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# A Grave Issue-Lone Fir Cemetery, Block 14, and Chinese Exclusion with Charlie Huxley

Charlie Huxley

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# Charlie Huxley

*Welcome to PDXPLORES, a Portland State research podcast, featuring scholarship innovations and discoveries, pushing the boundaries of knowledge practice and what is possible for the benefit of our communities and the world.*

My name is Charlie Huxley, and I'm a recent graduate of Portland State's History Department. At the southwest corner of Lone Fir Cemetery, nestled in a residential area of east Portland, lays a flat and grassy lot. This roped off area known as Block 14 was the segregated section for Chinese immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The bodies were buried for a set amount of time, then exhumed, cleaned, sent to China, and laid to rest with the ancestors of the deceased.

In 1952 Multnomah county officials believing that all the remains had been removed from block 14, authorized the construction of the Morrison building on site. Plans in 2004 to sell this plot to developers caused the community to intervene and an archeological investigation in 2007 revealed that there were still remains on site. Block 14 was then reconnected to the cemetery.

Community involvement with this space was not always positive. And as east Portland grew in the late 19th century, a hatred motivated by anti-Chinese sentiments developed towards block 14 through an analysis of newspaper articles in city ordinances, my research illustrates how community engagement with Block 14 in the 19th century was defined by efforts to legally restrict Chinese immigrants from the space.

The study of Block 14's existence broadens the understanding of the aggression and racism that Chinese immigrants faced in 19th century Portland. Newspaper articles in the Oregonian illustrated a hatred for Block 14 by the public, describing Chinese funerals as a nuisance, obnoxious, and disgraceful. Residents called for the Chinese to be refused burial in the cemetery and coinciding with this negative language were four ordinances. Brought up in the years, 1888, 1891, 1892 and 1895, that tried to restrict the Chinese funerals at Lone Fir.

The approval of the 1895 ordinance made it so that Chinese funeral practices had to happen within the confines of a building on site. And by pushing these funeral practices to an existence behind closed doors, east side residents manipulated the Chinese presence in a way that gave the public the opportunity to forget these people were there.

Though early history reveals the community's desire to bury Block 14. The present is dedicated to digging it up. A bond measure passed in 2019 designated \$4 million in funding for the design and construction of a memorial garden at Block 14, which would honor the people still buried there. This would not have been possible without positive community engagement and partnerships.

The continuation of scholarship focusing on the study of Block 14 in current efforts to memorialize the space, evokes a resurrection of sorts. And at Lone Fir Cemetery, the lives of the dead are not cut off and interment. They live on in the stories we tell the history we bring forth and the deliberate choices that we make to remember.