

Report to Historic Greenwood Mainstreet:
Archaeological Survey Conducted by the Mapping Historical
Trauma in Tulsa, 1921-2021 Project

Part 1 - BS Roberts Park
June 6-26, 2022

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Introduction

From June 6 - June 26, 2022, the Mapping Historical Trauma in Tulsa (MHTT) project, led by Dr. Alicia Odewale (Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of Tulsa) and Dr. Parker VanValkenburgh (Associate Professor of Anthropology, Brown University), conducted a pedestrian survey alongside high resolution GPS mapping on property owned by the Board of Historic Greenwood Main Street. Board members of this organization include Bill White (Project Director), Kristi Williams, Greg Robinson, Burlinda Radney, Jubar Shumate, Charles Harper, Kuma Roberts, City Councilor Vanessa Hall-Harper, Dr. Tiffany Crutcher, Dr. Phillip Lewis, and Franchell Abdalla. The MHTT survey team consisted of Dr. Parker VanValkenburgh, Dr. Alicia Odewale, Ms. Nkem Ike (Ph.D. candidate in Anthropology at the University of Tulsa), six student interns, and twelve student volunteers (Figure 4). Student volunteers and interns included high school, college, and graduate students from five local institutions—Oklahoma State University, The University of Oklahoma, The University of Tulsa, Tulsa Community College, and Booker T. Washington High School.

Background

The land included in this survey covers B.S. Roberts Park and an extension of the park bounded to the west by North Greenwood Avenue, to north by East Latimer Place, to the east by a flood basin / the Osage Prairie Trail, and to the south by an historic extension of East Latimer Street that is now not part of the modern road network (Figure 2). The entire survey area covers approximately three blocks running north to south and one block running east to west. A portion of the property of interest in this survey is currently being utilized as a public park facility in Tulsa, Oklahoma named after Reverend B.S. Roberts. Reverend Roberts served as pastor of the St. John AME Church in North Tulsa for 36 years and served as a city councilor for District 1 from 1990-1994, which made him the first Black man elected to Tulsa's City Council (Parrish 1997).

The area currently named B.S. Roberts Community Park has a complex and long-running history as the oldest park designated for use specifically for African Americans in the Historic Greenwood District. The park was originally named Greenwood Playground and held under the stewardship of the City of Tulsa Department of Parks, Culture and Recreation from at least 1914 to 1969 (Photomap Service 1969). Greenwood Playground, known locally as "King Park" was the first "colored" playground erected in the Greenwood district in 1914, pre-dating the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre (City of Tulsa Department of Parks, Culture and Recreation).



Figure 1. Aerial view of Greenwood Playground in 1946 Aerial Control Atlas, Courtesy of the City of Tulsa Department of Parks, Culture and Recreation

After the attack on Greenwood in 1921, the park survived while homes around it were destroyed and then rebuilt. The park's survival is indicated by an aerial photo from the 1946 Aerial Control Atlas published by the City of Tulsa, showing the park in existence in 1946, complete with a pool but with a much smaller footprint than what exists today (Figure 1). In the 1940s the park became known locally as King Park but instead of having any playground equipment, benches, or park trails only had the small pool visible in Figure 1. This would have been a unique feature for a park in North Tulsa at this time, given the long history of segregation and Jim Crow standards in Oklahoma and around the country that usually barred Black children from gaining access to public swimming pools. After the 1940s, possibly during the urban renewal period in Tulsa during the late 1960s and 1970s, the park was expanded to the larger open footprint that exists today with the playground itself being bounded by East Jasper Street and East King Street. There is now an extension of open field complete with a basketball court that extends north to East Latimer Place (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Aerial view highlighting divisions within land in the BS Roberts Community Park area. Basemap courtesy of Google Earth Pro

Survey Area

The team surveyed approximately five acres or 20,234 m² (24,200 yd²) covering both BS Roberts Park and the park extension – all of the areas identified within the red polygons above. The

portion of B.S. Roberts Park that contains park equipment is bounded to the west and east by North Greenwood Avenue and the Osage Prairie Trail / flood basin, to the north by an historic extension of East King Street, and to the south by a parking lot. Both East Latimer Place and East King Street reach a dead ends when those roads intersect with the park. The survey area covered both this area of the park, the block to its immediate north containing basketball courts and landscape, and the “extension” block to the north of East Latimer Street that contains no recreation facilities (Figure 3).

This area was chosen based on our research employing Sanborn fire insurance maps from the early 20th century, as well as surface reconnaissance indicating the presence of historic artifacts and structural foundations in the area. Sanborn fire insurance maps from 1915, 1939, and 1962 indicate the presence in this area of structures predating and postdating the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. These records chart cycles of growth, destruction, rebuilding, and clearance, providing a detailed history of how one neighborhood in Greenwood changed from the early 1900s until now. We prioritized work in this area in part due to the need to document historic structures before the implementation of the “Our Legacy, Our Community” Kirkpatrick Heights and Greenwood Site Master Plan, which has highlighted this section of Greenwood for development.



Figure 3. Overhead map of B.S. Roberts Park survey area. Pink polygons indicate areas of high artifact concentration; red points indicate individual artifact finds. Close association with trees suggests that these features are produced by floralturbation, in which tree growth brings artifacts to the surface.

Methods and Results

Overview

Between June 6 and June 26, 2022 and again between October 24th and 28th, 2022 MHTT team members conducted non-invasive archaeological research within the project area identified above. During fieldwork in June 2022, team members conducted a pedestrian survey to record the presence of surface artifacts and architecture. In October 2022, team members partnered with the Oklahoma archaeological survey to conduct a geophysical survey of the far northern block of the project area, employing Ground Penetrating Radar and Magnetic Gradiometry. The far northern area was chosen for geophysical survey due to the presence of visible structural remains that were identified during the pedestrian survey, as well as microtopographic features (such as pits and shallow depressions) that we believed might correspond to additional structural remains. Geophysical survey results are pending and not presented here but add documentation of additional structures preserved below the surface in the northern portion of the survey area.

Methods

Pedestrian Survey

Over the course of 3 weeks, from June 6 - 26th, 2022, MHTT team members conducted a pedestrian archaeological survey to map artifacts and historic structures within the three areas outlined in Figure 2. Following established procedures, survey was conducted using an interval sampling method, in which 50-meter long transects, each separated by 5 meters, were laid out throughout the survey block using survey flags. To ensure both spatial precision (and the precise orientation of transects in the north-south direction), the beginnings and ends of each transect were placed using a high-resolution, RTK GPS base-rover pair (Emlid Reach RS2) and marked with survey flags. Each transect was given a running number, preceded by the code "TS," such that the first transect recorded in B.S. Roberts Park was TS-0200 and the last transect walked at BS Roberts Park was TS-0293.

After transects were laid out, student volunteers were separated into groups of 2 and assigned to specific transects, along which they walked slowly, keeping their eyes fixed on the ground to look for individual artifacts and structures found within one meter of the given transect line. To maintain the correct orientation along that line, each team stretched out a long measuring tape, pulling it taut and staking it into the ground using a plastic stake. As students discovered artifacts, they marked them with survey flags, which they would then label using a sharpie. All structures were given sequential numbers with the prefix "STR," while all single-find artifacts were given sequential numbers with the prefix "FS" (standing for Field Specimen). In addition to structural features and single-find artifacts, this park area was so dense in artifact finds that we created a new category in our survey plan identified as Collection Areas. All collection areas

were given sequential numbers with the prefix “CA” and marked by UTM coordinates. These collection areas would be identified on our maps by a unique polygon shape, from which students took a sample of archaeological material and left the rest of the artifacts *in situ* (Figure 3). To determine artifact density, a 1x1 meter area of each Collection area was delimited and students counted all artifacts found within that area, recording them by category (ceramic, glass, metal, etc.) These (generally small) artifacts were left in place and a representative sample of larger artifacts was collected from each collection area. All single-artifact finds and artifacts collected from the collection areas were recorded on a survey form, and photographed in place. Subsequently, our GPS survey team recorded each point in the project database using the team’s RTK base-rover pair, registering it in Universal Trans Mercator (UTM) coordinates. All finds were then placed in a bag and tagged with the same information recorded in information that matched what was recorded on the survey form to ensure no artifact would become disconnected from his original context of discovery.



Figure 4. Photo of survey group with project directors Odewale and VanValkenburgh kneeling in front of the park sign, surrounded by project interns and student volunteers.

Results

Pedestrian Survey

In the 93 transects we walked on the surveyed portion of BS Roberts Park and the park extension (Figures 2 and 3), we recorded and recovered a total of 45 single-find artifacts, 57 collection areas with a dense assortment of artifacts exposed at the surface level, and the partial foundations of 29 historic structures.

Artifact Recovery

Each artifact that shared the same provenience information was bagged together and assigned a field specimen number or a collection area number. Single artifacts were given a field specimen number and artifacts recovered from collection areas received a collection area number. A total of 45 field specimen numbers were assigned to the recovered artifacts, each representing a unique spatial location, archaeological context, and associated features. Out of the total number of artifacts recovered between single-finds (FS) and collection areas (CA) (n=1,924), the most abundant classes represented in this surface collection were glass (by count, n=1,179). Notable amounts of ceramics (by count, n=383) and metal (by count, n=258) were also present (Table 1). All recovered artifacts were cleaned, rebagged, and temporarily stored at the Historical Archaeology and Heritage Studies Laboratory at The University of Tulsa. Modern waste from the site was not recorded.

Artifacts Organized by Class	Collection Area (CA) by count	Field Specimen (FS) by count	Combined Counts
Architectural Material	35	3	38
Glass	1,083	96	1,179
Ceramics	368	15	383
Metal	243	15	258
Fauna/shell	43	1	44
Charcoal	7	0	7
Other	13	2	15
TOTAL	1,792	132	1,924

Table 1. Number of artifacts recovered as single finds (FS) and from collection areas (CA) (note there were more artifacts observed but not collected in each collection area, the following assemblage reflects a sample of cultural material exposed at the site)

The locations from which artifacts were collected are depicted in Figures 3 and 10. The highest concentrations of artifacts were recovered surrounding older trees in the southern portion of the survey area, which likely predate the urban renewal period of the park's history. These artifacts appear to have been brought to the surface from underlying deposits by tree growth — a process called floralturbation, in which tree roots naturally pull artifacts from lower levels in the soil back up to the surface. However, the same pattern can also occur when the ground is disturbed through modern cultural site disturbance to make way for new fiber optic lines, trees, etc. Regardless of the causes of these developments, the pattern suggests that there may be substantially more artifacts buried in portions of BS Roberts park where they are currently not visible on the surface.



Figure 4. Image of glass artifacts recovered from BS Roberts Park. Photo by authors

Artifacts recovered from this portion of the survey area include a wide variety of glass, ceramics, metal, organic faunal remains, and plastic artifacts (Figures 4-7). While artifact analysis is ongoing, many of these materials appear to date from the mid 20th century and earlier. Some may be the remains of materials burned in domestic trash incinerators and/or exposed to fire by other means (Figure 5); others are complete artifacts that do not show evidence of burning and are therefore likely to have been discarded more closely to their contexts of use (*in situ*) (see Figures 6 and 7). Structural materials (i.e., bricks) are also present (Figure 8). A select few brick fragments were recovered with lettering stamped on one side to indicate the city of manufacture (Figure 8). Further analysis is needed to determine the origin of manufacture for these bricks with exposed partial lettering that may indicate out-of-state manufacture, possibly connected to the rebuilding of this neighborhood after the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.



Figure 5. Image of burned glass recovered from BS Roberts Park. Photo by authors



Figure 6. Image of shell casing and possible bullet fragments recovered from BS Roberts Park.
Photo by authors



Figure 7. Image of artifacts connected to children recovered from BS Roberts Park. Photo by authors.



Figure 8. Image of brick with “-LSA” lettering, possibly created in Tulsa from the ACME Brick company that historically existed across the street from BS Roberts Park. Photo by authors

Historic Structures

Our pedestrian survey revealed the presence of the foundations of several historic structures within the survey area. Two rectilinear foundations were visible within the survey area — one, in the far southern portion; the other, in the northern “extension” area. Further foundations have been identified through geophysical survey, which a forthcoming final report will describe in greater detail.



Figure 9. Image of structural foundation buried just beneath the surface, visible as linear areas with little to no vegetation.



Figure 10. Overhead map of B.S. Roberts Park survey area overlaid on top of a 1965 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.

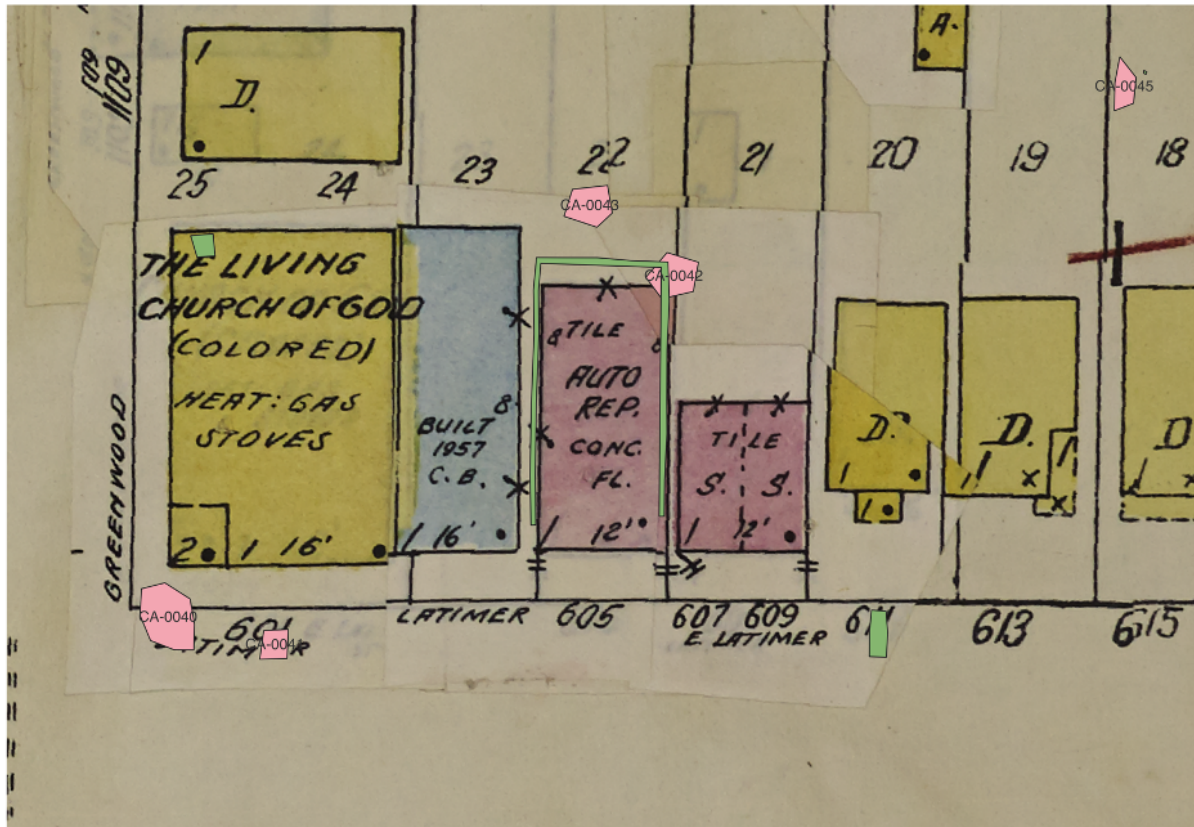


Figure 11. Close up of 1965 Sanborn map showing overlap of exposed foundation (in green) that corresponds to the location of an Auto repair shop in the Historic Greenwood District. Geophysical survey appears to also indicate foundations of the historic Living Church of God, located on the plot to the west.

Summary

MHTT's pedestrian survey and preliminary results from geophysical survey in the BS Roberts Park area outlined above indicate extensive presence of historic materials dating from before the time of urban renewal. In addition to several extant foundations and those inferred through geophysical survey, dense concentrations of historic artifacts in the southern portion of the survey area attest to an extensive archaeological landscape dating to at least the mid 20th century, when historic records attest to this area's having been a key component of the Greenwood community. We recommend further documentation of this landscape, including additional geophysical survey and test excavations to identify and characterize the remains of historic structures, so that they might be preserved and protected.

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