

TODAY'S WEATHER
PARTLY CLOUDY
23 °C
4 Day Forecast | Traffic



ultimate HD EVENT Get the best in HD at the best prices **SAVE NOW** **BEST BUY**

Tuesday, September 22, 2009 | Today's Toronto Star | Login

PHOTO VIDEO COLUMNISTS BLOGS TWITTER RSS MOBILE NEWSLETTERS ALERTS

thestar.com

thestar.com REDESIGN COMING SOON

thestar.com Web find a Business
Advanced Search | Full Text Article Archive

AUTOS CAREERS CLASSIFIEDS DEATH NOTICES REAL ESTATE

HOME NEWS OPINION BUSINESS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT LIVING TRAVEL WHEELS HEALTHZONE YOURHOME PARENTCENTRAL

Toronto & GTA | Ontario | Canada | World | Comics | Contests | Crosswords | Horoscopes | Lotteries | Sudoku | TV Listings | StarAuctions

OLD DON JAIL
3 bodies found under old Don Jail

Archeological survey finds remains of men, hanged for their crimes, buried in the jail yard

Sep 27, 2007 04:30 AM

Be the first to comment on this article...

CURTIS RUSH
STAFF REPORTER

Part of the Don Jail's dark past has come to light in way that has archaeologists and history buffs abuzz.

On Tuesday, the skeletal remains of three men were uncovered below an adjacent north parking lot during excavation, all apparent victims of hangings, which started at the old Don Jail in the 1860s.

The three skeletons, believed to pre-date the 1930s, were on display for the media yesterday while a documentary television crew filmed the event.

The remains, found during an archeological assessment, were individually buried in three of five grave shafts discovered on the north side of the jail, in the Gerrard St. E. and Broadview Ave. area.

Officials left the two other gravesites undisturbed and contacted the coroner and police, who said the findings are not of forensic interest to them.

The chief archeologist at the site, Ronald Williamson, believes there may be more skeletons – perhaps as many as 11 in all – buried in what was once a cemetery for prisoners.

In 1915, a crowd waited for him to die

As John (Jan) Ziolk began the long walk down the hallway between his cell and the execution room that April morning in 1915, his head was high, his step firm.

discovery of the skeletal remains was not a surprise because archival records indicated there might be a cemetery near the jail. "We're not anticipating there would be any impact on the building of our hospital," Walsh said.

The archeological assessment is being conducted in accordance with the heritage agreement Bridgepoint entered into when it bought the Don Jail property in 2002. The assessment has been underway for a week.

Although Williamson believes the three men were hanged, there is no obvious physical evidence on their remains to prove it. "We are not at this moment exposing these bodies to that level of detail. That will be ensuing work," he said.

But the top part of their skulls had been cut away, indicating cranial autopsies, standard practice for prisoners hanged in the 19th century. "So we have some confidence that we know we're dealing with people who were hanged at the jail and buried in this area," Williamson said.

Officials are poring over names of those hanged at the Don Jail. So far, they have the names of eight hanged prisoners who may have been interred in the yard, Williamson said.

In 1915, a crowd waited for him to die



VINCE TALOTTA/TORONTO STAR FILE
A carving of Father Time looms over the main door of the old Don Jail.

Email story
Print
Choose text size
Report error or complaint
License this article
BOOKMARK

RADCLIVE: THE AGONY OF THE EXECUTIONER
DON JAIL PHOTO GALLERY
LOCAL HISTORY PAGE

"In the next month or two, we'll get an answer to that," he said.

The old Don Jail is being preserved as a heritage site. Bridgepoint Health, the current owner, is in charge of redeveloping the site.

Bridgepoint Health president and CEO Marian Walsh said the discovery of the skeletal remains was not a surprise because archival records indicated there might be a cemetery near the jail. "We're not anticipating there would be any impact on the building of our hospital," Walsh said.

The archeological assessment is being conducted in accordance with the heritage agreement Bridgepoint entered into when it bought the Don Jail property in 2002. The assessment has been underway for a week.

Although Williamson believes the three men were hanged, there is no obvious physical evidence on their remains to prove it. "We are not at this moment exposing these bodies to that level of detail. That will be ensuing work," he said.

But the top part of their skulls had been cut away, indicating cranial autopsies, standard practice for prisoners hanged in the 19th century. "So we have some confidence that we know we're dealing with people who were hanged at the jail and buried in this area," Williamson said.

Officials are poring over names of those hanged at the Don Jail. So far, they have the names of eight hanged prisoners who may have been interred in the yard, Williamson said.

Advertisement
Save up to a \$1000 on Samsung LED HDT
ultimate HD EVENT BEST BUY

MORE IN THE NEWS
Can U.S. win war the Canadian way?
Province on verge of giving in to teachers
Girl, 14, charged in homeless man's slaying
Mystery of the missing girl
Mind the map? TTC didn't

RECENT SPECIAL SECTIONS
Local Wines
Back to School
CNE
HDTV
Digital Photo
Do It! This Summer Guide
Golf Magazine 2009
Sick Kids
Guide to Colleges & Universities
More Specials

Advertisement
Office DEPOT.
Taking Care of Business
SALE 59.99
SAVE \$40
RS TO GO™ Ruvia Mid-Back Chair
676-715 Leather
676-710 Mesh
SHOP NOW!

MOST POPULAR ON THESTAR.COM

- Most Read
- Rogers Wireless ends system access charge
 - Mystery of the missing girl
 - Girl, 14, charged in homeless man's slaying

The prisoners – some of the most notorious in Toronto’s history – would have been buried in the jail yard if family members failed to claim the bodies.

Positive identification of the remains will be a challenge, however, particularly given the lack of dental records.

Tests may determine the age of the bones and height of the person, but unless a family descendant provides DNA samples, the identification process may not be much more than an educated guess, the archeologist said.

The old Don Jail, which opened in 1864 and was closed in 1977, had more than two dozen hangings, the last in 1962. The death penalty was abolished in Canada in 1976.

The gallows were once outside the jail overlooking what is now a parking lot on the northeast. They were moved inside in 1905, officials said yesterday.

The remains were found buried at depths of more than a metre, with evidence of wooden coffins.

Realizing the historical importance of any findings, Bridgepoint contacted a television film company several weeks ago and a film crew was on site yesterday to record the discovery.

Williamson said yesterday he will work closely with the province to thoroughly investigate the graves.

Comments on this story are moderated | [Login to Comment](#) [Commenting Guidelines](#)

Sort By **Newest**

Ads by Google

>> Canada's Best Mortgages
 Rates from 2.50%, 100+ lenders
 Apply Now! (No SIN needed)
Canada.GetMyQuote.ca/Mortgages

Citizens'170 km/h car chase aids in arrest
 Mind the map? TTC didn't

SPECIAL



Cake Wrecks documents confectons gone awry
 Florida resident Jen Yates has been on an 18-month odyssey to share professional cake disasters with the world ...



Fall's arrival today heralds short days
 We squeezed as much as we could out of summer these last few weeks, but at 5:18 p.m. today, it will officially come ...



Lotto money, lotta hoopla, no big deals
 With more than \$20 million clutched firmly in his hand, Michael Honey knew just how he'd spend it.



Damien Cox: The Spin
 Wayne Gretzky at least deserves to be fired as Phoenix Coyotes coach. Instead he's in limbo during the legal battle over the team.



Musical treasure up for grabs
 Nathaniel Anderson-Frank is a gifted Canadian who could use a good violin.

More Specials

Ads by Google

Download Skype
 Make Cheap Calls Abroad & Enjoy Free Skype-to-Skype Calls.
www.Skype.com

Free Pardon Evaluation
 A free evaluation can change your Life. Do you have 60 seconds?
www.freepardons.com

> MoonFlower Toronto <
 If you want them to say "WOW" when the flowers arrive, see us! >
www.MoonFlower.ca/TorontoFlorist

- TheStar.com** [Corrections](#) | [Contact Webmaster](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Site Map](#) | [RSS](#) | [The Star on Twitter](#)
- Toronto Star** [About Us](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Subscriber Self Services](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [News Releases](#) | [Star Internships](#) | [Careers at the Star](#)
- Advertise With Us** [Media Kit](#) | [Online Advertising](#) | [Print Advertising](#) | [Special Sections](#)
- Initiatives** [Santa Claus Fund](#) | [Fresh Air Fund](#) | [Community Giving](#) | [Classroom Connection](#) | [Speakers Bureau](#)
- Torstar Sites** [toronto.com](#) | [InsuranceHotline.com](#) | [Pages of the Past](#) | [Stock Photos](#) | [New In Homes](#) | [ShopTV](#) | [More...](#)



© Copyright Toronto Star 1996-2009 [Terms & Conditions](#) | [Privacy Code](#)

