

# Caretakers restore dignity

12/28/2000

Please see **Peace**, INEWS-12

## of Union Cemetery



JOHN GREEN — Staff

John Edmonds (above) wrote a book about the Union Cemetery in Redwood City, pictured here.

yard. The absence of maintenance was the legacy of a peculiar legal deal struck by the

Association, which in the 1859

Please see **Cemetery**, NEWS-7

**By Bret Putnam**  
STAFF WRITER

REDWOOD CITY — It is the resting place of soldiers and pioneers from the earliest days of California statehood, but by the 1980s Redwood City's historic Union Cemetery had become a late-night refuge for drunks, vandals, and carousing teenagers.

Obscured by untamed undergrowth, the cemetery suffered the indignities of upended gravestones, broken wood grave markers, graffiti on monuments, and broken beer and whiskey bottles.

The greatest indignity came in 1994, when a someone wrapped one end of a rope around the Union Soldier statue, lashed the other end to his pickup truck and yanked the statue to the ground. The

soldier — cast in brittle pot metal in 1887 — was left in splintered shards.

The destruction and decay was lamented by residents who as schoolchildren had attended solemn Memorial Day celebrations there. Then, not long after the destruction of the Union Soldier statue, citizen groups, amateur historians and — perhaps most significantly — local Boy Scouts devoted themselves to its restoration.

### A home for the dead

In the 1850s Redwood City, Searsville, Summit Springs, and West Union — the area's small but active lumber and trading communities — lacked a formal place to inter their dead. So in 1859 townsmen formed the Union Cemetery Association, and built the cemetery on six acres of land just west of El Camino Real.

The County's first judge, Benjamin Fox, is here. So is

Lester Cooley, a wealthy dairyman whose 400-acre estate included Cooley Landing, a wharf through which much of the area's commerce moved. Sarah Willis, who came to California in 1844 as a member of the first wagon train to cross the Sierras, is here. She became an important champion of women's right to vote.

The cemetery is also home to veterans of the Civil War, who are buried in the Grand Army of the Republic plot, and to Masons, who also have a plot of their own. During the Great Depression, The County's poorest citizens were buried here, many in unmarked graves paved over when Woodside Road was widened in the 1960s. From 1940 to 1960 the cemetery was lightly used, and the final burial came in 1963.

The Union Cemetery Association became defunct in 1918, and for decades afterwards no agency took care of the grave-

dedded the cemetery to the governor of California and his successors. But the governors, it seems, were indifferent.

### Governmental indifference

When Gov. Earl Warren spoke at a Memorial Day ceremony at the cemetery in 1939 he promised to look into the lack of funding, but the state didn't remit any payments until 1947, when it sent \$1,500. Support from the Governor's office continued to be irregular. Redwood City assumed ownership in 1964, but the cemetery still went largely uncared for.

By the early 1980s, real estate developers were casting acquisitive eyes on the site and the staff at the Redwood City Department of Parks and Recreation floated the idea of removing the graves and tombstones to make way for a Little League baseball diamond.

The cemetery "was in a precarious position," said Jean Cloud, a Redwood City resident who married into a family with ancestors in the graveyard. The work of Cloud and other local history buffs put the cemetery on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. Cloud went on to form the Historical Union Cemetery Association, an organization of more than 100 people which has been instrumental in the push for preservation.

By the late 1990s the Parks and Recreation department had a list of restoration projects it wanted to pursue in the cemetery, and very little funding. The department sounded out stone masons and monument experts in Colma, but their services were prohibitively expensive.

### Prepared to help

In stepped Tim Blum, scoutmaster of Boy Scout Troop 991. Blum was looking for Eagle projects for five of his scouts: Lars Lysand, Nariman Shariat, Louis Stevenson, Richard Verducci and Andrew Blum, his son. Blum wanted something to challenge the boys; projects they could look back on and be proud of. He contacted Parks and Recreation, and staff pointed him in the direction of the cemetery.

But before the scouts could do any physical work they had to conduct research, and present plans before four bodies: the department of Parks and Recreation, the Historic Union Cemetery Association, the Redwood City Historical Resources Advisory Committee, and the city's Planning Commission. If any of these boards turned a project down, it would not go forward. The boys got the go-ahead from all four bodies.

Lars Lysand rebuilt a picket fence that surrounds the Cooley family plot. Boards from the fence had rotted, and others had been used as firewood, apparently by a homeless man who lived in the cemetery. Lysand reconstructed the fence, which was originally erected in 1859, with help from his father, a carpenter. Lysand "set the pace," said Ramon Aguilar of the parks and recreation department. "That was the most complex project that we had out there at the time."

Nariman Shariat took on the restoration of paths, which form boundaries around the ceme-

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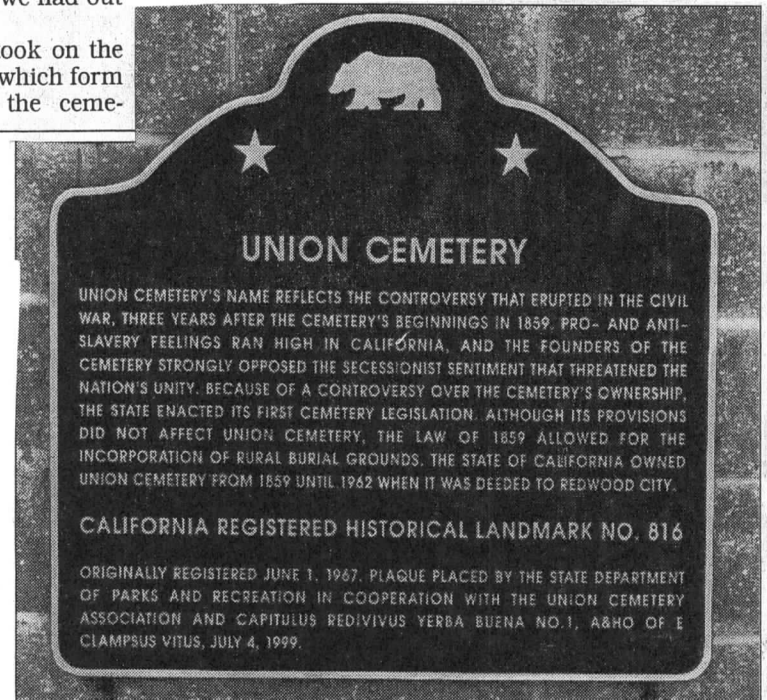
tery's 230 plots. Working with copies of original blueprints from the Redwood City Library, Shariat surveyed the plot lines, which were still faintly visible to the eye. He then marked them with string and stakes. Redwood City parks and recreation workers graded the pathways and brought in gravel. Then Shariat and other scouts, armed with shovels and wheelbarrows, filled in the paths, and packed them with a push roller.

Louis Stevenson restored grassy sod to the Mason's plot, a quarter-acre section in the southeast part of the cemetery. Stevenson cleared away rocks

and rubbish, yanked out weeds and shrubbery, turned over the soil, and laid in the sod. He also dug trenches for irrigation lines and installed a sprinkler system.

Richard Verducci built a mobile stage and podium to be used at annual Memorial Day celebrations. He also installed a sound system, digging trenches and burying electrical wire in plastic tubing.

Andrew Blum restored the cemetery's wooden grave markers. He researched a chemical process that would essentially petrify the wood. After cleaning the markers, inserting



“ These people had been forgotten. They made a major contribution to the history of the county.

John Edmonds

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# It almost became a baseball field

Eagle Scouts Nariman Shariat and Richard Verducci (left), both 18, are part of a group of scouts from Troop 991 in Redwood City that won a state historical preservation award for their work at the Union Cemetery in Redwood City. Historical landmark plaque (bottom left) at the Union Cemetery in Redwood City. Jean Cloud (below) is the President of the Historic Union Cemetery Association in Redwood City.

JOHN GREEN — Staff photos

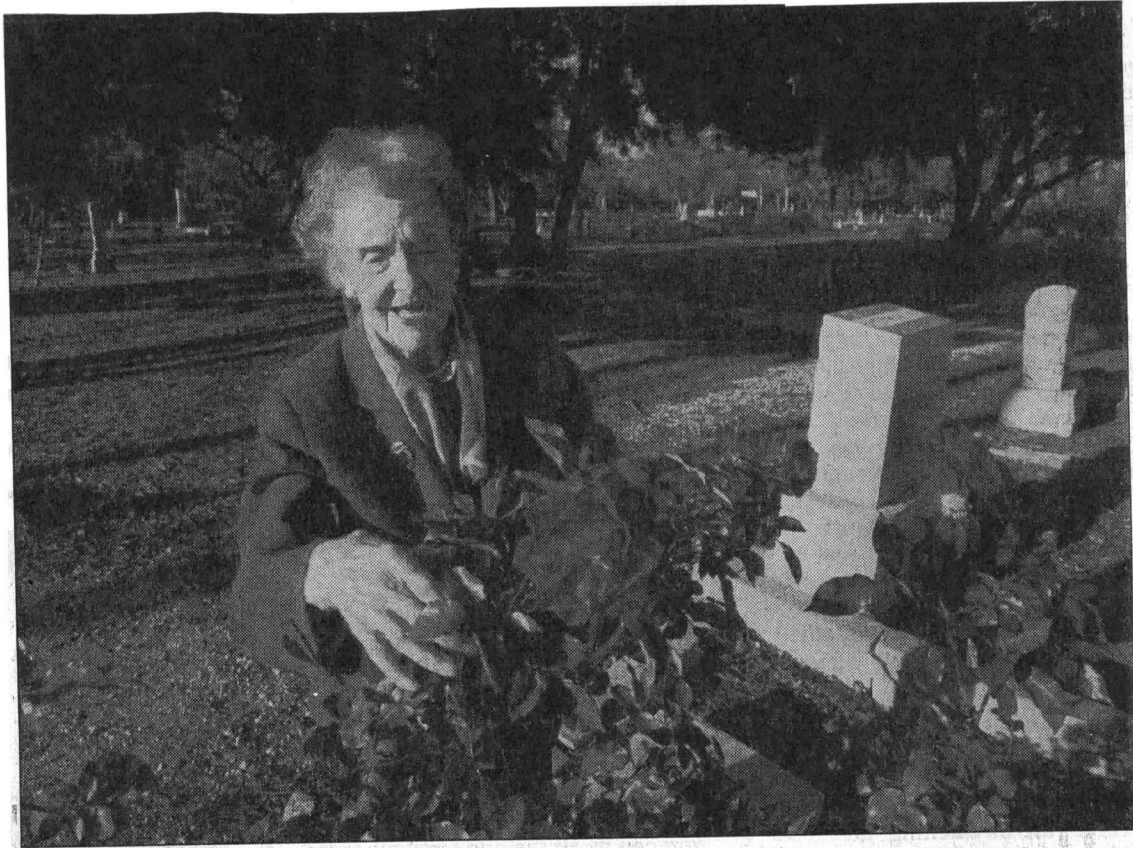


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*SM Times*

## Cemetery:

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rebar and hardening the wood with the petrifying process, Blum anchored them in the ground with cement.

#### A governor's award

All told, the scouts put in hundreds of hours. In December, Troop 911 received the Governor's Historic Preservation Award for their work. They are the first youth group to earn this prestigious recognition.

Care for the cemetery has come from other quarters, as well. Local history buff John Edmonds wrote a book that details the lives of over 90 of the cemetery's dead. Edmonds researched in the archives of the Redwood City Library and the San Mateo County Historical Association and conducted extensive interviews with the descendants of the deceased.

"These people had been forgotten," Edmonds said. "They made a major contribution to the history of the county." Edmonds is donating all proceeds from the book to the restoration of the cemetery.

Elio Fontana, owner of a Colma monument company, inspected the graveyard at the request of the parks and recreation department. Fontana's secretary plunged hip-deep into a grave while accompanying her boss. The mishap, though humorous, underscored the poor condition of the cemetery, Fontana said, and pushed him into action.

It "was in deplorable shape," Fontana said. "Every monument down there was tilted." Fontana sent a crew that cleaned, repaired, and set upright the majority of the graveyard's stone

monuments. Fontana estimated the value of the work at \$100,000 at least. He charged the city only \$7,000.

"We owe him a great debt of gratitude," Aguilar said.

In the mid-1990s, Jean Williamson, a member of the Poole family, which has a plot in the cemetery, willed \$25,000 to the Historic Union Cemetery Association. Williamson's donation became the seed money for the purchase of a new Union Soldier statue. Charles Fischer of the Monterey Sculpture Center cast the sculpture in bronze in 1999, using photos and pieces of the original pot-metal version as his model.

Now that the soldier has been returned to its pedestal, "he will never leave again," Edmonds said.

29 Mar 03

# Finally, recognition for long-dead deputy

By Amy Yarbrough

STAFF WRITER

REDWOOD CITY— In life, George Washington Tallman was a judge, gold miner and deputy sheriff.

In death, he was the victim of vandals, who swiped the headstone off his grave.

But next month, the County's first peace officer killed in the line of duty will get a new gravestone to mark his final resting place — and some long-due recognition.

On April 5, local Masons, sheriff's deputies and historians will gather at Redwood City's Union Cemetery to honor Tallman, who died in 1888.

The memorial ceremony will include a police motorcade, color guard and the un-

veiling of the new headstone.

"We wanted to make sure George didn't fall through the cracks," explained San Mateo County Sheriff's Deputy Phil Moser, who began collecting money for Tallman's headstone last summer.

"I thought it was significant that he was one of ours," Moser added, and "that the (sheriff's) office should get involved."

A native of New York, Tallman came to California in the mid-1800s to make his fortune mining gold, according to Sheriff's Deputy John Edmonds, who researched the late lawman's life for the upcoming ceremony.

Tallman then went to Nevada, where he became a justice of the peace, before

moving back to California, twice returning to live in the Redwood City area.

Tallman was eventually hired by the San Mateo County Sheriff, and died of injuries he sustained when four inmates broke out of the county jail, Edmonds said.

Tallman suffered a bleeding compound fracture to his right arm while scuffling with the inmates and died days later, presumably from an infection.

Edmonds said Tallman's tombstone was stolen sometime between 1970 and the early 1990s, when Union Cemetery fell into a state of disrepair and became a favorite target of vandals.

The new headstone is the latest step in the revitalization of the cemetery, an effort that

began with the formation of the non-profit Historic Union Cemetery Association in 1993.

Moser said more than 300 sheriff's deputies chipped in \$2 each to pay for the fallen deputy's tombstone.

The tombstone itself was created by sheriff's deputy Henry Sutter, who in addition to his job in law enforcement works with the Kholmman and Sutter Monument Company in Colma.

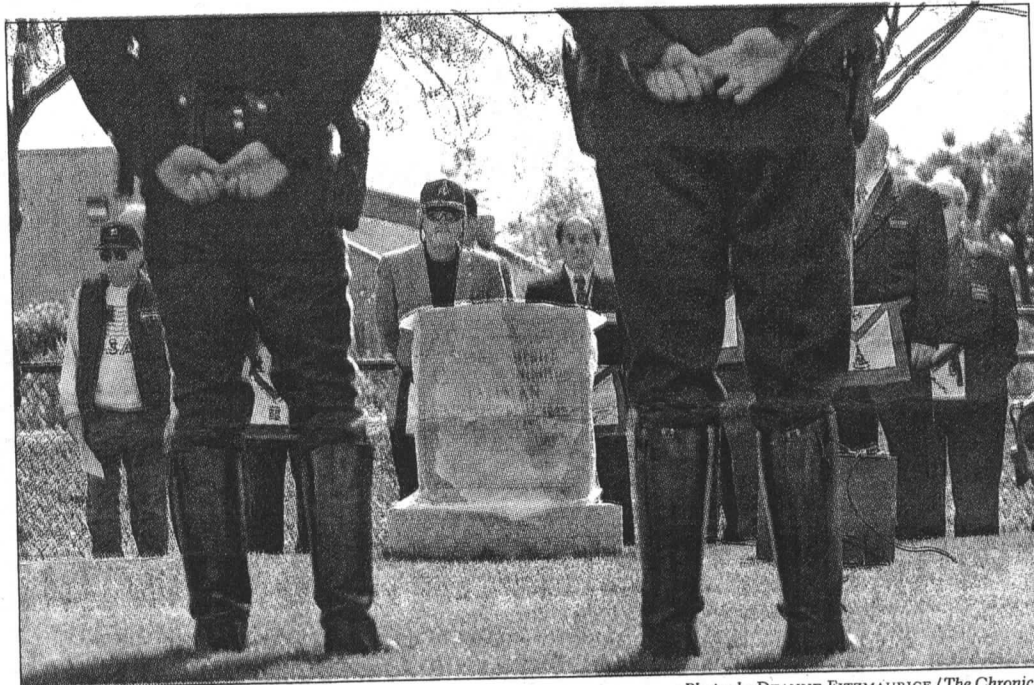
The memorial ceremony for Deputy George Washington Tallman takes place at 10 a.m. April 5 at Union Cemetery, located at Woodside Road and El Camino Real. A police procession precedes the ceremony and begins in downtown Redwood City.

Officers, officials  
pay tribute to  
deputy who died  
doing job in 1888



**"Dynamite Deke" Sonnichsen** (foreground) took part in the ceremony to honor a deputy slain in 1888.

# In the line of duty



Photos by DEANNE FITZMAURICE / The Chronicle

A new headstone for Deputy George Washington Tallman is unveiled in Union Cemetery.

By Patrick Hoge  
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The local citizenry so liked San Mateo County Sheriff's Deputy George Washington Tallman that they had a parade in 1888 after he became the first local lawman killed in the line of duty from injuries suffered during a jail break.

This weekend, Tallman got another showy sendoff by a group of history buffs and law enforcement officers who gathered in Redwood City's historic Union Cemetery to dedicate his new gravestone — a replacement for the original, which was stolen about two decades ago.

The new granite headstone was unveiled Saturday after a motorcycle procession from the nearby courthouse and a bagpipe-led police honor guard that carried the flags of the Unit-

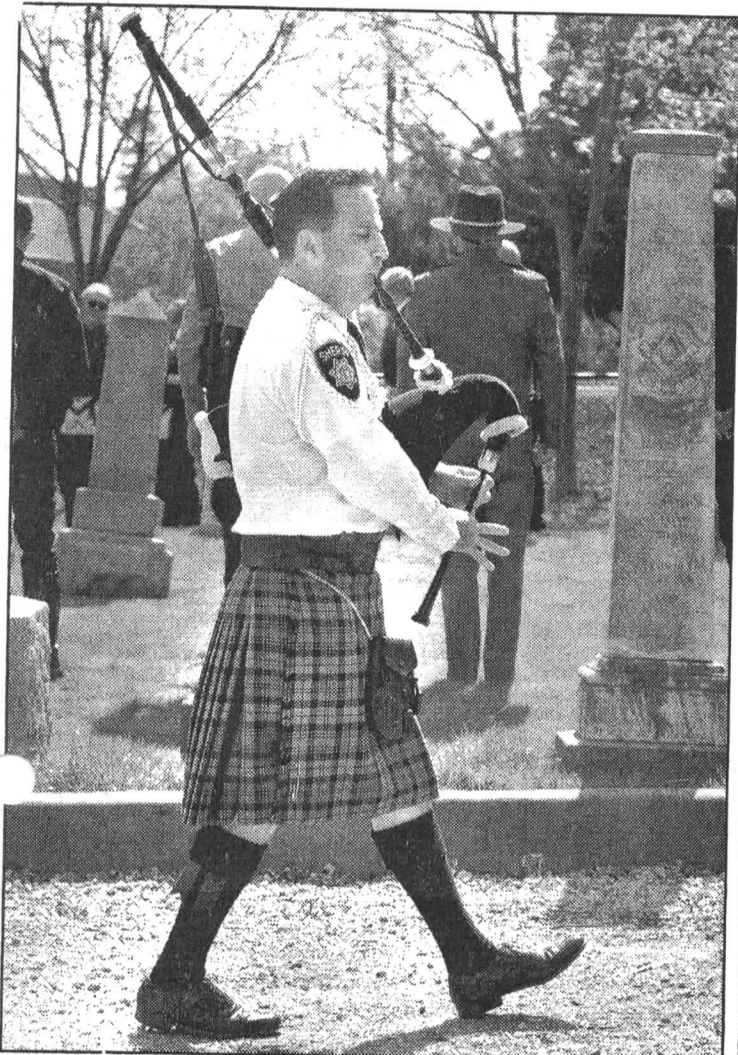


Members of E. Clampus Vitus march to the unveiling site in Redwood City's Union Cemetery to honor the first law enforcement officer slain in San Mateo County.

"We wanted to try to do it right. Even though none of us knew him, he still was one of our own — San Mateo

County Deputy Philip Moser, who was dressed as a cowboy with a six-shooter on his hip for

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DEANNE FITZMAURICE / The Chronicle

San Mateo County Sheriff's Deputy Joe Sheridan plays the bagpipes at the beginning of a ceremony in Redwood City.

# Ceremony honors deputy killed in 1888

## ► DEPUTY

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the event.

Tallman, a native of New York, came to California seeking gold. He was reportedly 73 when his arm was broken in multiple spots by four men who struck him with an iron door as they escaped from the county jail (where a grocery store now stands). All four escapees, who had been jailed on only minor charges, were later captured. It was not clear what their eventual fate was.

Tallman was taken to the nearby Tremont Hotel where his condition seemed to be improving for several days — but then he took a sudden turn for the worse and died.

"On the morning he died, he told everybody he was doing great, but things changed," said Deputy John Edmonds, who wore a cowboy hat to officiate over Saturday's event.

Also in attendance were Sheriff Don Horsley, members of the history preservation group E. Clampus Vitus, many wearing 19th-century costumes, and numerous representatives of four local Masonic lodges bedecked in their order's regalia.

Apparently never married, Tallman was a dedicated Mason and is buried in the Mason's plot of the Union Cemetery, a tree-shaded oasis next to now busy Woodside Road just west of El Camino Real. Long neglected, the cemetery has been much rehabilitated in recent years by volunteers.

"He (Tallman) lived a very active and exciting life," said Roy Fronberg, a past master of Peninsula Masonic Lodge 168, who cited Masonic records showing that Tallman was buried with Masonic honors following a procession of horses and carriages carrying public officials and police.

"On the morning he died, he told everybody he was doing great, but things changed."

DEPUTY JOHN EDMONDS

Fronberg recounted how Tallman came to California via Panama, seeking his fortune first in the gold fields of Nevada County and later Virginia City, Nevada, where he operated a toll road and pursued mining.

Returning to Nevada County, Tallman served as a justice of the peace before running through much of his earnings and heading for Redwood City, where he again became a deputy, Fronberg said.

To honor Tallman, Moser said he collected \$2 from more than 400 of San Mateo County Sheriff's employees to pay for the new granite gravestone.

"I couldn't believe it had not been replaced," said Mary Ganley, president of the local Deputy Sheriffs Association. Ganley, a scarf of stars and stripes around her neck, was one of several to draw parallels between Tallman's slaying and the sacrifices of U.S. troops now fighting abroad in Iraq and elsewhere.

"Help us never forget, ever, the lives that have been given so that we may live free and in this country," said the Rev. Dennis Tarr of San Carlos' Trinity Presbyterian Church in a prayer.

The ceremony was closed by a trumpeter playing "Taps."

E-mail Patrick Hoge at [phoge@sfchronicle.com](mailto:phoge@sfchronicle.com).

2082

**NEWS**

# Cemetery famous, full

**BY BETH WINEGARNER**  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

A few years ago, when local historian John Edmonds was digging in Redwood City's historic Union Cemetery to plant a rose bush, he got about 2 1/2 feet down before he uncovered the edge of a coffin.

According to the registry, about 2,200 of Redwood City's earliest denizens are buried in the 5-acre graveyard on Woodside Road.

"Some of the graves here are not 3 feet deep," Edmonds said, leading a tour of the cemetery yesterday. "The book says that some plots are 'stacked.' They're not kidding."

Nearly 40 people turned out for the walk and history lesson.

Union Cemetery was founded in 1859 — on the grounds of a former Native American burial mound, according to Edmonds, who is part of the 14-member Historic Union Cemetery Committee. Early graves were moved there from another cemetery located where Sequoia High School is now.

The last burial in Union Cemetery took place in 1963, just as supporters were looking for a way to make the site a historic landmark.

The graveyard fell into disuse in the 1920s,

and in the 1960s Redwood City officials discussed removing the headstones and putting in a baseball diamond and some picnic benches. Jean Cloud, president of the cemetery committee, fought for its preservation — and won.

Many of Redwood City's early movers and shakers are buried there, including Simon Mezes, who helped design the layout of Redwood City, and Simon Knight, who established the stagecoach road from Redwood City to San Gregorio.

James Peace rests in a large plot dedicated to the Grand Army of the Republic, soldiers who fought in the Civil War. Peace didn't enlist, but was the first to raise the American Flag in the town, Edmonds said.

Volunteers, including Boy and Girl Scouts, have helped restore the cemetery, which is frequently targeted by vandals. Colma-based V. Fontana & Co., a monument company, has also donated to the restoration effort.

Union Cemetery is not only home to historic people, but historic roses — which Edmonds has planted and tended over the years. Some of them are otherwise extinct.

"When they bloom in April, and the wind blows just right, you can smell them all the way to Woodside Road," he said. "You all need to come back in the spring."



# In remembrance

## ■ Homage paid to veterans at event in Redwood City's historic cemetery

BY BONNIE ESSLINGER  
Daily News Staff Writer

John Ammenti and his wife Cathy brought their children, 9-year-old Nathan and 7-year-old Lily, to Redwood City's Historic Union Cemetery for the annual Memorial Day commemoration.

John, of Redwood City, said he's concerned that the historical lessons of war and sacrifice are not being passed on to younger generations.

"This gives us a chance to talk about it," he said Monday morning at the gathering of several hundred people, including veterans and city officials.

Standing next to a statue of a Civil War soldier, Redwood City Mayor Alicia Aguirre said the event is an opportunity to "re-member those who have gone; also, those who are coming back."

Retired Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Fenwicke Holmes, the morning's keynote speaker, said it's important that wars and those who fell fighting them — the "blood of billions" — not be forgotten.

He also underscored that soldiers on both sides of the Civil War conflict were fighting for their country.

"Despite regional factions and disagreements, we are, under God, the United States of America,"

Holmes said. "That's the legacy we received from the men buried here."

Holmes then turned to the Union soldier statue and slowly raised his hand to his forehead.

"I acknowledge their gifts with a solemn salute," he said.

The one-hour event was a community affair that began with Belmont Boy Scout Troop 301 bringing in the American flag and the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Members of the troop helped maintain the landmark cemetery; they recently installed a water system under the rose bushes and repainted the fences.

The Carlmonteers, a San Carlos choral group associated with the national Sons in Retirement, sang Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land," as the audience chimed in.

The Slippery Gulch Band, part of the local chapter of the E Clampus Vitus fraternal organization, played several patriotic songs, including taps.

Children also participated, invited by members of the Native Daughters of the Golden West to help place flowers on the nearby graves of Civil War soldiers.

The observance concluded with a "firing of the anvil," a gunpowder blast that provoked shrieks of

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Bonnie Esslinger / Daily News  
Redwood City Mayor Alicia Aguirre speaks at the Memorial Day commemoration on Monday at the Historic Union Cemetery in Redwood City.

## REDWOOD CITY

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delight and alarm from the crowd.

World War II veteran Lloyd Lease, 89, who served in both the Navy and Marine Corps, said he didn't expect others to recognize the sacrifice soldiers have made.

"It's hard for people to understand it," he said.

After the ceremony people wandered

throughout the 153-year-old cemetery, pausing to read the grave markers.

Patricia Connor and her husband Linn Johnson, longtime Redwood City residents, said they always look forward to the annual event.

"It helps remind people what the three-day weekend is about," Connor said.

Email Bonnie Esslinger at [beslinger@dailynewsgroup.com](mailto:beslinger@dailynewsgroup.com).

# IN MEMORY

**BALLINGER, Susan**  
**BURNETT, Beatrice**  
**DEVERS, Jeffery**  
**FONG, Bessie**  
**FONTANA, Elio**  
**JULIAN, Jessie**  
**LOSCH, Catherine**  
**MYERS, Mary Anne**  
**ROLAND, Thomas**  
**SCHROEDER, Donald**

**Mary Anne Myers**

75, of Cleveland, Virginia, passed away on her birthday, on Wednesday, March 27, 2013. The daughter of the late Mattie Skeen Stuart and Herman Myers, she was also preceded in death by her sister, Patsy Ashbrook Wingfield.

Mary Anne cared deeply for others, working for many years as a Psychiatric Practical Nurse and volunteering for various organizations throughout her life. She wrote a monthly newsletter and through her passion for her own family heritage and genealogy, helped many others research their past. Being able to live in her family's ancestral home of Russell County, VA, where the Skeen family immigrated from Scotland was so important to Mary Anne, being surrounded by her "Mighty Clinch Mountains," as she often called them. Mary Anne treasured animals, and instilled in her family a profound love and care for all creatures.

Surviving are children, Jeffrey Michael Watkins of Martinsville, VA, Jaye Watkins Schisel and husband John A. of San Francisco, CA and Kelly Watkins Massoud of Richmond, VA; grandchild, Nadia H. Massoud of San Francisco; one niece; two nephews, and beloved companion, Trippy.

Funeral services were held at 8:00 p.m. on Friday, March 29, at Owens Funeral Service Chapel in Lebanon, Virginia. Interment followed on Saturday at Russell Memorial Cemetery in Lebanon.

Memorial contributions may be made to the animal charity ACHASi ([www.achasi.org](http://www.achasi.org)), founded by daughter Jaye, or to your favorite animal organization.

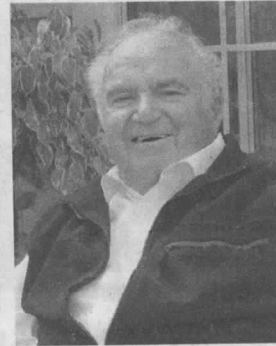
Condolences may be made to the Myers family at [www.owensfuneralservice.com](http://www.owensfuneralservice.com).

**Catherine Marie (Signer) Losch**

Cathy passed Dec 4th, 2012 on Bainbridge Is, WA. She attended St. Cecilia element...

## Elio A. Fontana

January 20, 1919–March 31, 2013



that 35-year period, he served as a member of the Jefferson Union High School District Board, San Mateo County Community College District Board, San Mateo County Arts Commission, San Mateo County Board of Education,

Our dad passed away peacefully, age 94, at his home in Millbrae March 31, 2013. Born in Vancouver, British Columbia January 20, 1919 to Valerio and Annunziatina Fontana, he was preceded in death by his beloved sister Gloria. He leaves behind his loving and caring wife, Louise Chessman Fontana; his children Mark and Valerie; grandchildren Theresa, Stephanie, Victoria, and David; son-in-law Dale; and brother-in-law Michael; he was uncle to Michael, Carol, Richard, and David; and is also survived by numerous cousins both in the United States and Italy.

Our dad also leaves behind his loving, extended family Janis and Brad Levesque; Greg Lagomarsino; Doug Lagomarsino; Jeanne and Doug Monsour. Loving grandfather to Kristina and Beau Levesque, Tony and Lauren Lagomarsino, Collin and Laura Monsour; brother-in-law Lee Chessman; preceded in death by sister-in-law Laura Chessman Olcese. He has also left behind many nieces and nephews who loved being part of his life.

Our dad was a veteran of World War II, serving in the U.S. 9th Army as they fought their way through Northern France, Belgium, Holland, Northern Germany reaching Frankfurt Am Main at the conclusion of hostilities. He was then assigned to Army Intelligence, G-2 and remained as part of the occupation of the Allied sector of Berlin until October 15, 1945.

Returning home, he took over the family business, V. Fontana & Co., which he presided over as a nationally acclaimed memorialist, designer and fabricator for the next 35 years. Within

San Mateo County Grand Jury, Daly City/Colma Chamber of Commerce, Daly City Rotary Club, and the Olympic Club Board of Directors. An accomplished accordionist, he was a long standing member of the Musicians Union Local 36.

Dad also found the time to be an active member of the Leonardo Da Vinci Society, Pacific Club, il Cenacolo Club and his beloved Olympic Club.

Outliving most of his older friends but still leaving behind a group of friends whose company he immensely enjoyed, they were a very important part of his life. And a special mention to Pietro Masnada his loyal employee at V. Fontana & Co. for over 50 years.

Our dad had a very strong presence and made his influence felt to all around him. He was a man of many accomplishments, proud of his business, V. Fontana & Co. but most of all he was proud of his entire family.

As a Master Mason of the San Francisco Bodies of the Scottish Rite for over 70 years and a member of the ASIYA Shriners, in lieu of flowers he would have appreciated donations made to the Shriners Hospital for Children or the Scottish Rite Language Disorder Clinic.

A funeral service will be held at 10:30 a.m. Thursday, April 4, 2013 in the Tiffany Chapel of Cypress Lawn Funeral Home, 1370 El Camino Real, Colma, followed by a reception at Cypress Lawn. The family will accompany Elio to the Fontana family vault at Italian Cemetery for a private interment.

