

THE BEST LAST PLACE



a history of the Santa Barbara Cemetery

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A HISTORY OF THE SANTA BARBARA CEMETERY

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The passing of civic leader Isaac Sparks in 1876 motivated the community to establish a proper cemetery. Ten years later, his remains were moved to the Santa Barbara Cemetery.



CHAPTER ONE ÷ 1867

Rising from a Spark

“A good cemetery blends the elegance of a park with the pensive beauty of a burial ground.”

—Adolph Strauch, 1869¹

A LARGE PROCESSION set out from the 300 block of State Street in Santa Barbara on a June day in 1867. At its head, drawn by four horses, trundled a black-draped wagon bearing a coffin. In it lay Isaac Sparks. Behind the wagon walked the pastor. Behind him came the black-garbed family, community leaders, employees, and town folk.

The procession was probably the largest ever yet held in Santa Barbara for a Protestant citizen.² Isaac Sparks had lived in Santa Barbara for more than twenty-five years. Arriving in 1832 as one of the first Anglos to even visit Santa Barbara, Sparks hunted otter up and down the coast and among the offshore islands. He worked with cohorts George Nidever and Lewis Burton, under a Mexican government hunting license issued to ship captain William Goodwin Dana.

Early on, Sparks used his earnings from hunting proceeds to purchase 200 square *varas* of the land now known as Burton Mound, located near what we now know as West Beach.³ On this site, he opened the first mercantile store and post office in Santa Barbara. His store was successful; he built a large brick house in the block at the northwest corner of State and Montecito streets, bounded by Chapala and Gutierrez. The home sat in the middle of a five-acre lot surrounded by gardens.⁴

Isaac Sparks led a colorful life. In his late thirties, he came close to death, losing his right eye to a grizzly bear he encountered in the Santa Barbara foothills in 1837. In his resolute manner, he recovered and married the young woman who nursed him back to health. In order to marry in the Mexican-governed town, Sparks became a naturalized Mexican citizen. His bride, Mary Eayres, was the daughter of a ship's captain who had been left in Santa Barbara to be raised by the De la Guerra family. Governor Manuel Micheltorena presented Sparks with the twenty-two-thousand-acre Huasna Rancho in San Luis Obispo County as a wedding gift.

The Sparkses continued to prosper, raising three daughters and weathering the 1846 military insurrection staged by John C. Frémont to win the state from Mexico. Sparks was conscripted as a rifleman by Frémont, and \$900 worth of supplies were requisitioned from his store.⁵

As Santa Barbara transitioned into an American territory, Sparks's hunting cohort Lewis T. Burton, was elected the first President of the Town Common Council in August 1850. However, Burton resigned the position after three months. The title of the position was changed to mayor and in quick succession Francisco de la Guerra (the first Santa Barbaran to hold the title of mayor) and then Joaquin Carrillo served. In 1852, Francisco de la Guerra served a second term. In May



An unremarkable, pre-Mission Revival style State Street, the center of all commercial life in the sleepy town of Santa Barbara, circa 1876.

requested to remain as sheriff. Later that same year, Dr. Samuel Brinkerhoff stepped off the boat to tend wounds after an altercation, learned the town had no physician, and stayed on.

Many Americans who stayed in Santa Barbara in the early years after statehood did so to fulfill one or more of the crucial roles required in the nascent Protestant community. Like that of early

Los Angeles, Santa Barbara's emigration pattern was upside down. Rather than attracting the settler and farmer, Santa Barbara attracted the wealthy and well-educated New Englander. These were individuals who nurtured the infrastructure and joined in the political and economic development of the town. They threw their expertise, energy, and capital into development projects on several fronts, each

juggling numerous roles at once. They opened stores and professional offices; imported necessary equipment, materials, and agricultural stock; took elective office; and joined the small but influential development and community improvement associations.²⁹

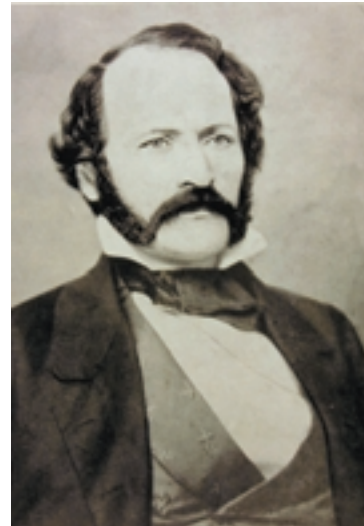
These men were busily developing a new culture within the dusty confines of a resident culture, fully aware that the root of change would soon grow to engulf and consume its host. One of these men, Charles Enoch Huse, figured large in Santa Barbara's history, as well as in the cemetery's. If Isaac Sparks represented the first wave of Americans—the hunters and trappers who intermarried with the Spanish and Mexican families in the little town—then Charles Huse effectively represented the wealthy and educated New Englanders who came soon after statehood and worked closely with men like Sparks and Burton, to transform the town into what would quickly become a city.

Charles Enoch Huse

Charles Enoch Huse was one of the founders of the cemetery, and eventually the leading influence in the cemetery's early development and expansion. He arrived in Santa Barbara in 1852 and quickly became one of the best-known of all Santa Barbara's civic leaders. According to an 1883 report, fifteen years prior to his death, "Few names are oftener mentioned in the history of Santa Barbara."³⁰ And one hundred years later, respected California historian Doyce B.



Charles Fernald



Charles Enoch Huse

Nunnis, Jr. wrote, "Probably more than any other American of his period, Huse influenced the future of Santa Barbara."³¹

Huse was born in 1825 in Newburyport, Massachusetts. He studied law and languages at Harvard and graduated in 1848. He left soon after graduation for San Francisco and the Gold Rush. He arrived in San Francisco in August of 1849 and traveled to the Sierra gold fields, but he was a slight man and found gold mining strenuous and ultimately unprofitable. Back in San Francisco,

he purchased property along the waterfront and attempted to develop it, but he was frustrated by quixotic and contradictory city regulations. He gave up after several years of attempting to build his own Long Wharf on the San Francisco waterfront and having it torn down again and again by hoodlums working for the competing Central Wharf. He sailed south on Captain Robert Haley's *Sea Bird*, intending to find a town where he could start a law practice. Arriving in Santa Barbara on January 11, 1852, he chose to stay.³²

Huse advertised his services as an attorney, finding work immediately in what he found to be a litigious, contentious, immoral, and immoderate community. At Harvard, Huse had studied several languages, including Spanish, and this served him well in the dusty frontier town. Soon after his arrival, he started work as an interpreter for Judge Joaquin Carrillo's court, enabling the few Anglo visitors and citizens to engage the court in their own language, and English-speaking judges to conduct proceedings for the local Spanish-speaking population.

Mural detail:
Martínez painted
colorful, detailed
garlands of lilies,
peonies and other
strikingly formed
flowers over the
arches that comple-
ment the chapel's
interior design.



[Henry Eichheim and Mary Greenough Smith] wanted to do something like that, they should have had a separate memorial.”¹⁵⁵

On the other hand, many people loved the murals. Oakleigh Thorne, for example, offered to purchase and install the lighting for them. Mrs. Helmar Koefod, wife of the Santa Barbara Clinic co-founder, let Bryant know she would “agitate a movement to retain the frescoes.”¹⁵⁶

In the complex surfaces and spaces of the chapel’s interior, the murals tell a story. From the domed chancel, the face of Christ looks down between upraised hands. His face is knotted in suffering and knowledge. In the four sconces below him, angels hover, blonde, lithe, serene. But across from the face of Christ, seen only from inside the chancel, are the penitents, people grieving his death or coming to seek his counsel.

This is the moment of death, the recognition of it. It is in the chancel where the dead are presented for services. It is where the old elevator once raised the coffin from the crematory chamber below. The mourners weep for their losses. But as we turn to go, directly above the exit, Martínez placed the risen Christ. Within the architecture of the chapel, Martínez reenacted the allegory of Christ from crucifixion to resurrection.

Along either wall, the nuns and monks move to join Him in a slow and certain procession. Each figure is nearly a pillar: lean, straight, carrying on with calm strength. Critics call Martínez’s work architectural and serene. Many count the murals in the Santa Barbara Cemetery chapel as his finest, and as one of “the noblest and most impressive creations of its kind in or out of this country.”¹⁵⁷

Martínez was an inspired and inspiring figure in the art world of the 1920s and 1930s. His own works were simple

and direct. He painted the Mexican and Indian people of his homeland near Mexico City. He painted the flowers and the faces and the dense tropical forests, and as he did so, captured the serenity, grace, and beauty of these people.

Martínez was also a great educator. Returning from fourteen years of study in France (while he was there he won the prestigious grand prize for the annual Salon d'Automne and the friendships of painters like Monet, Manet, and Picasso), he allowed himself to be talked into the directorship of the Escuela Belle Artes in Mexico City. He had attended the school nineteen years earlier but had skipped most of his classes—he wanted to paint *en plein air*, among the people.

Believing the school to still be too constraining, he refused the position when it was first offered, but reconsidered after the students presented a nearly unanimous petition calling for him to become the new director. The overwhelming number of signatures convinced him. He took the confidence of the students as permission to try his own methods for teaching art. He turned the school inside out, holding the classes in the streets around the school, encouraging experimentation, observation, self-expression, and courage. Thirteen years later, he took examples of his students' work back to France for a special exhibition.

By this time, Martínez's renown as a teacher had grown and he had developed twenty-seven thriving outdoor art schools in and around Mexico City. David Siquieros, famous for vigorous and colorful murals on political themes, was one early student. Martínez, Siquieros, and Diego Rivera were the great triumverate of Mexican muralists.

Martínez's show in France gained worldwide acclaim for his methods and the art works of Mexico and its children. Many of the pieces Martínez took with him were



"The Offering" in detail; one of five major panels painted in the nave of the chapel. The austere, stylized figures were once controversial, now acknowledged as real treasures.