

# Cemetery Desecration at the Rosa Bonheur Memorial Park in Howard County Maryland

## **Desecration**

At noon on Saturday, December 23, 2023, members and friends of the Rosa Bonheur Society gathered at the Rosa Bonheur Memorial Park to view the significant desecration that occurred on or about December 19, 2023.

In this 87-year-old cemetery, which has both pet and human burials, human grave markers were removed and piled up, eight to ten human graves were dug up and bodies removed, surrounding graves were churned up, other nearby grave stones were damaged, and muddy ruts were abundant.

For years Friends of Rosa Bonheur has been trying, without success, to work with the developer from the adjoining property to get an agreement to protect the cemetery. The developer denies knowing who caused the damage to the cemetery.

## **History**

Rosa Bonheur Cemetery is located at 7239 Washington Boulevard on Washington Blvd in Elkridge, Howard County across the road from the Meadowridge Memorial Park. In 1979 humans began to be buried at the cemetery. Burials of humans and pets continued until 2004 when the cemetery was closed to new burials although there was room left for thousands of additional burials. There are at least 24 humans buried and 4,000 confirmed animal burials at the cemetery. Many markers for both the human and pet burials are annually decorated for Christmas and other Holidays.

## **What We Observed**

On December 20 & 21, 2023, two Rosa Bonheur Society volunteers, and a society member whose family has plots dating back to 1946, observed the cemetery status. They reported desecration of burials, memorials, and the

grounds. They provided photos of the damage they witnessed. All three reported deep holes, markers strewn about, damage to the graves surrounding the holes, human remains missing from graves, and the exposure of other remains.

Robert Mosko, of Mosko Cemetery Monument Services, spent an hour assessing the damage. He confirmed that the soil indicated that the vandalism has occurred in the last two days, because the dirt is still fresh, that the area was heavily dug up probably using a backhoe. He noted tractor tracks. At least 3 sites were exhumed with evidence of probing. Graves were blindly destroyed, and human and animal markers strewn around and in piles. He said it was easy to tell what the desecrators did.

No notice of proposed disinterment was given to the families whose loved ones are buried at Rosa Bonheur. These disrespectful actions, the damage done, and lack of any attempt to repair that damage, make it evident that no professional funeral director and/or staff was present.

Memorial LLC had contacted the State's Attorney for Howard County, Rich Gibson, almost three years ago for permission to disinter remains. Gibson approved the request, despite the families objecting. Two funeral homes contacted to conduct the disinterment refused to proceed because no families had been notified or given permission. The Rosa Bonheur Society also has not been contacted regarding these disinterments.

### **Unanswered questions**

1. Who did this?
2. Why was no notice given to the families?
3. Why didn't the States Attorney require permission from the families?
4. Why didn't a funeral director guide the work?
5. What is the responsibility of the Maryland Office of Cemetery Oversight?
6. Was the Maryland Historic Trust contacted, as required by Maryland State Law?
7. And where are the bodies???