

# Grave is hidden in Knik hills

by Helen Gillette-Thompson  
For The Times

Walking through an Alaska woods, you needn't be surprised to come across old, worn graves. There's hundreds all over the state.

Most of them are without names. The head board, if there ever was one, is broken and decayed by weather. Some are surrounded by sagging picket fences or topped by worn old native gravehouses. Many lie unmarked, six-foot-long depressions in the ground.

As life-long Knik resident Bailey Theodore says, there's graves all over these hills.

But there is, on a bluff not far from Knik Arm, one grave that's very unusual.

Joe Redington Sr., who discovered it 33 years ago when he homesteaded at Knik, pointed it out the other day.

Right there in the middle of the woods, on what was Joe's father's homestead, (he moved on it about 1950), you come to a marble spire, decorated on all four sides by dignified clusters of oak leaves and acorns.

Not a homemade memorial at all.

"He must have been an important man, for them to go to the expense of bringing a monument from Outside," says Joe.

And yet, as far as he knows, nobody in all these 33 years has come near to decorate or keep an eye on this grave.

The marker states only the bare facts:

Cyrus D. Hunter  
Feb. 22, 1, 1846  
Died  
May 19, 1914

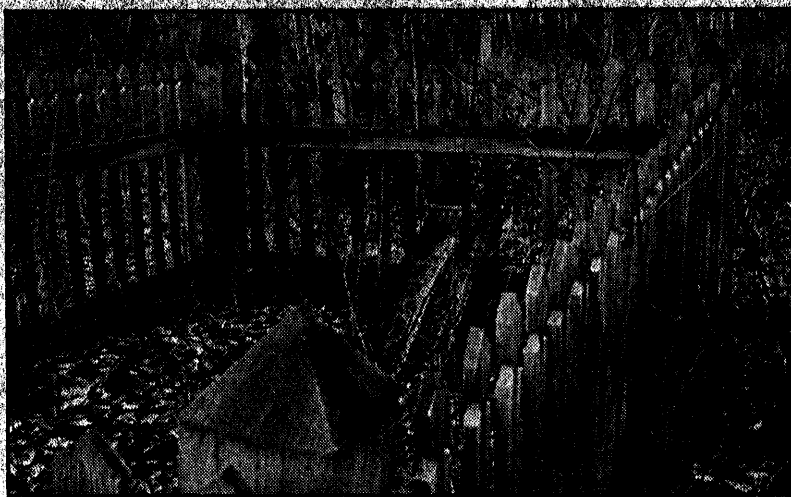
Redington would know nothing more about Hunter, except that his old neighbor, the late Lee Ellekson, told him that this "Hunter" is the man Hunter Trail is named for. Hunter Trail is near Joe's heart because part of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, (originated, fathered and fostered by Joe), is run over it. At least, every other year it is. The Hunter Trail takes off from the Iditarod Trail at Ophir and heads 200 miles up to Ruby.

Hunter's grave has company. Two other marked graves are nearby, both enclosed by unpainted wood picket fences.

The smaller fence is worn, the gate sagging. But the other seems almost untouched by time.

The wooden latch at the gate is unmarked, the hinges still strong. The corner posts, made of five-by-five dimension wood with the tops squared to four-sided spires, are sturdy, the edges still sharp. "Never painted, and hardly changed at all!" Joe marvels. He figures the corner posts are cut from six-inch spruce logs.

The marble spire, likewise, fails to show signs of age. The lettering is sharp and legible.



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## This grave, enclosed with a picket fence, keep Hunter's company

however, looks old. You can't even see where there's ever been a name.

Right by Joe's hilltop home, there's another cemetery, the native burying ground for a wide area.

The Indians have no access, but Joe lets them drive across his land. In these modern times they utilize a hearse, driving as near as possible to the burying ground. That still leaves a ways to carry the casket.

As it happens, the old Iditarod Trail, (which in early days served as dog sled highway and freighting thoroughfare from Seward to the Interior and now is used for the rando-rod race), has its course right by the graveyard.

"We tell the mushers to be sure to drive straight on through here, not to bother the graves," he said.

Right the same area, on the bluff above the Arm, there was also a white cemetery, well used around

the turn of the century when Knik was a city and transportation center. Twenty years ago this graveyard was very visible from Knik Road, (which followed a slightly different path than the present road.)

Now these graves would be hard to find. They're still there, but decayed and hidden. The historical society plans to do some rehabilitation and clearing in the spring.

That's why it seems so strange that the other little burying ground, where Hunter lies, is still so overgrown.

Redington, still keeping an eye on the grave, hopes some day to learn more about the man who lies buried there, and why Hunter Trail is named for him.

"Some place, Hunter must have some relatives," Joe says.