

# A GRAVE Concern



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

From left, Steven Wong, Robert Nelson, Georgie Guyer, Suzanne Schrag, and LeAnne Ravinale are among the actors and docents who will lead the tour-performance at Evergreen Cemetery.

## *Cemeteries* Tour at cemetery no reason to be alarmed

By **NANCY REDWINE**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

**T**his weekend at the Evergreen Cemetery, the dead will speak.

Hopefully not with their own voices, but through six Evergreen docents and local actors, who will embody the stories of local people who paved the way for the future.

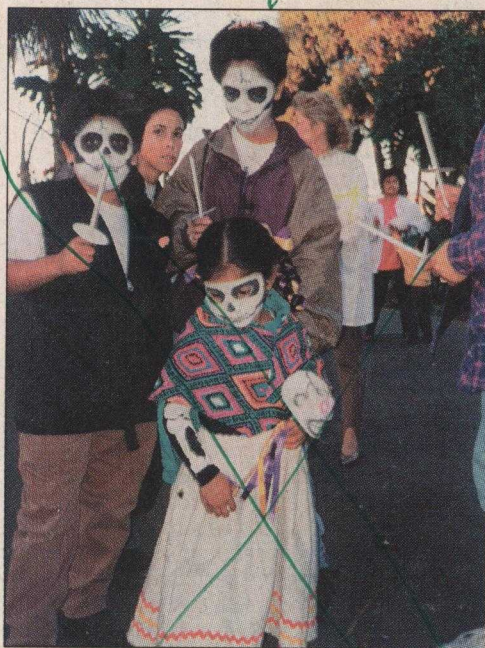
Tales of the Tomb: An Evergreen Cemetery Traveling Performance is just one of many Halloween activities taking place around the county this weekend and through Tuesday night.

Joan Nelson, who chairs the Evergreen Cemetery Committee and is a volunteer historian with the Museum of Art and History, is careful to clarify that this will be a fun and entertaining event, including trick or treating, fortune telling and prizes for costumes.

"Nobody's going to scare anyone," she said.

The performance will focus on the theme of migration, as the tour passes through the numerous sections of the cemetery highlighting families and social groups that arrived in Santa Cruz between 1840 and 1880.

The performances will be ongoing, so history buffs can drop in anytime during the two-hour period.



## Something for everyone

Check inside for our complete guides to Halloween parties and events from all around the county.  
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# Cemetery performance

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Themes will be: "They Came By Sea," "They Came by Land," "They Came From China," "They Came for Gold," and "They Fought in the Civil War."

According to Nelson, there are over 2,000 people buried in the Evergreen Cemetery. "At one time, the records were destroyed," she said. "We've recreated several hundred of them with obituaries, death certificates, newspapers articles and family histories."

We talked to some of the actors and docents — who will be possessed by the spirits of the past this Saturday — about historical accuracy, the honoring of ancestors, and the human craving for knowledge of the past.

**LeAnne Ravinale** works in training and development for a software company. She and **Suzanne Schrag**, a member of the improv troupe, Um...Gee...Um, will portray members of the William and Anna Jenkins family, who were drawn to California by the lure of the Gold Rush.

**Bob Nelson** is active in the Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War and has been working to restore the Grand Army of the Republic section of Evergreen Cemetery. He will tell stories of some of the Civil War vets buried there.

**Steven Wong** is a schoolteacher and a playwright who will connect his family history with the Chinese community in early Santa Cruz.

## What do people get out of knowing local history?

**LeAnne Ravinale:** A lot of the things that happen today reflect on what's happened in the past, and there's a lot to be learned from that.

Also, the tales of everyone who was here during the Gold Rush time are inspiring and amazing. They raise the question of "How am I a pioneer in my own life, and with what's going on in culture today? How am I changing things and making them better by fighting against oppression or racism?"

**Suzanne Schrag:** You get a sense of what people did to carry on, their bravery and ability.

William Jenkins was drawn here in 1850 during the Gold Rush, planning to become a millionaire. His wife Anna figured he wasn't coming back, and so she brought their three daughters, who were 3, 5 and 9 years old.

At that time a lot of people hired wagons with drivers, but Anna drove her own wagon and tended her own oxen.

The goal is to give people a sense of history by invoking the spirit of the place and the spirits of the people that are still here among us.

**Bob Nelson:** We can only judge the present and future by the past. Life's a continuum with a starting point way back when, and history links it to present and the future.

We're just travelers on one point of time. This didn't start or end with us.

What do you get out of doing this



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Dressed in a replica uniform, Robert Nelson tours a section of Evergreen Cemetery reserved for Civil War veterans.

## If you go

**WHAT:** Tales of the Tomb: An Evergreen Cemetery Traveling Performance

**WHEN:** 1 to 3 p.m., Saturday (wear comfortable shoes)

**WHERE:** Evergreen Cemetery, on Evergreen and Coral streets near Harvey West Park.

**COST:** \$1

**INFO:** 429-1964

## performance?

**Schrag:** Sometimes LeAnne and I improvise banter, but I feel a certain responsibility to know the facts and to be accurate.

Sometimes it's really tempting to wing it, to follow that instinct to make it fun and colorful, which is also important.

If I don't know the answer to a question, sometimes I'll say, "Sorry dear, it's been so long, I don't remember."

**Steven Wong:** I'm trying to make a connection between my family history and some of traditions and culture of early Chinese people in this county.

My paternal grandparents arrived in mid 1920's into San Francisco, and my grandfather spent time on Angel Island.

I'm glad for the opportunity to learn more. I'm working on a play about my family history, and so when I was called to do this tour I knew I had to because my cultural history has suddenly become very important to me.

## How did you prepare for your performance?

**Schrag:** There's not as much information available about the Jenkins as there was about Eliza Farnham and Georgiana Bruce Kirby — the women we've played in previous tours.

We have diaries from pioneer women, but Mrs. Jenkins didn't keep a diary of her own. We have a few anecdotes about the family, and then we already know a lot about the Gold Rush.

I've been reading about the Gold Rush, like "Roughing It" by Mark Twain. It's pretty romanticized, but you get a sense of the camps,

where they haven't seen a woman in years, and how brave it was for a woman to join her husband there.

**Wong:** I've found that many of the bodies in the Chinese section of the Evergreen cemetery were dug up and shipped back to China.

It was the intent of the Chinese to always return to China; but as there are still Chinese bodies in Evergreen, obviously a lot of them didn't make it.

I think there were a number of people who realized they were going to be here for awhile, and it became less important to them to send their dead back to China.

## Are there spirits in the cemetery?

**Ravinale:** There will be on the 28th.

What makes history so interesting is that you can pick up an old object or go to a place and for me — but probably not for everyone — it has a visceral sense of something important that went on.

**Wong:** One of the great Chinese cultural traditions is the honoring of ancestor spirits, and dealing with evil spirits, which show up all through ancient Chinese culture.

They affected a lot of Chinese funeral traditions and are appropriate for Halloween. There were all sorts of treatment to make sure evil spirits didn't mess with people.

Many of the routes taken to get to the cemetery were circuitous, with as many curves and turns as possible, because it was believed that evil spirits could only travel in certain directions.

**Bob Nelson:** During the maintenance of the Grand Army of the Republic plot, we've been attempting to identify who is buried where the headstones are missing.

We've put in four or five new headstones for people we've identified, and we're ordering another three.

In the process you can't help but feel a presence when you're putting a headstone over the grave of someone. It's a completion and you can feel that.