



MEMORANDUM

Date: March 17, 2026
To: Deadwood Historic Preservation Commission
From: Mike Runge, City Archivist
Re: 2026 Professional Services, Canine Burial Detection, St. Ambrose Catholic Cemetery

In the Winter 2025-2026 issue of American Archaeology Magazine, the article, “*Scenting the Past*” by Paula Neely discusses the use of canines to locate unmarked prehistoric and historic graves (see attachment #A). This noninvasive survey utilizes human remains detection dogs, also known as cadaver dogs, in unison with ground penetrating radar (GPR) to locate and mark unidentified burials. This proactive approach has saved time and funding by locating burials before being accidentally discovered during a construction project.

In November of 2025, the landowners at 58 Pleasant Street appeared before the Deadwood Historic Preservation Commission for permission to build a new residential structure in the adjacent, vacant lot. This property borders the historic, Saint Ambrose Catholic Cemetery, established in 1878. Based on research and firsthand newspaper accounts, two unmarked burials were placed outside the cemetery boundary. These burials belonged to a Lakota man named Two Sticks and an African American man named Isadore Cavanaugh, aka Charles Brown. Both men were publicly executed at the Lawrence County Jail on December 28, 1894 and July 14, 1897. Despite exhaustive research, the whereabouts of these burials have been lost.

The purpose of this memorandum is to open discussion for hiring a canine unit to search and locate the two unmarked burials outside the St. Ambrose Catholic Cemetery boundary. Based on a phone conversation with the Lawrence County Emergency Management Director, cadaver dogs have been used at least three times during search and rescue operations in the past ten years. This is due to dogs having a heightened sense of smell that can detect decomposition odors.

As construction continues to increase in and around the St. Ambrose Cemetery vicinity, a proactive approach in trying to locate the two burials is important. This is based on the historical significance of the burials as related to



Deadwood's history and the ethnic background of the interred individuals. A potential canine survey, whether positive or negative, would be a proactive approach and lessen a potentially negative reaction caused by disturbing the burials during future construction.

Furthermore, future development within the Presidential Neighborhood, more specifically the residential homes around Taylor Avenue and Jackson Street would also benefit from this type of survey. Over the past 20 years, three sets of human remains have been discovered during retaining wall replacements. These discoveries slowed and/or stopped construction work for up to one week.

RECCOMENDATION

Grant permission for city staff to solicit proposals for the hiring of a canine cadaver dog team to survey the perimeter of St. Ambrose Catholic Cemetery.