Restoring Auburn’s Pioneer Cemetery for Future Generations

By Rachael McAlister and Calvin Terada

In January 2017, the Museum began a project to enhance Auburn’s Pioneer Cemetery. The cemetery was officially established in the 1860s and has gone by many names in the past: Faucett Cemetery, the Cemetery at Slaughter, the Japanese Cemetery, and the Auburn Pioneer Cemetery. It sits on the busy corner of Auburn Way and 8th Street, but inside its gates it tells a story of dedication, perseverance, and reverence.

The cemetery has two main sections; early pioneering families and Japanese American families. It is a unique location and active cemetery with a rich history that includes stories of homesteading, immigration and dreams of a better life. In 2016, the cemetery became a King County and City landmark and in 2017 then Museum Director Patricia Cosgrove worked with two citizen volunteers, officials from the City of Auburn Parks, Arts, and Recreation Department, and Hoshide Wanzer Architects to create a master plan for its restoration. This master plan summarizes the history and significance of the cemetery:

Located in a peaceful farming area north of the town of Slaughter (later named Auburn) the land was used by John and Rachel Faucett as their family burial plot in the 1860s and was called Faucett Cemetery. About ten years later the land was donated as an official cemetery and was divided into 91 plots as the cemetery of Slaughter in 1889. Many early pioneers were buried there, but frequent spring flooding of the nearby rivers convinced some families to move their departed to the newer cemeteries on the surrounding hillsides.

In the 1890s Japanese immigrants began farming in Auburn. The first Japanese inurnment at the cemetery was recorded in 1890. It was followed by many others. With the establishment of the White River Buddhist Temple in 1912 the growing Japanese community had relationship to the cemetery and the east portion of the property was granted for their use. In return, Temple members began a long-term commitment to maintain the monuments and the grounds.

The City of Auburn took over ownership of the property in 1962, but the Temple still plays a major role in the cemetery and its members have continued their loving care of the property. With great support from the White River Buddhist Temple, Seattle Buddhist Temple, the City of Auburn, descendants of the Pioneer Cemetery, and a massive outpouring of support from the local Japanese American community, the Museum is working through the master plan and many wonderful improvements to the site have already been completed.
New Jizo Statues Coming this Spring

In the late 1930s a commemorative monument was installed to honor the passing of Tora Kato and her four children whose lives were tragically taken by their father. During the height of anti-Japanese sentiments during WWII three Jizo statues that were attached to the monument were defaced or stolen. Jizo are Japanese figures associated with Buddhism that are traditionally thought of as guardians who assist women and children. With a lot of help from Rev. Katsuya Kusunoki from the Seattle Buddhist Temple we have recently imported three replacement Jizo and this spring the monument will be moved and stabilized and the new statues will be installed. The formal unveiling of the most current updates to the Pioneer Cemetery will be conducted on May 27, 2019 at the annual Memorial Day gathering.

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