



Archeology Program

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Revelation in the Woods: Undocumented Cemeteries in Hot Springs National Park

For many Americans, the oldest national park is not Yellowstone, but [Hot Springs National Park](#), located at the southern margin of the Ouachita Mountains in central Arkansas. Congress established a Federal reserve here in 1832, 40 years before Yellowstone, to protect and preserve the natural hot springs for public use. After the Civil War, Hot Springs City, to the south of the park, boomed into a health resort, with many beautiful bathhouses built along the base of Hot Springs Mountain. Since then, Hot Springs has been host to visitors seeking cures or to bathe away their pain. Today's visitors still focus their attention on Bathhouse Row and still take hot water spa treatments in the old tradition. While considerable archeology has taken place in the vicinity of Bathhouse Row (especially in association with historic stabilization), archeology off the beaten path in the park's 5,500 acres of mountainous woodlands has been sporadic and small scale.



Hot Springs' Bathhouse Row in the 1890s.

This state of knowledge changed in 2008, when the Midwest Archeological Center began a five year parkwide inventory. To date, NPS archeology crews have documented prehistoric encampments, novaculite quarries (for making whetstones), historic roads, and dumps. Among the sites visited in 2009 were two cemeteries, abandoned and virtually forgotten. While both have been known for some time, grave locations and characteristics were never recorded in detail. Most of those buried in the cemeteries lie in unmarked graves and even the names of the cemeteries themselves had been lost through time. This report summarizes new information about the cemeteries.

Chalybeate Springs Cemetery

Chalybeate Springs Cemetery was identified in 1967 by the Garland County Historical Society and named after a nearby cold, iron-bearing spring. When the park acquired the property in the late 1970s, rangers noted grave depressions and headstones. Informants suggested that the cemetery was created for burial of Civil War casualties after an onsite skirmish in 1864. Archeological inventory was directed toward determining whether a battle actually occurred here and to record cemetery features in detail.

The cemetery is situated on a narrow wooded ridge and contains at least 49 graves: 27 identified only by depressions, 9 marked with fieldstone borders, and 4 having commercially-made markers (a granite cross-vaulted obelisk and 3 broken tablet markers with 1 tablet accompanied by a fieldstone border). Nine graves have fieldstone headstones, three of these with fieldstone borders.

Only four people buried here have been identified to date. The oldest grave, located three quarters of the way up the slope, has a fieldstone border and marble tablet inscribed

FRANCES, WIL....
son of
C & ML MICHAEL
DIED
AUG. 22 1870
AGED 2y 1m 9d

The 1870 U.S. Census places his parents, Calvin and Lucinda Michael, farmers in Yell County, about 40 miles northwest of Hot Springs. By 1880, the family had moved to Morris, Arkansas, located about 80 miles south of Hot Springs. At this time, they had four children, their ages suggesting that Frances Michael may have been their first child. The Michaels may have brought their toddler son to Hot Springs when he became sick. If so, that hope of cure was unfulfilled.

The newest marked grave occurs near the base of the ridge and has a granite obelisk marked

JAMES M
STEEN
BORN
APR.4 1839
DIED
OCT.25 1907

The NPS online database *Civil War Soldiers and Sailor System* lists Steen as a Corporal in the Confederate 1st Regiment, Arkansas Cavalry, led by "the Intrepid" General Archibald Dobbins. This unit was organized in 1863 and fought a number of battles in Arkansas. Steen had been demoted to Private by the end of the war. The 1870 U.S. Census identifies Steen and his wife, Nancy, as living in Union, Arkansas. The 1880 census records they have moved to Mississippi with their seven children, living with James' 89 year old mother and Nancy's parents. Arkansas land records indicate that Steen filed for a homestead in Searcy County in 1889. This is located about 150 highway miles north of Hot Springs near present day Buffalo National River. The 1900 U.S. Census lists Steen as a farmer living alone in Van Buren County, Arkansas. Steen's headstone indicates his death occurred in the fall of 1907. Had he moved to Hot Springs by that time or did he come to the spas for treatment of an illness?

Two other people are reported buried in Chalybeate Springs Cemetery although we found no markers for them. Franz Wetzler was a German immigrant working as a stone mason in Hot Springs in 1880. Arkansas land records list him as owning seven lots on four blocks in the city. Wetzler died December 16, 1892.

At one time, there may have been a stone for Robbie Lee Heffner in the cemetery. It was recorded in 1988 but apparently hasn't been seen since and we did not see it during our visit. Heffner's stone was inscribed

Robbie Lee
son of J. P. & S. C. Heffner, born May 2, 1892
died Feb. 16, 1893.

Robbie Lee may have been the son of John P. Heffner and Sarah C. Heffner. John and Sarah had moved from Illinois sometime after 1880. The 1900 Census lists the John Heffner as a house carpenter living with Sarah and four children. Robbie Lee would have been their youngest child. By 1908, Heffner had become owner of a lunch stand located next to Bathhouse Row. He died in Hot Springs in 1921.

An intensive metal detection inventory was conducted to determine whether Chalybeate Cemetery was an 1864 skirmish site. No battle-related objects were located but a number of artifacts related to the cemetery were found. Wire nails, woven wire, and a gate pull at the base of the ridge confirm a report that the cemetery had been fenced, the wire nails suggesting fence construction sometime post-1890. Eleven cut nails were found at nine places higher on the cemetery's slopes. Cut nails usually date prior to 1890. A cluster of artifacts at Depression #27 included cut nails, the base of a sun-altered violet glass mug, tin cup fragments, a fragment of a glass lamp chimney, and a pink and white annular whiteware sherd. Together, these items suggest a circa 1880-1890 date for this grave.



Archeologists Thomas Thiessen and Douglas Scott, with Ranger Mark Blaeuer, using metal detectors on the slope of Chalybeate Springs Cemetery.

Lawrence Cemetery

The Lawrence Cemetery site is located just inside the north-central margin of Hot Springs NHL on a relatively flat, sparsely wooded bench at the foot of Sugarloaf Mountain. Park memoranda associate the cemetery with Cedar Glade, a nearby rural African American community (now under Lake Hamilton). Surveyors recorded 27 graves tightly clustered in 5 to 6 rows, 1 with a commercially manufactured stone tablet, 1 with a homemade cement tablet, 8 graves with fieldstone markers, and 17 graves identified only through their depressions. Secondary features associated with the cemetery include a woven and barbed wire fence remnant at the cemetery's north margin and three large bottle and can dumps on its southern side dating from the 1920s through the 1940s.

The cemetery contains a single headstone, for a S. Lawrence (after whom the cemetery was informally named). The commercially manufactured grave marker is a marble Civil War shield tablet, a type authorized by Congress and used from 1879-1924 for graves of Union veterans in private cemeteries. Research by park staff identified the deceased as Stephen Lawrence. Lawrence was born in 1839 in North Carolina, probably as a slave. U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records indicate that Lawrence served as a Private in Company H of the 1st U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery in 1864. Within two months, he was confined to the Temperance Hill field hospital in Knoxville after suffering an injury to his eyes caused by smallpox. After his discharge in 1866, Lawrence married Margaret McNutt with whom he had three children. In 1890, the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions, awarded Lawrence a

meager pension of \$8/month for disability from rheumatism and heart disease. His wife Margaret died in 1893 and the following year, at about 58 years of age, Lawrence married Serna Newman and they had two children. Stephen Lawrence continued to operate a small farm a few miles northwest of Hot Springs until his death in 1896.

Metal detecting found the cemetery to be relatively free of extraneous metal, a surprise, given its proximity to the garbage dumps. Objects that may be associated with the cemetery are two cut nails found next to graves in the southwest corner of the cemetery and an iron pipe at a depression that may have been used as a grave marker or for holding flowers. By far, the most important find was an aluminum stake marker which retained its paper identification card. Found just below the surface at the edge of Grave 1, the card identifies this depression as Nancy Green's grave, confirming oral history for her burial here. Researchers were surprised though to find her burial so recent, May 10, 1949, given that the cemetery seems to have been virtually forgotten and remains untended. Green was a former nanny.

Nancy Green's obituary in the Hot Springs *Sentinel-Record* identifies her final resting place as Cedar Mountain Cemetery. With the actual name of the cemetery known, researchers may search back issues of the paper for references to others buried at Cedar Mountain Cemetery. While their specific grave location in the cemetery may never be known, some or all of those buried there may now be identified. This will be one of the goals of research at Hot Springs NP during 2010.

Summary and Comparisons

In summary, two forgotten cemeteries in the woodlands of Hot Springs National Park were documented in detail in 2009. Based on the dates on the identified grave stones, the use periods for the two cemeteries overlap about ten years, with Chalybeate Springs being the earlier of the two, dating from circa 1870-1910. Lawrence was in use from circa 1890-1950. Lawrence Cemetery saw only 27 identified interments over a 53 year use period while Chalybeate Springs witnessed at least 49 burials in 37 years.

Few artifacts were recovered from the Lawrence Cemetery. Cemetery-related artifacts at Chalybeate Springs, however, were found to exhibit spatial and chronological patterning corresponding with positions of dated markers. Wire nails near Steen's 1907 headstone suggest fence construction sometime post-1890 and that this portion of the cemetery was in use circa 1890-1910. Eleven cut nails were found at nine places higher on the cemetery's slopes suggesting the middle and upper slopes of the cemetery predate 1890. The exclusive occurrence of fieldstone bordered graves in the middle half of the cemetery, well above the area bearing wire nails and within the area having cut nails, suggests this practice was discontinued by circa 1890.

Although the data are weak at this time, preliminary information suggests that people buried in these two cemeteries differed racially, socioeconomically, and in location of residence. Chalybeate Springs Cemetery was for Euroamericans while the Lawrence Cemetery was for African Americans. These cemeteries date to Arkansas' Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras, so it is likely that the cemeteries were completely segregated racially. Chalybeate Springs Cemetery was a burial site for local residents and visitors from up to 135 miles away with non-local individuals possibly coming to Hot Springs in failed efforts to seek cures. Lawrence Cemetery appears to have been used exclusively by local residents. Farmers, laborers, craftsmen, and small business owners used Chalybeate Springs. Lawrence Cemetery seems to have been used by a more restricted group of farmers and laborers. Variations in burial spacing and marking may also reflect the social and economic disparity between African American and Euroamerican communities. For example, Lawrence Cemetery is only about 1/5 the size of Chalybeate Springs and its burials are much more concentrated: Chalybeate Springs averages one grave per 72 m² while the Lawrence Cemetery averages one grave per 28 m².

With regard to grave markers, it was surprising to find that fewer graves at Chalybeate Springs are marked in any way. The percentage of graves marked with fieldstone headstones was greater at Lawrence while the frequency of commercial markers was about the same at each location. The difference here, however, lies in the *kind* of marker used at each place: privately purchased stone markers at Chalybeate Springs versus government-issued stone and funeral home aluminum stake markers at Lawrence Cemetery. Fieldstone-outlined grave perimeters occur only at Chalybeate Springs probably because the practice pre-dates



A marble Civil War shield tablet inscribed "S. LAWRENCE/CO. H./1 U.S.C.H.A." at the Cedar Mountain (formerly Lawrence) Cemetery.

Lawrence Cemetery's operation.

There is one characteristic, however, which most clearly distinguishes the status disparity of these two cemeteries and this is the practice of dumping garbage next to the Lawrence Cemetery. This occurred within sight of the cemetery and at the time of its operation during the late 1920s to 1940s. High-end cosmetic bottles and decorative objects from Czechoslovakia, Germany, and Japan suggest dumping by people who had money during the height of the Depression. The dumps clearly illustrate the disregard and disrespect suffered by the African American community during the first half of the 20th century.

Future Investigations

MWAC archeologists will continue research at Hot Spring National Park cemeteries over the next three field seasons. Archival research will be directed toward identifying individuals interred in the cemeteries. Fieldwork will consist of non-intrusive geophysical inventories using ground penetrating radar, electrical resistance inventory, and magnetic gradient survey. This work will be directed primarily toward the Cedar Mountain Cemetery (due to the rough terrain at Chalybeate Springs Cemetery) with the goal of identifying additional grave locations. Oral history may come into play, too, when, and if, descendants of those buried at Cedar Mountain Cemetery can be located. Information derived from these efforts will continue to provide valuable insights into individual lives and communities in and around Hot Springs National Park.

By William J. Hunt, Jr., Archeologist, Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, Nebraska

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