

4. A POSSIBILITY OF A CEMETERY

*Surface indications raised the possibility
that part of the site had been
used as a cemetery or other domestic purpose.*

Human burials are a serious planning concern for construction projects. If an unmarked human burial is identified during construction, it can cause serious delays. Delaware law requires time-consuming procedures to be followed when unmarked burials are disturbed, even if it means delaying a project. Prudence, therefore, demands that any possibility of a cemetery should be investigated as early as possible during the planning process.

In this project area, two places were identified as possible cemetery locations. One lay in the middle of the initially proposed roadway, on state property; the other is near the apartment project pool, on the edge of the proposed right of way and probably not to be impacted.

MODELS OF CEMETERY SITES

Private cemetery locations in Delaware follow a fairly well defined location pattern, described very well by Bachman and Catts (1990: 81-100).

Their study included an assessment of cemetery location relative to farmhouses. Of 21 sites assessed, cemeteries were located from 100 feet to 1600 feet from the houses, for an average of 678.5 feet. A group of 34 cemeteries in Sussex studied by others yielded an average house-to-cemetery distance of 832 feet.

Unmarked rural burials were the rule, rather than the exception, in Delaware. The Loockerman family burial ground elsewhere on the Range property was unmarked during the

eighteenth century, but eventually stones were set on later burials. The Rodney and Brown/Graham cemeteries in Jones Neck probably never had formal markers except the boundary ditch. Poor people probably did not regularly have permanent inscribed stone markers until after the Civil War, when the government began providing markers for Union veterans.

Bachman and Catts concluded: "Thus, the number of gravestones present on the Delaware landscape of today may be drastically under-representative of the number of actual interments in rural areas." It is not unusual for a cemetery to contain only one or two tombstones, but many unmarked burials.

SITE ON STATE PROPERTY

Between the volleyball court and the fence line was an overgrown area, with a thick ground cover of *vinca minor*, commonly known as periwinkle. This plant is typically associated with cemeteries, where it is traditionally planted to provide low-maintenance ground cover.

Because of its association with



Figure 21: Before excavation, the area behind the volleyball court was cleared of ground cover and trash.

acre exchange is unusual enough to raise suspicions. The quarter-acre is now mostly occupied by the premises of the apartment office. The proposed road will cross a corner of the tract, well below its highest elevation.

APPROACHES TO CEMETERIES

There are many approaches to investigating putative cemetery sites. Generally speaking, the methods fall into two categories: excavation or remote sensing, which typically are used in tandem.

Remote sensing techniques include ground-penetrating radar, probe-rod testing, electrical resistivity, thermal imaging, and dowsing. One of these methods will typically be employed before any subsurface testing.

Dowsing is the most controversial of these. Although it frequently is dismissed as magical mumbo-jumbo, there are those who swear by it. First introduced into the serious literature by Ivor Noël Hume, it is cheap enough to try, if only to test its reliability (Noël Hume 1969:39). Certainly, Noël Hume's stature as one of the preeminent figures in American archaeology confers some degree of



Figure 22: Under the eyes of visiting DelDOT staff, the backhoe uncovered rectilinear dark stains in the soil below the topsoil.



Figure 23: Behind the volleyball court, the site was scraped with a backhoe-equipped tractor. The front blade was deployed in a near-vertical position, as if it were a very large trowel. The tractor backed up during the final scrape, to keep from driving over the newly-scraped exposed earth and leaving tire marks that could confuse interpretation.

legitimacy, and he continues to believe in its efficacy (Noël Hume 2001:297).

A dowser bends two pieces of wire to form a pair of hand-held pivoting wands that are carried in front of the dowser. Commonly they pivot in bottles, which the dowser carries upright. As he or she walks across the site, it is alleged that the wires will cross as the dowser walks across a grave or other major ground disturbance. Utility companies, electricians, and plumbers typically use dowsing to identify buried pipes.

Some people are supposed to have a special aptitude for dowsing, while others never get results. Among archaeologists, the mention of dowsing will excite animated debate. During the course of the present project, the author asked the HISTARCH on-line discussion group, with more than 800 members, to comment on the subject. Dozens of archaeologists expressed views on both sides, but no consensus evolved from the debate.

One of the three volunteers proclaimed that he has no talent as a dowser, even though his grandfather had been an accomplished water witch. He found not a single hit. The second volunteer had never tried it before. The third subject, this author, had some successful experiences with dowsing.

The first-time dowser experienced a number of hits, marked by round dots on Figure 25. The square marks are the hits experienced by the author.

The results do not constitute a resounding endorsement of dowsing as a cemetery analysis tool. Maybe results depend on something that is not measurable, such as belief or some undiscovered "animal magnetism" or elusive aura. In order to definitively test dowsing it will be necessary to enlist a number of experimenters for a controlled experiment on a variety of sites. The first obstacle, as we discovered, may be the difficulty of finding people willing to be seen, and even photographed, walking repeatedly across a field concentrating on bent coathangers.

After the dowsing, the site was stripped. The topsoil was homogenous brown, sandy, root-filled and loose. At the bottom, this soil gave way to a subsoil with more clay. This soil layer resembled that found in nearby unit 1, illustrated on Figure 14, page 19. The soil was marked with lamellae, which are generally identified as markers for relatively older soils.



Figure 26: Viewed after it was backfilled, the initial machine-cut trench still hid secrets that were not within the scope of a Phase I investigation. The identified features were located to the left, near the tree line. At the Phase III] level, it was necessary to remove some trees and the volleyball court. Even though the court was an active part of the apartment complex, it was on state property.

This apparent old soil layer was exposed for the full length of the trench. Several brown features could be seen clearly penetrating the lower level. These features were darker than any of the topsoils surviving in the area. Unfortunately, the small size of the trench did not afford a complete view of any of the disturbances.

These disturbances were clearly manmade. They could have been burials, but they could just as easily be old planting holes or privy pits, or