

POET'S GRAVEYARD IN BRONX TORN UP

Children Topple Stones in
Park Named for Drake

By FARNSWORTH FOWLE

Only a few blades of grass abide among the upturned gravestones in the burial place of the Bronx poet Joseph Rodman Drake.

Vandals have made a sport of uprooting headstones and knocking down obelisks and columns over the graves in the old burying ground of the Hunt family of Hunts Point on the East River in the Bronx.

Drake had lived in the old Hunt family grange, now gone, and was buried in its cemetery along with the Hunts and Leggetts and Willets and other eminent persons of the eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Bronx.

When Drake died in 1820 at the age of 25, his friend and fellow-poet, Fitz-Greene Halleck, elegized him in Wordsworthian lines that have found a place in Bartlett's "Familiar Quotations":

Green be the turf above thee,
Friend of my better days!
None knew thee but to love thee
Nor named thee but to praise.

The graveyard forms a knoll in Joseph Rodman Drake Park. Seven years ago the Parks Department reopened the park, adding walks and benches under the stately oaks, poplars and elms of the former manorial site. The New York Community Trust gave \$5,000 to rehabilitate the cemetery.

A neat hedge with iron gates was put around the whole area, and another fence with a padlocked door enclosed the graves of Drake and his wife. The cemetery gate is still locked, but the hedges are almost gone,

once lived in the neighborhood, came back to show the park to Edward, Jr., and were horrified with what they saw.

"People who lived around here used to clean the area themselves," he said.

Children were climbing over the graves. Some were experimenting at trying to prop up the headstones. A police car from the Forty-first Precinct stopped and patrolmen cautioned them, lingered a bit and drove on.

A week ago one shocked visitor had found the bronze plaque bearing Halleck's tribute to Drake lying on the ground, wrenched loose from its stone. He turned it over to the police, who entrusted it to the St. Mary's Park Association.

An elderly part-time employe of the Parks Department, Frank Smith, who lives at 643 Bryant Street, said the trouble had begun a year ago this spring. "The kids have broken it up, that's the whole thing," he said.

and the gate to the Drake enclosure is open to vandals.

The area used to be surrounded by modest homes and rural shacks, but now it is dominated by car-wrecking yards and other industrial concerns.

Yesterday Edward Nadeau and his wife and her mother, Mrs. Antoinette Dannucci, who