

[History](#)[Gardens](#)[Photo Gallery](#)[Visiting](#)[Volunteer](#)[About OCCC](#)[Links](#)[Information](#)[Old City Cemetery Committee, Inc. - 1850 Cholera Epidemic Victims](#)[Cemetery Hours](#)[Calendar](#)[Tours & Events](#)[Map & Directions](#)[Gifts & Souvenirs](#)[Volunteer](#)[Make A Donation](#)[Publications](#)[Burial Index
1849 - 2000](#)

1850 Cholera Epidemic Victims

One of the worst epidemics of Asiatic Cholera anywhere occurred in Sacramento in 1850. At that time, no one knew what caused cholera or how it was transferred, but there was no mistaking what it was. A victim would be well, then suddenly collapse with abrupt onset of profuse watery diarrhea followed by death in a few hours from dehydration and acidosis.



On October 8, a passenger on the "New World," a ship docked in Sacramento, emerged and collapsed on the wharf, sparking an epidemic that killed 800-1000 people in less than three weeks. Thousands fled in panic, leaving the stricken behind. Of the 40-80 physicians practicing here at the time, 17 died, making this the highest mortality on record for physicians caring for victims of an epidemic.

With few exceptions, victims were buried in mass graves. There were several, the largest at the New Helvetia cemetery. Because of mass flooding, these burials were transferred to the City Cemetery where they are believed to be under military graves.

A monument was erected in 1852. The monument's placement, however, has little bearing on the actual locations of cholera victims and, most likely, is placed atop an area originally sectioned off for the indigent. Of the 17 physicians who died of cholera while caring for the victims of the 1850 epidemic, only one of the 17 is notably buried in this cemetery. Records indicate that the other 16 physicians are buried under the City Cemetery, but the location is unknown.



[Top](#)

[Home](#) | [History](#) | [Photo Galleries](#) | [Volunteer](#) | [Make a Donation](#)
[Calendar](#) | [Hours](#) | [Map](#) | [Gifts](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About OCCC](#) | [Publications](#)

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