Uncovered graves dated to early 1800s

Coffin nails provide clues to archaeologist at unmarked site

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Tests have determined that the 32 graves uncovered by a construction project were those of slaves or poor laborers who perished in the early 1800s.

Charles Orser, an LSU archaeologist, said the graves appear to be of later date than first expected. Coffin nails were the first clue.

Orser said some of the nails were a machine-made type developed in the 1820s.

The unexpected discovery of the unmarked burial ground temporarily stopped the construction project until a city official ruled that the work was not a desecration.

Other than the coffins, the only objects found with the bones were a rosary and a locket. Ordinarily, other jewelry, buttons or buckles would be found.

Orser said the lack of such objects suggests that the people were very poor.

The shape of the skulls shows that most, if not all, of the dead were black and, judging by the bones, many had performed heavy labor.

This report was issued by the Office of Cultural Development at the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism.

LSU and the Department of the Interior funded the research, which will include detailed analysis of the skeletal material to derive information about age, sex, race, health and nutrition.