

# Take a Walk through Bakersfield's History at Historic Union Cemetery



Since 1872, Union Cemetery has been the final resting place of early area pioneers and settlers, old west cowboys, soldiers, judges and politicians - many of whom reside in our historic Pioneer Section. Below are some of the more notable sites, but it is far from complete. As you stroll along the cemetery's fascinating monuments and mausoleums, let this be the start of a fascinating journey into Bakersfield's unique and colorful past.

Historic  
UNION CEMETERY  
EST. 1872

## **A. Jacob Niederaur - Town's First Undertaker**      **Block 1**

Jacob Niederaur was Bakersfield's first undertaker and the first sexton of Historic Union Cemetery. He was born in Germany and moved to Bakersfield after serving in the Union Army in the Civil War. The first of Niederaur's many businesses was a cabinet-making shop, followed by a furniture store. He erected Bakersfield's first downtown shopping block and helped develop a hotel, a gym and a hall for opera. Niederaur died in 1903, a self-made man who added much to his adopted community.

## **B. Col. Thomas Baker - Founder of Bakersfield**      **Block 61**

Colonel Thomas Baker was the visionary founder of the city of Bakersfield and its most important resident. He arrived in Kern County, California in 1850 with a dream of building "an important city" and began an agricultural and business center. To entice settlers, he planted an alfalfa field where travelers could refresh their livestock. "Baker's Field" soon became the name of the burgeoning town. Baker died in 1872 and rests under a striking stone obelisk in what is now Historic Union Cemetery.

## **C. Ellen Baker Tracy - Pioneer/Col. Baker's Wife**      **Block 61**

Ellen Baker Tracy, third wife of Colonel Thomas Baker, founded Bakersfield's first school. She was born in Michigan in 1837 and met her husband in Visalia, California in 1854. Resourceful and strong, she was the classic pioneer woman and an active partner to her husband as they toiled to build their new town. After Col. Baker's death, she married another Bakersfield pioneer, Ferdinand Tracy. Ellen Baker Tracy remained active in community life and helped found an orphanage, the Children's Shelter. She died in 1924.

## **D. Benjamin Brundage - First Superior Court Judge**      **Block 62**

Benjamin Brundage was a celebrated jurist who made Bakersfield a political power center and helped draft a controversial new constitution for California in the 1870s. He was born on a farm in Ohio in 1834 and later moved to California to practice law. Brundage was instrumental in moving the Kern county seat from Havilah to Bakersfield. He also served one term as Kern County's first Superior Court judge and remained a prominent citizen until his death in 1911. The city named a street, Brundage Lane, in his honor.

## **E. Solomon Jewett - Bakersfield's First Banker**      **Block 72**

One of Bakersfield's first business magnates, Solomon Jewett made his first fortune supplying wool for Union Army uniforms in the Civil War. A descendant of the Pilgrims, Jewett was born in 1835 on a Vermont sheep ranch and later moved to California to raise sheep. As he prospered, Jewett diversified, opening a store and the area's first bank, the Kern Valley Bank. He also raised cattle and alfalfa and started an oil company. Jewett became active in civic affairs, serving on the county board of supervisors. He died in Bakersfield in 1905.

## **F. George Chester - First Postmaster**      **Block 112**

Pioneer George Chester accomplished several "firsts" for Bakersfield, including acting as its first postmaster and first telegraph operator and starting its first general store. George arrived in 1866 with his brother Julius and opened the store, which spurred the development of the business district. Chester Street, named for the brothers, became a bustling main thoroughfare in Bakersfield. Despite his initial business success, George Chester was not a rich man when he died in 1903. He was however, beloved in the community. His obituary called him "the friend of everyone and the enemy of none."

## **G, H, I. Joss House Old West Shootout**      **Bert Tibbett, Block 118; Jeff Packard, Block 135; Will Tibbett, Block 132**

On April 19, 1903, Bakersfield was the scene of one of the great gun battles of the Wild West. Notorious desperado Jim McKinney was holed up in a fortified Chinese joss house (temple) at the corner of L and 22nd Streets. Officers surrounded the house and Deputy Sheriff Will Tibbett and City Marshal Jeff Packard called for McKinney to surrender. McKinney opened fire, killing Tibbett instantly and mortally wounding Packard. Bert Tibbet, Will's brother, returned fire and killed McKinney. Tibbet and Packard were solemnly laid to rest in Historic Union Cemetery, their graves an eternal reminder of Bakersfield's Wild West past.

## **J. American Civil War Soldiers**      **Blocks 204, 205, 214, 215, 224, 225**

A Civil War-era cannon tops the striking monument that marks the final resting place of 86 veterans of the Civil War on the Union side. These soldiers were members of The Grand Army of the Republic, a national Civil War veterans' organization that played a major role in American politics through the middle of the 20th century. Bakersfield was home to G.A.R. Hurlbut Post 127, which purchased the section for its members. The post was named for U.S. Army Major General Stephen A. Hurlbut, one of the founding fathers of the G.A.R. There are an additional 11 Union soldiers buried elsewhere in the cemetery, as well as 17 Confederate soldiers.

