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# A Town Reburies Those the Flood Wouldn't Allow to Rest in Peace

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The anonymous remains of nearly 500 people were buried in a huge mass grave today, months after the great Midwest flood washed the dead from what was supposed to be their final resting place.

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"You're not supposed to be emotional, you know," said Dean Snow, the Ray County coroner, blinking back tears as he sat beside the mass grave and looked out over the 476 burial vaults.

The remains were unearthed in July when the Missouri River surged three and a half miles out of its banks and through Hardin Cemetery. The water swept tombstones, vaults, coffins and bones into fields and hung them on fences and trees. Some remains were deposited up to 18 miles away.

"You would think that after three and a half months it would just be another matter-of-fact sort of thing, but my goodness gracious, land sake's alive, it's not," Mr. Snow said, as he lowered his face in his hands. "But now they are back all together in one place under God's care." Coffins Washed Away

More than 700 vaults and coffins were washed away, and at one point the nine-acre cemetery was under about 30 feet of water. Almost 600 sets of remains were recovered, but only 118 have been identified.

The river carved out the cemetery's oldest section, where inadequate records and memories have yielded few clues as to who occupied the graves. The section, for example, included a segregated area where blacks were buried decades ago, many in unmarked graves.

Helen Gramlich, 70, drove with relatives from her home near Pilot Grove to watch the reburial. The flood swept away the grave of her father, Tim Jenkins, who was buried in 1937 without a vault, and she doubts that his remains were recovered.

"When I first heard about the cemetery getting washed away, I think I just sat down and shook and cried a little bit," she said. "But I'll keep coming up here to visit. It's showing some kind of respect. Even if my father isn't there, I'm respecting somebody else."

Vernie Fountain, coordinator of the disaster response team of the Missouri Funeral Directors Association, said the identified bodies were placed in newly marked graves in another section of the cemetery.

Mr. Fountain and Mr. Snow said they would continue trying to identify some of the other remains. The remains in the 24,000-square-foot mass grave have been carefully documented, so that if an identification is made, the vault can be located and the remains buried in a marked plot.

"This has been terrible from the standpoint of the families," Mr. Fountain said. "You bury someone and you expect them to be buried for eternity."

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