

Unearthing long-buried secrets

Archaeologists dig skeletons out of Newburgh building site

BY DOYLE MURPHY
Times Herald-Record

CITY OF NEWBURGH — The more dirt archaeologists clear away, the more old secrets they uncover.

Crews have discovered 58 whole and partial skeletons behind the old Broadway School and expect that number to climb easily past 60. They're uncovering an old graveyard, cut through and ravaged by periodic construction during the past century.

A team from Landmark Archaeology spent the past two weeks unearthing more than a dozen people buried on either side of a thick concrete wall on the western edge of the site. Archaeologists found skeletons cut off at the ankles by the wall on the Robinson Avenue side and cut off just above the shoulders on the eastern side.

In earlier work, the team found skeletons with a 20-year-old gas line laid through the chest cavities and older, hand-dug pipes that burrowed right through graves.

Archaeologists had discovered 28 graves by this time last month and expected to find at least a few more. They had divided the site into zones. The discovery of bodies under a Robinson Avenue sidewalk and the most crowded zone yet on the eastern side of the wall have pushed that number far beyond what was originally expected.

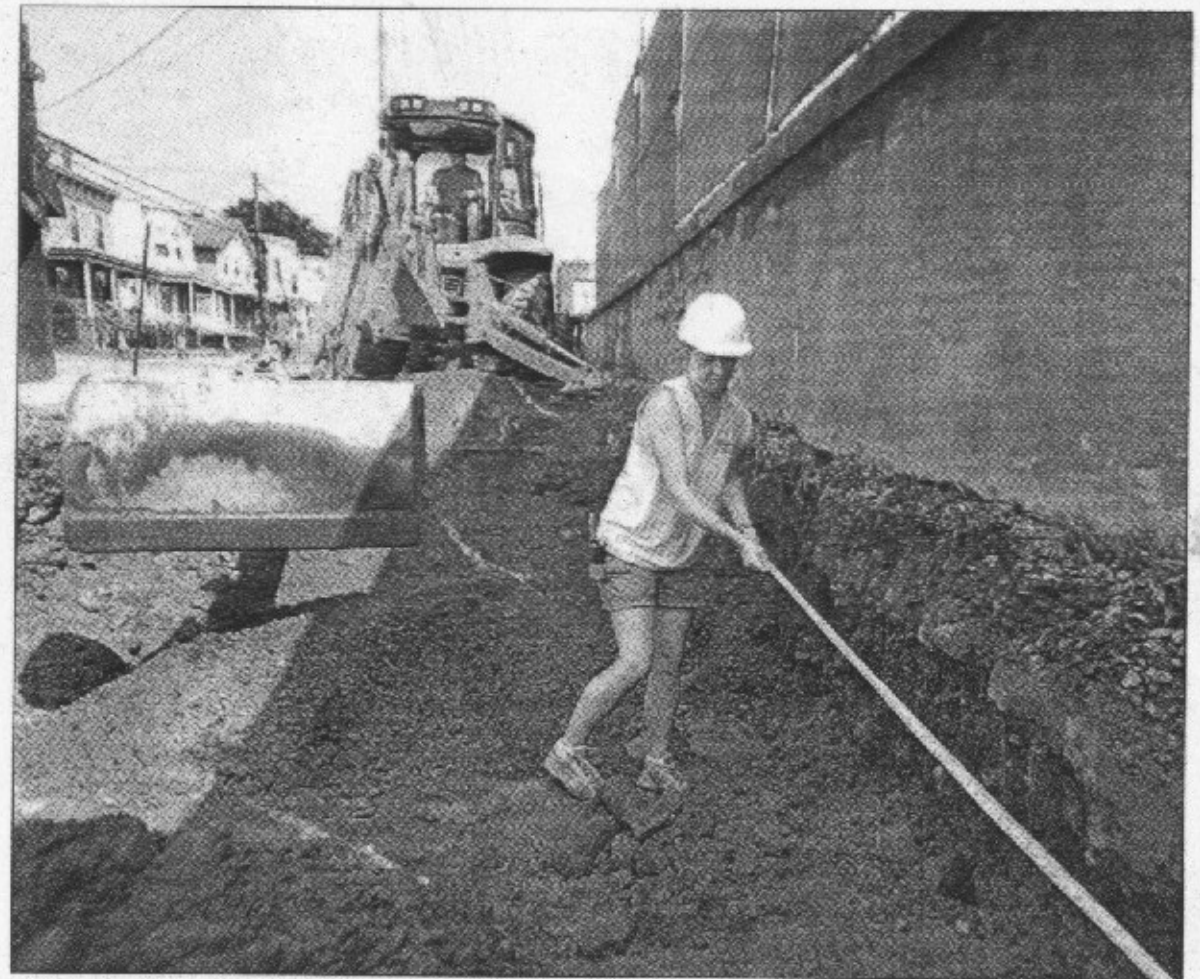


Dirk Marcucci and his field director, Jessica Dayton, look over a map marking the remains they have found so far.

The site is the future home of the city courthouse. Construction crews are renovating the old Broadway School that was built in 1909.

A sketch of property by a former city surveyor in 1869 noted the site as the "Colored Burrying Ground," but City Historian Mary McTamanev said she also found a journal reference to American Indian burials in the same area.

Some of the graves were moved to local cemeteries, McTamanev said, but archaeologists have discovered more and more people never went anywhere. That left them squarely in the way of



Times Herald-Record photos/JEFF GOULDING

Archaeologists have unearthed a dozen skeletons at a construction site in Newburgh in the last two weeks. Field director Jessica Dayton shows a worker where to carefully remove a thin layer of dirt.

the construction that was to come. They're still in the way today.

City Assessor Steve Ruelke, who is overseeing the project, said the archeologists are currently working on a part of the site where construction crews will eventually run utility lines for the courthouse, and the sooner the better.

Workers need a permanent electrical connection to complete the renovation, Ruelke said. The project is already about a month behind schedule.

In the past, construction crews pushed on without delays or public acknowledgement that anything unusual was buried in the path of utilities.

This time, they'll have to wait as the archaeologists carefully separate the bones from the dirt with hand trowels and brushes, catalogue them and send them to New Paltz for further examination. They plan to continue the work this week.

dmurphy@th-record.com