

Why We Should Care About History



Skinner family marker

It's a crisp, foggy spring morning as I stroll about the Masonic cemetery, burrowing into my coat and scarf, hands stuffed in my pockets. Though it's chilly, the birds can be heard, calling for mates, defending territory, and scratching and pecking for breakfast. I'm searching too, though as I wander among the headstones it seems less like a treasure hunt and more like being open to inspiration about the past. Who were these people and what are their stories? We can only glean a tiny bit about them from the inscriptions.

I've been leading the Singing Creek Educational Center since its earliest beginnings 20 years ago, doing living history programs and events for children and adults. I've watched many local presentations by notable reenactors, and now it is my turn to become Mary Skinner. I'm excited to delve into her life—all the parts of it: the happiness, the sorrow, the challenges.

Several members of my staff are taking on figures from Eugene's history as well. We will be learning together and practicing, so on Memorial Day weekend we can sit by their graves and talk

with you in character. Living history indeed!

Why should we care about history? The answer is the reason I do this work. In a world of nonstop headlines and instant opinions, it's tempting to ask why we should look backward at all. Why dwell on what's over when the future demands so much attention?

For people who care about democracy, justice, and human dignity, the answer is that understanding history is not a luxury. It's a responsibility. History is the memory of our moral experiments and actions. It is how a society remembers what it celebrates and what it regrets and helps us learn from the past so we don't repeat tragedies.

History education is about understanding cause and effect and not shielding our eyes from the hardest and darkest parts of our past. Racism, slavery, atrocities towards Native Americans—all of these things need to be talked about and understood within the context of their time and the changing values of the modern world.

History warns us about moral complacency. It's comforting to believe that peo-

ple in the past were obviously wrong and that we, by contrast, would have known better. But history shows that many who supported, tolerated or ignored injustice saw themselves as decent, patriotic and reasonable. This forces us to ask uncomfortable questions: What injustices do we accept because they benefit us? Whose suffering are we minimizing because it's inconvenient to face?

History education also expands empathy. It asks us to consider lives unlike our own. This perspective doesn't excuse wrongdoing, but it deepens understanding of why historical abuses occurred. It helps elucidate how systems shape behavior—and why changing systems matters more than judging individuals.

In an era of chaos and certainty, historical thinking slows us down, complicates our assumptions, and encourages listening over knee-jerk reactions. When history is understood, it equips people to argue better, vote wiser, and imagine better futures for all.

History doesn't trap us in the past, it exists to guide our choices now. It reminds us that the freedoms we enjoy were won by people who fought for them before our time—and that we are building a world for the generations to come.

In this year of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, we can remember that our choices have great significance now and in the future. One day someone may be sitting quietly in costume, talking about our lives and our times, sharing stories of hope and significance with visitors.

The sun peeks through the oaks and warms my face. I stand and brush the moss off my coat and head home, full of contemplation, inspiration and purpose.

*Karen Rainsong
Executive Director of Singing Creek
Educational Center, a 501(c)(3) living
history organization in Eugene.*



Welcoming Laura Rupert

We are delighted to welcome to the EMCA Board Laura Rupert, who has returned to Eugene after working for a number of years in the Seattle area. With a professional background in financial management and accounting, she is a welcome fit for our budget and finance committees. Her experience in strategic planning will also be valuable as we look to the future.

When asked why she was interested in joining the cemetery Board, Laura simply said “community.” That brief answer says a lot. Not only does she enjoy working with an interesting bunch of people on the board, she also sees an opportunity to help preserve and promote a unique asset of the community that she now calls home—one more chance to make a difference in the world around her. As she has put it, “to rebuild the community she enjoyed here in the 1990s.”

Laura’s experiences with nonprofit organizations go back to her girlhood in Job’s Daughters and church groups, and have continued throughout her life, including PTA work when her daughter was growing up, and now the START student reading program. When she’s not gardening or involved in nonprofit activities, Laura and her English-born husband, Ray, are beginning to explore Oregon, with plans to experience as much as they can of that larger community.

Letter from a Friend

Letter from a friend.

We received this letter after the spring 2025, Monumental News was published.

Dear Friends,

In your last newsletter you wrote about 30 years of EMCA stewardship. It made me think of an even older time – April 22, 1970 – the very first Earth Day celebration.

I attended what was then called Harris Elementary School, just a few blocks south of the Masonic cemetery. That morning, my sixth-grade teacher, Mrs. Horn, gathered us all together and shooed us out the back door of our classroom, up and over the hilly streets to the southern

edge of the old and vandalized neighborhood “graveyard.”

If we had previously ventured into the cemetery, it was probably by necessity and definitely in daylight. Tough older kids were known to “hang out” in the area, especially around the ruined building on the west side of the cemetery.

When our class reached the end of the pavement, we stepped into the cemetery and began walking between the markers, up and down aisles choked with weeds, overgrowth and trash. Before long, Mrs. Horn had given us bags and sacks to fill with the bottles, cans and other garbage scattered everywhere. As we worked, she told us about some of the famous people

interred there.

More than half a century later, I clearly remember that warm spring day because it opened my eyes to a community resource in my own back yard, and it got me to start thinking about our relationship with our immediate environment. I think my teacher would have been very impressed by your stewardship and the many changes you have wrought in just 30 years! Well done indeed.

Best regards,
Allyson Wright

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Eugene Masonic Cemetery Association (541)684-0949 www.EugeneMasonicCemetery.org

The IRS Form 990 is available for inspection upon request

We acknowledge that the cemetery sits on the the traditional Indigenous homelands of the Kalapuy peoples. We respect this Indigenous homeland, honor the care they provided for the land, and pay tribute to the Kalapuya peoples who continue to live and thrive in the State of Oregon.

Memorial Day | The President's Corner

At an early age it was impressed upon me that Memorial Day is a sacred day, a day to remember and honor our loved ones who have passed. Perhaps Memorial Day was especially poignant for me due to the fact that I grew up in a funeral home. Although our living space was pretty well separated from the funeral home space, the happenings of the funeral home were ever present. As a young kid, my jobs in the family business included folding funeral programs, vacuuming, and setting up chairs before a memorial service.

One memorable job I had was ironing the flags that were to be draped over the caskets of veterans. At the time of interment, the flag would be ceremoniously folded by a military honor guard and presented to a loved one – usually the veteran's widow. As described by the VA, the flag “serves as a final tribute to the deceased's military service, symbolizing a grateful nation's respect and honoring their sacrifice.”

These large flags, sent to the funeral home from the VA, measured 5' x 9 1/2', arrived tightly packed in cardboard boxes and were extremely wrinkled and creased. My job was to iron out every wrinkle and crease. It was a tedious job and it was especially difficult because we did our best not to let the flag touch the ground as it was ironed.

At the time, I probably grumbled while performing the task, and it wasn't particularly meaningful – it was just another job I did so that I could earn my allowance. Looking back, I am grateful I got to contribute, albeit in a small way, in preparing a symbol that recognized a veteran's ser-

vice and sacrifice.

The services provided by my family's funeral home also included headstone-related work. The weeks leading up to Memorial Day were particularly busy. Everyone wanted the headstones they purchased to be in place in time for Memorial Day. We would have to wait until the ground thawed, and the snow melted in our mountain valley before we were able to start setting the headstones.

Once Memorial Day weekend arrived and the work had been completed, my dad's stress level subsided. We recreated a bit and probably had a barbeque, but we also made sure to return to the cemeteries to place flowers at the graves of our loved ones and hear memories about those who had passed.

In college, I had the opportunity to participate in a summer internship in Washington, D.C. I happened to arrive on the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend – what a special time to be in the nation's capital. On Memorial Day, I had to visit a cemetery, and there was no question which one I would visit.

I will never forget the emotions I felt walking among the rows of graves in Arlington National Cemetery. I was overwhelmed as I reflected on the service of those thousands of men and women, many of whom paid the ultimate sacrifice.

As I neared the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, I noticed many people gathering. There was a large security presence, and soon the presidential motorcade arrived. Unbeknownst to me, President Obama was set to speak at the large amphitheater adjacent to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Fortunately, I was close enough to hear his remarks over the speakers as he honored those who served.

Years later, President Obama spoke at a similar Memorial Day ceremony at Arlington. In those remarks, he said this about the sacredness and symbolism:

“My fellow Americans, this hallowed ground is more than the final resting place of heroes; it is a reflection of America itself. It's a reflection of our history – the wars we've waged for democracy, the peace we've laid to preserve it. It's a re-



flection of our diversity – men and women of all backgrounds, all races and creeds and circumstances and faiths, willing to defend and die for the ideals that bind us as one nation. It's a reflection of our character, seen not only in those who are buried here, but also in the caretakers who watch over them and preserve this sacred place; and in the Sentinels of the 3rd Infantry Regiment who dutifully, unfailingly watch over those patriots known only to God, but never forgotten. Today, a grateful nation thanks them as well.”

To me, these words beautifully describe the importance of Arlington, and of every other cemetery – reflections of our history, our diversity, and of our character. Maybe I'm biased, but I also appreciate his recognition of the caretakers of the cemetery – those who preserve that sacred place and who watch over the heroes that have passed.

For these reasons and more, Memorial Day is special for me. This year I look forward to spending Memorial Day weekend at the Eugene Masonic Cemetery. We invite you to join us at the cemetery – to listen to taps being played, attend a music event at the Public Square, participate in a tour, learn about the history of our community and our forebearers, find peace among the firs, oaks, and madrones, and to walk among the rows of headstones, many with flags recognizing those who have served to protect the freedoms that we hold dear.

*Shawn Walker
Board President*



Guided Tours of Eugene Masonic Cemetery



Roz's bench

I'm a taphophile – a lover of cemeteries, especially this one. This place matters to me, and I love to show other people why it should matter to them, so I take them on my tour

We meet at Hope Abbey where we start the tour by admiring its fine Egyptian Revival exterior and talk about its architect, Ellis Lawrence. Once inside, I watch folks look in wonder at how magnificent it is now.

I describe what the abbey's interior was like when all the windows were broken and blocked up and there were two inches of mud on the floor. I read neighbor Mike Helm's account of his first Saturday night living across from the

Abbey with beer bottles and swear words flying from the weekly drunken party on the abbey roof.

The parties took place through the mid-1980s, until Mike's nightly patrolling with his pit bull and regular calls to the police put a stop to them. However, it wasn't until 1997, two years after EMCA took over ownership of the cemetery, that rehabilitation of the abbey began.

I talk about many of the abbey's residents including KLCC's Gavin "Rooster" Fox and former UO President Prince Lucien Campbell, but also about the people who toiled to make it look beautiful again. We look at the restoration of the bathroom by John Bredesen and Denny Hellesvig and admire John Rose's magnificent glass work in the golden windows. They hear the story of a former guide who inspired a generous donor to pay to polish the abbey's terrazzo floor.

Half an hour flies by and it's time to go outside.

Once outside, we observe stone carver Lisa Ponder's exquisite markers, and cemetery preservationists Dave and Bernadette's marker restorations. There's the Public Square featuring Roz's bench and the peace and beauty of the Memorial Overlook. A stroll down Founders Row appropriately starts with Fielding McMurray, who sold the land for the cemetery in 1859, Eugene Skinner, Eugene's founder and the first Mason in Eugene, and his wife Mary who convinced him that Eugene was a better name for our fair city than Skinner's Mudhole.

We visit the other historic markers, among them John Whiteaker, Oregon's first governor, John Wesley Johnson, UO's first president, artist Maude Kerns, and Wiley Griffon, the first known black resident of Eugene.

While I enjoy the teaching part of the tour, I also enjoy learning from those who join me. A woman on my last tour described how Lisa Ponder had designed and carved her husband's marker, which we visited later on the tour. Another tour member was excited to show me her favorite marker and to point out that "mathematician" was misspelled. She also told us more about Thomas Condon, Oregon's first state geologist, and his biographer, former UO President Robert Clark, buried in lots across from each other near the mausoleum.

There is so much more that I cover in my tour of this extraordinary place. I hope you will join me some time.

Check Facebook, the eNewsletter, the EMCA website or the Eugene Weekly for specific dates and times of future tours.

*Caroline Forell
Former Board Member*

A Long and Wearisome Trip

Crossing Prairies, Mountains, and Rivers in 1866

At a recent Last Sunday event at the cemetery, a family visiting their daughter, a student at University of Oregon, mentioned that they were descendants of Stewart B. Eakin Jr., a prominent Eugene resident who had come to Eugene on the Oregon Trail as a young man and whose biography is included in the cemetery's book *Full of Life*. The visiting family said the man's father and grandfather were also buried in the Masonic Cemetery, an unusual situation for a pioneer family crossing the country in the 1860s. It turns out the multigenerational family travelled the Oregon Trail together.

In 1866, Stewart B. Eakin Sr., his wife Catherine, and eight of their nine children made the trip west to Eugene from the Chicago area. He followed the path of his younger sisters, Maria Eakin McCornack, wife of Andrew McCornack, and Isabella Eakin Pattison, both of whom arrived in 1853 and are also buried in the Masonic Cemetery. The 1866 trip is detailed in three diaries written by the father, his 19-year-old son "Little Stewart" (Stewart Jr.), and his 16-year-old daughter, Jennie. Two of the diaries are in the Special Collections at the University of Oregon library.

The trip west was the third known westward migration for the family. The elder Eakins, Robert and Margaret, were born in Scotland in 1786, and moved to Northern Ireland before emigrating to the Chicago area in 1840. They were well off in Illinois: Stewart owned a farm and a store and was postmaster.

The farm prospered during the Civil War, but in the postwar recession Stewart decided to move west. He purchased five wagons, 12 mules, wagon tops, tents, and provisions. Several weeks before the trip Stewart's octogenarian parents decided to go with them, so he

purchased a horse and buggy for their comfort.

The diaries offer snippets of their daily life on the road. When they caught up to another Oregon train about five weeks into the trip, teenage Jennie said of the other pioneers: "I do hate the company we are in. The women are all rough, coarse, and ugly and the men all swear." The following day she noted that women came over to the Eakin camp, attracted by the "fine young men" in the Eakin party.

Although the way west was by then



Eakin family marker

a well-travelled path, the family faced harsh storms and difficult terrain as they crossed the prairies, mountains, and rushing rivers. On the way down a steep and rocky mountain, 80-year-old grandma tripped and fell forward on her face. She had considerable bruising and a strained wrist.

More catastrophically, three-year-old

Walter tried to get out of a wagon before it stopped. He fell under the front wheel, which rolled over his thigh, breaking it. The back wheel then rolled over his forehead, causing much injury and requiring stitches. Without knowing the extent of Walter's injuries, the parents left six children, ages seven to 17, with the grandparents in camp while they took Walter, Stewart Jr., and the buggy to Fort Laramie, 50 miles away.

The Illinois to Eugene trip was hard on everyone, but no one more than Stewart's wife, Catherine. She had always had a delicate constitution, and her eight-month-old child died just weeks before they left on the trip. She also left behind her oldest daughter who was recently married and pregnant with her first child. Seeing Walter injured so severely, along with the trip to find a doctor, were traumatic for her. Catherine died at age 42, shortly after the family arrived in Eugene.

Several of Stewart and Catherine's children became prominent Oregonians. Stewart Jr. was a founding partner of the Hendricks & Eakin Bank. He was elected sheriff of Lane County and served several terms in the Oregon legislature, including the state senate. Robert was a judge and attorney in Oregon and served as the 19th Chief Justice of the Oregon Supreme Court. Although the daughter left behind died early, likely in childbirth, the remaining Eakin children lived to old age. Even the grandparents, who are buried in the Eugene Masonic Cemetery, thrived in Oregon, living to 90 and 87 years old.

Beatrice McKenzie
Board Member

Music at the Cemetery

This year brings a new season of free concerts presented by the Eugene Masonic Cemetery. We offer two series: “Music To Die For” inside the beautiful Hope Abbey mausoleum and “Music on the Square,” at the Public Square atop the hill.

2026 Season Music Schedule	
Music To Die For Sundays at 2 PM	Music on the Square Sundays at 6 PM
JUNE 14 Linda Danielson & Janet Naylor Fiddle & Celtic Harp	MAY 24 The Dubious Rubes
JULY 12 Kara Eubanks & Nathalie Fortin Violin & Piano	JUNE 14 Blugene Brass
AUG 09 Casera South American music	JULY 26 The Sugar Beets
SEPT 13 Wild Hog in the Woods Skiffle band	AUG 09 Natsukashaii Soul
OCT 11 Oregon Bach Collegium	SEPT 13 The Feel Goods

Further information about the programs will be available on FaceBook, the eNewsletter, and the cemetery’s website closer to performance dates.

A Stroll in the Cemetery



Kay Holbo stone



Osoberry arboretum plant marker



Japanese gravestone



Wiley Griffon marker



Example of cemetery signage

Recent Contributions

The following individuals and organizations contributed gifts between October 1, 2025 and April 1, 2026. We thank you all.

Monumental Giver

(\$2,500+)

William and Christina Bradshaw
Eugene Masonic Lodge No. 11
David Fryefield and Catherine Kordesch

Monumental Rebuilder

(\$500-\$2,499)

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Gifts in Honor and in Memory

Between October 1, 2025 and April 1, 2026 the Eugene Masonic Cemetery Association received gifts from the following. We wish to thank all who contributed and regret any errors or omissions.

Monumental Giver

(\$2,500+)

Roslyn & A.J. Gaines Foundation in memory
of Carolyn Spector
Rebecca Weedon Lacy in memory of Bob,
Jonnie and Sam Lacy
The Larson Family Foundation for the
landscape fund

Monumental Rebuilder

(\$500-\$2,499)

Kathleen Wiley and Bob Carolan in memory of
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and Beth Currens Westcott
Michael Karasek and Jean Diamond in memory
of Andrew Karasek
Brigid Flannery for the landscape in memory
of Roz Slovic
Patrick Jones in memory of Eunice Kjaer and
Charles Allen Reinhardt
Linda Lewis in memory of Martin Kaufman
Tamara Lutz in memory of Mike Lutz, Carl
and Dolly Plant
Margot McDonnell in memory of Gerald
McDonnell
The Robert R. McIvor Family Charitable Fund
in honor of Loran Chandler McIvor
Sterling Morris for Hope Abbey
Carol and Samuel Williams in memory of the
Luckeys and the Leasures

Preserver (\$250-\$499)

Kathleen Doty in memory of Robert and
Margaret Leonetti
Lawrence Lawson in memory of Myra Lawson
Barbara Perry in memory of Robert Weiss
Paul Slovic in memory of Roz and Dan Slovic
Barbara Truax in memory of Donald Truax,
Connor Truax and Mary Truax Johnson
Jan Vitus in memory of C. James Vitus

Sponsor (\$100-\$249)

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and Murray Adams
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Julie V.B. Daniel in memory of Hallis
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Andrew Karasek
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Muriel Robinson
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Carol Williams for the endowment

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Lorraine Bias in memory of Jerome Bias
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Jennifer Peterson in memory of Don
Macnaughton
Mary and Dean Tanner in memory of
Gloria Semon and Patrick Donald
John and Kim Toner in memory of Peggy
and Peter Farmer
Mark Zorn in memory of Karen Zorn

Recent In-kind Contributions

We happily acknowledge the in-kind
services and discounts afforded to us by
the following.

Bob Weir Tree Service
Lane Forest Products
QSL Printing
Sanipac

Thank you!

Consider your place in history...

The Eugene Masonic Cemetery offers burial rights for both cremated remains and caskets. Your purchase not only creates a beautiful family memorial spot, but also supports the cemetery.

For more information, please contact Sara at 541-684-0949 or email emca1859@gmail.com

To Our Readers: If you would like to receive EMCA's monthly eNewsletter, go to the EMCA's website. On the pull down menu, click About Us and then EMCA publications. At the bottom of the page is a link to sign up!

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What's Inside

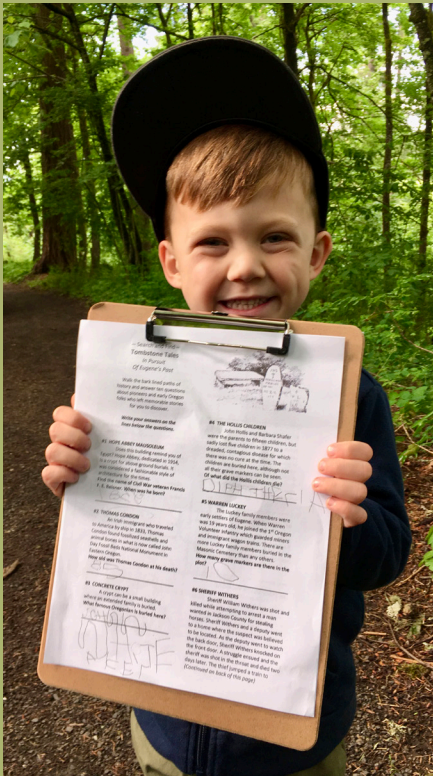
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Scan Here to Donate

Donations to help us maintain the beauty and serenity of this historic building and the grounds are always appreciated.

Memorial Day Weekend Events



History Hunt Participant

Note: while the cemetery will be open to visitors on Saturday, no events are planned for that day and Hope Abbey will be closed.

Sunday May 24th & Monday May 25th

Hope Abbey will be open from 11 am to 5 pm Sunday and Monday. Please come in to enjoy some refreshments while you explore the mausoleum.

History Hunt, a fun activity for older children and families, will be available both Sunday and Monday. Pick up a map, a list of questions and clues, and a clipboard in Hope Abbey any time you are ready. Everyone who participates gets a prize.

On your walk through the ten acres of beautiful trees and flowers, look for the flags placed at the graves of the veterans. Trumpeter Barry Barreau will play Taps

at the top of the ridge at approximately 12:15 pm on both days.

Two scheduled tours of the cemetery—one each day—will begin at 12:30 pm. Meet in the mausoleum for your host. Our landscape expert, Diego Llewellyn-Jones, will lead the Sunday tour. The Monday tour, led by Caroline Forell, an experienced guide, will focus on the history of the cemetery.

On Sunday, May 24, there will be a free concert at the top of the cemetery. Bring blankets or low chairs to be comfortable on the grass. The band, **The Dubious Rubes**, is scheduled to play at 6 pm.

We are adding a new event this year! Near some of the graves you may see a ghost or two with their stories to tell. Keep your eyes open! Check in with the volunteers in the mausoleum if you need help to find the ghosts.

Donations to help us maintain the beauty and serenity of this historic building and the grounds are always appreciated.