

COPPER THIEVES NOW EVEN TARGET CEMETERIES

Mary Jo Denton
Herald-Citizen Staff

PUTNAM COUNTY - - With copper prices up, thieves have been ripping the wiring out of buildings, air conditioners and other places where they could find the metal, which they sell on the scrap market.

And now they've hit a cemetery, law officers said.

Fifteen bronze vases valued at nearly \$2,000 were stolen off graves at the Smellage Cemetery on Hopewell Road on May 1, and Putnam Sheriff's Deputy Sgt. Rick Smith believes it is the copper content of the vases that the thieves wanted.

"The vases sell for an average of \$130 each, and according to people I've contacted, they also have a 75 percent copper content," Sgt. Smith said.

He said the vases were stolen after dark on May 1. A cemetery worker said the vases were there during the day, but were gone the next morning.

"The only vases left were either glass or stone," Sgt. Smith said.

Ironically, the thieves took the trouble to place the flowers they removed from the vases back into the holes where the vases had been, Sgt Smith said.

He said no other items were stolen and no buildings or lights at the cemetery were damaged or bothered by the thieves.

After investigating the case on Wednesday afternoon, Sgt. Smith notified all other shifts sergeants and said all cemeteries in the county will now be heavily patrolled.

On his report, he listed "fifteen families" as victims of the crime.

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BROTHERS CHARGED WITH CEMETERY THEFTS

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COOKEVILLE -- Two Baxter brothers have been arrested for allegedly stealing bronze vases off gravestones in a cemetery.

Shone R. Frazier, 23, and Daniel L. Frazier, 21, of Bryes Road, Baxter, were arrested Wednesday after Cookeville Police Detective Bobby Anderson completed an investigation.

Shone R. Frazier is charged with felony theft and misdemeanor theft, and his brother is charged with misdemeanor theft.

The two allegedly stole several bronze vases off graves and grave markers at Crest Lawn Cemetery and sold them for scrap metal at the PCS Metals Inc business on Mill Avenue in Cookeville. The sales to the

scrap metal business allegedly took place on three different dates between April 27 and May 7, Detective Anderson said.

The owner of the cemetery, Vinnie Faccinto, initiated his own investigation into the thefts when he first became aware that someone was stealing the vases off graves at Crest Lawn.

He said people visiting the cemetery to put flowers on graves for Mother's Day noticed that bronze vases which had been on graves or on monuments were missing.

"So I went over to the scrap metal business and talked to the workers there, and they were very nice and very cooperative," Faccinto said.

"They took me around to the back and showed me some bronze vases they had bought, and I could identify 14 of them as coming from Crest Lawn."

He said the sellers, the Frazier brothers, had received \$7.39 each for vases they sold there, but such vases are valued at \$137 each, according to police.

After his investigation, Faccinto contacted the police, and Detective Anderson was assigned to the case.

Anderson said records at PCS Metals Inc identified the sellers of the bronze vases as the Frazier brothers. He said he contacted the two and they voluntarily came to the police station to talk to him. After further investigation, he filed charges against the two and took them to jail.

The detective said 12 vases and one bronze head plate from a tombstone were recovered during his investigation.

Allegedly, the two brothers told the detective they had found the bronze vases in a garbage bin.

Crest Lawn owner Faccinto said theft of such items from a cemetery is a Class E felony, and the Herald-Citizen confirmed that by contacting Robert Gribble, executive director of the state Funeral Board.

Gribble cited Tennessee Code Annotated 46-1-313: "No person shall willfully destroy, deface, or injure any monument, tomb, gravestone, or other structure placed in the cemetery, or any roadway, walk, fence or enclosure in or around the same, or injure any tree, plant or shrub therein, or hunt or shoot therein, play at any game or amusement therein, or loiter for lascivious or lewd purposes therein, or interfere, by words or actions, with any funeral procession or any religious exercises. A violation of this section is a Class E felony."

Putnam County Sheriff's Detective Bob Crabtree is investigating similar cases of thefts from cemeteries in the rural areas of the county.

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CEMETERY THIEF GETS STIFF SENTENCE

COOKEVILLE – A man who stole brass vases out of a cemetery went to jail yesterday to begin serving 270 days and will pay over \$6,000 in fines and fees.

General Sessions Court Judge John Hudson handed Daniel L. Frazier, 21, of Baxter, the maximum sentence after he came to court and pleaded guilty to theft of property in the case.

Frazier and his brother, Shone R. Frazier, 23, and another man, Jonathan P. Golden, 27, of Cookeville, were arrested in May in connection with theft of brass vases out of Crest Lawn Cemetery, and Golden is also charged with theft of vases from Smellage.

The cases of Shone R. Frazier and Golden are still pending in court.

Several of the vases, which contain copper, were stolen and were sold to a scrap metal business, police said.

The owner of Crest Lawn Cemetery began to investigate after visitors to that cemetery reported to him that brass vases were missing from graves. He went to a scrap metal business here and found some of the stolen vases.

Police detectives also investigated and soon arrested the Fraziers and Golden.

Daniel L. Frazier went to General Sessions Court yesterday without a lawyer and pleaded guilty to theft in his case.

Judge Hudson gave him a jail sentence of 11 months and 29 days, with 270 of that to serve, and ordered him taken into custody immediately.

He fined Frazier \$500 and ordered him to pay restitution of \$411.

He also ordered that Frazier will be on supervised probation for a period of 11 months and 29 days after finishing his jail sentence.

And Frazier is restrained from “coming about or having any contact whatsoever” with Crest Lawn Cemetery.

According to court clerks, Frazier’s total costs, counting fines, restitution, court fees, and jail feeds, will come to more than \$6,000.

After Judge Hudson set the sentence, a sheriff’s deputy took Frazier to the Putnam County jail.

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