Holy Cross Cemetery in Saint Helena

On April 10, 1865 continuing with the generosity that distinguished the Saint Helena community, hotel owner Augustus Tainter, donated a strip of land on the corner of Oak and Tainter streets to Archbishop Alemany of San Francisco for Saint Helena's first Catholic Church.[1]

In 1901 a wealthy parishioner sent $3000.00 to Father Blake to finance the priest's trip to the Holy Land, Instead of taking the trip, the priest spent $1,000.00 to buy five acres of land from F.W. Krober to establish a Catholic cemetery adjoining to Saint Helena Public cemetery.[2] Here it resides today at 2121 Spring Street, merely a few blocks from Saint Helena Catholic Church.

Shortly after the purchase of the cemetery many palms, trees, and native plants were added to the grounds. The remainder of the gift paid for the chapel construction. Made from the same stone as the parish Church, the chapel's main building materials are indigenous to Saint Helena[3].

The construction for the small chapel on the grounds was started in 1901 and was finished and blessed in 1904. The chapel still has its original flooring and window designs. It is charming in size and historical relevance. It sits in the center of the cemetery, and is available for services by contacting the cemetery office.

Through the generous donations of the parishioners of Saint Helena Catholic Parish the chapel was refurbished in 2005-2006 at a cost of approximately $104,000. Stained glass windows were re-leaded, and new pews were purchased from a small church in Germany.

The cemetery is home to the final resting place of Father Patrick Blake. (Pastor 1892-1921) Father Blake was very important to the Catholic Parish of Saint Helena as he rebuilt Saint Helena Catholic Church after a most disastrous fire in 1888. He was also responsible for numerous charities and the building of many churches in the Napa Valley, such as Our Lady of Perpetual Help, in Calistoga, and Holy Family in Rutherford. He rests out in front of our chapel.

Our cemetery is home to many historic Saint Helena families. The main road towards the chapel takes visitors through a tour of Saint Helena history from winery families' resting places to the burial site of Father Blake.

In 1961 the Diocese of Santa Rosa was formed from the Archdiocese of San Francisco and the Diocese of Sacramento and with the new Diocese, Bishop Leo Maher included Holy Cross Cemetery as one of the several Diocesan Cemeteries of the Department of Cemeteries. Holy Cross' first mausoleum was built in December of 1961. It houses 80 crypts and is one of the first mausoleums in the valley. Five more mausoleums were soon to follow.

Saint Helen's is our newest mausoleum. In the courtyard is a statue of Saint Helena who is the patron saint of the Parish. She is credited with finding the "True Cross" of Jesus' crucifixion during excavations she had ordered for the building of the church on Mount Calvary in the Holy Land.

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[1] Wilmoth, George ~The Centennial Story of St. Helena Catholic Church
[2] Wilmoth, George ~The Centennial Story of St. Helena Catholic Church page 36
[3] Wilmoth, George ~The Centennial Story of St. Helena Catholic Church page 36