

ABSTRACTS of the Session
"Burial Archeology and Human Taphonomy in the Northeast"
at the 31st Annual Meeting of the Northeast Anthropological Association,
Waterloo, Ontario, March 16, 1991

Organized by Stephen P. Nawrocki & Edward L. Bell
Discussant: Dr. Randall McGuire

Brief Summary of the Session:

With the rapid expansion of urban and suburban areas into previously rural regions during the past few decades, archaeologists have become increasingly involved in saving potentially-important cultural resources from destruction. Perhaps nowhere else does public concern for these resources become as acute as when human skeletal remains are encountered. The complex legal, ethical, and methodological issues involved with the excavation of human remains has led or forced many of us to specialize in this particular subarena of Cultural Resource Management, born from the marriage of archaeology and physical anthropology. This session was aimed at assembling some of these diverse issues and viewpoints for practitioners in the Northeast.

Abstracts are given in alphabetical order by senior author; all papers are podium presentations unless noted otherwise.

(1) BEAUREGARD, Alan. "The Engelbert Site: A Geographical and Cultural Nexus of Mid-Atlantic Protohistory."

This presentation discusses the excavation history and research potential of the Engelbert Site, a multicomponent Native cemetery excavated in the Upper Susquehanna Valley during the late 1960's. The materials from this collection lend themselves to a number of pertinent concerns, including a need to revise the Susquehannock culture sequence, a reconsideration of existing typologies as temporal markers, and the significance of mortuary ceremony as a marker of cultural identity.

(2) BELL, Edward. "Archaeological Investigations at Historical Cemeteries: A Preliminary Overview of Scholarly Trends and Prospects."

The continuing demand for archaeological investigations of historical cemeteries suggests the need to review the available archaeological literature. This preliminary report describes a study-in-progress to examine several research areas using cemetery data, including theory and methodology, material culture studies, and physical anthropology, to provide directions for future investigations. Bibliographic sources are being entered into a data base system in anticipation of publishing a review essay and definitive bibliography of the available literature on historical cemeteries. Many valuable studies of historical mortuary behavior have been produced. More attention to exacting methodology, and a comparative historical and archaeological research program will foster expansive and accumulative scholarship; public education and negotiation with interested parties will overcome the obstacles presented by the prohibition against deliberately intrusive cemetery excavation and the

mandate for reburial. (NOTE: see Bell EL 1994. Vestiges of Mortality and Remembrance: A Bibliography on the Historical Archaeology of Cemeteries. Scarecrow Press, Metuchen NJ).

(3) DIRKMAAT, Dennis, B.J. GUNDY, & E.J. SIEMON. "The Mechanical Excavation of Mortuary Sites."

The use of heavy machinery during the course of an archaeological excavation is common practice today, especially in the case of cultural resource management (CRM) projects, which are often conducted under severe time and budgetary constraints. Traditionally, mechanical excavation has been employed in situations requiring the removal of large amounts of previously disturbed deposits prior to controlled excavation and evaluation of undisturbed levels. Increasingly, however, heavy machines are being used to strip overburden from undisturbed sites, thus providing cost-effectiveness while also, unfortunately, enhancing the possibility of destroying *in situ* cultural features, artifacts and biological remains as well as their contexts.

Rigorous adherence to a carefully conceived mechanical excavation plan and monitoring by professional, well-trained personnel is obviously required in all archaeological projects, regardless of their funding source and research objectives. This holds especially true for the excavation of mortuary sites (both historic and prehistoric), not only because these sites are of considerable archaeological value, but also because the political and social ramifications which attend the unnecessary disturbance and destruction of even small amounts of human remains are particularly acute.

This paper details the successful application of heavy machinery excavation procedures during two recent CRM projects in downtown Pittsburgh, one of which was suspected to contain a Historic period cemetery, and a forensic anthropology excavation in which the thoroughly charred and fragmented remains of a murder victim were recovered and identified.

(4) LEVEILLEE, Alan. "Woodland Period Canine Burials at the Lambert Farm Site: Three Needles in a Haystack."

Recent archaeological excavations at the Lambert Farm prehistoric site in Warwick, Rhode Island suggest elaborate Woodland Period canine burial practice and related ceremonialism. The burial features at Lambert Farm provide insights into Woodland Indian spirituality. These features and their meanings will be discussed from the perspective of the archaeologists who excavated the site and, through interviews, with contemporary Native Americans.

(5) NAWROCKI, Stephen. "Human Taphonomy and Historic Cemeteries: Factors Influencing the Loss and Subsequent Recovery of Human Remains."

Historic cemeteries are common features on the landscapes of practically every town and hamlet in the Northeast, and archeologists are becoming increasingly involved in locating and mitigating these cultural resources. This paper examines the various factors that can contribute to the deterioration and eventual loss of cemeteries over time, as well as those factors that affect their subsequent identification and recovery by archeologists. Variables such as cemetery design, location, ownership, types of markers used, floral landscaping, and sociocultural status of the interred can have significant implications for the long-term survival of the entire cemetery. In addition, these same factors can contribute to the loss and differential preservation of particular individuals within cemeteries, having important implications for osteological and demographic analysis.

(6) PAPPALARDO, Michael, & Stephen NAWROCKI. "The Effects of Depth-Below-Surface, Sex, and Stature on the Preservation of Buried Human Remains."

Few workers have systematically examined the variables that can affect the preservation of skeletal materials buried within historic cemeteries. This study utilizes data from 57 skeletons recovered in 1988 from the Oneida Burial Site, a late 19th century poorhouse cemetery located near Rome, NY. Using photographs, the burials were ranked according to their completeness and overall preservation. A significant relationship ($r = -0.36$) was found between depth below surface and skeletal preservation, with the deeper burials being better preserved. Sex significantly affects skeletal preservation independently of depth. The results for stature, while not reaching statistical significance, are suggestive. We discuss the potential utility of predictive models of skeletal preservation to archaeology and forensics. (NOTE: this research was published in Nawrocki SP 1995. Taphonomic processes in historic cemeteries. In *Bodies of Evidence: Reconstructing History Through Skeletal Analysis*, ed. by A. Grauer, pp. 49-66. Wiley-Liss, New York).

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