

Our Mother of Sorrows Cemetery History

Within the Catholic community, death has always been looked upon as a part of life itself. Death marks that hoped-for transition from life in this world to life in the next. From the time of the catacombs, Catholic funeral customs developed around a belief in the sacredness of the human body as a Temple of the Holy Spirit and around the central Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. Any history of a Catholic people must recount the ways in which the Church worked to provide assistance to its people in time of loss and grief.

Tourists who come to this area frequently visit the cemeteries because they provide so much information about the people who first settled here and the circumstances of their lives. There is a fascination with the "Old West" and the pioneers who left the comfortable and settled life of the East to make this incredible journey. Old cemeteries are found across the region: some near the old ghost towns and some in places where no remnants of a town are even to be found. Many of these old cemeteries have now been abandoned and no one is left even to maintain them. These sites often tell a story about the presence of Catholics and their adherence to the faith. Many of the miners and settlers were Catholics of European origin and their faith was often unshakable even though a Mass might be available only once a year.

Records about these places are often very spotty and in many cases there is little written record at all. It is interesting to note that a majority of these old cemeteries are divided into sections: a Masonic section, a Catholic section, a Jewish section, etc. The Church seldom designated a particular burial place but it was the custom of the time. A visiting priest would be asked to bless a certain section of the community cemetery and this would become the "Catholic Cemetery". Almost every historic cemetery has such a section. These were not Catholic cemeteries in the strict sense.

It is easier to track the history of Catholic cemeteries in more urban areas of the State. There has been a Catholic cemetery in Reno almost since the beginning. In 1879 a transfer of deed was recorded for a parcel of land that was to be used as a cemetery. The land was transferred to a Catholic priest for the use of St. Mary's Parish. That parish and its cemetery eventually became St. Thomas Aquinas Cathedral Parish and cemetery in 1910. Newspaper records show a burial at the original St. Mary's in April, 1879.

According to newspaper accounts and funeral home records, there was a cemetery in Sparks known as Holy Cross Catholic cemetery. It was apparently established when the town of Sparks was formed in the early 1900's. However, no one knows where this cemetery was located. The assumption is that when Our Mother of Sorrows cemetery was opened, the cemetery in Sparks was closed and the remains of those buried there were transferred to the new cemetery.

Land for Mater Dolorosa (Our Mother of Sorrows) cemetery was purchased from a local rancher just North of downtown Reno in 1928. This cemetery was and still is owned by

the Diocese. Located within view of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and directly across from what is now a large regional park, this cemetery has a beautiful location.

In 1963 because of the growth of the city, it was decided that St. Thomas Cemetery needed to be closed. Space in the cemetery was no longer available and it was not possible to purchase adjacent land. The graves were transferred to Our Mother of Sorrows Cemetery which was just about a mile away.

Over the years, Our Mother of Sorrows has become the only Catholic cemetery in Northern Nevada but it is available for all. It is still operated by the Diocese of Reno. One of the corporal works of mercy is to bury the dead. We accomplish this through Our Mother of Sorrows cemetery and the assistance we can provide for grieving families. In times of need, we are often able to provide help to some who do not have the means to bury a family member who has died whether they are Catholic or not. Here, too, many of the priests who have served the people of the Diocese are buried. A section reserved for the burial of children is a special place of prayer for many.

Because of our faith, we feel a kinship with those who have gone before us. At Our Mother of Sorrows cemetery Mass is celebrated monthly for all those who are interred there. Additionally, Mass is celebrated there on All Souls Day each year. There is great consolation to be found in the knowledge that loved ones are remembered in prayer throughout the year. Perhaps this is the greatest benefit of having a Catholic cemetery: it unites us as a community of support and prayer as members of the Communion of Saints. It is important that, even as a mission Church, the traditions of the faith are continued.

Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic Cemetery

P.O. Box 8505, 2700 North Virginia Street, Reno, NV 89507
775-323-0133, omos@powernet.net

Hours: 8:30 - 4:30 pm. Mon-Fri; Office Closed 12:00-1:00 (Lunch)