On the cover: From Left to right, Annie Johnson, Gilbert Johnson and Gillian Barton Sinclair are descendants of Ellen Barton, a former slave who once lived in the area of the Avondale Burial Place and who likely had family or friends buried at this cemetery. The three are ancestors of Herman “Skip” Mason Jr., whose family is pictured inside.

These artifacts were all recovered with individual burials. Each object, which was deliberately placed at the ground with the deceased person over 100 years ago, was placed back with the individual during reburial of the cemetery. Pictured are a porcelain doll found in the arms of a child buried at the cemetery; a black brooch with a rose which may have represented a piece of mourning jewelry and was found near a woman’s chest; and a Presidential campaign token for William Henry Harrison which was found on a string around the neck of an adult buried at Avondale Burial Place.

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Regional Airport, when the cemetery was discovered in 2008. After an extensive environmental assessment, including a multi-level burial and lake, the site could not be avoided in order to complete the road construction. The cemetery was located in the corner of four lots, a location that would have been too difficult to plow and could not be cultivated. New South Associates, Inc., a cultural resource management firm specializing in mortuary archaeology, was hired to complete the relocation. A total of 500 burial objects, believed to be former slaves and tenant farmers who lived in the surrounding area, were identified, recorded, and relocated as part of this project.

The arrangement of the graves suggests several African American families in the area used the cemetery during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The burials were found in clusters that likely represented different family groupings. Additionally, census research identified the following African American names in the area around the cemetery as: Bagly, Barton, Bowen, Burgay, Bivins, Brown, Castillo, Collins, Cumming, Dean, Dickson, Dixon, Durden, Glover, Johnson, Jones, McLennon, Mitchell, Moore, Reese, Ryder, Thomas, Willard and Williams. As African American families left the area for opportunities elsewhere during a period referred to as the Great Migration, the cemetery was left behind.

This project was led by archaeologist Sara Gale and historian Sharman Southall from the Office of Environmental Services, with support from staff across the Department. Georgia DOT District 3 maintenance staff assisted in the initial stripping used to identify the cemetery; and the right-of-way staff was essential in negotiating the contract for the reburial site. Surveyors from the Office of Design Policy and Support surveyed both the original cemetery and the reburial site; and many others played important roles in the success of this project.

Our work. Our mission.

Our role in recovery, relocation and reconnection.

The Barton-Thomas families visit the Avondale Burial Place in Bibb County during the “Two Sisters Family Reunion.” Historian Herman “Skip” Mason, Jr. (kneeling far right) is a descendant of Ellen Barton, a former slave who lived in the area and who likely had family or friends buried at the cemetery.