

# SPIRIT OF THE PIONEER

*A newsletter for the families and friends of  
the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery  
(Across from McArthur Court)*

**FALL 2003**

## **"A QUIET ANGEL"**

**Evelyn Lake Malkasian  
(April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1921 – April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003)**

*by Quentin A. Holmes*

With a mixture of sorrow and pride I write about the passing in her sleep of Evelyn Lake Malkasian, a long-time supporter of the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery. Born in Eugene on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1921 to parents Emery Dudley Lake and Georgie Warner Lake, she was named "Roberta Evelyn" (Her parents were hoping for a boy whom they would name Robert, and who would carry on the "Lake" name.) Both of Evelyn's parents and also her paternal grandparents rest in the Lake lot in our cemetery. Evelyn served as a Trustee of Eugene Pioneer Cemetery Association with diligence and loyalty from 1951 until her demise. To me, she was my gracious and loving Aunt Evie.

The story of Evelyn's life is simple to relate: She was born and raised in Eugene. She graduated from the old Eugene High School in 1938. Shortly thereafter, Evelyn met a tall dark handsome man of Armenian descent. One of her happiest days of her life was when he asked her to become Mrs. Sred Malkasian – the wife of a professional tailor. Together Sred & Evelyn raised two sons, Doug (born May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1939) and Greg (born August 17<sup>th</sup> 1941). During the late 1940's, every evening and weekend was spent building their lovely family home high up on Mission Avenue adjoining the woods near Hendricks Park.

Evelyn was a parishioner of St. Mary's Episcopal Church, a member of the Oregon Genealogical Society, and also served as a docent at the University of Oregon Museum of Art. Evelyn welcomed, and greatly enjoyed, the many animals and birds that frequented her back yard.

Dates and accomplishments simply fail to convey the zest that Evelyn brought to all her endeavors. She served as a member



**Evelyn Lake Malkasian**

of the Altar Guild at St. Mary's Church for more than 50 years. One time, she found a hummingbird that had broken its wing – so she carefully nursed it back to health. In mid-life she took up downhill skiing, and often rode "The Hooky Bus" to the Willamette Pass Ski Area. Late in life, while studying the family genealogy, she became proficient on a Macintosh computer. A small white Bichon Frise dog, "Cotton Candy" ("C.C." for short), was Evelyn's faithful companion.

In addition to her two sons, Evelyn is survived by beloved grandsons, Ian and Jeff, and talented granddaughter, Sophie. She is also survived by her sister, Ruth Lake Holmes, and her brothers, Charles Emery Lake & Ralph Stewart Lake.

A few weeks after her Memorial Service, one of her sons contacted our Treasurer to say that Evelyn's estate was sending a substantial donation to the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery Endowment Fund. My Aunt Evie was indeed a quiet angel.

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**Any Comments or  
Questions?  
Please write or  
phone us!**

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## IF STONES COULD TALK: AN ACCOUNT OF A WINTER TRAGEDY

by *Everett G. Smith*

On the night of December 6th, 1922 a terrible tragedy happened in West Eugene. An explosion and subsequent fire demolished a small house at 1381 West Eighth Avenue resulting in the deaths of 8 members of two young families. This story raises new questions, represents a link to earlier residents of our community, and reminds us how fragile and susceptible to accidents life can be.

The memorials on two separate plots in the Pioneer Cemetery bear testimony to this disaster. The family stone of the Johnson plot (Lot No. 201) has these names and dates:

JOHNSON		
Marvel C.	BERTINA	LEROY M.
APR 3, 1918	JAN 30, 1896	AUG 21, 1920
DEC 6, 1922	DEC 7, 1922	DEC 6, 1922

Several dozen yards to the South (Lot No. 505) another memorial contains this information:

MOTHER		
CLARA M. CHURCH		
CHILDREN		
BILLIE 8		ORVILLE 4
HAZEL 6		IDA 2
DIED DEC. 1922		

The 7 December 1922 issue of Eugene's Morning Register ran the bold headlines: **"Gas Blast Kills 5 Hurts 6 in Eugene"** and **"Home of Iver Johnson, Eighth Avenue West, is Scene of Terrible Holocaust"**. The James Church family visiting from Saskatchewan joined Iver and Bertina Johnson and their three young children after supper in the front room of the four-room residence. Around 8 pm someone mistakenly used a can of gasoline instead of kerosene to light a lamp. The can exploded. Four children were fatally burned in this fire, a fifth child died in the hospital that night.

Bertina Johnson, age twenty-six, and another Church child, Hazel (age 6) died the the next day. The second mother, Clara Church, died a few days later. In all, eight people perished.

Although severely burned in the fire, James Church, Iver Johnson, and his one-year-old son Clifford survived. Two other Church daughters were away: Edna - age 10, was with an Aunt, and Charlotte - age 12, was with a grandmother on Spencer Creek.

Iver Johnson and Clara Church were brother and sister. The Johnsons had resided in Eugene for

eight years. Iver worked as a foreman in the Lane County Road Department. The Church family had arrived just ten days earlier from Radville, Saskatchewan. They hoped to relocate in Eugene. The newspaper added:

*"The family( the Johnsons) had been there (on West Eighth) for some time and while it was very badly crowded with the Church family as guests, Mr. And Mrs. Johnson willingly shared it with them until Mr. Church could obtain a suitable house in which to live."*

Today, we can hardly imagine conditions surrounding this tragic accident with loss of life and house and belongings destroyed. The Johnson house was small and quite old. There were six youngsters under the age of 6 cooped up, because winter had arrived in force. The paper reported it was cloudy & wet in Eugene. In the previous 72 hours, Marshfield (now Coos Bay) had 3 inches of rain. Deep snow had fallen in the Cascades. Hood River had 18 inches of snow, while Pendleton had 8 inches. Christmas was less than three weeks away.

Iver Johnson lost a wife and two of his three children in the fiery explosion. He died in 1957 at age sixty-seven and is buried in Lot No. 505 beside his Mother, his sister Clara, and four of her six children.

New questions raised include: Did James Church stay in Eugene and start life anew? Is Clifford Johnson, who was carried out of the fire as a one-year-old infant, still alive? If so, he would now be in his eighties. Are either of the two surviving daughters, Edna Church and Charlotte Church, who would now be in their nineties, alive?

### SEEN RECENTLY IN THE CEMETERY



**Re-Enactors Firing 21-Gun (Musket)  
Salute During Rededication  
of Civil War Statue on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2003**

## MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY GRACED BY SHASTA MIDDLE SCHOOL BAND & CHOIR

*by Quentin A. Holmes*

May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2003 was a rainy day in Eugene, Oregon. However, the clouds blew away and the sun blazed down brilliantly on the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery for one hour beginning at 11 am. This warm sunshine seemed a Godsend to the more than 100 people who had gathered around the Civil War Plot for a Memorial Day Observance.

Mr. Paul Gilbertson, from the Eugene Chapter/ Veterans of Foreign Wars, arranged for this year's Memorial Day Observance. Master of Ceremonies, Dr. Bob Carmichael, kept things flowing smoothly.

Invited Speakers included:

- o Paul Gilbertson – “Order Issued by General John Logan to the Grand Army of the Republic in 1868”,
- o Ruth Lake Holmes – “History of the Statue”, and
- o Dr. Quentin Holmes – “Memorial Day Address”.

The highlight of the day was the gracious musical presentation given by Shasta Middle School Band and Choir. Band Director Joe Ingram explained how the Battle at Gettysburg found the Union Army advancing from the South and the Confederate Army advancing from the North. (Just backwards from what you might expect!) The featured song, “High Water Mark”, conveyed the momentous struggle that occurred during the battle of Gettysburg. Mr. David Fitch is the Director of the Shasta Middle School Choir. Everyone present felt deeply touched when the band & choir from Shasta Middle School joined together in a stirring rendition of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”.

As the ceremony drew to a close, the plaintive sound of “Taps” being played on a bugle came wafting toward us from somewhere beyond the trees - much as it would have during Civil War days.



**Shasta Middle School Band Performing in the Cemetery on Memorial Day**

## GEORGE DULL: OUR RESIDENT CARETAKER

*by Ruth Lake Holmes*

Many of you have met George Dull when you visited the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery. George is our genial, resident, part-time caretaker who has been with us for 9 years. You will often see him mowing the grass with the big John Deere riding mower, or using a weed eater to remove tall grass from around a lot curbing or a memorial. If work is going on in the cemetery, George is always in the midst of it lending a helping hand. He is a “Self-starter” who looks on the cemetery almost like his very own front yard. George is always glad to assist someone in locating their family plot or the grave site of a specific ancestor.

George was born in Sutherlin, Oregon. He was, the middle of six children, George's father worked as a logger on Weyerhaeuser' Woods Crew. When Weyerhaeuser shut down their Sutherlin operations, the family transferred to Springfield, where George graduated from High School in 1975.

George served in the U.S. Army, and was stationed in Korea. He worked his way up through the enlisted ranks to become a Sergeant. George was also a member of the Oregon National Guard.

The small trailer located behind the maintenance building serves as George's home. His presence there has kept vandalism to an all time low. He always has a greeting and a smile for those using the cemetery for multi-purposes—walking, studying, school field trips, walking a dog, relaxing and observing nature and the many birds and red & silver squirrels that make our cemetery their home. Please feel free to give George a big smile when you see him, he deserves it!



**Just Another “Day at the Office” for our Resident Caretaker. (Hint, George is up inside the Dumpster Compacting Brush and Limbs so that More will Fit.)**

**EUGENE PIONEER CEMETERY  
ASSOCIATION**

**EUGENE PIONEER CEMETERY  
ENDOWMENT FUND**

*by Sara A. Leiman*

A huge thanks for your help in building up the Eugene Pioneer Endowment Fund. This fund was started in 1975 and currently holds approximately \$372,000. Its ultimate goal is \$500,000. Just the interest earned by this fund is used for maintaining the cemetery, leaving the principal to provide for the future. Now, and in the future, this fund **MUST** grow to keep up with the expenses of maintaining our cemetery. So, please consider making a donation to the Eugene Pioneer Cemetery Endowment Fund. All donations to this fund are tax deductible. Our Federal Non-profit Identification No. is 51-01-75540. Our State of Oregon Non-profit Identification No. is NP11 0200-13. When you are doing your Estate and Tax Planning, **THINK OF US!**

**Eugene Pioneer Cemetery Association**

**c/o Ruth Lake Holmes**

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**Eugene, OR 97401**

**ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED**