James Franks of Friends of Old Holy Cross Cemetery, and Live Oak historian Norman Poitevin in Old Holy Cross Cemetery.

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Resting place restored

Cemeteries

VOLUNTEERS TRANSFORM OLD HOLY CROSS CEMETERY
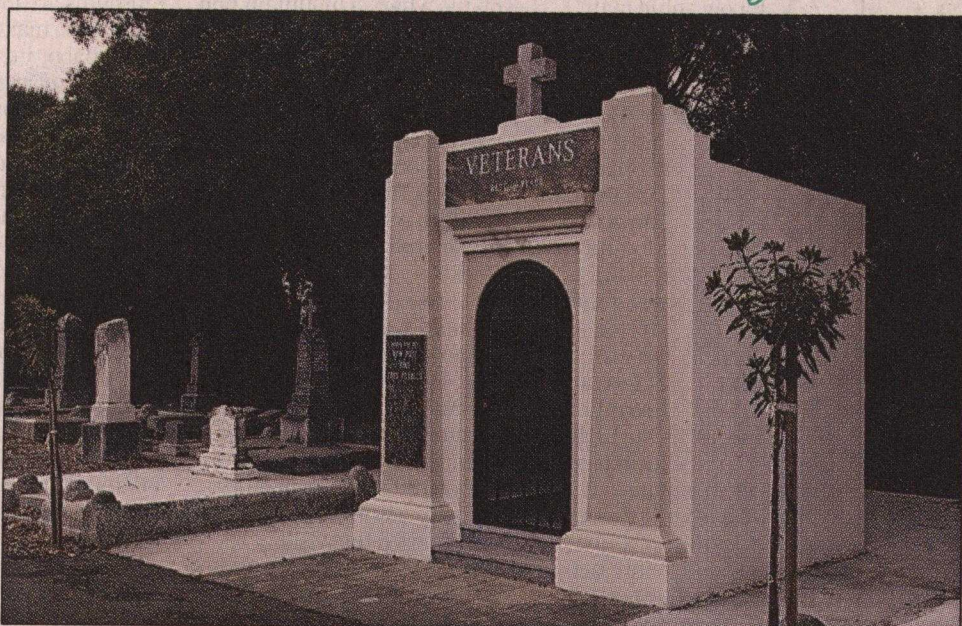
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LIVE OAK — After more than a year of hard work, a group of volunteers continue their efforts to restore Old Holy Cross Cemetery.

The cemetery, which was consecrated in 1873 and served the Santa Cruz Catholic community until 1946, had fallen into disrepair. Brush covered some of the grave markers while vandals had spray painted and smashed some of the headstones. Squatters had set up camps in the overgrowth.

James Franks, who has family buried in the cemetery, organized a group 18 months ago to bring the cemetery back to a state of "reverence and pride," as well as open up the grounds so visitors feel comfortable visiting loved ones.

Franks formed a group of 11 volunteers called "Friends of Old Holy Cross Cemetery," which used its substantial donations

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SEE **CEMETERY** ON **B3**   Veterans have their own donated crypt.

CEMETERY

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to rebuild damaged grave markers, pave a new road, enclose the grounds with a fence and paint over graffiti, Franks said.

"Looking around, I just couldn't believe this historical site was allowed to get as bad as it was," he said.

The workers removed the overwhelming plant growth and planted olive trees and redwoods. Revitalization also included newly painted markers, refurbished crypts and raised sections of graves that had been flooding during heavy rains, Franks said.

Franks and the group's historian, Norman Poitevin, strolled through the cemetery recently noting all the improvements. The real goal, according to Franks and Poitevin, is to give the cemetery back to the community.

"The immense amount of history in this place is just incredible," Poitevin said.

The cemetery is the final resting place of some of the county's early settlers. There are also more than 2,000 Native Americans buried in a mass grave at the northern end of the property. The group plans to create a proper marker where those remains are buried.

The group has compiled a book called "The Guide to Old Holy Cross Cemetery" that provides biographical details on many of the early businessmen, law enforcers and outlaws buried in the cemetery.

Near the end of the book, there's a section called "Outside of the Fence" by historian Phil Reader that details stories of a notorious outlaw named "Wild" George Tann and a murderer named Jose Rodriguez. They are buried under the street in front of Old Holy Cross Cemetery. The Stagnaro family, which owned a family crypt that was heavily desecrated by vandals, donated their structure to Franks so he could renovate it and turn it into a crypt designated for Santa Cruz veterans, Franks said. The six Stagnaro family members whose bodies were housed inside were transferred to the "New" Holy Cross Cemetery, which was created in 1946 a short distance away. In May, the donated crypt will become a space for 72 veterans who were cremated.

Workers are making other progress, Franks said. Many graves are unmarked and some only have a number on a small piece of stone. Franks said part of the group's job is matching those numbers with records of the buried people's names to make proper headstones.

Greg Knowles, manager at the new Holy Cross Cemetery, said the site has "gone from an eyesore to something that's respectable." Just last year, Old Holy Cross Cemetery was officially made a historic landmark.

Poitevin leads tours through the cemetery during the summers and said interest has increased greatly.

"I think people were nervous about coming in here before," Poitevin said. "People walk in here now and place flowers on grave stones. It's becoming a place they can feel comfortable."