

Riverview vandalism continues

Coffin of woman who died in 1907 is smashed open

By **TERRI SANGINITI**
Staff reporter

Twenty-nine-year-old Hannah Graham was laid to rest 95 years ago in the Stoeckle family's mausoleum at Riverview Cemetery.

But sometime between Friday and Saturday mornings, someone hacked through the ground-floor vault's white marble door and yanked out Graham's wooden casket.

"Who knows why they did it?" Wilmington police spokesman Lt. John Snyder said Monday. "It looks like they just smashed it."

The desecration, which is a felony, is the latest in a series of problems that have plagued the 130-year-old nonprofit cemetery in recent years.

The cemetery, at 33rd and Market streets, has been abandoned since June 2001, when it was forced to close after declaring bankruptcy due to mismanagement. Its perpetual care fund had plummeted from \$100,000 to near zero in five years.

Cemetery owners Lodges 1 and 34 of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and the Knights of Pythias Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania are finalizing an agreement to turn over cemetery operations to the Rev. Tom Davis, pastor of the Restoration Christian Fellowship Church at 35th and Market streets.

Wilmington resident Charles Kennedy, who re-



ported the damage to the vault, said he was visiting his parents' graves nearby about 10:30 a.m. Saturday when he noticed something amiss in the mausoleum.

"I found it had been slid straight out of the crypt and tilted slightly," Kennedy said. "They rested it on a big stone the size of a basketball. The first 18 inches of the wooden casket was really crushed in."

Kennedy said he was later told by police that the skull was missing.

Snyder said Monday the skeletal remains had been taken to the state Medical Examiner's Office for examination. He said the bones were disturbed, but could not confirm whether anything was missing.

"A couple of the bones were lying next to the coffin," Snyder said. "We're not treating it as ritualistic."

David and Donna Kleitz,
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who have been researching genealogy on the Stoeckle family, said Hannah Graham was 19 when she married David's great-uncle Frederick Kleitz.

Donna Kleitz said the couple met when Hannah worked as a clerk at Joseph Stoeckle's Diamond State Brewery at Fifth and Adams streets. Three months later, Hannah gave birth to a son they named Walter.

During their years together, the couple operated a saloon at 223-225 King St. and a liquor store at 708 Orange St.

At some point they divorced, which was rare at the turn of the 20th century, Donna Kleitz said.

Hannah, who died May 16, 1907, after a long illness, apparently reassumed her maiden name, Graham, which appears on the vandalized vault.

Jane Graham, 88, of Lewes, who is a descendent of Hannah Graham by marriage, said she was upset to learn of the desecration.

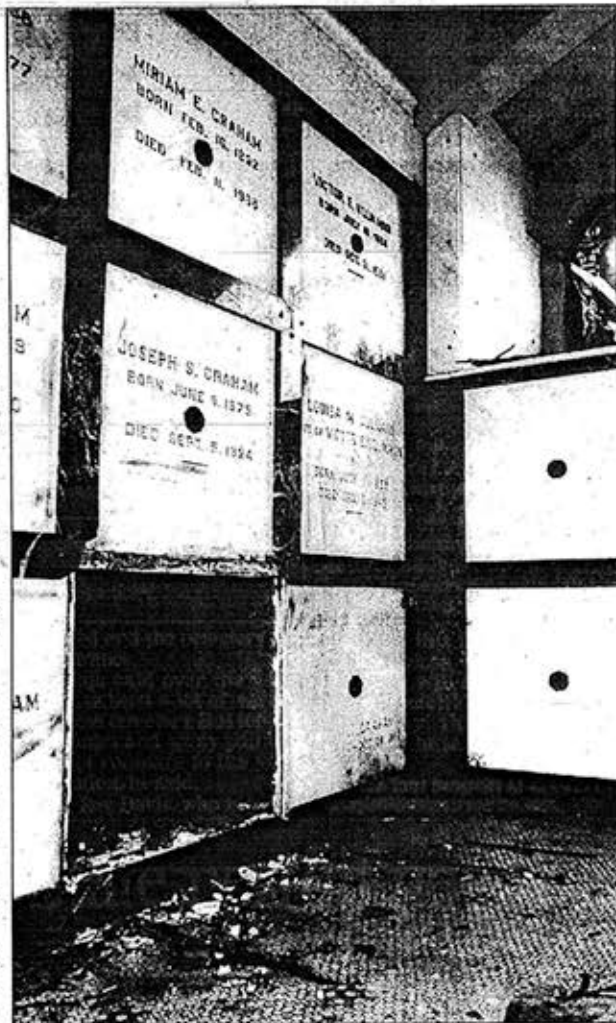
"I think that's terrible. What in the world were they looking for?" she said.

Joseph K. Stoeckle Jr., whose great-grandfather founded the brewery where Hannah Graham worked, said Monday that he wishes the mausoleum were sealed. But he said he does not know who has the deed to the remaining four vaults.

"I feel very frustrated. I can't imagine anyone doing this," said Stoeckle, whose father is buried there.

Walt Mateja, the cemetery's former executive director, said when the remains are released from the Medical Examiner's Office, they could be returned to the vault and a new marble face plate installed.

But the building is not secured. The mausoleum's gates were stolen more than a year ago, the stained-glass window is



The News Journal/GINGER WALL

The coffin of Hannah Graham was pulled from its vault in the Stoeckle family mausoleum at Wilmington's Riverview Cemetery.

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shattered and the cemetery has no insurance.

Mateja said over the years there has been a lot of vandalism at the cemetery. But toppled tombstones and spray painting does not compare to the vault desecration, he said.

The Rev. Davis, who is poised

to take over cemetery operations in the near future, said he cannot address the problems until the agreement with the cemetery owners is finalized.

"With this transaction coming to a close, once people realize there will be a functioning management team in place, hopefully this can be addressed," he said.

► Reach Terri Sanginiti at 324-2771 or tsanginiti@delawareonline.com.