



# EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

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## EPISODE INFORMATION

**Episode Title:** St. John's Cemetery

**Episode # & Date:** Episode #11 – January 9, 2020

**Episode Description:** Judy recounts the history of a hidden San Mateo gem: St. John's Cemetery

**Episode Web Page:** <https://sanmateofocus.com/st-johns-cemetery/>

## TRANSCRIPT

I'm Judy Gordon, and *this* is San Mateo Focus. San Mateo Focus is a weekly podcast that gives you a shot of San Mateo information.

Long before the city of San Mateo was considered a crossroads location in the Bay Area, with good access to the East Bay, San Francisco, and San Jose, it was a place where wealthy San Franciscans built grand summer and weekend estates. These were some of the most powerful people in the West and they bought up large parcels of land, keeping their families in control of a great portion of what is now the City of San Mateo. In the 1860s, the opening of the railway that we now know as Caltrain between San Francisco and San Jose, brought more people to the area. Even before San Mateo was incorporated into a city in 1894, there were already two churches and a volunteer fire department here.

One of the most interesting and least expected remnants of that era in San Mateo history is the beautiful small graveyard at Yale Drive and Oregon Avenue, called [St. John's Cemetery](#). It's a peaceful, well maintained acreage at the edge of the Baywood Knolls neighborhood. Established in May of 1885, it was a gift to St. Matthews Church from Abby Parrott. Following the death of her husband, [John Parrott](#), she wanted to create a legacy for her family by establishing a cemetery where he and future generations would also have burial space.

John Parrott had been the U.S. Consul at Mazatlan, Mexico at the height of the Mexican-American War in the 1840s. In this role, he corresponded with national leaders such as James Buchanan and Daniel Webster, as well as California leaders, such as Thomas Larkin.

These contacts proved valuable later when Parrott moved to San Francisco and started a financial and shipping empire which increased his wealth. In 1853, he married Abby Eastman Maher in Mobile, Alabama and settled at their home on Rincon Hill in San Francisco. In the summers, the Parrotts attended St. Matthews Catholic Church in San Mateo. Their family included six daughters and one son.

The first burials occurred in 1886. Originally, St. Matthew's Catholic Pastor, with Mrs. Parrott's guidance, managed the Cemetery. The majority of the Cemetery was reserved for Catholics, but two acres were designated for people of other faiths. The Cemetery is governed and operated by a Board



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of Directors known as St. John's Cemetery Graves Association. One representative is from the Parrott family, one is appointed by the Catholic Archbishop, and the remaining Board members are volunteers from the community. Cemetery staff today includes Kathy Wade, whose father, grandfather, and grandmother also worked at the cemetery. A gatehouse/cottage at St. John's is occupied by renters. Don't knock on the door, as they do not work for the Cemetery.

Many neighbors include St. John's on their walks, and students from local schools visit studying history and lifespan trends. St. John's is a unique setting for photography classes too. The cemetery welcomes visitors daily, 9:00 - 5:00, and 9:00 - 6:00, during daylight savings. Sometimes, tours are offered through San Mateo Park and Recreation, conducted by a local historian.

In memory of those who served in the U.S. Armed Forces, scout troops have placed flags for Memorial Day on graves. Recently, a flagpole was established by a young man for his eagle scout project. Kathy says that the cemetery was honored to be selected for the tribute.

Walking through the cemetery you'll see the history of the city located on the tombstones: business owners, firefighters, educators, judges, politicians, farmers, historians, and clergy. Many of the names will be familiar to you as you drive the streets around San Mateo: Parrott, Nash, Barroilhet, Hull, and Hayne.

Memorials range from modest to beautiful marble angels, along with many unmarked graves. The Parrott family chapel mausoleum is the focal point of the Cemetery.

Kathy says that people find St. John's a fascinating and tranquil place to explore. She says that much can be learned about the successes, struggles, and community evolution by reading headstones and memorials. [The book: \*Underground San Mateo: The Story of St. John's Cemetery\*](#) by Michael Svanevik, has an anonymous quote from 1894 on the back cover. It reads: "There, on the slope in a grassy field, resides the spirit and soul of this community."

St. John's is still an active cemetery, so if you're planning for yourself or a family member, Here's The Deal: St. John's Cemetery offers graves for traditional casket burial, burial of cremated remains, and a columbarium for cremated remains. Interested individuals should contact the office to gather information and make an appointment. There is a security gate at the property entrance at the end of Oregon Avenue. Visitors are asked to park inside the gate and leave street parking for the neighborhood.

Okay, that's all the time we have for this episode. Have a great week. Thanks to Jack Radsliff for the original music to this podcast. If you'd like more information about our sponsor or the topics in today's episode, go to [sanmateofocus.com](http://sanmateofocus.com).



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## HELPFUL LINKS:

St. John's Cemetery Website  
<https://stjohnssanmateo.org/>

Daily Journal article on John Parrott:  
[Link to Article](#)

San Mateo History Article on City of San Mateo Website  
<https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/291/More-History>

— end of episode information — [podcast overview below](#) —

## PODCAST OVERVIEW

**Podcast Name:** San Mateo Focus

**Logo:**



**Description:** Whether you're new to San Mateo, California, or a long time resident, the San Mateo Focus Podcast is the place to learn about local history, good eats, and things to do.

**Website:** <http://www.sanmateofocus.com>

**Email:** [info@sanmateofocus.com](mailto:info@sanmateofocus.com)

**Host & Founder:** Judy Gordon

**Producer/Co-host:** Peter Radsliff

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