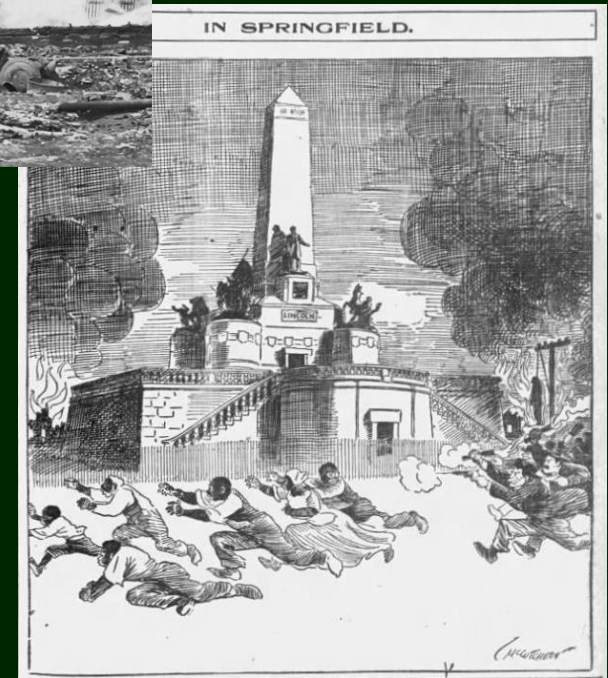


“Why Bother With The Archaeology of Burned Houses From 1908?”: The Significance of the Archaeology of Mob Violence on Jim-Crow Era Black Households in the Post-George Floyd Era.

by
Floyd Mansberger,
Christopher Stratton
and
Chelsea Coates

Conference on Illinois History
Springfield, Illinois
October 8, 2021



This is the third of three papers discussing the results of archaeological investigations at the Badlands 1 Site—the location of five houses destroyed by fire by a white mob during the Springfield Race Riot of August 14-15, 1908. The first paper, presented by Christopher Stratton discussed the historical context and actual excavations. The second paper, presented by Chelsea Coates, discussed the great variety of artifacts recovered from these investigations. This paper will focus on what the archaeological investigations have told us about the occupants of these houses during that eventful weekend.



Left: Chris Stratton and House E profile.



Right: Chelsea Coates inventorying artifacts (fabrics) from House E.

The excavations resulted in detailed information regarding the size, configuration, materials used, and construction techniques of these houses—houses that had been constructed in the 1840s and early 1850s.



Views of Houses A (left) and B (right) during Phase II testing.

The investigations yielded insights into the character of the 1840s housing constructed in the neighborhood. Two of the more common house forms in the project area included: 1) single-pile, 1½-story frame dwellings with shed-roof rear service wings (left), and 2) larger double-pile, 1½-story frame dwellings with rear service wing integrated under single gable roof (right). These larger double-pile houses often represented “double houses,” or duplexes.



Left: Detail of early twentieth century postcard illustrating Governor Deneen being escorted to Camp Lincoln from downtown rail depot.



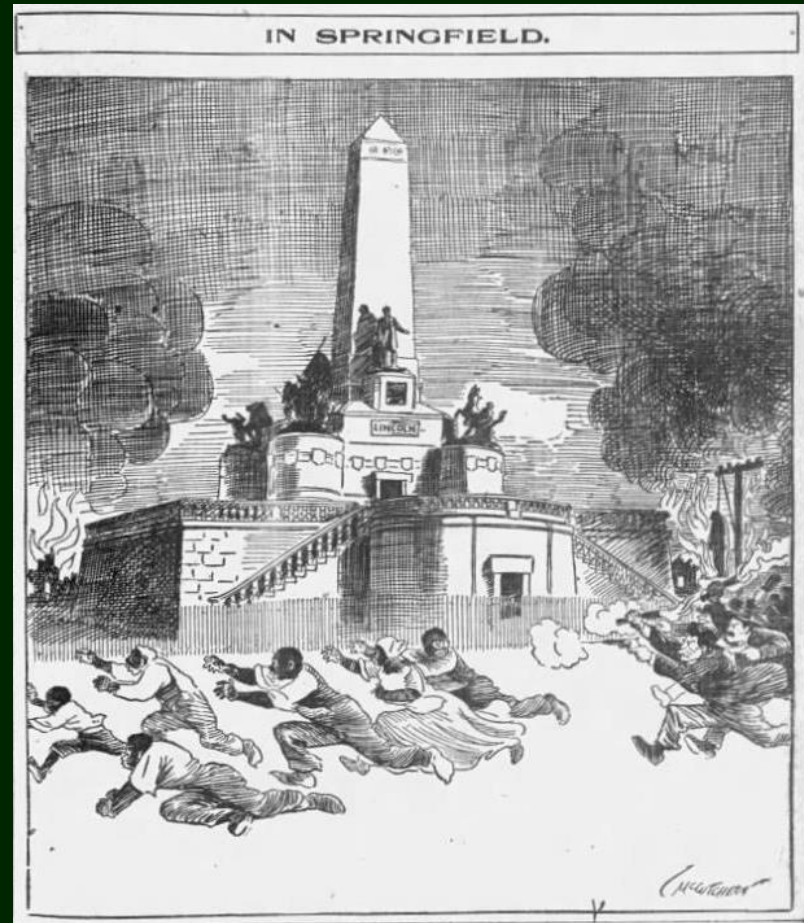
Right: Detail of circa 1872 picture of the new State Capitol under construction with houses in foreground. Often house form was a double house.

As the previous paper emphasized, a wide range of artifacts dating from the 1830s through August 1908 were recovered, but the most significant assemblages recovered from these investigations are those associated with the Late Pre-Fire and Fire assemblages. These assemblages give us new insights into the lifeways of the Black occupants living in the neighborhood just prior to, and during, the riots.

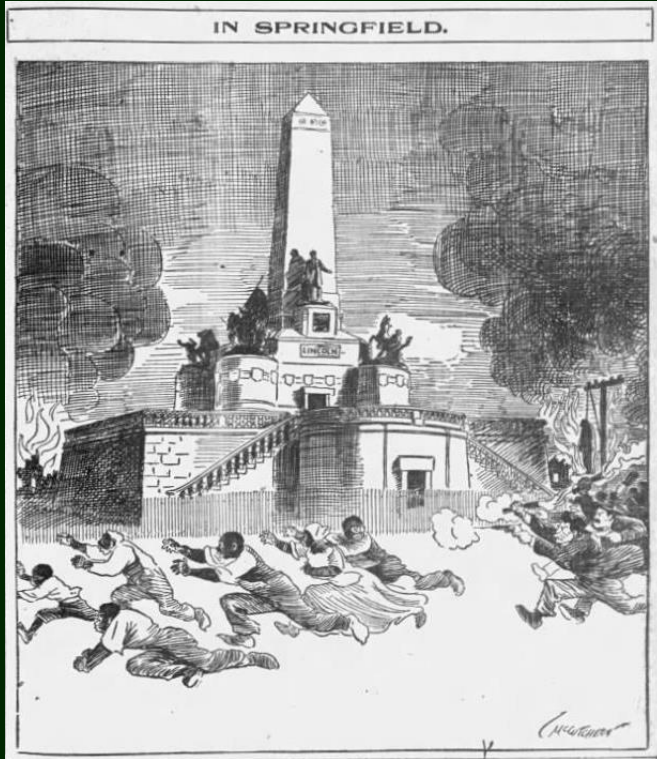
This table setting was recovered from House B, and it depicts a typical ceramic table setting for a working class family of the period—whether White or Black.



The most significant data from these investigations is that derived from the Late Pre-Fire and Fire deposits--data that gives voice to the Black tenants who had occupied the houses during, and just prior to, the violence inflicted on the neighborhood that horrific weekend in August 1908. The analysis of this material has resulted in a perspective that contrasts dramatically with the contemporary 1908 depiction of the neighborhood and its inhabitants.



THE PERCEIVED “REALITY” OF THE PRESS



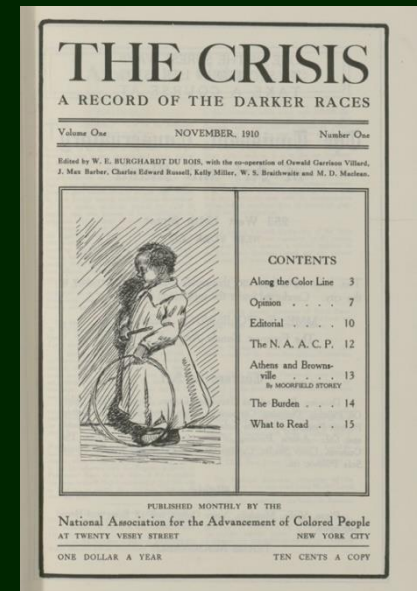
The contemporary press painted a dire picture of the City's Black inhabitants and described the residential area as the *Badlands... infested by negroes... living in huts and shanties... disreputable...*

In summarizing the impetus for the riots less than one month after their occurrence, William English Walling (1908) wrote that the feeling of the community was that “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.*”

William English Walling was a labor and race activist (as well as co-founder of the NAACP in early 1909) who visited Springfield during the course of the riots and authored “The Race War in the North” which was published in the magazine *The Independent* the following month (September 1908). Walling stated that “Springfield had no shame...” and wrote of the community’s racial tension leading up to the riots—noting, in essence, that many of Springfield’s citizens believed it was the Blacks themselves that brought this tragedy upon themselves.



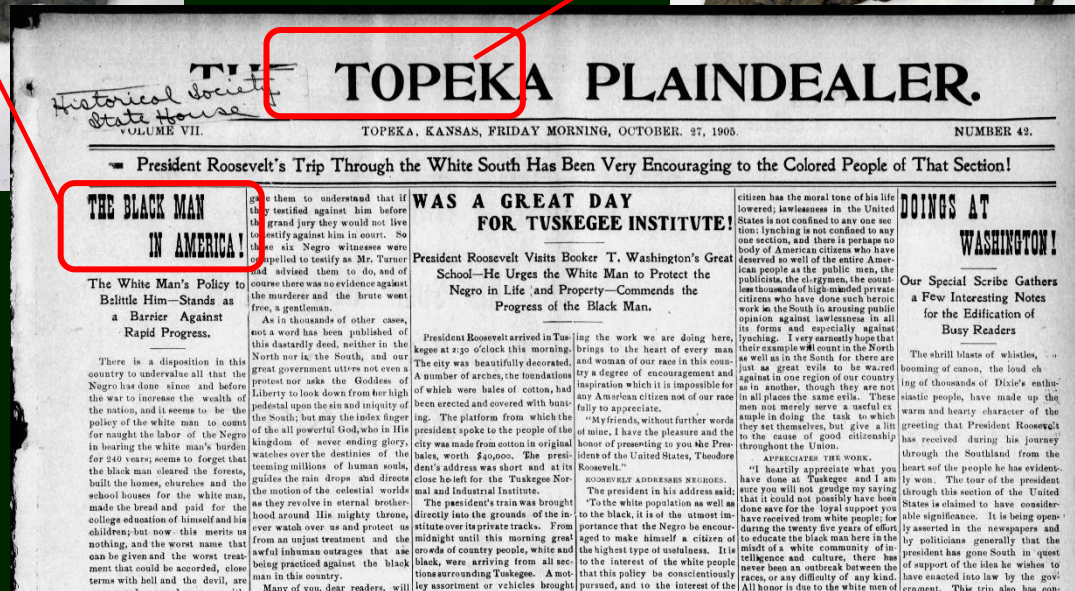
For the underlying motive of the mob and of that large portion of Springfield’s population that has long said that ‘something was bound to happen,’ and now approves of the riot and proposes to complete its purpose by using other means to drive as many as possible of the remaining two-thirds of the negroes out of town, was confessedly to teach the negroes their place and to warn them that too many could not obtain shelter under the favorable traditions of Lincoln’s home town. I talked to many of them the day after the massacre and found no difference of opinion on the question. ‘Why, the niggers came to think they were as good as we are!’ was the final justification offered, not once, but a dozen times....



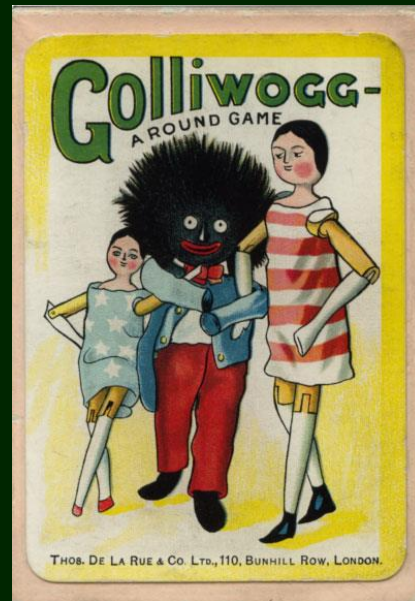
The archaeological excavations, and the variety of artifacts recovered from the houses, have provided a “voice” for the more-or-less anonymous victims of the mob action and has resulted in a *significantly different perspective* as to who these individuals were. Although silenced for a long time, these “voices” *provide a sharp contrast between the racially-driven “perceived reality” of the past, and the “actuality” of the time period.*



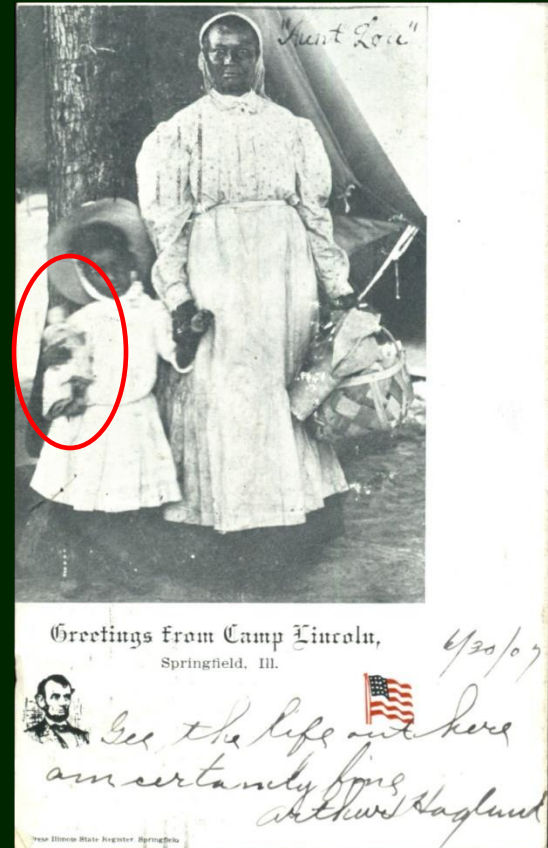
Few, if any, artifacts by themselves indicate race. Although the implication was that the occupants of the houses burned were Black, the race of the House E occupant was unclear. Historic records suggested the occupant of this house may have been a single White man (named Stoutmeyer). The recovery of the October 17, 1905 issue of *The Topeka Plaindealer*—a newspaper dedicated to a Black readership helped confirm the occupant of this House (Bessie Black) was indeed Black, literate, and actively engaged in issues relating to their Black identity.



The recovery of a black-skinned porcelain doll from House A was a relatively unusual, realistic depiction of a Black individual that contrasts with both the more common white-skinned dolls in use among poorer working-class Black families, and the racially-demeaning caricature dolls (such as Golliwogg dolls) typical of the Jim Crow era. This Black doll may represent a relatively rare French- or German-made doll.



Aunt Lou Maxwell and her daughter Tessa, circa 1907. Aunt Lou was a washerwoman working at Camp Lincoln. Note white-skinned doll.



Besides the newspaper, several other artifacts from House E indicate the presence of literate occupants of the house. 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.



This is a fragment of another book found in the trunk, entitled *The Mechanics' and Laborers' Ready Reckoner* (which was originally published in 1847).



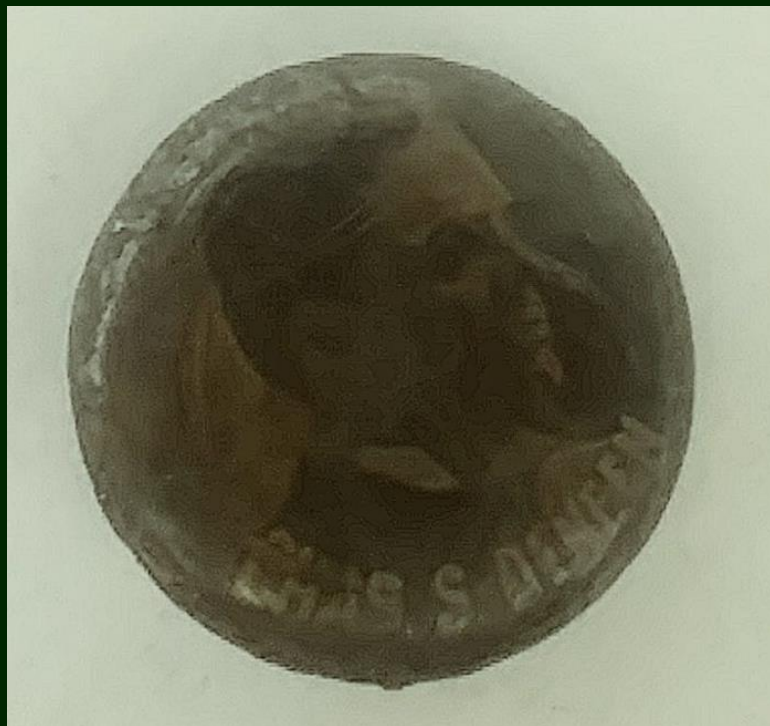
THE
MECHANICS'
AND
LABORERS'
READY RECKONER.

CONTAINING
WAGES BY THE DAY, BOARD BY THE WEEK
WAGES BY THE HOUR, FORMS OF
WAGES BY MONTH, FORMS OF
WAGES BY THE YEAR, FORM OF
CONTRACT FOR BUILDING

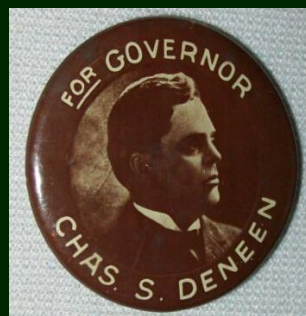
NEW YORK.
PUBLISHED BY C. P. HURD
104 Nassau, corner of Ann.

Table 23, —\$1,62½.			Table 24, —\$1,68¼.		
Showing the rate of wages from 1-4 to 6 days, at \$1,62½ per day, or \$9.75 per week.			Showing the rate of wages from 1-4 to 6 days, at \$1,68¼ per day, or \$10.112 per week.		
Days.	Dols.	Cts.	Days.	Dols.	Cts.
½	40½	42½			
¾	81½	84½			
1	1 21½	1 26½			
1½	1 62½	1 68½			
2	2 03	2 11			
2½	2 43¾	2 53½			
3	2 84½	2 95½			
3½	3 25	3 37½			
4	3 65½	3 79½			
4½	4 06½	4 22			
5	4 46¾	4 64			
5½	4 87½	5 06½			
6	5 28	5 48½			
6½	5 68¾	5 90½			
7	6 09½	6 32½			
7½	6 50	6 75			
8	6 90½	7 17½			
8½	7 31½	7 59½			
9	7 71¾	8 01½			
9½	8 12½	8 43½			
10	8 53	8 86			
10½	8 93¾	9 28½			
11	9 34½	9 70½			
11½	9 75	10 12½			

This political lapel pin was recovered from the burned floor of House D, and it is tangible evidence of Black political engagement by the house occupants—activity well documented in local newspapers decades prior to the riots.



Charles S. Deneen was elected to the Governor's Office in 1905. He had sought the Black vote, and was the Governor at the time of the Springfield riots.



Recovered from House A was this Salvation Army collar pin, embossed with the organizational logo “BLOOD & FIRE.” The presence of this pin in the Late Pre-Fire deposits of House A raises the question as to whether someone in the house was a Salvation Army volunteer, or a family was visited by a member of the organization (potentially bearing gifts of charitable goods such as food and clothing).



Top Left: 1880s image of collar pin in use.

Bottom Right: Image of a Salvation Army fund drive, 1903.

Little doubt exists as to the occupant of House B's military enlistment and service to his country during and after the Spanish-American War. At least three service medals and collar pins were found in the Fire Deposits of House B. These service medals have been attributed to Robert Wright, a young Black man who enlisted in Company H, Eighth Illinois Regiment—the first all Black regiment in the U.S. fully under the command of Black officers. Wright served in Cuba, and continued to serve in the Illinois National Guard up through the 1908 riots.



Although the Eighth Illinois did not arrive in Cuba in time to see combat, they served with honor as part of the Army of Occupation at Santiago. These are examples of the three medals recovered from House B—one of which appears to have been issued specifically to Springfield's Company H.



Company H, Eighth
Regiment in Cuba, 1899



Several artifacts attest to the religious conviction of the house occupants.

Middle: This small bone cross was recovered from the Late Pre-Fire and Fire deposits of House D. This fret-sawn and drilled bone cross (middle) may be a rosary cross similar to the one illustrated here (left). These rosary crosses often held a small Stanhope in the center opening. The Stanhope was a small magnifying lens which contained an image. Although images depicted in a Stanhope—particularly those associated with rosary crosses—often were of a religious nature, they also included landscapes, famous individuals, and even erotica.

Right: cast brass cross (Late Pre-Fire component, House D).



Written material also attests to the potential religious conviction of the house occupants. This is one of many small fragment of a nearly complete book from the trunk of House E. Based on the limited text transcribed to date, several references to Christ, Noah, and various biblical texts (including book, chapter, and verse) suggests that the book 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

Bread plate inscribed with Lord's Prayer recovered from the cellar floor of House B, probably associated with the 1870s occupation by the Bell Watkins family.



Several artifacts recovered also raises questions as to the continuation of older African spiritual traditions. These items include a large calcite crystal from the Late Pre-Fire deposits of House E (left), as well as a smaller quartz crystal, a broken soapstone amulet with a “crossed line” motif, and a cowrie shell recovered from the Late Pre-Fire deposits of House D (center and right). These non-Christian traditions believe that artifacts such as these have spiritual powers, and their presence may hint at the juxtaposition of Christian faith with Old World African beliefs in ritual and magic by the house occupants.



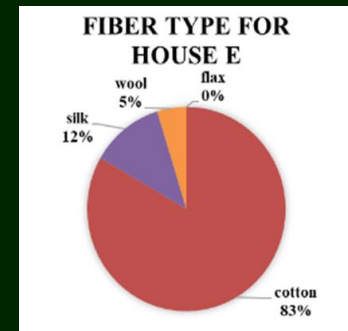
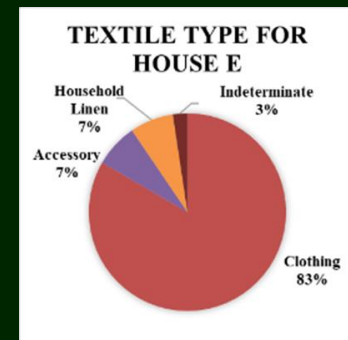
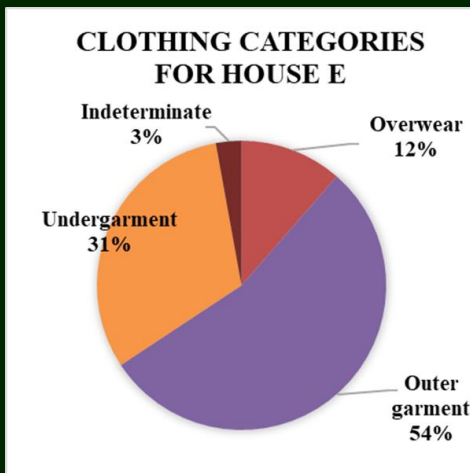
One of the more unusual assemblages from the investigations was the clothing recovered from House E. These textiles were represented by a range of Undergarments, Overwear garments, and Outerwear garments, as well as clothing accessories and household linens recovered from both a dresser and trunk in the house. Although predominately women's wear was located in the dresser, some men's wear and household linens were present in the trunk.

Gender	Dresser	Trunk
Female	16	9
Male	0	5
Unknown	1	6

Undergarment	Dresser	Trunk
corset	0	1
pantaloon	1	0
petticoat	3	1
stockings	1	0
union suit/vest	1	1
vest & drawers	0	1
wrapper	1	0

Outer Garment	Dresser	Trunk
blouse	1	0
bodice	1	1
dress	1	0
jacket	2	1
sack coat	0	1
shirt	0	1
shirtwaist	2	0
skirt	1	1
suit vest	0	2
indeterminate	2	2

Overwear	Dresser	Trunk
cape	0	1
duster	0	1
fur collar	0	1
indeterminate	0	1



These textiles represent the wardrobe of a younger Black woman with middling-class formal wear who had a wide range of clothing, as well as household fabrics (both machine and hand made).



Aside from the clothing, a wide range of jewelry and personal adornment items were also recovered with the textiles. These included multiple brooches (many of the distinctive Limoges design), collar studs, cufflinks, and a 14-carat gold wedding ring (which had been tucked away in the trunk)—items that suggest a desire for middle class respectability.



Cufflinks and collar stud



Oval and round Limoges brooches, all of same style



Also in the trunk of House E was this porcelain presentation cup—perhaps a remembrance of a family event. This printed vase and small seed starter pot were recovered from House A—both of which attests to the households' interest in floral decoration and desire for more than the bare necessities of life.



Left: finely-made, bone china demitasse cup and saucer, manufactured by the Rosenthal Company of Bavaria (Germany) sometime between 1896 and 1907. Recovered from the trunk in House E.

Right: Printed vase and earthenware seed starter pot recovered from bedroom context, House A.

Another totally unexpected artifact from the House E 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). It is unfortunate that we were not able to identify the name of the insured individual on the policy.



Metropolitan M. L. I. Co.
Life Insurance
Company

OFFICE:
NEW YORK CITY.

In Consideration of the payment of the premium mentioned in the schedule below, on or before each Monday, **Doth** Herby Agret, subject to the conditions below and on page 2 hereof, each of which is hereby made a part of this contract and contracted by the insured and every person entitled to claim hereunder to be a part hereof, and with the privileges and concessions to policyholders on pages 2 and 3 hereof, which are hereby made part of this contract, to pay as an Endowment, on the anniversary of this Policy next after the insured shall have passed the age of seventy-five years, maintenance of this Policy and the Premium Receipt Book, the amount stipulated in said schedule; **And** Doth further Agret, subject to the conditions aforesaid, if the insured shall die prior to the date of the maturity of the Endowment, to pay upon receipt of proofs of the death of the insured made in the manner, to the extent and upon the blanks required herein, and upon surrender insured made in the manner, to the extent and upon the blanks stipulated in said schedule. (Provided, however, that no obligation is assumed by the Company prior to the date hereof, nor unless on said date the insured is alive and in sound health, but should the proposed insured not be alive or not be in sound health on said date, any amount paid to the Company as premiums hereon shall be returned. The Company may make any payment or grant any non-forfeiture privilege provided herein to the insured, the executor or administrator, husband or wife, or any relative by blood or connection by marriage of the insured, or to any other person appearing to said Company to be equitably entitled to the same by reason of having incurred expense on behalf of the insured, or for his or her burial; and the production of a receipt signed by either of said persons, or of other proof of such payment or grant of such privilege to either of them, shall be conclusive evidence that all claims under this Policy have been satisfied.)



SCHEDULE ABOVE REFERRED TO.

Number of Policy 52872947	Date JAN 18, 1916	Name of the Insured MARY ANTHONY.
Age next birthday 20 years	Weekly premium 1.00	Amount payable at end of Endowment period or in the event of death after six months \$180-

One-half only of the above sum payable if death occur within six calendar months from date.

In Witness Whereof, the said Metropolitan Life Insurance Company has, by its President and Secretary, signed and delivered this Policy on the date named in the said schedule.

Adult Endowment Policy, payable on date of Policy after age 75.
Partial Death Benefit: Payouts from six months.
Distribution of Surplus Fifth Year and thereafter Annually.
Form 120-B — 1915 — 1-1-1916. 2-1-16
Age 18 to 65 2-6-11-1916

 Secretary
 Secretary

Example of similar policy, albeit dated 1916.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL “REALITY”

The archaeological research in Houses A-E illustrates a very different picture than that presented by the contemporary historical record—a picture detailing individuals and families of color trying to live in a community which was rife with racial bigotry and hatred. The archaeological record documented the victims’...

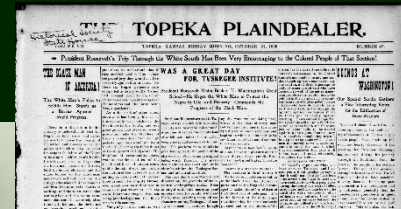
Literacy

Political Activism and/or Engagement

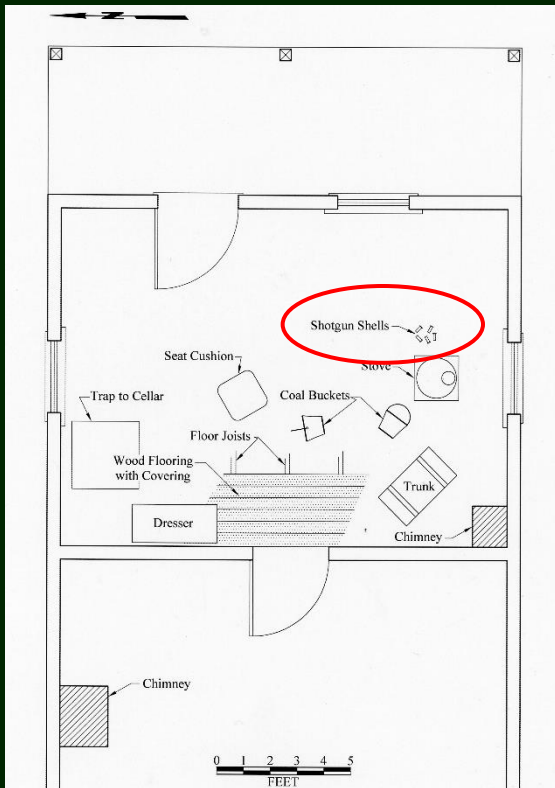
Service to Community and/or Country

Religious Devotion and/or Conviction

Integration into Middle Class Respectability



The archaeology of House E illustrates how decisions made that night by the house occupants had life-changing consequences. Unfired shotgun shells lying directly on the floor of the front room of House E suggests that the occupants of this house may have been sitting at the front door with gun in hand waiting for the mob to enter, only to decide at the last minute to flee out the back door—and live to see another day. In contrast, Scott Burton decided to stand his ground, and was killed by the mob.



The excavation of House E 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.



Cluster of unfired shotgun shells were also recovered from the floor of House E

Winchester "Leader" Paper Shell.

47368 Winchester Leader Smokeless Paper Shells can be reloaded; for nitro or black powders; using No. 3 W nitro primer.

	Per 100	Per 1,000
12 gauge, 2 3/4 in.....	\$0.83	\$7.80
12 gauge, 2 1/2 in.....	.89	8.50
12 gauge, 3 in.....	1.00	9.99
10 gauge, 2 3/4 in.....	.89	8.50
10 gauge, 3 in.....	1.00	9.95
10 gauge.....	.85	8.25

Winchester "Blue" Rival Paper Shells.

47369 Winchester Blue Rival Paper Shells, waterproof, quick and reliable, using No. 3 W primer can be reloaded; for black or nitro powders.

	Per 100	Per 1,000
10 gauge, 2 3/4 in.....	\$0.56	\$5.39
12 gauge, 2 1/2 in.....	.49	4.65
12 gauge, 3 in.....	.41	3.99
10 gauge, 3 in.....	.65	5.99
10 gauge, 2 1/2 in.....	.54	5.30

Rival Paper Shells.

Educational Outreach has been a large part of the Phase III mitigation strategy. In June 2019, 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).



Political Outreach: U.S. Representative Rodney Davis visiting the site.



U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth visiting the site.



In August 2020, the Race Riot Site (aka Badlands I Site) became the 30th property listed within the African American Civil Rights Network. This network was created by the African American Civil Rights Act of 2017, and is administered by the National Park Service to “commemorate, honor, and interpret” the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.



Legislation has also been introduced to the U.S. Congress for the 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.

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 139

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. RODNEY DAVIS 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,

SECTION 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 R. Davis, and Dr. Carla Hayden (Librarian of Congress)—discussing the significance of the archaeological remains recovered from the Phase II investigations, and Dr. Hayden’s desire to house some of the artifacts at the Library of Congress. Additionally, plans are currently being formulated for the creation of displays highlighting the results of the archaeological excavations (and their significance) within the new multi-modal transportation center being constructed in Springfield along the Tenth Street Rail corridor.

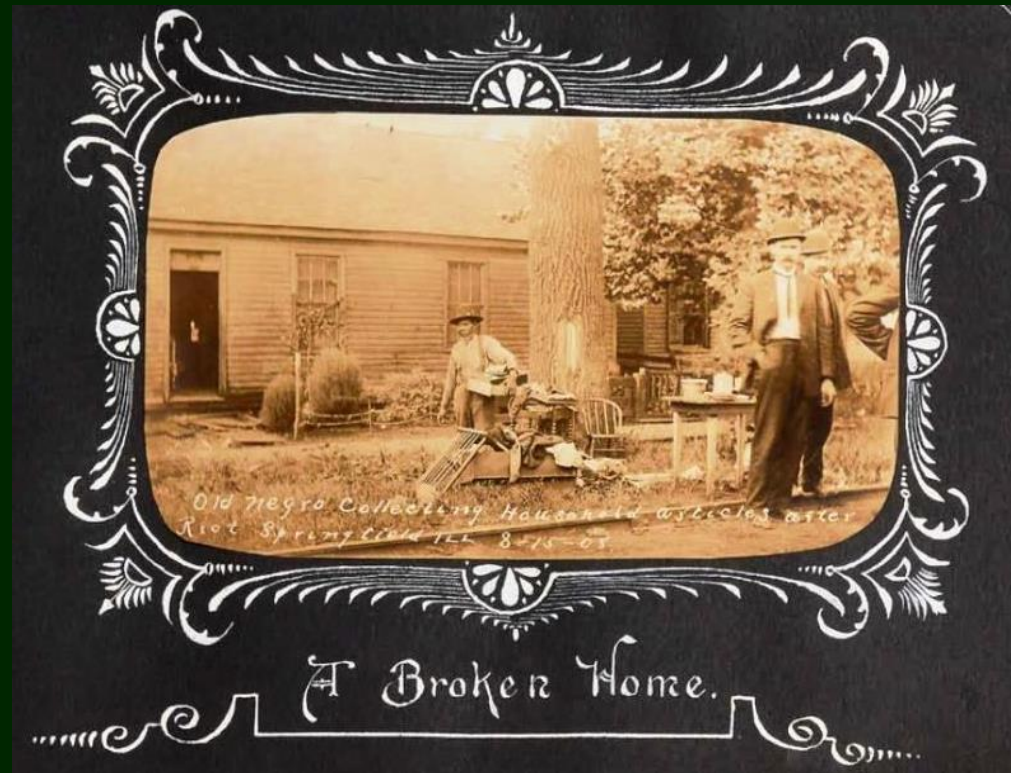


“Springfield had no shame. She stood for the action of the mob....” (Walling, September 1908).

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
[Go to "Miscellaneous Papers"]