

# Los Angeles Department of City Planning

## RECOMMENDATION REPORT

### CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION

CASE NO.: CHC-2008-4385-HCM

**HEARING DATE:** November 6, 2008  
**TIME:** 10:00 AM  
**PLACE:** City Hall, Room 1010  
200 N. Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA  
90012

Location: 7000 Parsons Trail  
Council District: 2  
Community Plan Area: Sunland-Tujunga-Lake View  
Terrace- Shadow Hills- East La Tuna Canyon  
Area Planning Commission: North Valley  
Neighborhood Council: Sunland-Tujunga  
Legal Description: Lot 2713 of TR 3947 (MB 72-60)

**PROJECT:** Historic-Cultural Monument Application for the  
VERDUGO HILLS OF PEACE PIONEER CEMETERY

**REQUEST:** Declare the property a Historic-Cultural Monument

**APPLICANT:** Verdugo Hills Preservation Society  
Mary Lou Pozzo and Kathleen Travers  
10966 Hillhaven Avenue  
Tujunga, CA 91042

**OWNER:** Hills of Peace  
7000 Parsons Trail  
Tujunga, CA 91402  
  
Hills of Peace  
353 S. New Hampshire Ave  
Los Angeles, CA 90005

### **RECOMMENDATION** That the Cultural Heritage Commission:

1. **Take the property under consideration** as a Historic-Cultural Monument per Los Angeles Administrative Code Chapter 9, Division 22, Article 1, Section 22.171.10(c)4 because the application and accompanying photo documentation suggest the submittal may warrant further investigation.
2. **Adopt** the report findings.

S. GAIL GOLDBERG, AICP  
Director of Planning  
**[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]**

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Ken Bernstein, AICP, Manager  
Office of Historic Resources

Prepared by:  
**[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]**

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Edgar Garcia, Preservation Planner  
Office of Historic Resources

Attached Exhibits: July 1, 2008 Historic-Cultural Monument Application

## **Verdugo Hills of Peace Pioneer Cemetery**

**CHC-2008-4385-HCM**

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### **SUMMARY**

Established in 1922, the subject area is a four-acre cemetery set on hilly terrain in the Sunland-Tujunga community of the City of Los Angeles. The subject area contains a landscaped entrance, a rectangular-plan mausoleum building built in 1957, and several examples of trees including Canary Island Pines (*Pinus canariensis*), Coastal Live Oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*), Scrub Oaks, and shrubbery. Natural river rock is used throughout the subject property to outline cemetery plots and pathways. The location of the cemetery also offers panoramic views of the San Fernando Valley.

The cemetery was established in 1922 by Marshall Valentine Hartranft, the developer and founder of Tujunga as a utopian cooperative. Hartranft originally intended using the subject property to construct his residence; instead, moved by the death of a popular local preacher, Hartranft designated the four-acre area a cemetery and buried the preacher there. The Verdugo Hills of Peace Pioneer cemetery would become the burial place for the local residents of the community. The cemetery was closed in 1978.

Alterations to the subject property include the addition of the mausoleum building in 1957, hillside stabilization following mudslides in 1978, and new fencing and gates in 2008.

### **CRITERIA**

The criterion is the Cultural Heritage Ordinance which defines a historical or cultural monument as any site (including significant trees or other plant life located thereon) building or structure of particular historic or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles, such as historic structures or sites in which the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community is reflected or exemplified, or which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, State or local history or which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction, or a notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influenced his age. At issue is whether the Commissioners determine the building is significant enough to warrant designation.

### **FINDINGS**

Based on the facts set forth in the summary and application, the Commission determines that the application is complete and that the property is significant enough to warrant further investigation as a potential Historic-Cultural Monument.

**SIGNIFICANCE WORK SHEET**

TYPE OR HAND PRINT IN ALL CAPITAL BLOCK LETTERS

*Complete One or Both of the Upper and Lower Portions of This Page*

**ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

THE Verdugo Hills of Peace Pioneer Cemetery IS AN IMPORTANT EXAMPLE OF  
NAME OF PROPOSED MONUMENT

ARCHITECTURE  
ARCHITECTURAL STYLE (SEE LINE 8)

AND MEETS THE CULTURAL HERITAGE ORDINANCE BECAUSE OF THE HIGH QUALITY OF ITS DESIGN AND THE RETENTION OF ITS ORIGINAL FORM, DETAILING AND INTEGRITY.

**A-N-D/O-R**

**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

THE Verdugo Hills of Peace Pioneer Cemetery WAS BUILT IN 1922  
NAME OF PROPOSED MONUMENT YEAR BUILT

The Valley's 3rd oldest cemetery, built by Tujunga founder Marshall Hartranft, WAS IMPORTANT TO THE  
NAME OF FIRST OR SIGNIFICANT OTHER

DEVELOPMENT OF LOS ANGELES BECAUSE it holds the remains of pioneers who chose to live forever in the Foothills they loved; its first funeral filled the L. A. Times front page. Those interred include Sunland's first postal carrier, three Civil War veterans and a Brigadier General, the Foothills most noted builder and Tujunga's first historian. Nature builder George Harris, architect/builder of Bolton Hall (HCM #2), built the lava rock wall encircling the pioneer burial bluff; he was buried here in 1940. In 1978, after torrential rains, the Cemetery slope gave way in the internationally famous flood of 55 bodies through local streets. Its setting and view are magnificent.

**HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT  
APPLICATION**

TYPE OR HAND PRINT IN ALL CAPITAL BLOCK LETTERS

**IDENTIFICATION**

1. NAME OF PROPOSED MONUMENT Verdugo Hills of Peace Pioneer Cemetery
2. STREET ADDRESS 7000 Parsons Trail
- CITY Tujunga ZIP CODE 91042 COUNCIL DISTRICT 2
3. ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NO. 2553-010-900
4. COMPLETE LEGAL DESCRIPTION: TRACT 3947
- BLOCK none LOT(S) 2713 ARB. NO. none
5. RANGE OF ADDRESSES ON PROPERTY 6994 - 7000 - 7040 W. Parsons Trail
6. PRESENT OWNER Hills of Peace (endowment care administered by State of California)
- STREET ADDRESS 7000 Parsons Trail E-MAIL ADDRESS: arspoetica@earthlink.net
- CITY Tujunga STATE CA ZIP CODE 91042 PHONE (818) 352-3420
- OWNERSHIP: PRIVATE  PUBLIC
7. PRESENT USE pioneer cemetery ORIGINAL USE cemetery (closed 1978)

**DESCRIPTION**

8. ARCHITECTURAL STYLE n/a - 4-acre geographic landmark  
(SEE STYLE GUIDE)
9. STATE PRESENT PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE OR STRUCTURE (SEE OPTIONAL DESCRIPTION WORK SHEET, 1 PAGE MAXIMUM)
- The Valley's 3rd oldest cemetery sits on a 4-acre plateau that rises on the east to a brief knoll, before sheering upward to the abrupt peaks of the San Gabriels. It drops off steeply on its southern and western ends, more gently to the north before lifting to join the mountains. A driveway enters the fenced site from the north, between five mature Canary Island pines, planted by the L. A. Fire Department; it terminates in a circular bench planter filled with a large scrub oak, beyond which stands a small rectangular mausoleum. On the left, a stepped path climbs the knoll to its encircling crown of a lava rock wall. On the right, a paved surface awaits a new visitors' pavilion. Ten coastal live oaks and native and Mediterranean shrubs dot the site. An offshoot of the Sierra Madre fault, a network of burrows and a year-round stream tunnel beneath the surface.

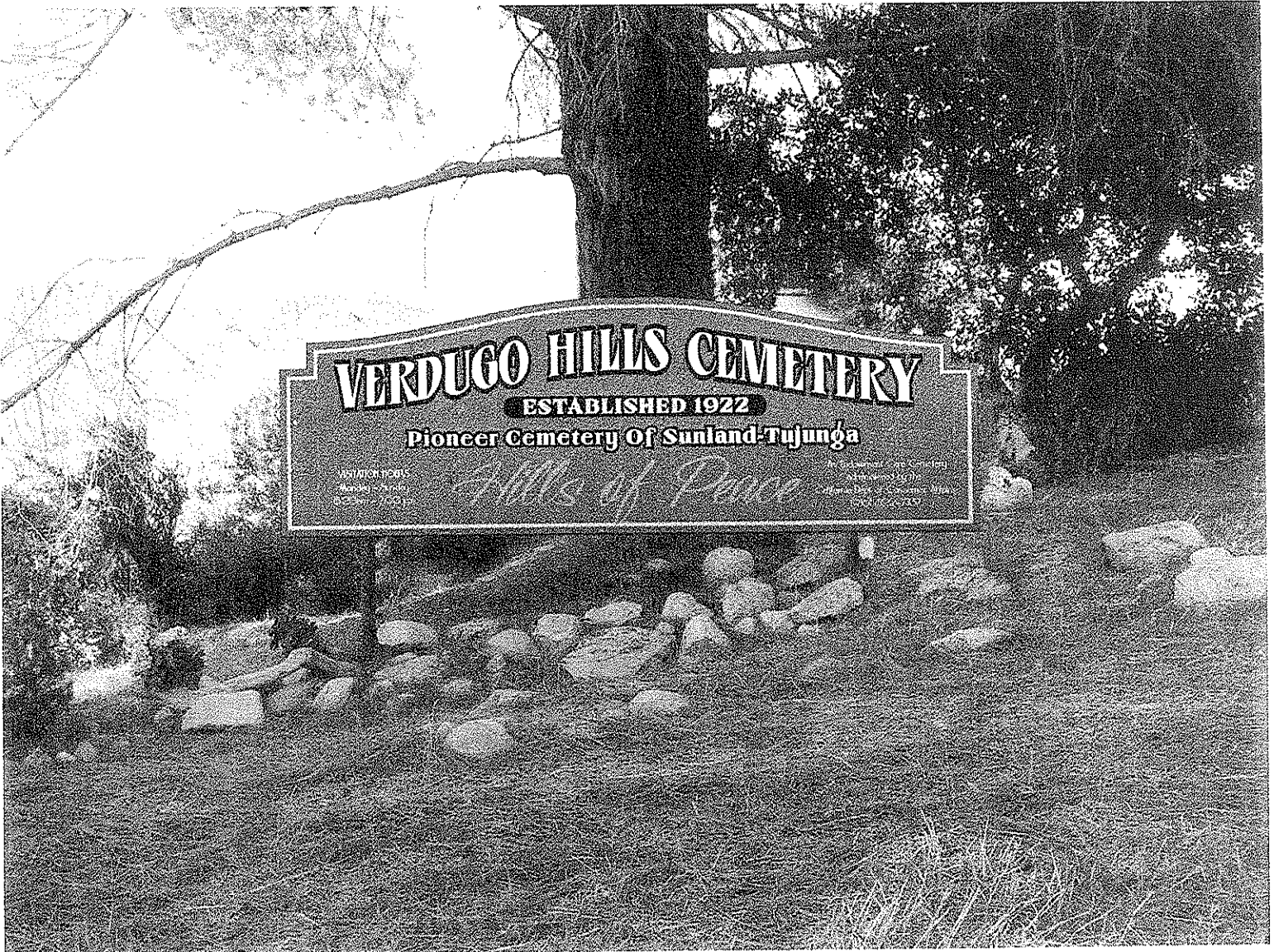
**HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT  
APPLICATION**

**NAME OF PROPOSED MONUMENT** Verdugo Hills of Peace Pioneer Cemetery

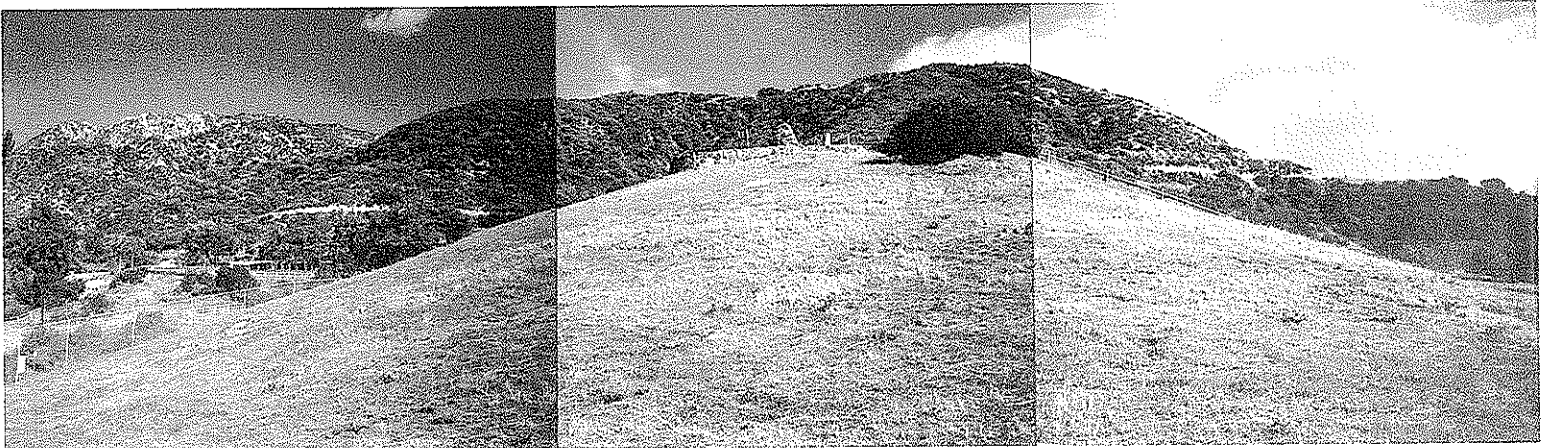
10. CONSTRUCTION DATE: 1922 FACTUAL:  ESTIMATED:
11. ARCHITECT, DESIGNER, OR ENGINEER Marshall Valentine Hartranft
12. CONTRACTOR OR OTHER BUILDER Hartranft Construction: Georae Harris
13. DATES OF ENCLOSED PHOTOGRAPHS April 22, 1922 - March, 2008  
(1 8X10 BLACK AND WHITE GLOSSY AND 1 DIGITAL E-MAILED TO CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION@LACITY.ORG)
14. CONDITION:  EXCELLENT  GOOD  FAIR  DETERIORATED  NO LONGER IN EXISTENCE
15. ALTERATIONS A concrete mausoleum, added in 1957; hillside stabilization following 1978 mudslide/disintern-  
ment; security gate and fencing (2002); new security gate and fence reinforcement in 2008
16. THREATS TO SITE:  NONE KNOWN  PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT  VANDALISM  PUBLIC WORKS PROJECT  
 ZONING  OTHER erosion, private development, vandalism, earthquake and neglect
17. IS THE STRUCTURE:  ON ITS ORIGINAL SITE  MOVED  UNKNOWN

**SIGNIFICANCE**

18. BRIEFLY STATE HISTORICAL AND/OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE: INCLUDE DATES, EVENTS, AND PERSON ASSOCIATED WITH THE SITE (SEE ALSO SIGNIFICANCE WORK SHEET. 750 WORDS MAXIMUM IF USING ADDITIONAL SHEETS)  
see attached statement
19. SOURCES (LIST BOOKS, DOCUMENTS, SURVEYS, PERSONAL INTERVIEWS WITH DATES) Original cemetery burial records (and other  
original cemetery documents); series of interviews with the late Edwin Carpenter; attached bibliography
20. DATE FORM PREPARED 07/01/2008 PREPARER'S NAME Mary Lou Pozzo, Kathleen Travers  
ORGANIZATION Verdugo Hills Preservation Society STREET ADDRESS 10966 Hillhaven Ave.  
CITY Tujunga STATE CA ZIP CODE 91042 PHONE (818) 352-3420  
E-MAIL ADDRESS: arspoetica@earthlink.net



The entrance to the cemetery



View east of Pioneer Hill

Note: Photos in this section by Mary Lou Pozzo, various dates 2002-2008





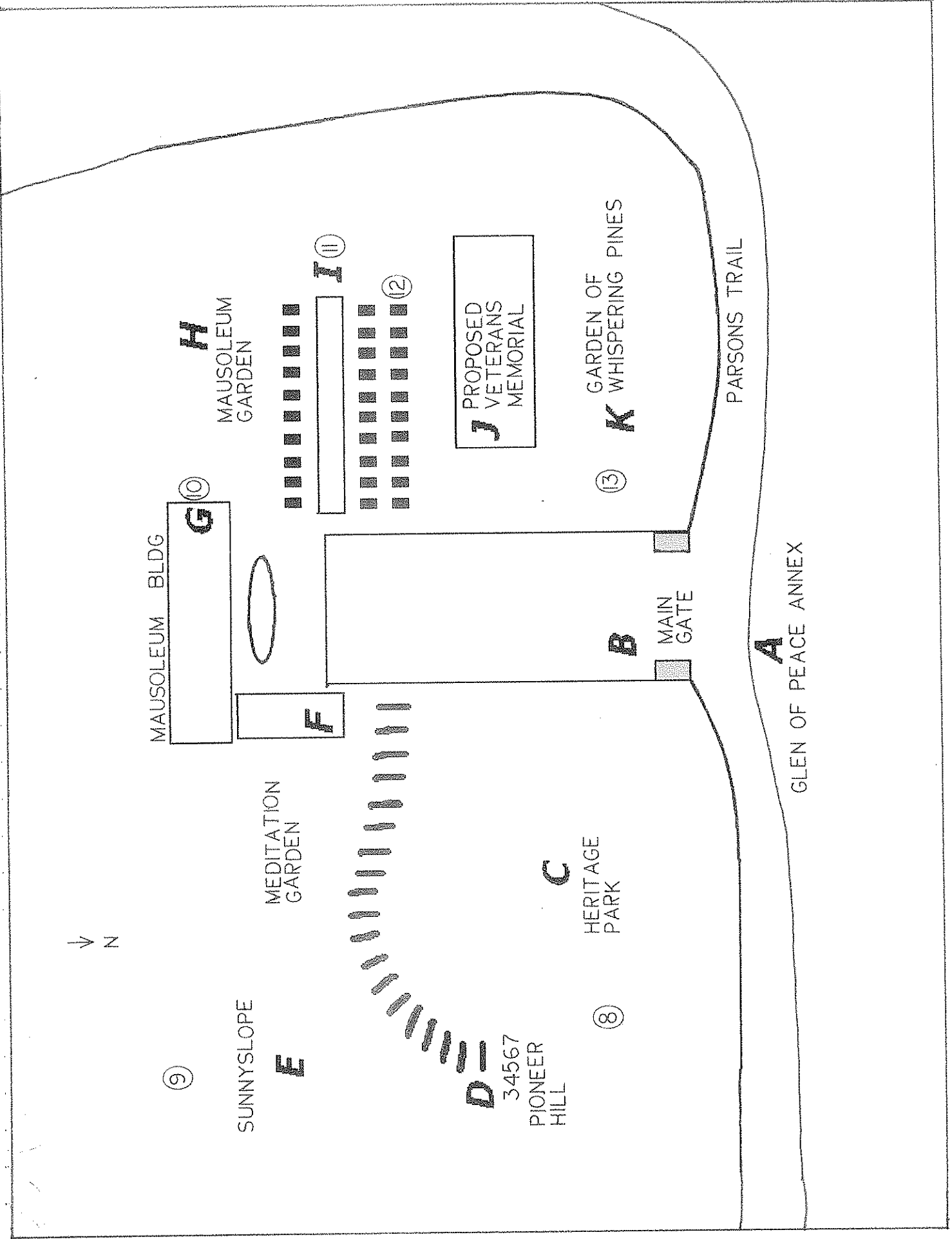
Views west from the Hills of Peace: the San Fernando Valley



Above: Future site of the Visitor's Pavilion beneath the Whispering Pines  
Below: The Meditation Garden







Cradled by rugged San Gabriels north and east and Verdugo Hills on the south, the semi-circular plateau gazes onto an unobstructed view of the small valley below and the great valley beyond. That a cemetery stands here instead of the home of Marshall Hartranft (the developer land baron who co-founded Tujunga with socialist-utopian William Smythe), hinged on a promise Hartranft made to his friend, itinerant preacher Parson Wornum, that he would spend eternity in the Foothills he loved.

One of a number of characters immortalized by John Stephen McGroarty in his L.A. Times column "From the Green Verdugo Hills," James T. Wornum settled in Monte Vista (Sunland) in 1903. The Civil War veteran, known for a rich pipe-organ voice and his way with horses, inhabited the abandoned Baptist church in Sunland Park with his Free Methodist services, then built the Tujunga Union Gospel Mission in 1921. Weekdays, he could be found bending his strong back digging a cesspool,



*From his wagon, the Parson held services wherever he could gather enough worshippers.*

spreading fertilizer on a garden, or building a home for anyone in need. The entire Tujunga

Valley turned out for his 1922 funeral, which made the Los Angeles Times front page in what one reporter labeled "a picturesque pageant . . . of a character never witnessed in these modern times."

Only a week earlier, "Marsh" Hartranft had his building crew



*The entire community paid their respects to their beloved Parson, accompanying him on his final journey up Parson's Trail to the new Verdugo Hills Cemetery. Photo courtesy of Bolton Hall Museum.*

"throw" a road around the hill planned for his own home to provide his preacher friend a burial place, thus creating the Cemetery, which he deeded to Tujunga's people in perpetuity.

Hiram Hatch (b. 1843 Michigan -1922), Civil War captain and warden of the Michigan State Penitentiary, settled in the Little Lands Colony at its 1913 inception with his daughter Mabel, 33, and his sister, Corabelle Linaberry. The cottage that he and Mabel built (after months clearing thousands of stones from their 1¼ acres) was featured in Hartranft's promotional brochure on the Colony.

In 1923, Aunt Jenny Wornum (b. Pennsylvania 1851) joined the Parson. An evangelist preacher and singer, she had traveled the church circuit of the Southland with her husband in their horse-drawn camp wagon,

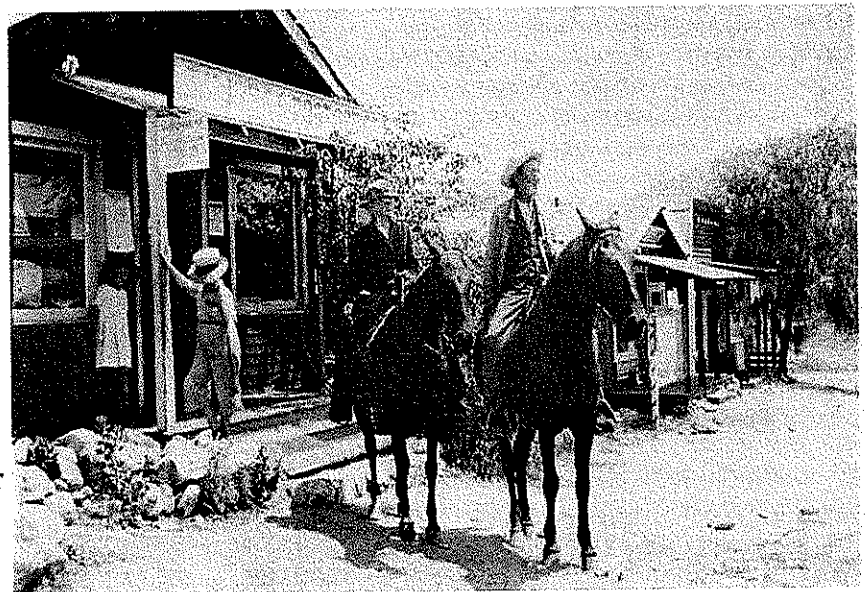
playing the portable organ it carried.

Childless, she treasured all the valley's children, who remembered fondly the "horse whisperer" who taught them riding and horse care – and her ready pocket of candy. Later that year, nature builder George

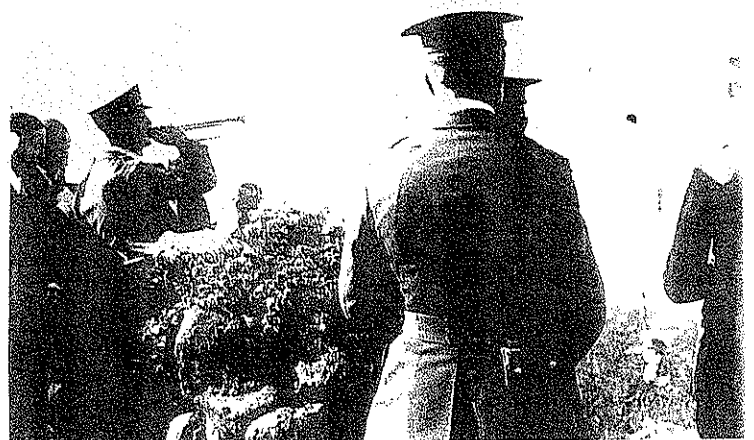
Harris built the lava rock wall

around those early graves on what is now known as Pioneer Hill.

Brig. General Henry Hatch (1869 - 1931, son of Hiram), joined the Army at the height of the Spanish-American War; over a lifetime of service, he rose to positions commanding the country's most valuable and vulnerable points of entry. At his death, he served as commander of anti-aircraft



Aunt Jenny and the Parson at Tujunga's first post office

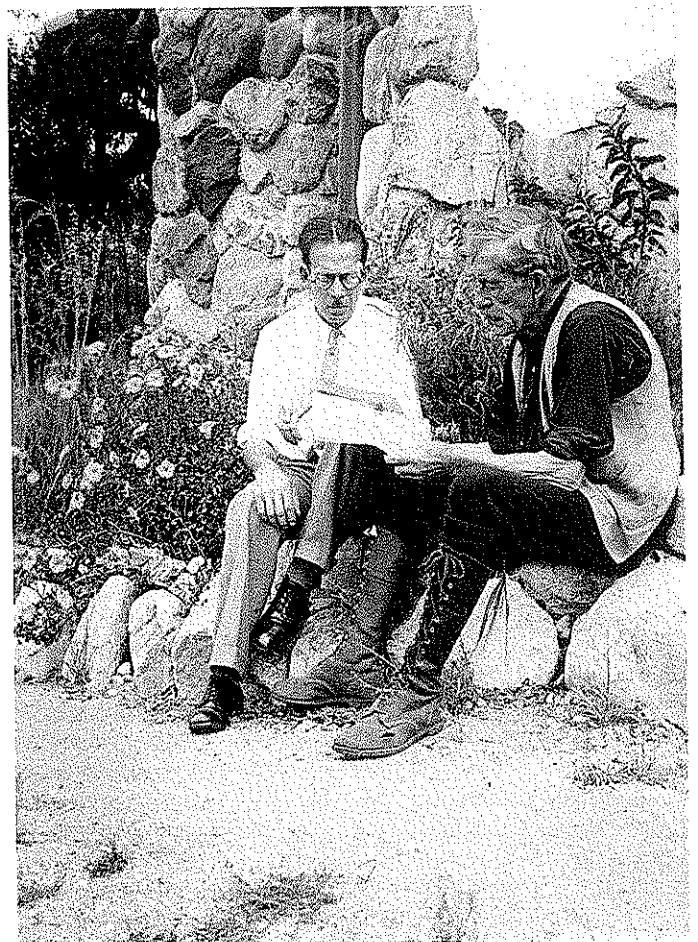


Brigadier General H. W. Hatch's burial service at the Cemetery



defences and the harbor of New York, at this time handling more passengers and cargo than all other major harbors in the country combined, and one of the world's greatest. His body lay in state for two days at Governor's Island, mourning guns booming at half-hour intervals, where he was honored with what the New York Times called "an impressive military ceremony" (in 13 column inches), before coming to rest on Pioneer Hill beneath an upright lava headstone crafted by George Harris.

Builder, craftsman, publisher, advertiser, philosopher-poet and eccentric George Washington Harris (b. Ohio 1866) called himself the "highest paid pick and shovel artist in the world;" charter member of McGroarty's celebrated Millionaire's Club of Contentment and Happiness, he walked Tujunga's streets in sandals, sunglasses and shorts cut-off from old work trousers, his gnarled poison oak cane and a copy of the Iliad under his arm, famously ready of wit and temper. Arriving in Los Angeles in 1906, he went to work for Hartranft's "The Western Empire." He had settled in Tujunga by 1909 when he first began his work as nature builder assembling brush and branches from his land into furniture – he'd filled an acre with them before he sold one, but soon was out of stock and thereafter in constant demand. He styled himself in the mold of the Roycrofters, eventually producing his own magazine of stories, quotes and philosophy, followed by a Record-Ledger column "Philosophy of the Hill Tribes." He worked until a week before his 1940 death, and is buried in an unmarked grave beyond the lava wall he built.



The elderly George Harris before one of his structures

Daisy Bell Rinehart (1878 La Crescenta - 1953 Tucson) bravely rode her buckboard daily over the lonely path – rocky, pitted, and sometimes flooded – through Shadow Hills to the Roscoe Station for the Monte Vista mail. She inherited this grit from her father Horace, who wrote about his harrowing experiences in Los Angeles' early mounted police in "Reminiscences of a Ranger."

WWI vet Phillip Farmer Johnson (1893 - 1956) represents the first family of the little valley, settlers in the Big Tujunga Canyon in the 1870s. His father John built the Monte Vista Inn (1880 - later the popular dance pavilion Twin Pines), and he was nephew to Cornelius Johnson, who killed the last California grizzly in 1916, and to Alvarado "Alva" Johnson, notorious train robber. "Aunt Alva" (as he was referred to by Johnsons anxious to avoid any association) was jailed for the 1894 Roscoe Train Robbery, "the boldest" in Southern California history, and later attempted escape from San Quentin. Aunt Mary Ann owned the Big Tujunga water rights. Phillip was a beekeeper (a family mainstay since the '80s) and owned Johnson Lumber.

Mabel Hatch's (1880 - 1957) community leadership began with organizing Bolton Hall dances for the Colony with dance and box lunch auctions to cover the building's maintenance.

Purchasing Tujunga's original insurance agency in 1924, she ran it successfully the rest of her life. She became a tireless caretaker of the area's history and abandoned animals, a 30-year champion of the Cemetery, and assembled the valley's first history, "The Green Verdugo Hills" (1952). Her cremated remains were buried in the lava wall.



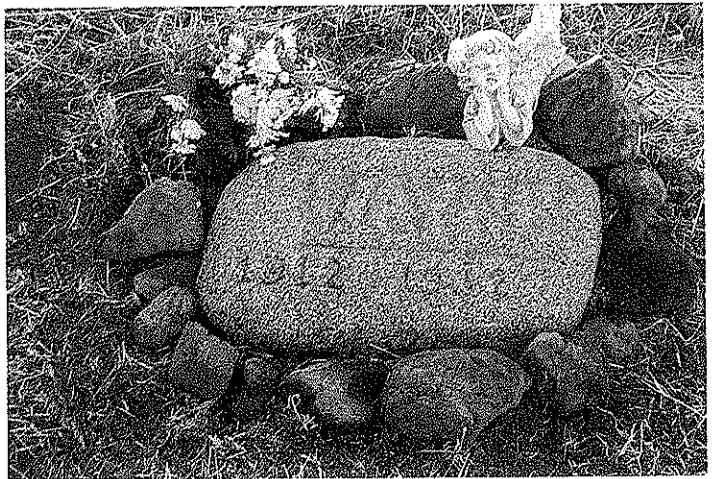
In the following years, the Cemetery fell out of community proprietorship, and its unscrupulous owners lived off the prophets of burials without maintaining the site. Resultingly, a heavy storm series in February, 1978, sent 55 corpses from an unreinforced hillside into Sunland-Tujunga. While the world watched, L. A.'s celebrated County Coroner Thomas Noguchi and his staff worked to collect and identify, where possible, the dead. In an official ceremony, they were reinterred in a



*Heavy rains tore open graves and sent corpses tumbling down the hillside.  
Photo courtesy of The Record-Ledger, February 16, 1978.*

stable section, a monument at the base of the flagpole marking those who remained unknown. The Cemetery was then closed by the State to burials.

But the Cemetery's history continues. Just this month, the hand-carved marker of the unknown "Wayne" received an identity for the records when 93-year-old Ruth Spencer Cronberg of Eugene, Oregon visited with two nieces, and named him as her brother, Isaac Wayne Spencer (1912-1932). In the summer of 1932, the young man, who had as a child volunteered to help build his new school, had just been accepted as a violinist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He was killed in a head-on collision with drunk driver Fiona Lorenz, who had previously killed two others driving while intoxicated.



## Bibliography

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