

Shelby's departed still

Historical walk debuts at Sunset Cemetery

By **JOE DePRIEST**
Staff Writer

SHELBY — In October 1887, the family of Anonymous W. Quinn buried him in maple-lined Sunset Cemetery.

Folks around town called him "Non." And except for a noteworthy military record — he'd survived a string of the Civil War's biggest battles — his life passed uneventfully.

Yet organizers of this Sunday's Walk Through History at Sunset included Quinn's tombstone in the tour of the 153-year-old city cemetery. They wanted a blend of ordinary citizens along with more famous figures like N.C. Gov. O. Max Gardner and "Mind of the South" author W.J. Cash. Six actors and actresses in period costume will portray people who might have known them.

"We're not saying any of these were the most respected people in Shelby," says Ginny Hughes, director of the sponsoring Historic Shelby Foundation. "Sunset has all sorts of interesting stories. This is just a random sampling. We want to whet people's appetites for history."

Hughes got the idea at a workshop in New Bern where the local historical society sponsors a "ghost walk" night tour of old houses and cemeteries. Guides there set the mood by dressing in

period costumes and blending ghost stories with local history.

The popular late-October tour started four years ago and attracted more than 2,300 people in 1993.

"It's the most enjoyable way I've ever seen to see history come alive," says New Bern society director Joanne Gwaltney. "It's become our biggest fund-raiser."

Still, the Sunset Cemetery tour isn't linked to Halloween.

The Shelby foundation planned the program for October so visitors could enjoy fall scenery in the rolling cemetery overlooking the South Mountains.

"The maple leaves there are usually so gorgeous now," Hughes says. "The fall colors can really, really set the stage for this."

A foundation committee selected cemetery characters for the tour. It was a hard job, Hughes says, because "there's quite a lot of unique history in that one place. They barely touched the tip of the iceberg."

Background on each character came from family members or from local researchers. Then all the information was handed over to the players, who created their own scripts and costumes.

Shelby actress Mary Lopez came up with an imaginary woman who remi-

niscas about the town's two most famous writers — Thomas Dixon Jr. and W.J. Cash.

They're buried close together though their work was worlds apart.

Dixon was a flamboyant figure of the early 20th century who wrote popular novels of the Old South, many of which had racist themes. His most famous — "The Clansman" and "The Leopard's Spots" — were the basis for director D.W. Griffith's 1915 silent classic "The Birth of a Nation." When Dixon died broke in 1946, Shelby friends paid for his large marker in Sunset Cemetery.

The shy and retiring Cash was considered a deadbeat, constantly working on a book most thought he'd never finish. But his classic study "Mind of the South" came out in 1941. Cash hanged himself in a Mexico City hotel that same year and was buried beneath a modest tombstone beside his parents.

If you're going

A Walk Through History at Sunset Cemetery is Sunday from 2 to 5:30 p.m. The tours take slightly more than an hour and cost \$7 per person, with proceeds going to the Historic Shelby Foundation.

have stories to tell

GARDNER, GOV.
O. MAX

CASH, W. J.

DIXON, THOMAS J.

Step back in time: Actress Mary Lopez walks among the graves at Shelby's historic Sunset Cemetery dressed as a townswoman of 1946. Lopez will participate in the historical walking tour of the cemetery on Sunday.

