



Women in Union Cemetery: Mary â??Mollieâ?• Wilcox Hurd

The women featured in this series of articles are part of the Women in Union Cemetery Tour conducted by Mike Roberts in 2024.

Mary Elizabeth â??Mollieâ?• Wilcox Hurd 1870 â?? 1929

Buried in Placerville Union Cemetery, Section 21A Block 15 Plot C

Portrayed by Ronnie Duska Fowler, Save the Graves 2023 event

Mollie was born in Placerville to a successful frontiersman and merchant, Truman Wilcox, and his wife, Mary Robertson. Mollieâ??s sister Jane married John Blair, linking the two prominent Scottish families.

Mollieâ??s father, Truman, was not only bound to the Blairs by marriage but also through several business partnerships. In the 1870s Truman Wilcox operated a grocery store in Uppertown, and had a warehouse on Upper Main Street, just east of the current police station. The warehouse was used as a stage stop and armory during the Civil War. In later years the Blair Brothers Lumber Company used it as a custom milling room.

When an office building and restaurant were proposed for the site in the 1980s, a concerned public opposed the destruction of the old building, to no avail. It was torn down and the project was built. To mitigate the loss of the historic building, a replica of a waterwheel was included at the site which at the time of this writing was in great disrepair.

Truman died somewhat mysteriously in 1877. On an overcast, particularly dark evening he left work for home and was attempting to navigate a footbridge over Hangtown Creek. He apparently stepped off the edge of the bridge and fell headfirst down a steep bank, breaking his neck.

Mollie graduated from a private high school and was sent to Southern California, where she met her first husband, Frank Stoddard, the nephew of Elizabeth Huntington, the wife of Collis P. Huntington of the Central Pacific Railroad, Frankâ??s employer. His family and career connections gave Mollie entree to Los Angeles high society and specifically, its philanthropic groups. More about Huntington can be found at the end of this article.

While raising their two children, Mollie threw herself into women's and children's aid societies. She became instrumental in compelling the state legislature to pass a bill that required fathers to pay child support whether the child was born in or out of wedlock.

After the kids were out of the house, she divorced Stoddard and married an old friend, former Los Angeles area state senator, Henry M. Hurd.

The couple became frequent visitors to Placerville, where they owned the Pioneer Lodge. Mollie remained close to her extended Blair family throughout her life.

Mollie was also an early supporter of the Placerville Shakespeare Club. When she died in 1929, she bequeathed a generous donation to build the historic Shakespeare Club building. Mollie also established a scholarship program that continues to this day. On her birthday, Shakespeare Club members visit Mollie's grave and leave flowers upon her memorial.

Huntington's role in the Big Four

Collis P. Huntington was a successful Sacramento merchant at the start of the Gold Rush. He later teamed up with Mark Hopkins, selling miners' supplies and other hardware. In the late 1850s, Huntington and Hopkins joined forces with two other successful businessmen, Leland Stanford and Charles Crocker, to pursue the idea of creating a rail line to connect America's east and west coasts. In 1861, these four businessmen (sometimes referred to as The Big Four) pooled their resources and business acumen, and formed the Central Pacific Railroad.

The Big Four built a powerful political machine, which Huntington had a large role in running. He was generous in providing bribes to politicians and congressmen. Revelation of his misdeeds in 1883 made him one of the most hated railroad men in the country. Of the four, Huntington was the most ruthless in pursuing the railroad's business. He even ousted his partner, Stanford.



FIG. 120. Wilcox Warehouse, Placerville, DMBS 124-119.

Wilcox Warehouse

Interpretation by Mike Roberts, 2024

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Category

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