



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Students Daniel Chai and Danielle Ciaravino clear debris at the old Holy Cross cemetery.

# Volunteers repair cemetery

Cemeteries  
Holy Cross site a focus for area historians, genealogists

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SANTA CRUZ — Old Holy Cross cemetery, a resting place for the area's early settlers and relocated bones of many American Indians, is considered an important site by many city historians.

But craggy piles of gravestones, broken beer bottles, fire pits and gang graffiti have made many potential visitors shy away. Now one community group, Friends of Old Holy Cross Church, wants to restore its original beauty. The group joined forces with high school students from Monterey Bay Academy Wednesday to fix up the old cemetery that sits at the end of Rodriguez Street in Live Oak.

Because the cemetery lies next to a large vacant lot, it is a favorite place for transients and underage drinkers, according to Friends of Holy Cross coordinator, Patricia Matejcek.

"The two pieces of land afford a haven for people buying liquor at nearby liquor stores," Matejcek said. "They come up a back trail and are invisible to police."

The cemetery, under the supervision

of the Diocese of Monterey County, has no on-site caretaker, according to Matejcek. She said headstones have been used in barbecue pits, holes cut in the fence, and slabs of marble stolen for resale.

"It's just sickening to look at the debris," said county historian Maria Pokriots, who is creating a genealogy of the people buried in Old Holy Cross for the Branciforte Bicentennial. Old Holy Cross will offer public tours from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Oct. 11, as part of the bicentennial.

According to Pokriots, much important history is being lost as the cemetery deteriorates. Many American Indian graves, transferred to Old Holy Cross from Mission Hill in the 1870s, are now unrecognizable in the rubble.

"I chose to come out and clean up the cemetery, because I figure we should show some respect to the people buried here," Monterey Academy freshman Gary Sanchez said.

According to Tim Kubrock, a history teacher at Monterey Bay Academy and organizer of the student community service project, the school is happy to have students become involved in projects like this.

"There's strength in numbers," he said with a laugh as he watched 12 burly high schoolers struggle to set a huge gravestone upright.

Next on the priority list after removing garbage is replacing headstones, putting in a sidewalk outside the cemetery, creating a handbook biography of all the cemetery's "inhabitants" and getting it upgraded on the county Planning Department's listing of historical sites.

"Anyone doing genealogical research for books or tracing lineages lives by these lists," Matejcek said. "If the father of a United States president were buried here, you better believe it would be high on their lists."

Matejcek said the site should be recognized for its historical value because it contains family plots of many of the city's founders.

"The people buried here sailed the Atlantic for weeks at a time, said goodbye to everything they knew to come here," Matejcek said. "There was no Pacific Bell, no reach out and touch someone. It's important for residents to connect in a direct way with the incredible courage of their ancestors."