Diane Angoni, Keeper of Story and Place

by Karen Youst

When she arrived six years ago, Diane Angoni recalled all the burials were "typed on cards and stored in index drawers." In reaction to what she termed chaos, Diane put all her affairs and her Basques, with a computer. Then she went through the books to make sure everyone was in the right place. That took two years. She spent another year out on the cemetery's grounds physically checking the names on the headstones and checking the Mac Burial List and the Master Burial List. A Master Burial List is now printed out new each year in alphabetical order. Diane did all the research and data entry for the cemetery's archival preservation, making it easier for people to find their roots.

According to Diane, some of the people searching for their ancestors are "addictive, obsessed with genealogy." For them she provided the Master Burial List along with other helpful information. She compiled a list of all the funeral homes in Boise along with their original names (if they have changed), addresses, and phone numbers. She compiled a list of a few Basque cemeteries. She made a list of all the other cemeteries in Idaho, but cannot vouch for their record keeping systems. Each cemetery does things differently. One suspects that they are not all equally as good. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church kept its own burial records on the cemetery's grounds physically checking the names on the headstones and checking the Mac Burial List and the Master Burial List. Diane assures she gets her information from the cemetery's guardian angel. She does not used to believe in ghosts, but she has to, now. She knows first hand. Necessary information pops into her head, even when the seeker could not even ask it.

Diane maintains a broader view as well. Of course, the first burial record book she says, "It's like looking at history." At Morris Hill history lives because Diane believes it is necessary to tell the stories of Morris Hill. It is important to us, so we can know our past, our place, and our people. In order to tell this story Diane created still another book, a thirteenth page booklet that is a walking tour of Morris Hill. It is a photocopy of book eight and a half by eleven-inch paper stapled together with a choice of covers, colorful art deco designs or crates, an Asian symbol of eternal life. The booklet can be purchased at Morris Hill's office for $2.50. Diane's attitude are clearly stated in the booklet's first paragraph. She tells us Morris Hill Cemetery has "served as a repository of the city's history and a reflection of the tone of growth and development of Boise, Idaho and the West. You will be asked to look at cemetery markers not as mutes stones but as works of art and as commentaries on our society."

Diane hopes that the walking reader will emerge from the tour with an appreciation for history and reverence for those who created it. The reader is also told to acknowledge those who were never famous or made deep impressions. These people also are "the source of our heritage.

The historical figures who make up the official guide may include Senator Borah, Senator Church, James Angleton of the CIA, supermarketer Joe Alberston, and pioneer "Peg Leg" Annie Morrow, among others. Diane did her own research, some of it inspired by names she read in the first burial record book.

When she found out that John Jarski had been "hung for murder" in 1936 she went to the library. The defense argued that "he was mentally unstable due to being kicked in the head by a mule when he was younger." The newspaper did not bother to write another story about him, but Morris Hill records suggest that his defense was inadequate.

We also talked about James Angleton. Though Diane wrote a rather nice paragraph about him, possibly to maintain their respect, she did not write another story about him, but Morris Hill records suggest that his defense was inadequate.

The short paragraph she wrote about Joe Alberston, whose home was just across the street from Morris Hill, demonstrates deferential respect and affection. Instead of just listing his many business accomplishments and philanthropic activities, Diane wrote a more emotional tribute, "Joe is a Boise institution, much loved by all of us and he will live in all our hearts."
Diane is a trustworthy narrator for the place because she is a compassionate person, touchingly human in the best ways. She realizes that history must be known not for its own sake, but for its use. She works for the city, for the parks department, for something greater as well. She chose to organize the cemetery records to facilitate ease of use for her replacement. In all of this she does not seem to be the least bit secretarial or bureaucratic. She envisioned her replacement would not seem to be the least bit secretarial or bureaucratic. She envisioned the walking tour. She unshrouds the information for something greater as well.

In times of shock and grief it is things running smoothly that helps. Small words. Candy offered to a child. "I always had a desire to comfort those who are suffering grief," Diane says. Many of us have that desire, but very few find a way to do it. Diane admits helping people is wonderfully satisfying. Diane Angost does the work of civilization. She records, orders, and helps remember the dead. At Morris Hill, when a funeral service was over, the deed books, the burial index books, the section books, the computer files remain. When Diane organized the burial index books, she unshrouds the information needed to comfort those who are suffering grief.

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The Boise Valley Monument Company is located in a designer gunnysack, can be ordered directly from the ICB for $19.95 plus $3 shipping and handling.

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