



Frederick Sieg monument in Union Cemetery

What's A Druid?

The original Druids were priest-like figures in Iron Age Celtic paganism. Many elements of ancient druidism still exist as quasi-religious sects.

• Modern Druidism was born in the late 1700s in England pubs. It borrowed iconography and semantics from the ancients but little else. The **Ancient Order of Druids** motto was *Justice, Philanthropy and Brotherly Love*. Modern Druidism has never been religious.

As more working-class members were attracted to the order, a schism developed. Poorer members wanted a friendship and benefit club, along the lines of the Odd Fellows and Foresters, which were both rising in popularity at the time. Benefit societies functioned like early insurance companies, collecting membership fees into a central fund that cared for sick members, and provided death benefits to families.

Things came to a head in 1833. The **United Ancient Order of Druids (UAOD)** split from the parent organization. The UAOD was more democratic, more open to different social classes, and structured as a benefit society. Its motto was *united to assist*.

The new organization was a great success. Members immigrated, creating new lodges in several countries. The first lodge in the US was founded in 1839. Placerville saloonkeeper Frederick Sieg brought Druidism to California in 1859. In 1871 the Druids were one of four fraternalists who formed a union and founded Union Cemetery. The Druid sections are in the northwest corner of the cemetery, between Bee St. and the lower mausoleum. Sieg's obelisk sits prominently along the road, emblazoned with at least a dozen Druidic symbols.

The organization faded after WWII. The golden age of fraternalism had passed. The last lodge in England closed in 1999. The national organization in the U.S. became defunct in 1979. But California Druids are made of stouter stuff. Druidism lives on in California, governed by a Grand Grove with 14 subsidiary Groves spread across the state. California Grove No. 1 was officially reinstated in Placerville in 2017-18 and continues to enjoy a modest but growing membership. The stated mission of the Druids of California is *to promote knowledge, unity, and peace*.

California Druids convene annually in Placerville to honor their founder, Frederick Sieg. The Druids support Save the Graves. For more information see CaliforniaDruids.org.

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