

Tucson Citizen

Archaeologists uncover 500 graves downtown

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- *Territorial-era soldiers, civilians to be reburied*

Ever walk around downtown Tucson by yourself at night and feel as if you weren't alone?

Maybe you weren't.

More than 500 burials have been uncovered in nearly forgotten Territorial-era civilian and military cemeteries just east of Stone Avenue, between Toole Avenue and Council Street, as part of a historical research project at the future site of the county and city's Joint Courts Complex.

Pima County hired Statistical Research Inc. to conduct the archaeological dig at the 4.2-acre site, which started late last year, before the area is covered by the courts complex.

The dead are being accorded as much dignity as possible. Photographs of the grounds are barred by Pima County.

Workers at the site - researchers for the archaeological consultant, equipment operators, utilities workers - have been given sensitivity training for handling human remains and artifacts revealed during the dig, said Roger Anyon, program manager for the Pima County Cultural Resources and Historic Preservation Office. For example, training stressed the need to not joke around and to take the project seriously.

"We are going to rebury all of the individuals we find in the research area,"

Anyon noted.

The cemeteries were in use from the 1860s until about 1916. The military cemetery for the then-Camp Lowell of the U.S. cavalry, at what is now Armory Park, saw its first burials in the mid-1860s.

The National Cemetery also included the civilian cemetery, which continued to see burials 15 years into the 20th century, Scott O'Mack, principal investigator for the archaeological consultant, noted recently.

Military remains likely will be reburied at Fort Huachuca. Civilians will be reburied elsewhere.

Researchers are finding an unexpectedly high number of burials in the Stone Avenue- Council Street area, O'Mack said.

By the time the field work stops, possibly in October, up to 1,100 graves may have been found and the remains removed for storage, research and, in most civilian cases, reburial at All Faiths Cemetery, 2151 S. Avenida los Reyes.

Up to 95 percent of the remains likely will never be identified. Church records were the primary source of burial information, but were not detailed enough for researchers to determine who was placed where underground.

"If there were grave markers, they were removed or made out of wood" and vanished over time, Anyon said.

Coffins, when used, likely were simple pine affairs and have all but disintegrated.

"All that is left is usually a stain," Anyon said.

Remains that can be identified will be offered to any living descendants in the area for private memorial services and burials.

DNA testing might aid in identifying individuals buried in the cemeteries. But it won't be done because of the cost of using it in more than 500 cases, Anyon said. Specific cost estimates were not available.

The project was given an extension by the Pima County Board of Supervisors Tuesday. Board members approved an additional \$6.4 million for research of data unearthed that is to continue into 2010.

The cemeteries were in use when Arizona was still a territory of the United States and the railroad had just arrived in Tucson.

The railroad opened the territory and the Old Pueblo to a period of speedy growth, requiring the expansion of city limits to eventually include the burial areas.

Life was tough then. Medicines were still relatively rare and largely ineffective against serious diseases.

Tucson had at least two major outbreaks of deadly disease during the period the cemeteries were in use.

Smallpox and influenza arrived in separate epidemics. Accounts from the period indicate that the elderly and young were especially at risk and died in large numbers.

"We are finding a lot of infant and juvenile burials," Marlesa Gray, SRI project manager, noted.

"This was the frontier. Life was hard."

Both cemeteries, in which 1,800 to 2,000 burials took place, were outside early Tucson's city limits. Eventually, the city spread northeast and the cemeteries were no longer used. Later, they were covered up by development, mostly mercantile businesses and residences, Gray said.

The research team also has uncovered foundations of homes, several of which belonged to prominent Tucson families.

Left behind by merchants and residents of the neighborhood that sprang up atop the gravesites were household artifacts such as early light bulbs, a bottle that once held tequila, newspapers, and trash pits and privies that served as convenient areas for trash disposal. *Islanders and Mainlanders: Prehistoric Context for the Southern California Coast and Channel Islands*

- *Sixty Years of Mogollan Archaeology*