

THE THREE SEQUESTERED GRAVES

About one mile from Monrovia is Sawpit Canyon, a pleasure resort for hundreds of picnickers who make daily and weekly pilgrimages to Sawpit Falls. A few hundred yards from the forks is a large open space, which has the appearance of a well kept lawn. Here are seen two large oaks, a flowering oleander and an orange tree of some year's growth. Under one of these trees is a pile of rocks which appears to have been the foundation of a house. The clue to these traces of early habitation is found in a trail which leads up to a bit of mesa. On this little eminence are three graves.

Little is known beyond the fact that the stones record the names of three children who died in 1877. Monrovia did not then exist as a town, but one of the old settlers of Duarte tells this story.

Hibbard Rankin, a sturdy farmer of Lafayette County, in Wisconsin, with his wife Polly and five little children, came to the new world of California and settled in Sawpit Canyon. In a clearing made by an earlier and more adventurous settler he made his home. Under each of the oaks stood a cabin rudely constructed of forest lumber. Fruit trees were set out, a garden was planted, bees helped to furnish a living and the canyon bounty yielded the wood which was hauled with great difficulty to Los Angeles.

The father and mother were spiritualists of a type not uncommon at that time, and the oldest daughter was a would-be medium. There were many gatherings of the elect in the interests of the cult in this favorable place.

Some of the children attended school in Duarte, walking the entire distance each day.

Albert, the nineteen-year-old son, who was a blacksmith's apprentice in San Gabriel, came home for a Sunday visit and suddenly became very ill. The malady proved to be typhoid fever. There were few facilities for nursing, the only doctor being a young man who was far gone with consumption. Imagine the sorrow of the family when, in a few weeks' time, nineteen-year-old Albert, thirteen-year-old Polly, and sixteen-year-old Stella

were laid to rest in this improvised graveyard.

The place soon became too lonely for the bereaved parents and they returned to their home in Wisconsin.

A canyon fire swept the cabin from the place and the flood of 1882 displaced the foundation. The only reminder of that mountain home and its sorrow is the small graveyard.

Stella Nelson, Class of 1913,
Monrovia High School.

Published in CRIMSON and WHITE by the Junior Class, Monrovia High School, 1913.

Hibbard Joseph Rankins	July 12, 1823 (NY) - January 25, 1908 (CA)
Polly Fuller	February 27, 1826 (PA) - November 20, 1888 (CA)
1. Jeannette Rankins	1846 -
2. Ernest Wellington Rankins	April 26, 1848 - October 20, 1914 (CA)
Elizabeth Lewis	1855 - April 28, 1877
A. Mildred Carlotta Rankins	March 14, 1875 - June 9, 1942 (CA)
James Larson	April 7, 1887 -
(1) James O. Larson	September 20, 1914 - April 19, 2009
B. James E. Rankins	April 29, 1877 - January 20, 1878
3. Mary A. Rankins	1850 -
Unknown Fossnight	
A. Elizabeth A. Fossnight	October 4, 1868 - November 24, 1967
James G. Kane	July 1861 -
(1) Clara M. Kane	June 15, 1888 - January 9, 1963
(2) Ethel I. Kane	
4. Ella Josephine Rankins	August 13, 1852 - March 19, 1902
Edward F. Hill	1851-
A. Jesse Franklin Hill	July 19, 1873 - 1945
5. Hibbard Adelbert Rankins	July 27, 1855 - August 29, 1917
Ada Emeline Penniston	July 1857 -
A. Joseph Albert Rankins	November 12, 1877 - 1942
B. Charles Rankins	August 1879 -
C. Earl L. Rankins	April 15, 1881 - June 1959
D. Frank Leo Rankins	October 30, 1882 - 1958
E. Stella Rankins	August 1885 -
F. Florence Rankins	May 1887 -
G. Lilley M. Rankins	February 1889 -
H. Josephine Rankins	June 4, 1890 - June 12, 1947
I. William Penn Rankins	April 6, 1893 - February 1, 1959
J. Daniel Warnie Rankins	October 22, 1894 - November 8, 1967
K. Sarah Rachael Rankins	February 1898 - 1935
L. Ralph Dwight Rankins	August 21, 1901- July 8, 1954
6. Albert C. Rankins	December 14, 1857 - March 6, 1877
7. Polly Rosa Rankins	March 11, 1861 - April 25, 1877
8. Estella H. Rankins	December 14, 1863 - April 19, 1877
9. William Dwight Rankins	June 1865 - before 1920
Clara F. Smith	1870?

Sources: Federal Census of 1850, Argyle, Lafayette County, Wisconsin; gravestone inscriptions; John Wiley, History of Monrovia.
Information available on Ancestry.com

California State Death Index

Name: Rankins, Ernest W.
Spouse: None
Age: 66 (b. 1848)
Date of Death: 20 Oct 1914

Copied 30 Nov 2000 at the Pasadena Family History Library

LARSON MILDRED CARLOTTA 03/14/1875 LEWIS RANKINS F WISCONSIN SAN DIEGO (37) 06/09/1942

Ernest W. Rankins, who spent four years of his early life, between 1874 and 1878, in Sawpit Canyon, was run down by a street car in Los Angeles and fatally wounded October 20, 1914.

Mr. Rankins had just returned from a visit to Monrovia where he visited the scenes of his early manhood in the canyon. While here he was a guest at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Harkness, whom he regaled with many lively stories of his life in the canyon. He was the oldest of eight children and the principal mode of earning a livelihood for the family was in the sale of wood. They hauled it to the old power plant near Emerson Flats, where it was loaded upon wagons and taken to Los Angeles. In those days, a round trip of such a load consumed two day's time.

Their family hoard was also augmented by an apiary and at one time they marketed three thousand six hundred pounds of sumac honey.

"History of Monrovia", 1927, by John Wiley, pp. 145-146

Fairmount Cemetery, Azusa, California

RANKINS, Elizabeth, b. 1855, d. April 28, 1877, age 22 years, 2 mos. 16 days (wife of Ernest W. Rankins) On her stone:

"There safely shalt thou abide
There sweet shall be thy rest
And every longing satisfied
With full salvation blest."

RANKINS, James E., b. Apr. 29, 1877, d. Jan 20, 1878. (Son of Elizabeth Rankins.) Footstone:
J.H.R.

Selma Cemetery District
559-896-2412

21 Jun 12: Verified that Hibbard, Polly, and Ernest are buried in the West Selma Cemetery. No other Rankins are listed.

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"The summer of 1877 was called the year of the great drought. Streams dried up, sheep and cattle died in the fields and canyons for want of water. Hundreds and thousands of head perished, and their bodies were thick along the dried streambeds. In Monrovia canyon lived Mr. and Mrs. Hibbard Rankin and their four children who had come to Southern California from Wisconsin. They had a cabin in the canyon near what is now Emerson Flats. When the drought came the mountain stream in Monrovia canyon dried up and almost disappeared; water was difficult to get, and probably contaminated, for three Rankin children, Estella, 13, Polly, 16, and Albert, 19, caught typhoid fever and died. The parents and a fourth brother, Ernest, escaped. The three children were buried near their home and small marble headstones giving their ages, names and dates of death, were put up. This was nine years before Monrovia was founded. Some time after Monrovia had come into being Liveoak Cemetery was laid out, south of town, and Ernest had his two sisters ;and brother exhumed and reburied in the new cemetery. Ernest had escaped the fever, but was later killed in Los Angeles when struck down by a street car. There is still one more chapter to the story. In 1917 the remains of the Rankin children were again moved, this time from Liveoak to Mountain View cemetery in Pasadena. (Mrs. G. Edwin Chapman, 252 Heather Heights)

"Another angle on the Rankin graves, empty for so many years, comes from Ada Willits, 335 N. Myrtle Ave. She had the story long ago from Mrs. Laura Poor, daughter of Duarte pioneer Nehemiah Beardslee and reputed first white child born in Duarte. Laura told Miss Willits the Rankin children went to school in Duarte and walked to the old Duarte schoolhouse from their home far up in Monrovia canyon. She also remembers Ernest coming out to visit the graves, and later being killed in the Los Angeles street car accident. C.F.D."

THE GRAVESTONES IN THE CANYON - Post Scripts by Chas. F. Davis 2-27-56

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"We do not know why the Rankins family had come out from Wisconsin to make their home in this deep mountain canyon. But we do know that they earned part of their living by cutting trees for wood and hauling it by wagon into Los Angeles nearly 25 miles away. The round trip took the team two whole days. Historian John L. Wiley says the Rankins kept bees, and at one time marketed 3600 pounds of honey.

"Ralph Slosson, member of a pioneer Monrovia family, has made a study of the Rankins family. He recently told me that in 1877, Albert, 19, was apprenticed to a blacksmith in San Gabriel. While at home in the canyon one Sunday he was stricken with typhoid fever, or as some say diphtheria. Despite the efforts of a young physician living in the foothills, Albert and his two sisters, Polly, 16, and Estella, 13, all died within a few weeks.

"The bodies were removed from their canyon grave many years ago.

"But the monument has remained, and successive canyon guards, park attendants and water department employees have seen to it that the brush has been kept down. Canyon hikers have paused to read the old-fashioned but beautifully incised script, and maybe to wonder who the stone cutter was who made this graceful memorial for three children who died nearly four score years ago, long before Monrovia was thought of.

"One day recently Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Poyas, of 2006 Graydon Avenue, their children and Mrs. Poyas' father, W. A. Miller, hiking in the canyon, came upon the mountain gravestone. Suddenly Mr. Miller squatted down and fairly shouted: "My father made that!" He pointed to a tiny signature, J. Miller, cut in the lower right corner of the stone.

"Further investigation by the Poyas family proved conclusively that Grandfather Jacob Miller, born in Coblenz, Germany, in 1831, and emigrating to the United States at 16, was indeed the monument cutter who had fashioned the triple headstone in the canyon. Mrs. Poyas showed me her grandfather's day book, and the entry: August-17,-1878 (See-over)-(Continued)

August 17, 1878

E. W. Rankins, Duarte, one headstone, with three inscriptions and hand-carved front, to be finished in three weeks. (Delivered and paid September 23, \$45.)

"The young German had crossed the Atlantic in 1847 in a small sailing vessel, landing at New Orleans. He had made his way up the Mississippi to St. Louis, where he learned the trade of stone cutter. In '49 the California gold fever swept him again down the river, on board another ship, this time bound for Panama.

With 200 others he walked across the isthmus, boarded another ship for San Francisco where he resumed his trade.

"Miller came south to Los Angeles in 1868, bought 10 acres and started Pioneer Marble Works on Main St., between First and Second.

"Being the only monumentmaker in Los Angeles at the time, Miller did work, and delivered it, over much of the Southland. All the marble pieces, including mantels, for the home of E. J. ("Lucky") Baldwin and for Pio Pico, last Mexican governor of California, were done by him. In 1882 he sold his business and bought 110 acres between Sunset Boulevard and the Santa Monica hills in what is now the heart of Hillywood. The original ranch house had later to be moved; a block to let the street that is now Hollywood Boulevard go through.

"Jacob Miller died at the age of 90 in 1921. W. A. Miller, youngest of his five children and only son living, makes his home with his daughter, and son-in-law in Monrovia. At the present he is developing 640 acres of desert land near Bagdad."

DAILY NEWS-POST, Monrovia, Feb. 27, 1956 (1) Picture of Jacob Miller
(2) Picture of THE GRAVESTONES IN THE CANYON. Pioneer Marble Works.

"An unusual monument in beautiful Monrovia Canyon Park, set beside a winding trail is white marble tombstone marking the graves of three children who died of typhoid fever in 1877. They were the son and two daughters of Hibbard and Polly Rankins, who had brought their family out to California from Lafayette County, Wisc. Only recently discovered is the fact that the stone-cutter who made the graceful memorial was the grandfather of a Monrovia woman. He was Jacob Miller, second from the left above. At right of gravestone is historical sketch under glass, written by Ralph Slosson."

ALBERT M. COOK AND THE STORY OF THE TRIPLE GRAVESTONES NEAR THE EMERSON FLAT PICNIC AREA.

Albert M. Cook, a resident of the Monrovia-Duarte area for 42 years, was for a time a cement contractor but was later employed by the City of Monrovia for 24 years and at the time of his retirement in 1966 was the guard at Monrovia Canyon Park. In this position he created much good will for the city over the years by his friendly and cooperative attitude toward visitors to the park. As a proxy father and guardian for hundreds of Girl Scouts and their leaders who visited the park he was proud of the honorary membership and medal that were awarded him by that group. He died on July 3, 1967.

In the photograph, Albert is shown standing by the triple gravestone located adjacent to the Emerson Flat picnic area. It marked the spot where three children of Hibbard and Polly Rankins were buried following their death in 1877. This was ten years before Monrovia was founded.

The Rankins and their four children had come from Wisconsin about 1874 and were living in the canyon in the area later known as Emerson Flat. The summer of 1877 was a time of great drought. Streams dried up and cattle died from lack of water. As there was almost no water in the canyon then, it was difficult to get and could have been contaminated. Three of the Rankins children, Estella, 13 years of age, Polly, 16, and Albert, 19 caught what is believed to have been typhoid fever and succumbed to it. The fourth, Ernest, and the parents escaped.

The family's income was derived largely from the sale of wood. It was hauled to the old power house site where it was loaded on wagons and taken to Los Angeles. The round trip took two days. Also, the family kept bees and sold honey as an additional source of income. At one time 3600 pounds of sumac honey was produced and sold.

One Monrovia "old timer" recalls that the Rankins children walked to and from their home in the canyon to the old Duarte school.

After Monrovia came into being, Ernest had the bodies of his sisters and brother removed and re-buried in Live Oak cemetery. Later, they were again removed and taken, according to local belief, to Mountain View cemetery in Pasadena.

In 1914 Ernest visited Monrovia to look again at the scenes of his youth. Soon after his return to Los Angeles he was struck by a street car and killed.

A few years ago the gravestone was broken by vandals and the fragments are now arranged flat on the ground within a border of small stones just above the Emerson Flat picnic area.

I am greatly indebted to Mr. Ralph Slosson for furnishing the negative from which the picture was made and the material upon which this brief account is based.

T.M. Hotchkiss,
Chairman, Historical
Section,
Friends of The Monrovia
Public Library.

THE GRAVESTONE

On high ground west of the picnic area at Emerson Flats is the gravestone which marked the burial place of three of the eight children of Hibbard and Polly Rankins. The family had moved into the canyon from Lafayette County, Wisconsin, in 1874, twelve years before the founding of Monrovia. One son, Albert, 19, worked as an apprentice blacksmith in San Gabriel. While at home in the canyon one Sunday in 1877, he was stricken ill with typhoid fever. Despite the efforts of a young doctor residing in the foothills for his own health, Albert and two sisters, Polly, 16, and Estella, 13, were claimed by death within a few weeks. The bodies were removed from their canyon grave many years ago.

THE RANKINS

Ernest W. Rankins, who spent four years of his early life, between 1874 and 1878, in Sawpit Canyon, was run down by a street car in Los Angeles and fatally wounded Oct. 20, 1914. Mr. Rankins had just returned from a visit to Monrovia where he visited the scenes of his early manhood in the canyon. While here he was guest at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Harkness (early-day Canyon guards), whom he regaled with many lively stories of his life in the canyon. He was the oldest of eight children and the principal mode of earning a livelihood for the family was in the same of wood. They hauled it to the old power plant near Emerson Flats, where it was loaded upon wagons and taken to Los Angeles. In those days, a round trip of such a load consumed two days' time. Their family hoard was also augmented by an apiary and at one time they marketed three thousand six hundred pounds of sumac honey.--Wiley

SAWPIT

According to legend the name "Sawpit" was originally applied to the canyon during the building of the San Gabriel Mission. Much timber used in its construction was taken from here. Large logs were rolled into place over a pit and then cut with long two-man saws into lumber of usable size and dimension. These saws were hand handled by men standing below the surface assisted by other sawyers working above the logs. The "sawpit" was located near Emerson Flats, which was named for L. H. Emerson from whom the property was acquired by the City of Monrovia.