

Georgia Department of Natural Resources

Historic Preservation Division

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Department of Natural Resources partners with Georgia State University in Oakland Cemetery tornado recovery

Archaeologists and students help complete final steps in clean up.

ATLANTA (March 27, 2009) – When a violent tornado struck Atlanta’s historic Oakland Cemetery on March 14, 2008, it toppled trees and damaged scores of historic monuments. Many of the toppled trees were growing over grave shafts. When they fell, they pulled up enormous amounts of earth, which potentially included the remains of the interred. Recognizing that any human remains would have to be removed from five of the root balls before the debris was removed from the cemetery, Historic Oakland Foundation Director of Restoration and Landscapes Kevin Kuharic requested assistance from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR). State Archaeologist Dr. Dave Crass invited Dr. Jeffrey Glover, an assistant professor of archaeology at Georgia State University (GSU), to involve his students in the fieldwork.

DNR and GSU archaeologists carefully removed the soil from each root mass, shaving off layers of soil with hand tools and examining the fresh soil as they worked. They were assisted by students, volunteers, City of Atlanta employees, and Historic Oakland Foundation staff. “I’ve worked with a lot of students,” Crass said, “and these folks worked hard under very difficult circumstances. I was really impressed with both their work ethic and their attentiveness to detail.”

The collective efforts revealed that none of the remaining soil included human remains. One very large oak tree root system incorporated two Civil War-era porcelain buttons. Their small size indicated

that they were shirt collars or cuff buttons, probably related to a skull fragment that had been found earlier. That fragment and the buttons will be reinterred in the original grave shaft. Other artifacts were removed, labeled, and put into storage. “This project was a win-win” Kuharic said. “Oakland Cemetery can now be rededicated, the historic landscape can be restored, and the students got some experience working on a historic preservation project.” The City of Atlanta's forestry department performed the final removal of root balls in the Confederate Memorial Grounds, representing the last step in the clean up after the 2008 tornado.

Oakland Cemetery is located less than one mile from the heart of downtown Atlanta. Founded in 1850, this garden cemetery is the final resting place of many of Atlanta's most noted citizens. It is also a showplace of sculpture and architecture as well as a botanical preserve. In an effort to address the needs of Oakland, the Historic Oakland Foundation was founded in 1976, the same year the cemetery was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Working with the city, the Foundation has done much to stabilize, maintain, and restore the cemetery. For more information about donations, tours, events, and other ways to support Oakland, please visit www.oaklandcemetery.com.

The Historic Preservation Division (HPD) of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources serves as Georgia's state historic preservation office. Its mission is to promote the preservation and use of historic places for a better Georgia. HPD's programs include archaeology protection and education, environmental review, grants, historic resource surveys, tax incentives, the National Register of Historic Places, community planning and technical assistance. For more information, call 404-656-2840 or visit their Web site at www.gashpo.org.

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Photo available from Helen Talley-McRae (helen.talley-mcrae@dnr.state.ga.us). Caption information: *Dr. Jeffrey Glover (left), an assistant professor of archaeology at Georgia State University, and several of his students carefully remove soil from fallen tree root balls in Oakland Cemetery. (Credit: Photo courtesy GA Department of Natural Resources/Historic Preservation Division.)*