

CHAPTER 7

The Middle Group

Warren R. Perry, Jean Howson, and Augustin F. C. Holl

Most burials in the archaeologically excavated portion of the African Burial Ground are placed in the main or Middle Group, by default, because they were not clearly assignable to earlier or later cohorts. Yet even though the temporal groupings are relative rather than absolute, it is likely that burials assigned to the Middle Group were indeed interred during the middle decades of the eighteenth century. For convenience, we describe the period of New York's history from approximately 1735 to 1760, when the cemetery would have been intensively used.

A sketch of the town and the development in the area of the burial ground is presented, along with an overview of the African population and the mortuary sample. The material culture and spatial distribution of the Middle Group burials are then discussed, followed by a description of some unique and unusual interments.

The Town

The city was in an economic recession in the 1730s. Aside from the Almshouse complex, begun in 1735 on the Common, construction in the area near the African Burial Ground was minimal. But the city's inexorable northward push soon resumed. Residential and commercial development proceeded up the west side of Broadway to present-day Warren Street (at the southwest corner of the burial ground). Development on the east side of town extended even farther north. The relative remoteness of the African Burial Ground also was reduced when the road along the east side of the Common (Park Row) was cut through to the Bowery and Pearl Street was extended westward. Two pleasure grounds northwest of the cemetery, the Ranelagh Gardens and the Vauxhall Gardens, drew

city residents beyond the settled edge of the town (see the Grim, Maerschalk, and Montessor Plans [see Figures 18 and 19 in Chapter 2, and Figure 29 in Chapter 3]; see Harris et al. 1993; Homberger 1994; Hunter Research 1994).

The Corselius/Crolius and Remmey pottery works were located in the eastern part of the Van Borsum patent by 1741. These pottery works shared space with the African Burial Ground, and at least one of them used a portion of the cemetery as a dump for waste material from the kilns. A palisade that spanned the width of the city was erected in 1745. It crossed the southern portion of the African Burial Ground, and burials were probably restricted to the area north of its line-of-march. During the time the palisade stood, access from the town to the cemetery required passing through a gate.

The Common drew large crowds in 1739–1740 and again in 1741. Thousands of whites and blacks turned out to hear evangelist George Whitefield preach in 1739–1740 at the height of a surge in religious enthusiasm known as the Great Awakening (Burrows and Wallace 1999:157–158). Protestant churches during this time were reluctant to accept Africans, but the evangelicals called for the baptism and humane treatment of captives. There is no evidence that the enslaved Africans of New York embraced evangelical Protestant faith as a result, although some contemporaries would suggest that Africans were spurred to insurrection in 1741 by the preaching (see Linebaugh and Rediker 2000:192–193). The churches of New York did have black congregants, although few in number, during the middle decades of the eighteenth century. Only three burials of blacks were recorded: one in the Reformed Dutch churchyard in 1729 (a free black woman) and two in the churchyard of Trinity Lutheran in the 1740s, one of a free black woman and one of an illegitimate “mulatto” child (New York

Genealogical and Biographical Society, Burial Register of the Reformed Dutch Church in the City of New York, 1727–1804; Stryker-Rodda 1974:84–85).

A year after Whitefield's visit, crowds assembled again to watch the executions of 30 enslaved Africans and 4 Europeans convicted of conspiring to burn the town. The Panic or "Conspiracy" of 1741 centered on a series of fires set during late March and early April. A grand jury concluded that the alleged arsonists were part of a wider network involving the city's black population and a handful of European ringleaders. More than 200 people were arrested with the aid of testimony coerced under threat, extricated through torture, or purchased through cash rewards. Underground activity involving the participation of both blacks and poor whites was exposed, highlighting the ability of people on the margins of society to move about, meet clandestinely, frequent taverns, plan and launch criminal actions, organize clubs, and forge unions with free persons.¹ Thirteen of the convicted Africans were burned at the stake, and 17 were hanged. The hangings took place near the powder house at the south end of the Fresh Water pond and the burnings a bit further to the southeast (see Figure 18 in Chapter 2). It is not known when and where the executed individuals were buried. The corpses of some of those who were gibbeted were left in chains to rot (see Lepore 2005:170–171); the desecration of the corpses constituted both an added punishment of the convicted and a warning to the community.

Did city residents gather on the Common to celebrate Pinkster, the Dutch holiday of Pentecost (English Whitsuntide)? The holiday was marked in New Netherland from at least the 1640s. By the second half of the eighteenth century, Africans in New York colony and New England held distinctive celebrations using town commons for Pinkster and Negro Election Day, respectively. These festivals involved large gatherings for drumming, dance, food, drink, and lampooning

typical of carnival. There is no documentary evidence for large-scale celebrations of black Pinkster in New York City.²

Legal restrictions on the economic pursuits of bondmen and bondwomen were tightened in this period, thereby providing an unintended glimpse of how black New Yorkers sought to gain a foothold in the economy. In August 1740, for example, the Common Council passed a law restricting the marketing of produce, stating that

of Late Years great Numbers of Negroes Indians and Molatto Slaves have Made it a common Practice of Buying, Selling and Exposing to Sale, not Only in houses, out houses & yards but Likewise in the Publick Streets Within this City, great Quantities of Boiled Indian Corn, Pears, Peaches, Apples and other kind of fruit which pernicious practice is not only Detrimental to the Masters Mistresses and Owners of such Slaves in Regard they Absent themselves from their Service: But is also productive of Encreasing if not Occasioning many and Dangerous fevours and other Distempers & Diseases in the Inhabitants in the same city [New York City Common Council 1905:4:497–498].³

Marketers who came into the city from the country and the Out Ward were exempted from the restriction and the penalty that accompanied it (public whipping or a 6 shilling fine payable by the slaveholder), so long as they had the permission of their legal master. The law refers not to the city's municipal markets, but to unregulated venues such as homes and streets where Africans bought produce for resale. Because it was already illegal to trade with enslaved persons without permission, the need for a special ordinance suggests there had been a noticeable lapse in enforcement.

¹ The events have been interpreted variously as a trumped-up conspiracy and subsequent "witch-hunt," the actions of a theft ring that were prosecuted overzealously, a true conspiracy but one that was limited in scope, or a proletarian "revolutionary conspiracy, Atlantic in scope" (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000:177–179). The records of the events caution us, in any case, about separating the African community from other ethnic groups too absolutely: overlapping social and economic networks among African, Native American, Spanish, English, and Irish New Yorkers were revealed by the investigation. The primary source is Daniel Horsmanden's *Journal*, published in 1744 (see Lepore 2005). For analyses of the conspiracy, see Davis (1985), Foote (2004), Launitz-Schürer (1980), Lepore (2005), Stokes (1915–1928:4:569–575), and Szasz (1967).

² For discussions of Pinkster in New York, see Epperson (1999:94–96), Hodges (1999:25, 221–223), Lepore (2005:158–159), Stuckey (1994), and White (1991:95–106). In his novel *Satanstoe*, James Fenimore Cooper (1912:66–79 [1845]) wrote a fictional account of a 1757 Pinkster holiday in New York City. The story locates the celebrations at the upper end of Broadway on the Common, with whites in attendance as spectators. Because no such public festival is recorded for the city, it is possible his story was based on oral tradition from the upper Hudson Valley area.

³ During the eighteenth century, similar laws were passed in towns throughout the English colonies, reflecting widespread participation of the enslaved in local economies.

Table 24. Black Population by Age and Sex, 1737–1756

Year	Label in Census	Adults		Children		Age for Children	Total
		Male	Female	Male	Female		
1737	“black”	674	609	229	207	≤ 10	1,719
1746	“black”	721	569	419	735	≤ 15	2,444
1749	“black”	651	701	460	556	≤ 15	2,368
1756	“black”	672	695	468	443	≤ 15	2,278

Note: Black adult males include 76 males over the age of 60 in 1746, 41 males over the age of 60 in 1749, and 68 males over the age of 60 in 1756. Information from Green and Harrington (1932) and U.S. Bureau of the Census (1909).

The Population Census

The black population of New York grew substantially from the mid-1730s to the mid-1740s, as census figures indicate a 42 percent increase. Children (defined as 10 years and under in 1737 and 15 and under in 1746) account for the increase. Black residents numbered 2,444 in 1746. This was the eighteenth-century high mark of 20.9 percent of the total population. The distribution by age and sex in 4 census years is shown in Table 24.

Imports of enslaved Africans into New York continued from both the Caribbean and Africa during the mid-1700s, although precise figures are difficult to reconstruct. It is possible that following the 1741 panic, when Africans from the Caribbean were implicated in the 1741 conspiracy, importation of captives directly from Africa increased.⁴ The sense among New York merchants was that the Caribbean colonies had been transporting troublesome captives to the northern colonies, and, in fact, there is evidence that seasoned insurrectionists from the islands played a role in the New York conspiracy (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000:193–203). It is also possible that greater numbers of children, especially young girls, were brought to the city beginning in the 1740s, owing to greater demand for domestic labor and anxiety about insurrection by seasoned men. The preponderance of girls over boys and of adult men over women in the

⁴ Lydon (1978:378, 387–388) compiled data showing that 70 percent of captives brought to New York Colony prior to 1742 were imported from American sources; subsequently, the ratio was almost exactly reversed. His information from shipping records indicates a marked increase in the African trade in the late 1740s.

1746 census probably reflects these market shifts. As noted in Chapter 13 of *Skeletal Biology of the New York African Burial Ground* (Blakey, Rankin-Hill, et al. 2009), the local urban demand for girls would be satisfied via the direct African trade.

Mortuary Sample

Nearly half of the burials excavated at the New York African Burial Ground are placed in the Middle Group (n = 198). Burials are listed in Table 25 and shown on the site plan in Figures 77a–77e. In the table, head angle is the orientation in degrees west of north (discussed in Chapter 5). Preservation codes are explained in Chapter 3. An entry of “n/a” in the coffin column indicates that the bones were severely disturbed, displaced, or redeposited so that coffin presence/absence could not be determined. The age and sex profiles for the mortuary sample are shown in Figures 78 and 79. The age profile carries a caveat: we noted in Chapter 5 that the frequency of child burials in this cohort is higher than that in the overall skeletal sample and proposed that some of these burials may actually belong in the Late-Middle or Late Groups, although there is no way to so assign them.

Mortuary Material Culture

Adult coffins were hexagonal by definition for the Middle Group. In contrast, the smaller coffins for subadults (when identifiable) were hexagonal (33), rectangular (7), tapered (5), or uncertain but four sided (7) in shape (see Chapter 10). There were 38 subadults buried in coffins for which shape could not be definitively determined. Only three burials without coffins are assigned to the Middle Group, Burials 371, 375,

Table 25. Middle Group Burials

Burial No.	Age Category	Low Age	High Age	Sex ^a	Head Angle (degrees)	Grid South (feet)	Grid East (feet)	Preservation Code	Coffin
3	adult	25	35	male		107	2	n	n/a
8	infant	0	0.5	undetermined	101	82.5	5	y	hexagonal
9	adult	35	45	male	90	89.5	25	y	hexagonal
16	adult	50	60	female	67	107	0	y	hexagonal
17	subadult	4	6	undetermined	89	83.25	20	y	hexagonal
19	subadult			undetermined	108	81.5	20	y	unidentified
21	subadult			undetermined		87.5	20	n	rectangular
22	subadult	2.5	4.5	undetermined	90	96.5	-1.5	y	unidentified
24	subadult	3	6	undetermined	92	87.5	5	y	rectangular
25	adult	20	24	female	96	87.5	20	y	unidentified
27	subadult	1.4	2.8	undetermined	74	88.5	5	y	hexagonal
30	subadult	7	11	undetermined	92	86	10	y	hexagonal
31	adult	14	16	undetermined	90	103.5	-1	y	hexagonal
32	adult	50	60	male	100	86.5	23.5	y	hexagonal?
35	subadult	8	10	undetermined	93	87.5	15	y	hexagonal
39	subadult	5	7	undetermined	82	81.75	40	y	hexagonal
41	adult			undetermined	66	99.5	-11	n	unidentified
45	subadult	2.5	4.5	undetermined	86	103.5	-5	y	hexagonal
46	adult			female?	86	95.5	0	y	unidentified
47	adult	35	45	male	94	103.5	0	y	hexagonal?
49	adult	40	50	female	82	87.5	40	y	hexagonal
50	subadult			undetermined	90	87.5	30	y	hexagonal
53	subadult	0.25	0.75	undetermined	90	87.5	0	y	hexagonal
55	subadult	3	5	undetermined	93	92.2	0	y	hexagonal
56	adult	30	34	female	90	90.5	15	y	hexagonal?
57	subadult	0.88	2.16	undetermined	90	87.5	25	y	hexagonal
66	infant	0	0.16	undetermined	90	93.5	25	y	unidentified
69	adult	30	60	male	82	89	-3.5	y (no cranium)	hexagonal?
70	adult	35	45	male	90	92.5	10	y (no cranium)	hexagonal
73	adult	20	30	female?	96	79	10	y	hexagonal
74					97	80	15	n (empty coffin)	hexagonal
75	infant	0	0	undetermined	97	92.5	34	y	rectangular
77	subadult	0.67	1.3	undetermined	110	88.5	35	y	hexagonal

Table 25. Middle Group Burials (*continued*)

Burial No.	Age Category	Low Age	High Age	Sex ^a	Head Angle (degrees)	Grid South (feet)	Grid East (feet)	Preservation Code	Coffin
79	subadult	0.25	0.75	undetermined	90	82	6	y	tapered
80	subadult			undetermined	88	87.5	40	y	hexagonal
81	adult			female	90	93	-3	y (no cranium)	unidentified
82	adult	18	25	female	86	93	3	y (cranium only)	unidentified
85	subadult	0.25	0.75	undetermined	89	80.5	15	y	hexagonal
87	subadult	4	6	undetermined	90	94	3	y (cranium only)	unidentified
90	adult	35	40	female	90	81.5	4	y	hexagonal
93	adult			undetermined		85	-3	n	unidentified
94	subadult			undetermined	80	92.5	47	y	hexagonal
96	adult	16	18	male	71	94.5	47	y	hexagonal
98	subadult	1	2	undetermined	90	81	20	y	hexagonal
100	subadult			undetermined	90	80.5	20	y	hexagonal
102	subadult	1.33	2.67	undetermined	90	79.5	20	y	hexagonal
103	subadult			undetermined	86	79.5	20	y	hexagonal
104	adult	30	40	female	77	89.5	61	y	hexagonal
111	subadult	0.67	1.33	undetermined	73	91.5	53	y	four sided?
112	subadult	0.25	0.75	undetermined		89	82.5	y	unidentified
113	adult			undetermined	85	91.5	60	y	unidentified
114	adult	45	50	male	100	94.5	91	y	hexagonal
115	adult	25	35	female	94	89.5	89	y	hexagonal
116	adult	45	55	male	100	95.5	81.5	y	hexagonal
118	adult			undetermined		94.5	55	n	unidentified
122	adult	18	20	female	86	93	61	y	hexagonal
126	subadult	3.5	5.5	undetermined	110	88	80.5	y	hexagonal
127	subadult	0.67	1.33	undetermined	94	90	95	y	hexagonal
128	infant	0	0.17	undetermined	89	92.5	83	y	hexagonal
129				n/a	97	91.5	95	no (empty coffin)	unidentified
130	subadult	1	2	undetermined	89	92	56	y	hexagonal
133	subadult	1	2	undetermined	76	96	78	y	hexagonal
136	subadult			undetermined		95	86.7	y	unidentified
142	adult	25	30	female	95	88	90	y	hexagonal
143	subadult	6	10	undetermined	111	88	80.5	y	hexagonal
144	infant	0	0.17	undetermined	99	88	90	y	four sided

Table 25. Middle Group Burials (continued)

Burial No.	Age Category	Low Age	High Age	Sex ^a	Head Angle (degrees)	Grid South (feet)	Grid East (feet)	Preservation Code	Coffin
148	adult	12	18	undetermined	93	91.5	70	y	hexagonal
149	subadult	0.5	1	undetermined	97	88	90	y	four sided
154	adult	25	29	female	88	95.5	75	y	hexagonal
156	adult	30	60	female		66.5	115	y	unidentified
159	adult	25	35	female	89	73.5	90	y	hexagonal
160	subadult	3.5	5.5	undetermined	93	73	98.5	y	four sided
161	subadult			undetermined	83	74.5	90	y	rectangular
163	adult	18	24	male?	89	74.5	99	y	hexagonal
167	subadult	8.5	12.5	undetermined	99	86.5	65	y	hexagonal
169	subadult	5.5	9.5	undetermined	114	91.5	81	y	hexagonal?
175	adult	24	28	male		72	64.5	n	unidentified
189	adult			undetermined	90	95.5	65.5	n	unidentified
206	subadult			undetermined		75.5	93	y	rectangular
212	subadult	4.5	5.5	undetermined	85	82.5	55	y (no cranium)	hexagonal?
213	adult	45	55	female	93	84.5	85.5	y	hexagonal
215	infant	0	0.16	undetermined	111	81.5	72.5	y	four sided?
218	subadult	0.5	3.5	undetermined	105	89	73	y	unidentified
220	subadult			undetermined	95	78	92	y	tapered
224	subadult	0.5	1.33	undetermined	86	77.5	97	y	four sided
231	subadult			undetermined		77.5	97	y	four sided
232	subadult			undetermined		77.5	97	y	unidentified
233				n/a	90	73	127	n	rectangular
234	infant	0	0.5	undetermined	107	77.5	96.5	y	tapered
239	subadult	1.5	3.5	undetermined	109	83.5	70	y	tapered
240	subadult	0.88	2.66	undetermined	90	79.5	95.5	y	hexagonal?
245	subadult	2.5	4.5	undetermined	93	75	85.5	y	hexagonal
246	subadult	0.5	2.9	undetermined	92	82.5	70	y	four sided
248	subadult	14	15	undetermined	90	71.2	118.5	n	unidentified
254	subadult	3.5	5.5	undetermined	96	79.5	97.5	y	unidentified
255	infant	0	0.17	undetermined	90	79.3	117.9	y	hexagonal?
256	adult	40	60	male	93	77.5	79	y	hexagonal
258	infant	0	0.5	undetermined	104	85.5	78	y	four sided
260	undetermined			undetermined	94	84.5	53.5	n	n/a
265	subadult	0.5	1	undetermined	95	82	120	y	hexagonal?
268	infant	0	0.5	undetermined	96	74.5	125.5	y	hexagonal?

Table 25. Middle Group Burials (continued)

Burial No.	Age Category	Low Age	High Age	Sex ^a	Head Angle (degrees)	Grid South (feet)	Grid East (feet)	Preservation Code	Coffin
270	adult			male	97	84.5	123.5	y	unidentified
271	adult	45	57	male	103	76.5	65	y	hexagonal
275	adult			female?	96	81	50	n	unidentified
277	subadult			undetermined	92	77.5	51	n	unidentified
283	subadult	0.33	0.67	undetermined	104	76	123	y	hexagonal
284	adult	21	28	male	86	80.5	115.5	y	unidentified
285	adult	20	30	female	102	80.5	64	y	hexagonal
286	subadult	4.4	8.5	undetermined	89	75	126	y	hexagonal?
287	adult	18	20	male	95	73.5	53	y (no cranium)	unidentified
288	adult			undetermined		74.5	120	n	n/a
291	subadult	3	5	undetermined		82.5	94	n	n/a
292	adult			undetermined		72.5	121	n	unidentified
293	adult			male?	106	82.5	94	n	hexagonal
294	subadult	0.5	1	undetermined	96	88	86.5	y	hexagonal
295	adult	30	50	female	110	82	70	y	hexagonal
296	infant	0.5	2.9	undetermined	68	84	98	n	unidentified
298	subadult	0.67	1.33	undetermined		66.5	123	n	unidentified
300	infant			undetermined	106	76	125.5	y	hexagonal?
301	adult			undetermined	99	86	100.5	n	n/a
301A	undetermined			undetermined		86	100.5	n	n/a
302	adult			female?	99	88.5	99.5	n	n/a
303	subadult	0.5	1	undetermined	100	73.5	76.5	n	n/a
304	subadult	3	5	undetermined	90	81.5	109	y	tapered
306	adult	28	44	male	88	76.5	125	y	hexagonal
310	adult	44	52	female	99	75.5	60	y	hexagonal
312	infant	0	0.3	undetermined	94	75	67	y	rectangular
315	adult	30	40	female	88	83	127	y	hexagonal?
318	subadult	7.5	14	undetermined	116	78	144	n	n/a
320	subadult	2	4	undetermined	120	90	251.5	y	unidentified
321	subadult	1	2	undetermined	117	79.5	143	y	hexagonal
324	adult	25	35	female	90	69	132	y	hexagonal
326	adult	45	55	male	96	73.5	135	y	hexagonal
328	adult	40	50	female	88	84.5	241	y	hexagonal
334	subadult			undetermined	111	89	251	y	unidentified
335	adult	25	35	female	127	84.5	248	y	hexagonal

Table 25. Middle Group Burials (*continued*)

Burial No.	Age Category	Low Age	High Age	Sex ^a	Head Angle (degrees)	Grid South (feet)	Grid East (feet)	Preservation Code	Coffin
336	subadult	0.5	1	undetermined	92	83	125.5	y	hexagonal?
339	subadult			undetermined	86	83	123	n	unidentified
341	adult			male	103	87.5	229.5	y	hexagonal
344	adult	25	35	male?		87.5	255	n	unidentified
345	adult			undetermined		74.5	254	n	n/a
347	subadult	0.5	1	undetermined	98	73.5	130	y	hexagonal
348	subadult	1	2	undetermined	112	66	138	y	hexagonal
349	infant	0	0.5	undetermined	94	72	132	y	unidentified
350	undetermined			undetermined		82	133.5	n	n/a
351	adult	50	60	male	106	84.5	145	y	hexagonal
353	adult	24	34	male	112	84.5	230	y	hexagonal
355	adult			undetermined		74.5	235	n	n/a
356	subadult			undetermined	128	84.5	248	y	shared
358	adult			female?	126	89.5	230	n	unidentified
359	subadult			undetermined	95	84.5	127.5	n	unidentified
360	subadult			undetermined		75.5	235	y	unidentified
365	adult			female	195	79.5	257.5	n	unidentified
366	adult	34	62	undetermined	118	78	224	y	hexagonal
367	adult	25	35	female?		72	130	n	n/a
368	subadult	10.5	13.5	undetermined	95	80.5	246.5	y	unidentified
370	subadult	2	4	undetermined	75	82	146.5	y	hexagonal?
371	adult	25	35	female	115	69	235	y	no coffin
372	adult	25	35	female		81	235	n	n/a
374	infant	0	0.25	undetermined	93	72	132.5	y	unidentified
375	adult	16	18	female	120	74.5	253	y	no coffin
378	undetermined			undetermined		75.5	235	n (not excavated)	unidentified
379	adult	30	40	male	109	71.5	215	y	hexagonal
380	adult	40	60	male	98	85	241	y	hexagonal
383	adult	14	18	female		79	245	y	hexagonal
384	adult	25	45	female	80	91.5	248	y	hexagonal
385	adult	40	60	female	121	86	251.5	y	hexagonal
390	adult	25	35	male	94	71.5	140	n	n/a
393	infant	- 0.17	0.17	undetermined	119	84	211	y	hexagonal?
394	adult	16	25	undetermined		59.5	185	n	n/a
396	subadult	6.5	8.5	undetermined	108	82.5	224	y	hexagonal

Table 25. Middle Group Burials (continued)

Burial No.	Age Category	Low Age	High Age	Sex ^a	Head Angle (degrees)	Grid South (feet)	Grid East (feet)	Preservation Code	Coffin
397	adult	30	40	female	100	87	229	y	hexagonal
398	adult	25	35	undetermined		93	255.5	n	n/a
399	infant	0	0.3	undetermined	106	78	213	y	rectangular
400	adult	25	35	male	85	65.5	130	y	hexagonal
403	adult	39	65	male	113	93	255.5	n	unidentified
405	subadult	6	10	undetermined	119	83.9	211.8	y	hexagonal?
406	infant	0	0.5	undetermined	280	68.25	253.5	y	hexagonal?
408	adult			male?		79.5	158	n/a	n/a
410	adult			female	95	69.5	178	y	hexagonal
412	infant	0	0	undetermined		78.5	218.5	y	unidentified
414	adult	39	59	male	112	74	165	y	unidentified
415	adult	35	55	male	99	81	215	y	hexagonal
417	subadult	9.5	14.5	undetermined		64.5	165	y	unidentified
418	adult	30	55	male	106	64.5	163	y	unidentified
419	adult	48	62	male	117	71.5	206.5	y	hexagonal
420	adult	35	45	male		69.5	186.5	n	n/a
422	undetermined			undetermined		86.5	212.5	n	unidentified
423				n/a		67	162	n (not excavated)	unidentified
424	adult			undetermined		76	220	n/a	n/a
425	adult			female	107	79.1	253	n (not excavated)	hexagonal
427	adult	16	20	male?	91	69.5	179	y	hexagonal
428	adult	40	70	female	95	66.5	147.5	y	unidentified
429	adult			undetermined		64.5	215	n (not excavated)	unidentified
430				n/a		84.5	215	n (not excavated)	unidentified
431	adult			undetermined		79.5	162	n	unidentified
433	adult			undetermined		79.5	160.5	n	n/a
434	undetermined			undetermined		79.5	155	n	no coffin

^aIn the Sex column, a question mark indicates a probable assignment

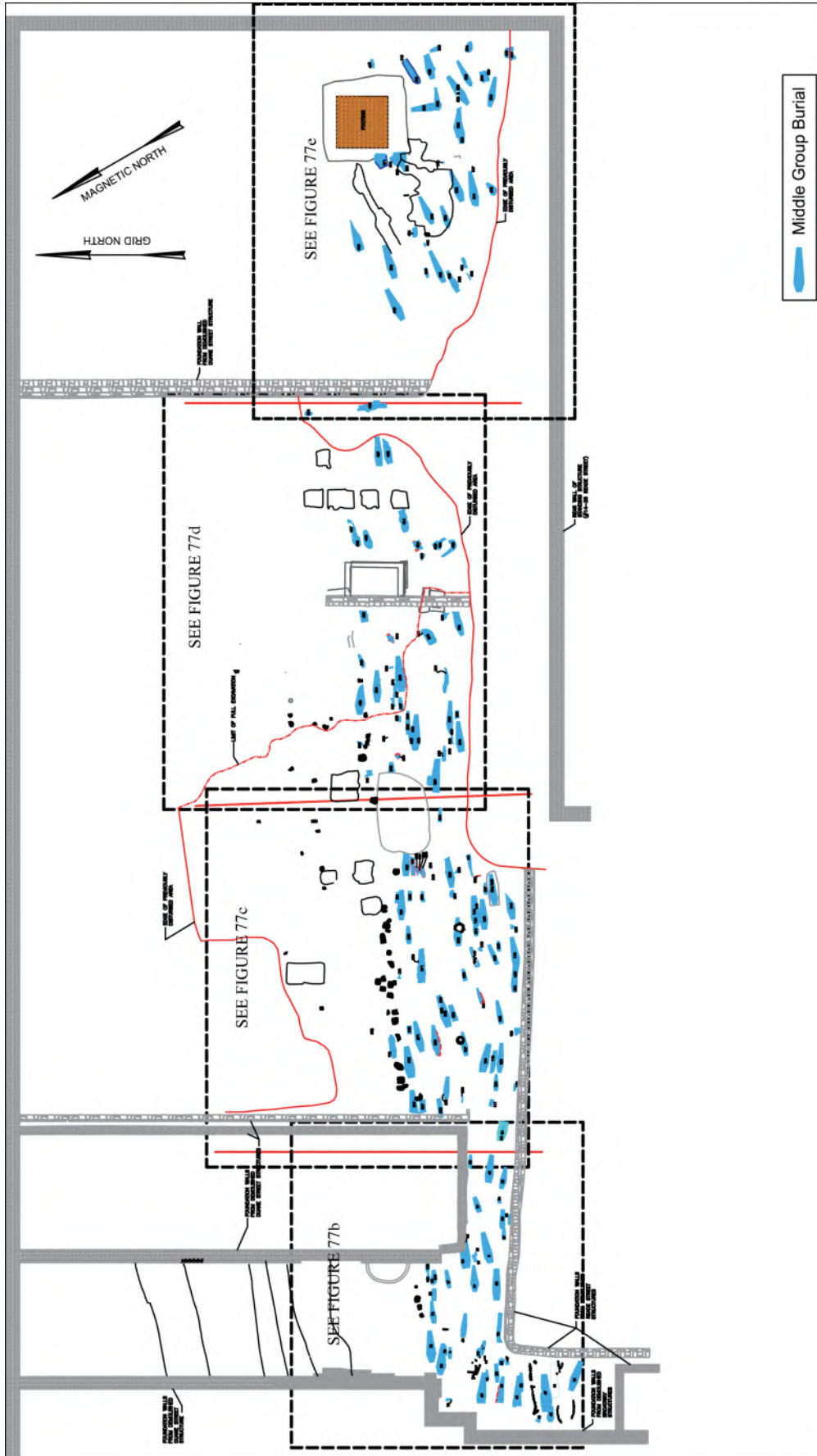


Figure 77a. Excavated Middle Group burials (prepared for the United States General Services Administration).



Figure 77b. Middle Group burials, western area (prepared for the United States General Services Administration).

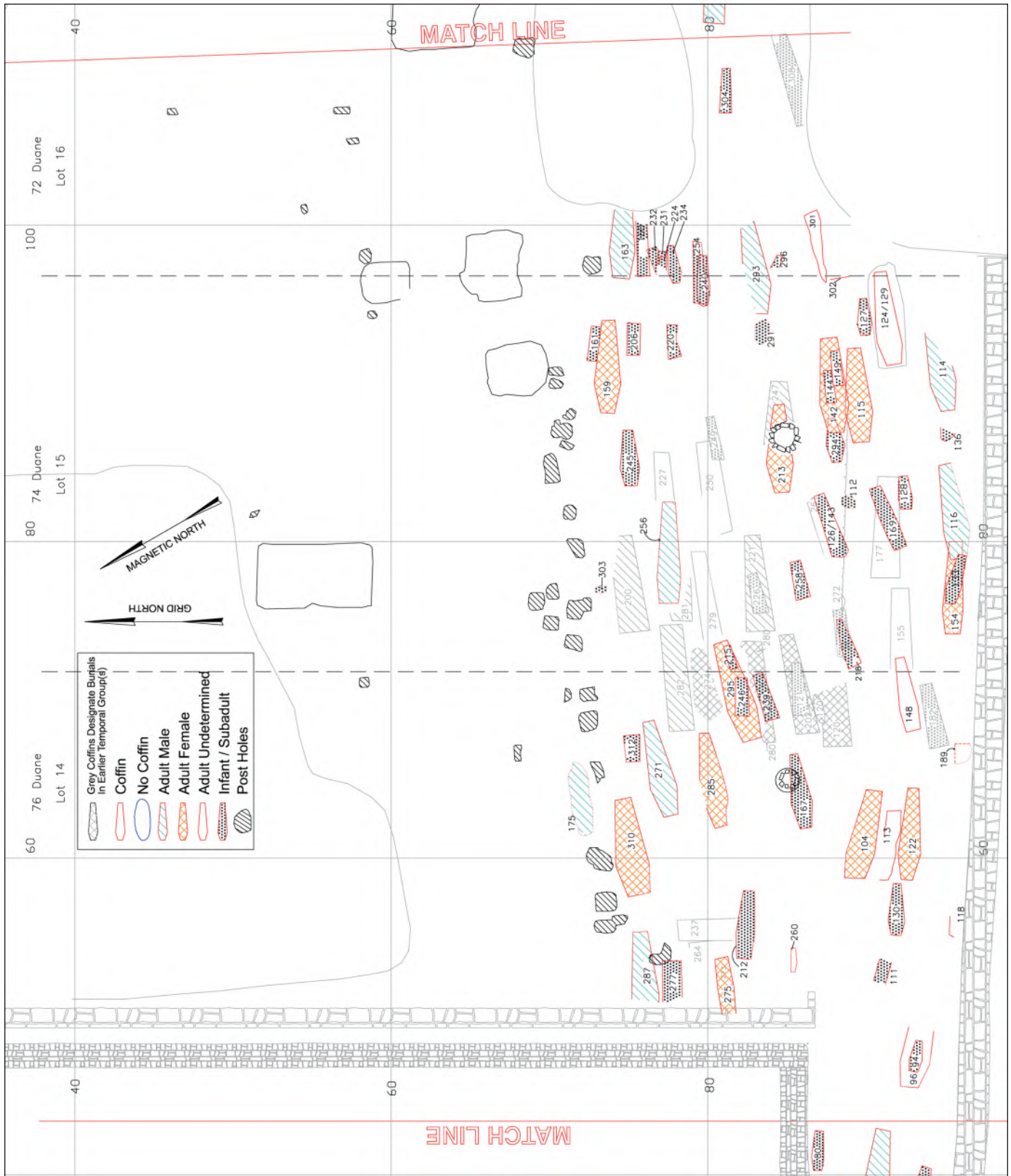


Figure 77 c. Middle Group burials, west-central area (prepared for the United States General Services Administration).

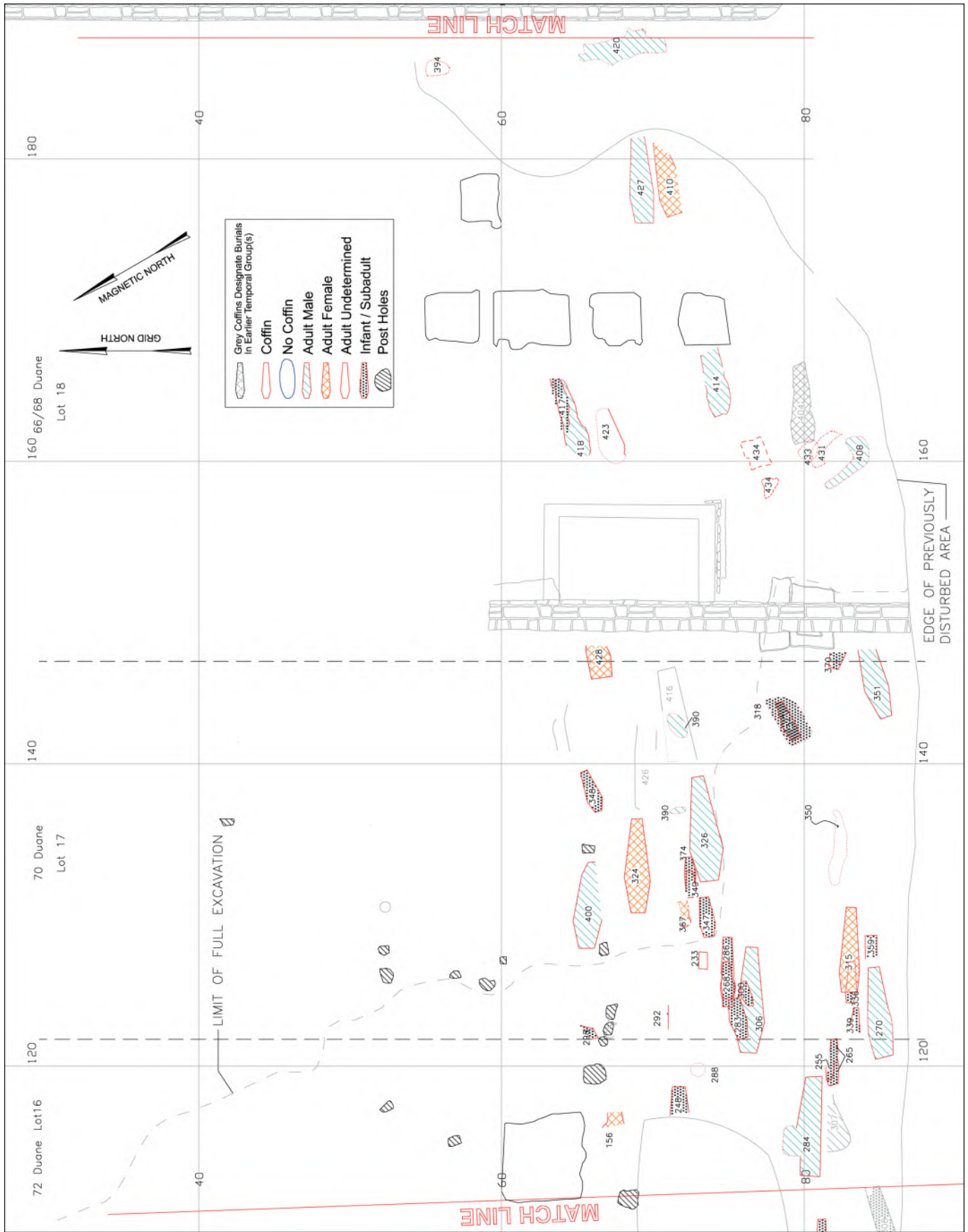


Figure 77d. Middle Group burials, east-central and Lot 18 areas (prepared for the United States General Services Administration).

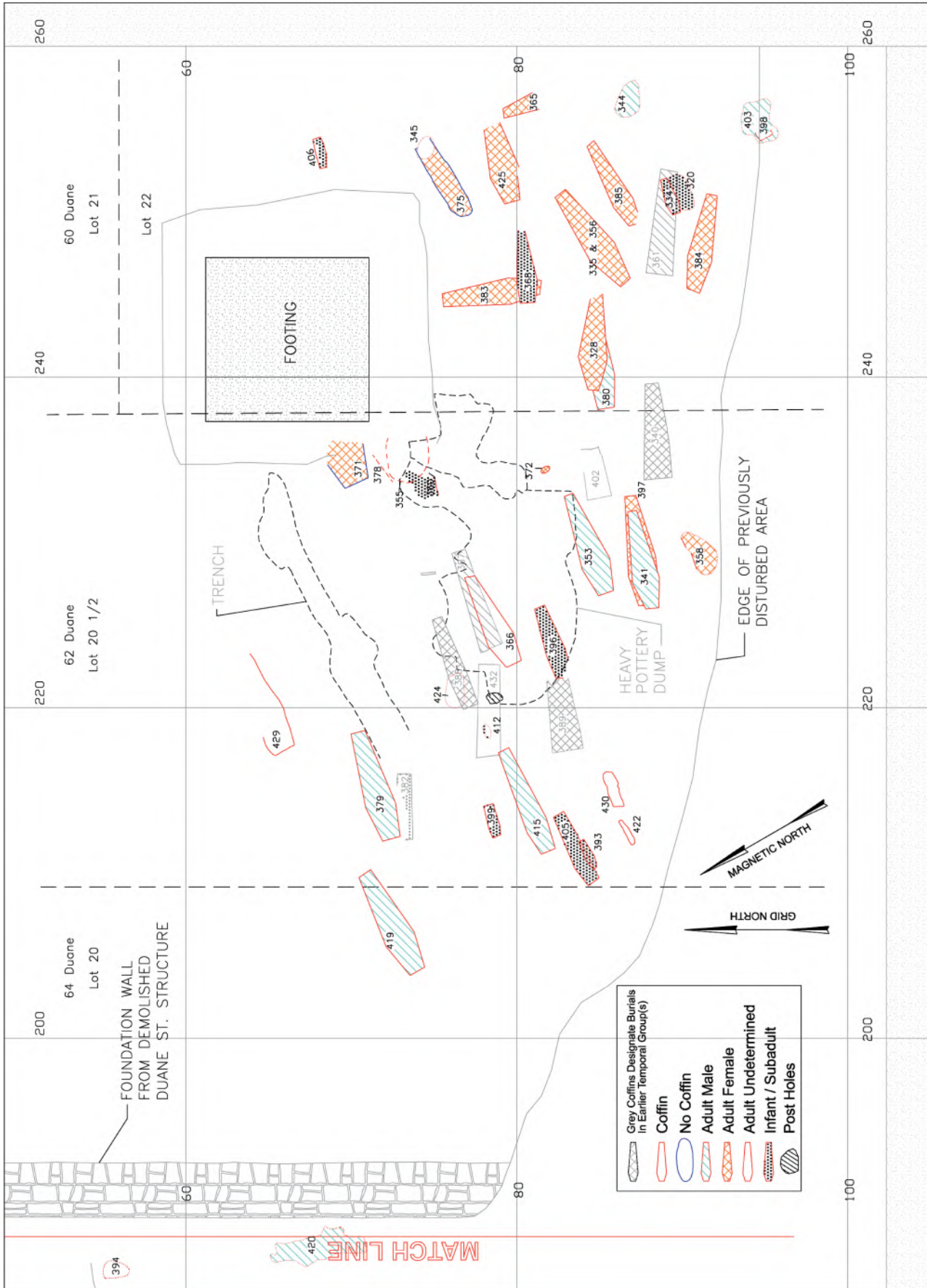


Figure 77e. Middle Group burials, eastern area (prepared for the United States General Services Administration).

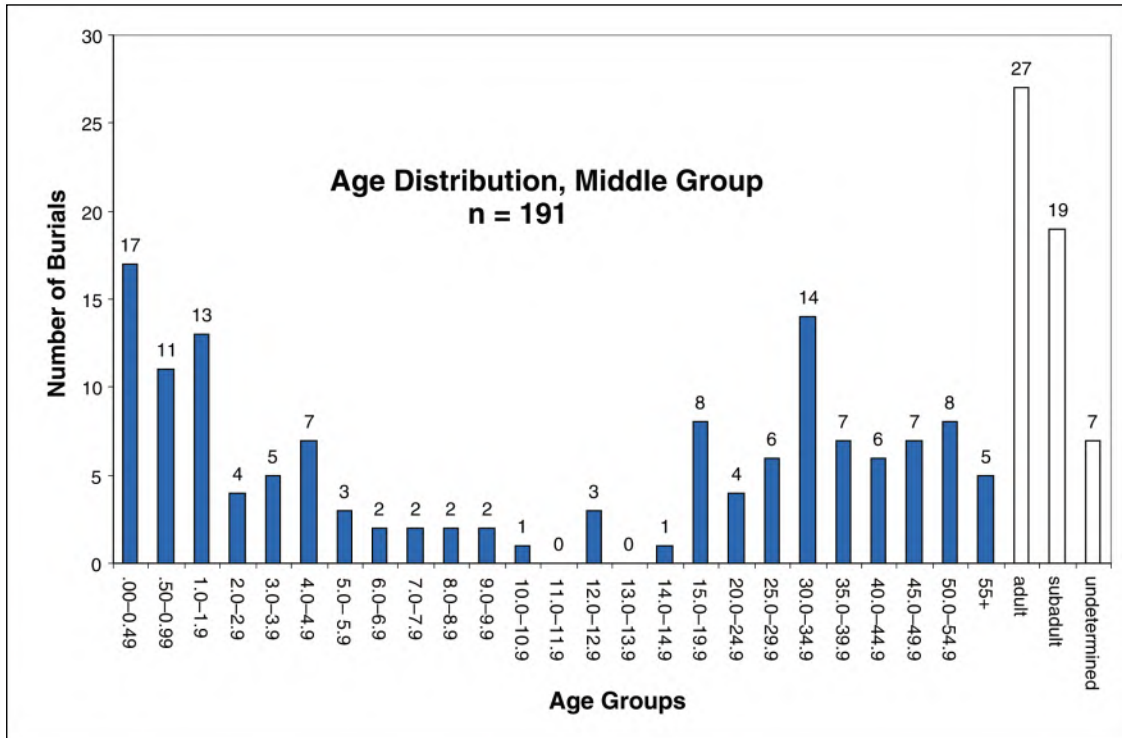


Figure 78. Age distribution, Middle Group. White bars indicate individuals whose age could not be determined (includes only burials from which remains were recovered).

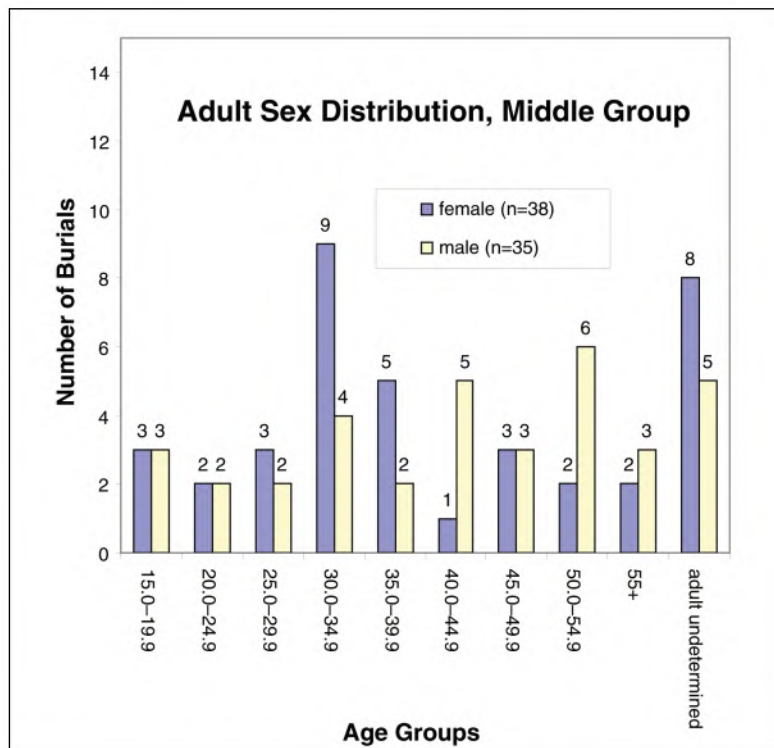


Figure 79. Adult sex distribution, Middle Group.

and 434. Although Burial 375 is placed in this group “by default,” there being no way of distinguishing it as either early or late, Burial 371 can be assigned with more confidence owing to the fact that it was found 2 feet beneath another adult interment. Both of these coffinless burials are located in the southeastern site area, and both had associated artifacts of particular note. Burial 434 was never completely excavated.

Pins were found with 103 of the Middle Group burials, including 62 children (see Chapter 11). Eleven individuals from the Middle Group had evidence or possible evidence for clothing (see Chapter 12). These 11 represent only 7.5 percent of the 145 burials that had adequate preservation for such evidence. A child (in Burial 22) and a woman (in Burial 213) had aglets (tiny metal tubes that enclose the ends of laces and cords), which probably indicate clothing or perhaps shrouds tied with laces. The men interred in Burials 326 and 415 clearly wore trousers, the first having a row of copper-alloy domed buttons indicating a trouser “fly” and the second having 13 copper-alloy buttons at knees and hips, representing breeches. The remaining buttons were found singly or in pairs on five men, one woman, and one adult of undetermined sex. Cuff links were found at the left wrist of the man in Burial 341.

Jewelry (see Chapter 13) was scarce, with only four burials containing items that appear to have been worn as adornment. The woman in Burial 115 wore a ring with a plain band on the third finger of her left hand, and the woman in Burial 310 had a ring with blue glass insets, also on her left hand (it is not clear which finger). A third woman (Burial 371) had two enamel cuff link faces beneath her left upper arm. They had a turquoise ground and white-and-pink surface decoration. A young child (Burial 254) had an exceptional item of adornment, a small silver pendant on a loop, similar to an earring, which may have been strung and worn at the neck. Glass beads from unknown contexts were recovered with Burials 428 (2 specimens) and 434 (1 specimen).

Other material culture from Middle Group burials included a small glass sphere associated with Burial 410 and a small crystal cluster with Burial 55; shells in the coffin of Burial 22 and on the coffin lids of Burials 348, 352, and 365; and several nails that may have been deliberately placed in coffins. A clay ball (roughly the size of a marble) encircled with a decorative copper band was found with possible evidence for a cloth or leather pouch in Burial 375. This unique artifact is discussed in Chapter 14, along with the glass sphere and the crystals.

Spatial Distribution

Burials assigned to the Middle Group were located throughout the excavated site except north of the fence line. For ease of discussion, the site is broken down into subareas, although these are defined more on the basis of preservation factors than spatial distribution of graves. The western area (see Figure 77b) is west of grid line 45 East, a line where a distinction can be seen between relatively sparse interments to the west and very dense burials to the east. This distinction may be the result of poor preservation to the rear of Lot 13, although topography probably played a role in the siting of graves, and there may have been a slope here that made it less desirable for interments (see Chapter 3). The west-central area (see Figure 77c) extends from grid line 45 East to grid line 110 East. Burials are relatively dense within this subarea, but the apparent sudden falling off of burial frequency east of here is probably a result of poor preservation, in particular because of a large construction disturbance at the rear of Lot 16. Again, we believe the original topography was important in the selection of grave sites, as this subarea was relatively flat. The area east of Lot 16 between grid lines 110 and 150 East is the east-central area (see Figure 77d). Here burials are again quite dense, and this was probably another relatively level area within the cemetery. Farther east, the rear of Lot 18 (see Figure 77d) saw particularly heavy disturbance and is considered separately. Finally, the southeast area (see Figure 77e) in and surrounding the pottery dump is discussed. We know that excavation was incomplete in the eastern part of the site, and burials once extended westward and northward of those exposed in this last area (i.e., there is a false appearance of a separate concentration here).

The distribution of burial orientations in the Middle Group burials is shown in Figures 54 (Chapter 5) and 77a–77e. Overall, there were more southwesterly oriented burials (relative to our grid) in this period than in the earlier group. It is possible that the fence was present during part of our middle period and that graves were oriented to it, but the town palisade—in place from 1745 through approximately 1760—may have been an even more notable landmark forming a roughly east-west axis by which to orient graves. It is also possible that more burials were oriented according to the position of the sun at sunset because of stronger enforcement of the law restricting the time that funerals could be conducted to daylight hours.

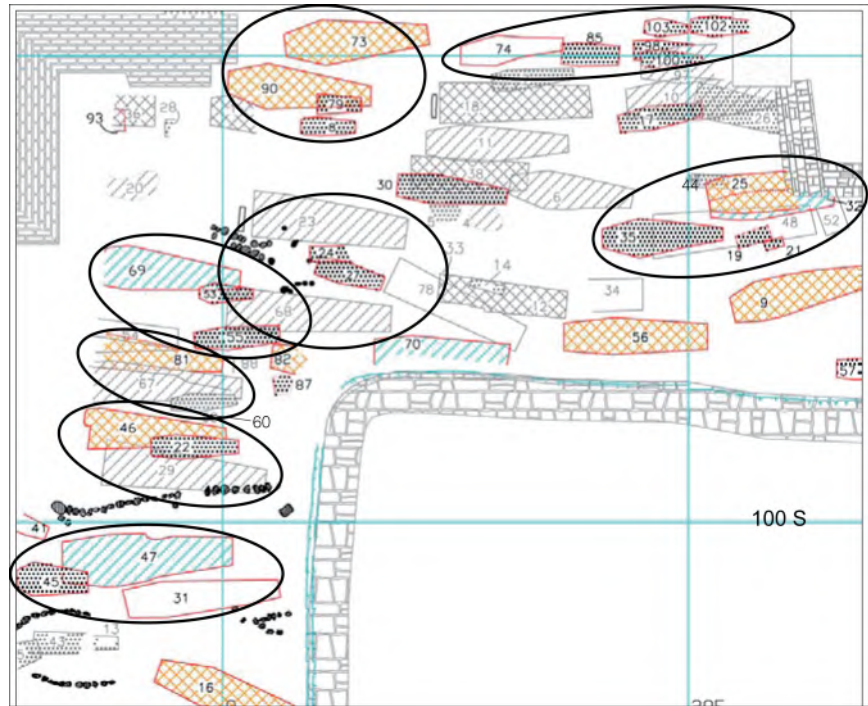


Figure 80. Detail (5 West to 25 East) of the southwestern corner of the site plan (see Figure 7, pocket map) showing burials from all temporal groups. Middle Group burials are shown in color. Grave clusters mentioned in the text are circled.

It seems possible that the spatial syntax governing the placement of a grave included some standard of distance between individual interments. Even the graves of children are sometimes spaced apart from others, which suggests that at times the locations were selected not on the basis of familial/social relationships but on expedience and/or in reference to a spatial system (implicit or explicit) within which individual “plots” were appropriate. There were eight children’s graves in the Middle Group that appear to have been placed apart from other interments: Burials 39, 77, and 80 (see Figure 77b) and Burials 130, 258, 245, and 304 (see Figure 77c). In addition, Burials 128 and 169 were separate from others in the Middle Group; however, they overlay Early Group Burial 177, and deliberate placement with that adult cannot be ruled out. Grave diggers may have sited burials with reference to each other, leaving a certain minimum amount of space between, unless a particular relationship dictated that a grave should join or overlap an existing burial.

Overall, Middle Group burials were dispersed over much more of the excavated portion of the cemetery than were Early Group burials. It is possible that intervening areas between spatial concentrations of early burials were gradually “filled in” during subsequent decades. Although older locations were also reused, resulting in some superimposed burials, there appears to have been some effort to maintain the identity or

integrity of early graves during the middle period. Thus, more than half of the early burials, including Burials 18, 23, 68, 29, 78, 34, 38, 48, 84 and 83, 182, 120, 202, 121, 282, 200, 221/226, 177, 308, 416, 426, 404, 387, 388, 432, and 340, were left undisturbed by Middle Group interments, although some subsequently would be disturbed by Late-Middle or Late Group burials.

The Western Area

Middle Group burials in the western part of the excavated site (see Figure 77b) are found in several clusters. Some of the clusters include burials that are thought to belong to earlier or later temporal groups, as discussed in Chapter 6, and in order to illustrate this, Figure 80 shows burials from all temporal groups in this area of the site (compare to Figure 77b).

One cluster includes Burials 73, 90, 79 and 8 (top left in Figure 80). These are located at the rear of Lot 12, just south of the projected fence line that once marked the cemetery’s north side. Burials 73 and 90 were of women in their 20s and late 30s respectively, and the infants in Burials 79 and 8 may have been placed deliberately with the older of the two women. It is also possible that a later burial, Burial 1, which lay at a higher elevation and is assigned to the Late Group, was placed deliberately with these graves. The recorded

stratigraphy suggests, however, that the surface of the earlier graves may have been covered over, obscuring their locations, before Burial 1 was interred.

To the east of this group, a second cluster can be viewed as a string or line of burials, running parallel to the south side of the projected fence alignment. These graves, which include Burials 74, 85, 98, 100, 102, and 103 (top right, Figure 80), belonged to children or infants (although no remains were recovered from the child-sized coffin in Burial 74).

Burial 53 lay at the foot of Middle Group Burial 69, and this association well may have been deliberate, but the child's grave also overlay the head of an Early Group grave, Burial 68 (left center, Figure 80). Burial 55, likewise, was near the foot of Middle Group Burial 81 but also at the head of Early Group Burial 68. Clusters where Middle Group (and later) burials may be associated with earlier graves have been discussed in Chapter 6. These include

- Burials 24 and 27, infant graves among earlier Burials 23, 68, and 78 (center, Figure 80);
- Burials 54, 81, 67, 60, 46 and 22, which may have been deliberately placed above early Burials 29 and 88 (left center, Figure 80);
- Burials 25 and 32 (described in the section on spatial distribution in this chapter), 35, 19, and 21, placed above Early Group Burials 44, 48 and 52 (at right in Figure 80).

Also discussed in Chapter 6 were Burials 22 (of a child) and 46 (of an adult woman), which may have been placed deliberately with Early Group Burial 29, a probable male adult. Burial 46, although included here with the Middle Group, also may in fact be an early burial (its coffin shape is difficult to determine). The child, between 2 and 4 years old, was in a possibly hexagonal coffin that had been placed so as to straddle the two underlying adult burials. An east-west row of cobblestones, 3–4 feet above the Burial 29 coffin, separated these three burials from other interments to the south. The cobbles, averaging about 0.3 feet in diameter, may have formed a boundary marker between grave groups. South of the line were Burial 47, of a man of 35–45 years; Burial 31, of an adolescent; and Burial 45, of a child of 2–4 years. The man and the adolescent may have been placed in a single large grave, although this is impossible to determine with certainty. The child was buried later, its grave overlapping the head end of the man's grave. A thin slab of stone was found oriented vertically above the upper-body portion of Burial 47

and was identified as a possible grave marker (see Figure 59 in Chapter 5).

To the south of Burial 103 and Burials 98 and 100, Burials 17, 35, and 56 lay in what may have been a "row," fairly evenly spaced from north to south. It is not possible to determine whether this apparent alignment was deliberate. Each of these graves was adjacent to or overlay an earlier burial. Their spacing, and that of Burials 9, 77, 80, 49, 39, and the cluster consisting of Burials 50, 57, and 66 (see Figure 77b), suggest the positioning of burials in "plots" as mentioned above for the Middle Group.

The West-Central Area

Several clusters can be discerned among Middle Group interments in this part of the site (see Figure 77c). One cluster centers on Middle Group Burials 96 and 94, an adult and child in a shared grave, located within Republican Alley behind the southeast corner of the Lot 13 basement (Figure 81). Surrounding and overlying this grave were those of several more children, Burials 42, 64, 61, and 91. Their placement is suggestive of deliberate association with the double grave. (Although they postdate Burials 96 and 94 based on superposition and were placed in our Late-Middle temporal group, it is possible these children all belong together in the main Middle Group.) A final interment, Burial 95, actually truncated the entire eastern portion of Burial 96, suggesting that the earlier grave had been forgotten or was disregarded by the grave diggers by the time the later grave was dug. Because of this, Burial 95 has been placed in the Late Group for this analysis.

Another tight clustering of burials includes Middle Group Burials 215, 246, 295 and 239 (at left center in Figure 82). Burial 215 was placed in the same grave as Burial 295, although possibly slightly later. All of these overlay an earlier grave, Burial 280, and in turn were overlain by a later grave, Burial 229. Early Group burials are concentrated in this area of the cemetery, including several that had no superimposed interments, as though they had been deliberately kept undisturbed. Because of this, initially, the placement of a cluster of later (Middle Group) graves immediately above Burial 280 seemed as though it might have been deliberate. However, the grave of shared Burials 295 and 215 truncated both the north side of Burial 280 and the western portion of another early burial (Burial 279), suggesting that the early burials either were not known or not considered at the time

Figure 81. Detail (41–55 East and 91–96 South) of west-central area of the site plan (see Figure 7, pocket map) showing burials from all temporal groups. The cluster containing Middle Group Burials 96 and 94 is circled.

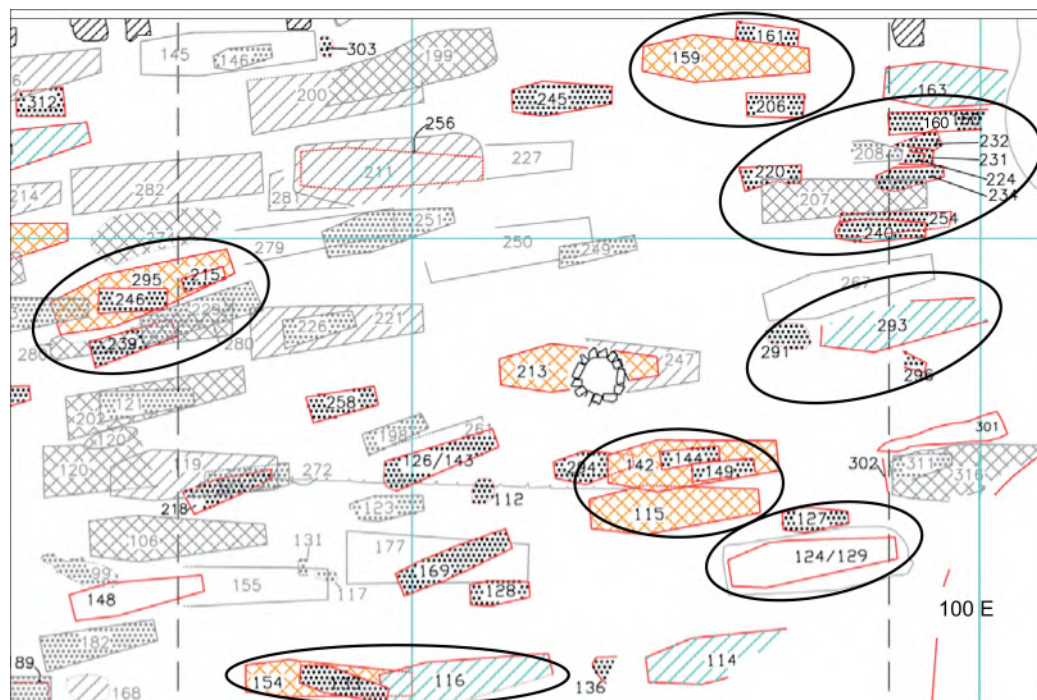
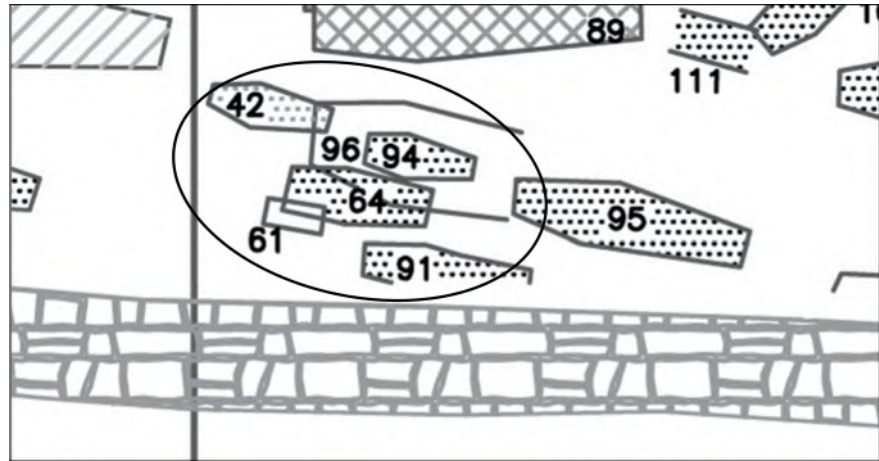


Figure 82. Detail (65–100 East and 70–98 South) of west-central area of the site plan (see Figure 7, pocket map) showing burials from all temporal groups. Middle Group burials are shown in color. Clusters mentioned in the text are circled.

of the later interments. Instead, we suggest that it was Middle Group Burial 295 that “anchored” the cluster of children’s burials from the Middle Group and later.

Three graves, Burials 133, 154, and 116, are clustered together near the south edge of Republican Alley (bottom center, Figure 82); their association is the more striking because of the gap of several feet between these burials and their neighbors to the north. Burial 116 was of a man between 45 and 55, Burial 154 of a woman in her late twenties, and Burial 133 of a child of 1–2 years. The woman and child were buried after the man.

Another cluster includes Burials 142, 144, and 149 (a triple interment of a woman in her late twenties with two children) and Burials 115 and 294 (lower right quadrant, Figure 82). Burial 115, adjacent to the south and parallel to the woman and children, held a woman between 25 and 35 years old; her grave appears to have been dug slightly later in time than the other. The stratigraphic relationship of Burial 294 to the others is impossible to reconstruct, but it probably was the first interment of the three.

Nearby, just to the southeast, lay Burials 124/129 and Burial 127. No skeletal remains were found in

the coffin of Burial 129, which was adult sized (a few skeletal elements found in its grave fill were designated Burial 124). Burial 127, which held an infant, was immediately adjacent to the central north side of Burial 129, and the two may have been placed together deliberately.

An instance of an adult with children probable co-interment assigned to the Middle Group is Burials 159, 161 and 206 (top right, Figure 82). As noted in Chapter 5, this group comprised a woman of 25–35 years old and two infants or young children, who were placed on either side of the foot end of her grave.

A cluster of overlapping graves of children was excavated at the eastern edge of the rear of Lot 15, in an area severely disturbed by construction activity during the fieldwork (upper right, Figure 82). The interments included Burials 160, 231, 232, 224; Burials 254 and 240 slightly to the south (in an apparent shared grave); and Burial 220 slightly to the west. Adult graves lay immediately to the north (Burial 163), and immediately above (Burial 207). The child burials are placed in the Middle Group, but their possible earlier assignment is noted in Chapter 6, where we discussed the problematic temporal assignment of Burial 207. In any case, Burial 207 was clearly later than the children's graves it overlay. It is unusual at the New York African Burial Ground site for an adult grave to be above children's graves. The underlying graves may not have been known to the Burial 207 grave digger. Alternatively, this adult may have been placed here on purpose, having had some relation to the children. A partially intact late child's grave (Burial 208) and disturbed adult remains from another adult grave (Burial 204) were found in positions overlying Burial 207 and the children's graves.

Burials 291, 293/269, and 296 may have formed another grave cluster (right center, Figure 82). Burial 296 consisted only of child-sized coffin remains, Burial 291 contained displaced infant bones, and Burial 293 held an adult, possibly male. A later grave, Burial 267, disturbed Burial 293 and presumably also the infant Burial 291.

The East-Central Area

Grouped burials, what we have been referring to as “clusters,” are few in this part of the site (see Figure 77d). One, with an adult and several children/infants, includes Burials 306 (this contained the adult, a man between 28 and 44 years of age), 300, 283,

268, and 286 (see Figure 77d, lower left). The latter two burials consist of an infant and a child between 4.4 and 8.5 years of age that appear to be in a shared grave that was dug before that of Burial 306—which was not placed above the infant graves but adjacent to them—followed by Burials 383 and 300.

Children's graves also lay to the east of these burials, and it is possible the grouping actually extended eastward to Burial 326, which held a man who died at 45–55 years of age. The man had filed teeth, as did the probable woman represented by a displaced cranium in nearby Burial 367. It seems likely these two individuals were originally interred in close proximity to one another. In the case of Burial 367, isotope and lead analysis pointed to African birth. Burial 374, which held an infant or newborn, was found within the grave of Burial 326, on the north side near the head. Other children's graves lay above and just to the west of Burial 374. These were Burials 349, 347 and 233 (the latter consisting only of a tiny rectangular box, with no extant human remains).

South of the Burial 306 cluster was an area crowded with graves, possibly representing another extended grouping (see Figure 77d). The burials include, on the west, Burial 284 (of a man in his twenties); on the south, Burial 270 (of another man, age undetermined); and on the east, Burial 315 (of a woman between 30 and 40 years old). Graves of infants and children lay between, above, and beneath these. In another unusual instance of an adult burial overlying a child burial, Burial 315 lay immediately above and perfectly aligned with the infant in Burial 336. Burial 339, partially destroyed by construction activity in this location, and the shared grave of Burials 255 and 265 lay in the midst of these others.

Other burials in the east-central area were apart from each other and from these clusters, suggesting, as noted, that the grave diggers at the African Burial Ground might have relied on a mental template when placing graves, which would have included an offset between plots.

The Lot 18 Area

The rear portion of historic Lot 18 (see Figure 77d) suffered disturbance from multiple twentieth-century construction features, including an elevator shaft and a series of concrete footings, and many graves were probably destroyed in this area. The area was never fully excavated, however, and, presumably, graves remain intact below and adjacent to those that were

exposed by archaeologists, which numbered 12. All were assigned to the Middle Group by default, except for Burial 404, which had a tapered coffin and was assigned to the Early Group, and Burial 413, which had a piece of creamware (dating no earlier than 1760) in its shaft and was dated to the Late-Middle Group.

Owing to the partial excavation and the degree of disturbance, an analysis of spatial patterning is not possible. It is possible that Burials 410 (of a woman of undetermined age who had a small amber-colored glass sphere in her grave) and 427 (of a young man in his late teens) were purposely placed adjacent to one another, as the graves were aligned and very close together.

The Southeast Area

As previously noted, colonial New York's mid-century palisade wall may have been used, along with the direction of sunset, to orient burials along a general east-west axis. This hypothesis is strengthened by the observation that head-to-west Middle Group burials in the southeastern part of the excavated cemetery (see Figure 77e) have a strong southwesterly trend in orientation (as do Late-Middle Group burials in this area). This is where the palisade, oriented southwest to northeast, passed closest to the excavated site (no doubt along the ridge of "Pot-Baker's Hill"), and this location would have been most prominent in the landscape as grave diggers worked. There were other nonburial site features excavated in this area that also raked southwest to northeast, including the pottery-waste midden and a filled-in trench, designated Feature 163. It is possible that the trench, midden, and burials ran parallel to the original slope of the ground here, just as the palisade wall would have.

The function of this 1-foot-deep trench is not known, and it may have been a natural depression. Artifacts within the trench do not lend themselves to firm dating but did include kiln waste (Janowitz and Cheek 2003). It separated Burials 419, 379, 429, and 382 (the latter assigned to our Early Group) from the rest of the burials in this area. This part of the site was never fully excavated, and it is likely many other interments are located to the north of the trench.

A few burials lay southeast of the stoneware dump (see discussion in Chapter 4), slightly lower in elevation than the burials that were within or at the edges of the dump, and contained no fragments of stoneware whatsoever. This loose grouping includes Burials 384, 320, and 334 from the Middle Group, along with Burial 361

from the Early Group (near lower right corner of Figure 77e). The complete absence of kiln waste from these graves is difficult to explain except by positing that they predate the dump. As discussed in Chapter 4, Burial 384 is problematic because although it is devoid of stoneware and aligned adjacent and parallel to early Burial 361, its hexagonal coffin suggests it is later than its neighbor. Burial 384 and the side-by-side children's Burials 320 and 334 all may have been placed deliberately in association with the early grave.

Although there are several paired interments in the southeast subarea, clusters are not discerned. Shown on Figure 77e (moving left to right), the pairs include Burials 393 and 405 (of an infant with a child of 6–10 years); Burials 341 and 397 (of a man and a woman); Burials 328 and 380 (a man and a woman both over 40 years old, possibly interred together, although not at the same time; and Burials 335 and 356, of a woman with an infant cradled in her arm. A unique pair (not sharing a grave) was formed by Burials 383 and 368, the latter lying perpendicular to the former such that the heads overlapped.

Unique and Unusual Burials

Burials 25 and 32: A Violent Death and a Shared Grave

The remains in Burial 25 were of a woman whose age was calculated as 20–24 years. Lodged beneath her fourth left rib was a lead musket ball, slightly flattened (Figure 83). Her coffin had been placed atop that of an older man aged 50–60 (Burial 32) and precisely aligned with it, so that a deliberate co-interment is postulated (Figure 84).

The bullet's point of entry cannot be definitively determined, although there was a large hole at the center of the shattered left scapula, and it is possible the woman was shot through her upper left back. Bone fractures suggest that she also had suffered a blunt-force trauma to the face; an oblique fracture of her lower right arm had been caused by twisting. A small trace of new bone around the fractures suggested that she lived for a short while after the fractures occurred (no more than a few days). The woman's skeleton showed scarring on each ulna (one of the two lower arm bones), where the muscles attached at the elbows, suggesting habitual activity using these muscles (see Wilczak et al. 2009 [Chapter 11 of *Skeletal Biology of the New York African Burial Ground*]).



Figure 83. In situ photograph of musket ball lodged in rib cage of the woman in Burial 25 (photograph by Dennis Seckler).



Figure 84. In situ photographs of *left*, Burial 32, and *right*, Burial 25. The burials may have shared a grave, and both were disturbed by the construction of a foundation wall on Lot 13. The heads are to the west. The ruler alongside Burial 25 is measured in feet (photographs by Dennis Seckler).



Figure 85. In situ photograph of Burial 175, bones placed atop the coffin of Burial 257. Ruler laid alongside the burial is marked in feet; north is to the right (photograph by Dennis Seckler).

Burial 175: A Secondary Burial

Burial 175 consisted of bones found in the grave of Late Group Burial 257 (Figure 85). Although completely disarticulated, the skeletal elements from Burial 175 were almost all accounted for and were identified as those of a man between the ages of 24 and 28. One possible scenario is of grave diggers coming upon the earlier grave, removing all of the bones, and then carefully replacing them atop the new coffin. Although the disturbance may have been accidental, another possibility is that these remains represent a deliberate exhumation followed by secondary burial. In this case, the bones may have been placed within the grave of a recently deceased relative.

Burials 74 and 129: Empty Coffins

There were no human remains found in the coffin excavated as Burial 74. The grave was located in the far western part of the site, at the rear of Lot 12 (see Figure 77b). The shaft outline was rectangular in shape, and the coffin was hexagonal, with its head to

the west. It was approximately 4.5 feet long, suggesting that it had held a child. Nails were recorded in situ around the perimeter of the coffin, although only at the bottom. Because this coffin was of a probable child, it is possible the skeletal remains had simply decayed, leaving no trace; however, judging by other child burials at the site, we expect that some teeth would have been preserved in situ.

Burial 129 also contained no skeletal remains. There were scattered adult skeletal remains (three teeth, an occipital fragment of the skull, and the distal end of a humerus) recovered from the grave-fill soil, and excavators hypothesized that when Burial 129 was interred it completely displaced another burial (designated Burial 124). It is not possible to determine whether one or two burials are actually represented. The coffin lid recorded as belonging to Burial 129 was fairly well preserved, however, and it is difficult to envision how or why the remains were removed from within it and somehow scattered. The coffin was first drawn as four sided, slightly tapered toward the foot (east) end; however, the final burial drawing represents the coffin as hexagonal in shape.

As discussed in Chapter 6, either the deceased were removed from their coffins after interment, or empty coffins were interred intentionally. Secondary burial and grave robbing are possible scenarios in the first case, although burial of an empty coffin might suggest adherence to a religious practice or an attempt at deception.

South-Headed and East-Headed Burials

Burials 383 and 365, south-headed women's burials in the southeast area of the site (see Figure 77e, left center), were discussed in Chapter 5. The orientation of the head of the infant in Burial 406, also located at the far eastern edge of site, was toward the east. The coffin shape was unclear: it appeared to be six sided, but the "shoulder" was not obvious. There is a possibility that the position of the infant within the coffin was not known to those who placed it in the grave, and thus that the unusual orientation was accidental.

Burials 142, 144, and 149: A Triple Grave

In this grave, a woman between 25 and 30 years of age was buried along with two infants, one whose age was calculated at less than 2 months, and one thought to have been between 6 and 12 months old

at death. The three were in separate coffins. The tiny coffins of the children, Burials 144 and 149, had been placed so as to both fit on the top of the woman's (Figure 86).

Either all three were interred at the same time, or the infants were buried together after the woman. In the other two instances at the New York African Burial Ground where a woman shared a grave with an infant (Burials 12 and 14 and Burials 335 and 356), the infant had been placed within the coffin of the adult.



Figure 86. In situ photograph of Burials 142, 144, and 149. The outlines of the individual coffins are indicated. Ruler alongside the woman's coffin is marked in feet; north is to the right (photograph by Dennis Seckler).

CHAPTER 8

The Late-Middle Group

Warren R. Perry, Jean Howson, and Augustin F. C. Holl

The Late-Middle Group consists of burials that have been distinguished from the main group because of stratigraphic relationships or because artifacts found with them are datable to the final third of the eighteenth century. It is possible that there is some overlap between the Late-Middle and the Late Groups, defined as post-1776. Nevertheless, in order to keep those burials that are most securely assignable to the later period (see Chapter 9) analytically distinct, we have separated out a Late-Middle cohort and for convenience use the start of the Revolutionary War as the end date. We use 1760 as an approximate beginning date for Late-Middle burials, although some overlap between the Middle and Late-Middle Groups is likely because in many cases temporal-group assignment is based solely on stratigraphic position. Relatively few burials ($n = 58$) are assigned to the Late-Middle Group.

A sketch of the town and its population precedes the presentation of the Late-Middle Group mortuary sample. The material culture, spatial distribution, and some unique and unusual burials assigned to this group are then discussed.

The Town

This period opens with the French and Indian, or Seven Years, War (1754–1763), over the course of which thousands of soldiers were quartered in the city and thousands of sailors manned ships in the harbor (for a description of the city in these years, see Burrows and Wallace [1999:165–222]). New barracks to house the troops had to be constructed, and the buildings were sited in the northern part of the town Commons just south of the African Burial Ground. The city's merchants prospered during and after the war. Following the war the growing trade of the port and the

marketing of goods that began to flow to the colonies as a result of the Industrial Revolution in England fed the local economy and the fortunes of the local elite; artisans also benefited from a boom in construction during and after the war. The town continued its northward growth, although the fashionable families remained downtown.

Residential development along Broadway began to encroach upon the western side of the burial ground during these years. The town is best depicted on the Rutzer Map of 1767 (see Figure 20 in Chapter 2) for the Late-Middle burial cohort. A composite map (covering the entire period 1730–1770) prepared for the book *Gotham* (Burrows and Wallace 1999:206) is also useful for locating streets, churches, and public buildings throughout the city. Isaac Teller (one of the heirs of the Van Borsum Patent) built three houses along Broadway near present-day Chambers Street sometime between 1760 and 1765, and two other houses stood to the north of these. Teller's fence, reportedly with a locked gate, also went up in this period (see Chapters 2 and 4). Buildings that may have been associated with the Campbell pottery abutted the cemetery on the northwest along the property line; buildings that may have been part of the Crolius/Remmy pottery operation were farther to the east, also along the property line. On the town Commons just south of the burial ground, a jail and a cemetery for the Almshouse were erected in 1757; in 1775, the Bridewell went up. Although this part of town was no longer remote, it was still marginal in a social sense, as it was characterized by a concentration of public institutions for the criminal, the homeless, the insane, and the impoverished, not to mention the place of execution.

As neighborhoods moved northward, churches also appeared in the northern precincts (see Rothschild 1990:25–80). Many churches had at least small

numbers of black congregants by this time. An important development was the founding of the Methodist Church in New York, the first meeting of which was held in 1766. Its permanent home was built in 1768. The Methodists welcomed blacks and were antislavery. The black membership in the beginning included small numbers of mainly enslaved men and women, but reports from the early 1770s suggest that the numbers of blacks who came to hear the Methodist preachers grew quickly (Walls 1974:39–40).

Complete segregation and restrictions on full participation by blacks within the churches was the norm, however. At John Street, as at the other churches, blacks sat in the loft and entered by a separate stair, and black members met in separate “Negro classes” led by white men (John Street Methodist Church Archives, New York, Class Rolls, 1785–1790, Record No. 223, Book 1A [old]; Walls 1974). Segregation extended to the churchyards. Burial records survive for this period for the Reformed Dutch; Anglican (Trinity as well as St. Paul’s and St. George’s Chapels); Lutheran (Trinity, Christ, and United); Moravian; Baptist; and German Reformed churches of Manhattan, and of those examined, only the Dutch church recorded the burial of blacks in the 1760s—just three individuals, and even for these the location of the burials is not known (New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, Burial Register of the Reformed Dutch Church in the City of New York, 1727–1804). In 1773, Trinity (Anglican) Church’s black membership was substantial enough to warrant some provision for burials, and the church established its own small African cemetery at the corner of Church and Reade Streets (just one block west of the African Burial Ground). Trinity also allowed the 1774 burial of an enslaved woman named Mary—arranged and paid for by her master Evert Bancker—at the “English” churchyard (Trinity), suggesting the occasional paternalistic gesture (House Expense Book of Evert Bancker, cited in Foote [1991:146]). It is possible other blacks were interred in elite family vaults or plots as well, but there is no evidence for the general practice.

The importation of captives continued down to the eve of the Revolution, with the 1760s and 1770s seeing the greatest volume of direct trade between New York and Africa. Doubtless a high proportion of African-born people entered the local black community (Lydon 1978:378–381). It was in March 1762 that merchant John Watts (1928:31) wrote that captives for the New York market “must be young the younger the better if not quite Children.” Two large shipments of cap-

tives direct from the continent, a total of 196 persons, arrived at the city docks in 1763, and at least 59 more African-born captives were recorded between 1768 and 1772 (Lydon 1978:382–383).

The Population

Census

After a slight drop from the 1740s to 1750s, the black population of New York City grew substantially again between 1756 and 1771 (Table 26). The 38 percent increase was accounted for mainly by adults and by more women than men, with the adult sex ratio dropping to 85.9 in 1771.

The adult male category included 68 men over 60 years of age in 1756 and 42 over 60 in 1771. This absolute and proportional drop in elderly men may reflect natural attrition accompanied by increased importation of younger men. As a proportion of the city’s total population, blacks dropped to 14.3 percent, outstripped by accelerating European growth (presumably through immigration and natural increase).

Mortuary Sample

The 58 burials assigned to the Late-Middle Group are listed in Table 27, and their distribution within the excavated portion of the cemetery is shown on the site plan in Figures 87a–87e. In the table, head angle is the orientation in degrees west of north (discussed in Chapter 5). Preservation codes are explained in Chapter 3. An entry of “n/a” in the coffin column indicates that the bones were severely disturbed, displaced, or redeposited so that coffin presence/absence could not be determined. Age and sex profiles are shown in Figures 88 and 89.

As explained in Chapter 5, we believe that subadults are underrepresented in the age profile because children’s burials that might actually belong in the Late-Middle Group were buried in, above, or near existing graves from earlier periods, and such children’s burials cannot be distinguished.

Mortuary Material Culture

Only three burials assigned to the Late-Middle Group were without coffins, Burials 357, 377, and 391. All three may in fact belong with the Late Group, which

Table 26. Black Population by Age and Sex, 1756–1771

Year	Label in Census	Adults		Children		Age for Children	Total
		Male	Female	Male	Female		
1756	“black”	672	695	468	443	≤15	2,278
1771	“black”	932	1,085	568	552	≤15	3,137

Note: Information from Green and Harrington (1932) and U.S. Bureau of the Census (1909).

had most of the other coffinless interments. However, lacking additional evidence, such as stratigraphic superposition, spatial association, or late artifacts, we have kept them with the middle period graves, thus avoiding the tautology of placing them in the Late Group solely on the basis of having no coffins. It should be noted, however, that shifting these burials to the Late Group would enhance that cohort’s distinctiveness (for example, two of the three are men, which matches the skewed sex distribution of the Late Group).

Coffins of adult burials in the Late-Middle Group were hexagonal except for those in Burials 333 and 392, which were rectangular. These were the only unambiguously rectangular adult coffins excavated at the site. Coffins of children and infants were hexagonal (9), rectangular (1), tapered (2), and four sided but uncertain as to rectangular or tapered (1). Four were unidentifiable owing to poor preservation.

Four of the five coffins at the New York African Burial Ground that were either clearly or probably decorated (in Burials 101, 176, 222, and 332) have been assigned to the Late-Middle Group (the fifth, a possibly decorated coffin in Burial 252, has been assigned to the Late Group). This may reflect changing coffin style and perhaps indicates that by the third quarter of the eighteenth century, in some cases coffins were being displayed at the deceased’s home or graveside. However, we stress the small number of decorated coffins and also would caution that some of these burials’ Late-Middle Group assignment is based on the decorations themselves: tacks forming the lid adornment were of a type manufactured in England beginning in the 1760s (see Chapter 10 for further discussion of coffins and hardware). All of the individuals in decorated coffins were identified as adult males or probable males. Burial 101 had a coffin with a heart-shaped design formed from tacks; the design has been identified as a possible Sankofa symbol. The coffin in Burial 176 had tacks edging the lid and six handles with back plates, each with cut-out

< > shapes. The coffin in Burial 222 also apparently had a tack design on the lid, although it was disturbed and could not be reconstructed. Burial 332 held a coffin with initials and a number formed in tacks. These coffins are illustrated in the section on unique and unusual burials in this chapter and in Chapter 10.

Pins were found with 34 of the individuals in the Late-Middle Group. Pins were in 70.2 percent of the 47 graves considered well enough preserved to expect them and in 1 other burial (Burial 319), where preservation was very poor but pin fragments were recovered with the bone. Men, women and children were among the 34. By contrast, only 4 (8.3 percent) of the graves, all of men, had clear evidence for clothing. Burial 10 contained 13 copper-alloy buttons (8 whole; 5 with shanks only) in positions indicative of breeches and a jacket. Burial 238 had a bone button back that was recovered from the cervical vertebrae (neck) of its occupant, along with octagonal cuff links recovered from each wrist. Burial 333 had 6 bone buttons in the pelvic area. Burial 392 had 11 buttons, some in fragments and others associated with cloth; the positions of the buttons are indicative of breeches. This man also had an octagonal cuff link face at the right clavicle (collar bone); the apparent mate was recovered in the laboratory when the cervical vertebrae were cleaned. The only other item of adornment found with a Late-Middle Group interment, the woman in Burial 107, was a single cylindrical red and green glass bead found during cleaning of the cranium in the laboratory; the bead may have been worn in her hair. Pins are discussed further in Chapter 11, buttons in Chapter 12, and the bead in Chapter 13.

Spatial Distribution

For convenience, we will look at spatial distribution of the Late-Middle Group burials using the same subareas we used for the Middle Group (the western,

Table 27. Late-Middle Group Burials

Burial No.	Age Category	Low Age	High Age	Sex ^a	Head Angle (degrees)	Grid South (feet)	Grid East (feet)	Preservation Code	Coffin
4	adult	30	40	male		86.5	11	n	n/a
4A	adult	20	25	male?		86.5	11	n	n/a
5	subadult	0.5	1	undetermined	90	86.5	9	y	unidentified
7	subadult	3	5	undetermined	105	80.5	15	y	hexagonal
10	adult	40	45	male	88	82.5	20	y	hexagonal
11	adult	30	40	male?	90	83.5	12	y	hexagonal
13/43	subadult	2.5	4.5	undetermined	90	105	-7	y	four sided?
42	infant	0	2	undetermined	76	91.5	45	y	hexagonal
54	adult			undetermined	90	92	-4	n	unidentified
60	subadult	0.25	0.75	undetermined	95	93.5	0	y	four sided?
61	undetermined			undetermined	82	87.5	45	n	unidentified
64	subadult	0.38	0.88	undetermined	82	92.5	45	y	hexagonal
67	adult	40	50	male	88	94	0	y (no cranium)	unidentified
89	adult	50	60	female	92	90.5	48	y	hexagonal
91	subadult	0.67	1.3	undetermined	84	95	48	y	hexagonal
101	adult	26	35	male	78	88.5	49	y	hexagonal
105	adult	35	45	male	89	95	60	y	hexagonal
106	adult	25	35	female?	92	90.5	71	y	hexagonal
107	adult	35	40	female	93	90	48	y	hexagonal
108	subadult	0.25	0.75	undetermined	68	87	53	y	hexagonal
109	subadult	0.67	1.33	undetermined	126	90.5	54	y	hexagonal
119	adult	35	45	male	93	88.5	72	y	hexagonal
123	subadult	0.67	1.33	undetermined	96	89.5	80	y	hexagonal?
145				n/a	95	73.5	74	n (empty coffin)	hexagonal
146	infant	0	0	undetermined	102	73.5	74.5	y	hexagonal
168	adult			male	90	95.5	68.5	n	n/a
176	adult	20	24	male	103	74.5	65.5	y	hexagonal
198	subadult			undetermined	113	86.5	80	y	four-sided
216	infant	0	0.16	undetermined	104	78.5	57	y	rectangular
219	subadult	4	5	undetermined	87	71.5	122	y	unidentified
222	adult			male?	95	76.5	118	y (no cranium)	hexagonal
229	subadult	6.75	11.25	undetermined	108	83.5	72	y	unidentified

Table 27. Late-Middle Group Burials (continued)

Burial No.	Age Category	Low Age	High Age	Sex ^a	Head Angle (degrees)	Grid South (feet)	Grid East (feet)	Preservation Code	Coffin
235	adult	28	42	female	85	71.5	123	y	hexagonal
238	adult	40	50	male	102	78.5	62	y	hexagonal
251	subadult	12	14	undetermined	101	79.5	79	y	hexagonal
253	subadult	13	15	undetermined	96	82.5	65.5	y	hexagonal
267	adult			undetermined	105	82.5	94	y	hexagonal
289	subadult	5	9	undetermined	89	81	125	y	tapered
290	adult	45	55	male	89	84	114	y	hexagonal
311	subadult	0.25	0.75	undetermined	100	88.5	99.5	y	tapered
314	adult	40	50	male	97	82	134	y	hexagonal
316	adult	18	20	female	95	88.5	99.5	y	hexagonal
317	adult	19	39	male?		91.5	220	n	unidentified
319	adult			female		88.5	249	n	unidentified
332	adult	35	40	male?	92	80.5	126	y	hexagonal
333	adult	45	55	male	121	81.5	230.5	y	rectangular
338	adult	33	65	female	92	84.5	133.5	y	hexagonal
352	adult			male	100	67.5	131	y	hexagonal
357	adult	45	65	male	109	72	228.5	y	no coffin
362	adult			undetermined	119	69.5	235	y (cranium only)	unidentified
373	adult	45	60	female	100	70.5	132	y	hexagonal
376	adult	45	65	male	98	77	134.5	y	hexagonal
377	adult	32.6	57.8	female	103	75.5	235	y	no coffin
381	undetermined			undetermined		75.5	235	n (not excavated)	n/a
391	adult	16.5	19.5	male	90	68	140.5	y	no coffin
392	adult	42.5	52.5	male		71.5	140	y	rectangular
395	adult	43	53	male	107	76.5	135.5	y	hexagonal
413	adult	50	70	female	95	62.5	175.5	y	hexagonal

^a In the Sex column, a question mark indicates a probable assignment.

west-central, east-central/Lot 18, and southeast subareas (see Figures 87a–87e).

Burial orientations, all head-to-west in the graves assigned to the Late-Middle Group, were at angles that overall were more similar to those in the Middle Group than to those in the Late Group. Late-Middle Group burials, like the rest of the Middle Group, often

appear to be sited with some sense of an appropriate separation from other burials. Again, as in the Middle Group, even children's graves sometimes seem to have been dug several feet apart from others, as though such separation was part of a standard practice. Burials 5, 7 (see Figure 87b), 109, 123, and 198 (see Figure 87c) were all children's graves that were spatially separated

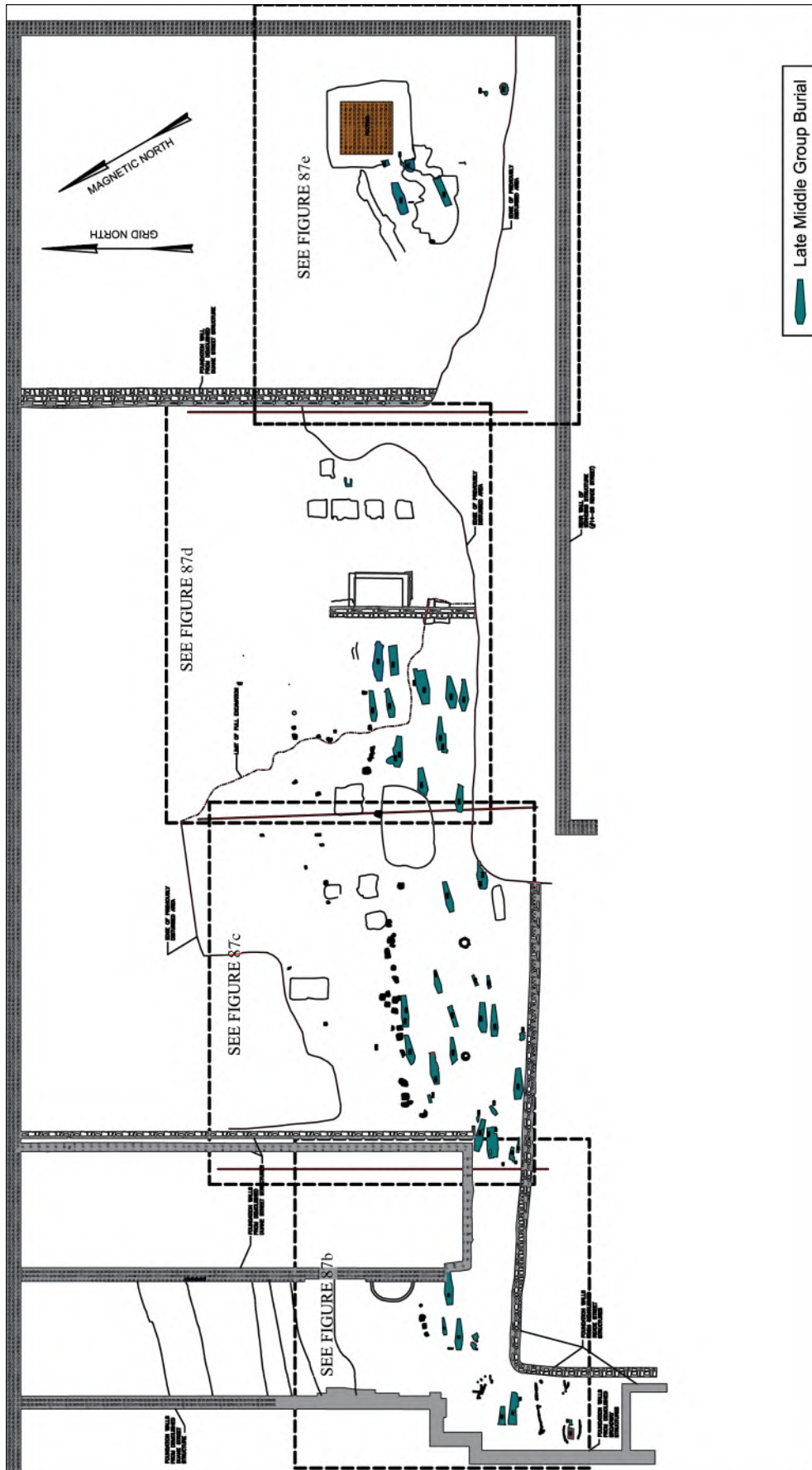


Figure 87a. Excavated Late-Middle Group burials (prepared for the United States General Services Administration).



Figure 87b. Late-Middle Group burials, western area (prepared for the United States General Services Administration).

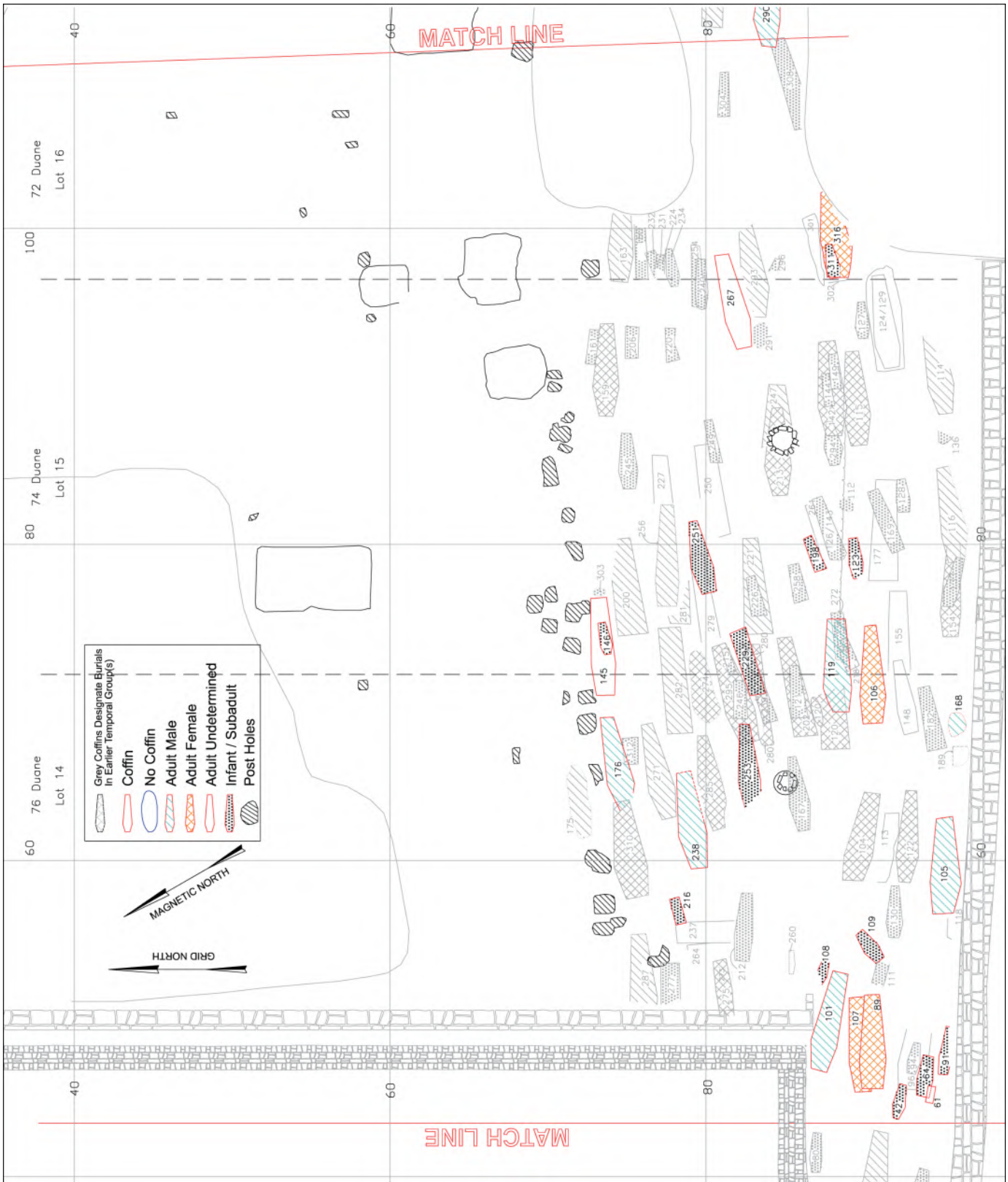


Figure 87c. Late-Middle Group burials, west-central area (prepared for the United States General Services Administration).

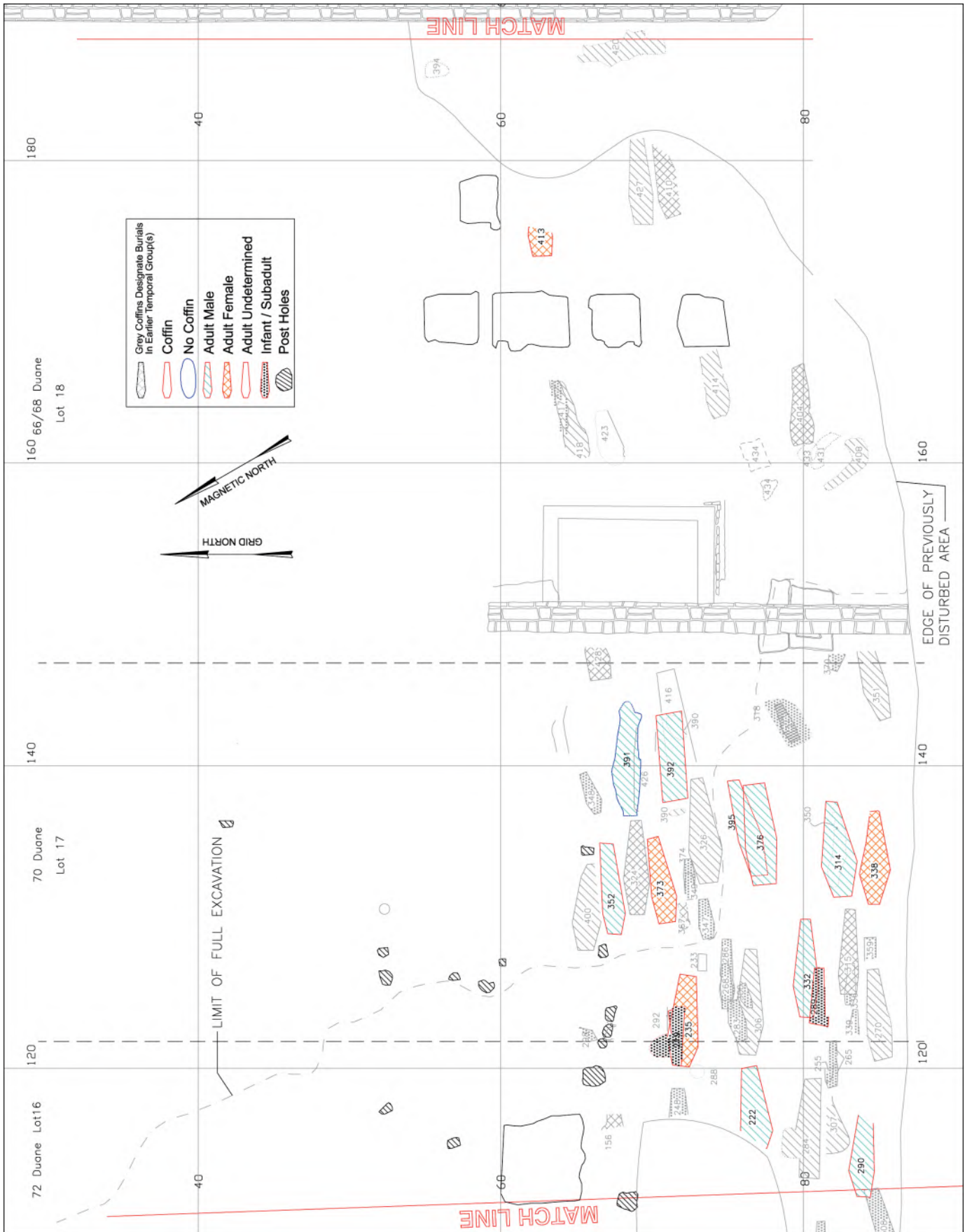


Figure 87d. Late-Middle Group burials, east-central and Lot 18 areas (prepared for the United States General Services Administration).

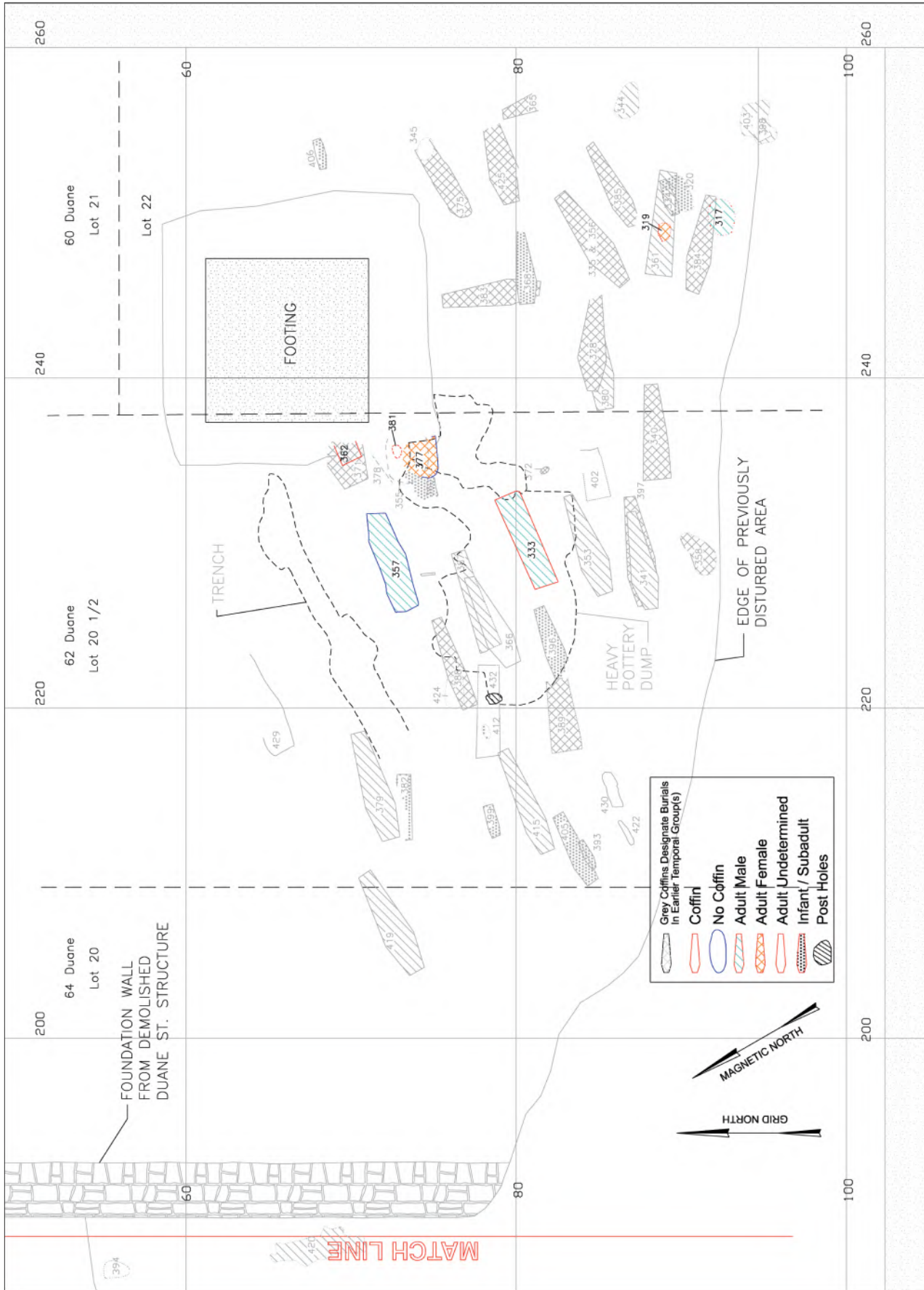


Figure 87e. Late-Middle Group burials, eastern area (prepared for the United States General Services Administration).

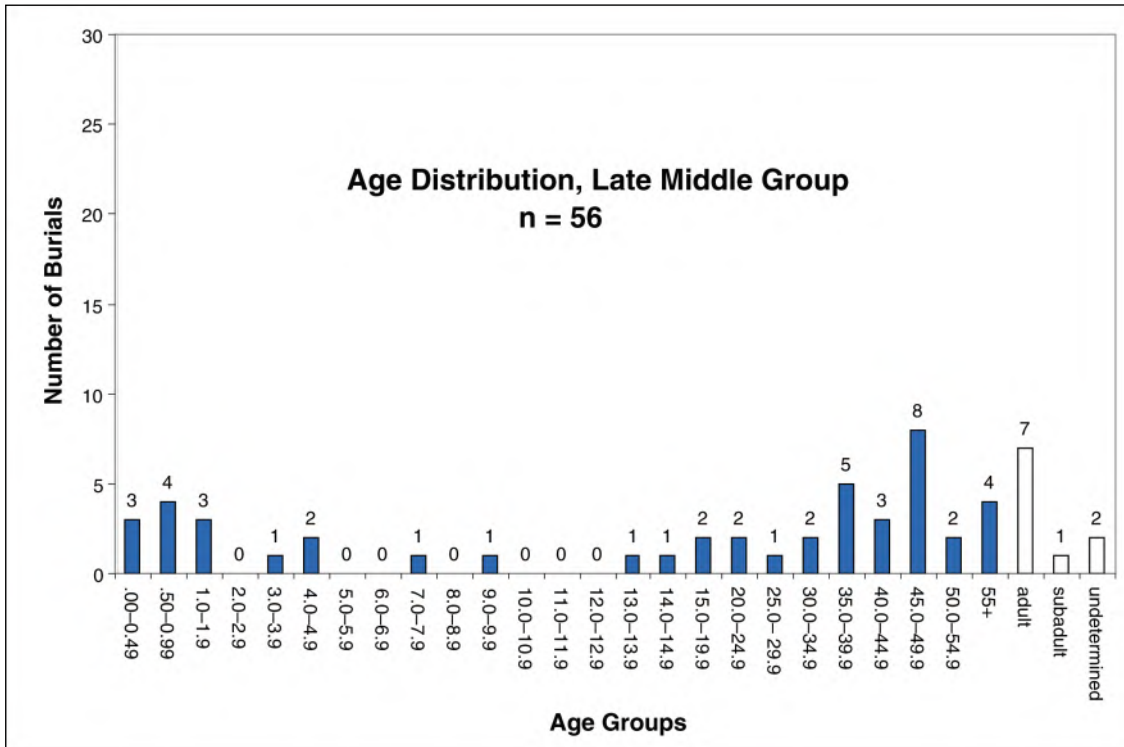


Figure 88. Age distribution, Late-Middle Group. White bars indicate individuals whose age could not be determined (includes only burials from which remains were recovered).

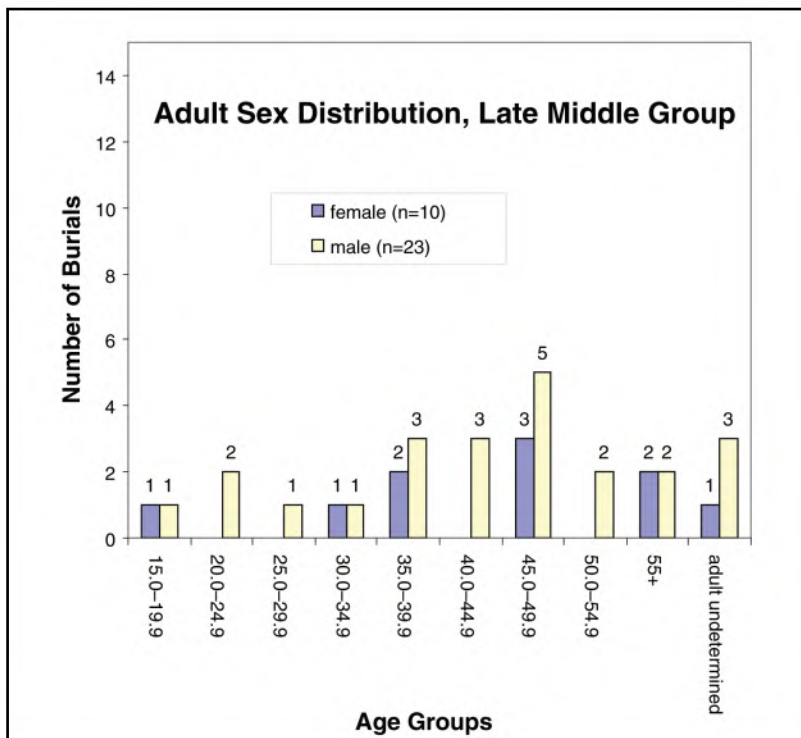


Figure 89. Adult sex distribution, Late-Middle Group.

from other graves in the Late-Middle temporal group; yet their deliberate placement above or near burials we have placed with the earlier groups is possible, so the apparent isolation may be false. By this time the cemetery was becoming increasingly crowded, and the “filling in” of spaces between earlier graves had clearly commenced. Although Late-Middle Group graves might be spatially separated from one another, they most often overlay or lay close beside earlier graves.

The Western Area

The western part of the site is shown in Figure 87b. Burials 54, 60, and 67, all adjacent, were placed above earlier burials from both the Middle and Early Groups, although there is no way to determine whether or not they were deliberately sited with reference to the earlier graves (the cluster is shown on Figure 80). Burial 60, which held a baby of 3–9 months, may have been deliberately placed at the foot of Burial 67, the grave of a man between 40 and 50, although the two had separate grave shafts, indicating the child was interred later than the man. Burial 54 was about 1 foot to the north of Burial 67 and held a second adult, although because it was truncated from the legs up, no sex or age could be assigned. All three form a possible group.

Burials 4, 4A, 5, 7, and 11 also were placed above earlier graves, possibly deliberately. As we mentioned in Chapter 6, the Early Group Burial 18 had a headstone, and therefore the deliberate placement of Burials 7 and 11 above and adjacent to it should be considered likely (although a social relationship cannot necessarily be inferred). Burials 7 and 11 also “fill in” between two Middle Group graves (Burials 74 on the north and 30 on the south), suggesting that the spacing of graves, although tight, was deliberate. The entire cluster of graves from Burial 74 south to Burials 4, 4A, and 5 appears as a roughly linear arrangement, the graves nearly parallel. Burial 6, too, offset somewhat to the east, may have been added later. It is possible to envision the deliberate reuse of this small area over time, with Burial 18 as the “anchor” marked by a headstone.

In the southwesternmost corner of the excavation was the grave of a child between 2 and 4 years of age, Burial 13/43 (excavated as two separate interments and subsequently determined to represent a single burial). This grave was outlined with a double arc of cobbles, found in situ (see Figure 57 in Chapter 5). It seems likely the cobble grave marker was

tended until such time as this area was covered over with fill. Based on general stratigraphy in the area and the fact that its rather ephemeral surface marker was intact, Burial 13/43 has been placed in the Late-Middle temporal group, although it could be placed in the Middle cohort instead. This corner of the site gives us a tantalizing glimpse of the type of surface markers that once may have been used throughout the African Burial Ground (see additional description of the area in sections entitled “Mortuary Material Culture” in Chapters 6 and 7). As we noted in Chapter 3, historical development as well as machine stripping during the project resulted in the loss of the original surface layer over the majority of the site.

The West-Central Area

Burials in the Late Group in the west-central site area are shown in Figure 99c. We noted in Chapter 7 that Middle Group Burials 96 and 94, an adult and child in a shared grave, were surrounded and overlain by later graves of several more children, Burials 42, 64, 61, and 91. We cannot determine how close in time all of the interments occurred but place the latter four in the Late-Middle Group because of their stratigraphic relationship to the double burial. The entire cluster exhibits a relatively uniform orientation, slightly northward of grid west, suggesting the earliest grave may have been marked at the surface and the later graves deliberately aligned with it. The single adult, in Middle Group Burial 96, appears to have anchored the grouping.

There was a “gap” or void in Late-Middle Group burials from approximately 55–70 feet grid east and approximately 80–95 feet grid south. Within the void was a smaller circular area without graves from any period (see Figure 7, pocket map). The absence of burials there is intriguing. The circular arrangement of graves around a central void may allude to, or reproduce, a cosmogram. But it also may allude to former topography, such as a mound, that had been destroyed through leveling, with soil from the top of the mound scattered to become part of the overlying fill (for discussion of burials arranged around mounds at Newton Plantation, see Handler and Lange [1978:105–117]).

On the west side of the void were Burials 108, 101, 107, 89, and 109. Burials 101 and 108 may represent a deliberate pairing of an infant with a man, although the excavation records do not clarify the relationship between the two grave cuts. Burial 101 had the coffin

with the heart-shaped design on its lid; this burial held a man between 26 and 35 years of age. Burials 89 and 107 represent the possible shared grave of a woman in her fifties placed above a woman in her late thirties. The two hexagonal coffins were essentially parallel and precisely aligned. They were just to the south of Burial 101, although oriented differently.

Northeast of the void, Burials 176, 238, and 253 appear to be “filling in” between Middle Group burials along a north-south row. The northernmost of these, Burial 176, appears to have been placed along the south side of the fence that once marked the northern boundary of the cemetery. Just to its east, Burials 145 (containing an empty adult coffin) and 146 (of an infant in a coffin) also seem to have been placed up against the fence line, although not because of crowding, as there was space to the south. It is possible the Middle and Late-Middle Group graves in the area were deliberately placed so as not to disturb early graves, Burials 200 and 282.

Burial 145 suggests one of three scenarios: a stolen cadaver, removal of the remains for secondary burial, or deliberate burial of an empty coffin for either religious purposes or for deception. The fact that the Burial 146 child coffin was placed atop the empty coffin argues against the body-snatching scenario. As we noted for the empty coffins of the Middle Group (see the section entitled “Unique and Unusual Burials” in Chapter 7), it is not possible to choose among possible explanations.

East of the void, Burials 119 and 106 were placed adjacent to each other, only a foot apart and parallel, as though a pair. An underlying Early Group grave, Burial 120, was partially displaced when Burial 119 was interred, suggesting that the grave digger was unaware of the previous burial, but bones from Burial 120 were set aside with some care rather than simply mixed with the shaft fill. Three other underlying interments, Burials 263, 272, and 218 were left intact by Burial 119.

The East-Central Area

Four pairs of graves are noted in the east-central area (see Figure 87d): Burials 289 and 332, Burials 219 and 235, Burials 376 and 395, and Burials 314 and 338. Burial 289, which held a child between 5 and 9 years old buried with a tiny quartz crystal, was placed so as to overlap with Burial 332, the grave of a man whose initials, “HW,” and probable age, “38,” were tacked on his coffin lid (see the illustrations in this

chapter in the section entitled “Unique and Unusual Burials” and in Chapter 10). Burial 219 held a young child buried above a woman aged 28–42, within the latter’s grave shaft.

Burials 376 and 395 were of men whose age ranges extended from 45 and 43 to 60 and 53. The pair is placed in the Late-Middle Group because they appear to have been part of a north-south “row” of burials that filled in between existing Middle Group graves (see Figure 7 [pocket map] for the distribution of burials from all temporal groups in this area). This row may have extended all the way to the north edge of the site, but the interments north of the fence line are assigned to the Late Group. Burials 352 and 373 are part of this row. At the south end of the row are Burials 314 and 338, a pairing of a man between 40 and 50 and a woman aged 33–65, whose coffins seem to have been placed side by side and parallel, possibly in a shared grave.

At the east edge of the east-central area, Burials 391 and 392 are somewhat problematic in their assignment. Both may in fact belong with Late Group burials. In the case of Burial 391, this is suggested by its lack of a coffin, but again, we have not used this variable alone to place interments in the last period. Burial 392 seems to have totally disturbed an underlying Middle Group burial (Burial 390), and thus the interments may have been separated by many years. However, this area was never fully excavated, and burial relationships are not clear-cut. It seems prudent to place both burials in the Late-Middle Group, with the caveat, rather than in the Late Group. Burial 392 is described in the section entitled “Unique and Unusual Burials.”

The Southeast Area

Two burials in the southeast area of the excavated site (see Figure 87e) were assigned to the Late-Middle period on the basis of artifacts recovered from the grave-shaft fill (Burials 333 and 357), and two additional, disturbed burials were placed in this group on the basis of stratigraphic position (Burials 317 and 319).

Burials 333 and 357 were oriented identically to numerous Middle Group burials in the immediate vicinity. Two Early Group burials nearby were also parallel (Burials 387 and 388). The very strong alignment of all of these interments suggests the grave diggers used some constant feature to orient the openings, and/or, of course, that they were all purposefully aligned with each other. As noted in Chapter 7, a

trench (Feature 163) with a similar orientation ran just to the north of these graves, and the trench itself may have provided the alignment, or it too may have followed another feature.

Unique and Unusual Burials

Decorated Coffins

Coffin decorations that survived archaeologically were very rare at the New York African Burial Ground, but there were four (out of five overall) in the Late-Middle Group. Photographs and drawings taken during excavation show the coffin lids of Burials 101, 176, and 332, but Burial 222, which had tacks that apparently formed a decorative lid pattern, was disturbed by vandals before the decoration was recorded.

Two of these burials held individuals that can confidently be identified as men (Burials 101 and 176), and the other two (Burials 222 and 332) held individuals that were very likely men as well. Calculated age ranges were 20–24 (Burial 176), 26–35 (Burial 101), and 35–40 (Burial 332). Burial 222 could not be assigned an age range. Burials 222 and 332 were located just 5 feet apart, in the east-central part of the site (see Figure 87d). Burials 101 and 176 were not close by each other, but both were in the same general area, in the west-central part of the site (see Figure 87c). It is noteworthy that the men in Burials 101, 176, and 332 each had a child or infant buried either immediately adjacent to or above his grave.

The tack pattern on the lid of the Burial 101 coffin was first described as heart shaped, with unidentified designs within the outline of the heart (Figure 90). As discussed in Chapter 10, the interior decoration may represent initials and a date of death. In this case, the upper portion, which would be the initials, has not been deciphered (the tacks displaced as the coffin wood rotted); the lower portion may have formed numerals for the year “1769” (Figure 91).

The heartlike design has also been identified as a Sankofa symbol associated with Twi-speaking Akan people of Ghana and the Ivory Coast. The symbol depicts a proverb, “*Se wo were fi na wo sankofa a yenkyi*” which can be translated as “It is not a taboo to return and fetch it when you forget.” It reminds people of the need to “[tie] the past with the present in order to prepare for the future” (Ofori-Ansa 1995:3).

Four straight pins, three on the cranium (one with a small tuft of hair) and one on the torso, were found



Figure 90. In situ photograph of coffin lid decoration formed of iron tacks in Burial 101 (photograph by Dennis Seckler).

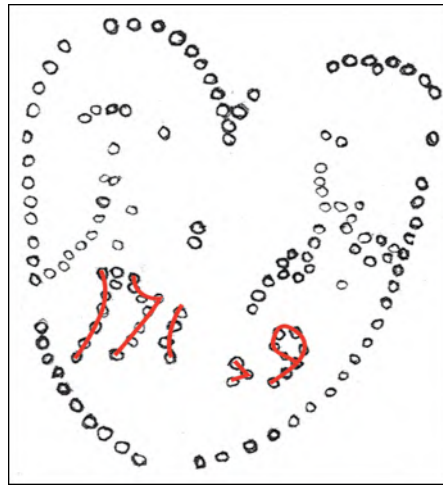


Figure 91. Possible reading of the year “1769” formed by tacks on the lid of Burial 101.

with the bones, but no other artifacts were recovered. Excavators recorded two possible bone button fragments on the left leg; however, no buttons were cataloged in the laboratory, and it is possible the observed pieces were simply fragments of the skeleton.

One of the man’s incisors had been intentionally filed, a practice found in Africa and a possible indicator of his birth on that continent. Chemical analysis was undertaken in an attempt to determine whether the man had spent the early part of his life in Africa,

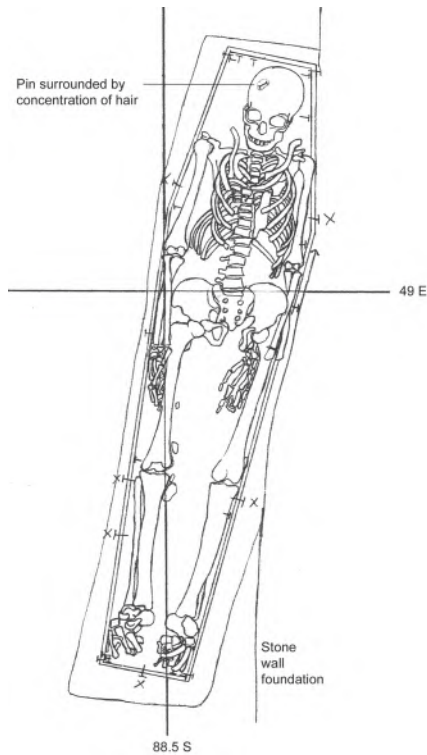


Figure 92. In situ drawing of Burial 101 skeletal remains. Scale is 1 inch = 2 feet (drawing by M Schur).

but strontium isotope levels overlapped those of individuals from the cemetery population that are likely to have been born in New York (young children), although lead levels were low, close to those in other individuals with modified teeth. The man's nativity remains ambiguous.

Preservation of the skeleton was excellent (Figure 92) and several pathologies were observed, including signs of periostitis (bone scarring due to inflammation from bacterial infection or injury) on the cranium and legs; “saber shin” (suggesting he had treponemal disease); stress-affected muscle attachments at the elbows; conditions of the bones at the joints that indicated mild to severe arthritis; enamel hypoplasias on the teeth suggesting childhood nutritional stress; and severe molar caries with indications of likely abscesses and perhaps infections of the surrounding bone.

The coffin in Burial 176 was the only one excavated that had a full set of coffin handles, two on each side and one at each end (see Chapter 10 for illustrations and discussion). Its lid was decorated with iron tacks around the entire perimeter, spaced 2 inches apart—also unique within the excavated sample (Figures 93 and 94).



Figure 93. In situ photograph of excavation showing iron tacks edging the lid of the Burial 176 coffin. Six handles were also found. Ruler is marked in feet; north is to the right (photograph by Dennis Seckler).



Figure 94. In situ photograph of one of the Burial 176 coffin handles during excavation. Ruler is marked in inches (photograph by Dennis Seckler).

The lid tacks and handles were recorded in situ during excavation. The only other artifact found in association with the remains was a straight pin fragment from the jaw/neck area. It is possible Burial 312, of an infant, was placed immediately adjacent to the

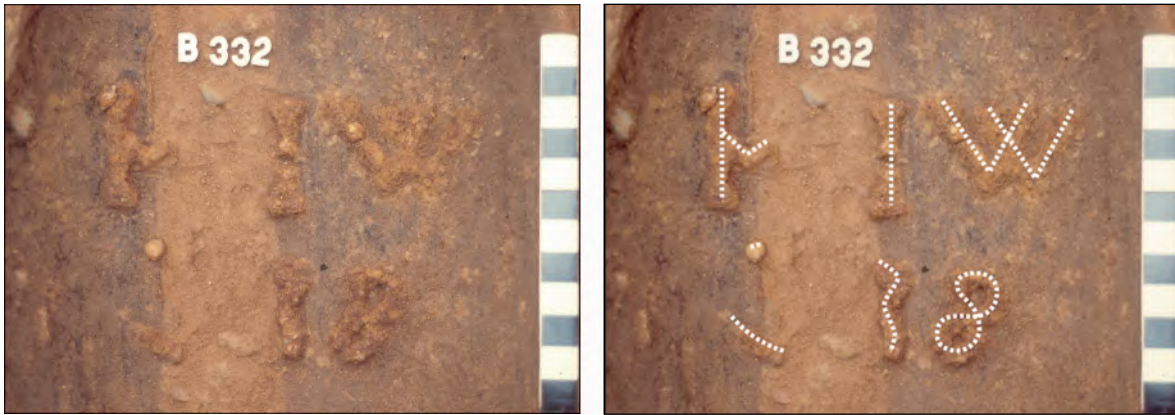


Figure 95. Left, in situ photograph of Burial 332 coffin lid decoration formed of iron tacks (photograph by Dennis Seckler); right, reconstruction of initials “HW” and number “38.” The coffin lid had split longitudinally, severing the “H” and the likely “3.”

Burial 176 grave, although the stratigraphic relationship is not clear.

Only one of the graves excavated at the New York African Burial Ground held a clue to the name of the deceased. This was Burial 332, where the coffin lid had been decorated with iron tacks forming the initials “HW” (“M” is an alternative, but perhaps less likely reading of the first letter) and a number, probably “38” (Figure 95). The number was probably the man’s age, which agrees closely with the age range calculated from skeletal analysis (35–40). Thus far, documentary sources have not yielded any record of a man with initials H.W. who is likely to have been laid to rest at the New York African Burial Ground, but future compilations of the names of African New Yorkers or escapees from out of town may yet reveal a plausible identity.

There were just two items recovered from this burial other than the coffin and the skeletal remains (Figure 96). One straight pin and a lock of hair were recorded under the right side of the cranium, and during cleaning of the thoracic vertebrae in the laboratory, a curved copper-alloy object was recovered, adhering to a fragment of coffin wood. The latter may have been the remnant of an earring or a curved pin (see Chapter 13). As noted, a child of 5–9 years old (Burial 289) may have been deliberately buried immediately above “HW.”

Burial 392

Burial 392 was one of just four interments in the excavated sample that was oriented with the head toward



Figure 96. In situ photograph of “HW” (Burial 332) skeletal remains after removal of the coffin lid. Ruler is marked in feet; north is to the right (photograph by Dennis Seckler).

the east (Figure 97). It also contained a rectangular coffin, one of only two adult coffins that were clearly of this shape. One explanation for the east-headed orientation is that the symmetrical coffin was lowered into the grave without the bearers knowing which end was the head, although deliberate placement is also possible. The coffin was of unique construction among those recorded at this site, with at least two cross pieces nailed to the lengthwise boards of the lid.

The man in Burial 392 was buried wearing breeches, as evidenced by buttons found at the knees and hips (see Chapter 12). In addition, two octagonal cuff links were found in the neck/shoulder area. The skeletal remains were in poor condition, complete but crushed and very eroded. Three possible urinary stones were removed from below the hip, and possible healed fractures of the left kneecap and right ribs were also noted.



Figure 97. In situ photograph of Burial 392. Ruler alongside the remains is marked in feet; north is to the right (photograph by Stan Bottitta).

CHAPTER 9

The Late Group

Warren R. Perry, Jean Howson, and Augustin F. C. Holl

Late Group assignments are based on the dating of artifacts from grave shafts, on stratigraphic relationships, and, most importantly, on burial location, as discussed in Chapter 4. Reasons to place this group in the period from 1776 to the close of the cemetery include the destruction of the fence marking the cemetery's north edge and likely usurpation of Rutgers property during the British occupation, and northward pressure caused by military uses of the ground to the south (for a more complete discussion, see Chapter 4). The frequency of coffinless burials and the preponderance of men to the north of the fence-post alignment is also best explained by the circumstances of the Revolutionary War and the British occupation of New York, as discussed in the section on mortuary material culture.

The town and its population are characterized, and then the mortuary sample and related material culture are described. A discussion of the spatial distribution of excavated graves and descriptions of some unique and unusual burials in this temporal group follow.

The Town

The American War for Independence profoundly disrupted the city's streets, homes, and cemeteries. British troops took the city in the first months of the war and occupied it for 7 years. Conflagrations, beginning with the Great Fire of September 1776, ravaged the downtown area, destroying huge swaths of the built environment. Public spaces were taken over for military use. Soldiers were billeted in barracks on the Common and in private homes appropriated for army use, including Isaac Teller's on the western side of the African Burial Ground. Thousands of prisoners of war languished in makeshift prisons and on prison ships, most of them perishing before hostilities ended. Loyalists from the hinterland relocated to the city, and

over the course of the war refugees streamed into town (on New York in general during and after the war, see Burrows and Wallace [1999:223–287]; on the presence and role of Africans in the city in these years, see *Historical Perspectives of the African Burial Ground* [Medford and Brown 2009a:98–102; Medford and Brown 2009b:103–104], Hodges [1999:139–161], and Foote [2004:212–216]).

Africans from New York and New Jersey escaped from households sympathetic to the patriot cause and joined the British forces in the months leading up to the war. They were responding to Lord Dunmore's proclamation freeing enslaved and indentured servants who supported the crown. During the occupation of New York City, thousands of blacks from surrounding areas and from distant colonies found their way to refuge here. Those confiscated by the British from patriot households during the war were brought to the city, and Loyalist refugees brought their own enslaved Africans with them. The British used hundreds of African workers, mainly runaways, during the occupation, paying wages (or, sometimes, rum) for various types of labor. Housing was in seriously short supply, but some were billeted in "Negro Barracks" (appropriated buildings), several in the vicinity of upper Broadway (New York Public Library, Special Collections, British Headquarters Papers 1775–1783, List of Barrack Houses in the Garrison of New York, No. 10349). A "Black Brigade" had been organized when the British took the town, and blacks brought in from other colonies joined its ranks. The "Black Pioneers" were commissioned in 1776 to serve as guards, pilots, spies, and interpreters to the Native Americans (Hodges 1999:147). Blacks were used mainly as teamsters but also for cleaning the streets and in the fuel and ordnance departments; they rebuilt the infrastructure burned in the Great Fire, were used for foraging expeditions, and worked as pilots on

harbor craft. Numerous opportunities for paid work were seized by Africans during this time, but harsh exploitation of the enslaved also characterized the occupation. Severe wartime shortages, especially of food, fuel, and lumber for building, made life in the city difficult for all.

By an agreement negotiated with Washington, when the British evacuated New York in 1783, the blacks who officially left with them were inspected and registered. This was the famous “Book of Negroes” (New York Public Library, Special Collections, British Headquarters Papers 1775–1783, No. 10427, 1783), listing some 3,000 men, women, and children, many of whom testified that they had escaped from households in New York or other colonies and come to New York, or had served in the British forces during the war. Approximately 80 percent of the black refugees listed were from southern colonies and 20 percent from New York and New Jersey (Foote 1991:342–343). It is estimated that perhaps a thousand additional blacks evacuated with the British in private vessels (Quarles 1961:172), for a total of approximately 4,000.

It is likely that most blacks who died during the occupation, whatever their residence or status, were buried in the African Burial Ground, though Trinity’s small “Negroes” cemetery on Church Street was probably available to church members, of whom there were many among Anglican loyalist families. Reportedly, many black refugees also joined the church (Hodges 1999:146–147).

Dissenting Christian denominations also were attracting black members. The John Street Methodist Church reported membership of 25 blacks in 1786, 70 in 1789, 135 in 1791, and 155 by 1795 (Walls 1974:40–46). After the war, black churchgoers increasingly moved to separate from white congregations, where restrictions on their full participation as members and preachers continued unabated. A pivotal moment in the history of the black church in America was the formation in New York of a separate black Methodist meeting in 1795.¹ One of the galvanizing issues behind the separatist movement in this and other churches was probably the

¹ In the 1780s, the John Street congregation had several “Negro Classes” with men and women separated, as was the church practice. Several of the men who would emerge as leaders of the black community and founders of a separate black congregation were in Class Number 31; Class Number 28 included Peter Williams, Sr., the church’s sexton and one of its grave diggers, who worked at John Street to earn his own freedom. Black Methodists met in a house on Cross Street in 1795. In 1801, they incorporated the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and erected their own chapel, with a burial ground as well as a vault, on Church Street (see Walls 1974).

demise of the African Burial Ground, which, we believe, had heretofore served as a focal religious institution in New York’s African community.

A new soldiers’ barracks erected at present-day Chambers Street and the use of the ground behind the barracks for a cemetery by the British (see Figure 21 in Chapter 2) would have constricted the African cemetery and possibly pushed it northward. Members of the city’s African community might have appropriated the southern edge of the Rutgers Farm (the old Calk Hook Farm) for burials at this time. As discussed in Chapter 4, the British reportedly destroyed the fence that had marked the boundary between the burial ground and the Rutgers/Barclay property; that property may have been left unleased, or been held in uncertain possession, during the war. The houses within the Van Borsum patent were either destroyed or were occupied by various tenants, also in uncertain possession, during the war once Teller was removed (Johnson 1853–1859:9:174–77).

The growth of the town in the decade following the war is reflected in the 1797 Taylor-Roberts Plan (see Figure 26 in Chapter 2). Streets and building lots were laid out northward from Chambers Street, and in 1787, the Barclays began selling off lots along Duane Street, on the northern edge of the African Burial Ground. Sometime soon after, a new fence was probably constructed, once again delimiting the area Africans could use. Within 7 years, claimants to the Van Borsum patent were able to have the remainder of the cemetery land surveyed and sold in lots (see Chapter 2).

Depredations on the African Burial Ground from medical students seeking cadavers in the 1780s led to forceful protests from the city’s African community leaders. Aside from providing a window on the development of black leadership in the town, the protests revealed the vulnerability of what we believe was still the community’s most important institution at the time, their cemetery. As explained in Chapter 2, at least one attempt was made to provide a more secure place of burial (Mr. Scipio Gray’s plot on Gold Street), but that, too, was subject to depredation. Africans were particular targets of this practice, as attested by numerous newspaper accounts, and were the first to raise a public protest. Public anger against doctors was first aroused when a free African American man’s letter was printed in the *Daily Advertiser* on February 16, 1788.² The author suggested that a law be passed

² The writer’s name was omitted “for reasons,” as the publisher stated, “which must be obvious to the author.”

Table 28. Black Population by Age and Sex, 1771–1790

Year	Label in Census	Adults		Children		Age for Children	Free	Enslaved	Total
		Male	Female	Male	Female				
1771	“blacks”	932 ^a	1,085	568	552	<16			3,137
1779	“blacks”					No separate count given by gender or age.			1,951
1786	“slaves”	896	1,207			No separate count of children.			2,103
1790	“all other free persons” and “slaves” (no separate count given by gender)					No separate count given by gender or age.	1,036 ^b	2,056	3,092

Note: Information from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1909) and White (1991:126); for 1779, Elliott Papers cited in Hodges (1999:150).

^a Includes 42 men over the age of 60.

^b Includes 678 men living in free black households and 349 living in households headed by whites. In 1790, about half of the enslaved (1,170 persons) and about half of the free blacks living in households headed by whites lived with merchants, artisans, or retail tradesmen (White 1991:7).

prohibiting dissection of any but criminals so that “a stop might be put to this horrid practice here; and the mind of a very great number of my fellow-liberated, or still enslaved Blacks quieted.” The closing of the letter is an intimation of rising concern on the part of the aggrieved African community. His next letter contained a less veiled threat: “students of physick” were warned that “their lives may be the forfeit of their temerity should they dare to persist in their robberies” (*Daily Advertiser*, February 28, 1788). A group of free and enslaved black men also petitioned the Common Council to protect the graves of blacks (Municipal Archives of the City of New York, Papers of the Common Council, Petitions, Free Negroes and Slaves of the City of New York, February 14, 1787). Black leaders thus pursued simultaneous strategies: appealing to the authorities and threatening to meet violence against the dead with violence on the streets. A general riot that became known as the “Doctors’ Riot” erupted in April, showing that New Yorkers of European heritage were as incensed about grave robbing as were Africans, and suggests that for people of all backgrounds the desecration of the dead was a particularly heinous crime.

The Population

Census

African New Yorkers made up 14.3 percent of the population before the war but were only 9.9 percent of the city total in 1790. This drop does not reflect a decrease in the black population, which was essentially the same in 1771 and 1790. Rather, European immigration accelerated following the war, their numbers increasing by 10,000.

Census figures for Africans are available for points in time bracketing the war years (1771 and 1786) and for 1790, which can be considered the eve of the African Burial Ground’s closing (Table 28). There was also one count taken during the occupation, in 1779 (Hodges 1999:150). Fluctuations during the war years went unrecorded, however. We do know that 3,000–4,000 blacks left with the British in 1783 and that most of them were from out of town. The 1779 count seems low; it may be inaccurate, or it is possible the numbers of fugitive/refugee Africans swelled after that year.



Figure 98. Locations of households in New York in 1790: *top*, free black households; *bottom*, slaveholding households. Arrows point to the location of the African Burial Ground. (From *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770–1810*, by Shane White. © 1991 by the University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia 30602. All rights reserved.)

In addition to the census figures, data on residential patterns of both enslaved and free blacks in New York are available. Shane White, by analyzing the census and city directories, has been able to locate most of the households inhabited by people of African descent (Figure 98). The extent of slaveholding in the early federal era is evident.

The numbers of free blacks in New York are difficult to reconstruct for the period before 1790. Because the number of enslaved persons in the 1786 census is roughly equal to the number enslaved in 1790, it is possible that the free blacks were counted with the white population in 1786. Many came to New York during the war as fugitives and stayed on. Others constituted the small number of free blacks whose families had been living in the city for many years, even generations. Free blacks were overwhelmingly con-

centrated in the Montgomerie Ward, especially along Fair, Gold, and Beekman Streets near St. George's Chapel, where Scipio Gray worked, and adjacent to which the African Free School was founded in 1789 (see Rothschild 1990:100–101).

There was a preponderance of black women over men in counts taken both before and after the war. Child-to-woman ratios cannot be calculated except for 1771, when about one child per adult female was counted.

Mortuary Sample

Late Group burials, numbering 114, are listed in Table 29. In the table, head angle is the orientation in degrees west of north (discussed in Chapter 5). Preservation codes are explained in Chapter 3. “N/a” in the

Table 29. Late Group Burials

Burial No.	Age Category	Low Age	High Age	Sex ^a	Head Angle (degrees)	Grid South (feet)	Grid East (feet)	Preservation Code	Coffin
1	adult	20	25	female?	94	82.5	2	y	hexagonal
2	adult	27	42	male		43.5	11	n	n/a
6	adult	25	30	male?	91	87.5	15	y	hexagonal
12	adult	35	45	female	83	89.5	12	y	rectangular?
14	infant	0	0.5	undetermined	89	89.5	12	y	rectangular
15	subadult	11	18	undetermined	105	103.5	-5	n	unidentified
20	adult	45	50	male		85	0	n	no coffin
28	subadult			undetermined		83	-2	y	unidentified
36	adult			female		87.5	-5	n	unidentified
37	adult	45	55	male	102	65	20	y	hexagonal
40	adult	50	60	female	94	65	10	y	hexagonal
51	adult	24	32	female	118	75	10	y	hexagonal
58	subadult	3.5	4.5	undetermined	93	65	15	y	rectangular
59	infant	0	0.25	undetermined	90	65	15	y	hexagonal
63	adult	35	45	male	91	70	15	y	hexagonal
65	infant	0	0.49	undetermined	90	75	10	y	hexagonal?
71	adult	25	35	female	102	75	10	y	hexagonal
76	adult	25	55	male	112	75	10	y	no coffin
86	subadult	6	8	undetermined	91	74	18	y	hexagonal
95	subadult	7	12	undetermined	76	94.5	51	y	hexagonal
97	adult	40	50	male	97	81	20	y	hexagonal
99	subadult	6	10	undetermined	78	91.5	70	y	unidentified
117	infant	0	0	undetermined		91.5	77	n/a	n/a
125	adult			female?	89	64.5	52	n	unidentified
131	subadult			undetermined	90	91.5	76.5	n	unidentified
132	adult	25	30	male	98	64.5	61.5	y	hexagonal
134	adult	40	50	female	106	62.5	85	y	hexagonal
135	adult	30	40	male	100	70	70	y	hexagonal
137	adult	25	35	undetermined	100	63	75	y	unidentified
138	subadult	3	5	undetermined	98	67.5	86	y	rectangular
147	adult	55	65	male	81	70.5	56.5	y	hexagonal
150	adult	20	28	female	117	70.5	80	y	no coffin
151	adult	35	45	male	138	67.5	83	y	hexagonal
152	undetermined			undetermined	110	55.5	67	n	unidentified
153	adult			female?	111	54.5	74	y	hexagonal

Table 29. Late Group Burials (continued)

Burial No.	Age Category	Low Age	High Age	Sex ^a	Head Angle (degrees)	Grid South (feet)	Grid East (feet)	Preservation Code	Coffin
157	adult			female?		53.5	81.5	n	n/a
158	adult	20	30	male	111	63	92	y	no coffin
162	adult	35	45	male	109	55	51.5	n	unidentified
164	subadult	8	13	undetermined	97	52.5	91	y	tapered
165	adult			undetermined	108	62.5	73	y	no coffin
166	subadult	0.5	1	undetermined	111	55.5	92.5	y	rectangular
170	subadult	7	11	undetermined	90	96	65	y (no cranium)	unidentified
171	adult	44	60	male	114	53.5	99.5	y	hexagonal
172	adult	25	35	female	118	40.5	88	y	no coffin
173	subadult	0.25	0.75	undetermined	121	57	101	y	rectangular
174	adult	17	18	male	115	60.5	90	y	hexagonal
178	adult			male		62	57	n	n/a
179	adult	25	30	male	110	46.5	98	y	hexagonal
180	subadult	11	13	undetermined	111	50	97.5	y	hexagonal
181	adult	20	23	male	86	66	115	y	no coffin
183	subadult	0.63	1.13	undetermined		50	113.5	y	hexagonal
184	subadult	1	1.5	undetermined	121	52	108.5	y	four sided
185	adult	21	23	male		54.5	122	y	no coffin
186	infant	0	0.17	undetermined	124	47.5	110	y	hexagonal
187	subadult	1.5	4	undetermined	112	52.5	119.5	y	hexagonal
188	adult	26	32	undetermined	95	58.5	52.5	n	n/a
190	subadult	0.38	0.88	undetermined	112	55	100.5	y	hexagonal
191	adult	25	30	male	109	56.5	87.5	y	no coffin
192	adult	40	60	female	116	67	101.5	y	hexagonal
193	adult	30	48	male	109	65.5	101.5	y	no coffin
194	adult	30	40	male	104	50.5	84	y	hexagonal
195	adult	30	40	female	100	81.5	63	y	hexagonal
196	adult	20	24	undetermined	90	83	56	y	hexagonal
197	adult	45	55	female	77	76	57.5	y	hexagonal
199	adult	30	40	female	112	73.5	80	y	no coffin
201	subadult	1.5	3.5	undetermined	101	59.5	70.5	y	rectangular
203	adult	12	18	undetermined	83	59	77	y	hexagonal
204	adult			female?		77.5	98	n	n/a
205	adult	18	20	female	108	59.5	102	y	hexagonal

Table 29. Late Group Burials (*continued*)

Burial No.	Age Category	Low Age	High Age	Sex ^a	Head Angle (degrees)	Grid South (feet)	Grid East (feet)	Preservation Code	Coffin
207	adult	25	35	female?	93	78.5	95	y	tapered
208	subadult	0.5	1	undetermined		77	96	n	unidentified
209	adult	40	50	male	117	42	94	y	hexagonal
210	adult	35	45	male	88	46	116	y	no coffin
211	adult			male?	95	77	79.5	y	no coffin
214	adult	45	55	male	99	79.5	63.5	y	hexagonal
217	adult	17	19	male	100	64.5	122.5	y	hexagonal
223	adult	25	35	female	101	66.5	76.5	y	no coffin
225	subadult	0.5	1.25	undetermined	112	64.5	95.5	y	four sided
228	adult			male?	85	86	55	n	hexagonal
230	adult	55	65	female	120	45.5	106	y	hexagonal
236	subadult	4	5	undetermined	90	84.5	53.5	y	hexagonal
241	adult	55	65	female	94	54.5	121	y	hexagonal
242	adult	40	50	female	90	49.5	117	y	hexagonal
243	adult	40	50	male	105	57.5	121	y	no coffin
244	subadult	5	9	undetermined	104	51.5	90	y	unidentified
252	subadult	1	2	undetermined	115	64.5	95.5	y	hexagonal
257	adult	30	40	male	100	72.1	64.5	y	other
259	adult	17	19	female?	105	40.5	102	y	hexagonal
262	adult	15	17	male?	94	38.5	120	y	no coffin
266	adult	25	35	female	105	38.5	113.5	y	hexagonal
276	adult	20	24	female	108	35.5	118.5	y	no coffin
278	adult	45	55	male	116	42	103	y	no coffin
297	adult	30	40	male	106	62.5	117.5	n	unidentified
299	adult	40	50	male	80	68.5	123.5	y	hexagonal
305	infant	-0.33	0.33	undetermined	109	57	122	y	hexagonal
309	adult	20	25	male		62	143.5	y	no coffin
313	adult	45	55	male	102	31.5	114.5	y	hexagonal
322	adult			female	99	64.5	140	n	n/a
323	adult	19	30	male		45	128.5	y	no coffin
325	adult	25	35	male	99	63.5	137.5	y	hexagonal
327	adult	35	45	male	98	48.5	129	y	no coffin
329	adult			male	85	56	128.5	y	no coffin
329.1	adult			undetermined		56	128.5	n	n/a

Table 29. Late Group Burials (continued)

Burial No.	Age Category	Low Age	High Age	Sex ^a	Head Angle (degrees)	Grid South (feet)	Grid East (feet)	Preservation Code	Coffin
330	adult	28	58	male		58.5	140	n	n/a
331	adult	30	35	undetermined		58	137	n	n/a
337	adult	40	50	male	116	37	130	y	no coffin
342	adult	25	35	female?	104	50	129	y	hexagonal
343	adult	19	23	male	92	59.5	130	y	hexagonal
346	adult	50	70	female	117	57.5	138.5	y	hexagonal
354	adult	35	45	male	93	44.5	129.5	y	hexagonal
363	subadult	1	2	undetermined	124	49.5	135	y	hexagonal
364	adult	25	35	male	90	44.5	143.5	y	no coffin
369	adult	40	50	male	83	54	131	y	no coffin
386	infant	0	0.3	undetermined	101	48	121.5	y	unidentified

^aIn the Sex column, a question mark indicates a probable assignment.

coffin column indicates that the bones were severely disturbed or redeposited so that coffin presence/absence was not determined. The distribution of Late Group graves is shown on Figures 99a–99d. Profiles by age and sex are graphed in Figures 100 and 101. It is possible men predominate in this temporal group because they were more likely than women to remain in, or flee to, the occupied town, and because they were volunteers or conscripts in the British army.

Mortuary Material Culture

Coffins and Burials without Coffins

Most graves without coffins, most of which were located to the north of the fence alignment, have been assigned to this last period of the cemetery's use. In Chapter 5, we suggested three possible explanations for burial without a coffin: (1) the inability of the family and friends of the deceased to afford a coffin or the refusal of an enslaved person's household head to provide it, (2) burial under some kind of special circumstance, or (3) adherence to a distinctive funeral practice.

A culturally distinctive funeral program may be the explanation for burial without coffins, but there is no evidence, either documentary or archaeologi-

cal, to illuminate this possibility. Although coffins were not used in most African cultures of our period, there are no other features of the New York burials that point to specific cultural origins. For example, although we know that there were probably Muslims among New York's African population—and in strict adherence to Islamic law, they would not have used coffins by choice—body orientation and the presence of personal items argue against Muslim practice. The other explanation based on distinctive funeral practice is that these were poor church members who were brought to the cemetery in a “parish coffin,” used to transport the deceased but retained by the church for repeated use. The growth in the late period of black Christian congregations, especially at the Anglican and Methodist churches, may support this explanation. Proper burial facilities were given priority by eighteenth-century African American benefit societies and by early leaders of the black churches, including those in New York, but whether a church coffin would have been seen as adequate is not known.

There is one obvious circumstance affecting the provision of coffins. The disruptions of the war caused shortages in supplies, particularly wood for fuel and building. Even obtaining sufficient scrap lumber to fashion a coffin for one's own kin might have been difficult. This explanation supports the dating of coffinless burials to the period of the occupation.

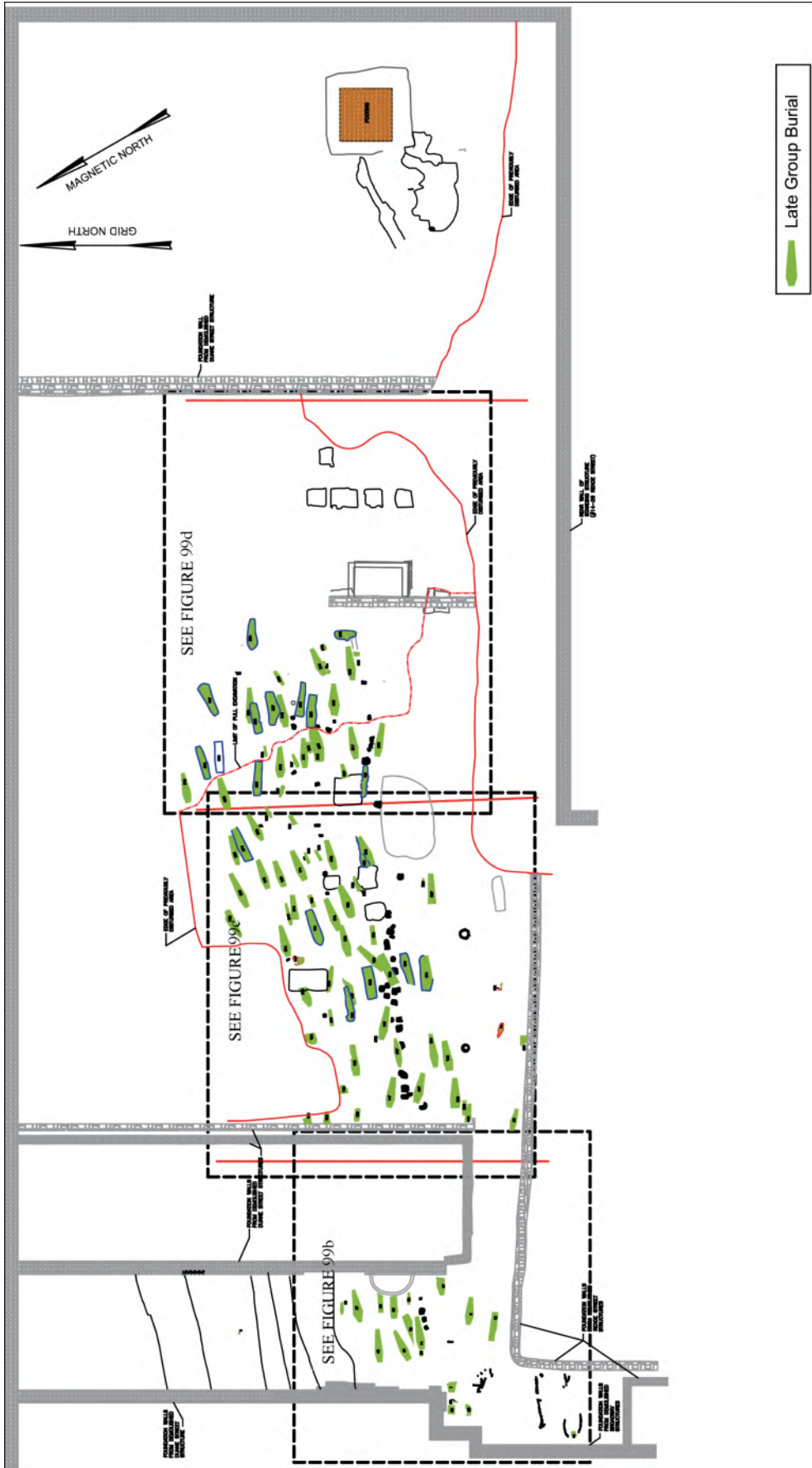


Figure 99a. Excavated Late Group burials (prepared for the United States General Services Administration).

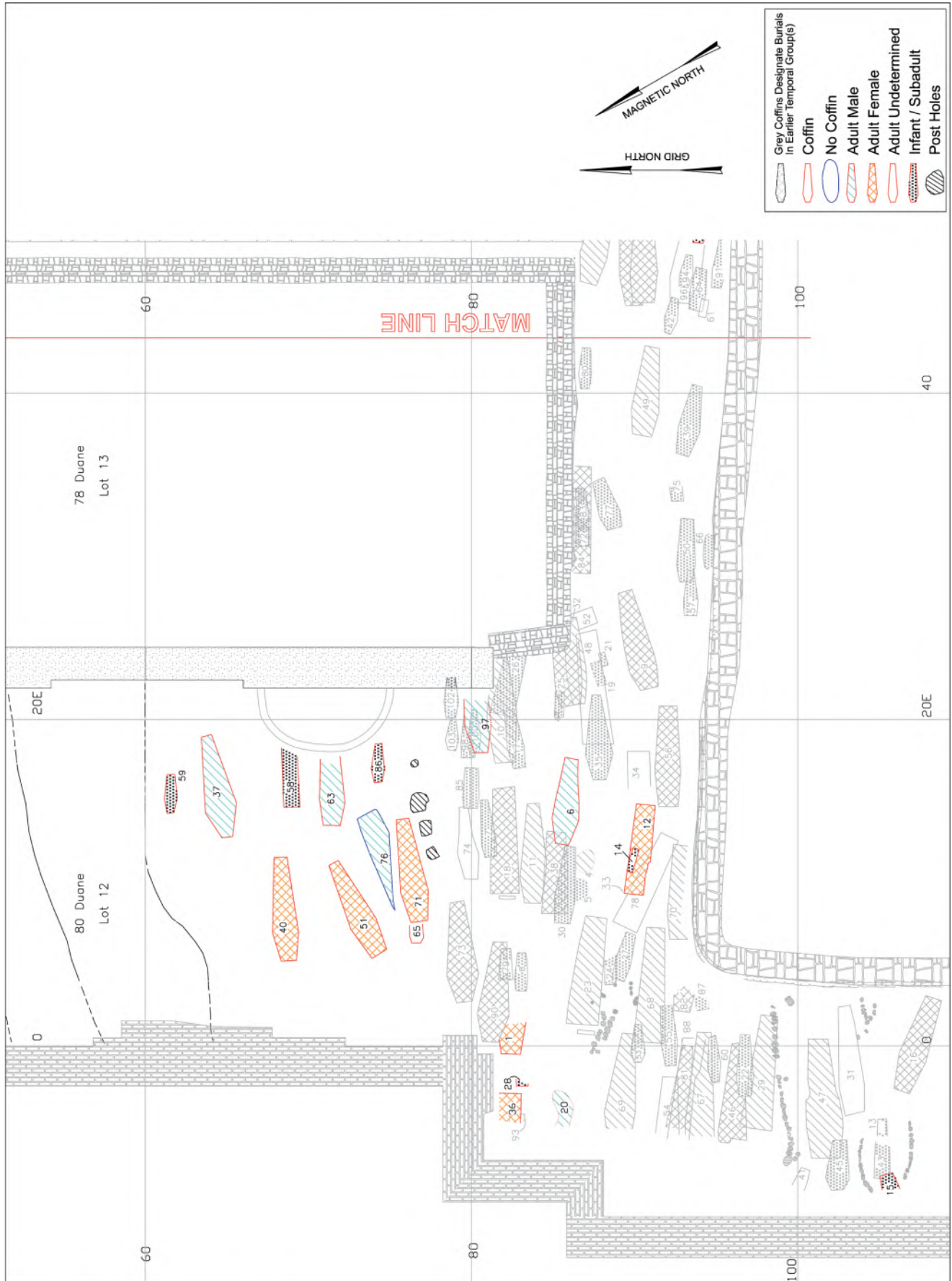


Figure 99b. Late Group burials, western area (prepared for the United States General Services Administration).

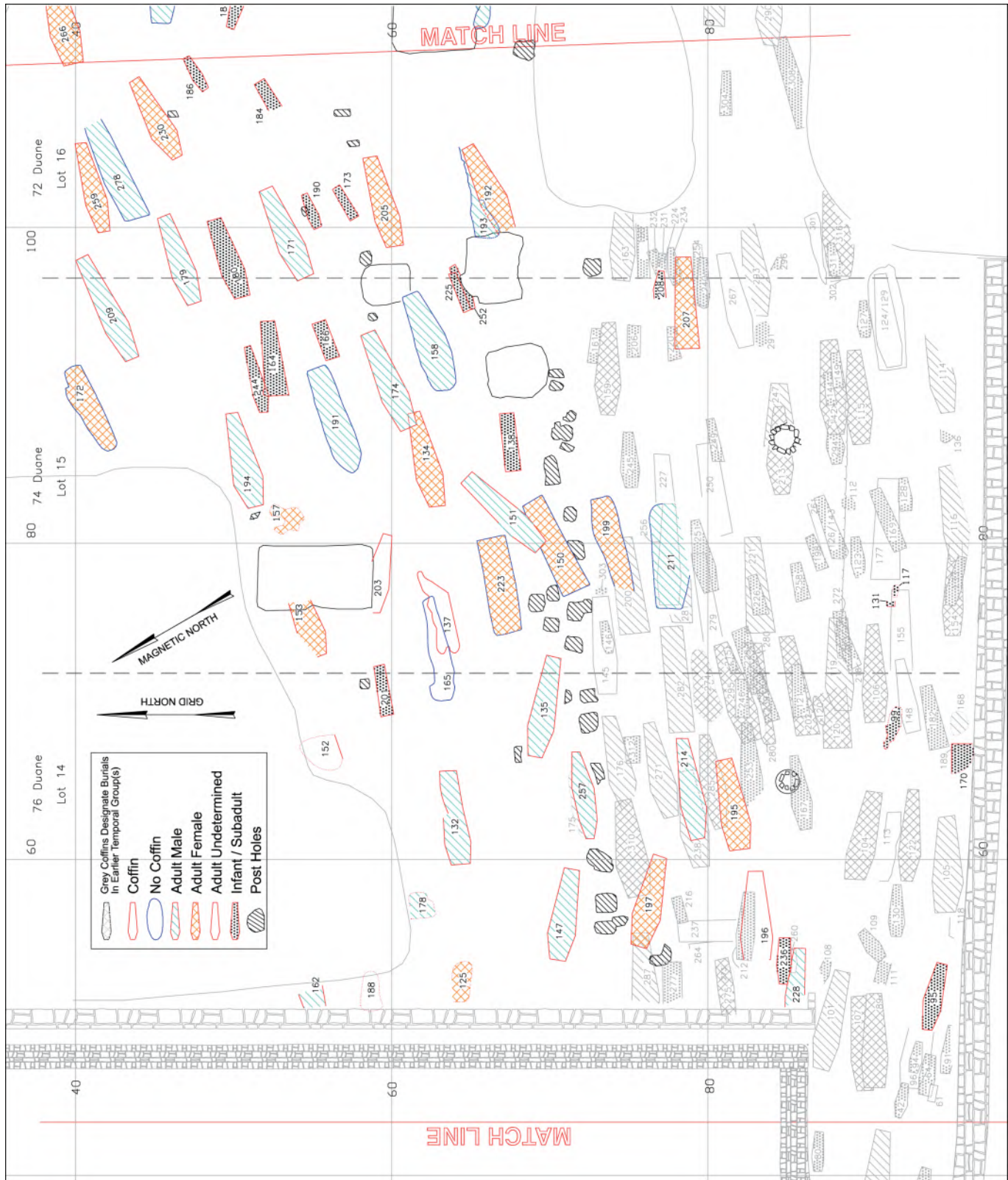


Figure 99c. Late Group burials, west-central area (prepared for the United States General Services Administration).

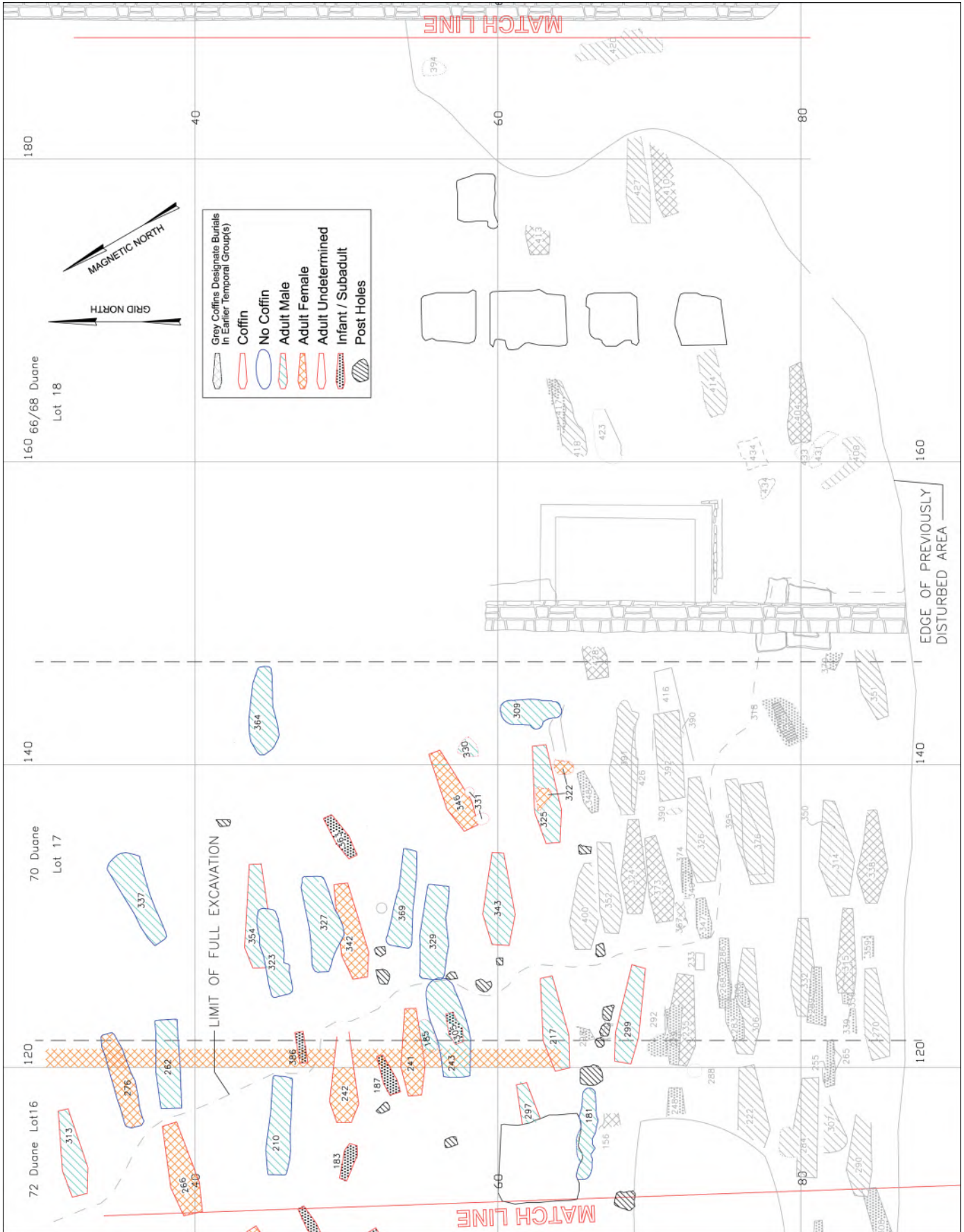


Figure 99d. Late Group burials, east-central and Lot 18 areas (prepared for the United States General Services Administration).

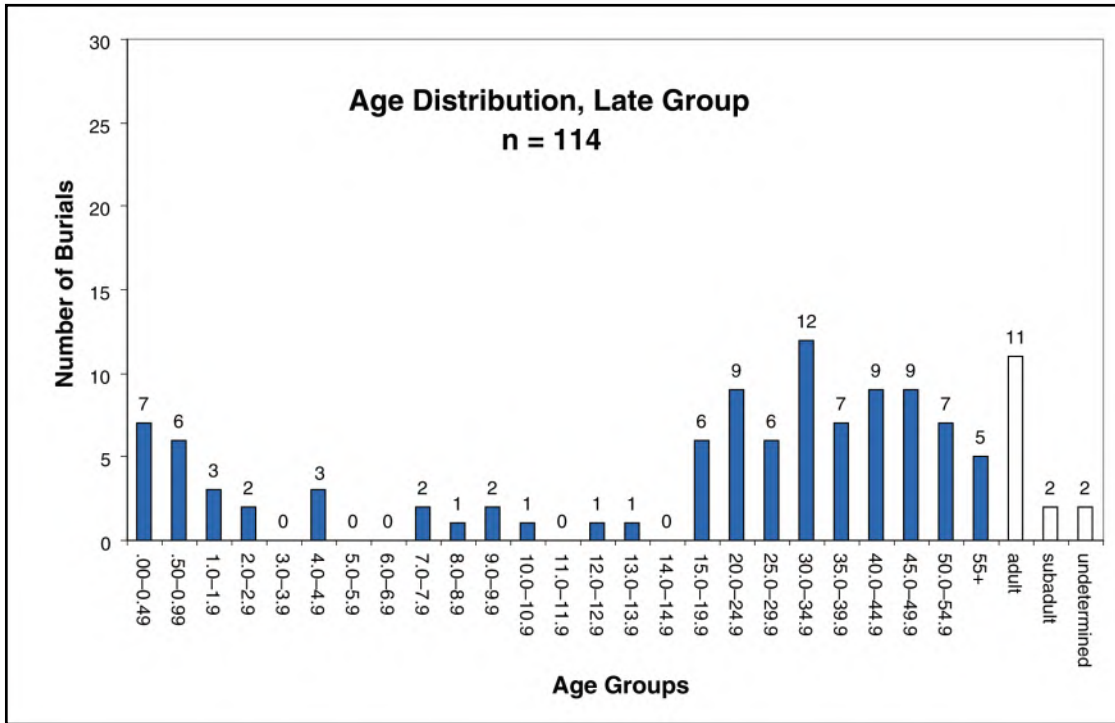


Figure 100. Age distribution, Late Group. White bars include individuals whose age could not be determined (includes only burials from which remains were recovered).

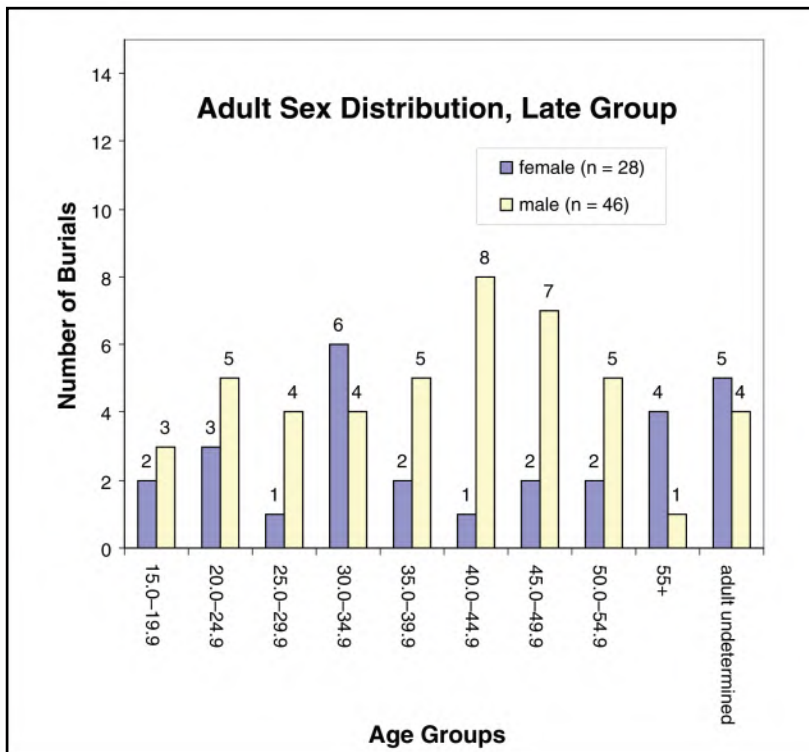


Figure 101. Adult sex distribution, Late Group.

Table 30. Late Group Burials without Coffins, by Sex and Age

Age Group	15–19	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	40–44	45–49	50–54	Adult, Undetermined	Total
Female	—	2	—	2	1	—	—	—	—	5
Male	1	4	2	1	1	3	4	1	2	19
Undetermined	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1

Note: Two coffinless burials of men (Burials 391 and 357) are in the Late-Middle Group (see Chapter 8), and these may also be from the period of British occupation.

We hypothesize that another special circumstance leading to coffinless burial was not a lack of means, but a lack of people to see to these individuals' funeral arrangements. If the burials took place during the Revolution, the deceased may not have had time sufficient to form deep social bonds in the local community. They may have been soldiers, laborers in the employ of the British forces, or refugees, and they may have been in the city for only a short while. Typically, when someone in the New York African community died, the provision of a coffin was considered a minimum standard of proper treatment. Even outsiders, in earlier periods, may have been afforded this minimum through the pooled resources of an established community (which took in escapees or transient free blacks), or, if enslaved, through their slaveholders, who were obliged by custom to provide it. But during the war, with severe disruptions in community life and the huge influx of outsiders, we can imagine strangers dying with no people of their own and no local group able to take care of their funeral.

The fact that the coffinless burials are all of adults lends support to the idea that these burials held transients. Children were unlikely to be in the city alone, and therefore when a child died, there was probably someone to see to its burial.³ The predominance of men in coffinless burials also supports the interpretation: black soldiers and refugees who became laborers

³ Poor preservation of child burials may also account for the lack of recorded coffinless children's graves. Even with no dental preservation, the outlines of graves should have been discernable. Yet, if excavation failed to turn up any evidence of either a coffin or skeletal remains, it is possible no burial would have been recorded, and disturbances to the site may have obscured such graves beyond recognition. A number of infants' or small children's coffins contained minimal or no skeletal material; if a coffin aided preservation at least to some degree, we would expect even less skeletal survival for coffinless juveniles. The degree of skeletal preservation for individuals 15 years and older does not appear to have been significantly affected by the presence of coffins.

for the British would have been buried at the African Burial Ground (Table 30).

This is not to deny the formation of families among Revolutionary War refugees in New York, for there is, in fact, evidence of this process. For example, the lists of blacks evacuated with the British in 1783 provide information on several marriages of men and women from distant places who met in the occupied city (Foote 1991:370–375; Kruger 1985:666–673). But many deaths must have occurred among those who had not yet had opportunities to find kin, acquire spouses, make friends, join a religious group, or otherwise form bonds within a local community.

The lumber shortage during the war cautions us against overinterpreting the structural niche of occupants of coffinless burials. Even if families and friends were on hand and wished to provide adequate funerals, the means may not have been available. Still, we believe that the provision of a coffin for most of the deceased speaks to the efforts of mourners to provide that item even in the face of shortages. Burials without coffins may therefore represent individuals for whom less effort was made, because they were strangers or because the family's or household's means were too limited.

Despite the possible hindrances, there were three times as many Late Group burials with coffins than without (79 coffins). Hexagonal coffins are typical of the late period. Only three of the adult coffins with recognizable shapes were not six sided: a tapered coffin (Burial 207), a possible rectangular coffin (Burial 12), and a possible eight-sided coffin with a two-piece headboard (Burial 257). Even among the children and infants, 12 out of 21 recognizable coffin shapes were hexagonal. One adult, in Burial 207, had a four-sided tapering coffin, the shape we have considered to be typical of the early period. Although the presence of a sherd of pearlware in the soil within the cranium and the fact that the burial overlay many children's graves force us to consider it late, it is possible Burial 207 has

been assigned incorrectly. Burial 12, which also had pearlware in the grave-shaft-fill soil, had a coffin for which it is difficult to determine the shape, although it appears to have been four sided.

Other Artifacts

Other types of material culture directly associated with Late Group burials included pins, jewelry, plain and decorative buttons and cuff links, and miscellaneous items including coins. Fifty-three percent (60 out of 114) of the Late Group burials had at least one pin. Shrouding was probably typical, although 16 individuals had some evidence of clothing (buttons, cuff links at the wrists, or an aglet). Little in the way of personal adornment was recovered from Late Group burials, as was the case for the excavated cemetery as a whole. A woman was laid to rest wearing a ring with glass insets (Burial 242), an infant was buried with a glass and wire filigree ornament (Burial 186), and a young child was interred with a string of black beads looped at the waist (Burial 187).

Sixteen of the 33 burials with clothing items that were clearly associated with the deceased were in the Late Group; more than half of the buttons recovered at the New York African Burial Ground were from Late Group burials. Particular types of clothing are suggested in Burials 6 (a jacket), 181 (trousers or breeches), 203 (breeches), and 259 (breeches). One man had cuff links at each wrist (Burial 158), and another was buried with an enameled cuff-link face (Burial 211); a possible cuff link was recorded for Burial 181.⁴

The greater frequency of buttons and cuff links in later burials raises questions about the increased use of street clothes as burial attire (see Chapter 12). There is a caveat, however: because buttons have in some cases provided the rationale for placing burials in the Late Group (Burial 6, for example), a comparison of button/no button burials within and across temporal groups is suspect. In other words, there are probably burials that date to the late period but that have not been identified as late because they have no artifacts and are not assignable spatially or stratigraphically. Such burials would increase the frequency of buttonless burials in the Late Group.

⁴ Buttons, cuff links, and clothing are described in Chapter 12. All of the decorative buttons and all of the cuff links are considered as personal adornment and hence are also discussed in Chapter 13. The enamel cuff-link face from Burial 211 is illustrated in Chapter 13. Beads, rings, and pieces of jewelry made from metal and glass are discussed in Chapter 13, as well.

“Miscellaneous” items such as coins, shells, and pipes were also more prominent in Late Group burials than in burials from earlier groups (see Chapter 14). Because these items were not used to date burials, the comparative frequency is more likely to reflect actual mortuary practice than in the case of clothing fasteners. Miscellaneous items were found in direct association with 11 individuals in the Late Group. Two women (Burials 230 and 242) and one man (Burial 135) had coins on their eyes. A coin and a knife were found with another man (Burial 214). Iron tacks were found with a woman (Burial 197) and a young child (Burial 138); the infant in Burial 186 had a possible nail on the left side of its cranium. The man in Burial 147 was found with a cluster of small copper rings and pins next to his right arm. Two adults (Burials 158 and 165) had portions of pipes.

Spatial Distribution

Orientation

In the later grouping of burials, more graves were angled southward relative to the site grid than in the earlier or middle groupings (see discussion of orientation in Chapter 5). The pattern may be evidence for a higher frequency of winter deaths, or reliance on physical features in the northern part of the cemetery (for example, terracing along the slope of the hill), or a more regularized approach to grave digging, such that once a grave was dug, other graves were aligned to it.

The fence-post alignment was oriented at approximately 102° west of grid north. If the southerly trend of Late Group burials were construed as evidence of alignment with the fence, the hypothesis that these burials postdate the fence’s destruction must be rejected. There remains the possibility that a path or road extended roughly parallel to the property line, leading from Broadway to the pottery buildings that stood near the northeast part of the cemetery. The trenches identified in Lot 12 (see Chapter 4) might be related to such an access road. Such an east-west feature could have been used to orient burials.

Rows

To a greater degree than elsewhere at the site, burials in the northern area appear to form “rows” with north-south alignments. These rowlike alignments

can be explained in several, mutually compatible ways. First, the alignments might reflect the lay of the land, lying more or less along parallel “terraces” on the sloping ground. This may be supported by the somewhat more regular orientation of graves. Second, the rowlike alignments might indicate that the day-to-day management of the cemetery was becoming more regularized, so that a grave digger, rather than the mourners themselves, would have sited graves. Regularization of grave sites is also compatible with our idea that the northern area was used during the British occupation and contains many individuals from outside the local community. The grouping of graves with regard to known social ties, such as kinship or residence, would not always have been possible under the circumstances of war. Finally, the arrangement may reflect a pragmatic response to a heightened mortality rate. The war and the appalling health conditions in the town would have raised the death toll and possibly required several burials on a single day. Similarly, the yellow fever that plagued the city annually beginning in 1791 may have taken lives at a rate requiring that several graves be prepared at once.

Paired Burials

A woman-infant co-interment, Burials 12 and 14, was found in a relatively separate location in the southwest part of the site (see Figure 99b), and child Burials 225 (of a 6–12-month-old) and 252 (of an 18-month-old) form another pair in the northern area of the site (see Figure 99c, at the east edge of former Lot 15). Although there is no way to know, the pairs may have been victims of the yellow fever epidemics of the 1790s.

Burials 137 and 165 in the northern area of the excavated site (see Figure 99c, straddling the line between former Lots 14 and 15) may have been placed together deliberately, since the two are spatially separate from other interments within an apparent row. Burial 137 was between 25 and 35 years old and of undetermined sex; Burial 165 was an adult for whom neither sex nor precise age could be determined. Burial 137, which had a coffin, overlay Burial 165, which did not; the later burial did not disturb the earlier, however.

Burials 243 and 305 are the only other likely paired burials in the Late Group (see Figure 99d, on the line between former Lots 16 and 17). They were very unusual if in fact they were deliberately buried together: the infant (in Burial 305) was beneath the

adult (Burial 243), a man between 40 and 50 years of age.

Gendered Space

We have noted that the predominance of men in the later burials and their greater frequency in coffinless burials is to be expected because of the presence of soldiers and laborers during the British occupation. Do the coffinless burials exhibit any spatial patterning by gender? There were three women’s graves (Burials 223, 150, and 199) aligned roughly parallel in a north-south line at approximately 75 East (see Figure 99c, center). Other burials in this possible “row” include two to the north (Burials 137 and 165) for which sex could not be determined, and another to the south (Burial 211) identified as a probable male. A “row” of four men’s graves lay to the east of the women, two in coffins and two without (Burials 194, 191, 174, and 158; see also Figure 99c). Another possible row of men’s graves, mainly without coffins, lay somewhat further east (approximately at 130 East; see Figure 99d, within former Lot 17) and included, from north to south, Burials 337, 354, 327, 369, 329, and 343. (A woman’s grave, Burial 342, intervened.)

These rows of adjacent burials of the same gender are distinctive in comparison to the overall demographic distribution within the excavated site (see Figure 7, pocket map). The apparent nonrandom distribution of men may be related to specific historical circumstances. Men from the barracks, for instance, may all have been buried in a row if sickness claimed several lives in quick succession. Infectious and contagious diseases notoriously ravaged the troop barracks and prisons during the occupation. The cluster of women consists of only three individuals, so it may simply be the random result of normal day-to-day cemetery use. The possibility that gendered space within the cemetery had a religious basis should be considered, but there is no documentary or comparative evidence to provide hypotheses.

Isolated Infants

No children were identified as having been buried without coffins, and although many adults came to the city from other geographical locales during the final period of the burial ground’s use, children were likely to have had family members who could provide for their funerals. On the other hand, there

were several spatially separate child burials in the northern part of the excavated cemetery, suggesting that these children's families may not have had their own places of burial within the cemetery. Detached child burials in the northern area include Burials 59, 58, and 86, in the rear of Lot 12 (see Figure 99b). Although interred in an apparent north-south row, the children are aligned with, but not clearly associated with, any of the adult interments nearby. Burials 173 and 190 similarly appear to be aligned in a row but not definitely coupled with adult burials (see Figure 99c, approximately 100 East), and Burials 166, 187, and 386 may also fall into the category of "detached" child burials that may be associated with rows. It is possible, of course, that the children were placed near adults with some specific association within the apparent rows.

Even more isolated are Burials 201, 138, 184, and 186, shown east to west on Figure 99c, and Burials 183 and 363, shown on Figure 99d. Burials 183, 184, and 186 (see Figures 99c and 99d) lay within the central part of Lot 16 where few burials were found, and it is possible that disturbances could have obliterated nearby interments. But it would be unusual for these child burials to have better preservation than those of adults. Here is an area that may have been used specifically for the burial of children.

The Area of the Animal-Bone Dump

Burials in the area where animal bone (mainly cow and likely tannery waste) had been dumped are shown in Figure 47 in Chapter 4). The faunal material found in each grave shaft in this area is inventoried in Appendix E, Part 3 of this volume. We examined the distribution of these graves in relation to the presence/absence of coffins and in terms of burial superposition to determine whether the tannery dump can provide a relative dating sequence in the area. There were 23 grave shafts containing significant amounts of cow bone, and these must have been dug after the dumping had occurred. Of these, 10 were adult burials with coffins, 7 were adult burials without coffins, and 6 were children's burials, the latter all with coffins. Thus, both coffined and coffinless burials occurred after the dumping episode(s). It is likely that the tannery dump dates to some time during the occupation. Therefore, it is possible that some burials were placed within the dump area during the occupation (coffinless) and some burials were placed within the dump area after the war, during the mid-1780s (coffined). There

were only two cases of burial superposition among those with tannery waste. In one case, two burials, coffinless Burial 243 and coffined Burial 241, both truncated coffinless Burial 185—the coffined burial may be the latest. In the second case, a coffinless burial (Burial 323) overlay a coffin burial (Burial 354), which would argue against a coffinless wartime vs. coffined postwar sequence within the dump. However, as we discuss in the section on unique and unusual burials, Burial 323 is a unique interment, one that probably occurred under inauspicious circumstances unrelated to the war, probably in the mid- to late-1780s.

Area within Lot 17

A slight increase in the density of graves can be seen in the small area that was excavated eastward of grid line 120 East. This is approximately the western boundary of Lot 17, surveyed originally in 1784 and available for lease after 1787, when the Barclay property was subdivided. It is possible this lot continued to be used for burials after 1788, whereas those to its west did not, the latter having been fenced off (see Chapter 4). Another explanation for the increased overlap in burials is topography: this may have been one of those areas of flatter ground that was used more intensively than the slope. Because the central and northern portions of Lots 17, 18, 20, and 21 were not excavated fully, it is impossible to determine whether the concentration of burials in these eastern lots supports the idea that they were used for a longer period of time than Lots 12–16.

Unique and Unusual Burials

Burial 183: Head-to-East, Possible Painted Coffin

Burial 183 was one of two excavated child burials with its head oriented toward the east rather than the west (the other was Middle Group Burial 406). The grave, located in the north-central part of the site, held a 6–12-month-old child in a tiny-shouldered coffin. As noted, it was an isolate burial, with no apparent relationship to any other. Coffin wood preservation was excellent (Figure 102), and samples were identified as cedar and spruce. Excavators noted flecks of possible paint over the entire surface of the coffin lid and a concentration of orange/red color on the north



Figure 102. In situ photograph of exposed coffin lid, Burial 183. Ruler is marked in feet; north is to the left (photograph by Dennis Seckler).

side.⁵ Fifteen straight pins were recorded in situ in the burial, distributed the full length of the remains.

Burial 194: Wooden Grave Marker

A cedar board was attached to the head of the coffin in Burial 194. The vertical board was the remnant of a grave marker that would have extended to the ground surface, a unique find at the New York African Burial Ground (Figure 103; see Chapter 5 on other types of grave markers). The coffin, which was shouldered and made at least partly of cedar, held a man aged between 30 and 40 years. His central incisors had been filed. Tooth modification is sometimes interpreted as a sign of birth in Africa, although tooth modification in diaspora contexts should also be considered (see Goodman et al. 2009 [Chapter 6 of *Skeletal Biology of the New York African Burial Ground*]). Burial artifacts included a single copper-alloy button shank and an

⁵ Field records indicated that a sample was collected, but it was not brought to the attention of the conservators or inventoried by the Howard University Archaeology Team laboratory staff. Consequently, the substance was never analyzed.



Figure 103. In situ photograph of Burial 194 showing wood from the coffin bottom and the vertical board at the head end (photograph by Dennis Seckler).

organic fragment, possibly a leather button cover, found near the head of the right femur. Pollen analysis suggested that flowers of the Liguliflorae family might have been placed on the coffin.

Burial 196: Displaced Legs and an Opened Coffin

Burial 196 held the remains of an individual of undetermined sex whose calculated age range was from 20 to 24. The western end of the grave shaft and the coffin had been disturbed, and the skeletal elements from the upper body, although all accounted for, were displaced and shifted eastward within the coffin. The leg bones were found as shown in Figure 104, as though the legs had been severed at the knees, with the tibiae and fibulae offset next to the femurs.

The state of the coffin in this burial may help explain the disposition of the bones. Coffin lid nails



Figure 104. In situ photograph of Burial 196. Ruler alongside the burial is marked in feet; north is to the right (photograph by Dennis Seckler).

were found in place only at the foot corners; the other lid nails appear to have been removed. A small pile of nails was found alongside the north edge of the coffin, near the top, and another cluster of nails was removed from the corresponding area beneath the coffin. It is possible the coffin was opened and the lid replaced without the nails. The coffin may have been tipped on end some time after decomposition, causing the bones to shift toward the foot. This might account for the position of the leg bones, providing the shifting followed at least partial soft-tissue decomposition.⁶

⁶ Ubelaker (1974:28–31) has analyzed frequencies of partial disarticulation, reflecting the strength of muscle or ligament attachments. Ubelaker's (1974:28) results suggest that decomposition produces separation first at the major joints such as the shoulder, elbow, wrist, hip, and knee. Separation next occurs at the joints between the sacrum and pelvis, bones of the hand, lower leg and foot, radius and ulna, sacrum and fifth lumbar vertebrae, skull and first cervical vertebrae, the lumbar segments, first and second cervical vertebrae, skull and mandible, and the third to seventh cervical segments. The thoracic vertebrae, tibia and fibula, and bones of the feet are the last to become disarticulated.

The possibility that the deceased had been dismembered at the knees prior to or after death is also considered, though no visible cut marks were noted by the Skeletal Biology Team. The positions of the leg bones appear too precisely in tandem to have simply slid into this arrangement when the coffin was disturbed. It is also possible that the hands had been behind the deceased's back at the time of burial, which would suggest possible execution.

The coffin bottom was of unusual construction (see Chapter 10). Instead of lengthwise boards, short crosswise boards had been used, nailed from the bottom into the coffin sides. The unique coffin, possibly of ad hoc construction, along with the apparent opening of the receptacle some time after interment, the shifting of the remains, and the disconcerting leg position, suggest unusual circumstances surrounding the death and burial of the individual in Burial 196.

Burials with Skeletal Elements Displaced: Dismemberment and Dissection

Like Burial 196, Burials 151 and 364 contained skeletons with bones placed in puzzling ways. Burial 151 held a man between 35 and 45 years old. The coffin was oriented with the head well to the southwest, outside the typical range at the excavated cemetery. Excavators noted that the right leg was turned “backward” (Figure 105). It is possible the leg had been severed (before or after death) and placed in the coffin in this position. The man's incisors had been filed to points. A single pin, found at the neck, was recovered from the burial.

The bones in Burial 364 were even more mystifyingly arranged. The remains were of a man between 25 and 35 years old, buried with no coffin (Figure 106). The right ulna and radius (the bones of the forearm) were found in the left lower leg area, end to end, where the tibia should have been, and the left tibia was rotated 180 degrees and placed at the inside of the left femur. The left arm bones were flexed at a sharp angle. The left foot overlay the distal end of the left fibula. The hand bones were found scattered in the torso area. Skeletal analysis revealed indirect evidence of a gruesome scenario: the left hand and possibly the right, as well as the forearms, had been severed near the time of the man's death. Old cuts or abrasion of bone on the top of the left ulna and dark cut marks consistent with a sharp blade on the top of the left radius might have been made just before or

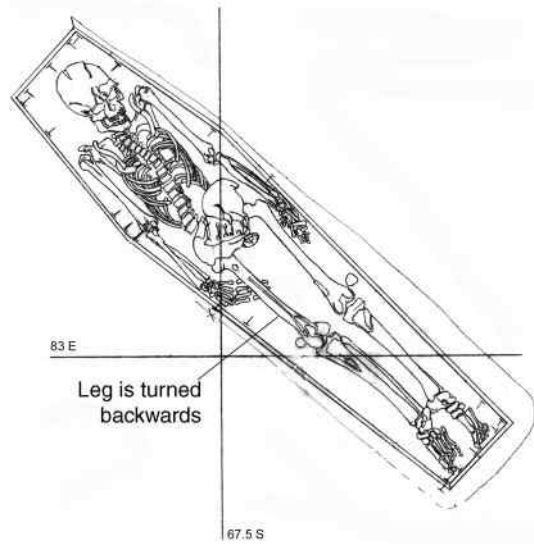


Figure 105. In situ drawing of Burial 151. North is to the right. Note the southwesterly orientation. Scale is 1 inch = 2 feet (drawing by M. Schur).

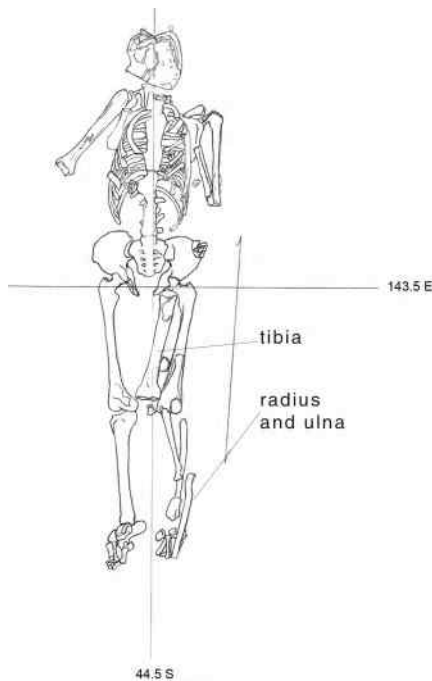


Figure 106. In situ drawing of Burial 364. The vertical line to the right of the remains represents the edge of the grave shaft. The scale is 1 inch = 2 feet; north is to the right (drawing by W. Williams).

after death. Darkened blade cuts were also found on the distal (hand) end of the left radius. This cannot be a case of simple dismemberment, however. The left fibula was in its correct anatomical position, but the tibia was not, and the displaced, right lower-arm bones were not adjacent to each other but laid end to end.

One explanation for the position of the bones is that the remains represent a stolen cadaver (perhaps from the burial ground) that had been partially dissected and subsequently interred with the bones from the severed elements. We cannot know who performed the burial, but it is possible family and friends of the deceased, or other citizens among the many who decried the practice of dissection, retrieved the body and laid it to rest. Because we know that African New Yorkers assumed active vigilance over their dead (see section entitled “The Town” and Chapter 2), it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that they made efforts to retrieve bodies, which then would have been afforded proper burial.

One other grave in the Late Group raises issues of the appropriation of bodies after death. Burial 323 held a man between 19 and 30 years of age who had been subjected to postmortem surgery during which the top of the skull had been sawn off. He had been placed in his grave with the top of his skull held in his arms upon his torso (Figure 107). It is possible that his body had been obtained for dissection, and perhaps the family or friends were able to retrieve the body and bury it. It is also possible that a coroner’s inquest had been performed on the body, as sectioning of the cranium was typical of an autopsy in the eighteenth century (Sledzik and Micozzi 1997:488; for archaeological examples from Great Britain, see Chamberlain [1999]). The position of the body, with the head to the east rather than the west, is very unusual (only four instances were recorded at the New York African Burial Ground), and supports the overall impression of inauspicious circumstances of burial. So, too, may the absence of a coffin.⁷

⁷ New York City coroner Thomas Shreve’s 1771 petition to the Common Council for recovery of fees lists 20 inquests performed but does not indicate whether autopsies were undertaken. The petition does itemize extra fees incurred for burials, and Shreve charged for having to dig two graves himself. In only one case was there a charge for a coffin, implying that the others were buried without coffins (Municipal Archives of the City of New York, Papers of the Common Council, Petitions, Thomas Shreve, April 19, 1771).



Figure 107. In situ photograph of Burial 323 skeletal remains as found. The top of the skull was held in the man's arms. Ruler is marked in feet; north is to the left (photograph by Dennis Seckler).