1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Investigation
Proposed Test Excavations and
Additional Geophysical Survey at
Oaklawn Cemetery

Presented to the Public Oversight Committee for Consideration
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Geophysical Results: Sextons Area
Proposed Test Excavations: Goals

1) Establish the presence or absence of human remains;
2) Determine the nature of the interments (if present);
3) Obtain data to help inform the ensuing steps in the investigation—including appropriate recovery efforts.

• No exhumation proposed at this time.
• Any human remains that are uncovered during excavation will be treated respectfully.
• Excavations may only proceed once the appropriate medicolegal documentation has been obtained.
Proposed Testing Plan

• Accommodations will be made to allow safe observation of this phase of the investigation by interested members of the Public Oversight Committee.
• Accommodations will be made to honor requests for ceremonies, prayers, or similar observations that do not otherwise impede the investigation.
• Media access will be coordinated with the City.
• The City will attempt to notify family members of individuals who are interred near the proposed excavation area.
Proposed Testing Plan (con’t.)

• Expose an 8x8-foot area near the center at the base of the geophysical anomaly.

• Mechanical excavation to remove the top layers of soil over the targeted excavation area. Then, excavation will continue by hand.

• Mechanical excavations monitored by 2-3 qualified archaeologists and/or forensic anthropologists.

• Hand-excavations completed by a team of professional forensic anthropologists and/or archaeologists.

• Hand-excavated fill will be screened adjacent to the excavation block.
Proposed Testing Plan (con’t.)

• If burials are present, we will expose the remains adequately to assess:
  • the minimum number of individuals (MNI) in the excavation area;
  • contextual clues for the burial(s);
  • extent to which people were interred in containers (or not); and
  • maintain a state of preservation.
• Other observations may be made depending on the condition of the remains.
Proposed Testing Plan (con’t.)

• Intrusive burials are not expected, but if encountered, accommodations will be made to address them appropriately and with utmost sensitivity.

• If such burials are encountered and they are not associated with a violent event, excavations will be adjusted to leave them in place if possible.

• If removal is necessary to allow continued excavation, such exhumed burials will be re-interred following Oklahoma state laws, preferably within Oaklawn Cemetery according to their existing practices.

• If the remains appear to have been associated with another criminal event, they will be further investigated by law enforcement and Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (Ok SS 21-1168.4).
Proposed Testing Plan (con’t.)

• Mechanical excavation may be accomplished in 1-2 days.
• Hand excavations would likely require an additional 4-8 days.
• Excavations will be covered by tarp at the end of each day and security measures enacted.
• Detailed documentation and total station mapping will be compiled throughout.
• Upon completion of the excavations, geotextile fabric and wood panels (or similar) will be emplaced in a manner to facilitate ease of later re-exavcation.
• The removed overburden will be returned to the excavation block
Proposed Testing Plan (con’t.)

• Daily on-site meetings will be coordinated with interested members of the Public Oversight Committee.

• A summary briefing will be compiled and distributed to the Public Oversight Committee within two days of completion of the test excavations.

• A meeting will be arranged to further discuss the results with the Public Oversight Committee and a timeline for completion of a full report of this phase of the investigations.
Comparative Example

- 19th-century Cemetery at Eastern State Hospital in Lexington, Kentucky
- Larger than the anomaly at Oaklawn
- Roughly 56 x 14 m (~184 x 50 ft)
- 62 individual graves, 28 mass graves with 97 individuals, and comingled remains of 27 individuals (186 total individuals)

Image courtesy of David Pollack, Kentucky Archaeological Survey
Eastern State Hospital Cemetery

• Both single and mass graves present in the cemetery.

Image courtesy of David Pollack and Greg Maggard, Kentucky Archaeological Survey
Eastern State Hospital

- Example of a mass grave associated with cholera epidemic
- \(~7 \times 2\) m (\(~22 \times 6.5\) ft)
- 11 individuals (one was earlier)

Image courtesy of David Pollack and Greg Maggard, Kentucky Archaeological Survey
Coffin Nails

Images courtesy of David Pollack, Kentucky Archaeological Survey
Examples of Personal Adornment

Images courtesy of David Pollack, Kentucky Archaeological Survey
How You Can Help...

• What might your loved one have been wearing the day that they died?
  • Typical attire
  • Suspenders
  • Jewelry
  • Belt with a distinctive buckle
  • Hair combs
  • Pocket knife
Additional Geophysical Survey: Clyde Eddy Area