

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY RESEARCH SEMINAR SERIES: Geography 596

Day: Friday, October 11th

Time: 3:30–4:30pm

Location: McClure 209

Tree rings and coffins: The dendrochronology of unmarked graves of the Mississippi State Asylum (1855–1935), Jackson, MS

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The Mississippi State Asylum (MSA) operated in Jackson, Mississippi from 1855 to 1935. Patients of the MSA who died while receiving treatment and who did not have family to claim the remains were buried in the Asylum Hill Cemetery. Historical records indicate that over the years, the small, wooden crosses acting as grave markers were either removed or allowed to decompose, and the cemetery and those buried therein were forgotten. Today, the former location of the MSA is in the middle of the 164-acre campus of the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC). In 2012, a construction project on the UMMC campus unearthed several coffins and acted as a reminder of the now unmarked graves of the Asylum Hill Cemetery. A series of initial excavations were performed by an archaeology team from the Cobb Institute of Archaeology at Mississippi State University. Preliminary geophysical analysis indicates up to an estimated 7,000 unmarked graves at the Asylum Hill Cemetery. I apply techniques of dendroarchaeology to determine the feasibility of providing burial dates.

