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African Burial Ground in Portsmouth, New Hampshire

By Emily Aronson

January 21, 2006

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Evidence suggests slavery at African burial ground.

Physical evidence from the site of an African burial ground dating back to the 1700s supports the belief that the people buried there were slaves, an archaeological report has revealed.

A more than 100-page study by Independent Archaeological Consulting said that one of the eight bodies unearthed from the former cemetery on Chestnut Street showed signs of repetitive forearm rotation and possible inflammation in the right leg.

Archaeologists said this is "presumably from repeated shoveling, heavy lifting or other strenuous work."

"The discovery of a burial ground permits us to partially reconstruct the demographics of enslaved Africans of the 1700s," the report said.

Senior researcher Ellen Marlatt said any information archaeologists can gather about the remains is essential because the site is the only known African-American cemetery of its age in New England.