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Clarksville preservation continues



A new wrought iron fence will better protect the Clarksville Cemetery from vandalism. A June 7 fundraiser will raise money to build a new front gate, repair the pillars and erect a new archway. Village Life by Julie Samrick

Not just a young community born in the last 50 years, El Dorado Hills is steeped in history. During the Gold Rush era a portion of southern El Dorado Hills visible from Highway 50 was known as Clarksville and one local group makes sure it's not forgotten.

Once Clarksville's schoolhouse, today a dilapidated barn is one of the last remaining structures and it's on the Clarksville Region Historical Society's watch list to protect.

Founded in 2006 to identify and preserve objects of historical interest, the Clarksville Region Historical Society "enlists public support for the historical preservation and display of documents, artifacts, records and other objects of historical interest related to historic Clarksville and the surrounding region."

As El Dorado Hills teems with modern growth, another remnant of Clarksville remains. High on a hill above the Mercedes-Benz dealership the Clarksville Cemetery (once called the Mormon Tavern Cemetery) houses the remains of at least 90 individuals who were part of a dozen families, including the Joerger family that owned a sprawling ranch where El Dorado Hills Boulevard is today.

Corporal Samuel E. Kyburz, a veteran of the Civil War and prominent figure in California's history, was buried in the Clarksville Cemetery in 1917.

If not settlers, many people buried in the cemetery were passing through the then transient town of Clarksville on the way east. The earliest grave is marked 1853.

"The cemetery is the most pressing preservation because once it becomes known it's subject to vandalism and we want to protect it," said Clarksville Region Historical Society vice president Betty January. "There's a lot of history there. We might even discover more."

Over the years headstones have been damaged and outright stolen.

There are also stories of extraordinary volunteer efforts to preserve the cemetery, like when youth Jeff Carlson used a cadaver dog to locate unmarked graves as part of his Eagle Scout project in 2008. "People died of cholera and nobody wanted to touch them so they were just buried," January explained during a site tour.

Only a barbed wire fence protected the cemetery until earlier this spring when a 610-foot wrought iron perimeter fence was installed.

Donors' contributions and two local grants added up to the \$13,000 needed. The new fence was installed by Linmoore Fencing.

Approximately \$4,000 still needs to be raised to complete the renovation. January said the cemetery still needs a new front gate, the original pillars built at the turn of the 20th century need to be repaired and a new Clarksville Cemetery archway is planned. January said benches will also be installed in the future and she'd like to see prominent donors' names sandblasted onto the benches or placed on a plaque.

January does have one concern with better security. "We will have a lock on the gate, but we want to be sure the descendants' families aren't locked out of their own cemetery," she said. "Just over Memorial Day a whole slew of Wilsons came up to put flowers on headstones as they do every year."

The pioneering Wilson family has one plot dating back to 1882.

Jim and Erlinda Vindler of Vindler Real Estate & Acquisitions will host a fundraiser on Saturday, June 7, from noon to 4 p.m. to benefit the Clarksville Region Historical Society. Monies will first be used for the entry gate, arch and repaired pillars, but the next priority will be the barn.

"Preserving Clarksville is an ongoing effort," said January. "The barn is next. We've already used \$1,500 (from the Historic Society's) general fund to put up panels to protect the roof, which is missing right now. We want to get that taken care of before winter."

The public is invited to meet at the Vindler Real Estate office in El Dorado Hills, 4540 Post Street, Suite 230. Free shuttle rides to the cemetery where guided tours by costumed docents will be offered. There will be live music, raffle prizes and food and drink for sale back in the parking lot in front of the office (across from Starbucks).

The Vindlers, who have lived in El Dorado County since 1988, have been in real estate for more than 20 years. "Jim is going all out for the fundraiser," said January. "Once he learned about Clarksville and the cemetery he got all excited."

The Vindlers will give 100 percent of the fundraiser's proceeds to the Clarksville Region Historical Society. "I wanted to be Indiana Jones before there was an Indiana Jones," Jim told Village Life about his love of history and archaeology. "Our kids are grown and it's the right time for us to help preserve local history."

In Placerville the Vindlers are concurrently working on another restoration project. They're renovating Old City Hall, where they moved their offices into the nicknamed "catsup" side of the "catsup and mustard" building Jan. 1.

January said they've been busy readying the cemetery for the big unveil. "We've been cleaning, removing branches and debris," she said. "It's in pretty good shape for the tour."

As for the future, January said, "We will be having Clarksville Day again." The annual spring event the Historical Society hosted until 2012 to bring alive the spirit of Clarksville has been on hiatus

since the Silva Valley interchange construction cut into event parking.

January emphasized the new interchange will not impact Clarksville in the long run. “The only thing we lost was parking,” she said. “The Silva Valley interchange doesn’t even go into Clarksville. Nothing will be impacted unless they develop it and right now there are no plans to do anything to the historic site of Clarksville. When the interchange is finished we think we will get a new lot leveled for us; that is the plan. Then we’re back in business to host Clarksville Day again.”

Donations to the cause may be mailed to: Clarksville Region Historical Society, 9045 Orchid Shade Drive, El Dorado Hills 95762

Clarksville Region Historical Society general meetings are open to the public and are held at 6:30 p.m. on the fourth Wednesday of each month in the meeting room of the El Dorado Hills Library. Guest speakers with knowledge in local history are usually secured for monthly meetings.

For more information call (916) 933-8525 or visit edhhistory.org.