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## SAVE OUR CHINATOWN COMMITTEE

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**Preserve the past for the future**

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### 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Ching Ming Ceremony Honors Riverside's Chinese Pioneers

Olivewood Cemetery to be the site of ceremonies on March 31

The return of Ching Ming observances in Riverside is now firmly established with a fourth annual public ceremony at the cemetery where many of Riverside's Chinese Pioneers are buried. The event will take place on Saturday, March 31, at 4:30 pm at Olivewood Cemetery, 3300 Central Avenue, Riverside. Participants will gather in an older area of the cemetery with many Chinese graves on the south side of Central Avenue, near the railroad tracks at the west end (reached by turning right at the cemetery entrance).

Many of Riverside's ethnic or religious communities have a time of the year when they remember and honor those members of the community who have died, sometimes in a church or temple, and sometimes at the cemetery. For the Chinese there is Ching Ming, the "Grave Sweeping Day," or "Day of Purity and Brightness," when families go to the gravesites, clean them and have a small offering and prayer ceremony.

At the time when the Riverside Chinese community was comprised almost entirely of men – from the 1880s until the 1940s – it became the responsibility of the community to take care of the Ching Ming ceremonies because the families, who normally performed the rituals, were back home in China due to the various Exclusion Acts and other discriminatory laws. Most of the male residents of Riverside Chinatown never married for the same reasons. There was a period of around 60 years when no Ching Ming ceremony was held in Riverside, because there were few or no descendants of the original Riverside Chinatown residents to perform the ceremonies.

This event is open to the public, and people who wish to come are encouraged to participate at whatever level they feel most comfortable. Activities will include a literal cleaning of the gravestones with scrub brushes and water, in addition to making offerings of tiny cups of wine and flowers, prayers accompanied with the burning of incense, the offering of "celestial money," and a small meal of remembrance, eaten at the cemetery. Participants are welcome to bring whatever supplies they would like to contribute, or may come just to observe.

A private ceremony for George Wong, the last resident of Riverside's Chinatown, will be held earlier in the day at Evergreen Cemetery where he is buried.

For more information about Ching Ming, and details about the activities on March 31st you can go to the Save Our Chinatown website at: <http://saveourchinatown.org>