



Red Hill Cemetery Project

Monthly Digest

April 2022

Find us at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/239348086615923>

Contact us at:

redhillprisoncemetery@gmail.com



THIS MONTH'S
TOP STORIES

Photos feature Mary Esther Smith, Lauren Paschel Puls, Kevin Haywood, Kerri Gebler, and other members of the Red Hill Cemetery Facebook Group.

State Properties License 605-466

by **Edwin Atkins**

The Survey of the graves has continued with excellent cooperation from Mac Hamilton of the Georgia Transmission Corporation and Clark Wong of the State Properties Commission. The legal requirements for the cutting were signed off and during the week of April 18th, the work was completed. This opportunity to explore the easements provides us the access to look at the historic gully and survey the tree line and continue our search for graves.

On April 22nd, Tom Gresham of the Southeastern Archeological Services inspected the corridor and saw no indications of graves.



On April 24th, the corridor search continued with Kerri Gebler's 3 cadaver search dogs from Griffin Ga., 3 teams of metal detectorists, and visual inspection for the presence of Cherokee roses. We have concluded no present gravesites are located in the main section of the corridor; however, the dogs did report odor along the tree line and roadbed of the historic stagecoach road. Since access is now available we believe further inspection is warranted.

[Red Hill Preservation Plan](#)

Education of the Public

by **Edwin Atkins**

Coverage has been published in local and state publications.

1. *Union Recorder*, March 25, 2022 - The Georgia Trust For Historic Preservation has continued granting excellent media coverage with the quarterly magazine "Ramble", and two "In The News" stories about our efforts.

2. The WMAZ coverage "Central Georgia Historians Tackle Cemetery Restoration" by Anthony Montaito.

[Central Georgia Historians Tackle Cemetery Restoration](#)

3. Interviews have occurred for media coverage with Jay Jarvis for *Georgia Backroads* magazine, and Rick Franzman for *Milledgeville Living*. We have reached out to *Smithsonian Magazine* and the *New York Times* for interest in our historic preservation of the cemetery, massive gully, and stagecoach road.

4. Press releases continue with a plan which includes statewide media.

The cemetery contains graves from almost all of the Georgia Counties.



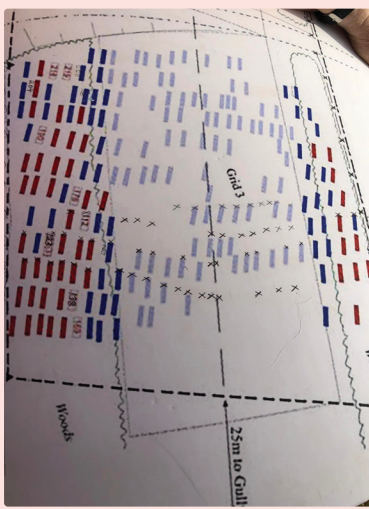
Assistance in media contacts would be appreciated.

Press Release: Week of April 18 - 22, 2022

by **Edwin Atkins**

In the search for 1000 missing graves, Cherokee Roses and cadaver dogs are providing the clues.

The Red Hill Prison Cemetery investigators are finding that the Georgia State Cherokee roses planted in the 1920s are now blossoming and providing clues to the grave locations and cemetery boundaries. In 1936 as the prison was moving to the new location in Reidsville, the superintendent noted that the 1500 license plates marking the graves would be documented but to date, this historic record has not been found. In 2016, a survey by the Southeastern Archeological Services found and documented 600 - 650 possible graves located in two fenced sections of the Red Hill Cemetery. In 2022, with the historical documentation that possibly 1500 - 2000 graves existed, the search continues. The missing graves could be located on adjoining lands or behind the prison which to date have not been surveyed. On Sunday, April 24, 2022, a survey is planned with the help of cadaver dogs, flowering Cherokee roses, metal detectors, drones, and thermal photography. Will thousands of white roses tell us where a thousand missing graves are located or will a dog's nose know the answer?



Red Hill Prison Cemetery



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TALK TO US

Join our Facebook group and support Friends of Red Hill Prison Cemetery.

For more information contact Edwin C. Atkins (Project Manager)
redhillprisoncemetery@gmail.com
 (917) 861-8024

Social Media Comments: 1700 Members of RHPC

by **Kerri Gebler**

Little did I know a year ago when I posted wanting a Confederate Rose (the Georgia State Flower) that this year our team would be helping to locate forgotten graves at a prison graveyard. The Chaplain who worked at this prison from 1922 to 1936 planted one of these unique plants at the head of every grave for which he officiated the service. I'm sure he planted them at the heads of other graves in the cemetery, as well, because he planted them all around the boundaries.



After the prison was closed/torn down and the graves are forgotten, power companies came in and cleared the overgrowth to erect poles to carry electricity across the region. In doing so, they also removed the metal pins and license plate tags identifying the numbers of the graves. Those were the only identifying markers of the people buried in the cemetery. The bodies weren't unearthed, and the people (the Chaplain's great-grandson and his friends) overseeing this mission are working hard to find each and every grave to mark it, once again, with a Cherokee Rose. Prisoners weren't the only ones buried there. The cemetery also holds stillborn babies and young children whose parents couldn't afford a "proper" burial. It was the Depression Era, and people were lucky to eat.

Identification of Grave Sights

by **Mary Esther Lord Smith**

Thank you to all our new volunteers!

Mary Esther Lord Smith, our site historian, has been successful in documenting over 175 metal license posts in the east sector indicating the exact location of a grave.

Kevin Haywood's metal detectorists and his volunteer Lauren Paschal Puls have surveyed the GTC easement, east sector and now are working on the west sector which could contain a vast number of graves.

In addition to finding the metal marker posts, work continues on the search for the license plates.



Flag Identification

White - Metal Detection

White - Post Found, Tag #

Orange - Cadaver Dog Hit

Blue - Cherokee Rose

Red - Index Grave #

Tennessee Granite - Grave

Wooden Stake - Tag #



Metal Detection Helpful in the Search for Markers

by **Kevin Haygood**

Most cemetery preservation projects are about cleaning and repairing. Unlike most cemeteries, our Red Hill Cemetery has no carved stone monuments.

The only markers are car license tags with a three-digit number. Prisoners manufactured car tags on site so these metal tags were used to mark the graves of their fellow convicts. Most of these license tags have been damaged and rusted away many years ago.

At least two types of metal posts were used to mount the numbered tags. One often found on this site is an iron spike flattened at one end with a rivet to hold the tag. These may have been forged by Mattie Crawford, the prison blacksmith.

The metal tags may be just under the surface, but they are completely invisible to the eye. To know where the graves are and who is buried there, we must find any remaining fragments of these old tags.

The best tool for this job is the metal detector. Modern metal detectors can easily find many types of metal buried in the ground. A good detector can find a dime buried a foot deep in the soil but here we are only looking for a rusty post and plate just under the grass.



The challenge is to sort out the numbered tags from the rusty nails, broken pieces of barbed wire fence, and hardware from the overhead power line.

If a post or tag is found, we don't dig it up. The grass is removed and a shallow layer of dirt is scraped away to reveal the condition of the metal. Most of the items we have found are still in their original locations. So far we have found over 175 metal posts marking grave locations. Many of these are without a numbered tag.

The metal detector has helped discover several graves that were previously unmarked. We continue to work to recover more ID tags and match these with the written records. Detecting the numbered tag changes a grassy depression into the final resting place of a person with a name.

Death Registry

by [Diana Boland and Carley Reeves](#)

The death certificates list the place of burial as GSPF (Georgia State Prison Farm) but William Henry Tate confirms the cemetery name as it is listed as Red Hill Cemetery.

Demographics are as follows: Males 339, Females 32, Black 303, White 68, Indigenous 1, Black Male 282, White Male 57, Black Female 21, White Female 11, Infant 7, Legal Executions 102, Total Entries 394. Over 75% were African Americans.

Michelle Wright Weaver has documented news clippings of many of the crimes and prisoners.



Items to Address in May

1. State Visitation
2. Security
3. Beautification
4. Grants and Donations - **Please Help!**

You can donate to our bank:

Magnolia State Bank

P.O. Box 1989

Gray, Georgia 31032

Attention - Terry Ramsey

5. Website for Red Hill Prison
cemetery.org

6. Video production for Youtube and social media

7. Crowdfunding site

8. Department of Corrections and Archives



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