

El Dorado County cemetery gets headstones without epithet

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

A 57-year-old injustice weighing on El Dorado County may have finally been lifted Wednesday, when Derrick Bonar raised a 90-pound piece of granite and carefully set it into wet concrete prepared by John Cooks.

The two men, inmates from Folsom Prison, were installing the last of 36 new markers on graves at the Mormon Island Relocation Cemetery, which straddles the El Dorado-Sacramento county line near Folsom Lake.

The graves were those of people who had been buried in the town of Negro Hill before the reservoir rose behind the dam and flooded the old cemetery.

The new stones culminated a decadelong effort to replace older concrete markers that bore a racist version of the town's name.

"I feel like I'm a part of history," Cooks said. "I'm giving back to society."

The cemetery is now operated by El Dorado County, but the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers took responsibility for having placed the markers bearing the epithet in the 1950s.

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