1792-1867

*Dr. Duncombe, a member of English royalty, a medical politician and social reformer, came to Sacramento during the Gold Rush with a price on his head.*

The paternal grandfather of Dr. Duncombe went to New York toward the end of the Revolutionary War. His oldest son, Thomas, married Rhoda Tyrill, a granddaughter of King James 11 of England. Thomas and Rhoda had 3 sons, all physicians, and two daughters. Rhoda Tyrill was the best educated woman in the Colonies and taught her children, including Charles, who was born in Connecticut and later received his medical degree in New York. The Duncombe family, including 3 children, moved to Upper Canada (Ontario) in 1819 where Dr. Duncombe practiced medicine, became a wealthy landowner and was elected to Parliament. He and a Dr. Rolf founded Ontario's first medical school at St. Thomas.

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In 1843, both doctors became involved in an insurrection against the British government led by William Lyon Mackenzie. At first, Dr. Duncombe was an English loyalist but became disillusioned and led a group of reformers on a number of social issues. One was the excessive amount of land set aside for the Church of England which he felt would be better used for education. Another was establishing hospitals for the insane.

He was the leader in an armed rebellion that was no match for the British militia, and reformers were arrested, including his son-in-law. Dr. Duncombe barely escaped, dressed as a Quaker woman. He was sheltered at a nearby farm where he slept between the farmer and his wife.

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The next stop toward the American border was a farmhouse where there was barely time for Dr. Duncombe to dress as “grandma”. He was sitting in a rocking chair knitting when a posse arrived that greeted him politely as they searched the house. He was taken to a hotel but left in a hurry to avoid a group anxious to collect the \$1800 reward for his capture. He finally arrived at his Sister’s farm near London, Ontario. Dressed as “Aunt Nancy” he and his sister’s family boarded a sleigh, driven by a loyal friend, where they were stopped at a frozen river. The friend boldly asked for help regarding the safest place to cross so the family could attend a funeral in the United States. A member of the militia who was searching for Dr. Duncombe found a pilot for them and the family made it over the border. The friend was arrested when he returned ill to Canada, and could have died in jail had not Dr. Duncombe’s sister arranged for his release, nursed him back to health and gave him some Duncombe land.

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After trying unsuccessfully to gain support for his cause in New York, in 1849 Dr. Duncombe joined the Gold Rush to Sacramento where he practiced medicine, founded the Masonic Lodge and moved to a farm at Hicksville. He was elected to the State Assembly twice despite lack of citizenship, which he corrected before his second term. He died from heat stroke while working on his farm in 1862.

Dr. Duncombe was later pardoned by the Canadian government who eventually adopted his reforms. His son-in-law was released from jail and his former home near St. Thomas became a medical museum.

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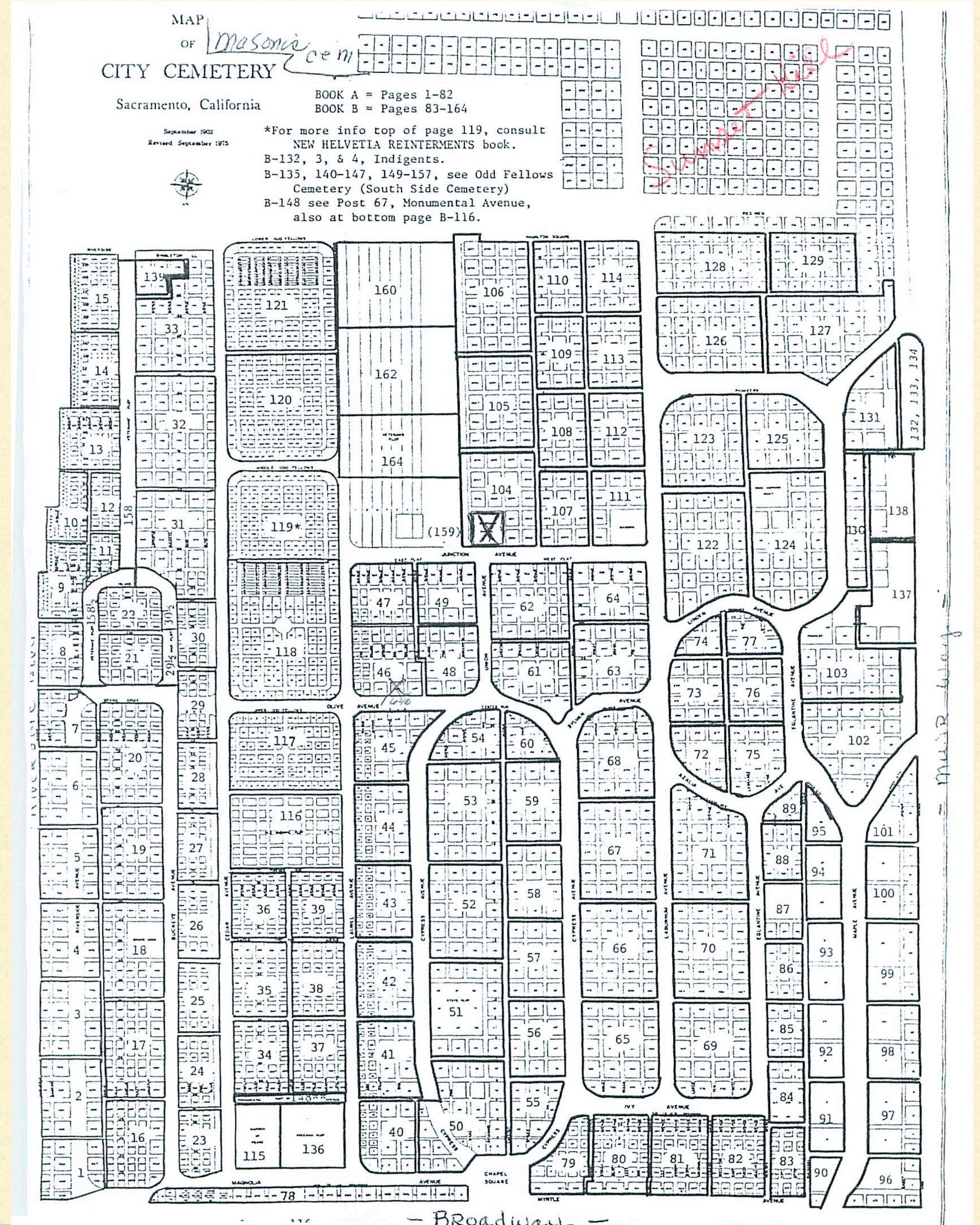
# **Thomas Blackwood, MD**

## **1804 - 1856**

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Little information has been found about Dr. Blackwood... not unusual for persons dying here in the 1850's.



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**But...here is some information  
about  
another Gold Rush Era  
Dr. Blackwood**

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Research turned up information about Dr. T.L. Blackwood in the 1880's...in Bodie...unknown whether he was a relative of Dr. Thomas's...but a story too interesting not to be told...

Dr. Blackwood of Bodie was an enthusiastic student of anatomy. In order to obtain bodies to study he engaged a gravedigger to provide him with corpses, which were plentiful in this wild town. He would clean up some of the bones and keep them in his office for future reference. The remains were supposed to have been restored to their graves but the grave digger found it easier to throw them down old mine shafts. One day someone discovered the mutilated corpses in the mine shafts and a search began for a mass murderer. About that time a woman patient, visiting Dr. Blackwood's office, saw a skull on the shelf. She screamed..."I'd know Aunt Nelly's gold teeth anywhere."

Subsequently, Dr. Blackwood's anatomy studies were discovered and he was run out of town.

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# **Anson Bruce, MD**

## **1818 - 1849**

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Gravemarker for Dr. Bruce... original condition on left, current status after restoration post-vandalism on right.



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## ***Sacramento Daily Union 'City Cemetery Sketch' 7/13/1872***

Dr. Anson Bruce, a native of Boston, died December 20th, 1849, aged 30 years. At the late Pioneer banquet Nathan Porter, referring to Dr. Bruce, said: "In the latter part of '48 or early in '49 there sailed from Boston an old brig called the 'Toronto'. Some of you may have been in her company. One of the company was a dear friend of mine and a kinsman of my wife. He left behind a young, intelligent and beautiful wife, and a lovely daughter of very tender age. The vicissitudes of the early pioneer were his. But in course of time his companions were scattered, and he found himself sole possessor of the brig.

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She was anchored in the Sacramento river opposite your beautiful city, and he found occupation in her. He occupied the vessel as a house. But absence from the dear ones at home, thoughts of his devoted wife and of his darling little one preyed upon his mind and deprived him of that zest for business so necessary for success. Bodily disease followed that of the mind, and after a heroic struggle for himself and family he finally yielded to the power of the great destroyer, and with broken heart he died. If you are waiting for his name, it was Anson Bruce. If any here knew him you knew an honest man."

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**Elizabeth Ewing, MD**  
**1839 - 1890**

**E. Ewing, MD**  
**1831-1894**

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Dr. Elizabeth Ewing moved from Pennsylvania to Ohio, where she was trained as a teacher. She traveled to Chicago, where she graduated from Women's Hospital Medical College in 1884. It was here she met and married Dr. George Ewing in 1870. She and her husband came to Sacramento where they built a large practice in surgery and female diseases.

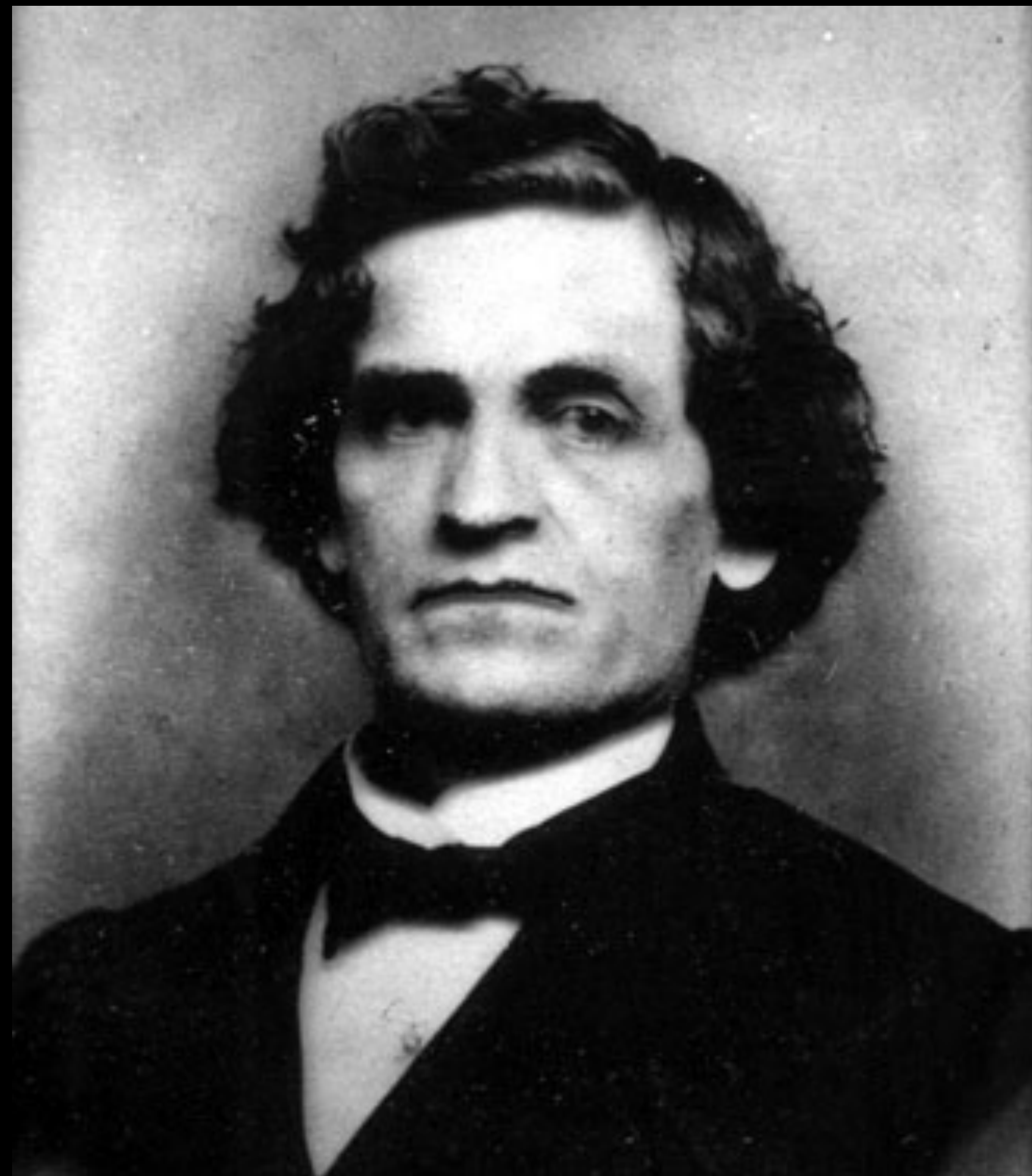
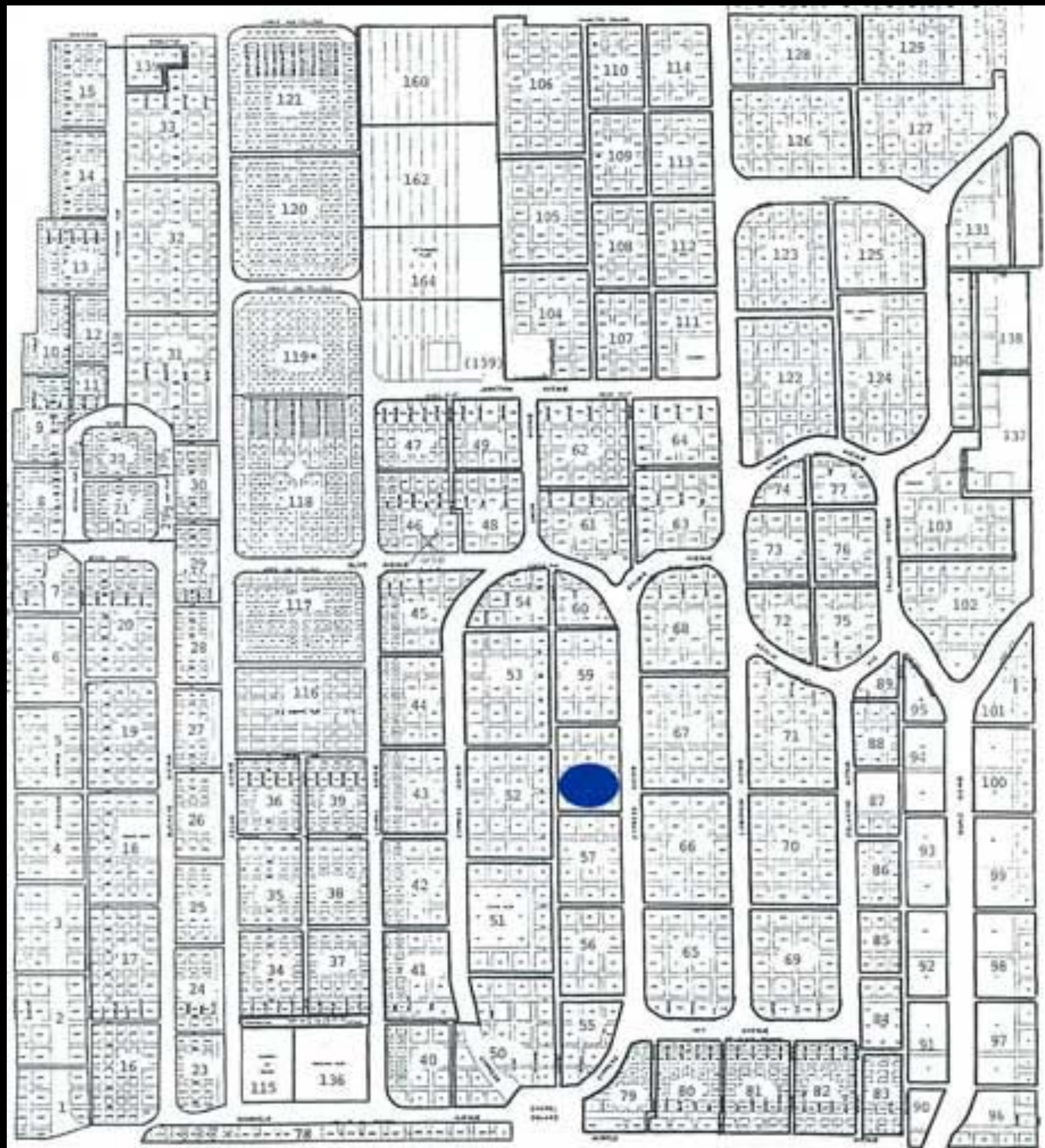
Dr. George Ewing was born in Hayesville, Ohio and received his medical degree from Western Reserve Medical College in Cleveland in 1852. He came to Sacramento via Amador County in 1884 with his second wife, Elizabeth.

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**Harvey Harkness, MD**  
**1821 - 1901**

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**Dr. Harkness has no gravemarker...**not clear whether he had one at one time and it disappeared or never had one. His wife has one (bottom right).

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Dr. Harkness was born in Pelham, Massachusetts in 1821 into a poor farming family of seven children. Parents, and all but one brother, died of tuberculosis while Dr. Harkness was still a youth. He received his medical degree from Pittsfield Medical College after serving an apprenticeship with Drs. Barrett and Thompson. It was for health reasons that he came to California. He was one of the many physicians who came overland to California during the Gold Rush of 1849. Unlike most of his medical colleagues, he did profit from gold mining. He mined at Bidwell's bar on the Feather River where he also practiced medicine.

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He began a successful medical practice in Sacramento in 1850. He married Amelia Griswald in 1854 only to grieve her death within a year. He never remarried. As a close friend to Governor Leland Stanford he was the trustee for the grant to establish Stanford University. Dr. Harkness was a member of Sacramento's first Board of Health in 1862 and was one of the twelve founding members of the Sacramento Society for Medical Improvement.

His primary avocations were education, fungi and finance. In recognition of his contributions to Sacramento's first Board of Education the Harkness Elementary School which still stands at 2147 54th Street was named after him. Because he made astute investments from his mining profits into real estate and the railroad, he became a wealthy man able to retire at age 48 to the Pacific Union Club in San Francisco.

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He devoted the rest of his days to Pacific Coast fungi, using his microscope, the first in the Sacramento area. As President of the California Academy of Science he published his findings which attracted attention throughout the world. He was 80 when he died. Funeral services were held at the Odd Fellows Cemetery in San Francisco. His cremated remains are buried at Sacramento's Old City Cemetery.

**He was:**

**Sacramento's first microscopist**

**Physician to the Railroad magnates, Leland Stanford, Charles Crocker,**

**Collis Huntington and Mark Hopkins**

**President of Sacramento's first Board of Education (1853)**

**President of the California Academy of Sciences (1887-1896)**

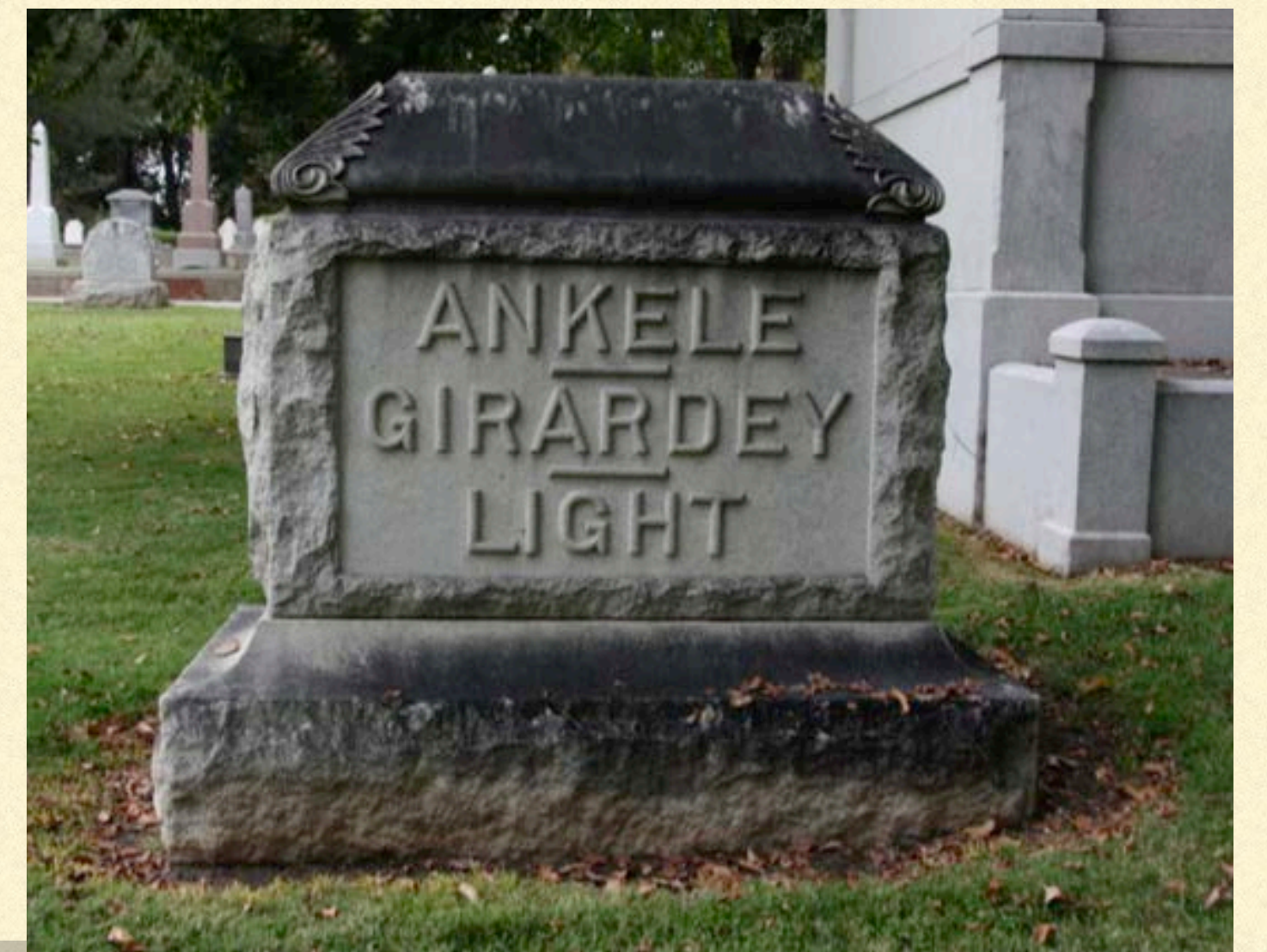
**World expert on Pacific Coast fungi**

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**William Light, MD**  
**1819 - 1895**

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Dr. Light proceeded to Sacramento where he found employment at a local mint for \$50 a day. Soon he was lured into the gold fields, first at Weaverville and then at Shingle Springs where he met a Spaniard who was telling about gold nuggets all over the ground at Dark Gulch near Sonora. Upon arriving there he and others found that they had fallen for the Dark Gulch Hoax, a ploy by a storekeeper to sell goods to those flocking to the area.

Upon returning to Sacramento in 1851 Dr. Light entered a medical partnership with Drs. Ames and McKenzie at which time he prepared his popular Light's Cholera Remedy. He married Mrs. C. M. Weber who was an artist, writer and botanist. Unfortunately he and his wife lost all of their property in the fire of 1852. From 1852 to 1861 he returned to dentistry in partnership with Dr. Pearson. In about 1860 Dr. Light became interested in mining properties in Sonora, Mexico, where a relative owned a mine in which Dr. Light invested. Upon traveling to Mexico to appraise the mine he found it worthless, but the owners went ahead with its development anyway. When it became apparent that Dr. Light was right, the investors decided to recover their losses by unloading the mine in San Francisco. They asked Dr. Light to prepare bogus assays which the good doctor refused.

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The mine was eventually sold to unwary investors. Dr. Light's share was \$55,000. Unfortunately the broker absconded with the money from the sale and made a quick trip to Germany. While in Mexico Dr. Light was caught up in the revolt against Maximilian and volunteered as surgeon for the Mexican Army. In gratitude a soldier brought him a rock which Dr. Light determined to be rich in gold beyond his wildest dreams. A claim was filed in Sonora where the rock was found and the mine was called Dos Hermanos. Smelting equipment was installed, living quarters were erected and the doctor's brother and nephew joined him in a very profitable operation. There was one problem. The mine was in lawless territory with bandits and hostile Yaqui Indians. One day a band of Yaqui Indians rode up to the mine cabin where Dr. Light and his nephew were seated on the porch. They did not know that their brother/father had been killed by the marauders as he was bathing in a nearby stream. Inside were two deserters from the American Army which Dr. Light had befriended. Before the good doctor could reach his rifles just inside the door, he was seized from behind by the deserters as he felt the sting of multiple bullets. His nephew was fatally wounded. Dr. Light fought off the deserters as he managed to enter the cabin, seize a rifle, and kill them both. (The Mexican Army had done a good job teaching him how to shoot).

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**Mary Cronemiller, MD**

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Dr. Cronemiller was born amid the Gold Fields along the Sacramento and Yuba Rivers in 1862. As a young woman, she fell in love with a physician, but for an unknown reason she did not marry...so she vowed "to become every bit as good a doctor as he was."

Dr. Cronemiller practiced medicine in Sacramento from 1891 until 1919, and was president of the local homeopathic organization. Her office was at 815 10th Street. She cared for those from all walks of life, from Sacramento's Crocker family and the Gladding family of Lincoln, to a multitude of others from Dixon to Yuba to Folsom and beyond.



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For a detailed history of Dr.  
Cronemiller, scan this QR  
code. It will link to an  
excellent article.



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**Henry Nichols, MD**  
**1823-1915**

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Dr. Nichols came by ship through Panama from Augusta, Maine, to Sacramento in 1853 to join his uncle, Allen Lambard, who owned the Sacramento Iron Works and the Lambard Flour Mill. Dr. Nichols' father, an attorney, had been Maine's Secretary of State. In 1845 Dr. Nichols graduated from Maine Medical School, Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, after which he completed post graduate studies at Philadelphia Medical College. His Sacramento office was at Second and I Streets.



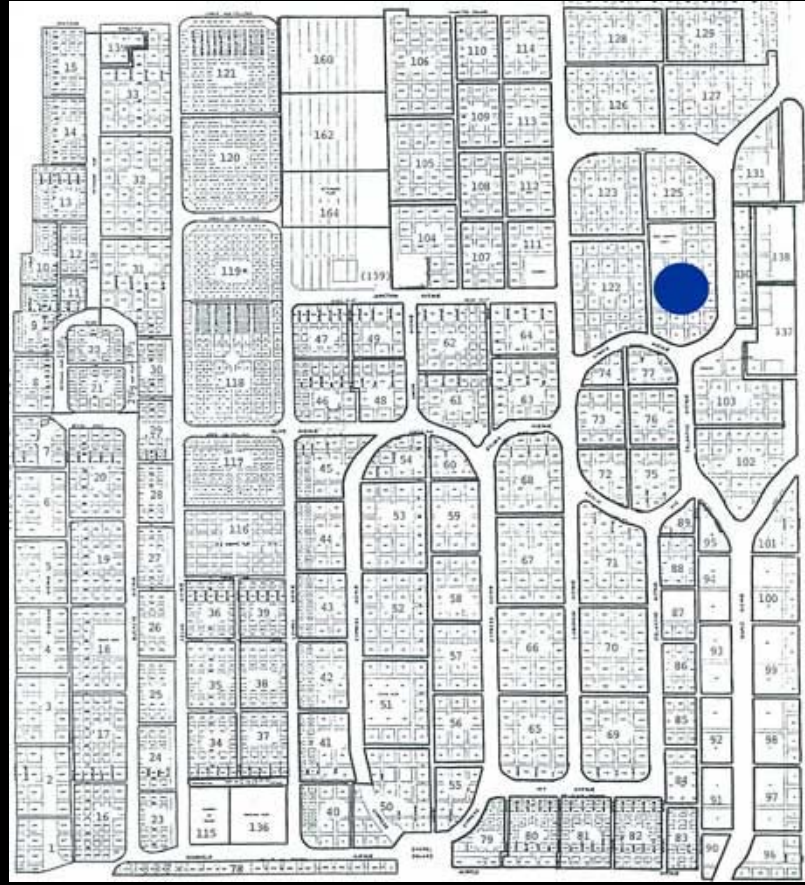
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# Alexander Nixon, MD

## 1821 - 1889

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Three years after his graduation from Ohio Medical College in Cincinnati, Dr. Nixon traveled overland in 1849 from his home in Hamilton, Ohio, to Coloma, California, in search of gold. His medical practice in Sacramento began in 1852 after returning to Ohio to pick up his family. In 1856 he took an active part in the organization of the Republican Party. He was active in medical, civic, political and religious organizations, serving as a Sacramento State Senator from 1862-1863.

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Tall, impeccably dressed with a Prince Albert Coat, tall hat and carrying a gold handled cane, Dr. Nixon could be seen in downtown Sacramento walking toward 13th and D Streets to the Central Pacific Railroad Hospital where he was chief surgeon from 1869 to 1885.

History was made by Dr. Nixon when he was President of the California State Medical Society in 1875. Five women physicians led by Euthanasia Meade, MD applied for membership. The vote to admit them was a tie and Dr. Nixon cast the deciding vote in favor of the women who became the first female members.

Dr. Nixon was one of the twelve founding members of the Sacramento Society for Medical Improvement and served as President in 1875. He was State Commissioner of Lunacy for 22 years. During the Civil War he was a United States examining physician for the Board of Enrollment. He was instrumental in popularizing the Republican Party in Sacramento, although in later years he supported the Prohibition Party and ran for mayor on that ticket. For many years he served on the Board of the Unitarian Society.

Dr. Nixon is buried in the Pioneer Section of Sacramento's Old City Cemetery. He was survived by three sons, a daughter, and his second wife, Anne Wisewell, who in 1892 obtained her MD from Cooper Medical College ( now Stanford School of Medicine) in San Francisco.

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**Dr. Nixon held the following offices while residing in Sacramento:**

**State Senator**

**Surgeon of the Board of Enrollment for the Middle District of California during the late Civil War**

**Commissioner of Lunacy, which he held for over twenty-five years**

**Secretary of the Sacramento Society for Medical Improvement**

**President of the Sacramento Society for Medical Improvement**

**Secretary, Vice-President and President of the State Medical Society**

**Surgeon-in-Chief of the C.P.R.R. (Central Pacific Railroad) Hospital.**

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Dr. Nixon's Gold Headed Cane



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**Ira Oatman, MD**  
**1819 - 1888**

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DR. IRA E. OATMAN

VILETTE OATMAN

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## **Ira E. Oatman, MD 1819-1888**

Dr. Oatman, born in Indiana and with a medical degree from Rush Medical College in Chicago, was lured by GOLD to Sacramento in 1849. In 1853 he returned to Illinois for his family before establishing his practice at 264 J Street.

He was a charter member and vice-president of the Sacramento Medical Society in 1857. He was active in the first California State Medical Society and was also Vice President of that organization. In 1868, as a founding member of the Sacramento Society for Medical Improvement, he presented many essays on the then-popular miasma theory as a cause of disease. His practice was primarily obstetrics, gynecology and internal medicine. He served on the Sacramento Board of Health for six years, was State Commissioner of Insanity for five years, and served the military as assistant surgeon for the Fourth Infantry Regiment,

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**Theodora Purkitt, MD**  
**1856 - 1923**

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173408

THEODORA TIFFEE PURKITT, M. D.

BORN IN SONOMA COUNTY, CAL.

JULY 12, 1856

DIED AT WILLOWS, CAL.

FEB. 8, 1923

DAUGHTER OF

JOHN RICHARD TIFFEE AND

REBECCA TERRILL POAGE TIFFEE

ERECTED BY HER CHILDREN

UNDER AUSPICES

OF

WILLOWS CHAPTER

D. A. R.

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Theodora's father moved to California from Kentucky and spent time in the Placer County gold, then moved to Sonoma County and became a successful stock raiser, acquiring 2,500 acres in Glenn County.

Theodora Tiffie was born near Petaluma and raised in Glenn County. She attended the Sacramento Seminary and, in 1873, married George Purkitt. George was an engineer and surveyor, and had an ancestor reported to have participated in the Boston Tea Party. They lived on the Tiffie ranch with their six children. To ensure her ability to educate and care for their children, she sold the ranch and moved to Willows. She attended Cooper Medical College in San Francisco, graduating with honors in 1894. She opened an office in Willows, became a member of the California Medical Association, and made numerous contributions to medical journals. She also continued her agricultural and stock raising interests, and joined the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1921. She died two years later.

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# **Gustavus Lincoln Simmons, MD**

## **1832 - 1910**

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**SIMMONS**, Gustavus Lincoln, MD 75y6m21d Oct 4 Oct 6 1910 B 122 5

H Hingham, Plymouth Co, MA; carcinoma of cardiac; over 50 yrs Sac'to MD; husb of Celia C.

Dr. Simmons original trip to Sacramento was to assist his brother-in-law, Dr. Henry May, at the Old Boston Drug store at 48 J Street. He worked as a pharmacist and irregular physician until 1854 when he left for Boston. He became the first person from California to receive an MD from the Medical Department of Harvard University and, on his return to Sacramento, he began 50 years as a beloved family practitioner.

Dr. Simmons was the **guiding force in organizing the Sacramento Society for Medical Improvement**. It was in his office at 46 J Street that twelve of Sacramento's leading physicians held the first meeting on March 17, 1868.

He traveled to Italy to select **Italian stone pine trees** saplings and, tending them on the long voyage home, planted them around Capitol Park.

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**He made it possible for the Sisters of Mercy to start what is now Mercy Hospital** by selling his hospital, Ridge Home, to the Sisters at a bargain price, loaning them the money to pay for it and refusing the last payment. He also taught the sisters how to run a hospital

Throughout his life Dr. Simmons was active in medical, educational and civic affairs.

- Member of the City Board of Health in 1868, serving several terms.
- City Board of Education in 1858 and was its first secretary.
- State Commissioner of Lunacy for twenty years
- Brigade Surgeon for the National Guard
- President of the California State Medical Society 1894-95
- President of the Sacramento Society for Medical Improvement 1878-79.

Dr. Simmons had the largest and most expensive funeral of the time, costing \$595. He was survived by his wife and two sons, both graduates of Harvard Medical School.

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**Joseph Frey, MD**  
**1819-1888**

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Dr. Frey was a native of New York City and arrived in San Francisco on June 18, 1849, coming around Cape Horn. His office was at Third and J Streets. He stood high in his profession and was highly respected. He had a fine mineral collection which he sold to the State and it was placed in the State Library. 14 years before his death he moved to Newcastle for his health and planted what became the oldest and best orange and lemon orchard in Placer County.

*From the Union of July 13, 1888*

FREY, Joseph M., M.D. 68y9m Jul 12 1888 B 125 1 12 H NY; general debility; res/Newcastle, CA; memb Soc/CA Pioneers

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**Louise C Heilbron DO**  
**1873-1933**

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Dr. Helibron was the best-known osteopath in the State because of her successful practice, her prominent Pioneer family and her contributions to the civic life of both Sacramento and San Diego.

The oldest of 10 children, she was born in Sacramento and moved to San Diego at age 15. Her father, from Germany, came to California to join his brothers in the cattle business, and also later founded the Buffalo Brewery. Her Uncle, August Helibron, owned a magnificent house at 7<sup>th</sup> and O Street where she occasionally lived.

Lousie was tall, slender, green-eyed with curly red hair. She never married...possibly because she may have discouraged her suitors by insisting that they pass a medical exam. She always wanted to be a doctor but due to her father's death, when her youngest sibling was an infant, she was needed at home. She later attended the California College of Osteopathy at Irvine.

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She graduated in 1900 and began her practice in San Diego, later moving to Sacramento and then San Francisco...just in time to lose her office and home in the earthquake. She returned to San Diego and then to Sacramento with a busy practice until her unexpected death following emergency surgery for a ruptured appendix.

She always was involved in community activities, having been a charter member of the San Diego Daughters of the Golden West, serving as State President in 1929. She organized the PTA in San Diego and was a charter member of the San Diego Business and Professional Women. She was a co-founder of Sacramento Soroptimist International and Chair on Public Health Matters for the State Osteopathic Association.

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The following physicians at the Sacramento Historic City Cemetery need additional research, as information on them has not been readily available.

If you have any information you would be willing to share on any of the physicians please contact me.

Dr. Bob LaPerriere  
Curator, SSVMS Museum of Medical History  
[ssvmsmus@gmail.com](mailto:ssvmsmus@gmail.com)

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# Leman Bates, MD



**Silas  
Seymour  
Crane, MD**

**1822 - 1881**







We need to be appreciative of the  
foundwork that all our early physicians accomplished to help  
prepare for the subsequent, almost two centuries, of  
Sacramento development leading  
up to our community today.

You are encouraged to visit the  
Sacramento Historic City Cemetery at  
10th and Broadway and visit the gravesites,  
and pay respect, to our pioneers and  
pioneer physicians that were responsible  
for the area we live in today.

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Please contact Dr. Bob LaPerriere at:

[ssvmsmus@gmail.com](mailto:ssvmsmus@gmail.com)

with any comments or question, and explore the other resources available at our museum website:

<http://www.ssvms.org/museum>

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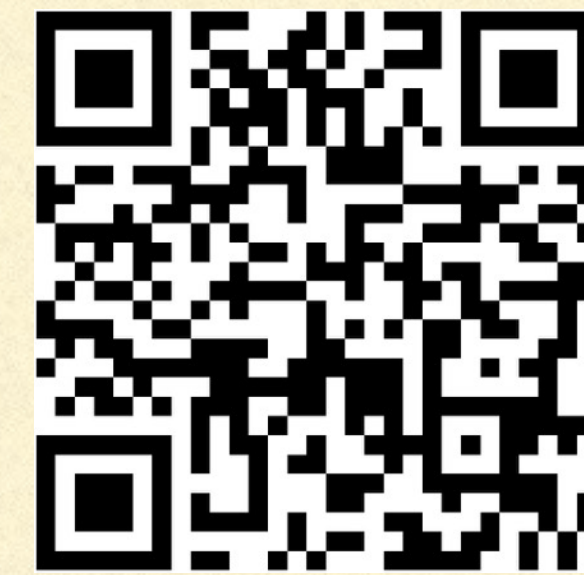
## **Medical History Articles by Irma West, MD**

<http://www.ssvmmh.org/west-article-index.html>



## **City Cemetery Committee Website**

<http://www.historicoldcitycemetery.org>



## **City Cemetery City Website**

<https://www.cityofsacramento.org/ParksandRec/Parks/Specialty-Parks/City-Cemetery>

