

GRASS VALLEY THE COMMUNITY

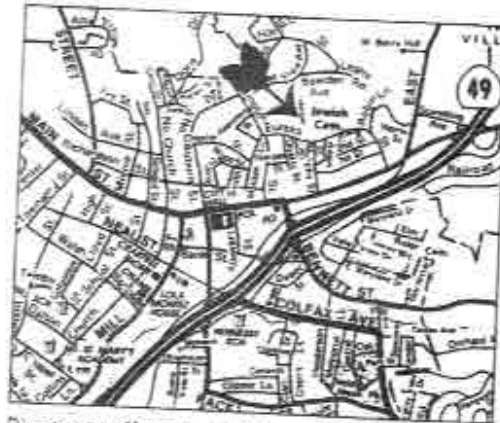
Community Overview

Grass Valley, a mere four miles from Nevada City, gained its name from the rolling grasslands which define the local terrain. In the first years of the Gold Rush, cattle could be seen grazing in the valley, but already by 1851 this idyllic vision was obscured by a tent city of close to 20,000 miners. In 1850, it is said, George McKnight had stumbled upon quartz rock that glittered in the moonlight, revealing a vein of gold embedded deep in the stone. With this discovery, the methods and economics of gold mining in Grass Valley had dramatically changed. The lone miner with the pan swishing in the stream, or even the pair of miners using a sluice box, was soon replaced by large organizations holding significant investments in the massive and expensive mining equipment needed to burrow deep into the earth and to retrieve the gold from the rock. The owners themselves did not burrow into the earth, of course, but hired hundreds of employees, including many experienced miners from Cornwall in England, to run the equipment. The Empire

Mine, during its years of operation (1850 to 1956), yielded more than five million ounces of gold. Even the fiery dancer Lola Montez and her protégé, Lotta Crabtree, both of whom danced during the Gold Rush decades in Grass Valley could not eclipse the drama of hard rock mining for Grass Valley citizens.

Glimpses of the Pioneer Jewish Community

As noted in the chapter on Nevada City, the adjacent communities of Grass Valley and Nevada City supported separate Jewish organizations. In 1856 the Shaar Zedek (Gates of Righteousness) Hebrew Benevolent Society of Grass Valley was formed for the express purpose of "taking charge of the cemetery, taking care of the sick, and burying the dead." In the February 13, 1857, edition of the San Francisco's



Directions to Shaar Zedek (Grass Valley Jewish cemetery): From Highway 49 take the Grass Valley Historic District exit (Collax Highway 174), and turn right onto E. Main Street. Proceed on Main Street and turn left at Eureka Street. Proceed up the hill. Turn left on Second Street. The cemetery is on your right, bound by Blossom Lane, Second Street, and Eureka Street.

GRASS VALLEY THE COMMUNITY

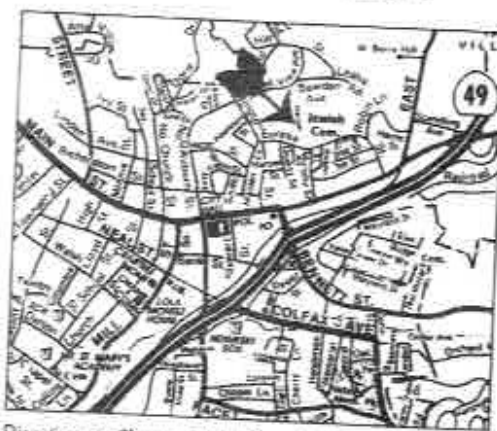
Community Overview

Grass Valley, a mere four miles from Nevada City, gained its name from the rolling grasslands which define the local terrain. In the first years of the Gold Rush, cattle could be seen grazing in the valley, but already by 1851 this idyllic vision was obscured by a tent city of close to 20,000 miners. In 1850, it is said, George McKnight had stumbled upon quartz rock that glittered in the moonlight, revealing a vein of gold embedded deep in the stone. With this discovery, the methods and economics of gold mining in Grass Valley had dramatically changed. The lone miner with the pan swishing in the stream, or even the pair of miners using a sluice box, was soon replaced by large organizations holding significant investments in the massive and expensive mining equipment needed to burrow deep into the earth and to retrieve the gold from the rock. The owners themselves did not burrow into the earth, of course, but hired hundreds of employees, including many experienced miners from Cornwall in England, to run the equipment. The Empire

Mine, during its years of operation (1850 to 1956), yielded more than five million ounces of gold. Even the fiery dancer Lola Montez and her protégé, Lotta Crabtree, both of whom danced during the Gold Rush decades in Grass Valley could not eclipse the drama of hard rock mining for Grass Valley citizens.

Glimpses of the Pioneer Jewish Community

As noted in the chapter on Nevada City, the adjacent communities of Grass Valley and Nevada City supported separate Jewish organizations. In 1856 the Shaar Zedek (Gates of Righteousness) Hebrew Benevolent Society of Grass Valley was formed for the express purpose of "taking charge of the cemetery, taking care of the sick, and burying the dead." In the February 13, 1857, edition of the San Francisco's



Directions to Shaar Zedek (Grass Valley Jewish cemetery): From Highway 49 take the Grass Valley Historic District exit (Colfax Highway 174), and turn right onto E. Main Street. Proceed on Main Street and turn left at Eureka Street. Proceed up the hill. Turn left on Second Street. The cemetery is on your right, bound by Blossom Lane, Second Street, and Eureka Street.

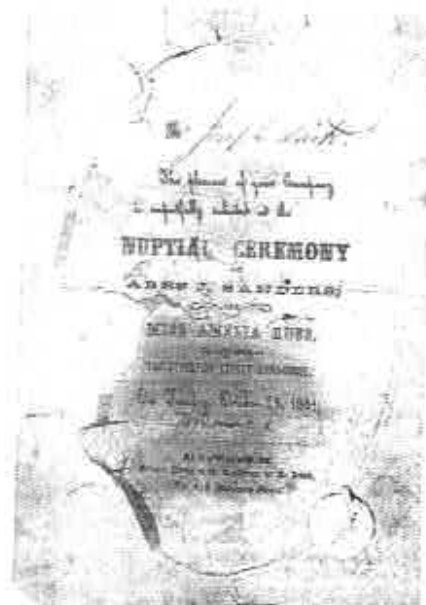
Weekly Gleaner, editor Rabbi Julius Eckman reported the words of Grass Valley resident Jacob C. Marks: "Allow me to inform you that our Society is in a flourishing condition. We were organized September 8th, 1856, and have since that time purchased a *Sepher Torah* [sic], with the necessary appendages, and also a Shophar [ram's horn for High Holiday services]. We have, too, a fine, well-fenced cemetery, with a substantial building on it, with all the implements required by our rites. May they never be wanted." A *Sefer Torah* from Grass Valley was donated to Congregation Emanu-El, San Francisco, after the 1906 earthquake and fire destroyed their Torah.

In later years, the Garizim Lodge No. 43 of B'nai B'rith, founded in 1861, replaced the Hebrew Benevolent Society in overseeing the cemetery and caring for community needs. The thriving Jewish world of Grass Valley, consisting of merchants, bankers, and investors in the mines survived well into the 1880s, probably as a result of Grass Valley's flourishing hard rock mining economy. In one outstanding example, the Weissbein brothers, Jacob and Joseph, who in the early years worked for their brother-in-law Jacob Hyman in his dry goods business at Mill and Bank Streets, established the Bank of Weissbein Brothers in 1876. According to local historian Michel Janicot, "The brothers acquired much property, land tracts, and several mining operations, includ-

ing the well-known Work Your Own Diggins and the Pittsburg Gold Flat Mine." The street adjacent to the Jewish cemetery was once known as Weissbein Avenue, and Joseph Weissbein once owned a property at Neal and South School Streets that had previously been owned by the Hebrew Benevolent Society and possibly slated for a synagogue site.

Worth a Visit

- ◆ Empire Mine State Historic Park, 10791 E. Empire St., Grass Valley
- ◆ North Star Mining Museum and Pelton Wheel Exhibit, Allison Road at Mill Street, Grass Valley



Wedding invitation of Abraham Sanders and Annetta Buss, married at Sherith Israel, San Francisco, 1861. The Sanders were residents of Grass Valley, Sherith Israel Congregation, San Francisco Collection, Western Jewish History Center.

GRASS VALLEY
 THE CEMETERY

Cemetery Facts

Name: Shaar Zedek
Founded: 1856
First burial: 1857
Last burial: 1891
Rededicated as historic site:
 September 13, 1970
Number of gravestones visible:
 Approximately 30
 Many of the stones in the cemetery have crumbled, and grave sites are often difficult to determine. The stones in this cemetery seem particularly vulnerable to the destructive elements of weather and time. Many stones, which most likely were originally vertical, now are embedded horizontally in concrete slabs.
Site characteristics: Less than one acre remains of what was once a five-acre plot of land purchased by the Shaar Zedek Hebrew Benevolent Society. A mortuary building used to exist on the large cemetery property; however, it is not known where the structure was located.
Special arrangements: There is a padlocked gate. For information and access arrangements, please call or write the Western Jewish History Center, Judah L. Magnes Museum, 2911 Russell Street, Berkeley, California 94705,

(510) 549-6950. The Museum is open Sunday through Thursday from 10 to 4.

Walking Tour

As you walk these paths, you will notice that for some of the individuals buried in these sacred grounds there is much more information in this guide than appears on their gravestone. For others the only information is a gravestone and carved inscription. Sadly, some stones have been too badly damaged to decipher a name; some stones are missing and for some only a foundation or a raised mound of earth remains.

For some individuals we have information from such sources as: recorded deeds and contracts, newspaper articles and advertisements, minute books, diaries, letters, photographs, family histories and family trees, etc. And yet, there are those who shared in the Jewish experience in the California Gold



Shaar Zedek Cemetery, Grass Valley

Rush whose lives leave little or no permanent record.

After unlocking the gate and entering the cemetery, turn to your left to begin the tour.

1. **Clarence Morris Nathan** (died December 28, 1874, age 2 months, son of Nathan and Annie Nathan).

Nathan Nathan was an investor in the mines and in partnership with Morris Nathan, a clothing merchant. Nathan and Annie owned a house on South Auburn Street.

2. **Simon Harris** (died 1863, age 18 years).

A native of England, Simon may have been the son of B. Harris, an investor in mines who was also a tobacco and liquor merchant on Mill Street. Records also show that B. Harris and his wife Hannah sold an improved lot, with a brick building, to Abraham Salaman for three thousand dollars. This is a broken stone.

3. **Cecilia Nathan** (January 15, 1862, age 22 years).

In the *Nevada Daily Gazette*, January 16, 1867, is an account of Cecilia's death indicating that the young woman slipped and fell into a well "while in the act of drawing water." The article further speculated that the death may have been a suicide. Traditional Jewish custom does not allow a suicide to be buried in sacred ground.

4. **Issac Hirsch** (May 28, 1874, son of Samuel and Minna Hirsch).

In 1874, Samuel Hirsch had a tailor shop on Main Street.

5. **Celia Nathan** (1861, age 2 years, daughter of Benjamin J. Nathan).

Nevada County deed books show Benjamin Nathan's name on over fifty deeds between 1856 and 1860. And it is known that a B. Nathan was in the clothing business in Rough and Ready in 1856, and by 1861 was a partner of Jacob Morris in Grass Valley. Benjamin Nathan's estate was valued at over forty thousand dollars.

6. **Moses Goodman** (died May 1, 1862, son of E. and S. Goodman).
7. **Solomon Goodman** (born April 27, 1858—died April 22, 1862, son of E. and S. Goodman).

The father is possibly the E. Goodman, a merchant in the nearby town of Rough and Ready.

8. **Unknown grave.**

There is a base only.

9. **Unknown grave.**

There are a base and the bottom six inches of the stone with no legible writing.

10. **Abraham Levy** (died May 5, 1874, age 23).

He was the youngest son of Esther Levy of "Victoria, V.I. B.C."



Shaar Zedek Cemetery, Grass Valley.
Gravestone of Louis Levy. Photo: Ito Nowinski/
Judah L. Magnes Museum, Western Jewish
History Center.

11. Louis Levy (1837–1871).

He was a native of Fordom, Prussia. "Erected by his nieces and nephews."

12. Elie Halphen (1800–1882).

Halphen was a native of Metz, France. An article in the *Nevada Daily Transcript* reported that Halphen had served as Captain in the French army and as mayor of Metz before leaving France, possibly as a result of family and political problems. In 1852, Halphen emigrated to Oakland, California where he owned considerable property. In the Gold Country, he invested in several mines, opened stores in Brown's Valley,

Yuba County, and in Grass Valley and was listed as a saloon keeper and grocer. It is said that Halphen's family, who remained in France, were successful capitalists.

13. Solomon Rosenthal (died 1878, age 62 years).

Rosenthal was a native of Margolin, Prussia. A Grass Valley merchant, he officiated at the High Holiday services in Nevada City in 1861 and at the wedding of Isadore Jacobs and Miss Singer in Nevada City in 1868. Solomon Rosenthal is possibly the father of Raphael Rosenthal, who died at age four in 1868 and is buried in Nevada City. This stone has a Hebrew inscription on the back which tells us that Solomon (Sholomo) was the son of Raphael and he died on Thursday the sixteenth of Kislev (December).

14. Cohn.

This stone is barely readable. According to Michel Janicot, it may be that Cohn is an infant who died on July 17, 1861.

15. Maria B. Salaman (died at five months, daughter of Abraham Salaman).

Maria's brother, Isadore Abraham, who died in 1856 at fourteen months of age, is buried in the Nevada City Cemetery. Abraham Salaman, the father of these two children, was a very successful grocer, liquor, mining supplies, and crockery retailer, and investor in real estate and mining properties.

Records show that, in 1856, Salaman was a partner in the Grass Valley firm of Silvester & Company, whose building had withstood the disastrous 1855 fire. City council minutes show that Salaman once protested the "house of ill-fame next to his dwelling." In 1866 Salaman and Martin Ford sold their interests in the Union Jack Mining Company to Lewis Gerstle for fifty thousand dollars. Gerstle figures prominently in Jewish Gold Rush history. In the early 1850s Lewis Gerstle and his partner, "forty-niner" Louis Sloss, ran a grocery store in Sacramento. Later, the successful entrepreneurial partners opened up the Alaskan fur trade with their San Francisco based Alaska Commercial Company.

16. Unknown grave.

There is a broken base only

17. Benjamin Nathan ([?]slaw, Prussia, born or died 1873, son of [?] and Tzvi Nathan).

This stone is broken and indecipherable.

18. Unknown grave.

There is a base only.

19. Judith Sanders (died January 12, 1866, age 7 months and 13 days, daughter of Abraham I. and Amilie Sanders).

20. Unknown grave.

There is a base only.

21. Unknown grave.

There is a base only.

NOVITZKY FAMILY PLOT (22-23)

22. Simon Novitzky (1817-1891, a native of Prussia, husband of Sarah).

Sarah Novitzky (1822-1889, a native of Germany, wife of Simon).

Simon Novitzky was the owner of the Pioneer Hat Store on the corner of Mill and Bank Streets. Simon's brother, Henry, was a tailor in Nevada City in 1856, and by 1861 moved to Grass Valley where he was a retailer, and with Simon, invested in mining claims.

Sarah and Simon's names are inscribed on either side of this free standing column, one of the few markers still vertical in the Grass



Gravestone of Simon and Sarah Novitzky
Shoar Zedek Cemetery, Grass Valley. Photo:
Ira Nowinski/Judah I. Magnes Museum.
Western Jewish History 1, 2016

Valley cemetery. The column is inscribed "We are not separated. We will meet again."

23. S.N. (most likely refers to Sarah Novitzky).

24. Unknown grave.

25. Simon Abraham (died December 17, 1865, age 44 years).

He was a native of Nakel, Prussia, and the brother of Hyman Abraham buried in plot 28.

26. Unknown grave.

One can barely make out "Louis" on this broken stone.

27. Henry J. Steler (1869–1875, son of Pepi and E. Steler).

It is reported that Henry died of scarlet fever. Pepi may have been the P. Steler who was a jeweler and watchmaker on Main Street. There is a faded flower engraved on this column. "Pepi" is often the nickname of Joseph.

28. Hyman Abraham (died July 16, 5617 [1857], 32 years).

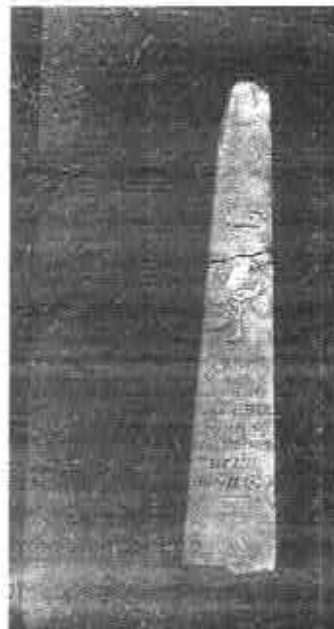
He was a native of Nachel Province, Posen. Hyman Abraham is the first known burial in Shaar Zedek Cemetery. He was the brother of Simon Abraham [buried in plot 25] and owned property on Main Street, Grass Valley valued at fifteen hundred dollars. The bottom of this stone is engraved "R. Myers & Co, 747 Market St. S.F."

29. Unknown grave.

There is a broken stone which is indecipherable.

30. Unknown grave.

There is a base only.



Shaar Zedek Cemetery, Grass Valley. Gravestone of Henry Steler. Photo: Ira Nawinski/Judah L. Magnes Museum, Western Jewish History Center.