

# The Arch Street Project: Handling Human Remains

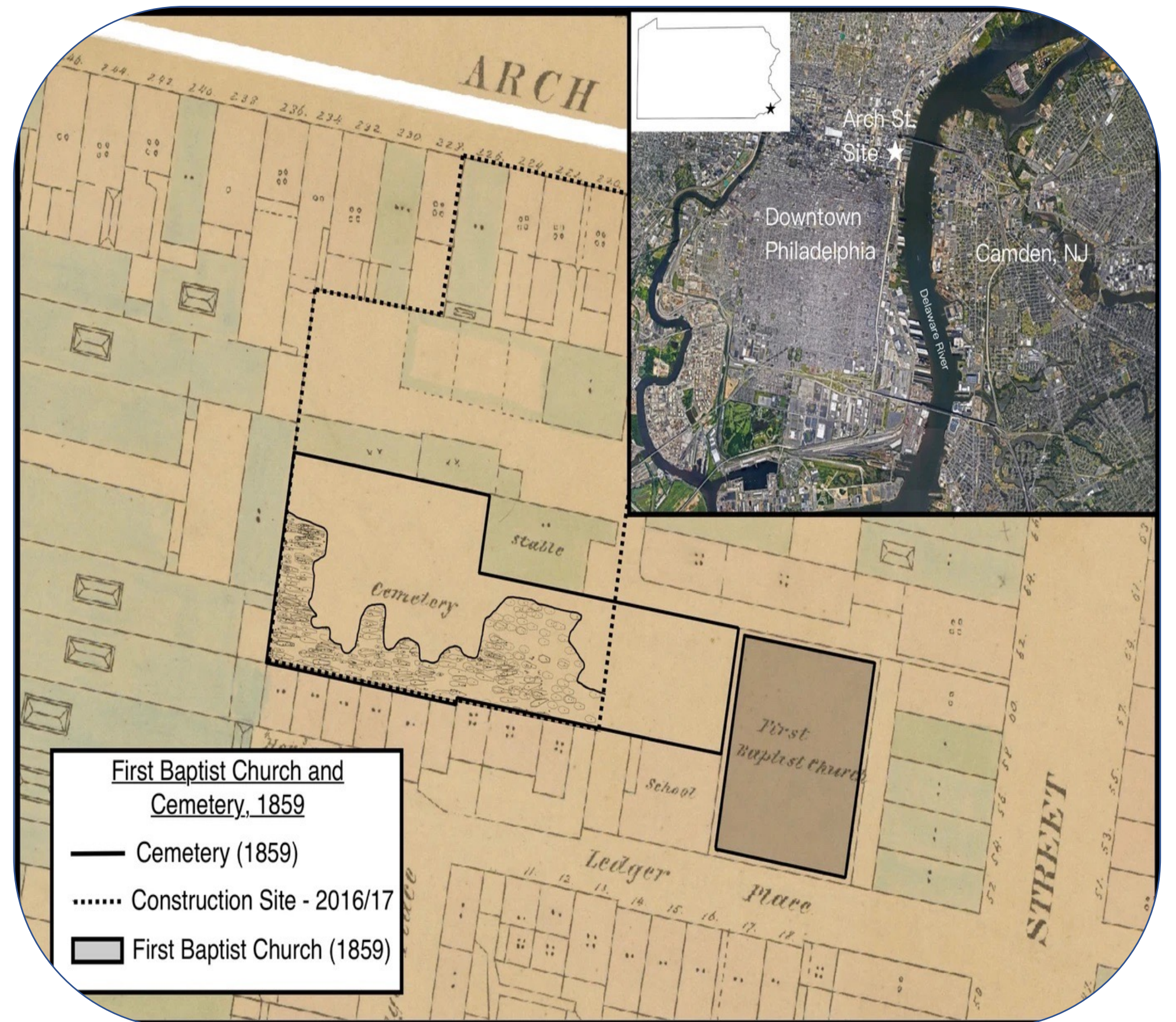


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## THE FIELD SITE:

In November 2016, at 218 Arch Street in Philadelphia, contractors of PMC Properties were hard at work starting the construction of a subterranean parking lot for a new condo unit going up. As the construction began, dirt was being up turned along with human remains. The medical examiners office was contacted anonymously, and it was then determined that the remains were archaeological in nature – a burial ground, active from 1702-1859, once connected with the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia. As more and more bones turned up, salvage excavations were conducted, first by community archaeologist and anthropologist, and later by AECOM, a contract archaeology company. There was an appeal to the Orphan's Court of Philadelphia for the remains to be studied. The appeal was approved on the condition that the remains be reburied in September 2023. The commingled remains were brought to the forensic and osteology laboratory at Rutgers University – Camden under the care of Kimberlee Moran, a professor and forensic archaeologist.



(Leader et al. 2021)

## ACCESSIONING:

The definition of accession is to "record the addition of (a new item) to a library, museum or other collection". In this case, the collection is the Arch Street skeletal samples.

The skeletal material is separated into boxes which all have accession numbers. Each bone within the box also has a number assigned to it. Each bone is entered into an online database along with the following information:

- Estimated sex (possible male, probable male, indeterminate, possible female, probable female)
- Estimated ancestry (Indeterminate, possible European ancestry, probable European ancestry, possible African ancestry, probable African ancestry)
- The particular skeletal element (i.e.. Tibia or calcaneus)
- State of preservation (Complete, near complete, partial, fragment)
- Pathology (i.e.. Any deformation on the bone due to disease)
- Taphonomy (i.e.. damage to the bone due to construction work or staining)
- A clear photo



## GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Because of the nature of bioarchaeological work, we were never able to get consent from these individuals to have their skeletal remains studied after their passing. How then, can we honor the individuals of the Arch Street burial ground all the way from the act of accessioning to publishing research?
- Why is it important to study these remains? What information can be gleaned from this population that would advance the larger bioarchaeological literature?
- What are my own ethical parameters and how does the Arch Street Project fit in with them?