

Cemetery

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dent. "It's a neat old cemetery."

The residents' main concerns are:

- Maintenance workers driving tractors over gravesites, cracking the concrete.

- The tractors dripping oil on graves.

- The owners are neglecting the upkeep and are unresponsive to complaints.

- Water is no longer available at the site, so the grounds are covered with weeds and dead grass. Gophers are having a field day underground, which causes the headstones to sink.

- There is little protection against vandalism.

The grounds were cared for by individual families until the 1920s, when the Odd Fellows took over some responsibility for supervision. The cemetery was sold to Irvin M. Smith and Sons in 1970. The family once owned a mortuary.

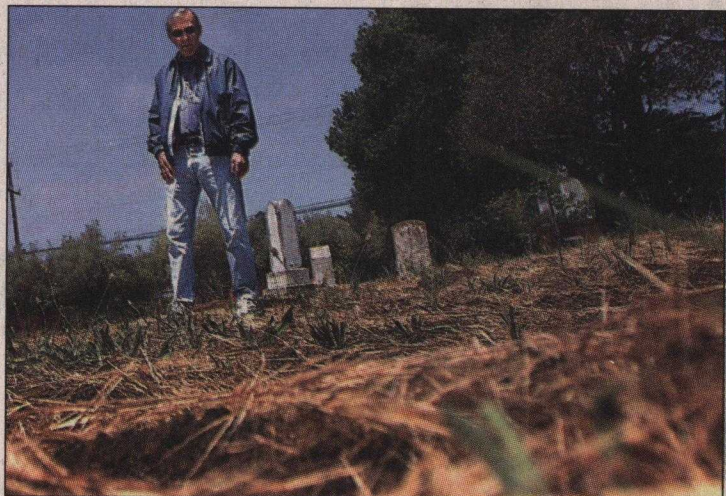
The cemetery — which the owner says is home to "thousands" and has room for "thousands more" — sits on the outskirts of town. It was never the most manicured cemetery, but a walk through it Monday revealed a property in a state of obvious neglect.

Instead of a lawn, there are piles of dirt and waist-high weeds, and empty water bottles, broken pots and tin cans litter the grounds.

Land for the cemetery was donated by Soquel founders John and Sarah Lard Daubenbiss, according to local historian Carolyn Swift. They are now buried in the cemetery along with a majority of the town's other pioneers.

"The site is, in addition to being a cemetery, one of keen historic interest and significance," Swift said. "It is one of few small local cemeteries that a person can wander through and get a strong sense of the town's history and patriotic loyalty."

Among those buried there: Bozo Choklat, a Swiss immigrant who killed himself with poison. His marker was stolen years ago, according to Swift.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

Richard Nutter visits the weed-choked burial site of his great-grandmother Elizabeth Nutter at Soquel Cemetery on Monday.



A gopher hole encroaches on Elizabeth Nutter's 1880 grave at Soquel Cemetery.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Barbara Schaarschmidt walks through knee-high weeds near her son's grave at Soquel Cemetery on Monday.

In Soquel, cemetery in need of revival

By SORAYA GUTIERREZ
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

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SOQUEL — Buried in the Soquel Cemetery are most of the town's founders, their stories written on headstones for all to see. That's if the markers, some of which date to the early 1800s, haven't been cracked by tractors, covered with dirt and weeds or stolen.

Local residents fear the cemetery's history will be buried if the owners don't start to take responsibility for the property, and are meeting today with the family that owns the cemetery to try to improve things.

"We're asking for decency for those that have died," said resident Barbara Schaarschmidt, whose son Paul was buried at the cemetery in 2000. "It's a disgrace."

She and her husband bought three plots in the cemetery 16 years ago for \$400 each. Plots are current selling for \$1,100.

The cemetery manager, whose Santa Cruz family has been in the business for years, said the cemetery is not a big money-maker and that his family is doing the best it can to keep the grounds, off Soquel-San Jose Road near the high school, in respectable shape.

"We've tried to keep it up as best we could," said Greg Smith, who has been running the property since December, when his dad was severely injured in an acci-

If You Go

WHAT: Soquel Cemetery meeting.

WHEN: 10 a.m. today.

WHERE: Porter Memorial Library, 3050 Porter St., Soquel.

INFORMATION: E-mail dnutter@earthlink.net or call 688-2412.

Musician Skip Spence also is buried at the Soquel Cemetery, according to findagrave.com. He died in Santa Cruz in 1999 at age 53. He was initially the drummer for the influential San Francisco rock band Jefferson Airplane, and also helped bring the Doobie Brothers to national attention.

Now the cemetery needs some attention of its own, residents

agree, before it gets worse.

"Let's have some respect for what's going on here," said Richard Nutter, president of the Soquel Pioneer and Historical Association. Nutter's ancestors are buried in the cemetery. There's a gopher hole next to the headstone of Elizabeth Nutter, who died in 1880.

Greg Smith said because it's a non-endowed cemetery, meaning no money is set aside for its maintenance. As a result, the water has been shut off because the pipes were leaking and there isn't a paid caretaker.

And not everyone minds the condition, he added.

"Some like the rural look," he said.

Contact Soraya Gutierrez at sgutierrez@santacruzsentinel.com.