

Vandals wreak havoc in Ebenezer cemetery

Church broken into 3 weeks ago

Mike Moore

mmoore@jessaminejournal.com

May 21, 2009

For more than 12 years Christine McCauley has made her way to the Ebenezer Church Cemetery every Memorial Day week to decorate graves of the nearly 150 plots.



Jeff Smith surveyed the damage at the Ebenezer Church Cemetery Tuesday afternoon. Vandals toppled 12 to 15 tombstones, breaking some in two.

Photo by Mike Moore.

But Tuesday's trip to the cemetery, located on Ebenezer Church Road in southwestern Jessamine County, was a little disheartening for her when she learned vandals had toppled between 12 and 15 tombstones last weekend.

"I vaguely heard something on the news about another cemetery being bothered, but I didn't catch the name," she said, while planting flowers at her in-laws' (Hoard and Mary McCauley) grave site. "I think it's a little bit off the road. It seems to me that it would have been overlooked (by vandals). I've never seen this happen ... not since I've been in the family, which has been 60 years."

McCauley wasn't the only one taken aback by the damage.

Jeff Smith, church trustee and caretaker for the cemetery, was blunt in his assessment of those involved.

"I don't think that anything was going through their minds, other than just having fun," he said. "One probably started pushing them over, and I'm going to say there was probably more than one because to push that one (tombstone of John McCauley) over, it probably took three or four people because it's probably 700 or 800 pounds; it's just dead weight."

The discovery was made Sunday by a man visiting the cemetery, Smith said.

"He notified one of our other trustees, and the other trustee came out Monday morning, and 10 o'clock is when I came down here and saw it," Smith said.

Smith said the church, which has been rebuilt many times, has been in Jessamine County since the 1790s, and the oldest grave site that he is aware of is of a person buried in 1806.

The church building itself has been the target of vandals in the past, but Smith said this was the first time that he knows of the tombstones being damaged.

"As long as I've been a part of it, this is the first time that we've had someone overturn the stones," he said.

In fact, the church was broken into about three weeks ago when someone jimmied the bolt on the lock on a side door and kicked it in, Smith said.

Fifth District Jessamine County Magistrate and cemetery caretaker George Dean, who also has family members buried in the cemetery, said the act of desecrating the graves left a sick feeling in his stomach.

"Their (his family's) graves were honored, respected and went undisturbed for 146 years until last



Don Curtis, left, and Jeff Smith put the tombstone that read, "Eliza Consort of James McCauley. Died June 13, 1833. 38 yrs, 6 mos, back into its proper location Tuesday.

Photo by Mike Moore.

weekend," Dean said. "I was really very disappointed and upset. We've had problems here recently with people trying to break into the church, but for them to go and desecrate the graves is unconscionable."

While the vandalism act has members of the Ebenezer Church Cemetery Association scratching their heads as to a reason, they are now turning their attention to putting the stones back in place.

"I know it's going to get expensive," Smith said. "The dollar amount ... these (pointing to three stones which were broken in two) are priceless ... it's probably going to be \$3,000 to \$4,000 to fix the other ones over there."

Tuesday afternoon, Smith and Nicholasville's Don Curtis, owner of Resource Granite, worked to put a

few of the tombstones upright, while attempting to make sense of the senseless.

Smith, who is also a Fayette County School Resource Officer, has offered a \$200 reward for anyone to come forward with information which would lead to a conviction of those responsible.

"When you start talking money, the kids tend to talk a whole lot," he said.

Dean said that because of the cemetery's remote location, there wasn't much that could be done to prevent a recurrence.

"In our situation, we need to work with the next-door neighbor or farm owner and possibly try to set up some type of surveillance, but other than that, there's very little that can be done," he said.

The Jessamine County Sheriff's Office is investigating the incident.

Deputy Gerald Wheeler said while there were no suspects as of Tuesday afternoon, there were some leads that he's following up on.

"There are some trails where they've been walking back and forth from Revere Way (which backs up to the cemetery), and it's going to be juveniles," he said. "I don't think it was adults. I don't think adults would do anything like this."

The Ebenezer Church is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Anyone with information about this case is asked to call the sheriff's office at 885-9512 or Central Dispatch after 4 p.m. at 887-5447.

Copyright: JessamineJournal.com 2009