

BETHANY CEMETERY
EFFINGHAM COUNTY, GEORGIA

EBENEZER ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT SERIES,
NUMBER 2.

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Athens, Georgia
August, 1989

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INTRODUCTION

On July 14 and 15, 1989, archaeology was conducted within the Bethany settlement in present-day Effingham County, Georgia. This report presents the findings of that study. These efforts were predicated on an unpublished study in historical geography conducted by Raymond Davis, and others. Davis assembled a variety of documentary evidence and presented a convincing argument for the precise location of the Bethany cemetery (Davis 1987). As a result of Davis' thorough detective work, a 1.76 acre tract was deeded to the Georgia Salzburger Society and was designated as the Bethany Cemetery. Plans were formulated for the erection of a stone memorial to commemorate the forgotten colonists at Bethany. Archaeology was implemented to independently confirm the presence of a cemetery at this location and to identify a sample of graves that could be marked with replica wooden slabs as part of an ongoing restoration of the abandoned cemetery. This project was sponsored by the Georgia Salzburger Society (Bethany Cemetery Restoration Committee), Historic Effingham Society, and the LAMAR Institute.

The Bethany colony was established by Swabian immigrants in 1751 under the leadership of William G. de Brahm. This settlement was situated on the northern flank of the Ebenezer colony--composed of Swabians, Salzburgers, and other German-speaking groups who practiced the Lutheran faith. [Note: For a detailed account of the Bethany colony consult George F. Jones' *The Salzburger Saga. Religious Exiles and Other Germans Along the Savannah*, University of Georgia Press, Athens (1984)].

Bethany was situated along the Savannah River and consisted of many "long lot" plantations. Within the central core of Bethany were the Glebe lands which contained a church, school, an cemetery. A colonial plat dated 5. September, 1760 depicts the 100 acre tract deeded t Harman Lemke and others, Church and School Land (Figure 1). In 1760, this Glebe land was bounded on the north by Ludwig Ernst, on the south by Valentine Deppe, on the west by John Happakers, and on the east by the Savannah River.

Surviving church records indicate that at least 33 colonists were buried in the cemetery at Bethany between 1757 and 1775 (Voight 1929). A list of those known to be buried at Bethany is shown in Table 1. There were doubtless many others buried there as well.

Bethany was ~ thriving settlement until the onset of the American Revolution. As a result of military occupation, pillaging, and internal strife, Bethany, as well as Ebenezer, became a dead village. During the nineteenth-century lands in the Bethany vicinity were annexed for the formation of large plantations, and consolidation in land holdings occurred. The Bethany cemetery continued to be used for burying the dead until the nineteenth century.

TABLE 1. RECORDED BETHANY CEMETERY BURIALS (Source: Voight 1929).

<u>NAME</u>	<u>DIED</u>	<u>AGE</u>
Mary Magdalene Mohr	July 28, 1757	1 1/2
Soloman Schubdrein	Jan. 6, 1758	
Anna Catherine Fischer	March 15, 1759	10
Anna Gerber	May 13, 1759	10
Christian Oechsle	May 16, 1760	2
Wihelmine Ernestine Michler	June 18, 1760	8 1/2
George Gross	Feb. 4, 1761	45
Michael Mackh	Nov. 4, 1761	1 1/2
Fredericka Margaret Bollinger	Nov. 12, 1761	2
Daniel Rieser	Dec. 6, 1763	4 1/2
Bartholomew Mackh	Jan. 12, 1764	34
Christian Gravenstein	Feb. 13, 1764	9 days
Tobias Fischer	July 8, 1764	2 1/1
Christian LeBrecht Rieser	April 23, 1766	11
Angelica Oechsle	Oct. 30, 1766	-
Anna Catherine Biddenbach	Jan. 11, 1767	3 1/2
John Meyer	Jan. 23, 1767	-
Anna Bexle	June 4, 1768	10
Christine Ochs	Aug. 30, 1768	3 1/2
Regina Ochs	Aug. 26, 1769	9
Frederich Ochs	Sept. 12, 1769	69
Henry Louis Gravenstein	Oct. 28, 1769	4 1/2
Matthew Fischer	Dec. 3, 1769	2
George Fischer	Feb. 20, 1770	5
Christian Bittenbach	May 5, 1770	60
Anna Margaret Biddenbach	Aug. 31, 1770	-
Sophia Frank	Nov. 14, 1770	14
John George Eppinger	Aug., 1770	3 1R
N. Harret (An English Girl)	Aug. 26, 1771	16
John Oechsle	Nov. 16, 1771	13
Anna Barbara Epinger	May 28, 1773	-
Jacob Gnann	Oct., 14, 1773	44
Wolfgang Mack	Nov., 1775	-

Stone grave markers apparently were not used at Bethany, and graves were either marked with wooden slabs, or they had no markers at all. The use of wooden markers, usually heart pine, was common within the Ebenezer settlement. Wooden markers of this type are preserved at the Jerusalem Church, Zion Church, Goshen, and Plantation cemeteries (Dasher Creek), as well as at several small family cemeteries in the Effingham County. Elder residents of Effingham County recall seeing similar markers at Bethany. However, no traces remain above the ground surface.

Specific Documentary Evidence for the Relocation of the Bethany Cemetery

A synopsis of Raymond Davis' historical geography investigation is presented here as background information. Prior to 1986, local tradition held that the Bethany cemetery was located south of Michaels Creek, and a granite marker was placed near the supposed location as a memorial. A chance event occurred in 1986 that placed this location in doubt. A sketch of the Bethany community written on a loose piece of paper was discovered in a book that had belonged to Rev. S. S. Rahn, a resident of the Bethany vicinity who died in 1911. This map, which was apparently drawn from memory, showed the relative positioning of landowners in the community, and it showed the Bethany Cemetery and Church situated north of Michaels Creek (Figure 2). The map was shown to Milton H. Rahn and Rev. Raymond Davis who quickly realized its historical significance.

Davis began a search of extant archival records to prove, or disprove the accuracy of this map. The lines of evidence Davis used included: S. S. Rahn's sketch map; published historical sources, particularly DeBrahm's map of the Bethany settlement (DeVorse 1971); oral interviews; published genealogies; entry claims, royal grants, colonial plats, and Effingham County deeds, plats, and probate records; U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers maps; A.S.C.S. aerial photography (1938, 1949, 1953, and 1958); Effingham County tax aerial photographs (various years); a land title search; and on-site reconnaissance. His search was rewarded.

We know that during February, 1810, the Trustees of the German Lutheran Congregation at Ebenezer (Jonathan Rahn, Michael Exley, John Sherrou, Joel Kieffer, Andrew Gnann, John Grovenstine, Emanuel Rahn, and Godlieb Ernst) deeded William G. Porter a tract of land at Bethany, but reserved one acre of ground "for a burring Ground" and would "forever Grant the Congregation the priviledge to inter the burrying Ground to

bury their dead" (Effingham County Deeds). The memory of this "privilege" was forgotten in later years.

Later in the nineteenth century, the cemetery became known as the Crews (Kraux) family cemetery, and lost its historical significance within the community. The Probate inventory of Cletus Rahn includes a 100 acres identified as the Cruise Tract (Effingham County Probate Court). This places the association of the Bethany cemetery and the Kraus family dates prior to Cletus Rahn's ownership. The land ownership continued in the Rahn family, until it was donated to the Georgia Salzburger Society in 1996. The historical evidence gathered by Davis strongly supported this location as the Bethany cemetery.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Goals

The LAMAR Institute was contacted by members of the Bethany Cemetery Restoration Committee, a project of the Georgia Salzburger Society, to conduct an archaeological study of the presumed Bethany Cemetery site. This work was desired so that a monument honoring the earliest colonial residents of Bethany who were buried in the cemetery could be erected. Although convincing historical evidence as to the location of the cemetery was presented to this author by Raymond Davis, no physical evidence for the existence of the cemetery had been gathered. The goal of the archaeological research project at the Bethany cemetery was simple--could the graves be located by archaeological techniques? Did the area that had been identified as a cemetery through Davis's historical research contain human burials associated with the colonial settlement of Bethany? Did the cemetery also contain later graves? We hoped to achieve this goal with no destruction of human remains.

Field Methods

Archaeological investigations were confined to a 1.76 acre tract that had been deeded to the Georgia Salzburger Society by Mrs. Daisy Rahn (Figure 3.). This area was logged and windrowed during the mid 1980s, and all surface evidence of the cemetery was destroyed. Prior to our fieldwork, the site was plowed and stumps and other debris were removed.

The archaeological study began with the removal of topsoil (or the plow-disturbed soil zone) from four areas. This was accomplished with the aid of a Gradall provided by Effingham County. These areas included an area near the center selected for construction of a large memorial which was designated Block 1, and three exploratory trenches along the outer margin of the tract which were designated Blocks 2, 3, and 4. In addition, a small area was hand-stripped of topsoil, and it was designated Block 5.

The remainder of the tract was sampled by 18 shovel tests spaced at 20 m intervals. Each test was excavated to a minimum depth of 35 cm below ground surface (BS). The entire contents of each test were screened through 1/4 inch hardware cloth. The location of each test was determined using a metric tape and hand held compass.

Faint soil discolorations were examined as potential graves. A metal detector also was used to aid in locating metal associated with the graves. Grave outlines were identified only in the central area where the monument was to be placed. The location of the proposed monument was shifted as a result.

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The most clearly defined stain was partially excavated to determine if it contained human remains, which it did, and it was designated Burial 1. Once the pit was confirmed as containing a human burial, the Burial was photographed, sketched, and, following a brief religious ceremony, the grave was backfilled. No human remains were removed from the grave, and great care was taken to avoid disturbing the skeletal remains. A representative sample of burial artifacts were collected as an aid in dating the burial.

A plan map was made showing the outlines of 11 probable human graves within the machine stripped area (Figure 4). Copies of this map were sent to the Bethany Cemetery Restoration Committee so that historically authentic wooden gravemarkers, dubbed "tombsticks", could be erected at the head and foot of each grave.

Laboratory Methods

All artifacts were returned to Athens, Georgia for processing. The artifacts were cleaned and catalogued. Since only a very few artifacts were collected from the project, a simple artifact analysis was conducted. All artifacts were identified and described as to raw material, function, and time period. A metal coffin handle was submitted to Jerald Ledbetter for cleaning and stabilization at Southeastern Archeological Services metal conservation facilities in Athens. Graphics were prepared by Rita Folse Elliott.

The Bethany Cemetery site was recorded as an official archaeological site in the Georgia Master Site Files at the University of Georgia. The site was recommended as potentially eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP).

Curation

All artifacts, notes, field analysis forms, maps, photographs, artifact analysis sheets, and other field records of the project are temporarily housed in the office of the Georgia Salzburger Society within the main building of the New Ebenezer Retreat pending the creation of a more appropriate curatorial facility which is planned for Ebenezer. In the absence of any cataloguing and accessioning system at the existing Georgia Salzburger Society Museum, a system was created for labeling the artifacts. Under this system artifacts from the 1989 Bethany Project were designated by a 4. followed by the bag number.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The topsoil was removed from five areas within the 1.76 acre tract. Eleven probable graves were identified during the project (See figures 3 & 4). All were located within the central area of the alleged Bethany Cemetery in Block 1. No burials were found in Blocks 2, 3, 4, or 5. No eighteenth- or nineteenth-century artifacts were found by shovel testing, although two tests contained recent artifacts. The surrounding soil matrix in Block 1 was a slightly darker yellow brown sand than the grave fill. This distinction between the grave fill and surrounding subsoil was extremely subtle and difficult to distinguish. Burials 1 and 2 were easily recognized by the yellowish orange sandy clay content in the fill, but the remaining nine graves contained very little clay. Grave outlines suggest that both hexagonal (or pinch-toe) and rectangular coffins are present, with the hexagonal type being more common. The grave outlines consisted of two groupings: Group 1) eight graves oriented with their long axis east-west and; Group 2) three graves with their long axis north-south. Table 2 presents measurements and other recorded variables for the burial sample.

Group 1 included four probable adults, three probable adolescents or small adults, and one probable child. Group 2 included two probable children and one of indeterminate age. Grave outlines suggest that hexagonal coffins are associated with this group.

One grave designated Burial 1 was partially excavated. This excavation was carried to a point where human osteological remains (bones) were identified, the burial was sketched in plan view and profile, and was photographed (Figures 5 & 6.). The grave was then immediately backfilled.

At the base of the plow disturbed soil zone, Burial 1 was visible as a distinct soil discoloration. The grave shaft suggested a hexagonal coffin, and this was confirmed by excavation. This grave measured 2.2 m east-west x 90 cm north-south.

The coffin was hexagonal in outline, a style most common prior to the 1850s (Blakely and Beck 1982:188). The coffin wood in Burial 1 was bound using two types of nails machine cut square nails (dating after 1790) and hand wrought nails (probably manufactured prior to 1850). Even after the invention of mass produced machine cut square nails, wrought nails continued to be used, and were, in fact, more expensive than manufactured nails in Georgia (Jerald Ledbetter, personal communication 1989). No wire nails (produced in large quantities after 1880) were found which supports a pre-1900 date.

The ornate coffin bail type handle found with Burial 1 at Bethany was constructed of a cast base white metal and was coated with zinc to give it a shiny, silvery appearance (Figure 7.). This handle was fastened to the coffin with four iron wood screws. Wood screws are not particularly datable, but they were not hand wrought indicating a nineteenth-century, or later, association. There were probably a set of six identical handles associated with Burial 1, but only one was removed. This coffin handle is illustrated in Figure 7.

A single opaque white glass 4-hole button was recovered from above the thoracic region, and probably had been attached to a man's shirt. This button type is more prevalent after the mid-nineteenth century.

This grave probably contains the remains of an adult, approximately 5 feet 11 inches in height. Since the skeletal remains were left largely undisturbed, no detailed study of the bone was conducted. There are no historical records that have been located thus far that would allow a firm identity of these corpse.

Discussion

Although many historic graves have been excavated in Georgia, most have been moved by grave relocation companies who held no interest in forensic research. Consequently, we know amazingly little about Christian mortuary behavior from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In fact, so few cemeteries in the United States have been excavated by professional archaeologists, that dating the age of graves can be very difficult. Most previous cemetery studies in Georgia date to the 1980s (e.g. Blakely and Beck 1982; Wood et al. 1986; Garrow and Symes 1985, 1987; Garrow 1987). As late as the mid-1980s, historic graves within the Richard B. Russell Reservoir were removed by a grave relocation company and no scientific research was allowed. One previous grave excavation in Effingham County was conducted (Sue Mullins-Moore personal communication, 1988). Although the dead town of Old Ebenezer was searched for traces of the colonial cemetery, this search was unproductive (Larry Babits, personal communication 1984).

Cemetery excavations in Georgia and South Carolina provide clues to the age of Burial 1 at Bethany. The hexagonal coffin type dates prior to 1870 and is uncommon after 1850 (Blakely and Beck 1982; Garrow 1987). At a cemetery in Talbot County, Georgia, (Garrow and Symes 1987), hexagonal coffin forms were assigned a date of no later than the 1850s, while rectangular coffins were dated to ca. 1900 or slightly later. Garrow (1987:10) identified a hexagonal coffin with an associated headstone date of 1855. Wood et. al (1986) examined a grave population at the Mt. Gilead Cemetery at Fort Benning (circa 1832-1849). At the Mt. Gilead cemetery, both coffin rectangular and hexagonal coffin

types were found, and coffin hardware was extremely rare.

At the Windsor Hill plantation in Charleston County, South Carolina, South (1977) examined a small grave population that dated to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (1796-1832) where only hexagonal coffins were found. At least one of these graves had wrought iron coffin handles. Both wrought nails and machine cut nails (produced after 1790) were found at the Windsor Hill cemetery.

This Bethany specimen is a bail type coffin handle identical to a coffin handle recovered by Garrow at the Nancy Creek site which was dated to 1893 by an associated headstone (Garrow 1987:14). Garrow (1987) places the use of bail type coffin handles after 1870 at Nancy Creek. This style of handle has been dated in South Carolina between 1860 and 1900 (Trinkley and HackerNorton 1984:7, 11-12). Garrow (1987) noted that coffin hardware, beyond simple hinges, were not associated with the hexagonal coffins at Nancy Creek. Burial 1 at Bethany is an exceptional case.

Burial 1 has a hexagonal coffin shape that is generally regarded as pre-1850 and a coffin handle style that has been tentatively dated after 1860, but pre-1900. The square nails used in the coffin construction include wrought and machine cut varieties. No wire nails, common on sites dating after 1880, were found within Block 1. This strongly suggests that the cemetery was waning in use by 1880. Both wrought and machine cut square nails were used in Georgia during the mid-nineteenth century, although wrought nails are generally uncommon after 1850. Given these date ranges, it is estimated that Burial 1 was interred sometime between 1850 and 1880.

The area examined by this study was identified through historical research as the colonial period Bethany cemetery. It was known in recent memory as the Crews or Cruise [Kraus] cemetery. According to an elderly local informant, Virgil Zoeller, who was told by his father, people from the surrounding community were buried in this cemetery as recent as the 1880s or 1890s. No one alive remembers a burial in this cemetery during their lifetime, although several people recall seeing wooden grave markers within the graveyard. These people disagree as to the precise location of these markers, however.

All of the Group 1 graves were oriented within a few degrees of True East. Burial 1 was oriented with the head at the western end of the tomb with the body lying facing upward. The grave outline of Burial 1 was slightly wider on the western end than the eastern end. Four other graves in Group 1 shared this characteristic suggesting a similar body entombment plan. At least four rows (oriented north-south) of graves are apparent in Group 1. From east to west, Row 1 includes Burials 10 and 11, Row 2 includes Burials 6 and 8; Row 3 includes Burial 5; and row 4 includes Burials 1 and 3. Burial 9 is the only grave in Group 1 that is inconsistent with the rows. Burials appear to be widely spaced within the rows, possibly indicating that crowding was not characteristic of the cemetery.

The Group 2 graves were oriented nearly perpendicular to the Group 1 graves, or along a nearly True North axis. The northern end of two of these graves were slightly wider than the southern end implying that the head in each was located to the north.

The total extent of burials within the Bethany cemetery was not discovered. Graves were not found over the entire 1.76 acre tract, however. The machine stripped trenches and the hand excavated areas (Blocks 2-5) yielded no evidence of human remains or subsurface features. The density of graves within Block 1 was one grave per 10.5 square meters. This estimate may be slightly lower than the actual amount since the graves were extremely difficult to recognize and some may have been missed within Block 1. Given this density, a conservative estimate places at least 75 burials in unexcavated portions of the cemetery. This grave density projection is based on an estimated dimension of 30 x 30 m for the cemetery, or 900 square meters. Given the abundance of wrought nails in Block 1, it is quite likely that this burial population includes the remains of the earliest settlers associated with the Bethany colony, as well as others buried during the nineteenth century.

Summary

Bethany cemetery is a significant cultural resource and it is recommended eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The site has been recorded in the Master Archaeological Site Files at the University of Georgia. The role of Bethany in the colonization of Georgia, and the preserved mortuary data it contains lend to its significance and value as an archaeological site. The planned reconstruction of the cemetery by relocating the graves will not alter, or threaten the integrity of the human remains, rather, this action will insure protection of the site from future threat of development. Any additional archaeological research involving disturbance of the skeletal remains should be preceded by a comprehensive research design subject to approval by the Office of the State Archaeologist and the State Historic Preservation Office, Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Through the combined efforts of many interested individuals and group organizations, the Bethany cemetery has been relocated (Figures 8 & 9.). Descendants of the people that were laid to rest in this hallowed ground during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries now have the opportunity to visit this historic piece of real estate and muse about their ancestors. The archaeological remains at Bethany are an important remnant of our shared cultural heritage, not only for the descendants of its German speaking settlers, but for all Americans who seek answers to their questions about the past.

-END-

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