

**Delineation of the  
Dr. White Cemetery, Saint Helena Island,  
Beaufort County, South Carolina:  
Supplementary Comments**

*LAMAR Institute Publication Series  
Report Number 136*

**The LAMAR Institute**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Cemetery delineation fieldwork was conducted on July 9, 2007 at the Dr. White Cemetery, also known as the Coffin Point Cemetery, on the property of Mr. John Clements, Saint Helena Island, South Carolina. This study was directed by Cypress Cultural Consultants, LLC (CCC) for Mr. Clements. Mr. Daniel T. Elliott was retained by Mr. Clements for one day (July 9, 2007) as an archaeological consultant to assist in this project. The primary reporting for this research effort was addressed by CCC in a thorough research report (Battle and Battle 2007). Readers are directed to that report for the background and details of the delineation project. This LAMAR Institute Publication provides additional observations and commentary on the CCC cemetery delineation project.

## **COMMENTARY**

Research at the Dr. White Cemetery on Saint Helena Island was conducted by CCC, under the direction of Ms. Daphne O. Battle and Mr. Daniel E. Battle, and assisted by Mr. Mike Benton (Battle and Battle 2007). That study included a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey on three sides of the existing (known) cemetery. The cemetery had been delineated by a professional land survey more than 20 years ago, and a log fence was erected to replace the dilapidated wire fence that existed. The GPR fieldwork and other observations by CCC resulted in the identification of several likely human burials that were located outside (immediately north of) the cemetery fence. In addition, two suspicious GPR anomalies were recognized from their GPR survey and these were recommended for testing by CCC. The CCC field crew returned to explore these GPR anomalies by a limited archaeological testing project on July 9, 2007.

Mr. Daniel T. Elliott was retained by Mr. Clements for one day as an archaeological consultant for the July 2007 cemetery testing effort. Mr. Elliott is an archaeologist with more than 32 years experience in the eastern United States, Canada, and the Caribbean. He is registered as a Certified Field Archaeologist by the Register of Professional Archaeologists. He is also a member of several state organizations for professional archaeologists, including South Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia. Mr. Elliott has considerable experience with cemetery research in South Carolina and Georgia. Mr. Elliott has worked on several sites in Beaufort County, South Carolina. He is also an expert in Ground Penetrating Radar survey and its interpretation.

Testing at the cemetery was accomplished by a smooth-blade backhoe and operator with constant supervision by professional archaeologists with CCC and Mr. Daniel Elliott. The exploration began by testing the two suspicious GPR anomalies. One of these was determined to be a large tree root disturbance and was not a human burial. The other was determined to be a deeply buried refuse deposit of modern building slate, which Mr. Clements stated that he had dumped in the area decades earlier.

Next, the backhoe was used to sample areas where the GPR survey was unable to traverse because of the terrain and vegetation conditions at the time of the first CCC fieldwork. This exploration began with a series of short trenches located immediately east of the cemetery fence. Archaeologists discovered probable human burials in three of the four trenches that were placed on the east side of the cemetery fence. The sampled areas were carefully cleaned off with every effort to minimize damage to the graves. Grave offerings dating from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> were recognized in association with three or four graves. These included a small milk glass teapot, a hand painted porcelain doll's tea cup, two kerosene lamp bases, two bottles, window glass, small pieces of sheet tin, and a clay tobacco pipe. In one of these tests, multiple graves were likely present. In order to minimize any disturbance to the graves, these tests were terminated once the presence of graves was positively recognized. These areas were troweled off, photographed and documented. The grave offerings that were displaced were carefully returned to their approximate locations, and these trenches were carefully backfilled. Many more graves are likely located in this newly-discovered eastern part of the cemetery.

Next, a long trench was placed from east-west on the north side of the cemetery. This trench was placed north of the suspected graves that had been identified earlier. A cluster of approximately three additional graves were discovered in this trench. Grave furniture, consisting of six or more large whelk shells and a solarized glass vase were recognized in association with one of these burials. This grave probably dates sometime between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The glass vase was probably manufactured sometime after 1860 and prior to 1918. Two other likely burials did not display any obvious grave offerings. One of these displayed a narrow grave shaft (possibly associated with an early hexagonal-style coffin), which may indicate a pre-1860 age for this interment. Two additional trenches were then placed north of the first trench to determine if the cemetery continued in that direction. Neither of these two trenches contained any grave evidence.

Next, two trenches were excavated just outside of the cemetery fence on the south side. Neither of these two trenches yielded any evidence of graves. The cemetery boundary on the south side appears to conform to the surveyor's existing boundary.

Next, two trenches were excavated just outside the cemetery fence on the west side. Neither of these two trenches yielded any evidence of graves. The cemetery boundary on the west side appears to conform to the surveyor's existing boundary.

Thus, the cemetery boundary was expanded to the east and north to include additional graves that were discovered on July 9. The cemetery may extend to the marsh edge on the east side. The northern boundary was mostly defined from the previous fieldwork, although one small cluster of graves was located on July 9 that extends a portion of the cemetery further north that was previously known.

The "ground truthing" of the GPR data mostly verified that areas thought to be void of any large cultural features, such as graves, were not present in those areas. The single exception was on the north-central part of the cemetery. A careful re-examination of the original GPR data may shed light on this area. GPR surveys on historic cemeteries can be

affected by a variety of conditions that make grave identification difficult. The presence of concentrations of marine shell can affect the signal. The tight clustering of graves can result in ricocheted radar signals that mask the presence of individual graves. The shallow nature of the graves may also render their recognition with a 400 MHz antenna impossible. For the most part, however, the testing verified the suspected cemetery boundaries on the three sides that were sampled. The cemetery boundary on the east side, where no GPR was attempted, was expanded by the most recent fieldwork. As a result of CCC's efforts, the cemetery boundary is now better established. While some outlying graves may exist in more distant areas that have not been explored, the core of the cemetery is now known and rigorously delineated. Mr. Clements was informed of these new discoveries and the expanded dimensions of the cemetery will be protected from any disturbance. This research represents an important contribution to the history of Beaufort County, Saint Helena Island, and the people who once lived there. The tested areas outside of the Dr. White Cemetery were clearly marked so that their boundaries could be mapped by a professional land surveyor. These new data, which was fully documented in the CCC report addendum, should allow for a better management of this important cultural resource.

The addition of grave offerings of various sites on the surface of graves is well documented for African-American cemeteries in coastal South Carolina and Georgia. None of the grave offerings that were identified at the Dr. White Cemetery were visible at the ground surface, but either settled into the ground, or been obscured by soil from storms or other past activity. These objects were relatively shallow, however, which may partially explain why the graves on the north side of the cemetery were not first recognized in the GPR survey data. These may represent children's graves, based on their small appearance. While ethnicity is not definitely known based on the evidence that was discovered, similar graves in coastal South Carolina are linked to African-Americans (Combes 1974:52-61). The presence of an early house site dating to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which is located approximately 50 meters west of the cemetery, suggests that this cemetery may have began as a family plot for that homestead and later became a community cemetery that was used by numerous families.

## **SUMMARY**

The efforts by CCC to delineate the Dr. White Cemetery on St. Helena Island were accomplished in 2007 and that work is documented in their research report (Battle and Battle 2007). The present LAMAR Institute publication provides additional opinions and observations about this cemetery delineation. The current landowner of the cemetery, Mr. John Clements, took an important step in searching for the boundaries of the cemetery so that it may be protected. The delineation of the cemetery by means of historical research, archaeological survey, ground penetrating radar survey (GPR) and backhoe testing, shovel shaving and mapping accomplished that goal. The work that was done represents a reasonable, good faith effort to define the cemetery boundaries.

## REFERENCES CITED

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