

Atrocities at Barnett Cemetery carry

Cemetery trustee hoping community will help with repairs; sheriff department says they have strong lead on culprits

BY PAT MUNSEY
Perspective Managing Editor

The oldest grave in Barnett Cemetery has been in place 100 years. The inscription on the stone marking the site is nearly worn away by time, and now it sits in pieces on the well-kept lawn.

This small monument to the life of a man -- along with 63 others in the northwestern Howard County graveyard -- were horribly desecrated on July 4. Some were simply overturned. Others cracked as they tumbled to the ground. And, one -- a simple, alabaster plaque -- was snapped off at ground level and hurled at another tombstone until it shattered into stone slivers and dust. The cemetery's utility shed did not escape the vandals' notice, either. Graffiti was sprayed upon it in crude designs.

This thoughtless act of disrespect will cost thousands of dollars to reverse, but the little cemetery at 700W, County Road OONS can ill afford the repair bill.

"They knocked over 64 of 'em in total, and some of the older ones were ruined. We've got them set back in place -- the ones that weren't destroyed," said Wayne White, a trustee of the cemetery. "They had to be lifted

and sealed, and that cost a lot of money -- a lot more than we have."

White says the total bill for resetting the stones will amount to \$2,500-\$3,500. Paying that bill will seriously strap the cemetery, but White doesn't see another option on the horizon. And, the cost of resetting the stones does not include replacing those that were completely destroyed.

"The little ones for the old Civil War guys out there -- you can't fix those," said White. "I don't know what we'll do for them. I don't know if we can build something to help preserve their stones. I don't have that information yet."

"We've had a few stones knocked over in the past -- several years ago -- but never anything like this. Now, we gotta hope that people in the community will want to help us with the cost of putting the stones back in place."

He is not aware of any insurance that could be purchased to cover acts of vandalism, and he has spoken to other cemetery trustees who echo his concern.

Ervin Township Trustee Arthur Hartman and his wife traveled to the cemetery to survey the damage a couple days after the incident. Hartman explained that,



Above and right, gravestones at Barnett Cemetery were toppled. Some of the stones were a century old. (Perspective photos by Pat Munsey)

even though the township administers the maintenance of five cemeteries within its borders, Barnett Cemetery is not one of them.

"I've never seen anything like it," said Hartman. "It would take three strong men to push some of these stones over. Some of them weigh more than 1,200 pounds. We have a stone or two knocked over once in awhile, but nothing like this."

"It will be an enormous bill to put the stones back up, but who's going to pay it? The township won't because we don't maintain it, but even if we did, we don't have enough money to repair something like this."

White says he has been in contact with the families of those who had their tombstones vandalized, and they appear willing to help with the cost of the repairs.

When vandalism of this

sort occurs, the suspects are rarely found. But, Jail Commander Harold Vincent, who lives less than a mile from the cemetery, says department investigators may have caught a break in the case.

"We're getting close to finding who did it," said Vincent. "We got some information on a suspect -- we have his name. Apparently, it was a group of Northwestern High School students. We have good sources that tell us that one of the boys was bragging about committing the vandalism while at a party."

White says he has mixed emotions about what should be done with the vandals if

they are caught. Certainly, paying for the damage done is one penalty he feels should be imposed.

Regardless of whether law enforcement brings the responsible parties to justice, the cost of restoring Barnett Cemetery

remains. For those willing to contribute to the repair of Barnett Cemetery, an account has been set up for donations. Interested citizens should send their checks to: Central Bank, Box



Vandals wreck cemetery

■ Police looking for white Grand Prix seen in the area.

By MIKE FLETCHER

Tribune staff writer

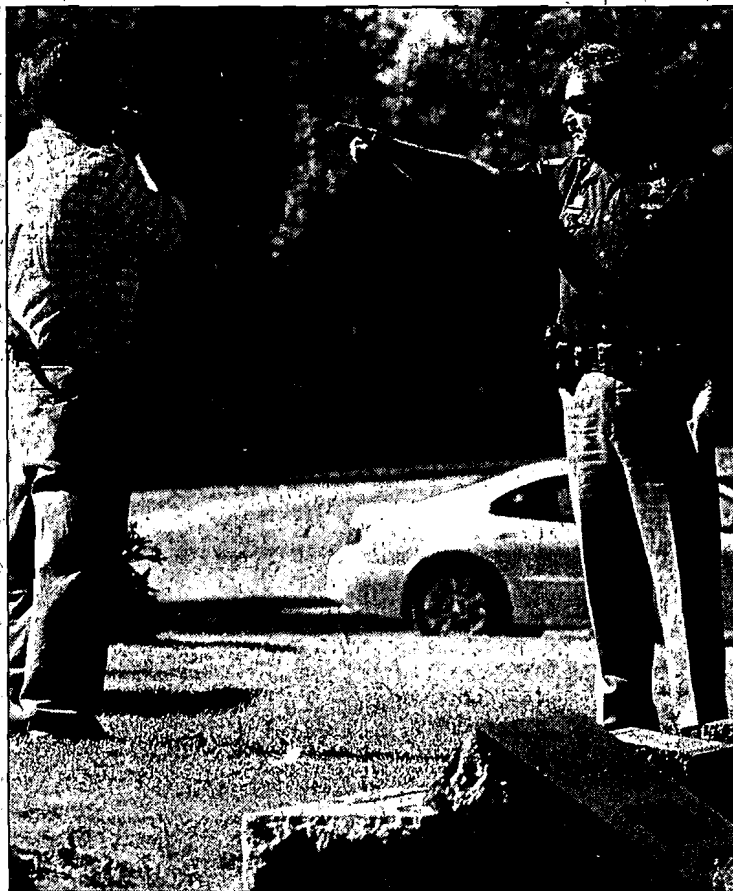
Jim White is fed up with vandals knocking over gravestones and spray painting graffiti in his western Howard County cemetery, located in Ervin Township. So he's hoping someone can help catch these inconsiderate few.

"It just makes you sick," White said Thursday about the vandalism at Barnett Cemetery at the corner of 700 West and old Sycamore Road. White and his father, Wayne White, are trustees who take care of the cemetery.

"They're going in and tipping over headstones," White said. "They've hit close to 50 of them already, and some are busted. They busted flower pots and stole the flowers and painted all over the shed," he said of the cemetery.

Howard County Sheriff Dept. Capt. Harold Vincent said shortly after the damage occurred, a white Pontiac Grand Prix, late-1980s or early-1990s model, was seen in the area. The car was driven by a white female with blonde hair and contained another white female and two white males, according to Vincent.

The captain said a total of 64 headstones were vandalized, rang-



KT photo by Erik Markov

DAMAGE: Howard County Sheriff Dept. Capt. Harold Vincent points to some overturned headstones as he talks with cemetery trustee Jim White Thursday at Barnett Cemetery on Old Sycamore Road.

ing in weight from 20 pounds to a half ton.

Howard County Sheriff Dave McKinney said he is investigating the thoughtless acts.

"Mischievous to a cemetery is a class D felony," McKinney said, "and I personally am offended that somebody would do that to a graveyard."

Vincent added that there was enough damage to the cemetery (over \$2,500) to make the crime a felony.

McKinney said deputies will be patrolling around the Barnett Cemetery and other cemeteries to watch for vandals.

"Anybody that may drive by and see suspicious activity should call us," the sheriff said. "And if they witness a crime in progress they can call 911."

Vincent said the sheriff department has asked the township trustee to clear out a ditch next to the cemetery, making it easier for police to see while on patrols.

People wishing to report information about this or other crimes in the county should call the sheriff department at 457-1105.

Mike Fletcher, Tribune reporter, may be reached at 454-8599 or via e-mail at mike.fletcher@kokomotribune.com

Cemetery vandals sought

The Howard County Sheriff Department said they have several teen suspects in the vandalism at a western county cemetery, but no arrests have been made.

"We feel we have the suspects," Sheriff David McKinney said of the investigation. "This is something we take very seriously. I'm very concerned. I drove out there and personally looked at the overturned gravestones and the spray paint. This is very disrespectful. I hope the detectives will track the people down who are responsible."

McKinney also wants to thank those who called in to report the vandalism.

Jim White, who takes care of the cemetery said vandals knocked over gravestones and spray painted graffiti in Barnett Cemetery at the corner of 700 West and old Sycamore Road last week.

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