

THE WEBSTER STREET CEMETERY: Oakland's first cemetery—located somewhere near today's Lake Merritt BART station (black arrow)—did not suit the needs of the new city, as it was too close to homes. The citizens located their second cemetery at a place they considered well out of town along an arm of today's Lake Merritt (white arrow.) Webster Street was extended beyond the College Block, site of the College of California, to reach the new burial grounds. The cemetery took the name of the street as a moniker. Jerome Whichter, one of Mountain View Cemetery's original trustees, made this map (shown in its entirety in the inset) in 1860. Four years later he surveyed Mountain View's new property. Frederick Law Olmsted used Whichter's survey as a starting point for his work.

Part One

A matter of necessity

Oakland's elite looks for an alternative to the dank Webster Street graveyard

Rev. Isaac Brayton was a religious man. So he was puzzled as to why Dr. Samuel Merritt had chosen this of all days to invite him to a his home for a meeting. Dr. Merritt saw things in a more businesslike, practical vein. Yes, it was the day after Christmas, 1863, but it was Saturday. What better day to gather his friends together? Christmas had brought business throughout Oakland to a standstill, and, after all, this meeting did touch on the sacred.

Let's eavesdrop using a little imagination and some of what we know of the players:

State Senator Addison Crane approached Rev. Brayton and began to strike up a conversation. The senator began telling of last January's Central Pacific Railroad groundbreaking in Sacramento. Rev. Brayton had heard all this before.

"I made the opening address and my words held such importance that the newspapers published them the very next day," Rev. Brayton half-heard the senator say.

An avowed Union man, Senator Crane next launched into a soliloquy about the Federal army's Fourth of July successes at Vicksburg and Gettysburg and, more recently, around Chattanooga, Tennessee. When the senator raised his voice and



REV. ISAAC BRAYTON carried the burden of keeping the College of California afloat. To help, he and his wife, Mary, sold their 200-acre spread to the Mountain View Cemetery Association. Rev. Brayton also influenced Frederick Law Olmsted to draw up plans for a campus in a town that would later be named Berkeley.

began to relate the story of Lookout Mountain, Dr. Merritt had heard enough of a story that Senator Crane had already told time and again. He approached the good senator, put a heavy hand on his shoulder and beckoned him to take a seat. They had other business to discuss. The senator frowned, but obeyed the more imposing physician.

A relieved Hiram Tubbs discreetly smirked, shook his head and sat down across the table from Major Ralph Kirkham. Mr. Tubbs looked at the brandy in his glass and drained it. His smirk changed to a smile as he reached for the decanter, happy not to have to listen to the long-winded senator.

Major Kirkham was trying to stop turning his grin into a laugh. He found people like the senator amusing. Unlike Senator Crane, he had tasted war first-hand. A West Point graduate, Major Kirkham had bravely fought—and been wounded—in the Mexican War 17 years earlier. He had long ago grown tired of war stories from armchair generals.

Mr. Tubbs was a businessman—he and his brother Alfred owned a cordage company and ship’s chandlery. He wanted to get down to brass tacks.

“Gentlemen, we are here to discuss where men of our station—and their families—will rest in this world once the Lord has called us to the next,” Dr. Merritt began. “I can not abide the thought of resting there.”



BRAYTON HALL: This building stood on Oakland’s 12th Street between Franklin and Webster streets and housed the College of California until its move to Berkeley.

With that Dr. Merritt gestured with his brandy glass in the direction of the city’s graveyard on Webster Street and looked Rev. Brayton squarely in the eye. The good reverend unconsciously winced; he owned the property Dr. Merritt spoke of.

Rev. Brayton knew he needed to close this graveyard and offer something better. In fact, just six months earlier Edward Tompkins, who owned the property with him, had petitioned the city to prohibit further burials at the Webster Street property.

“We have just returned from the telegraph office,” Dr. Merritt continued. “And there I joined Messrs. Tubbs, Heath, Faulker, Persey, Emery and Whichter in consummating the formation of a rural cemetery.” As he mentioned their names, Dr. Merritt pointed his brandy glass at each in turn. Each bowed.

“I have invited the rest of you here because—as some of you already know—we must form a board of trustees. I need each and every one of you to help in this endeavor.”

As he listened, Rev. Brayton ran two issues through his mind. First, his College of California, located just a few blocks away, needed money. Second, this new cemetery—the more respectable name for “graveyard” currently in vogue—which had been named “Mountain View,” needed land. Rev. Brayton had a solution to both these problems: He and his wife, Mary, owned roughly 200 acres about two miles outside of town.

The Braytons could offer this new venture the opportunity to buy the land for the sum needed to keep their educational enterprise going: \$13,000—a fair price for a fine piece of property—and the dead could be moved from the graveyard to the new cemetery.

Rev. Brayton’s wince turned into a smile. He looked forward to returning home and discussing this idea with Mary. Then he would sit down with Dr. Merritt in private.

All those present—Rev. Brayton, George S. Grant, J. A. Mayhew, S. E. Alden and Rev. S. T. Wells —agreed to join those who had been at the telegraph office as members of the board.

After sealing the agreement with signatures and handshakes, they left Dr. Merritt's home and returned to tell their families and friends that they had given their city a belated Christmas present—a new cemetery, a respectable place for their final rest.

Isaac and Mary Brayton wanted to give the city more than just a cemetery, however. The couple held a stake in how Californians would be educated in the future. In 1853, Massachusetts native and Yale College graduate Rev. Henry Durant had arrived in Oakland and opened the Contra Costa Academy.

The school's name changed to College School and then to College of California. In 1857, Rev. Durant learned that Orrin Simmons had 160 acres for sale in the hills five miles away.

Two years later, Rev. Durant shed his administrative robes and donned those of a professor of Greek languages and literature. With that, Rev. Brayton became principal, and the responsibility for keeping the school going now rested on his shoulders. Rev. Brayton already knew that the school's Oakland site would not allow for future growth. In 1860 the College of California opened with a freshman class of

eight students. That same year the school purchased Orrin Simmons' land; it constantly needed cash to fund its daily operations, however, and the Civil War was hampering fund-raising.

When the Braytons sold their land to Mountain View Cemetery in February 1864, they turned their windfall into a dream. The money allowed them to buy half the College of California's Oakland campus—the portion that held the College School—and to purchase the school's buildings. The Braytons continued to operate

the school which by this time had some 250 students from all over the state.

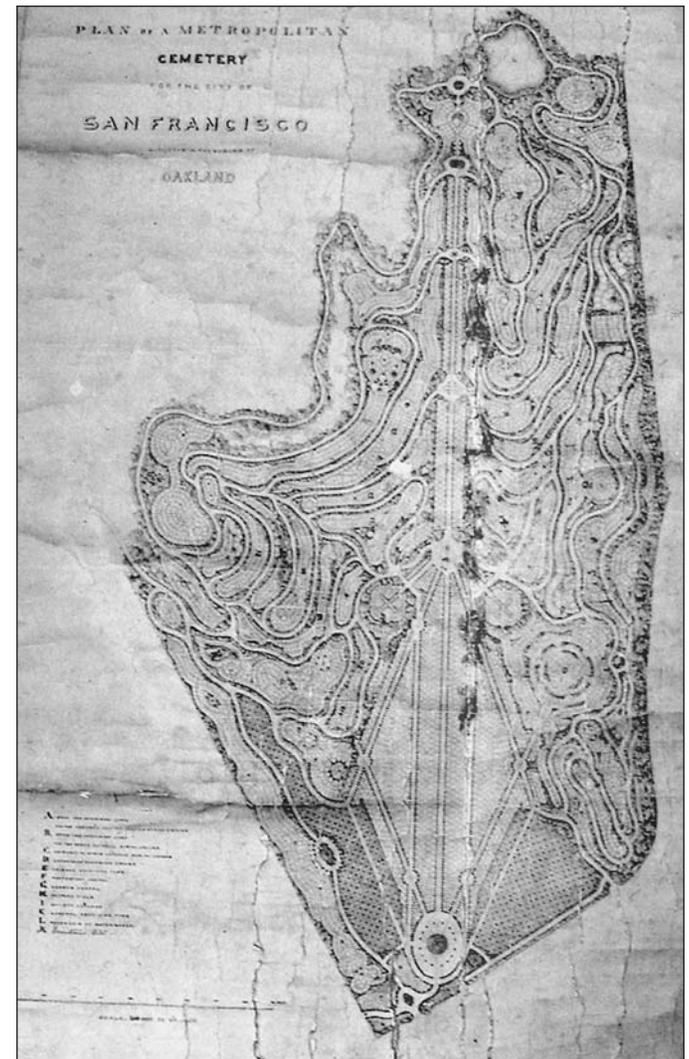
That meeting at Dr. Merritt's home the day after Christmas the previous year had paid the Braytons higher dividends than they ever dreamed possible.

Now that Mountain View Cemetery owned the land, the trustees looked for someone to develop it into an attractive rural cemetery. They were delighted to learn that the man who had designed New York's Central Park had arrived in San Francisco from the gold fields in Mariposa. Could they be fortunate enough to hire Frederick Law Olmsted to design their cemetery?

It was certainly worth a try.

Did you know?

Mountain View Cemetery was dedicated on May 25, 1865, just six weeks after the end of the Civil War.



TRANSFORMATION: In September 1864, Frederick Law Olmsted changed the grassy landscape that had recently belonged to Isaac and Mary Brayton into Mountain View Cemetery. This is a copy of the plan that Edward Miller drew for Olmsted. (See the inside back cover for a closer look.)

