

# WOODLAND CEMETERY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN BURIAL GROUND HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROJECT

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Woodland Cemetery stone entrance sign near Memorial Stadium's West End Zone. Photograph by Marquise Drayton.

The Woodland Cemetery Preservation Project seeks to tell the stories of the known and previously unknown burials located in Woodland Cemetery on the Clemson University campus. Through research and community engagement we intend to uncover as much as we can about this historic space and to properly commemorate all who are buried here.

In this issue we will provide information about construction on Woodland Cemetery, inform on the legacy of Professor Carrel Cowan-Ricks at Clemson University, provide research, community engagement updates, and highlight some upcoming local events.

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## Construction began on Woodland Cemetery enhancements

Fencing was established on February 13, 2023, as construction commenced on a \$3.5 million enhancement project at Woodland Cemetery. The scope of work includes relocating existing walkways and service drives and adding lighting and cameras to improve accessibility and security in and around the area.

Regularly visiting the cemetery is limited during this period to keep the construction environment safe, and the contractor completes improvements to include pathways that do not obscure burials. The University is working with the contractor to develop some days of entry during the project for visitation. University officials have been in direct contact with family members of those interred at the cemetery.

Individuals seeking access to see a grave between February and the anticipated conclusion of construction in July should email [cemetery@clemson.edu](mailto:cemetery@clemson.edu) to

schedule a time and ensure safe access to the gravesite.

As construction is ongoing, signage near the cemetery displays the project's core tenets:

- Existing burials in Woodland Cemetery will not be disturbed;
- We will honor and respect all graves through an appropriate preservation plan; and
- All burials must be consistent with the Guiding Principles, including archeological oversight and utilizing appropriate methods.

Special care has been taken to instruct the contractor and all subcontractors of the importance of this project and to emphasize respect for the sacred space as they conduct their work.



Gated signage to alert the public on the Woodland Cemetery Pathways Enhancement Project at Clemson University. Photograph by Marquise Drayton.

## Cemetery History Series #3

### Professor Carrel Cowan-Ricks' Legacy at Clemson University and the 1990s Archeological Dig for the African American Burial Ground in Woodland Cemetery

This is part of an ongoing series highlighting various aspects of Woodland Cemetery history.

Carrel Cowan-Ricks began her journey in Historical Archaeology in 1980 when she enrolled at Wayne State University to study Anthropology. By 1990 Cowan-Ricks entered the Anthropology Ph.D. program at Wayne State with a desire to study African American cemeteries and burial customs. At this time, Cowan-Ricks was one of three African American women with a graduate degree in archaeology in the United States and very likely the world.

Clemson University hired Cowan-Ricks in 1991 to locate unmarked African American Burials in Woodland Cemetery. These burials include the enslaved peoples of the Fort Hill Plantation; sharecroppers, domestic workers, and tenant farmers who worked at Fort Hill during Reconstruction; and convicted laborers who constructed the early buildings on Clemson's campus. To aid her in the search for unmarked burials, Cowan-Ricks recruited volunteers from the history, education, engineering, and architecture departments, along with African American high school and middle school students, and local community members.

During the fall of 1991, Cowan-Ricks and her team surveyed the entire west slope of Woodland Cemetery to locate evidence of burials. Her plan did not involve disinterring any possible graves but finding evidence of burial shafts. Cowan-Ricks noted that the purpose of the Cemetery Hill Archaeological Project was to memorialize, honor, and protect the enslaved and convict burials on Cemetery Hill. During these excavations, the team uncovered

a number of artifacts, including indigenous projectile points and shell casings fired at military funerals.

During the 1991-1993 excavations Cowan-Ricks concluded the burial ground was much larger than anyone ever thought and that she would need to dig deeper to locate the graves; thus, she would need more time to locate the burials. However, in 1993, Cowan-Ricks was fired from Clemson University due to budget cuts. She would likely have found the graves if she had been granted more time. Between July 2020 and January 2022, more than 500 unmarked burials believed to be those of African Americans were located in the cemetery using ground penetrating radar.

In addition to locating the unmarked burials, Cowan-Ricks also aimed to reconstruct the population of the enslaved peoples during the Fort Hill period. She noted that census data at that time severely undercounted the amount of enslaved individuals on the Fort Hill property and wanted an accurate representation of the population. Cowan-Ricks

also researched the traditions and customs of the enslaved people of Fort Hill and gave a presentation entitled "African American Plantation Culture" that detailed the daily lives of the enslaved people. She noted African American cultivation practices, pottery making and styles, ritual and worship, and day-to-day tasks they would have performed.

Cowan-Ricks continued to show her passion for archaeology after her time at Clemson University. She served on the Detroit Museum's Black Historical sites committee and at the Society for Historical Archaeology. During her time at the Detroit Museum, she organized a symposium entitled "Is Historical Archaeology White? Prospects for Minority Contribution." She continued to push the status quo of what traditional archaeology looked like in the United States at that time and advocated for more African American and women voices in the field. Cowan-Ricks also contributed to many archaeological projects, including the Center for Field Research in Watertown, Massachusetts. During this time, Cowan-Ricks' battle with Lupus was growing stronger, and on January 11, 1997, she lost this battle with the disease.

Cowan-Ricks was a groundbreaking archaeologist who was rewriting what archaeology looked like during this time. Cowan-Ricks also represented a number of people while practicing in the field; she has given strength to aspiring archaeologists who are African American, women, and those who are battling a chronic condition.



Carrel Cowan-Ricks speaking to the news media in Woodland Cemetery at Clemson University. Source: Clemson University Special Collections and Archives.

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### Cemetery History Series #2

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One of her life missions was to add more African American and women voices into the archaeological narrative. With her work, we have the knowledge about Woodland Cemetery that we do today. Cowan-Ricks continues to inspire each and every one of us to protect the sacred space that is Cemetery Hill.

Currently, Dr. David Markus and I

have been working on cataloging the artifacts recovered from the 1991-1993 excavations that Cowan-Ricks led. The artifacts had been uncleaned and not cataloged, only being stored in plastic bags that were not useful in protecting the artifacts. This process has included cleaning all of the artifacts and completing an inventory. Dr. Markus and I have also assigned the artifacts

with field specimen numbers that will aid in finding a specific artifact. We have also upgraded all the artifact bags and assigned the artifacts with specific tags. Our hope for this project is to fully process the artifacts to better understand what was found during the excavations on Cemetery Hill.

by Alleyia Bailey  
Undergraduate Research Assistant

### Research Update

Dr. Mandi Barnard has been examining photograph collections at Clemson Special Collections and Archive to enhance project publications. She has also been working on antebellum history of Fort Hill Plantation to recover the names of the enslaved and their lived experiences under chattel slavery.

Dr. Sara Collini is working with the undergraduate students in the Creative Inquiry class for the cemetery project. They recently completed their research project proposals for this semester. The class, along with several members of the cemetery project team, also took a field trip to the Hopewell Plantation Cemetery off of Cherry Road near the Morgan Poultry Plant at Clemson. There are three marked graves in this cemetery, in addition to several unknown graves marked with fieldstones. The graves date back to the 19th century and are believed to belong to enslaved and free African Americans with ties to the Pickens' family Hopewell Plantation, later owned by the Cherry family.

Deborah Robinson, Genealogist, is continuing to develop the family history program, building family trees, and visiting sites to discover context that connect people to Clemson. She met with Family Search International, joined the Old Pendleton District chapter of the South Carolina Genealogy Society, visited the Hopewell Plantation Cemetery with the Creative Inquiry Team, and toured sites on campus including the Power Station to investigate coal in the smokestacks which African American wage



Unmarked graves located with Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) at Hopewell Plantation Cemetery. Photo by Dr. Sara Collini.

workers helped maintain before and after the 1950s. A genealogy page on the project website is also being developed.

Dr. Rhondda Thomas made a presentation on community engagement strategies at the Universities Studying Slavery South Carolina Conference hosted by Francis Marion University in February 2023. She also visited a historic Black cemetery in Florence, SC. to examine African and African American burial traditions and the site of the state penitentiary in Columbia where convicted laborers who helped build Clemson were incarcerated and the penitentiary cemetery were some were buried after they died in the prison yard.

## Community Engagement Update

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On February 3, 2023, Marquise Drayton presented research with the cemetery team at the Universities Studying Slavery in South Carolina Conference at Francis Marion University in Florence, SC. His presentation, "Put 'Em in the Dirt," explores college football's obsession with deadly traditions and the truth behind who is left behind without proper burial rites. He compares each collegiate sport's morbid folklore at Clemson University, the University of Georgia, Florida State University, and the University of Alabama with their campus cemeteries' treatment. The proximity that the college sporting venues has near campus cemeteries is something that Drayton examines as well.

On February 10, Drayton represented the Woodland Cemetery and African American Burial Ground Historic Preservation Project at Seneca's 11th Annual Black History Month Luncheon at the Seneca River Association

Family Life Institute where Dr. Thomas also spoke about the project. Later that day, he led a virtual tour of Woodland Cemetery for Clemson's Phi Sigma Pi National Honor Fraternity.

Several speaking engagements he's participated in during Black History Month 2023 included a lecture at the Clemson Area African American Museum on February 15, dinner for Peace Congregational Church in Clemson on February 19, and lunch at North Anderson Community Church in Anderson, SC, on February 22.

On February 19, he volunteered during the Call My Name 5K Run



Marquise Drayton presenting at the USS Conference in South Carolina at Francis Marion University in Florence, SC. Photograph by Dr. Sara Collini.

coordinated by Dr. Thomas and Clemson Athletics. Stationed at the Woodland Cemetery entrance, he helped encourage runners and walkers to finish their historical trek of Clemson's campus.

Drayton and Dr. Thomas completed adding the last teal ribbons to highlight the white flags representing unmarked Black burials in Woodland Cemetery earlier this month. On February 7, he joined Dr. Collini's Creative Inquiry class in visiting the Hopewell Plantation Cemetery at Clemson University's Morgan Poultry Center. Then on February 21, he joined them again to visit Old Stone Church and cemetery. Drayton is working with the cemetery team on a group effort to create a holistic guide handbook for Woodland Cemetery tour training. Also, Drayton is working with the cemetery team on a group effort to create a holistic guide handbook for Woodland Cemetery tour training.

Lastly, the Commission on the Black Experience at Clemson University voted Drayton in as a new associate staff member.

## Upcoming Events

More detailed information and registration for Zoom events can be found on the cemetery web page and our social media. Email [mdrayto@clemson.edu](mailto:mdrayto@clemson.edu) to suggest an event or get involved. Please also visit the websites for the [Clemson Area African American Museum](#) and [Bertha Lee Strickland Cultural Museum](#) to find other events going on in the community.

**2023 Carrel Cowan-Ricks Day of Remembrance, March 29, 2023 @ 12 PM (Student Luncheon in Freeman Hall Annex Lobby Area), 6 PM (Keynote Speaker/Panel Discussion in 260 Humanities Hall), Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29631**

Please join the Woodland Cemetery and African American Burial Ground Historic Preservation Project at Clemson University to commemorate Carrel

Cowan-Ricks Day of Remembrance during Women's Celebration Month on March 29, 2023. Each year we honor Professor Carrel Cowan-Ricks as one of a few Black female archeologists nationwide in the early 1990s and for accelerating our current-day work for the Woodland Cemetery Preservation Project.

A luncheon will occur in Freeman Hall's Annex Lobby Area at noon. This

gathering mainly targets students but is also open to the public. They can converse about archeology and community outreach with the main event's keynote speaker, Dr. Alexandra Jones.

At 6 PM, inside Humanities Hall 260, Dr. Jones will deliver her lecture "Sustainable Community Archaeology and Morningstar Tabernacle No #88 Cemetery." A panel discussion of those who worked with Professor Cowan-Ricks

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## Upcoming Events

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and benefited from her research will follow.

**Alexandra Jones, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Archaeology in the Community,** is an education leader focused on community outreach and service. She completed her Ph.D. in Historical Archaeology at the University of California, Berkeley in 2010. Her work focuses on African diaspora archaeology, community archaeology and archaeology outreach. Jones has been an archaeology educator for more than 16 years focused on making archaeological knowledge accessible to all. She also worked for the PBS television show Time Team America as the Archaeology Field School Director, where she directed field schools for junior high and high school students. Her current research projects are the Estate Little Princess Archaeological Project in St. Croix, USVI and the Morningstar Tabernacle No.88 Moses Cemetery in Cabin John, MD. Dr. Jones serves as the President-Elect for the Society of Black Archaeologists and she serves as the Chair for the US Cultural Property Advisory Committee, the Board of Directors of the St. Croix Archaeological Society and is an Academic Trustee for the Archaeological Institute of America.



## Meet the Research and Community Engagement

- Dr. Rhondda Thomas, Calhoun Lemon Professor of Literature, Call My Name Faculty Director, and Coordinator of Research and Community Engagement for the African American Burial Ground and Woodland Cemetery Historic Preservation Project
- Sally Mauldin, Board of Trustees Office Staff
- Dr. Mandi Barnard, Research Historian
- Dr. Sara Collini, Postdoctoral Fellow in University History
- Deborah Robinson, Genealogist
- Dr. David Markus, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminal Justice, Registered Professional Archaeologist 5174
- Marquise Drayton, Community Engagement Assistant
- Ka'tia Reyes, Undergraduate Communications Assistant
- Jessica Foster, Graduate Research Assistant
- Alleyia Bailey, Undergraduate Research Assistant
- Lucas DeBenedetti, Undergraduate Research Assistant

## And Meet Our Community Engagement Council

- From Anderson: J. T. Boseman, Jack Henderson, Nekaun Swinger, Dr. Beatrice Thompson
- From Clemson-Central: Rosa Grayden; Dalphine Jameson; Pastor Dr. Zackary Johnson
- From Pendleton: Terence Hassan
- From Oconee County: Shelby Henderson; Kathy Jenkins; Helen Rosemond-Saunders

# Questions?

Questions about the cemetery project?

Email [afamburials@clemson.edu](mailto:afamburials@clemson.edu) or call (864) 656-8855