

I C F



ICF is a non-profit organization in Northern California
for the advancement of research and education of Forensic Evidence
and Human Remains Detection Dog teams.



Hidalgo County Texas, Pauper Cemetery Project November 1st and 2nd 2017

Dr. Russ Skowronek has been a friend for many years and in the beginning of ICF he assisted us in getting involved with projects by introducing us to Native American monitors and archaeologists.

Russ asked me to come to TX to give a presentation to the archaeology and Forensic Science classes as well as take part in Hidalgo County pauper cemetery project. I told Russ I would be happy to come to TX but only in the winter so it would be cooler, if I could bring LynneE, and if we could get some good BBQ. We set the date several months ahead

for November 1st and 2nd. We did not realize it was going to be 90°F with 80% humidity, so much for going in the winter. We also did not realize the dates we picked fell on Dia de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead). The cemetery was filled with families visiting their deceased relatives, this made it more challenging to work. But, we did get good BBQ.

Students registered in Public Archaeology at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) are involved in research of the site under the supervision of their professor, Dr. Sarah M. Rowe. This is a joint project with Hidalgo county and the University. The purpose of this joint project is to involve students with the community, collect the data about the cemetery including recording name, number of graves, condition of grave and location as well as introducing students to public archaeology.

Our dogs would be adding an additional layer to the is project, hopefully by finding some unmarked burials.

This is a link from the University web page about the project.

<http://www.utrgv.edu/en-us/about-utrgv/news/press-releases/2017/december-21-utrgv-hidalgo-county-project-working-to-restore-dignity-identify-burial-plots-at-abandoned-pauper-cemetery/index.htm>

~Adela~

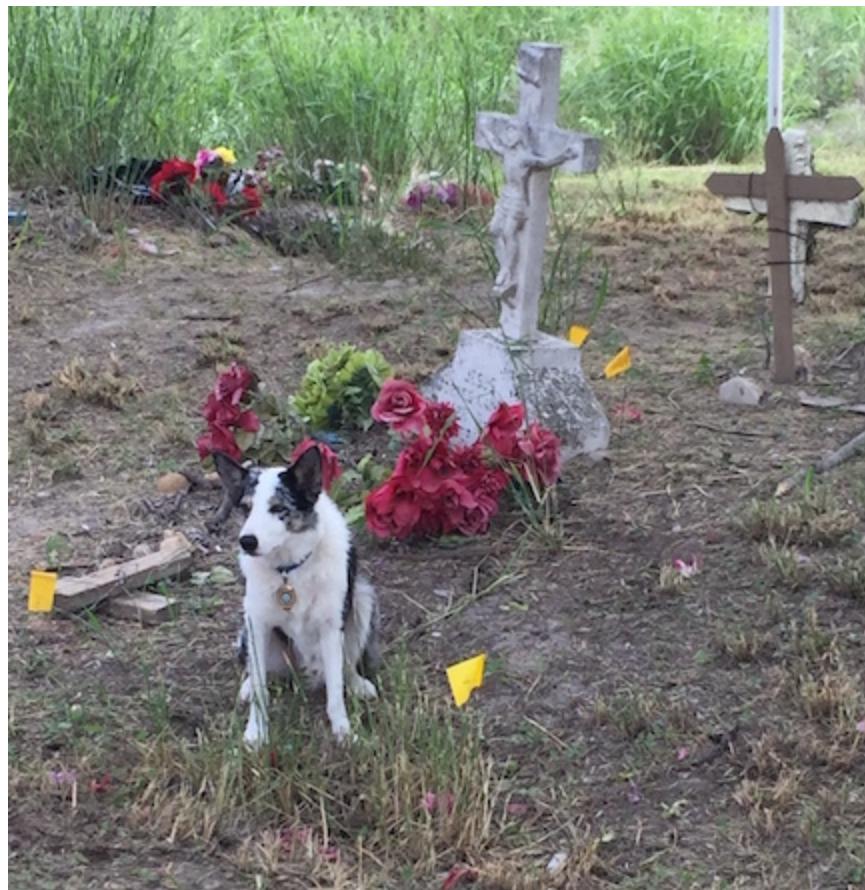


The Hidalgo Pauper cemetery was unlike any of the cemeteries we usually work. This was a child's grave, typical of this cemetery there were many offerings left at the grave. For us so many items on and around the grave causes scent to stick causing large scent pools.

The dogs are very drawn to the big scent pools making it more difficult to find unmarked burials because they have small scent pools.

Some of the lessons learned and new experiences

- Santeria religion
- High density cemetery, overpowering scent for our dogs
- Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)



Santeria

We were told by some of the students that they had been finding items thought to be spells left by people practicing the Santeria religion. I was fascinated and had to do some research to find out more about the Santeria religion.

Santeria is an Afro-American religion of Caribbean origin that developed in the Spanish Empire among West African descendants. Santeria is a Spanish word that means the "worship of saints". Santería is a system of beliefs that merges aspects of religion brought to the New World by the enslaved. Some of their customs and beliefs include trances, communications with the dead, animal sacrifices and spells. To preserve their traditions and beliefs in a hostile cultural, caused the believers to merge their customs with aspects of Roman Catholicism. They syncretized their beliefs with Catholic saints to hide that they were still practicing their original religion.

The cemetery is a powerful place because of the many spirits that are there. Many offerings, spells and other religious practices are performed and, at times, items are left in cemeteries. We might not even recognize a spell or offering left in a cemetery. They can be anything as simple as a small jar, candles, wax bound in twine hanging from a tree, cloth dolls, blood offerings, a small bag filled with herbs or other items.

Santeria reputation has been tinged with negativity, being accused of witchcraft because they deal with health through the unfamiliar paradigm of the spirit world, which is not understood by either medical doctors or the Catholic priests. Santerian priests and priestesses are herbalists who use plants as both remedies and for their “magic”.

There are reported to be secret versions of Santeria that practices black magic. It is a very closed religion so its hard to know if the items we found while searching the cemetery were spells to protect or do harm. We were very clear we were not going to touch or disturb any items found.

Santeria is a growing religion in the USA, although rooted in Africa it is not limited to those of African descent.

~Adela~



Left

We found several cloth dolls bound with string.

Right

Wax figure bound with twine



Left

Vials with things in them

Right

Wax balls wrapped in twine tied to trees.



Sarah Rowe

It was a pleasure to get to know Sarah, what lucky students to have her as their professor. She brings her love of archaeology and knowledge to her class. I am ready to sign up.

As I looked at this picture I saw, for the first time, Jasper in the background waiting for me to acknowledge that he is alerting at a grave. Our dogs live to do this work, we don't have to tell them, they put themselves to work. Even when we take a break, they are working.

~Adela~



Archaeologist Mike Newland, dog handlers LynneE & Piper, and Adela & Jasper

Santa Rosa Fire, More Ashes

We have continued to respond to residents of the Santa Rosa Fire who have asked for help in locating the cremated remains of their loved ones that had been left in the house when it burned.

We thought we would have several months to work on capturing the process of using trained dogs and archaeologists to locate cremains after a fire. But here we are, sadly watching the news of yet more huge fires in California, decimating hundreds of acres of wilderness and homes in Ventura, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles and San Diego counties.

You can read more about our stories of working in Santa Rosa in our November and December newsletters.

~Adela~



We are happy and excited to welcome our newest certified team Karen and Echo.

Please feel free to pass this newsletter along to someone who might be interested.

You can check out past ICF newsletters on our web page.

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(650) 503-HHRD (-4473)

www.HHRDD.org

We are happy to talk to you about your project and how our dogs might help locate human remains or burials. Email or call us.

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