

# News Release



Oregon Parks and Recreation Department

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Release Date: [May 27, 2021](#)

## Media Contact:

Kuri Gill, Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries coordinator

503-986-0685, [Kuri.Gill@oregon.gov](mailto:Kuri.Gill@oregon.gov)

[www.oregonheritage.org](http://www.oregonheritage.org)

Sura Rubenstein, Congregation Kesser Israel Cemetery volunteer manager

[sura.rubenstein@comcast.net](mailto:sura.rubenstein@comcast.net)

## [Date designation change for Oregon historic cemeteries](#)

SALEM, Oregon — Governor Brown signed into law a bill recently passed by the Oregon legislature to change the designation date for a historic cemetery. Oregon is one of a few states with a historic cemetery designation and preservation program. The bill extends the designation beyond the original date of February 14, 1909 to 75 years or older.

The Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries, housed within Oregon Heritage in Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, has worked toward this change for over a decade. They recognized that many cemeteries didn't qualify under the original designation which was based on the establishment of Oregon as a state on February 14, 1859. Designated historic cemeteries are eligible for grants and other protections under state law. The commission found many cemeteries that didn't qualify still had historic significance. For example, central Oregon saw western settlement at a later time than the rest of the state. Many of the cemeteries in that area date to the 1910s and 1920s.

The commission recognized that historic value and significance changes over time. So, the rolling date became the goal. The current law for a historic cemetery is "any burial place that contains the remains of one or more persons who died before the date that is 75 years before the current date." An estimated 180 cemeteries are currently eligible

for listing with the commission under the new date. Operating cemeteries are not required to list as historic with the commission, but they are eligible.

“We are delighted with the Legislature’s passage of HB 2123 — introduced at Gov. Brown’s request — which makes it possible for the Congregation Kesser Israel Cemetery to be included among Oregon’s historic cemeteries,” said Sura Rubenstein, the cemetery’s volunteer manager.

The Orthodox Jewish cemetery, located in Southeast Portland, was established in 1924 and had its first burials in 1925. Many of the earliest of the 300-plus burials in the cemetery are of immigrants from Poland and Russia. They came to Oregon in 1890-1924 as part of the great waves of Jewish immigration seeking better lives for themselves and their families. In some cases, the stories of the people in the cemetery tell of hardships and sorrows.

“Although we do have notable people among the burials, the cemetery tells more of a ‘people’s history’ of Jewish life in Oregon,” Rubenstein said. “We are looking forward to working with the Commission on Historic Cemeteries on issues of preservation, restoration, and long-term planning for the cemetery’s future — and are grateful for the opportunity.”

State law established the seven-member Commission to maintain a listing of all historic cemeteries and gravesites in Oregon; promote public education on the significance of historic cemeteries; and help obtain financial and technical assistance for restoring, improving and maintaining their appearances.

For information on historic cemeteries, available resources, and to designate a cemetery visit [www.oregonheritage.org](http://www.oregonheritage.org) or contact Kuri Gill at 503-383-6787 or [kuri.gill@oregon.gov](mailto:kuri.gill@oregon.gov).

###