



Phase II and Phase III Archaeological Database and Inventory

Site Number: 18BC191

Site Name: Laurel Cemetery

Prehistoric

Other name(s)

Historic

Brief Description:

Mid-19th to Mid-20th century African-American cemetery

Unknown

Site Location and Environmental Data:

Maryland Archaeological Research Unit No. 14

SCS soil & sediment code 44UC

Latitude 39.3214 Longitude -76.5829

Physiographic province Eastern Piedmont

Terrestrial site Underwater site

Elevation m Site slope 0-15%

Ethnobotany profile available Maritime site

Site setting

-Site Setting restricted

-Lat/Long accurate to within 1 sq. mile, user may need to make slight adjustments in mapping to account for sites near state/county lines or streams

| Topography | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Floodplain | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| High terrace | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Hilltop/bluff | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rockshelter/cave | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Interior flat | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hillslope | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Upland flat | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Unknown | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ridgetop | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Terrace | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Low terrace | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| Ownership | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Private | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Federal | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| State of MD | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Regional/county/city | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Unknown | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| Nearest Surface Water | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Name (if any) | Unnamed tributary of Herri |
| Saltwater | |
| Ocean | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Freshwater | |
| Stream/river | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Estuary/tidal river | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Swamp | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Tidewater/marsh | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lake or pond | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Spring | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Minimum distance to water is | 68 m |

Temporal & Ethnic Contextual Data:

Paleoindian site

Woodland site

Contact period site ca. 1820 - 1860

Archaic site

MD Adena

ca. 1630 - 1675 ca. 1860 - 1900

Early archaic

Early woodland

ca. 1675 - 1720 ca. 1900 - 1930

Middle archaic

Mid. woodland

ca. 1720 - 1780 Post 1930

Late archaic

Late woodland

ca. 1780 - 1820

Unknown historic context

Unknown prehistoric context

Unknown context

Ethnic Associations (historic only)

Native American

Asian American

African American

Unknown

Anglo-American

Other

Hispanic

Y=Confirmed, P=Possible

Site Function Contextual Data:

| Prehistoric | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Multi-component | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Misc. ceremonial | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Village | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rock art | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hamlet | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Shell midden | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Base camp | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| STU/lithic scatter | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rockshelter/cave | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Quarry/extraction | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Earthen mound | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Fish weir | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cairn | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Production area | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Burial area | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Unknown | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other context | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| Historic | |
|--------------------|---|
| Urban/Rural? | Urban <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Furnace/forge | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Military | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Battlefield | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Domestic | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Transportation | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Homestead | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Canal-related | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Farmstead | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Road/railroad | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mansion | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Wharf/landing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Plantation | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Maritime-related | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Row/townhome | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Bridge | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cellar | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ford | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Privy | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Educational | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Industrial | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Commercial | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mining-related | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Trading post | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Quarry-related | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Store | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mill | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Tavern/inn | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Black/metalsmith | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Possible Structure | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Post-in-ground | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Frame-built | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Masonry | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other structure | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Slave related | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Non-domestic agri | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Recreational | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Midden/dump | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Artifact scatter | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Spring or well | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Unknown | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other context | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Interpretive Sampling Data:

| Prehistoric context samples | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Soil samples taken | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Flotation samples taken | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other samples taken | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| Historic context samples | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Soil samples taken | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Flotation samples taken | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Other samples taken | <input type="checkbox"/> |



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Diagnostic Artifact Data:

| Projectile Point Types | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Koens-Crispin | <input type="text" value="0"/> | <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Clovis | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Perkiomen <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Hardaway-Dalton | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Susquehana <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Palmer | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Vernon <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Kirk (notch) | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Piscataway <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Kirk (stem) | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Calvert <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Le Croy | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Selby Bay <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Morrow Mntn | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Jacks Rf (notch) <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Guilford | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Jacks Rf (pent) <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Brewerton | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Madison/Potomac <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Otter Creek | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Levanna <input type="text" value="0"/> |

Prehistoric Sherd Types

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| Marcey Creek <input type="text" value="0"/> | Popes Creek <input type="text" value="0"/> | Shepard <input type="text" value="0"/> | Keyser <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Dames Qtr <input type="text" value="0"/> | Coulbourn <input type="text" value="0"/> | Townsend <input type="text" value="0"/> | Yeocomico <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Selden Island <input type="text" value="0"/> | Watson <input type="text" value="0"/> | Minguannan <input type="text" value="0"/> | Monongahela <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Accokeek <input type="text" value="0"/> | Mockley <input type="text" value="0"/> | Sullivan Cove <input type="text" value="0"/> | Susquehannock <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Wolfe Neck <input type="text" value="0"/> | Clemson Island <input type="text" value="0"/> | Shenks Ferry <input type="text" value="0"/> | |
| Vinette <input type="text" value="0"/> | Page <input type="text" value="0"/> | Moyaone <input type="text" value="0"/> | |
| | | Potomac Crk <input type="text" value="0"/> | |

Historic Sherd Types

| Earthenware | | Ironstone | | Staffordshire | | Stoneware | |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| Astbury <input type="text" value="0"/> | Jackfield <input type="text" value="0"/> | Tin Glazed <input type="text" value="0"/> | English Brown <input type="text" value="0"/> | Borderware <input type="text" value="0"/> | Mn Mottled <input type="text" value="0"/> | Whiteware <input type="text" value="0"/> | Eng Dry-bodied <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Buckley <input type="text" value="0"/> | North Devon <input type="text" value="0"/> | Porcelain <input type="text" value="0"/> | Nottingham <input type="text" value="0"/> | Creamware <input type="text" value="0"/> | Pearlware <input type="text" value="0"/> | | Rhenish <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| | | | Wt Salt-glazed <input type="text" value="0"/> | | | | |

All quantities exact or estimated minimal counts

Other Artifact & Feature Types:

| Prehistoric Artifacts | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Other fired clay | <input type="text" value="0"/> | <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Flaked stone | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Human remain(s) <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ground stone | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Modified faunal <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Stone bowls | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Unmod faunal <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Fire-cracked rock | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Oyster shell <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other lithics (all) | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Floral material <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ceramics (all) | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Uncommon Obj. <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Rimsherds | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Other <input type="checkbox"/> |

Prehistoric Features

| | |
|--|--|
| Mound(s) <input type="text" value="0"/> | Storage/trash pit <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Midden <input type="checkbox"/> | Burial(s) <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Shell midden <input type="checkbox"/> | Ossuary <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Postholes/molds <input type="checkbox"/> | Unknown <input type="checkbox"/> |
| House pattern(s) <input type="checkbox"/> | Other <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Palisade(s) <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Hearth(s) <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Lithic reduc area <input type="checkbox"/> | |

Lithic Material

| | |
|--|---|
| Fer quartzite <input type="checkbox"/> | Sil sandstone <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Jasper <input type="checkbox"/> | Chalcedony <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Chert <input type="checkbox"/> | Ironstone <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rhyolite <input type="checkbox"/> | Argilite <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Quartz <input type="checkbox"/> | Steatite <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Quartzite <input type="checkbox"/> | Sandstone <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | European flint <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Basalt <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Unknown <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Other <input type="checkbox"/> |

Dated features present at site

| Historic Artifacts | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Tobacco related | <input type="text" value="0"/> | <input type="text" value="0"/> |
| Pottery (all) | <input type="text" value="12"/> | Activity item(s) <input type="text" value="5"/> |
| Glass (all) | <input type="text" value="27"/> | Human remain(s) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Architectural | <input type="text" value="6"/> | Faunal material <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Furniture | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Misc. kitchen <input type="text" value="15"/> |
| Arms | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Floral material <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Clothing | <input type="text" value="6"/> | Misc. <input type="text" value="46"/> |
| Personal items | <input type="text" value="0"/> | Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

headstones/gravestones, casket pieces/hardware, textile, metal

Historic Features

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Privy/outhouse <input type="checkbox"/> | Depression/mound <input type="checkbox"/> | Unknown <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Const feature <input type="checkbox"/> | Well/cistern <input type="checkbox"/> | Burial(s) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Foundation <input type="checkbox"/> | Trash pit/dump <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Railroad bed <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cellar hole/cellar <input type="checkbox"/> | Sheet midden <input type="checkbox"/> | Earthworks <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hearth/chimney <input type="checkbox"/> | Planting feature <input type="checkbox"/> | Mill raceway <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Postholes/molds <input type="checkbox"/> | Road/walkway <input type="checkbox"/> | Wheel pit <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Paling ditch/fence <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

All quantities exact or estimated minimal counts

Radiocarbon Data:

| | | | | | |
|---|-------------|--|-------------|--|-------------|
| Sample 1: <input type="text" value=""/> +/- <input type="text" value=""/> years BP | Reliability | Sample 2: <input type="text" value=""/> +/- <input type="text" value=""/> years BP | Reliability | Sample 3: <input type="text" value=""/> +/- <input type="text" value=""/> years BP | Reliability |
| Sample 4: <input type="text" value=""/> +/- <input type="text" value=""/> years BP | Reliability | Sample 5: <input type="text" value=""/> +/- <input type="text" value=""/> years BP | Reliability | Sample 6: <input type="text" value=""/> +/- <input type="text" value=""/> years BP | Reliability |
| Sample 7: <input type="text" value="0"/> +/- <input type="text" value=""/> years BP | Reliability | Sample 8: <input type="text" value=""/> +/- <input type="text" value=""/> years BP | Reliability | Sample 9: <input type="text" value=""/> +/- <input type="text" value=""/> years BP | Reliability |

Additional radiocarbon results available



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Unknown

Brief

Description:

Mid-19th to Mid-20th century African-American cemetery

External Samples/Data:

Collection curated at

Additional raw data may be available online

Summary Description:

Laurel Cemetery (18BC191), located in what is today the Belair-Edison Crossing section of East Baltimore, is a cemetery that was demolished and officially moved to Carroll County in the late 1950s. It is generally thought that only a small proportion of the graves were actually relocated; most were either built over or destroyed. Soils in the area are Urban land 0-15 % and Beltsville-Urban land 0-8%. The site lies under the Belair-Edison Crossing shopping center in East Baltimore. It is paved over almost in its entirety, aside from 2,675 m² area grassy area in the northwest portion and several smaller grassy areas at the periphery.

In 1852, Laurel Cemetery was created as a nondenominational African American place of burial. Over the ensuing several decades, it became a very popular cemetery in Baltimore City's Black community, for people across the socioeconomic spectrum. It has been estimated that several thousand people were likely interred there between its creation in the 1850s through the time the cemetery company went bankrupt in 1852. However, recent work by the Baltimore Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society has identified over 14,000 death certificates indicating Laurel Cemetery as the final resting place, which suggests the number of people buried there could be in the tens of thousands. Even before bankruptcy, the cemetery became overgrown and people began to dump garbage on the property. The area was eventually deemed a health hazard and sold to developers.

Late in the 1950s, the new owners of the property began the demolition of Laurel for the construction of a shopping center. However, the construction apparently involved the bulldozing of the cemetery and the outright removal of a large swath of it, i.e., most or all of the area of the main strip mall and land behind it. Indeed, human bones could be found eroding from the hillside behind the cemetery for years after the stores were opened. When the local chapter of the NAACP learned of the destruction of the cemetery, they managed to put a temporary halt to the development.

A mortician was brought in and officially Laurel Cemetery was moved to a new location in Carroll County where Laurel Cemetery officially still stands today, in Johnsville. However, this removal involved only approximately 300-400 graves, representing likely a small fraction of the graves originally placed at the Belair Road site. Articles about the cemetery have appeared in the Baltimore Sun from time to time, but in actuality this important piece of Baltimore history, especially its African American community's past, has been almost completely forgotten.

Funds were requested from the University of Baltimore Foundation Fund for Excellence program for the Laurel Cemetery Project in 2015/2016, which began as a purely archaeological research project and endeavored to determine if human burials still remain at the site, now part of a shopping center. As part of this endeavor, both remote sensing (in the form of magnetometry and ground penetrating radar) and six excavations were carried out.

There was one goal in the archaeological work: to determine if still human remains still exist at the site. Officially, the cemetery was moved to a site in Johnsville, Maryland, 45 miles northwest of the City of Baltimore. It's clear from reports of the period that the remains of only a small fraction of those likely buried at Laurel were moved to the new location. However, it's also clear that many graves were destroyed in the development of the property. The working hypothesis was that graves from much of the area were bulldozed and perhaps much of the material was deposited in the area that is now the grassy section (our area of interest). In the evaluation of this hypothesis, a combination of test excavations, magnetometry, and ground penetrating radar (GPR) was planned. The area of interest at the Laurel Cemetery site presents challenges to magnetometry since it is in an urban zone. Indeed, a large parking lot is immediately adjacent to it to the east; Belair Road borders it to the west. The metal in automobiles has the potential to create a degree of "noise" in the measurements that could make subtle differences in the magnetic field difficult to discern. In the end, it was concluded that there is too much noise in that area to identify with any reliability areas potentially containing the remains of burials with magnetometer.

In the fall of 2015, a ground penetrating radar device or GPR was used to study two areas: an approximately 21 x 6 m swath of the area of interest and an approximately 42 x 3 m area of the parking lot. Both GPR surveys yielded results that suggested locations of graves. The final test pit was placed in an area that appeared particularly promising for excavation. In the end, it was determined that the GPR did, in fact, pick up remnants of burials from Laurel Cemetery. The Laurel Cemetery Project chose to excavate in one promising location in the far lower left (northwest) area of the survey area. GPR survey on the parking lot also revealed evidence of Burials.

Six units were placed to investigate anomalies. Unit A was a 2 x 1 m unit situated just off the north, sloping edge of the parking lot, an area of erosion and likely location of exposed/emerging burials. Not much of interest uncovered artifactually (a lot of recent/modern garbage); some material from the time of original construction of the shopping center (1960s) found.

Unit B was a 2 x 1 m unit, approximately 20 m to the west of Unit A, just off the north edge of the grassy area at the northwest margin of the parking lot, also on a sloping area. Many more artifacts recovered here than in Unit A; most appears to be modern/recent garbage, however. In the second layer of soil, a lot of brick was discovered, conceivable associated with the old cemetery.

Unit C was a 2 x 0.5 m unit, located more centrally in the grassy area. A lot of modern garbage was encountered in the first layer, but the second soil layer contained material directly associated with the old cemetery. Metal artifacts associated with caskets were found, in addition to one large and one smaller stone (probably tombstone bases). This lot was terminated when white clayey soil was discovered. It extends from 12 cm to 78 cm. The decision was made to remove approximately 50 cm of fill, considering the potential depth of the deposits and that fact that the fill is consistent throughout.

Unit D was a 1 x 0.5 m unit directly adjacent to Unit C, dug so that the smaller of the two grave markers could be completely uncovered. More metal artifacts associated with casket were uncovered in the second soil layer, which extends down to approximately 80 cm to level of the bottom of the marker.

Unit E was a 2 x 1 meter unit placed in a gently-sloping area near the northern edge of the grassy area in a location where ground penetrating radar indicated that there were possible burials. In a number of places were the remains of almost completely decomposed casket/coffins, found in the lower 40-50 cm of this pit. These remains appear as natural roots, paper-thin layers of brown soil, although it was very difficult to make sense of the arrangement. In this layer were also uncovered human remains. Unit F was started specifically because the side of a casket with handles visible was found in the north wall of Unit E. A large beam-like feature was uncovered in the fourth soil layer. This layer extends to 131 cm below datum close to where the original position of the casket lid is believed to have been; the upper sections of the north and south walls of the casket are exposed. Unfortunately, it became clear approximately 50 cm from the top of the casket that archaeologists were excavating into a second casket that must have immediately underlain the first. The bottom casket had a partial glass lid. The pieces of bone recovered probably pertain to the bottom casket. Numerous pieces of casket hardware were uncovered in this soil layer as well. Since fieldwork began in the summer of 2015, the Laurel Cemetery Project has grown to include ethnology and history; indeed, it has become a true public anthropology project. The archaeological component of the project set out to answer one question: is the site an extant burial ground. The excavations and GPR survey demonstrate conclusively that this is the case.

After reviewing the information available in the literature and walking the Belair Edison Crossing shopping center, the original idea was that the cemetery was completely destroyed. The remains of a small number were removed and reinterred in Johnsville, Maryland, and the rest was bulldozed. Seeing the broken tombstone in the grassy area near Belair Road, it was hypothesized that a lot of material from many graves was pushed into this area. Excavation operations A, B, C and D were placed with this idea in mind.

While survey did find remains of graves in C and D, it became clear that the original hypothesis was not supported by the evidence gathered. Magnetometry was performed for the placement of the pits that would ultimately be C and D, but the results were inconclusive at best. The limited GPR survey revealed many possibilities for excavation; that output led to the placement of Operation E, which led to Operation F.



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Unknown

Not only was ample evidence of burials in E and F found, but also human remains. The uncovering of two sets of human remains and the remnants of multiple caskets in a very small area, combined with the GPR survey in the grassy and parking lot, suggests that many burials remain intact on the grounds of the shopping center. It is suspected that only under the locations of the structures themselves were graves destroyed. Clearly the leveling of the terrain where the strip mall now stands required the removal of a lot of earth. As discussed above, it is in this location where remains could be found for years after construction took place.

The work has brought a lot of attention, now, to this subject, and plans have been put in motion to recognize the site that very likely would not have happened but for the evidence collected. A task force has been formed to look into plans for memorialization and the current owners of the property are fully onboard with these efforts.

Notes: The artifact counts for this entry in Synthesis may not be accurate, as the artifact inventory in the report did not cite specific numbers of artifacts. It is assumed it was a 1:1 listing.

External Reference Codes (Library ID Numbers):

95003766, 18BC191 SF