

# History Comes *Alive!*

~ Tales From the City Archives ~



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## The Protestant Cemetery

Also known as the  
Ft. Moore Hill Public Cemetery  
1863-1888



One of Frank Lecoureur's original Protestant Cemetery maps.



An early graphic of the mausoleum on Ft. Moore Hill, on the former site of the Protestant Cemetery and now the site of the Board of Education. This graphic was sourced circa 1940.

Photos courtesy the Security Pacific National Bank and Times-Herald Collections, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Archive, Christina Rice, acting Sr. Librarian. Additional thanks to Michael Holland, City Archives, for the cemetery map image.

The population of the City of Los Angeles in 1863 was approximately 5,000 people.

There were a number of cemeteries in early Los Angeles. The earliest known cemetery was the Roman Catholic burial ground next to the Plaza Church on Main Street from 1823 to 1844, used for the remains of the early Indians of Yanga. Today it is the site of Los Angeles County's Los Angeles Plaza. Other early Catholic cemeteries date back to the Spanish era.

The Jewish community established its cemetery in 1854, not far from Chavez Ravine. There were also 19th century cemeteries in Boyle Heights and Wilmington.

The Protestants had two graveyards, one on Fort Hill where the Board of Education is today, and the other near Ninth Street and Figueroa. This article will focus on the Fort Moore Hill cemetery. But it must be noted that the remains of most, if not all the bodies, were moved to more modern resting places as the City of Los Angeles grew and matured.

Renowned local historian Nick Curry has dedicated an inordinate amount of time researching this Fort Hill underground repository of the dead. His findings increase the importance of a City Archives drawing of the cemetery in 1863 by City Surveyor Frank Lecoureur, a master of cartography and calligraphy in the 19th Century.

According to Curry, the Protestant City Cemetery covered the period from 1869 to 1888. The location was the current parking lot of the Los Angeles City

Board of Education at 450 N. Grand Ave. (Grand Avenue was originally called Charity Street, but no one wanted to live there, so the name was officially changed to Grand Avenue on February 22, 1887.) At the cemetery site, it was recorded that there had been 867 burials. Supposedly there were two subdivisions – one was for Public Ground and the other Private Ground. In other entries relating to the subdivisions, there were three others included: (1) International Order of Odd Fellows; (2) The Order of Knights of Pathias; and (3) a fireman's section.

Nick Curry notes that the Fort Hill Cemetery was called by different names. He mentions that his formal information is sporadic. Therefore, it is impossible at this time to determine when and why these options occurred. Nevertheless, the cemetery had been referred to as: City Cemetery (Protestant); Fort Moore Hill Cemetery; and the City Cemetery of Los Angeles City.

On Nov. 23, 1863, Lecoureur presented his cemetery map to the Common (City) Council, where it was adopted. Later, the mayor and council authorized the prices of the plots at sums of \$20, \$25, and \$30. The size of the plots on the cemetery map are listed as 10, 12 and 14 feet wide. There was also a house for a sexton, who cared for the religious property, and cemetery water tanks.

On a final note, I want the readers of *Alive!* to be aware of a scholar, historian, antiquarian and author Edwin H. Carpenter, who passed away in January 1995. I was fortunate, at one time, to sit with him on an organization board. I soon learned what a captivating jewel he was in the field of Los Angeles history. Ed, who was employed at the Huntington Library, had a number of publications. But in relationship to this article, his volume on *Early Cemeteries of the City of Los Angeles*, published in 1973 by the Dawson's Book Shop, gives great information on Los Angeles pioneer burials. This book is a great source of information.



1947: An aerial view of Los Angeles civic center looking west along Sunset Boulevard. The Hall of Justice is at left on Broadway and Temple, and the Board of Education headquarters is near the upper right, south of Sunset. The original Protestant Cemetery referenced in this article was where the Board of Education parking lot can be seen in this photograph.