



## *Coloma Pioneer Cemetery overview*

*aka “Coloma Protestant,” “Sutter Mill” & “Vineyard House”*

### **Intro**

Coloma Pioneer Cemetery is the oldest Gold Rush Cemetery in the Mother Lode. It is located on and around an oak-studded hill immediately south of the Coloma town site, directly across Cold Springs Road from the Vineyard House. It is a spectacularly beautiful place in the morning and late afternoon.

It's the oldest Gold Rush cemetery in the Mother Lode, yet its recent notoriety is for its connection to the alleged haunting of the Vineyard House.

The county gave the cemetery to the State Park System in the 1980s. Popular park Superintendent Matt Sugarman and the Gold Discovery Park Association cemetery restoration committee embraced the restoration of this important cultural resource. Funding for the project must have come from the park budget.

According to historian Sue Silver, the first documented reference to the cemetery was in Oct 1849. Immigrant John Banks from Ohio mentioned seeing “about a dozen graves” from the road. She found early references to Coloma Pioneer calling it the “new” cemetery, and suspected the existence of a earlier burial ground.

Since then a few headstones have been discovered on private property across the river, north of Mt. Murphey Road. There are also known grave sites on Point Pleasant Beach.

The realities of life, and death, in the earliest months of the Gold Rush, were harsh. The mortality rate was high, due to disease and accidents. The first arrivals were those who heard about the gold discovery early, could get here quickly, and generally survived once they got here. One group of these early settlers played a large role.

Mormons were in Coloma when gold was discovered. Some say it was they, and not James Marshall, who actually discovered the nugget that started it all. They were the first to explore up and down the river and realize the extent of the placers.

Two Mormon groups were here before or very shortly after the gold discovery. Their history is fascinating, and the subject of the annual “California Pioneer History Day” here at the park every summer. While I’m at it, there is a similar but larger history event called Coloma Gold Rush Live the second weekend in October.



The so-called “Brooklyn Saints,” led by Sam Brannon, sailed from New York in February, 1846, and doubled the population of the small Mexican village known as Yerba Buena when they landed in July.

Others were part of the famed Mormon Battalion, Roughly 500 men and a few women, split off from the great migration of Mormons to Salt Lake City and marched nearly 2,000 miles southwest in 1846 to fight for the US in the Mexican American war, but got there right after the brief conflict ended. They about creating San Francisco, when they landed in July. Discharged in July, 1847, about 100 made their way north to work for Sutter. We’ll meet one of them, Nathan Hawk, shortly.

The other early arrivals were a mix of Californios – former Mexican citizens that were here all along, mountain men – mostly from Oregon, Mexicans – who lived near ports on the trading routes and already know about gold mining, and Mexicans who likewise knew about mining. These were the survivors. They knew what they were doing. Many got here, got rich, and left before the onslaught in 1849.

The waves of immigrants started in 1849. They came by land and sea. Traveling several months, often in brutal conditions. An estimated one in 5 didn’t get here. They were exhausted and often sick when they got here in the fall, only to encounter one of the harshest winters in history. Another one in five died within months of arrival.

Many of those who died were buried near where they fell. Wooden placards which marked those graves are long gone. We’ll never know their numbers, but we assume there were lots of them.

The single-minded pursuit of gold precluded most aspects of civilized Victorian life, but some of these men and women nonetheless took the time to build churches and organize burial grounds.

The Protestant church, which is now the Emmanuel Church, affiliated itself with this cemetery early on. The newly remodeled church is immediately southwest of the central portion of the park.

St. John’s Catholic Church is just a couple hundred feet north of the Emmanuel Church, and is graced its own pioneer cemetery out back. These two churches and the Catholic Cemetery are worth a tour of their own, and are typically open during history events here at the park.

### **Coloma Pioneer timeline:**

1849 – first known burials

1850 – Protestant Church organized in Coloma

1880s – Fence and improvements.

1980s - County gave it to the state for inclusion in the Gold Discovery Park.

1990s – Gold Discovery Park Association preservationists launch decade-long restoration effort, repairing coping, ornamental fences and tombstones, conducting ground penetrating radar testing inside the fence, and identifying dozens of unmarked graves.

## ***Coloma Pioneer Cemetery tour bios - 2026***



### **Quick Facts**

Estimated graves: 650+

Remaining tombstones: 169+/-

Maintained by Park Service

Outside fence put in by Native Sons. Graves might have been fenced out.

GPR was done in 1990s, but not outside the fence.

Mickee Free and Jerimia Crane (SP?) were hung outside fenceline and buried there.

Oldest stone Ezra Schooley, 1850 . in white picket fence on right side. Crib rebuilt many times. Great great granddaughter buried next to him. She was murdered.

Rukula repaired the stones.



## Francis and Louisa Veerkamp - *"Do right and fear no man"*

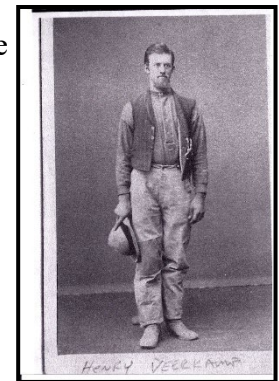
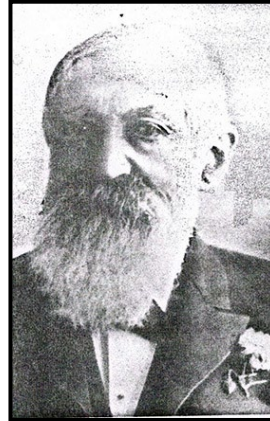
Francis: 1822 – 1906

Louisa: 1825 - 1899

Francis and Louisa each immigrated from Germany with their families at a young age. They met and married in St. Louis. In 1852 they departed by wagon for California with their first-born son, Henry. There was an uneventful trip. They arrived in Hangtown exactly 5 months later. Francis was 29 years old at the time.

He brought useful skills to CA: farming, lumbering, merchandising, gardening and even bee-keeping.

The family initially settled in Uniontown, which is now Lotus, where Francis opened a hotel and a store. Francis first bought land in Gold Hill in 1863. After the Japanese Colony failed in 1871, he purchased that as well.



The family ranch was ultimately 340 acres around the intersection of Gold Hill and Cold Springs Road. They grew fruit and raised cattle.

Francis and Louisa had ten children six of which lived to adulthood.

Subsequent generations of Veerkamps have engaged in a wide range of ranch-related enterprises, including a retail dairy, a home delivery butcher service, and lots of fruit growing and cattle ... always cattle. Many of the women in the family became teachers.

Seven generations after Francis and Louisa arrived, the county is full of Veerkamps. The best known are from the fifth generation. Doug owns a large construction company and supports many things that make this county a great place. Full disclosure, Doug was a founding Save the Graves sponsor.

Doug's brother Brian is currently serving his third term as county supervisor. Brian was the El Dorado Hills Fire chief and served on the Camino school board for many years before that. Brian's wife Lori has her own long legacy of public service. She currently sits on six boards. For 22 years she has been an El Dorado Union High School District trustee. Last year she took a much lower profile seat on the Save the Graves board.





William B.  
Francis J.

**Francis and Louisa's children** (*that reached adulthood*):

Henry B., 1851 - 1934  
Francis Joseph, 1853 - 1928  
William Barthold, 1861 - 1933  
Louis Barthold, 1866 - 1929  
Louis Phillip, 1871 - 1958  
William Jos. Egbert, 1864 - 1957

## Francis Veerkamp was not that great

Mountain Democrat [Letters to the Editor](#) [From page A5](#) | November 19, 2012

EDITOR: In the name of family modesty and humility a correction is in order. Chris Daley reports on Brian's victory [Newly elected El Dorado County District 3 Supervisor Brian Veerkamp] speech by asserting that Brian, "quoted his great-great-great-grandfather who said, 'Do right and fear no man.'"

Brian's Dad is Jim. Jim's Dad was Maurice, Brian's Grandpa Veerkamp. Maurice's Dad was Louis, Brian's Great-Grandpa Veerkamp. Louis' Dad was Francis Veerkamp, Brian's Great-Great-Grandpa Veerkamp. Francis Veerkamp's greatness needs to be reduced by 1/3. It's only right.

Now, if this "excessive greatness" is the result of shoddy research on the part of Mr. Daley then sharpen up, Chris. On the other hand, if Mr. Daley is seeking some sort of GOB favor through a gratuitous bestowment of undue greatness on Francis Veerkamp then I have this to say, "Mr. Daley, your overture is offensively transparent, and Brian will see right through it. Shame on you!"

But it is possible that Brian has mistakenly assigned an extra level of greatness on Francis Veerkamp. If that is the case, Brian, then please take note — in the name of family modesty and humility. However, Brian, if this prattle is patently pretentious pompous political puffery then knock it off. Your Great-great-grandpa Francis would be proud of you. Don't blow it.

P.S. Brian, just because my father was your Great Uncle Sammy I have no intention whatsoever of exploiting the GOB network by seeking a variance on my 1/4 acre Diamond Springs parcel to build a casino-bar-brothel to "service" the flatlanders.

Second Cousin Phil, First Cousin of your Dad...

PHILLIP VEERKAMP





## Peter and Nancy Gooch

From the Gold Discovery Park Association Website:

<http://marshallgold.org/places-to-see/monroe-family/>

Peter and Nancy Gooch were brought to California in 1849-1850 by wagon-train from Missouri as slaves. Their owner was likely William Gooch, a partner in the Crescent hotel in Placerville. Nancy had to leave behind her three-year-old son, Andrew, who was sold by William Gooch in Missouri to the Monroe family, and as was customary, assumed his owner's name and thus became Andrew Monroe.

In 1850 Peter and Nancy were freed when California became a free state. Peter worked as a handyman and Nancy cooked, did washing and mending for local miners. By 1870, nine years after Peter's death, Nancy had saved \$700 and acquired some property. She located her 24-year old son in Missouri, helped Andrew pay off his debts (he was a tenant farmer), and sent four railroad tickets to bring **Andrew**, wife Sarah and sons **Pearley** and **Grant** to California. Once in California Nancy helped Andrew start a farm on adjoining land in the northwestern end of Coloma.

Over the next 15 years Andrew and Sarah had five more children: Andrew Jr., Cordelia, William, Garfield and James (two infants did not survive). That was the third generation of Coloma Gooches.

Andrew taught himself to read and write and all the children were educated in Coloma & nearby schools. Andrew cleared 80 acres on the west side of the Old Coloma Road & turned it into a productive apple and pear orchard.

In 1885 Andrew and his oldest son Pearley dug the grave of James Marshall.

Pearley quit school early to work as a ranch hand. Later, he leased land to farm and ranch himself. Around 1900 Pearley got his own place, swapping labor for a 6-acre plot of land in Coloma that included Marshall's mill site. It's hard to imagine the gold discovery site being an afterthought in that transaction





Andrew died in 1921. On news of his father's death, James returned from Oakland, where he had been employed on Pullman rail cars, to help Pearley care for the Monroe homestead. In years that followed and as the town population declined, Pearley continued buying land & properties, growing the family homestead to more than 360 acres.

Brother Grant spent most of his life working as a stagecoach driver and teamster in Placerville. Andrew Jr. died at age 20 possibly of a heart condition. Andrew's daughter Cordelia took care of her grandmother Gooch who lived to 90, and her mother Sarah, who made it to 88.

Coloma's two pioneering African American families united in 1913, when William Gooch married widow Josephine Burgess. William helped her three sons care for the Burgess homestead (which included the blacksmith shop property that later was acquired to build the Gold Trail Grange).

Around 1923 Pearley built the Monroe House, which is next to the blacksmith shop. He probably rented it out. The Blacksmith Shop came later, in 1928.

By 1930 Pearley was working at the State Library as a custodian,

In the 1930's the State Park Commission opened negotiations to buy the old Mill property. Pearley wanted \$6,000, The State offered \$2,000. Pearley maintained that the gold discovery site wasn't just another piece of commercial real estate.... That it offered potential gold panning, camping and picnicking revenue. Negotiations collapsed and the state condemned it, forcing the sale at \$3,100.

Pearley retired from the State in 1948 and returned to Coloma. He subsequently sold the original 80-acre farm to the State and by 1962 had sold the remaining land and properties. In his last years old residents remembered Pearley living in the Monroe House and hanging out in front of the Post Office chewing the fat with old friends. This while blacks in southern states were being blasted with fire hoses.

Pearley died in a convalescent home at age 95 in 1963. In his will he left \$125,000 to the NAACP to further the 1960's civil rights causes as well as \$2,500 to help 35 school-children.



## **Rufus Burgess, 1827 - 1900**

Anna Burgess, 1827–1886

Josephine Burgess Monroe, 1862–1921,

*Josephine married Rufus in 1892, He was 65, she was 30. He died 8 years later. Josephine remarried in 1913, William Henry Monroe, 1877-1928. William was the son of Andrew and Sarah Monroe, and the grandson of Peter and Nancy Gooch.*



Row 3 Plot 6

Rufus and his parents were slaves. They came to California via wagon train, with their owners, in 1850. They were granted their freedom soon after arrival. Rufus briefly tried his hand at gold mining, but soon bought some land to start an orchard. He also operated a blacksmith shop where the Grange Hall currently stands in Coloma.

His obituary in the Mountain Democrat called Rufus “one of the best known colored men in the county, highly esteemed by all and an honest, industrious citizen.”

A pioneer resident of Coloma, Rufus owned and operated the blacksmith shop for many years.

In 1950 the Mountain Democrat again mentioned Rufus:

"The old Burgess home that had been in that family since the early 1860s was razed last week by state employees. Once one of the nicest homes in Coloma, it was bought by Rufus Burgess when the owner moved to greener pastures after the county seat was moved to Placerville. Mr. Burgess, a tall commanding figure and a member of the Methodist Church, also bought a blacksmith shop standing under the shade of a huge locust tree at the south end of our bridge where the Community Hall now stands and worked at his trade there until his death in the early 1900's. The oldsters can still hear the music of that anvil, busy all day and every day, except Sunday's."



## **Mickey Free, *died in 1855***

Michael “Mickey” Free, a small-time highwayman and ruffian, is said to have lived at the Tong’s Railroad House, which was located immediately north of Hwy50, between the EDH golf course and Silva Valley Parkway. His only known occupation was as a “road agent” at the junction of the road from Folsom to Placerville, and the Coloma Road, eight miles northeast of Clarksville.

At trial for robbing and killing two traders in Tahoe, Free admitted to a long career of crime. He’d married a true and virtuous woman, taken her money and left for California some years ago. Once here he became a thief, highway robber, and murderer.

Free was hanged for murder here in the parking lot on October 26, 1855.

Newspaper accounts say that 6,000 people crammed in here to see it. At 1:00, Sheriff Carson brought the prisoners in a wagon. Free was well-dressed, “in a light coat, trimmed with red, with a red sash, black pants trimmed with red, an elegant low-crowned black rowdy hat which he wore a little on one side, and appeared not unlike a jolly sailor.”

Neither man hesitated to climb up the hastily constructed gallows stairs. Neither man was tied up or otherwise confined. Free danced a little jig on the gallows. They were now permitted to address the assemblage. After Crane had spoken, Free said that he had concluded not to make any remarks, as it would only excite the people present, and stepped back from the edge of the scaffold. Calls from the crowd of “Go on, let us have it!” brought him forward. He then said, ‘I’ll give you Mickey Free’s Scaffold Song,’ and commenced, but after singing three lines stopped, saying ‘Gentlemen, I can’t go through with it, you must excuse me.’

“They were clothed in the habiliments of the grave, and stepped upon the drop without the slightest apparent reluctance.” The ropes were placed on their necks, a prayer said for mercy on their souls, and with the ‘Amen,’ the drop fell. A second or two later, the two men reached the end of their rope... literally.



## **Jeramiah Crane, 1816 - 1855**

Jeramiah Crane confessed to the murder of Susan Newnham and was hung right here, with Mickey Free, in 1855. The story was reported in newspapers throughout the country. As Craine faced the gallows, he remained committed to his belief that he and Susan would be reunited for all eternity. She was 16. He was in his late 30s.

Craine's confession laid out the facts of the case from his perspective. He and Susan had formed an attachment, professed their love for each other and signed a marriage contract before God Almighty.

Craine had a wife and four children back east, so he couldn't legally marry Susan. He'd told Susan that he would kill her and himself so that they could live together in the next world. But she apparently didn't take him seriously. Who would do such a thing?

What she didn't realize was that Crane was a Spiritualist, and Spiritualist beliefs fueled his deranged thoughts and cravings.

Spiritualism was a social-religious movement that became popular in a grieving, post-Civil War America, when almost every family was touched by death. It held the comforting premise that death is not as the end but a stage in humanity's progress. Awareness persists after death. The dead are still among us. We just can't see them.

Spiritualism got its start in Europe, where the filth of city slums and poor medical care leads to sporadic outbreaks of contagious diseases. Death rates are horrific. Many no longer accept the conventional Christian explanations for the loss and suffering they experience.

Occult movements rise. Mediums claim they can communicate with the dead. They address the existential dilemma of living in a world surrounded by misery....where joy is fleeting and death is inevitable.

Death is so common that Victorian society becomes obsessed with it. The queen herself will set the tone when her husband Albert dies in 1861. She mourns him for the rest of her life. The world seems to mourn with her.

Death and grieving will also become a way of life for Americans in the 1860s when the Civil War breaks out. When the bloodletting finally ends in 1865, it leaves a traumatized nation, especially in the south. Spiritualism softens the loss.

Jerimiah Crane's Spiritualist beliefs explain his actions.

Crane came to California from Kentucky in 1849 for the same reason everyone else did. Like most of them, he struck out. He met the Newnhams in 1853. Susan was 16. He knew she was special, and he sensed that she felt something as well.



The Newnham family ran a boarding house. Crane needed a place to stay. He was broke but well read, so he offered to tutor the Newnham children in the evenings, in exchange for lodging. Susan became Cranes penmanship student. The touching of hands was required. One thing led to another.

Crane was smitten. There were mutual professions of love and even a written document of “spiritual marriage.” He told Susan that his wife had divorced him and remarried.

Another, younger suiter emerged. Susan cut if off with Crane. He remained convinced that they were meant to spend eternity together.

On August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1855, he called on Susan one last time. Her father initially refused him, but Crane convinced him that he just wanted to talk, so he allowed it.

Susan emerged from the house and wanted nothing to do with him. She wanted no part of his “marriage for eternity.” He grabbed her, She pushed him away. He snapped.

He shot her twice and fled. It took her five days to die. He was apprehended the next day and nearly got lynched. He confessed.

Two months later he was swinging from a rope right over there. His last words were a promise to Susan that he would soon be with her.



## **Nathan Hawk, 1823 - 1910**

Nathan Hawk was a member of Mormon Battalion, which marched cross country roughly 2,000 miles from Council Bluffs, Iowa to San Diego between July 1846 and July 1847.

Fleeing persecution in Navoo, Ill, LDS church leader Brigham Young ordered a mass migration to modern-day Salt Lake City. His divine inspiration had some practical problems.

- Provisions: The migration was short of food and supplies.
- Logistical: They didn't have enough wagons, eventually resorting to hand carts... which were a disaster.
- Protection: Mormons were profoundly disliked at the time.

Young sought the protection and support of the US government. His timing was good. The U.S. had just declared war on Mexico. He offered to send a battalion south to support the war effort. In exchange, the men would receive a uniform allowance - which funded wagons and provisions for the main migration - a rifle, and regular Army pay for the following year, which totaled roughly \$30,000, which went directly to Salt Lake City.



*Nathan Hawk*

The battalion never fought in a battle, but was a public relations win for the church at the dawn of the Salt Lake City era. Relations with the rest of the U.S. would again deteriorate to the point that only the outbreak of the Civil War prevented a shooting war with the Mormons.

Shortly after the battalion arrived in San Diego, the war ended and they were mustered out. About 100 went north to work for John Sutter. Some ended up at the sawmill in Coloma.

Hawk connected with Sam Brannon in San Francisco, and was hired to take about 2,000 copies of the April 1, 1948 edition of Brannon's *California Star* newspaper to Washington. The edition extolled the virtues of California, including the recent gold discovery on the American River.

Along the way Hawk diverted Oregon-bound wagon trains to California, and took a side trip to Salt Lake City with the news. Word of the gold discovery reached New York in July, 1848.

An estimated 90,000 people arrived in CA in 1849. Over the next six years nearly a third of a million arrived from all over the world.

Hawk returned to California. The census found him in Sacramento in 1850, Yolo County in 1870, Salmon Falls in 1880, and finally in Coloma in 1900.

## **Texas Ellen, 1822 - 1855**

One story brings her as the young bride of a gold seeker who later abandoned her. Another brings her as a seasoned madam. In either case, by mid 1850, she had settled into a newly constructed, two-story, seven-bedroom house on the west end of town near Sutter's sawmill. The establishment, which she called the "Lone Star of Texas," earned her the moniker "Texas Ellen." It was supposedly one of the most elegant in the Central Mines.



Wilson had a bartender, a cook and five girls working for her. The house changed hands a couple of times, but the new owners never saw a need to evict her. Edward McCabe, the third owner, deeded the property to Wilson as he lay on his deathbed. For one month, she owned her house. He recovered however, and successfully filed a deed of revocation annulling his gift.

Wilson was known for her generosity. She provided board for miners, and was always ready to jump on her horse to minister to the sick. She even grubstaked miners down on their luck, never expecting to be repaid. In 1852 and 1853, cholera and small pox raged through Coloma. Wilson closed her business and opened the house as a hospital. At a time when many miners were living in canvas tents, Wilson provided a warm, dry place to recover—or perhaps die.

When the epidemic subsided, Wilson resumed her business. However, on March 16, 1855, a paragraph in the local paper noted the "unintentional killing" of Wilson. According to the article, a quarrel occurred between three or four vagabonds. Several shots were fired, "one of which took effect in the breast of Ellen Wilson." A romanticized version puts the pistol in the hands of a man named York who was infatuated with Wilson. He supposedly became enraged when he saw her dancing with another and tried to shoot his competition. Unfortunately, he missed and killed her.

Women in Wilson's profession were usually buried outside the Christian cemetery, but because of Wilson's kindness during the epidemic, an exception was made. At her funeral, "a sermon was preached and a number of persons followed her remains to the grave" in the southeast corner of the Pioneer Cemetery. For more than 100 years, her grave was unmarked. Thirty years after her death, a miner named John S. Covington was buried in the same place, and his headstone marked both graves. In 1975, researchers determined the site of Wilson's grave and gave her a headstone.



## **Matsunosuke “Matsu” Sakrai, 1834 – 1901**

“Matsu” was on the losing end of a Japanese civil war that pitted Samuri Lords against their Emperor. The war was captured vividly in the Tom Cruise Movie *The Last Samurai*.

In 1869 Samurai Lord Matsudaira and his followers, including Matsu, fled Japan with thousands of mulberry bushes, tea plants, and other Japanese plants, intent on starting a tea and silk plantation in America. They had the support of American John Henry Schnell, a Dutch soldier of fortune who married Lord Matsudaira’s daughter, and became an adopted son of Japan. He was a known arms dealer and had probably been selling them guns.



With Schnell’s help, the company purchased what we now know as Wakamatsu Farm and became the first Japanese immigrants in America.

They arrived on June 8, 1869 at what they named the Wakamatsu Colony, after the town of Aizu-Wakamatsu, the castle town of their home Aizu domain.

The venture was much celebrated in the Sacramento newspapers but ultimately ill-fated. Water was scarce due to drought. Miners and settlers often fought over water availability. Mining operations blocked the stream that fed into the Wakamatsu Colony and essentially choked them out. The crops, and the colony, failed. All but two colony members left Gold Hill.

Those two stayed on, working for the Veerkamp family, which purchased the property after they left.

A young girl named Okei became a nursemaid to the Veerkamp children. Her compatriot and protector, Matsunosuke Sakurai, “Matsu,” worked for the family as a carpenter. Okei died of malaria in 1871. She was just 19. In her last days, she would venture up to a hill that reminded her of her home in Aizu. She requested that the Veerkamps bury her atop that hill, which they did. Matsu erected her marker, which remained there until the site was restored by the American River Conservancy, which purchased the ranch from the Veerkamp family. Okei was the first Japanese immigrant to die on American soil.

In 2017 ARC researchers found evidence that Matsu was buried in an unmarked grave near the Marquat plot. The Marquat family were Wakamatsu neighbors. The family, and Mary Marquat in particular become very close to Matsu. He purportedly asked that he be buried at her feet. And so, it seems, he was.

It should be pointed out that much of the research demonstrating that this is Matsu’s grave in anecdotal, reliant on the distant memories of elderly Marquat family members. But it makes sense and feels good...



## **Ezra Schooley, 1806 – 1850**

Grave 50, Row 20

Ezra Schooley was born in Seneca County, NY in 1827. His marriage to Nancy Bennet at 21 produced nine children.

Ezra headed west when he heard about the gold discovery, leaving his wife and children behind. He'd never see them again.

He established a livery stable in Coloma then died of unknown causes.

This headstone is the oldest marked grave in the cemetery.

Ezra was not the first person to be buried in this cemetery, although his headstone is the oldest that still exists. The original wooden crib that was built around his burial plot eventually deteriorated and fell apart. Some time ago it was reconstructed using old photos and documents to ensure it resembled, as closely as possible, the original. By 2009 that had completely fallen apart. Another crib was built in 2010.

Buried next to Ezra, is Ezra and Nancy's great-great-great [granddaughter](#), who was murdered.

Interestingly, their daughter Amanda married James Blair, the son of John Blair, the founder of Placerville's lumber dynasty. Ezra left his family in Seneca County, NY, How did Amanda get out here? Ezra's wife Nancy, who remarried in 1867 and is buried in Winters, came west at some point after his death. Her second husband was older, and died in Seneca in 1867. Did Nancy come west with her four youngest children at some point looking for Ezra? Their four younger children are all buried in California or Nevada.

**Spouse:**

Nancy Bennett Scott (1809 - 1879)

**Children:**

Evaline Schooley Ike (1830 - 1918)

Helen Schooley (1837 - 1915)

Henry M Schooley (1840 - 1915)

Amanda J. Schooley Blair (1842 - 1916)

Samuel J. Schooley (1848 - 1874)



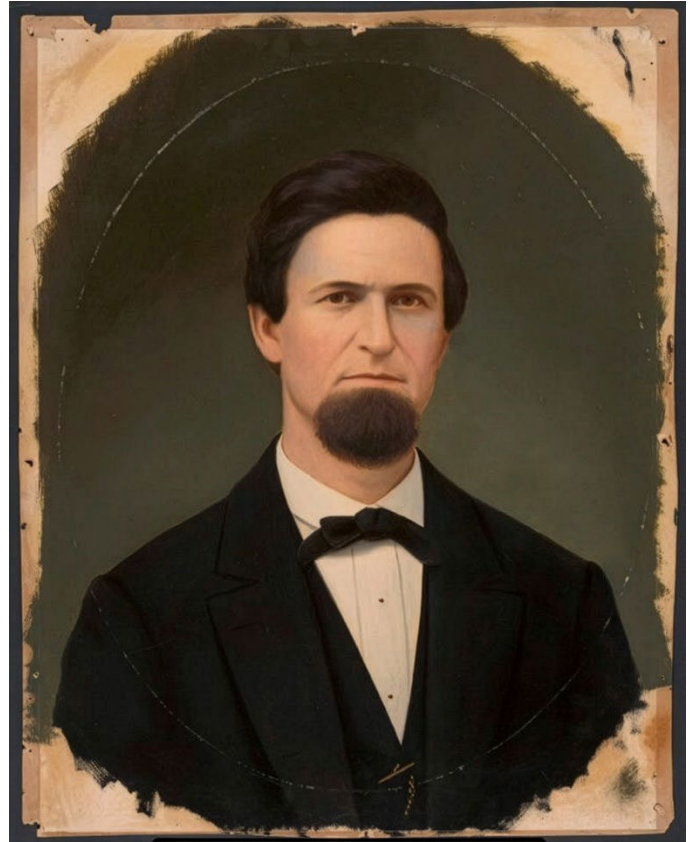


**Martin Allhoff, 1827 – 1867**  
*Plot 2, Row 15, Grave 13*

***He built the Vineyard House***

Born in Germany.  
Got to Coloma early – mid 1849.  
Tried mining.  
Returned to Ohio and married 14-year old Louisa Weaver.  
Returned to Coloma and established vineyard and winery in mid 1850s.  
By 1857 the winery is flourishing.  
Saloons of Virginia City are his biggest customers.  
Business is great for the next decade.  
The couple have three children.

In 1867 his agent in Virginia City was arrested for tax and licensing violations. Allhoff went in person to clear the matter up. He, too, was arrested and indicted under similar charges. Devastated by shame and the possibility of prison Allhoff slit his throat and bled to death.



His sensational death is one of the reasons ghost hunters site for the Vineyard House being haunted.



*Coloma Pioneer Cemetery tour bios - 2026*





## **Robert Chalmers, 1820 - 1881**

Grave 39

As a boy, Robert Chalmers immigrated from Scotland to Canada with his family in 1834. He married in 1838, then became first a ropemaker and then a fireman on a Lake Erie steamer, before buying a farm and sticking his hand into his new threshing machine, losing a couple fingers. He supposedly returned to work the next day.

When he heard about the Gold Rush, he immediately sold his farm and moved his family close to his parents. He boarded a steamer in May, 1850, on the first leg of his trip to California, but the ship caught fire. Chalmers escaped with his life, but all his belongings were lost. He continued, and was able to join a wagon party, arriving in Coloma that fall.

In Coloma he saved enough as a miner, then a baker, and then a shopkeeper, to return to Canada for his family.

When he got back to Coloma he bought and enlarged the Sierra Nevada Hotel, and immersed himself in his community as a member of the Sutter Mill Grange, the Odd Fellows and the Masons.

In 1857 Katie fell ill with consumption (Tuberculosis,) which, in the pre-antibiotic era was a death sentence. She is buried here in the family plot.

Two years later he remarried and had several good years with Delia.

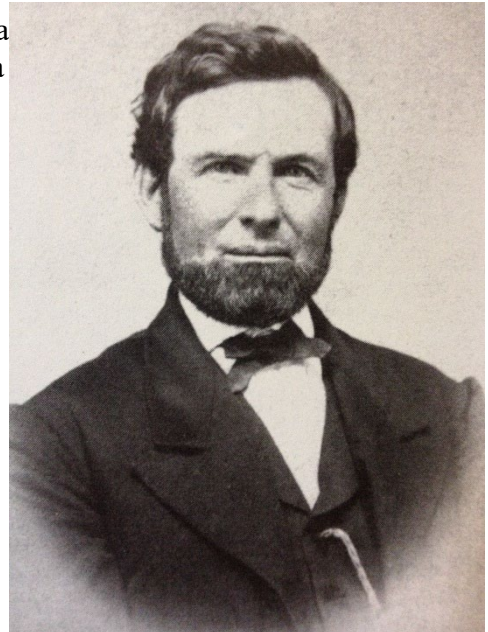
Chalmers was the Coloma postmaster for parts of 1862 and 1863, and also became the foreign miners tax collector. He sold the hotel in 1865.

A stint as the county treasurer followed in 1867.

He ran for sheriff and lost to J.B. Hume in '68, then closed out the 1860s with the tragic loss of his wife Delia. Chalmers buried his second wife here and moved on.

Despite all the ups and downs, Chalmers best and worst years were yet to come. First, the best: Shortly after Delia's death, Chalmers married Martin Allhoff's widow, Louisa, owner of the successful vineyard and winery her late husband had built.

Chalmers jumped in, further developing the property and expanding the vineyards... to great acclaim.





He was elected to the California State Assembly and served from 1871 to 1873.

The couple had three children in the 1870s, and built the Vineyard House, a large three-story structure, which served for many years as a hotel, the family home and the town's social center. Robert and Louisa regularly hosted dinners and balls.

Chalmers was a long-time member of the Coloma band, and taught music to local kids. He was an intelligent and successful businessman with varied interests, a good wife and a good life.

Then it all came crashing down. Chalmers was struck by a mysterious ailment in the late 1870s. He lost his memory and then went blind. He was confined to the house. The rumor mill claimed he'd had lost his mind. Some even said that he had become so mad that Louisa had to lock him in a cell in the basement, which was built from bricks taken from an old jail.

He died in June of 1881 and was buried here in the Pioneer Cemetery. Some thought he starved himself to death out of paranoid fear that Louisa was trying to poison him. Modern wags lean more to syphilis, based on his symptoms.

Louisa lived another 32 years. The Vineyard House has been thru several owners. When I arrived in the 1980s it was a wonderful family restaurant with amazing chicken and dumplings and a really cool bar in the basement.

The Pioneer Cemetery and the Vineyard house have been fodder for stories of hauntings, apparitions, ghost sightings and strange crying sounds in the night.

**Spouses:**

Catherine *Ferrier* Chalmers (1820 - 1857)

Delia *Kneeland* Chalmers (1824 - 1869)

Louisa S. *Weaver* Hardie (1838 - 1913)

**Children:**

Abram Chalmers (1844 - 1916)\*

Hugh Chalmers (1846 - 1891)\*

Agnes Chalmers (1849 - 1856)\*

John S. Chalmers (1852 - 1854)\*

Elizabeth Chalmers (1856 - 1861)\*

Robert Chalmers (1870 - 1873)\*

William Robert Chalmers (1871 - 1876)