

# Cemetery watchers thwart teens' Halloween haunting

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Fair warning to teenage witches and zombies planning ghastly deeds at St. James at Sag Bridge Church cemetery this Halloween: Beware of figures in the shadows.

They'll be lurking somewhere behind the iron gates of the 160-year-old cemetery, poised to make your nightmares come true if you dare disturb graves at this sacred spot.

We're not talking about the phantom monks of local lore said to float to and fro in the woods chanting Latin liturgies. Nor the feared torch-carrying "mad monk," said to scare revelers away with a bellowing yell.

We're talking security, kids.

Guards posted at the cemetery just north of southwest suburban Lemont will alert local police about intruders Friday night.

For decades, St. James has attracted grave-desecrating teens on All Hallows Eve. Already this fall, vandals have smashed an elaborate marble headstone on the grave of a 4-year-old girl who died in 1902.

"They have to watch the cemetery very carefully on Halloween," said Regina Bozec Murphy, a descendant of the farmer who donated the land for the cemetery. "The last pastor had a housekeeper who saw a group of kids marching around with knives in a circle right outside there."

Security has been posted the past few Halloweens to nab teens who leap the fence after dark.

"They come in here with their faces painted purple and black like witch's brew," said the Rev. Edwin V. Bohula, pastor of St. James, founded in 1833.

The oak-and-maple-shrouded cemetery, the oldest in the area that still accepts burials, has the

spooked-out chill of a haunted New England graveyard and a colorful history of ghost stories.

The story begins with the Murphy family, whose son, Thomas, was born one Halloween in the late 1800s. James Murphy, a Palos area farmer, donated the hilly plot that would become home to the church and cemetery sometime in the early 1830s—on the condition that his cows could still graze behind the church. Some of the first to be buried there were workers who died digging the Illinois and Michigan Canal in the 1830s and 1840s.

James Murphy's son Thomas was one of the southwest area's original All Hallows Eve rabble-rousers.

He later told his children about throwing cabbages on neighbors' roofs and tipping over outhouses—preferably with someone inside, said Bozec, who lives across the road from St. James in the family's original farmhouse.

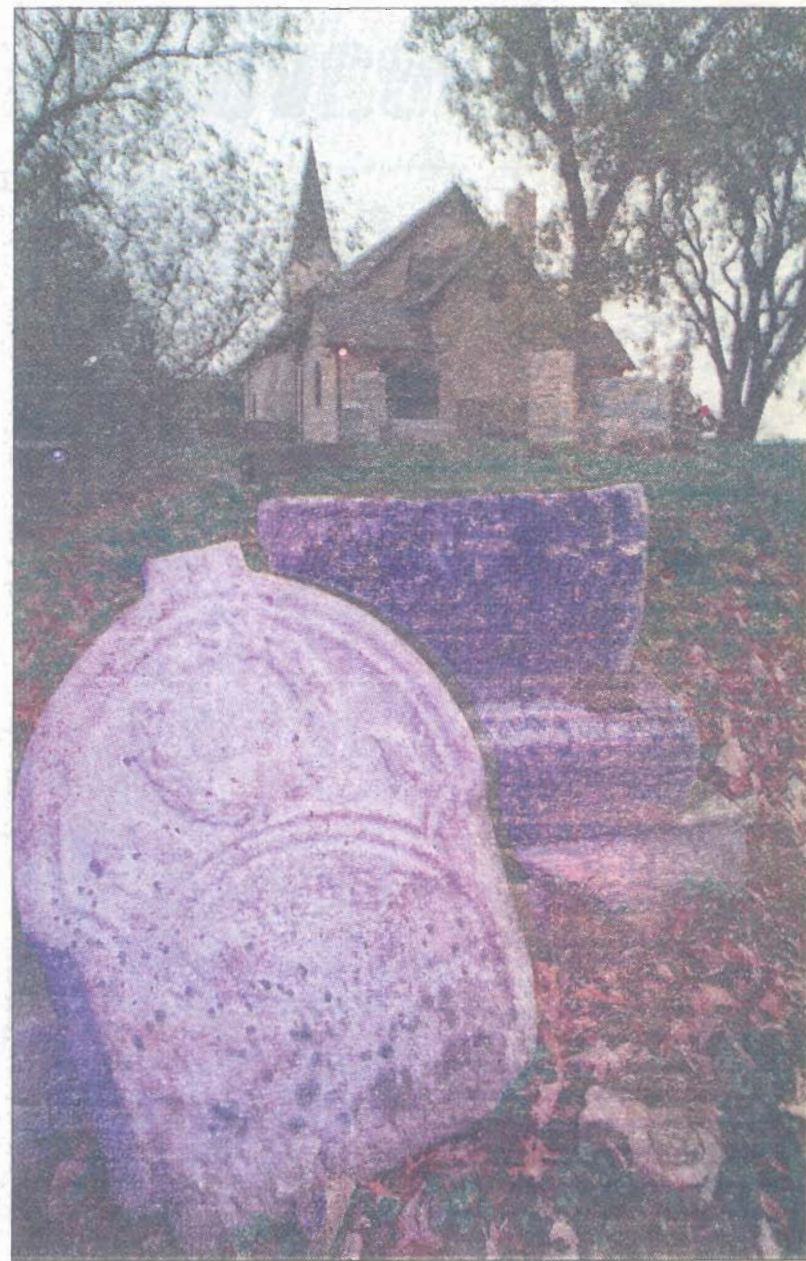
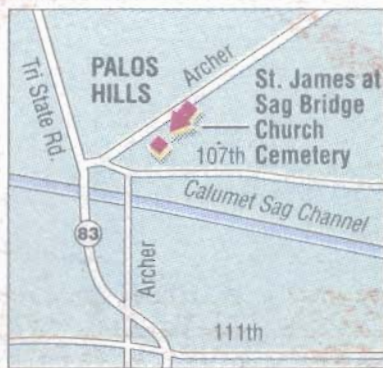
Neither Bozec nor Bohula is certain when the first sightings of the phantom monks occurred. The most famous account is attributed to a county police officer who supposedly saw hooded monk-like ghosts floating toward the rectory in 1970.

Stories of another monk ghost who chased children from the cemetery with bellowing shouts and a blazing light also have been passed down.

Bozec and St. James' parishioners know the truth behind that myth. The "mad monk" probably was the Rev. George Ashenbrenner, the retired pastor. Ashenbrenner was known to have chased would-be vandals from the grounds using a flashlight and a bullhorn, they say.

This Halloween, security guards will be the only apparitions at the cemetery, Bohula said.

## TALES HAUNT CEMETERY



ROBERT A. DAVIS/SUN-TIMES

A team of security guards will be on the lookout for would-be Halloween vandals Friday at St. James at Sag Bridge Church cemetery, where a marble headstone was destroyed this fall.