



## Physical Anthropology Section - 2013

### H56 Our Place in the Sun—Investigations Into the Boot Hill Cemetery at the Florida School for Boys

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how to use multiple methods of remote sensing, archaeological field methods, archival research, and forensic interviews to locate clandestine burials. Attendees will also learn about methods for reconstructing a historical narrative for humanitarian missions.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community and others by offering research into the lives and deaths of more than 80 children, which have previously not been reported. This research was undertaken as a humanitarian initiative for families searching for missing relatives. The results of the initial phase of this effort are reported here and have the potential to impact future investigations into the school.

In 2011, the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys (a.k.a., “Florida School for Boys”), located in Marianna, Florida, was closed after more than a 100-year history of controversy regarding abuse, financial scandals, and allegations of murder. The Florida State Reform School first opened in 1900 and is located on 1,400 acres of land. Children were committed to the school for minor offenses such as “incurability” or “truancy” or for serious crimes such as “theft and murder.” Originally, the school housed children as young as six years old, including both males and females. Beginning in 1901, reports surfaced of children chained to walls in irons, being brutally whipped, and hired out for labor. During the first thirteen years of operation, there were more than six state-led investigations. Allegations of beatings, rapes, and whippings by more than 300 men, called the “White House Boys,” led to a more recent investigation in 2008 – 2009 by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE). The FDLE report cites newspaper and archival resources and lists 81 deaths that occurred.

Ledgers found in storage, newspaper reports, and death certificates researched through this project show 86 deaths resulted from 1911 – 1973. Among these, records indicate that 21 individuals were buried in the cemetery (1914 – 1952) and nine entries indicate that the bodies were “shipped” away. Therefore, the final depositions of more than 50 children are still unknown. In 1996, 31 metal crosses were placed within the current boundaries of the Boot Hill Cemetery; however, their locations do not correspond to actual interments.

The purpose of this research was to conduct a pedestrian survey, map the Boot Hill Cemetery, and to research the history of the site to determine the number, location, and identity of graves. Specifically, the initial goals of this project were to: (1) document and map the cemetery; (2) identify graves through multiple forensic and archaeological methods, including remote sensing using ground-penetrating radar; (3) research the site’s history, creation, and use based on anthropological methods of field investigation; and, (4) research the identity of those buried in the cemetery and the morbidity and mortality patterns of the decedents.

Through the course of this investigation, the number and location of graves present within the cemetery were determined and the potential presence of multiple burial areas was investigated. Clandestine graves in the wooded areas surrounding the current Boot Hill Cemetery were found as far as 20m from the current site. Moreover, the identity and circumstances surrounding the deaths, based on archival research and forensic interviews, establishes patterns among those who died at the school such as a higher number of African American juveniles, a high number of runaways, and the spread of several infectious disease outbreaks. This presentation will detail the multiple investigative methods used and will provide qualitative results. Further, results from remote sensing followed by archaeological trenching and soil chemical analysis, which clearly demonstrate the presence of burial shafts, will be discussed. Finally, the historical significance of human and civil rights violations in Florida in the area of juvenile justice and the rights of families to have accountability and transparency are discussed.

#### Reference:

1. Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Office of Executive Investigations. Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys Abuse Investigation. Investigative Summary. Case No. EI-73-8455, May 14, 2009.

#### Forensic Archaeology, Forensic Interview, Historic Cemetery