Archaeological Insights into the Anonymous Victims of the 1908 Springfield Race Riot: An Update of the Carpenter Street Investigations

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Project Location:
On the morning of August 14, 1908, Mabel Hallam accused George Richardson of having raped her the night before.

Mabel Hallam (21; wife of streetcar motorman William Hallam)  
George Richardson (36; construction laborer)
Although Mrs. Hallam was later to recant her story, absolving Mr. Richardson of any wrong-doing, her actions unleashed a fury of violent activity that was to wreck havoc with the City of Springfield.
On August 14th, 1908, the City of Springfield erupted in racially motivated mob violence that lasted for several days, and resulted in the lynching of two African-American citizens, as well as the destruction of numerous houses and businesses within the city. Much of the violence was centered on the Levee commercial district and residential Badlands. The violence was subdued through the efforts of the Illinois National Guard.
Photographs of East Madison Street, and National Guard in Springfield (August 1908).
Over 40 houses and business were destroyed in the Badlands during the August 14\textsuperscript{th}-15\textsuperscript{th}, 1908 weekend in Springfield. This map depicts the location of the houses and businesses destroyed by fire during the riots (as depicted on the 1896 Sanborn fire insurance map). The current project area is circled in red. The blue arrows indicate the location of perspective view historic photographs. No photographs have been located depicting the houses in the existing project area.
The Springfield Race Riot of August 1908 was one of the catalysts that resulted in the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). On February 12th, 1909 (in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of Lincoln’s birth), the organization was formed. As quoted in the NAACP’s webpage, “The NAACP was formed partly in response to the continuing horrific practice of lynching and the 1908 race riot in Springfield, the capital of Illinois and resting place of President Abraham Lincoln.”
Phase II archaeological testing of the project area was undertaken in late 2014. This work documented the well-preserved remains of seven nineteenth century houses—five of which had been burned in the riots of August 1908. Only the front sections of the houses were located within the proposed project area, with the rear yard activity areas associated with these houses located to the west beneath the existing parking lot.
Views of Houses A (left) and B (right) during Phase II testing. House A appears to have been occupied by, among others, the Smith family at the time of the 1908 riot. At the time of the Phase II research, the occupant of House B at the time of the riots was unknown.
Two views of House E (and associated brick walkway) during Phase II testing. This house was occupied by the Isaac Smith family for much of the nineteenth century. At the time of the 1908 riot, the house was reportedly occupied by “H. Stoutmeyer.”
Location of burned (A-E) and unburned (F and G) houses in the Tenth Street Corridor, overlain on existing aerial view. Buildings highlighted in orange were destroyed by fire in the August 1908 Springfield riot. The railroad right-of-way depicted here was the original proposed right-of-way as envisioned in 2014.
After four years of coordination with various state and federal agencies, and the community (“Consulting Parties”), the decision was made to 1) shift the railroad right-of-way 22’ to the east to preserve in place those areas of Houses A through E outlined in yellow, and 2) completely excavate those areas within the new right-of-way that could not be preserved in place (those areas outlined in red).
Beginning in mid-April 2019, we began the mitigation of the Race Riot Site, with work being initiated at House E. Excavations continued through the summer and early fall of 2019.
Excavations proceeding on House E.
First half of House E checkerboard nearing completion
House E after completion of the first half of the checkerboard (left), and after completion of the fieldwork (right)
Site conditions in the middle of May. House E is on the right at 50% excavation. House D is on the left, with excavations only beginning.

Panoramic view courtesy of Chelsea Coates.
House D after completion of the first half of the checkerboard (left), and nearing completion of the second half of the checkerboard (right).
House C after completion of first half of the checkerboard (left), and nearing completion of the second half of checkerboard.
House B after completion of first half of the checkerboard (left), and nearing completion of the second half of the checkerboard.
Now that the fieldwork has been completed, our focus is with the artifacts—which have all been washed and are in the process of being inventoried. Our Data Recovery Plan specifies that we need to have the artifacts processed, and report completed, in 18 months.
A cache of materials recovered from within the fire deposits of House E (Tests 10, 12, and 13) included the contents of a trunk, and included a wide range of small finds (jewelry, dominoes, rubber balls, hair combs, slate writing stylus, and even a toothpick), clothing, multiple books, and even an insurance policy.
Among the items in the trunk was this finely-made, bone china demitasse cup and saucer, manufactured by the Rosenthal Company of Bavaria (Germany) sometime between 1896 and 1907.
In the trunk was a wide variety of clothing fragments and buttons—representing numerous garments, including a suspected corset, and shoes.
We have only recently begun the sorting and identification of the fabric remnants. The objective is to sort the fragments by individual garment, and are confident that the analysis of these garments, along with the other items in the trunk, will tell us much about the occupants of the House E.
Among the artifacts in the trunk was the burned remains of a life insurance policy issued by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. This policy was relatively new in August 1908 (note printed 1907 date on fragment).
This is a fragment of a book found in the trunk, entitled *The Mechanics’ and Laborers’ Ready Reckoner* (which was originally published in 1847).
This is one small fragment of a nearly complete book from the trunk. Based on the limited text transcribed to date, and references to Christ, Noah, and various biblical references (including book, chapter, and verse), this probably was a Christian devotional text.

This scrap references Christ, and the book of Acts.

...from the beginning...
...should give Him loving...
...for by His very loving...
...obedience...
...In His image...
...condemned...
...abhorrent...
...he never...

Transcribed fragment of text
Among the items from the trunk was this stack of three similarly sized books with identical covers—potentially suggesting a three-volume set. Unfortunately the subject matter of these three books is unknown.
Although the subject matter of the three books is unknown, one of the books had a signature across its top apparently of its owner—a Jeff Sammack [?]. Unfortunately, no information has been found regarding Mr. Sammack or the Sammack family in Springfield.
One of the more intriguing class of artifacts from the trunk was its jewelry. The jewelry included multiple brooches, a collar stud, several sets of cufflinks, and a 14 carat gold wedding ring.
Toys recovered from the trunk included small pressed wood dominoes, and three small rubber balls.

Enlarged to illustrate pressed design on backside of dominoes.
This advertising pocket knife was found in close proximity to the trunk. It was a promotional item for the *Broderick and Bascom Rope Company*, a St. Louis firm that was established in 1876. The firm manufactured “wire rope.”
A second concentration of artifacts was found in Test 11, and included a small marble slab (believed to represent the remains of a marble-topped dresser) and casters. These two images depict the burned floor boards, floor joists, and remnants of the marble-topped dresser (with remnant burned clothing).
Unlike the trunk, the only items present in the dresser were the remains of several fabric garments. As with the fabrics from the trunk, these fragments are being sorted by individual garment—such as this two blouses. The garments appear to represent predominately women’s clothing.
Two coal buckets (or “hods”), and a cluster of unfired shotgun shells were also recovered from the floor of House E.
The excavation of House E has resulted in the partial reconstruction of the floor plan of the front portion of this house, as it appeared on the day of the riots in August 1908.
This political lapel pin was recovered from the burned floor of House D.

Charles Deenen was elected to the Governor’s Office in 1905. He had sought the Black vote.
During the Phase II investigations, a nearly complete ceramic table setting was recovered from House B. The artifacts suggest that the house may have been ransacked prior to the fire.
Medals recovered from the fire deposits of House B.

Illinois Militia and/or National Guard “Long and Honorable Service Medal” (center); “Spanish-American War, Cuba Campaign Medal” (Center and Right); Issued to a member of the 8th Regiment, which was composed solely of African American soldiers and officers—and was the first in U.S. History to be officered by black soldiers!
Black soldiers served gallantly in the Cuba campaign. Although the 8th Illinois did not arrive in time to see combat, they served with honor as the Army of Occupation at Santiago. Robert H. Wright—an occupant of House B at the time of the riots—was a member of that regiment in Cuba.
Educational Outreach has been a large part of the Phase III mitigation strategy. In June, we held an open house for public viewing of the excavations.
Dr. Lynn Fisher’s (Department of Sociology/Anthropology; UIS) *Introduction to Archaeology* class (Left).

Springfield and Central Illinois African American History Museum’s Summer Camp visit to the site (right).
U.S. Representative Rodney Davis visiting the site.
U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth visiting the site.
The project has bipartisan support for creation of the *Springfield Race Riot National Historic Monument*, which would memorialize the events that transpired that fateful weekend ("Lest We Forget"), and to commemorate the formation of the NAACP.

**H. R. 139**

116th CONGRESS
1st Session

To establish the Springfield Race Riot National Historic Monument in the State of Illinois, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

January 3, 2019

Mr. ROYDEY DAW of Illinois introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources

A BILL

To establish the Springfield Race Riot National Historic Monument in the State of Illinois, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SEC. 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Springfield Race Riot National Historic Monument Act".

SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) HISTORIC MONUMENT.—The term "Historic Monument" means the Springfield Race Riot

[Click here to view a video of one memorial proposal.]
Teresa Haley (President, Illinois NAACP), U.S. Representative Davis, and Dr. Carla Hayden (Librarian of Congress)—discussing the significance of archaeological remains recovered from the Phase II investigations.
Contemporary press described residential area as the Badlands... infested by negroes... living in huts and shanties... disreputable...

“It was not the fact of the whites' hatred toward the negroes, but of the negroes' own misconduct, general inferiority or unfitness for free institutions that were at fault” (Illinois State Journal, as cited in Merritt 2008:54).
THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL “REALITY”

The archaeological research in Houses A-E illustrates a very different picture—a picture detailing individuals/families of color trying to survive in a community which was rife with racial bigotry and hatred, and sometimes making decisions that are at odds with today’s standards. In the archaeology we see evidence of the victims…

Political Activity and/or Engagement

Service to Community

Service to Country (Military Service)

Religious Devotion and/or Conviction

Integration into Middle Class Respectability
“Springfield had no shame. She stood for the action of the mob….” (Walling, September 1908).

After the riots, people—both black and white—seldom spoke of the events that transpired on that horrific weekend. It was an event that was quickly “swept under the rug” and not talked about for a long time. By the 1970s many Springfield residents were not even aware of the event, let alone its significance.

The archaeology of the Race Riot Site has given voice to the practically anonymous individuals that experienced this horrific event, and hopefully will yield a more holistic interpretation of who the people were who had the misfortune of being caught in the middle of this historical event.

History is complex, has multiple viewpoints, and must be interpreted in its proper context. Hopefully, this research will contribute to further discussion as to who we are as a society, to understand our past so that we can improve our future—LEST WE FORGET.
Questions Or Comments?

Email Contact: fmansberger@comcast.net

Facebook Coverage of Project: Fever River Research

Reports and PowerPoint Presentations: IllinoisArchaeology.com
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