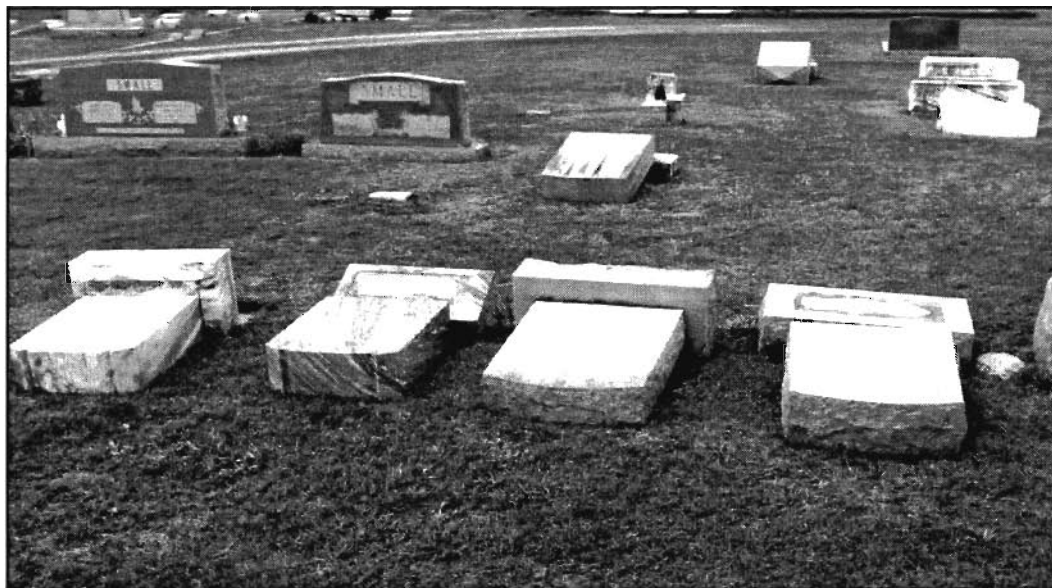


CONSERVATION TALK

Michael Trinkley



Vandalism like this occurs frequently at cemeteries across the country.
What can caregivers do to reduce the damage?

This month let's talk about cemetery vandalism—a problem that most of us have faced, but about which little is written. It's an important conservation issue since repairing damage can be costly and often difficult.

The official definition given by the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting is "willful or malicious destruction, injury, disfigurement, or defacement of any public or private property, real or personal, without the consent of the owner or persons having custody or control." In a cemetery context it is usually toppling or breaking of monuments, although it may also include graffiti.

I don't include theft of either metals (for their monetary value) or statuary (for their folk art value) as vandalism. It is also useful to exclude damage with a political or racial motivation (swastikas spray painted in a Jewish cemetery, for example) since they are likely hate crimes. And finally, I exclude the removal of or damage to human remains since these acts exhibit a disturbing psychological motivation. For the record, I believe that little cemetery crime can be attributed to so-called cults.

If you were to Google "cemetery vandalism" you'd find at least 343,000 hits. That's a lot, but not when compared to library vandalism (1,380,000 hits) or school vandalism (2,670,000 hits). As distressing as cemetery vandalism is, it is relatively uncommon. A 1984 study found that cemetery vandalism, engaged in by only about 4% of the respondents, was the least reported vandalistic activity.

After examining several hundred news articles over the past three years, I found a pattern. Cemetery vandals range from 12 to 28 years old, with numbers peaking between about 15 and 20 years of age. Predominantly males, they are usually composed of groups of two to eight. Rarely is cemetery vandalism conducted by a single individual. The 1984 study found most vandalism was committed by groups of 4 or more individuals—a probable indicator of peer pressure. Most incidents occurred on weekends and after dark. Alcohol and marijuana figure prominently in the accounts.

Damage ranged from a "few" up to 700 stones in a single incident. Values assigned are usually not very useful since I found no report where estimates by a conservator. One sexton failed to understand historical values, reporting that the "markers had depreciated over the years."

Catching the perpetrators is easier if the vandalism was identified within 24 to 48 hours, the police were notified, and they responded with investigators (rather than simply taking a report) and a reward (\$500 to \$5,000, with most about \$1,000) was immediately offered. Most arrests were based on tips provided either through school resource officers, neighborhood canvassing or through tip-lines (like Crime Stoppers).

So what can cemeteries do to prevent vandalism or minimize their losses? Preservationists usually talk about

physical measures to reduce vandalism—such as installing fences or erecting lights. One benefit of these types of projects is that they only require a one-time only outlay of funds. Still, such approaches aren't always helpful as they may inadvertently turn our cemeteries into fortresses, dissuading legitimate users from visiting the burial grounds we seek to protect.

Other approaches that look at offender behavior, administrative policies or community involvement appear more complex and difficult to implement. Group consensus for these complex steps may be difficult to achieve. To simplify, I'll focus on four main tactics: those that impact the physical environment, those that impact the offender, those that focus on administrative practices and those that enlist the community's help. A balanced approach that integrates all four approaches is likely to be successful in the long-term.

1. Changes to the Physical Environment

Control access to deter unauthorized entry

The cemetery boundary must not be permeable. This enclosure requires appropriate fencing and restricts entry and prevents cut-throughs and inappropriate access. Closing and locking gates, however, is not always a good idea because it prevents police patrols, especially at night.

Posting Regulatory Signage

Access-control signs are an important part of "rule setting" because they establish the activities prohibited in the cemetery. Every cemetery requires regulatory signage identifying the hours of operation and warning that individuals in the cemetery outside of those hours will be arrested for trespass. These signs need to be installed at all entrance points.

Lighting

Lighting is sometimes seen as reducing vandalism. However, there is no consensus on whether well-lit areas or "dark" locations are superior in terms of crime prevention. Cemeteries were not lighted historically. Thus, the introduction of lighting detracts from the historical integrity of the properties and is useful only if there is someone guarding the property who uses the lighting to identify problems. Such monitoring is unavailable in most cemeteries. Therefore, I generally don't recommend lighting inside cemeteries.

Repairing damage quickly and improving the appearance of the cemetery

Clean, well-maintained cemeteries, free of debris or garbage, free of evidence of past vandalism with

attractively landscaped grounds reduce their risk of vandalism. Consistent maintenance may serve as an "occupation proxy," giving the appearance that the cemetery is under steady surveillance by those concerned about keeping it safe. Conversely, cemeteries with much trash, evidence of damage, and poorly maintained grounds appear to be abandoned; if no one cares for the property, why should the prospective vandal? Simply put, the appearance of abandonment attracts additional damage and vandalism.

Ensuring ready access to the property by police

Law enforcement must have quick and reliable access to cemeteries where gates are locked. If a property must be locked I recommend that a Knox-Box® be installed at the primary entrance. The Knox-Box® rapid entry system is a secure emergency access program developed for property owners and fire/law enforcement departments. When there is an emergency, Knox® products allow immediate entry into buildings and property without forced entry damage or delay. Property owners store entrance keys in high-security Knox-Boxes mounted near building or property entrances. Each Knox-Box® purchased by a property owner is keyed to a single master key controlled by the fire or police department. The cost of a Knox-Box® 3200 is less than \$300.

Hardening Targets

Often the stones toppled lack pins or other mechanisms to ensure their stability. Ledgers removed from box tombs are not attached in any way. While there is no mechanism to keep a stone from being shattered, stones can be pinned to their bases and ledgers can be pinned to box tombs—both making it more difficult to cause significant damage.

2. Offender-Focused Responses

Increasing the frequency of police patrols

Increasing the frequency with which police patrol the cemetery increases the likelihood that potential vandals will be seen. Even if police do not have access to the cemetery grounds during routine patrols, raking their spot light through the cemetery from adjacent streets can give the appearance of visibility. Patrols are crucial at night—and especially on long weekends and holidays when alcohol consumption increases. Halloween is a particularly common time for cemetery vandalism.

Use of electronic, CCTV, or photographic monitoring

An option for hardening cemetery targets is the use of video and photographic imaging technologies. At the

high end are systems such as VidShield—an automated wide-area surveillance system that detects, tracks, and classifies objects in real time on a computer screen. If an object violates a policy set by the user, the software streams live video of the alarm event to the display and can also send wireless alerts to law enforcement personnel (<http://vidsys.com/>). Although an ideal solution, the cost makes such system beyond the reach of most cemeteries.

An alternative, however, is the Flashcam by Q-Star Technology (<http://www.qstartech.com>). This self-contained digital system is motion activated; a photograph is taken (a flash unit allows night photographs at 100 feet), and a customized recorded announcement is played. Units are solar powered, eliminating the need for electrical connections. Photographs are high resolution and time/dated stamped. Units can be downloaded wirelessly. Although not inexpensive, they are among the most affordable solutions for cemeteries facing on-going vandalism and theft problems.

Though the initial financial outlay may be significant, over the long term, these surveillance systems may be less expensive than security patrols.

Improving opportunities for natural surveillance

The likelihood that adjacent neighbors and pedestrians going about their daily activities will spot an intruder depends on the visibility of the cemetery grounds from nearby houses, sidewalks, streets and highways. Clear sight lines in key locations maximize the ability of residents and passersby to observe activity in vulnerable areas. It is critical that security be taken into consideration when plantings are chosen and located. Security is an equal concern when existing plants are pruned.

Provide caretakers on the cemetery grounds

The continuous presence of a caretaker in a cemetery can deter potential intruders. At one time resident superintendents lived on the property in exchanged for rent free housing. Dedicated and uniformed maintenance crews can deter inappropriate activities. And while a paid workforce isn't feasible for many cemeteries, volunteer groups can be effective.

Volunteers should be given readily identifiable t-shirts (distinctive color and logo) to wear when working in the cemetery and should be publicized. They should be scheduled to conduct periodic inspections during the week and on weekends, throughout the year. Like police patrols, these visits should be unscheduled and occur at different times and on different days. These volunteers should not confront vandals, but should be eyes and ears, providing a presence in the cemetery and immediately reporting any suspicious activities.

Hold offenders accountable

Few perpetrators of cemetery vandalism are identified and apprehended and even fewer are prosecuted. Courts are generally lenient with offenders, and in most cases, the damage from an individual incident is seen as minor and does not appear to warrant harsh penalties. However, creative and well-publicized interventions to hold offenders accountable can have both a specific and a general deterrence effect. Restitution programs include a set of administrative and legal procedures to get money from offenders to pay for repair or replacement of damaged property. Publicizing the results of these efforts is important to maintain their deterrent effect.

Caregivers should ensure that police investigate vandalism and work to secure an arrest. If an arrest is made, representatives should be present in court, testify concerning the impact—and cost—of the damage and ask for the maximum punishment possible. If no restitution is required by the court, caregivers should consider civil court action to recover costs associated with professional repair of the damage.

3. Management Practices

Maintaining an inventory of cemetery stones and their condition

Vandalism often goes unreported because cemetery caregivers may not know what is present in the cemetery or its current condition. Thus, vandalism can be overlooked as preexisting damage. Caregivers should have up to date knowledge of the condition of all stones in their cemeteries as well as a file of current photographs. Volunteers may be assigned specific areas within which they should become familiar with the condition of all stones.

Educate the responsible authority

Law enforcement should be familiar with the vandalism prevention steps enacted at your cemetery. If the cemetery is publically owned, you should make periodic reports to the city or county council, describing vandalism and prevention efforts, the costs associated with vandalism, as well as the importance of the cemetery (financial, social and historical) to the community. Vandalism prevention strategies should be discussed regularly at your organization's meetings.

4. Community-Focused Responses

Provide rewards for information concerning vandalism

Offender-focused responses require that vandals be identified and apprehended. Law enforcement

investigations of vandalism incidents can be enhanced by high-quality information provided by community residents and even students from local schools. As seen with traditional "Crime Stoppers" programs, setting up telephone or internet-based tip-lines, offering rewards for information and guaranteeing anonymity will encourage people to come forward with specific information. The most effective programs actively involve volunteers who collect and synthesize information for police, and determine payout amounts in the event of apprehension.

Create "Cemetery Watch" programs

Similar to "Neighborhood Watch" efforts, community residents can conduct citizen patrols of cemetery property during evenings and weekends. Membership and regular participation in voluntary patrols increase when some form of prestige is offered to volunteers. Effective practices include:

- patrolling regularly, but at unpredictable times;
- equipping volunteers with cell phones for prompt communication with police or other emergency services;
- engaging in passive surveillance only, and not interacting with potential vandals or intruders in any way;
- publicizing activities and outcomes through school-based and local media outlets.

Also, nearby residents should be encouraged to attend to problems in the cemetery. Unusual noise, lights or activity should be sufficient to have neighbors call the police to report their concerns. Meetings should be held, preferably in the evening and preferably on the premises of the residents, to allow caregivers to enlist the support of local residents.

In response to a specific problem or rash of incidents, Watch programs can produce short-term reductions in vandalism. However, these programs are difficult to sustain, so caregivers will likely need to periodically "rejuvenate" the program by holding new meetings and bringing in new participants.

Caregivers should also consider developing similar programs in nearby schools, enlisting students to assist in collecting trash, cleaning stones or painting fences. Boy and Girl Scout troops should also be contacted. Involving students in the care of cemeteries, and engaging them in ongoing, active projects is another avenue to support the preservation efforts.

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