

# **Fern Prairie Cemetery**

1855  
|  
2005

Clark County

Pioneer  
Cemetery

Washington





## Clark County Cemetery District #1

Fern Prairie Cemetery  
26700 NE Robinson Rd.

### Board of Commissioners:

Richard Engel  
Maxine Terrill  
William Zalpys

Secretary - Eileen Abernathy

Sexton - William Zalpys

### Mailing address:

P.O. Box 969  
Camas WA 98607  
Office hours: Tuesdays 9:00am -5:00pm  
Office phone / fax: (360) 833-9176  
Email: fernprairie6310@aol.com  
Website-<http://www.rootsweb.com/~wafpc/>

### Cemetery hours:

Opened from dawn to dusk

### Announcements:

All cemetery announcements are posted on a cemetery bulletin board located on premises

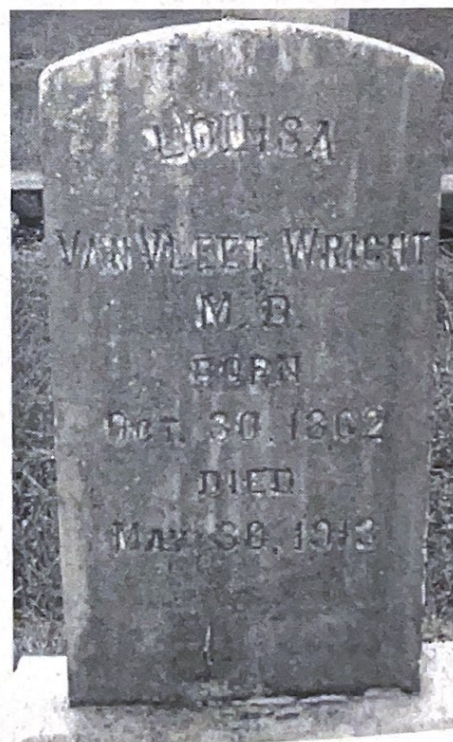
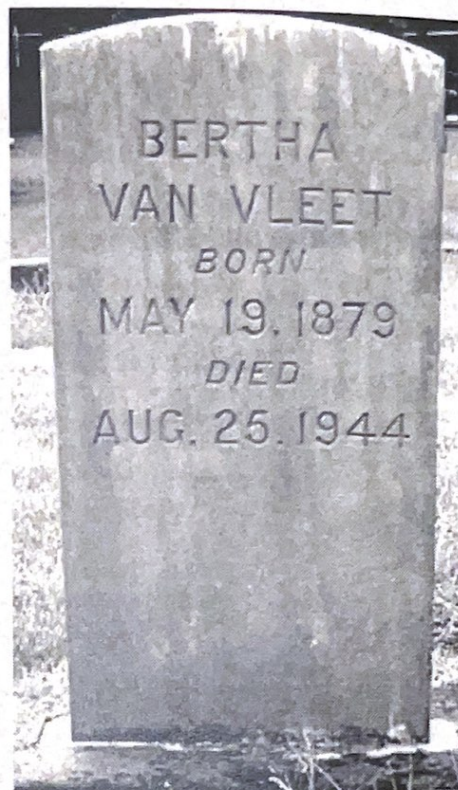
Board Meetings held once a month

### Services:

Water is available 12 months of the year  
Toilets opened at all times  
Grounds mowed weekly  
Office staffed on Tuesday only

### Grave types:

Columbarium – niche space for cremains  
Ash Garden - for cremain interment in the ground.  
Flat marker graves  
Upright marker graves





## Fern Prairie Cemetery History

On Dec. 10, 1855 Joel Coffey was buried on the land now known as Fern Prairie Cemetery on the Lewis Van Vleet land. Two months later Coffey's daughter Elizabeth Angeline married a neighboring Pioneer Lewis Van Vleet. This burial area was later to be known as the Fern Prairie Cemetery. In a new Fern Prairie History book put out by Della M. Howe and Jane A. Woodworth there is mention of an earlier burial of a Native American called Homan. We do not have a date or other information on this burial so we have used the 1855 burial as the date of establishment. In the following years the cemetery was the resting place of Van Vleet's and Coffey's until it was donated to the local community by the Van Vleet's.

In our search for old death certificates and obits of people buried in Fern Prairie Cemetery we have come upon a few documents that called the cemetery by other names, be it by error or just different names used by locals. We have come across the name Oak Farm Cemetery (the Van Vleet land was called "The Oaks" or Oak Farm.) and on occasion we have seen it mistakenly called Camas cemetery.

May of 1926 a small parcel of land adjoining the cemetery was purchased from C. F. Webberley and his wife Ella. Then on May 6, 1946 another section was bought. It also adjoined the cemetery and was purchased from C. F. Webberley and his wife. Later land was donated by Mr. Charles Gates and two acres were purchased on Dec. 31, 1989

In 1953 the Cemetery members decided to become a district. Shortly thereafter, they became Clark County Cemetery District #1. At that time three commissioners were elected and those commissioners selected a secretary. It has been operating in this manner since that time. The cemetery is financially supported by a cemetery tax voted in by the public. This tax revenue is minimal but thanks to the hours of volunteerism the cemetery gets much more attention.

The cemetery now owns 6 ½ acres. In 2004 two new sections were added as well as a Columbarium. The two new sections are called the Oaks as they are in our Oak grove. One section is for upright monuments, another is an Ash Garden. In the middle of the Ash Garden is a Columbarium. The columbarium is located under five big oak trees. A lovely setting.

In 2002 when an entire new slate of Commissioners were selected by the Clark County Commissioners, the cemetery saw a new beginning. Cemetery recording standards used for the logging of burials and grave sales were introduced. These standards were emulated from similar ones used in Park Hill Cemetery. These books have allowed us to properly log old and missing burial records and record grave sales.

The Yacolt burn destroyed the original cemetery records when it burned the Methodist Church in Fern Prairie. Post Yacolt burn records were not complete and or not clear when changes were made. Old burial records, obits and other information have allowed us to now fill in the new books with past records.



**Joel Coffey**, buried in 1855 is the first dated burial in this location and this is the date used as the establishment of the cemetery. The following Bio was taken from the *Clark County Pioneers History Book* with permission from the Clark County Genealogical Society.

#### Joel Coffey

The Grandson of Chesley Coffey and Jane Cleaveland. Joel Coffey descended from ancestors that came to Virginia with Sir Walter Raleigh. One of the Coffey family was an officer of Andrew Jackson's staff in the War of 1812, and they were related to Samuel Houston of Texas. Joel Coffey was born June 15, 1789, at Wilkesboro, Tennessee, the son of Chesley Coffey and Margaret Baldwin. Together with his sons Terrell and Alexander and daughters Amanda, Mary and Elizabeth, he crossed the Oregon Trail to Clark County in 1852. He died at Vancouver, Washington on December 10, 1855, just a little over a year after receiving his Donation land Claim of 159.70 acres at Fern Prairie. His claim was bordered by those of his son Terrell, his son-in-laws, owned most of the land that the present city of Camas is situated upon, with their boundaries extending to Prune Hill.

Sarah "Sally" Mackey and Joel Coffey were married April 19, 1818, in Maurey County Tennessee. She was born in 1795 in Rutherford County, North Carolina, the daughter of Lewis Mackey and Elizabeth Ashbrook. In 1851 Sally passed away at the age of fifty-six in Boonsville, Missouri, where they had lived for twenty years. After her death the family decided to seek the opportunities in the west and they joined a wagon train bound for the Oregon Country.

The Coffey's were a Catholic family and helped to build the little Church at Fallen Leaf Lake, near Camas.



Commonly assumed when Dr. Louisa Wright met untimely death.

The Jewel of Fern Prairie Cemetery is the well known **Dr. Louisa Van Vleet Spicer Wright**. She is said to be the first Female MD in the Washington Territory. The following has been taken from the Clark County Genealogical Society's book "Clark County Pioneers" (one change from the original article is the spelling Van Vleet where the book has it spelled Van Fleet as well the addition of MD)

Born on her parents "Oak Grove Farm" at Fern Prairie on October 30, 1862, Sophia Louisa Van Vleet was the first woman doctor in Washington Territory. Louisa was a brilliant girl and was very ambitious, but in those days

it was difficult for a woman to become anything other than a school teacher. She became a teacher and taught at Grass Valley for the sum of \$25 per month. She loved nursing and decided to attend the University of Oregon Medical School, transferring to Ann Arbor Michigan Medical School where she received her degree as Doctor of Medicine at the age of twenty-three in 1885.

Her first year of practice was in Missoula, Montana. She then returned to the Camas area of Clark County where she practiced until her retirement in 1912. For several years she was the City Health Officer at Camas and served for twelve years on the school board.

She was married on August 4 1888, to William Cecil Spicer, a pharmacist in Camas. They had four children, but the marriage ended in divorce. On June 18, 1901, she married James W. Wright, a widower with five children. He was born ca. 1863 in Iowa, the son of Stephen Wright and Emily Duncan. James owned a livery stable in Camas. The children by her former marriage didn't get along well with their step-father and left home as soon as they could. The boys changed their name to Van Vleet, and her daughter was married. Her son Lewis went to live with his grandparents.

Louisa was much loved by the Indians, whom she treated for their various ills. She met with a sudden and tragic end when kicked by a horse. On May 30, 1913, Louisa was helping her husband hitch up a horse to go to the train for her sister, whom they were taking to the cemetery with them to decorate the graves of her parents and a sister who had died a few months earlier. A white apron that she was wearing frightened the horse and it kicked her in the chin, instantly breaking her neck. Friends and mourners came from miles around to attend her funeral. Some of the Indians attending had traveled for two days by canoe in honor of their friend. She was buried in the family plot at the Fern Prairie Cemetery.



### Pioneer Families found in the Fern Prairie Cemetery

Pioneers – What is considered a Pioneer? Pioneers are defined as those who arrived prior to the declaration of Statehood in a particular territory. In Oregon that was the year 1859 and in Washington that was the year 1889. In our collection of names from the Fern Prairie Cemetery the list of Pioneers came from the Clark County Genealogical Society's Pioneer Book. Our apologies to those we may have missed.

We have used the criteria above to classify a Pioneer.

Abbott, Webster  
Anderson, Nelson  
Armstrong, Mary Alameda  
Wilson  
Atkins, Anna Lois Burden  
Atkins, William Everett  
Bartlow, Charles E.  
Beacock, Charles F.  
Beagle, Almon  
Beagle, Ruth Ann Allen  
Berggren, Peter  
Berggren, Robert  
Bergmann, Frank  
Bergmann, Mary Ann  
Blair, George and Sally Rook  
Blair, Jasper and Sarah P.  
Pyland, Hoyt, Herron, Mrytle,  
Hettie  
Blair, Rufus and Louisa Watson  
Brunner, Catherina Kasper  
Brunner, John  
Cavitt, Albert and Lydia Pitner  
Holmes  
Claurson, Christine Lawson  
Coffey, Joel, children Alexander,  
Terrel, Amanda, Mary and  
Elizabeth  
Cook, Laurretta Blair  
Davis, Sadie  
Day, Charles  
Dorman, Clara  
Dorman, Sarah Ellen Benbow  
Dorman, Thomas  
Dunn, John Michael  
Dunn, Julia Welch  
Dunn, Patrick

Ferrin, Jacob R.  
Ferrin, Mary Jane O'Dell  
Finch, Ellen Armstrong  
Fletcher, Julia Ann Steele  
Flynn, John Edrion  
Galvin, Albert O.  
Gates, Sarah Frances Piercy  
Hall, Alice May  
Hall, Eva A.  
Hall, William Sanford  
Hargis, Mary E. Prester  
Haskell, Christine  
Haskell, Herbert Melville  
Herron, Walter Scott  
Hosmer, William  
Johnson, Charles  
Johnson, Charlotte  
Johnson, John August  
Jones, Harret  
Jones, James Knox Polk  
Kaufman, George  
Kaufman, Lida  
Lake, David Soloman  
Langford, Susana Lillian  
Laws, Preston and Catherine  
Irwin  
Liensch, Henry H.  
Linderman, George  
Livingston Arty Noe Bias,  
Margaret, Mary Jane  
Lynch, Anna T.  
Lynch, John C.  
Maxwell, William Robert  
McAllister, Joseph and Rebecca  
Laws

McQueen, John Rice Penny (to  
Camas in 1889)  
Mitchell, George  
Petraim, John  
Piispanen, AnnaLisa Penra  
Prince, David  
Rasmussen, Christian  
Rienel, Nicholas  
Robinson Thomas Watt Jr.  
Runyan, Samuel Cyrus  
Sherrell, Mary Matilda Gill  
Stebbins, Orville Dewey

Stephenson, Deborah  
Stephenson, John  
Stephenson, Lorenzo  
Sund, Carrie  
Van Vleet, Lewis  
Wakefield, Mary F.  
Webberley, William Albert  
Welch, Hannah  
Welch, Katie  
Wilson, James  
Wolfe, Amanda (Amelia)  
Wylie, Rosetta Foster

### Pioneer Monument proposal

This monument would be for all those who came to the Washington Territory and made this place their home. On one side it could remember those Pioneers who moved to this area. On another side it could stand for all Pioneers who came to Clark County. A third side and a fourth side could be determined later what to use it for if this project becomes a reality.

At this point this is just a suggestion that Commissioner William Zalpys has been working on. A year back I visited the South West Washington Foundation. They work with a philanthropist and help place donations with the wishes of the donators. I explained the Pioneer Monument and its idea. They said it was interesting and that we would need to fill out the forms and all the documents that need to accompany it.

They are but one possible source of partial help. We would need other donations. The monument itself would be in the \$8-10,000 range. Fern Prairie would be a nice location for East Clark County to have such a monument. It would be placed in the middle of the large flat area with a clear view from all directions..

To use real wagon wheels was the first idea but after talking to the Granite Company they mentioned that the rust from the wheels would stain everything below it. This would leave us a choice of Bronze or stainless steel. But all these topics could be discussed at a later point. At this time we need to hear feed back on this type of Monument. Next we would need Individuals who have expertise in writing for grants or donations.

If you are interested in this project and would like to pledge some money towards it please let Eileen Abernathy, the cemetery secretary know. It would be best to get something in writing with a phone number name and amount of pledge.





### **Fern Prairie "The Oaks" Columbarium**

This Columbarium is unique in many ways. The unit is made entirely of granite. The Niches are all polished granite on the inside, 15" deep and 12" x 12" for a double unit. Unlike most cemeteries we allow more than two remains to be put inside. The center is available for use as a more affordable option with spaces on the panels for inscriptions.

Why build a Columbarium? The State of Washington is 3rd in the nation using cremation as the choice of burial. We wanted to fill the need of the people and introduced two new areas for cremation. The location where the Columbarium sits is inside a ring of Oak trees. By making the area around the Columbarium an Ash Garden we have saved the roots of the Oak trees from damage due to full size burials.

What is missing from the Columbarium are four pink granite benches which have been ordered but have not come in yet.



## Records – burials

Our warmest thanks to all those who have helped us collect documentation of early burials. We needed this information to fill in the empty spaces of history and once again have logged those who are buried in the cemetery. This work took many hours of looking through microfilm, going long distances to reference libraries and countless hours on the internet searching. Due to the hard work of so many we have been able to place a grave with a name. Leading this search is our own Secretary Eileen Abernathy. Eileen took on the job of secretary but has been effortlessly searching and typing in all this information on her own time for the most part.

Don Finel has also been of help to the cemetery. Don has found us so much information and is always willing to help when asked. Eileen says he is a "genealogist extraordinaire". Many of the obituaries and other information about the people buried at Fern Prairie Cemetery were obtained thanks to the tireless effort of Don. He's also responsible for several of the excellent pictures we've used including the one on the homepage of our web site. He's a long-time genealogist and willing volunteer for the Clark County Genealogical Society where he serves as librarian each Tuesday. He is also the capable leader of the monthly CCGS Legacy Users Group for people using the Legacy Family Tree program. Don is always willing to put in the "extra mile" on any project in which he's involved. A widower since the death of his wife Margaret, Don has been retired for several years. His constant companion for the past couple of years has been Rusty, a friendly, happy dog he rescued from the pound. Don has 2 adult children who live away from this area.

Pat Bauer is the person who designed and did all the work for the Fern Prairie web site. She spent many hours doing this. Pat herself is a descendant of a Clark County Pioneer family. Her g-grandmother Elvira Blackwell McKee came here in a prairie schooner in 1883 as an elderly widow woman (age 47 at the time). Before retirement Pat worked at the Vancouver Post Office. She is self taught on the computer and does web pages as a volunteer for the Clark County Genealogical Society, Citizens for Cultural Arts, NARFE Chapter 131 of Vancouver, the Whipple Creek Condo Association and the Fern Prairie Cemetery. She is very busy with her many projects, too numerous to mention here. Much thanks to Pat for her work on getting our cemetery into cyberspace. We now have a web page due to Pat Bauer.

Ron Brown of Brown's Funeral Home and Chris Dierichx of Straub's Funeral Home both in Camas have warmly opened their record books to Fern Prairie Cemetery for research of old records.

Robert McKachnie, manager of Park Hill Cemetery in Vancouver has helped us by supplying many old death certificates that he collected at his own expense.



## Where is the Cemetery now, and where is it going?

In 2002 an entire new board of commissioners were appointed which consisted of Richard Engel, William Zalpys and one position held first by Frank Donahe then by Lorraine Webberley Bush and currently by Maxine Terrell. A Secretary Eileen Abernathy was appointed by the board. During this Boards tenure the following improvements have taken place.

1. Setting up records system for the recording of burials and grave purchases as well as introducing a new and easy to use transmittal.
2. Investment in the construction of a Columbarium.
3. Bringing water into the cemetery
4. Purchasing a toilet for use 12 months of the year.
5. Building an office and setting office hours
6. Paving of the roads
7. Purchasing a fire proof safe to store the cemetery documents
8. Offering more services (this brings in more income)
9. Weekly grounds upkeep and planting of trees.
10. Making use of volunteerism and working with neighboring municipalities.
11. Purchase of eight granite benches (yet to be delivered)
12. Cemetery Web page (by Patricia Bauer)
13. Purchasing a computer, printer, and copier
14. Purchasing a fire proof cabinet for storing files
15. Bring a phone line into the cemetery office

All of this came at a cost but the cemetery will quickly recoup. None of this would have been possible without the tremendous amount of volunteer hours given by the commissioners, secretary, and public.

Where does the cemetery go from here? We plan to keep up the higher quality of customer service and cemetery grounds care. We will continue to pursue all possible volunteer help that is available for us.

We will investigate and attempt to work on the Pioneer's monument (see Pioneer's monument page).

We will continue to work with all the Clark County Genealogical and Historical groups to form close ties with them.

We will read and pay close attention to the comments left for us during Memorial Day weekend.




## Clark County Cemeteries

Amboy Cemetery  
Bethel Lutheran Cemetery  
Bethel Methodist Cemetery  
Brush Prairie Cemetery  
Buncombe Hollow, (Highland Valley) Cemetery  
Camas Cemetery  
Chelatchie Cemetery  
Columbia Tie Road Cemetery  
Columbia Mausoleum (no longer exists, was near current Harney School)  
Crawford, (or Kuntux) Cemetery  
Dead Lake, (Fallen Leaf) Cemetery (removed)  
Elm Lutheran Cemetery  
Evergreen Memorial Cemetery  
Fairchild, (Hawk Hills) Cemetery  
Fern Prairie Cemetery  
Finn Hill Cemetery  
Fisher Cemetery  
Fork Vancouver, (or the Post Military) Cemetery  
Gardner, (Hayes) Cemetery  
Gravel Point Cemetery  
Highland Lutheran Cemetery  
Hurt Road Cemetery  
John Pollock Cemetery  
John Pollock Cemetery  
Knight Family Cemetery  
Lewisville Cemetery  
Livingston Cemetery


Memory Memorial Cemetery  
Mountain View Cemetery  
Mt. Zion, (La Center) Cemetery  
New 2004 – Family Cemetery  
Northwood Park Cemetery  
Old City Cemetery  
Page, (Red Rock) Cemetery  
Park Hill Cemetery  
Indian burial grounds (near Day Break Bridge)  
Pioneer Cemetery  
Ridgefield Cemetery  
Robinson Family Cemetery  
Sacred Heart Catholic, (Dublin) Cemetery  
Salmon Creek Methodist Cemetery  
Sara Union Cemetery  
Sifton Cemetery  
St. James Catholic Cemetery  
St. Johns Catholic Cemetery  
St. Johns Lutheran Cemetery  
St. Mary of Guadalupe Catholic Cemetery  
Sunnyside Memorial Cemetery  
Indian burial grounds, (Crown Road / 3<sup>rd</sup>) Camas  
Venersborg Cemetery  
Washougal Catholic Cemetery  
Washougal Memorial Cemetery  
Wilson Bridge Cemetery  
Yacolt Cemetery



## **Camas-Washougal Historical Society Two Rivers Heritage Museum -- Washougal, WA**



**TWO RIVERS  
HERITAGE  
MUSEUM**



**An All Volunteer - Non Profit Organization**  
**Sponsored by**  
**Camas - Washougal**  
**Historical Society**

**Two Rivers Heritage Museum**  
**has permanent and rotating displays**  
**including:**

- Past local physicians instruments**  
**and information**
- Over 6,000 local photos**
- 4800 oral and family history files of**  
**local pioneers**
- Native American artifacts & basketry**
- Antique dolls and toys**
- Antique glassware, utensils and tools**
- 1900-1940's school memorabilia**
- Past local businesses memorabilia**

*We also have extensive land and family  
history records for research.*

*Information on old homes, buildings,  
communities and organizations  
agriculture and transportation*

Two Rivers Museum provides opportunities for historical research and education, primarily related to that area within a five-mile radius from the juncture of the Washougal & Columbia Rivers.

The museum has a large collection in a research room of family & land information.

The Camas-Washougal Historical Society, a non-profit organization, manages the museum using all volunteer help.

For Camas & Washougal Washington, two neighboring communities on the southernmost bend of the Columbia River, the past has been particularly resplendent. The proud heritage and natural beauty of these communities make them a one-of-a-kind place.

The Two Rivers Heritage Museum is located across from the Pendleton Woolen Mill parking lot.

Normal hours are – Tuesday thru Saturday 11 am - 3 pm