

ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY  
OF THE CEMETERY AT THE STADIUM ROAD  
HOUSING PROJECT, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA

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## INTRODUCTION

This report is a summary of the Phase II archaeological investigation of a historic cemetery, an investigation which was conducted for the Planning Department of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. The site is located in the central portion of the Stadium Road housing project currently under construction for the University of Virginia. The objectives of the work were to locate and then determine the boundaries of the cemetery in order to assess possible impacts from the dormitory construction.

The field work was carried out primarily by students of the University of Virginia, between March 4, 1983 and April 28, 1983. The project was supervised by Stephen Plog, an assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology. Elizabeth S. Word, a graduate of the university, was responsible for the field directions.

A total of 30 test pits were excavated with approximately 400 person hours expended to complete the investigation. No supplemental record search or formal interviews were conducted because of time constraints and the presence of a previous report which discussed the research area (de la Haba and Rice 1982). All records relating to this project are available in the Laboratory of

Archaeology of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Virginia.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A Phase I archaeological survey of the Stadium Road housing site was conducted in 1982. For a summary of the general environmental setting, and the historical and archaeological background, the reader is referred to the Phase I survey report (de la Haba and Rice 1982). The site is located on a gentle slope covered with periwinkle, honeysuckle, poplar trees, and a few maple trees. Since no stone markers are visible on the site, the only surface indications suggesting the presence of graves are the periwinkle, historically used as a ground cover for cemeteries, and a few slight depressions which could indicate past subsurface intrusions. A previous search of historical records did not produce any written record of the burial site (de la Haba and Rice 1982).

Subsequent to the Phase I survey, Mrs. Alice H. Clark stated that a cemetery was located in the vicinity of the dormitory construction site. According to Mrs. Clark, it is a slave cemetery that was once part of a 2300 acre plantation owned by her grandfather, Jesse Lewis Maury. She believes the cemetery is between one-quarter and one-half of an acre in area, and that it contains the remains of slaves

who worked on the plantation. Mrs. Clark remembers that there were once upright stones marking the graves, but those have been either stolen or covered by vegetation over the years.

#### FIELD METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Since the exact position of the cemetery was not known, the first objective of the field work was to locate the burial site. Once the location was determined, it was necessary to establish the boundaries of the site in order to evaluate any effect the construction would have on the cemetery. In the following sections, we will discuss the strategy employed to pursue those objectives, including the selection of the areas to be tested, the placement of test pits, and the general excavation techniques used in digging the pits.

The decision to excavate test area A (Figure 1) was based on Mrs. Clark's recollection of the cemetery location. By the time work began, preliminary clearing of vegetation had begun and a bulldozer had scraped some areas. Within the latter area, five large pits, arbitrarily placed, were excavated with shovels. Each pit was then scraped, using trowels, so that any subtle changes in soil color and texture could be identified. Some amorphous soil discolorations or stains were detected in four of the five

Figure 1. Test areas A and B and locations of individual test pits.

pits, so small areas within each pits were chosen for deeper excavations to verify the absence of burial activity.

Test area B (Figure 1), located approximately 20 meters east of test area A, was selected because of the presence of the periwinkle ground cover and visible depressions. At this time, the size of the test pits was reduced to approximately two-by-two meter squares in order to decrease excavation time in each area while maintaining the ability to recognize soil staining.

The first test pit (no. 6) excavated in test area B was placed in a depression on the assumption that the depression may have been caused by previous excavations, such as a burial. Two grave stains were discovered in the pit and will be discussed below.

With the general cemetery location established, the process of determining the site boundaries began. Using test pit no. 6 as a center point, additional test pits were excavated in four directions along lines radiating from the center. Similarly, test pits were dug around each subsequent burial stain that was found.

The distance between the excavated pits varied and was determined in several cases by the location of trees and their inevitable accompanying network of roots. In a few



cases, pits were placed beyond obvious depressions so that energy could be expended on establishing the site boundaries, rather than locating each grave. Thus, the distance between test pits was large enough that every single grave was not discovered, but was not so great that determining the site boundaries was tenuous.

The depth to which each pit was excavated varied according to changes in the depths of the soil levels. Generally, a pit was stripped of the vegetation and of topsoil with a shovel. Upon reaching the red clay B horizon, the floor of the pit was leveled and then scraped and cleaned with a trowel. Pits containing burials were excavated only to the depth at which the distinct stain of the grave shaft was evident. Some of the staining could be detected in the topsoil level, but frequently further excavation was required to get a clear view of the staining. It is estimated that the deepest excavation in pits which did contain graves was 75 to 150 cm. above the coffin or body level. In addition, complete burials shafts were never uncovered, as that information was not necessary for interpretation. In the event that an amorphous stain, a portion of a stain, or a large rock was uncovered, the pit usually was expanded beyond the two-by-two meter limit.

## RESULTS OF THE FIELD WORK

Five postholes and nine burials were uncovered during the Phase II fieldwork. Table 1 lists each of the test pits, their dimensions, and what was discovered within them. This section will summarize that information and offer some general, preliminary conclusions.

Test area A had no evidence of human burial activity, but did have four postholes. Three were located in test pit no. 3 and one in test pit no. 4. Posthole no. 1 was profiled to verify that it was a posthole as opposed to root or rodent disturbance. These posts were probably part of a fence line(s) that has either been removed or has deteriorated with time. No definite relationship between the proposed fence line and the cemetery could be established.

The cemetery was located in test area B where nine burials were discovered. All of the burials were oriented along an east-west axis, a historically common Christian burial practice. The western portions of burials 1 and 2 were uncovered in test pit no. 6 (Figure 2). The grave shaft stains, characterized by a soft, brown, sandy loam, were clearly recognizable against the culturally sterile red clay B horizon. The distance between the burials was 36

Table 1. Locations, Dimensions, Depths, and Contents of Test Pits.

Test Pit No.	Test Area	Dimensions, North-South by East-West in m.	Maximum Depth	Contents
1	A	3.5 x 3.5	*	-
2	A	4.0 x 2.0	*	-
3	A	7.2 x 4.0	*	Post 1-3
4	A	6.0 x 3.5	*	Post 4
5	A	2.5 x 5.0	*	-
6	B	2.0 x 1.4	.50 cm.	Burials 1-2
7	B	1.8 x 2.0	.42 cm.	-
8	B	1.8 x 1.5	.63 cm.	-
9	B	2.0 x 1.8	.35 cm.	-
10	B	1.3 x 1.4	.55 cm.	Burials 3-4
11	B	1.9 x 1.9	.35 cm.	Burials 5-6
12	B	1.9 x 1.4	*	-
13	B	1.6 x 2.0	*	-
14	B	1.8 x 1.6	.50 cm.	-
15	B	2.0 x 1.8	.43 cm.	-
16	B	2.0 x 1.9	.38 cm.	Burials 7-8
17	B	2.0 x 2.8	.58 cm.	-
18	B	2.8 x 6.2	.65 cm.	-
19	B	1.9 x 1.7	.15 cm.	Burial 9
20	B	2.0 x 1.8	.43 cm.	-
21	B	2.0 x 1.8	.45 cm.	-
22	B	1.8 x 1.8	.38 cm.	-
23	B	2.0 x 1.4	.50 cm.	-
24	B	1.4 x 1.2	.34 cm.	-
25	B	1.8 x 1.4	.25 cm.	-
26	B	1.8 x 1.6	.20 cm.	-
27	B	2.0 x 1.6	.48 cm.	Post 5
28	B	2.0 x 1.4	.43 cm.	-
29	B	1.8 x 1.8	.35 cm.	-
30	B	1.8 x 1.6	.30 cm.	-

\* Depth not known because of bulldozer activity.

Figure 2. Test pit no. 6 showing locations of burials  
1 and 2.



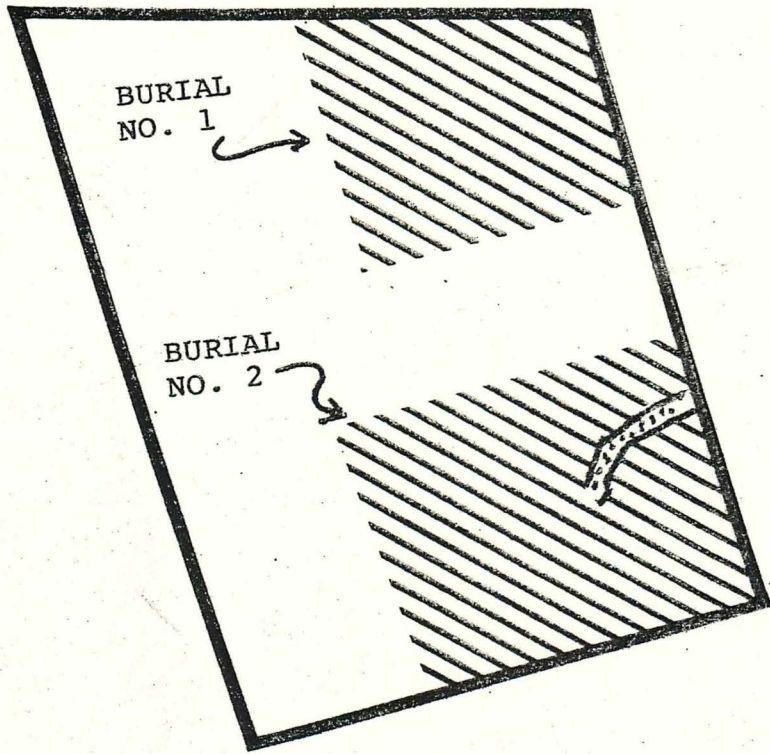
GRAVE



ROOT



20 cm.



cm. The central portions of burials 3 and 4 were found in test pit no. 10 (Figure 3), approximately 4 m. southeast of test pit no. 6. The grave shafts were 50 cm. apart and contained the same soil type as burials 1 and 2. Test pit no. 11 (Figure 4), located 11 m. south of test pit no. 6, also contained two burial stains (5 and 6) similar to those described above. Burial 5 extended along the entire northern section of the test pit, while only a small portion of burial 6 was visible along the southern end of the pit. Burials 7 and 8 (Figure 5), located in test pit no. 16, were visible as a red, mottled, sandy clay soil surrounded by yellow brown topsoil. They were separated by a distance of 56 cm. and positioned approximately 20 m. south of test pit no. 6. Burial 9, located approximately 27 m. southwest of test pit no. 6, was the only burial uncovered with an accompanying stone marker (Figure 6). The upright slab, believed to be a foot stone, was not visible from the surface. Only a small portion of the western end of burial 9 was uncovered. The grave shaft stain was composed of a red, sandy clay that was recognized about 10 cm. below the present ground surface.

Posthole no. 5 was located in test pit no. 27 in the eastern section of test area B. It appears to have been a double posthole as there were two distinct circular components. Although other postholes were not uncovered in

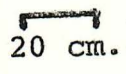
Figure 3. Test pit no. 10 showing locations of burials  
3 and 4.



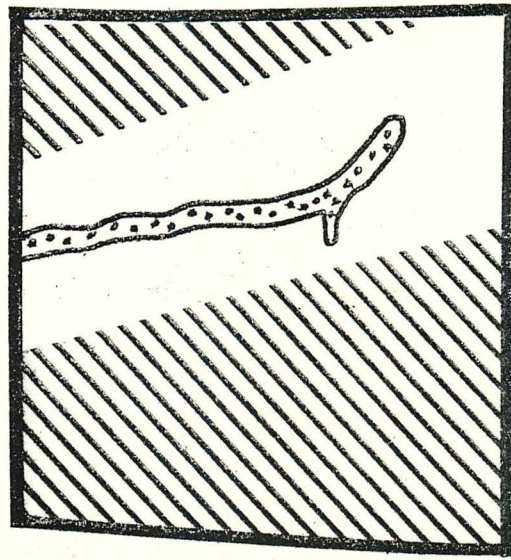
ROOT



GRAVE



BURIAL  
NO. 3



BURIAL  
NO. 4



Figure 4. Test pit no. 11, showing locations of burials  
5 and 6.

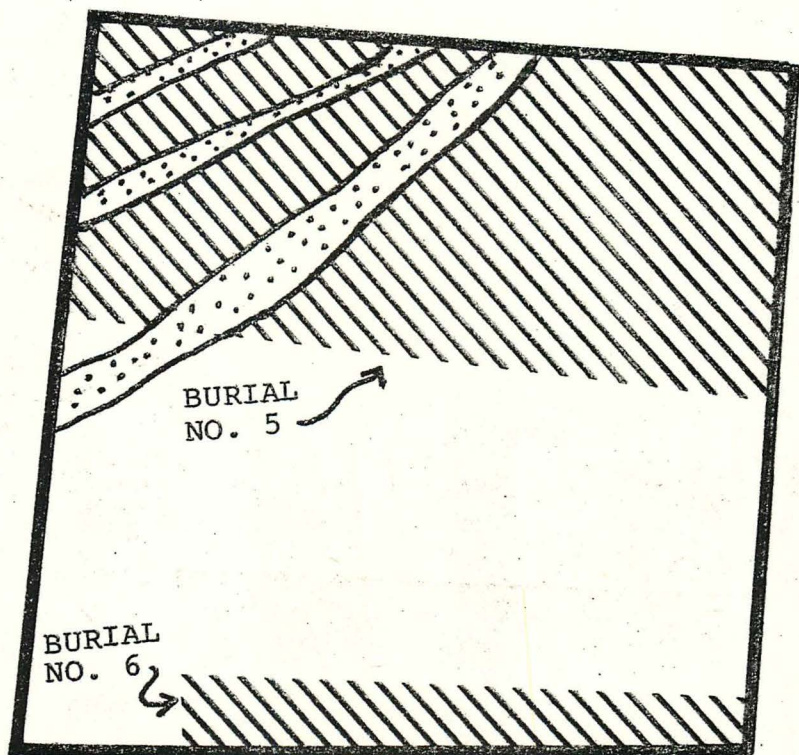
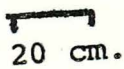
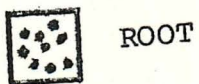
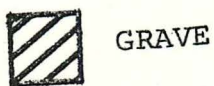


Figure 5. Test pit no. 16 showing locations of burials  
7 and 8.

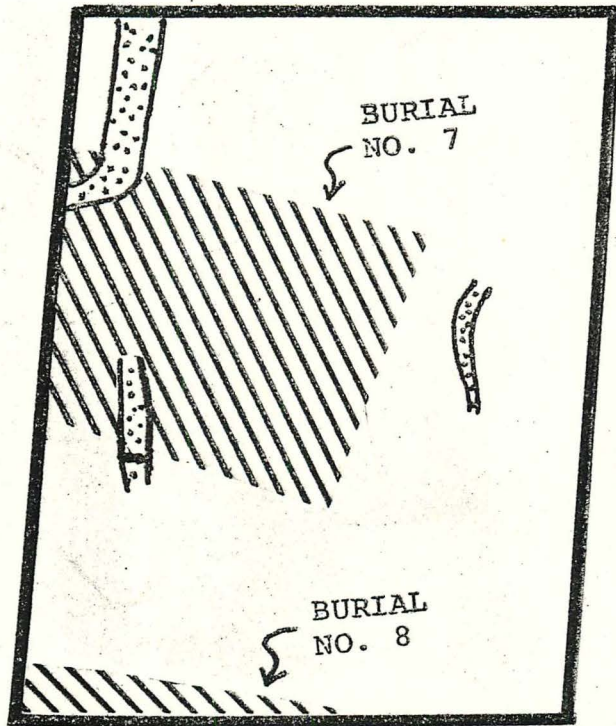
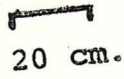
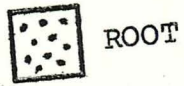


Figure 6. Test pit no. 19 showing location of burial 9.



ROCK



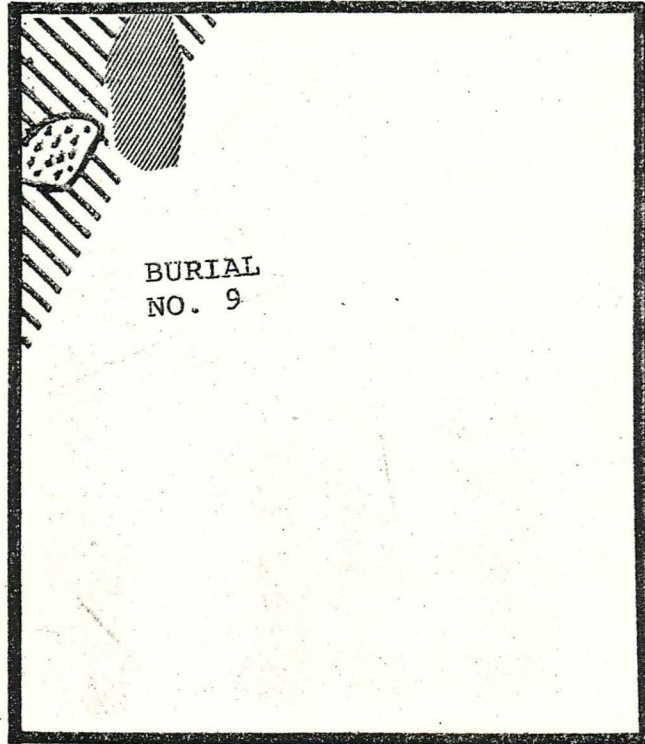
UPRIGHT SLAB



GRAVE



20 cm.



this area, it is possible that others exist.

The final feature present in this area occurred in test pit no. 18, where the original excavation uncovered a series of stones. The original impression was that the stones may have been part of a structure foundation or a rock wall erected to outline the cemetery. The subsequent extensions of the test pit revealed that the stones were probably a natural formation and part of a bedrock outcropping.

#### INTERPRETATIONS

The oral history indicates that the site was a slave cemetery, but the limited nature of our excavations did not uncover any artifacts or other archaeological information which indicated a cultural affiliation or date for the burials. The archaeological data recovered do allow us to estimate the site size and the number of burials within the site. By measuring the distances between the outermost burials uncovered in each of the cardinal directions, a minimum site area of 350 m.<sup>2</sup> is obtained. This estimate is conservative since graves may be located between the furthest burials uncovered and the next sterile test pits. Measuring the distance between the sterile test pits which surround the cemetery area produces a maximum site area of 504 m.<sup>2</sup>. By approximating the area containing burials 1 and

2, including the space between them, it is estimated that an area of 6 to 9 m.<sup>2</sup> is necessary for two interments. Considering that figure along with the density of the graves in excavated test pits and the presence of many unexcavated depressions, we estimate that the site could contain between 75 and 175 burials.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

If additional information is needed on the cemetery, a search of historical records as well as informant interviews may prove valuable and allow a better interpretation of the site. Mrs. Alice H. Clark and Mr. F. Gordon Tice, descendants of the Maury family who live in Charlottesville, may provide an oral history of the site and refer a researcher to other sources.

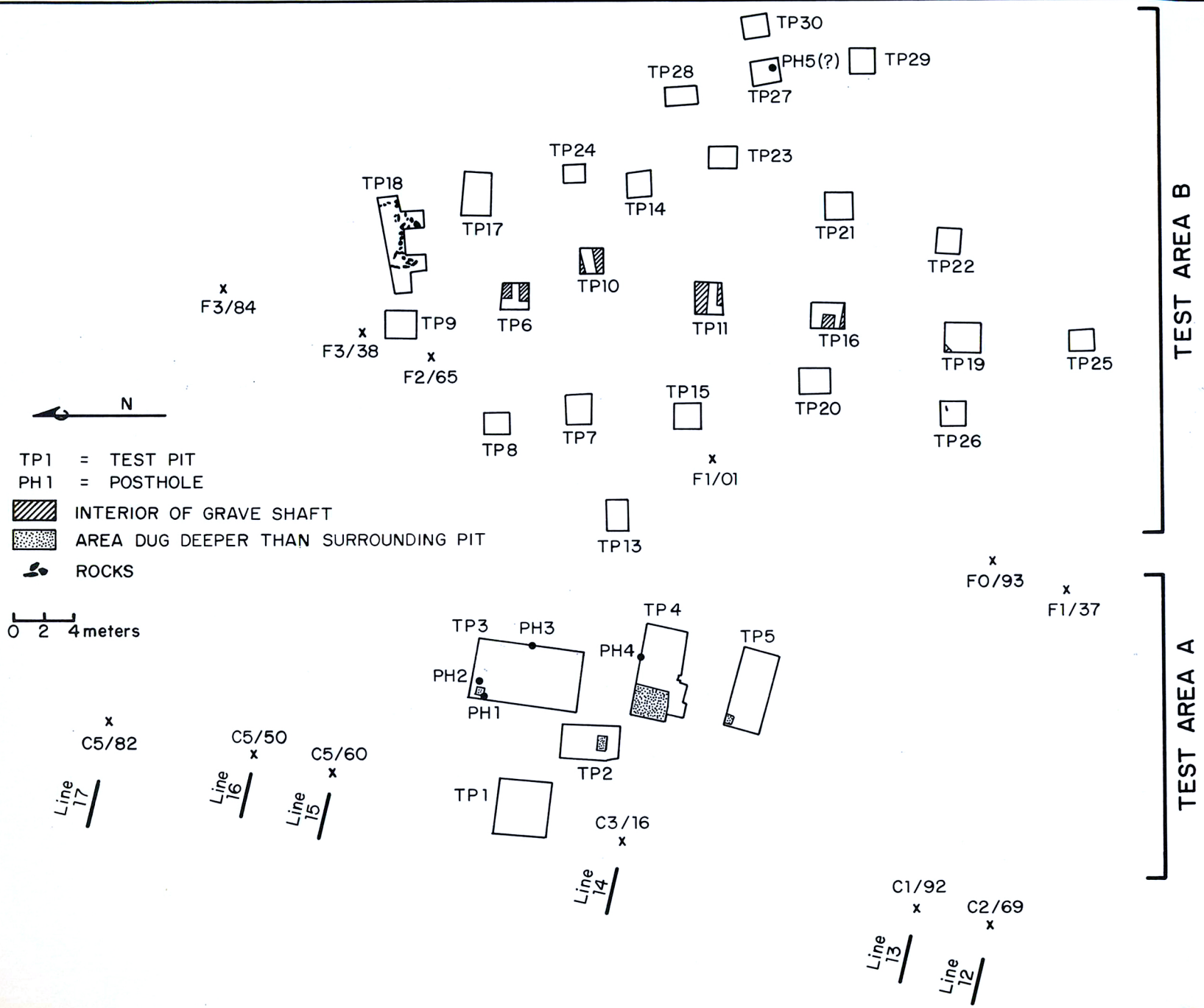
The majority of the Stadium Road housing project will not have a direct impact on the cemetery. There are some proposed walkways and ramps transversing the site which would impact the upper portions of the graves. We recommend that a fence be placed around the cemetery to protect it. In the event that the site will be impacted by future construction, we recommend that Phase III work be conducted in the impact areas.



## REFERENCES

de la Haba, Alison T., and John J. Rice

1982 Phase I archaeological survey of the Stadium Road housing site, Charlottesville, Virginia. Report submitted to the Planning Department, University of Virginia.



TEST AREA B

TEST AREA A