Profiling Helps Discover Prison Cemetery

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Old Newgate Prison Cemetery in East Granby, Connecticut has been lost for 150 yr-until recently. Today, Old Newgate Prison Cemetery can be found in a clump of trees, previously an old field, with a stone wall in the background coming to an end in one corner. There, stones are set above the ground aligned in a logical order. Not one of them is inscribed.

The Prison

Originally begun as a copper mine in the early 1700s, Newgate opened in 1773 as America’s first state prison. Tories and Loyalists were held there during the Revolutionary War as well as serious criminals until Newgate ceased operating as a prison in 1827 and reopened as a mine at that time. It became a tourist attraction in the 1860s, and in 1976 was declared a National Historic Landmark.

The Cemetery

According to local land records, land was purchased for a prison cemetery in 1812. From 1814 to 1827 the remains of up to 20 prisoners were taken about one-half mile down the road leading from the prison and buried. The last chronicled document on the property is a newspaper article with a photograph taken in 1895. Soon after, the cemetery and its location disappeared from official records. Recently, local residents interested in the history of the prison picked up the search for the cemetery. Using a combination of the original purchase records, a crude old map drawn by local residents years ago, and an old photograph of the cemetery, a location was derived. The old map shows the cemetery located to the west of the power lines, about a half mile from the prison. A photo of the location (Fig. 1) shows an open field with several stones in a line and a stone wall in the background coming to an end in one corner.

Finding the cemetery was difficult and often confusing given the minimal clues, the rerouting of Newgate Road to its current location, changes in the landscape from agriculture to woodland, and new housing developments... All in all, the map, the photograph, and some very hard working individuals led archeologists to the most promising cemetery location. To aid in identifying special soil features and characteristics of disturbed soils, the Connecticut Office of State Archeology requested technical soil assistance from the NRCS in Connecticut. On August 20, 2004, Connecticut NRCS soil

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