

Graveyards: National Disgrace?

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Evergreen Cemetery is the oldest cemetery in Santa Cruz under continuous use up to the present day.

It is a small, tree-enclosed area that wanders up and down hill and along Evergreen Street with grass-grown plots and toppled headstones ... a scene that has bothered many localites for many years. It is one of the most historic institutions remaining in the city, but a sort of step-child status has fallen upon it in these later days of its existence. It is operated by Evergreen Cemetery Association, headed by LaSalle Bachelder. It was founded in 1850 — that makes it 122 years old. Vandals have had a field day there in recent years, among the graves of Santa Cruz County pioneers.

In 1968 the ailing cemetery got a shot of vitamins when the State of California designated it a Point of Historical Interest.

But it needs another shot of life — and one is on the horizon, it would appear.

Santa Cruz Genealogical Society hopes and plans to take Evergreen under its wing, and raise money for preservations and repairs. But this is just one facet of the Genealogical Society's plan.

John Ballard, society president, states it this way: "We have appealed to Congressman Burt Talcott, to State Senator Donald Grunsky and to President Nixon, for laws preserving and restoring

graveyards. We hope this will become a nation-wide crusade in conjunction with the United State's bicentennial year of 1976."

It is time for the entire nation to take notice of its graveyards, many of which are neglected shamefully, or actually in danger of disappearing, Ballard said.

The Genealogical society has asked for a President's Proclamation and for California to be designated as the site of the bicentennial celebration, as well as for graveyard legislation.

Anyone interested in these projects may contact the local society at P.O. Box 72, Santa Cruz, California.

The bill to "Recover, restore, repair, protect and perpetuate all historical burial places of this nation," will be titled THE TALCOTT AMERICAN HERITAGE BILL.

Lloyd Leadmon of the society and Ballard met with Talcott recently and presented their request for the bill. Talcott told them he would deliver a letter to President Nixon, and that the national bicentennial committee is searching for an appropriate project to spark citizen participation in the 200-year observance.

The society is interested in all forms of historical preservation, Ballard noted.

"Historical graveyards are disappearing," Ballard said. "They are being plowed under, their headstones carted off to the dump." One dentist

in the mid-west collected gravestones of an old forgotten cemetery and paved his patio with them for a conversation piece, Ballard said.

Worst of all, an old and historically important graveyard near Salinas is right now being destroyed, he noted.

"A housing development is going in over a 200-year old graveyard near Santa Rita, just north of Salinas. There are more than 100 graves there — some of prominent early-day Spanish families, the Rodriguez, Berryessa, Castro, Soto, and Governor Alverado families," Ballard stated. "The man who hanged Tiburcio Vasquez is buried there. His name was Marcus Cecina and he was buried in 1910."

The most recent burials in the Santa Rita graveyard were in that year.

Destruction of the burial places came to the Genealogical Society's notice when a bulldozer driver got so upset at crunching his machine through coffins and bones that he quit his job, Ballard said. The earth was to be excavated and leveled about ten feet deep. All bodies and caskets uncovered were to be pushed into a nearby gully and covered with earth, Ballard said.

One man still living in Santa Rita, Dan Anthony Williams, tried to protest the desecration of the graveyard; his family is buried there.

"He got nowhere with his protests," Ballard said.



Broken gravestones at Evergreen, above.

Ballard said he did research which revealed that the property on which the cemetery exists, was sold to a man who wanted to farm it. He advertised for families to remove their bodies, waited 90 days, then had the tombstones carted away.

Ballard believes that under the law, this cannot be done.

Right now, slabs of concrete are being poured over the old site, he said.

"This is what is happening all over the country, and we want to stop it," Ballard said. "We plan to start with Evergreen."

Graveyard legislation is planned by Congressman Burt Talcott, above center; John Ballard, right, president of Santa Cruz Genealogical Society, and Lloyd Leadmon, the society's convention chairman. At left, toppled gravestones are a common sight at Evergreen Cemetery, one of Santa Cruz' most historic burying grounds.

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