

## EVERGREEN CEMETERY

# Monument commemorates Santa Cruz's Chinese history

**SANTA CRUZ** » There are restless ghosts of Chinese immigrants that wander Santa Cruz.

The spirits belong to single men who arrived in the city to work as servants and farmworkers.

"The terror for traditional Chinese was to die away from your family," said Sandy Lydon, a Santa Cruz historian. "It meant then that if your family wasn't here to take care of your grave, you become what is known as a 'hungry ghost.'"

Lydon, author of "Chinese Gold," a book about contributions of the Chinese in the Monterey Bay, said many in the area ended up buried in the Evergreen Cemetery in the Chinese section. Their remains are still there — unacknowledged for decades.

That changed Saturday as more than 100 people came together to put the spirits to rest in an honorary ceremony to remember their contributions and place in Santa Cruz history.

Organized by the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, the day's events began with a funeral procession starting on Front Street and ended in the Chinese section of the Evergreen Cemetery near Harvey West Park.



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Community members gather around the cement memorial gate erected in Evergreen Cemetery.

Along the way, the procession was joined by a troupe of lion dancers from Monterey. The route took the group to the southeast end of the cemetery, where the Chinese were buried. For years, the section remained largely unkept.

"The Chinese in the Monterey Bay region are largely unrecognized for their incredible contributions," said Sibley Simon, chairman of the Evergreen committee for the museum. "Perhaps the unfortunate thing is that almost all the signs that there was ever a Chinese section of the cemetery aren't visible."

While there were once four Chinatown in Santa

Cruz, the only thing that remains of them is a commemorative plaque on the Galleria building on Front Street where the last Chinatown stood. George Ow, who lived there from 1943 to 1948 before it was destroyed by a flood in 1955, knew the men who lived in Santa Cruz before and felt a connection to them.

"The laws were written against them," Ow said. "They couldn't become citizens. Couldn't vote. Couldn't own land. Couldn't testify in court. Couldn't marry white people. Because of this and the hard lives that they lived, I always thought that they should be acknowledged."

That changed with the construction of a 17-foot cement memorial gate, which was privately funded by Ow.

"The Chinese have a very big history here and it's mostly unknown," Ow said.

Written at the top of the gate in Chinese characters is "Chinese Section of Evergreen Cemetery Santa Cruz." Carved into the pillars of the gate is a poem: "Eternal land of struggle and home. Forever meritorious are the Chinese pioneers."

The mournful words reflect the lives of the men.

"They're hungry ghosts because their lives were unfulfilled," Ow said.

The day's events coincided with the Chinese festival Qing Ming, translated to Tomb Sweeping Day. During the holiday, families go to cemeteries where their ancestors are buried to clean tombstones and make food offerings to appease their spirits. While tradition dictates families bring foods like roast duck, whole chickens, fruits and an assortment of other dishes, the menu for the spirits on Saturday subsisted of just oranges.

"It's a very positive occasion," Lydon said. "It's only morbid if your culture doesn't have lunch in a cemetery. But theirs does."