

Cemeteries

Vandals desecrate graveyard

Headstones destroyed and statues toppled

By TOM LONG
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SANTA CRUZ — Vandals tore through a graveyard off Ocean Street early Saturday morning, knocking over more than 75 gravestones and statues, leaving behind a trail of crushed beer cans and broken memorials.

"A lot of this stuff is going to be unreplaceable," said Police Sgt. Bill Aluffi. "Some of these headstones are more than 100 years old."

The desecrated graves were at Santa Cruz Memorial Park, at the base of Graham Hill Road. Aluffi said it looked as if the vandals had hit the graveyard between 4-8 a.m. Saturday, since a security check of the grounds was done at 4 a.m.

A number of beer cans were scattered about on the ground at the scene, according to Aluffi, and tire tracks were found on grass near the entrance to the cemetery. But investigators had no hard leads in the case.

"This is the biggest case of graveyard desecration I can remember," said Aluffi. "We've had others there and in some of the other cemeteries, but there's no way to tack a (damage) figure on this yet."

Most of the broken gravestones and statues were located along the back perimeter of the park. Every few yards a gravestone or statue could be seen toppled over, many broken into pieces, some laying atop other gravestones.

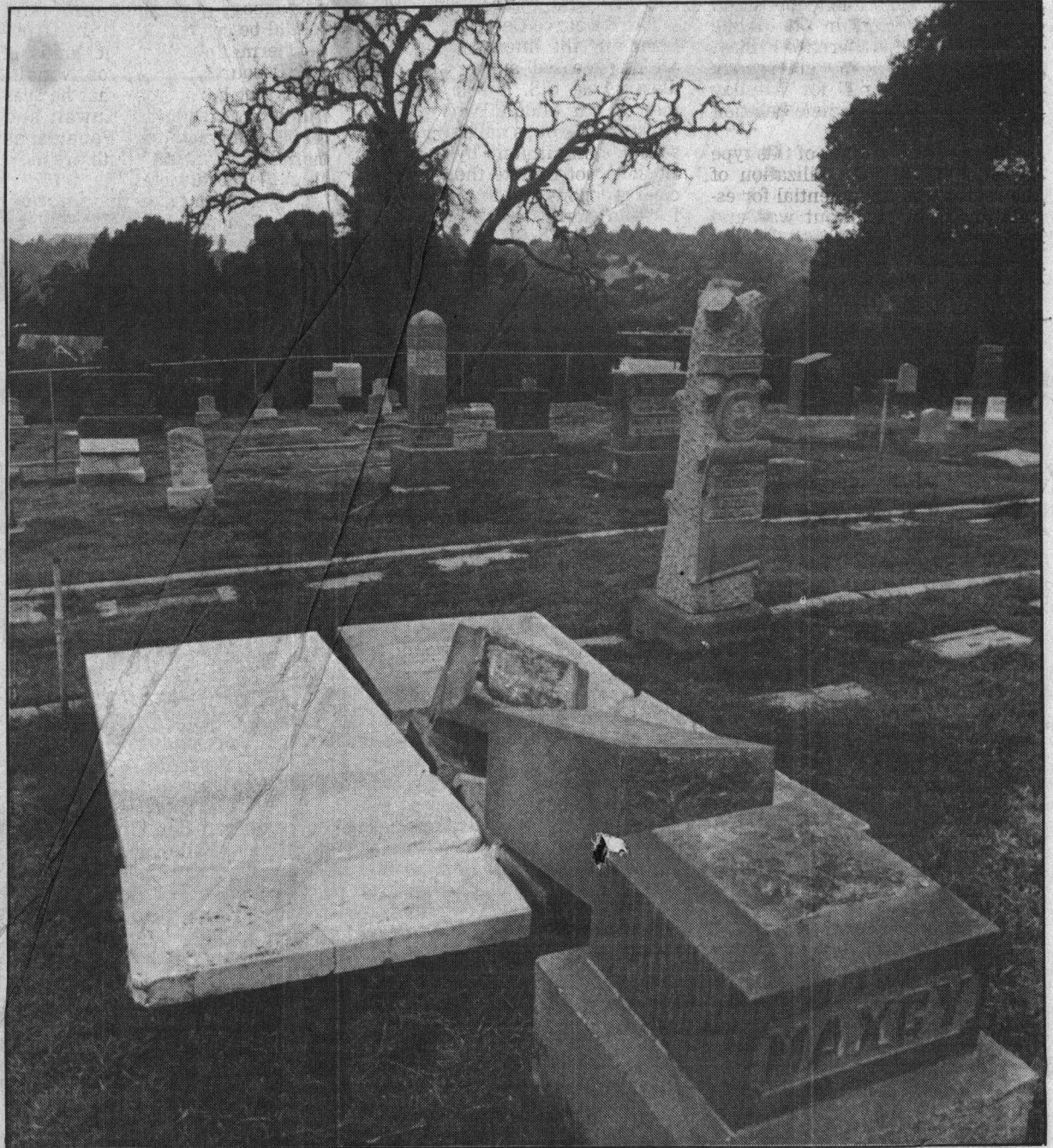
The memorials were knocked over in a helter-skelter pattern. "Martha J. Clark, wife of E. Clark, May 26, 1847, Sept. 20, 1912: Gone Home" read one toppled gravestone.

Nearby, a monument with a weathered, unreadable inscription had broken into three pieces as it fell upon and shattered the marble grave covers of William and Sarah Short, who died in 1917 and 1910.

According to park officials, many of the gravestones were damaged beyond repair, and in many cases there is no record of relatives of the deceased. The gravestones are considered the personal property of relatives, according to memorial counselor Leonard Robideaux, and broken stones will be held while park officials try to trace and contact next of kin.

"It's unknown whether some of the families will still be alive or even in the area," Aluffi said.

Aluffi said that anyone with information about the vandalism can call the police department's anonymous hotline, 423-4333.



Vandals leave behind broken memories at the graveyard.

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