

The Race Riot Site: Discovery and Partial Excavation of Five Houses Destroyed During the Springfield Race Riot of August 1908

by
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Floyd Mansberger,
and
Chelsea Coates



Conference on Illinois History
Springfield, Illinois
October 8, 2021

The following session will include three presentations:

1. A brief historical context of the project area and the archaeology undertaken there (by Christopher Stratton).



2. A description of the variety of artifacts recovered during the project (by Chelsea Coates).



3. A discussion of the significance of the project's results (by Floyd Mansberger).



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 wreak havoc with the City of Springfield.

The Illinois State Journal

SEVENTY-SEVENTH YEAR

SPRINGFIELD ILLINOIS SATURDAY AUGUST 15 1908-10 PAGES

PRICE 3 CENTS

**Frenzied Mob Sweeps City,
Wreaking Bloody Vengeance
For Negro's Heinous Crime**

**MOB WRECKS
LOPER'S CAFE
DURING RIOT**

Through Atlanta Restaurant
Owned by Man Who Took
Suspect Away

PLACE TOTALLY RUINED

FIGURES, CHARTS, TABLES AND
OTHER VALUABLES BURNED
IN THE STREET

AUTHORITIES HELPLESS

Baker, P. and M. J. B. Baker

VICTIM OF NEGRO ASSAULT.

[illegible]

NEGROES REMOVED TO BLOOMINGTON

OFFICERS FEAR VIOLENCE AND
SPIRIT FRANCHISING AHEAD

United Released From County Jail By
False Alarm of Fire Which Ignited
Barrel of Ammunition in Garage Near
Automobile and Bank City—Phases
on Train Near Bridge.

It was the first time that the government had been able to track down a communist spy in the United States. The man, who was known as "The Red Spy," was a member of the Communist Party and had been active in the United States for many years. He was known for his ability to infiltrate government agencies and was considered one of the most dangerous spies in the world. The government had been searching for him for a long time, but it was only recently that they were able to locate him. The man was arrested and is now being held in custody. The government is hoping that this will be the first of many such arrests.

[illegible]

THE CASUALTIES

1084-4338

2. A 200 FT. strip by strip bottom.
3. 100' x 100' ft. strip bottom, strip through the 100' x 100' ft. strip.

1998年12月20日

ALBERT BERNERLINE, 410 South First street, shot through the left hip during street racing.
 DENARD STUBBS, 404 North Tenth street, shot through the left arm during street racing.
 ARNOLD ALLENHARTER, 2012 East Jefferson street, shot through right arm on street.

HARVEY D. FARRINGHAM, 120, South Sixth Street, member of South
Sixth Avenue of Fife Masonry. Shot in the head while returning
toward restaurant.

[illegible]

(JESSE M. CAMPBELL, giving statement; not in book with the
other books)

丹波篠山市 丹波川上町合併: *Shinano-shi, Tanabe-gun, Tanabe-shi, Tanabe-shi*
 丹波市 丹波川上町: *Tanabe-shi, Tanabe-gun, Tanabe-shi, Tanabe-shi*
 丹波市 丹波川上町: *Tanabe-shi, Tanabe-gun, Tanabe-shi, Tanabe-shi*

WILLIS, STU-497. Chicago 4. Brown granular perianth, colored; beak not
red.

[illegible]

ROBERT LAWRENCE, 400 West Belmont Street, Daily, Married and
Divorced.

JOHN W. WILKE, *Psychomotor analysis for reconstruction*, left.

6. P. 274, LINE 10. "The East German string" should be "East's" after "and the string" and "East" after "string".

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 08-11-2010 BY 60322 UCBAW

**TWO ARE KILLED
AND MANY HURT
AS MOB WORKS**

Springfield Helpless in
Hands of Thousands of
Frenzied Citizens.

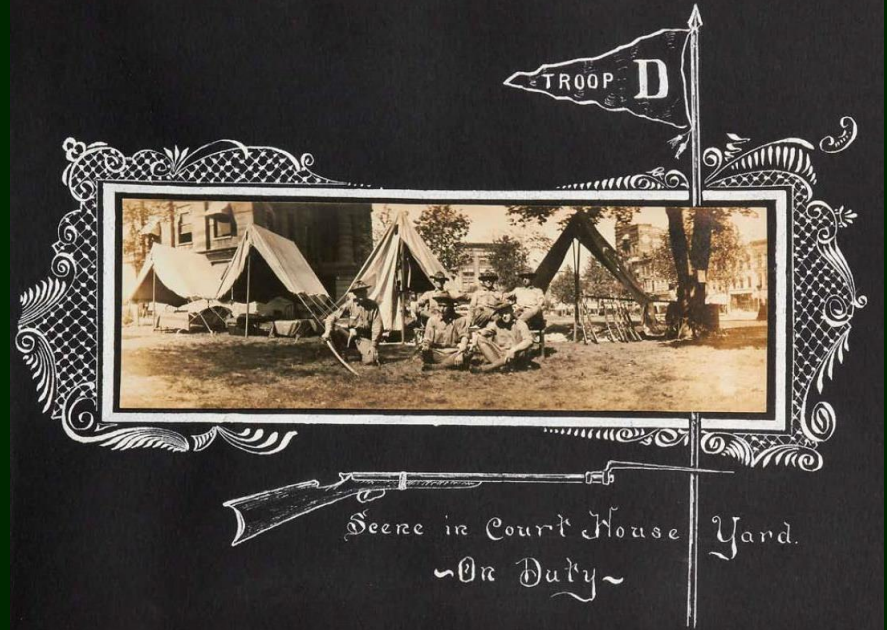
ASSAULT INCITED 6

Each War Follows the Act
Made by Negroes Upon
Local Women.

RESTAURANT IN RUIN

Unidentified at Jett. Group 20

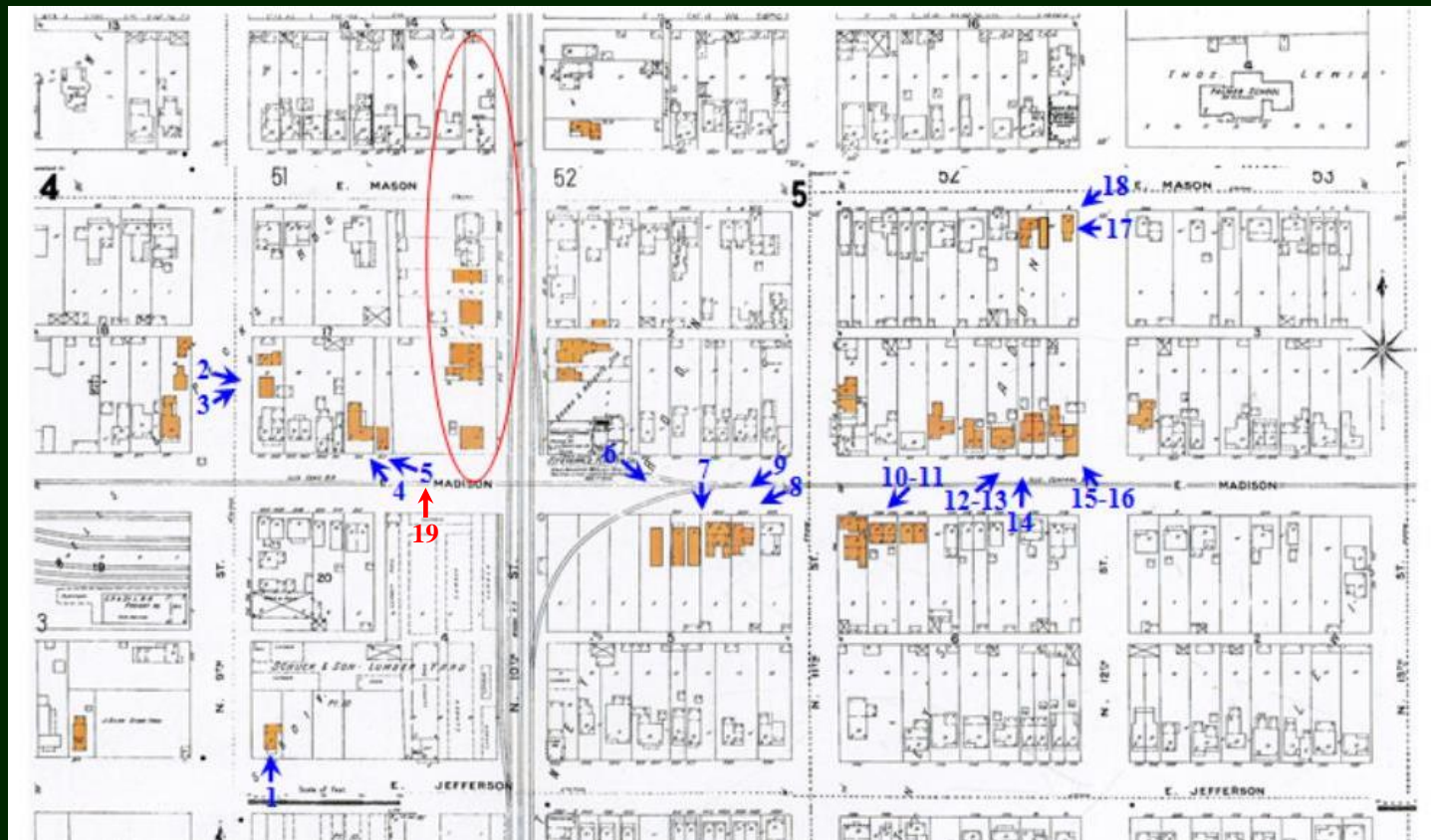
On August 14th, 1908, the City of Springfield erupted in racially motivated mob violence that lasted for several days, and which resulted in the lynching of two African-American citizens, as well as the destruction of numerous houses and businesses within the city. Much of the violence was centered on the Levee commercial district and residential area then-known as the “Badlands.” The violence was subdued through the efforts of the Illinois National Guard.



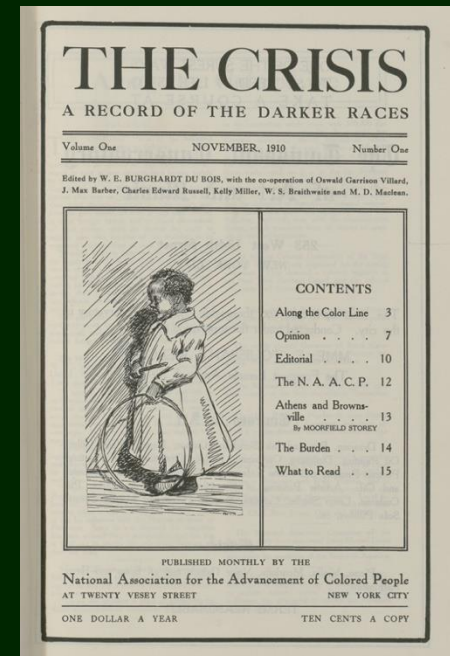
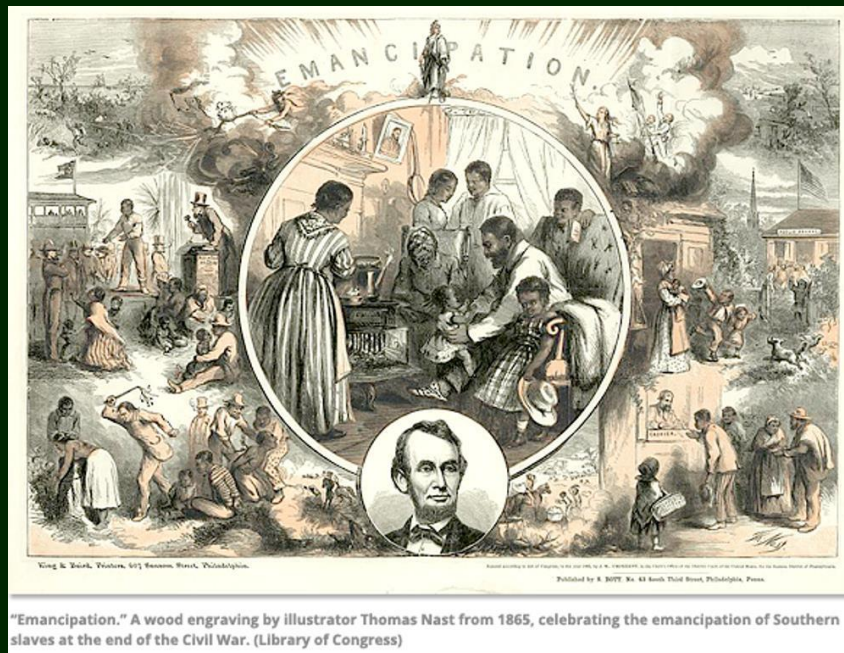
Photographs of East Madison
Street, and National Guard in
Springfield (August 1908).



Over 40 homes and businesses were destroyed in Springfield's "Badlands" during the weekend of August 14-15, 1908. 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. Only one historic photograph has been located depicting the houses in the existing project area (number 19, in red).



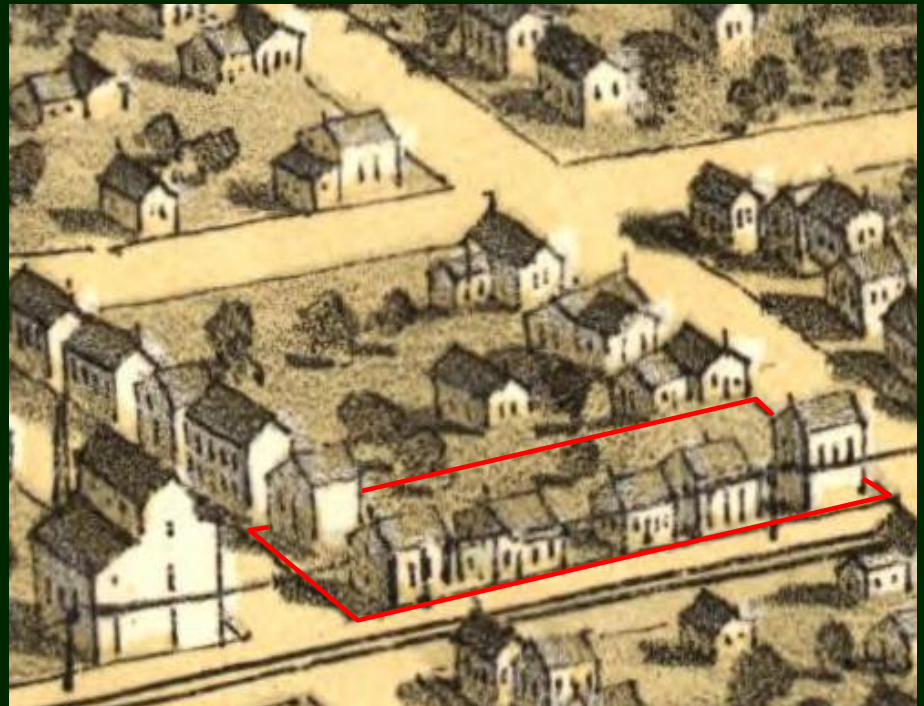
The Springfield Race Riot of August 1908 was one of the catalysts that resulted in the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). On February 12th, 1909 (in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of Lincoln's birth), the organization was formed. As quoted in 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."



The five houses investigated were constructed in the 1840s. They were built on lots re-oriented to face Tenth Street, along which the Great Western Railroad ran through Springfield. The homes initially were occupied by white families. By the late 19th century the residents predominately were African American.



1854



1867

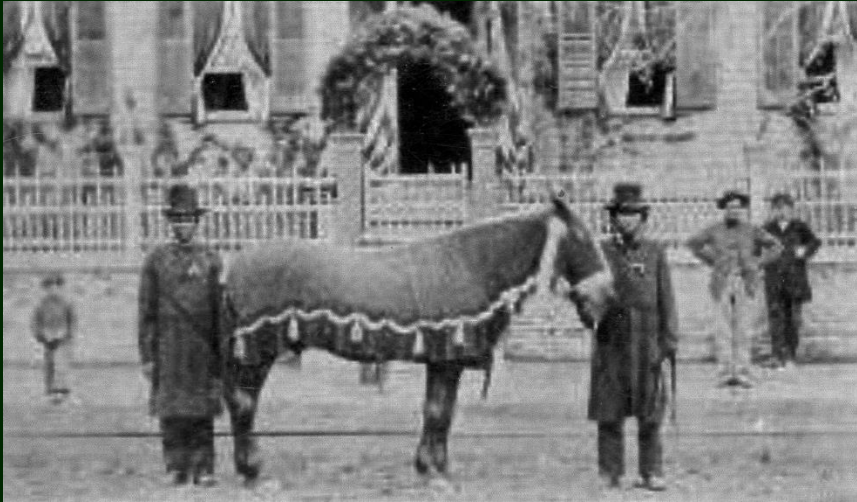
A Civil-War-era African American enclave in Springfield was located immediately adjacent to the project area, on the opposite side of the Tenth Street rail corridor. Some of the people who lived here also occupied homes in the project area at various times. The project area is highlighted in red; the early African-American enclave in blue.



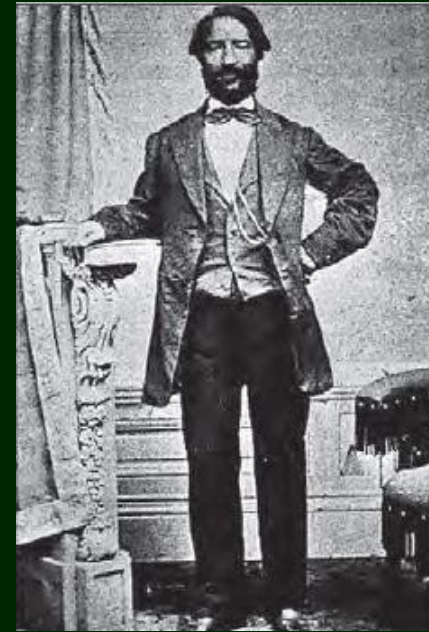
1873



Several of the families residing adjacent to the project area were very prominent within Springfield's African-American community.

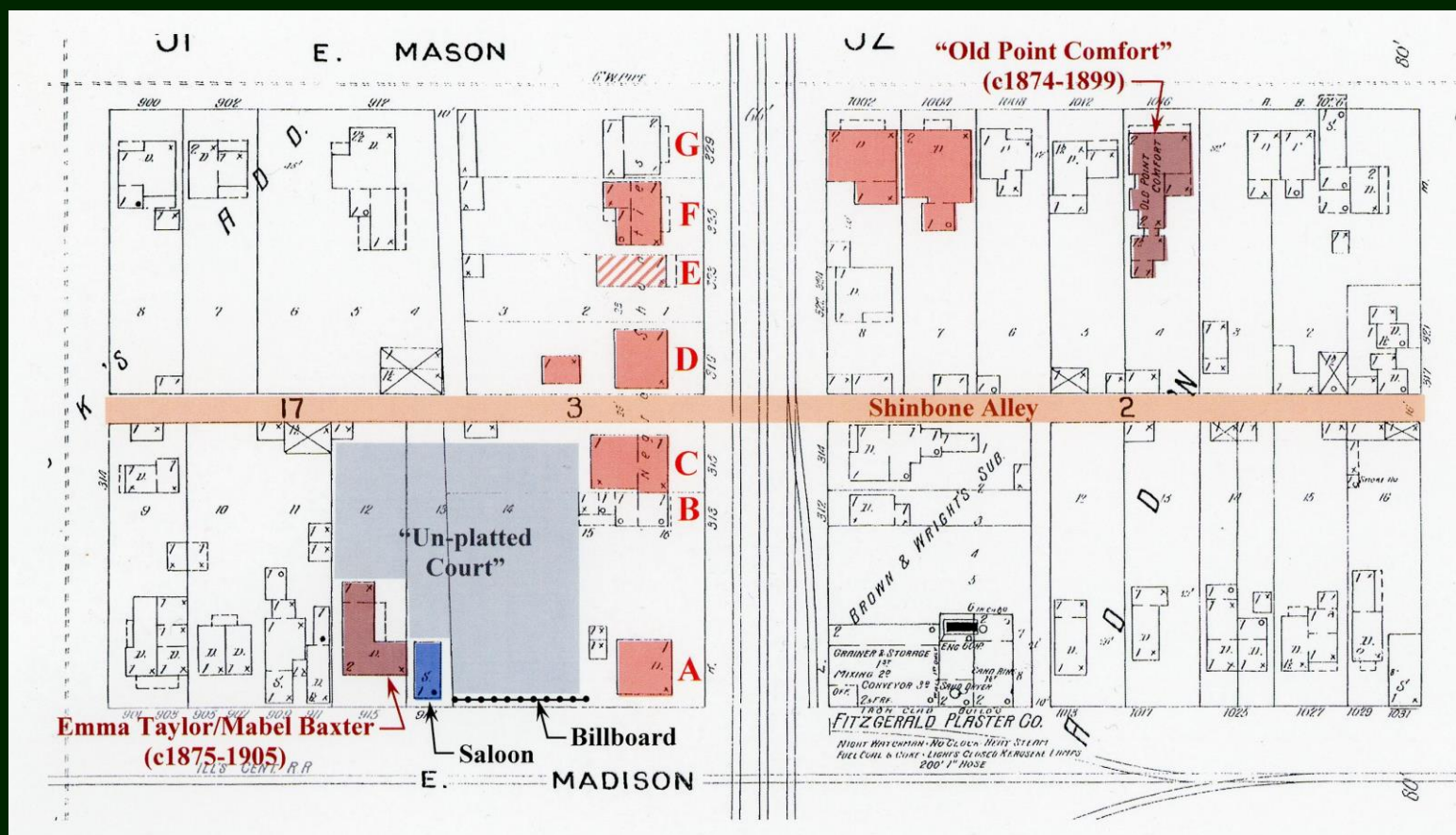


Rev. Henry Brown (at left of horse) resided on the northeast corner of Madison and Tenth streets at intervals from the early 1860s into the 1890s. He was asked to lead Abraham Lincoln's horse, "Old Bob," in the president's funeral procession in May 1865.



Two households of the Donigan/Donnegan family, including those of Leanna Donigan Knox (the family matriarch) and her son Wiley's widow (and family). William Donnegan, pictured here, lived on Jefferson Street. He was one the victims of the 1908 riot.

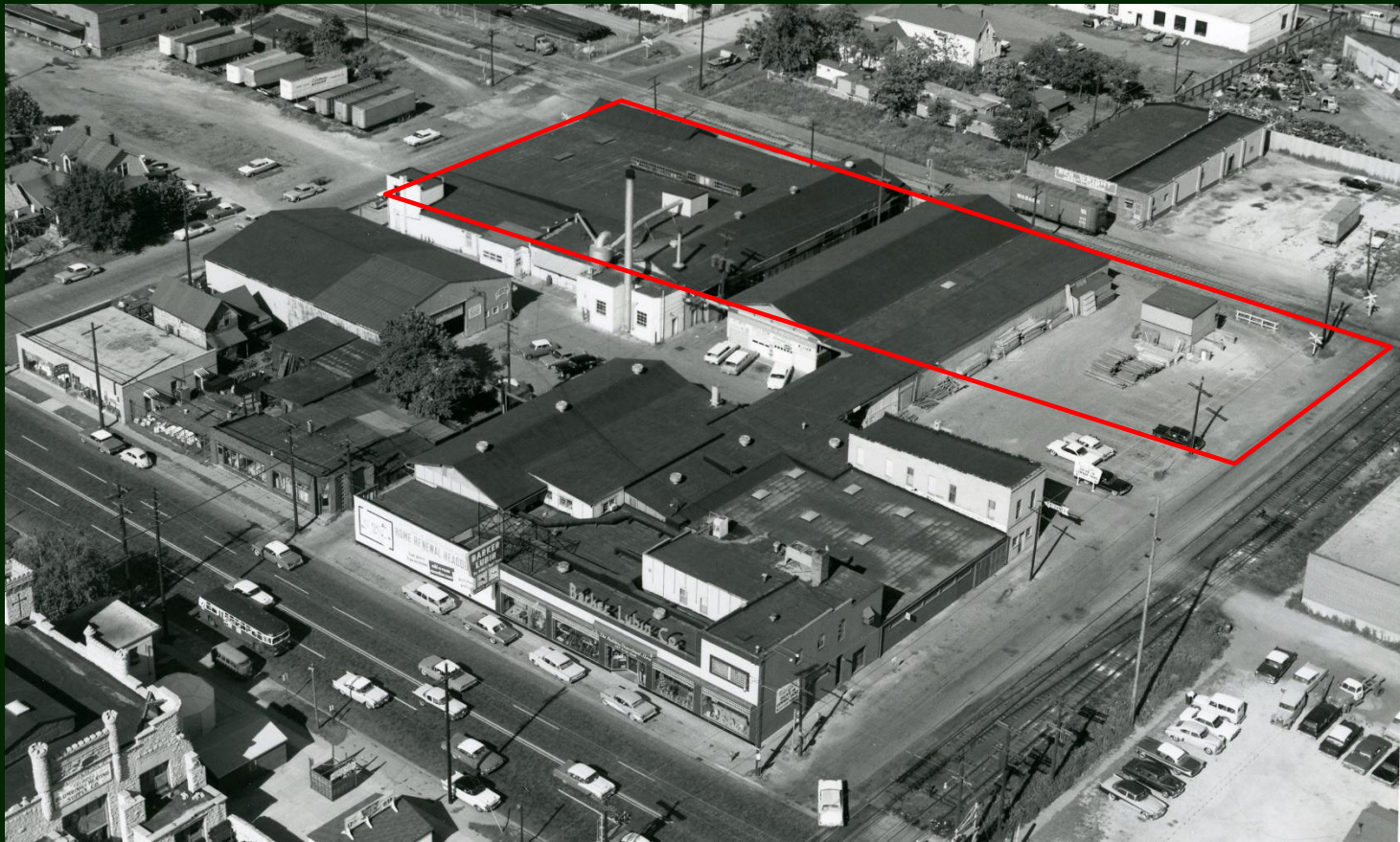
In the 1870s, two white-run brothels—located at 915 East Madison and 1016 East Mason Street—were established either side of the project area and remained in operation for several decades. The presence of these brothels (highlighted in dark red) eventually attracted further prostitution and vice to the properties lying in between them. Shorter-lived “resorts” (representing more informal “houses of ill fame;” highlighted here in light red) are indicated on the 1896 Sanborn map below. By the 1890s, the 10th and Madison Street intersection had acquired a reputation for illicit activities (though by no means representative of all of its residents). This reputation provided a convenient excuse for the white mob when it torched the homes in the project area on August 14, 1908.



Photograph of the ruins of House A, located on the northwest corner of Tenth and Madison streets, taken in the immediate aftermath of the riot.



Following the 1908 riot, the project area sat abandoned for several decades before being redeveloped as a lumber yard. This redevelopment, however, appears to have had relatively limited impact on the earlier archaeological resources within the project area.



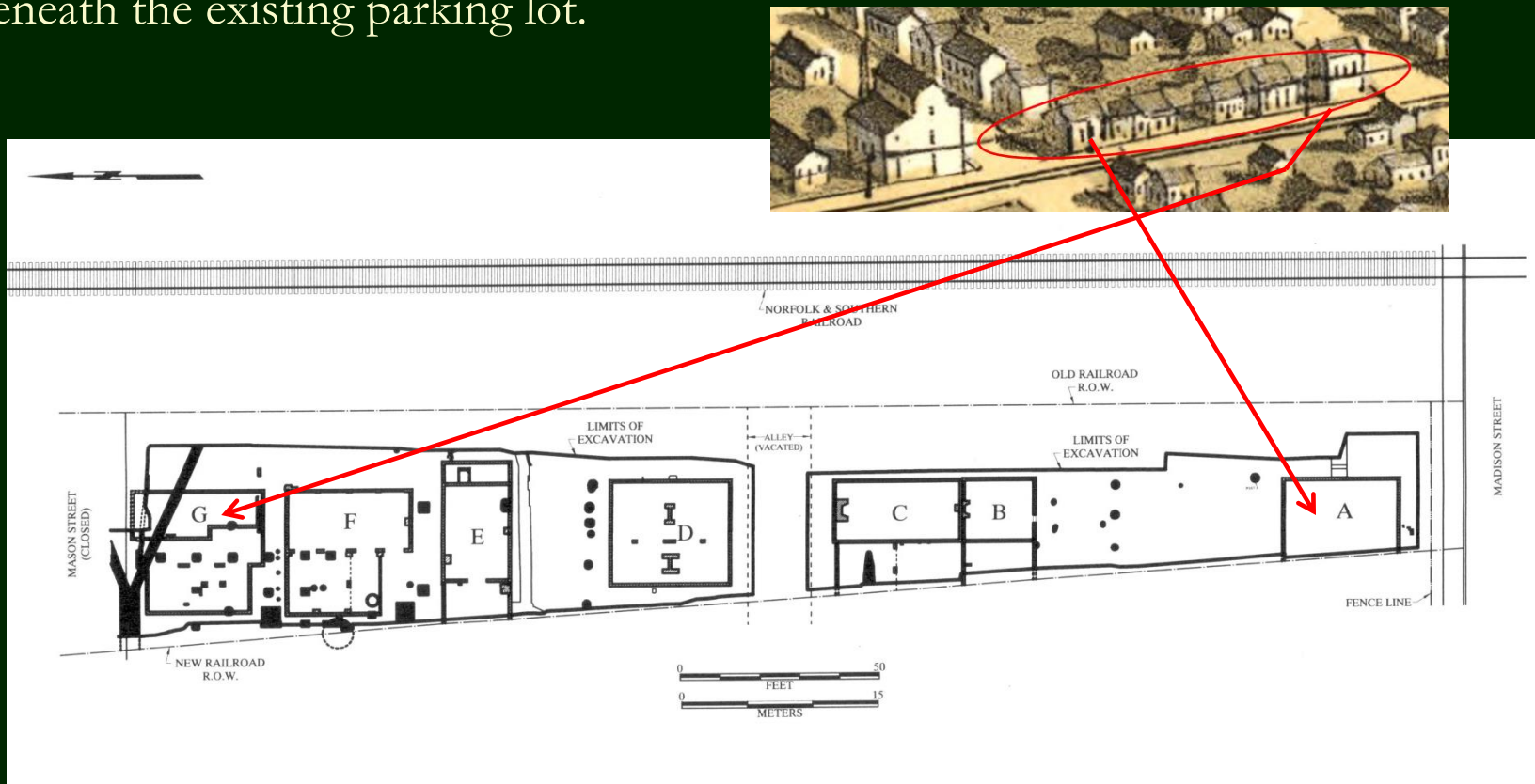
1960s

The five burned houses were discovered during the Carpenter Street Underpass Project, which was the first component of the Springfield Rail Improvements Project.



 160 0 160 320	 © Copyright Hanson Professional Services Inc. 2013	CARPENTER STREET UNDERPASS
		SANGAMON COUNTY SPRINGFIELD RAIL IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT
		EXHIBIT 1

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. Subsequent research indicates that Robert Wright, a Spanish-American War veteran was was living there at the time.



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. Although one local newspaper reported that an “H. Stoutmeyer” occupied House E at the time of the riot, recent research strongly suggests that Jessie Black, a young African-American woman, may have been the home’s last resident.

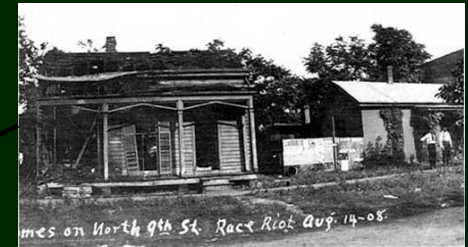
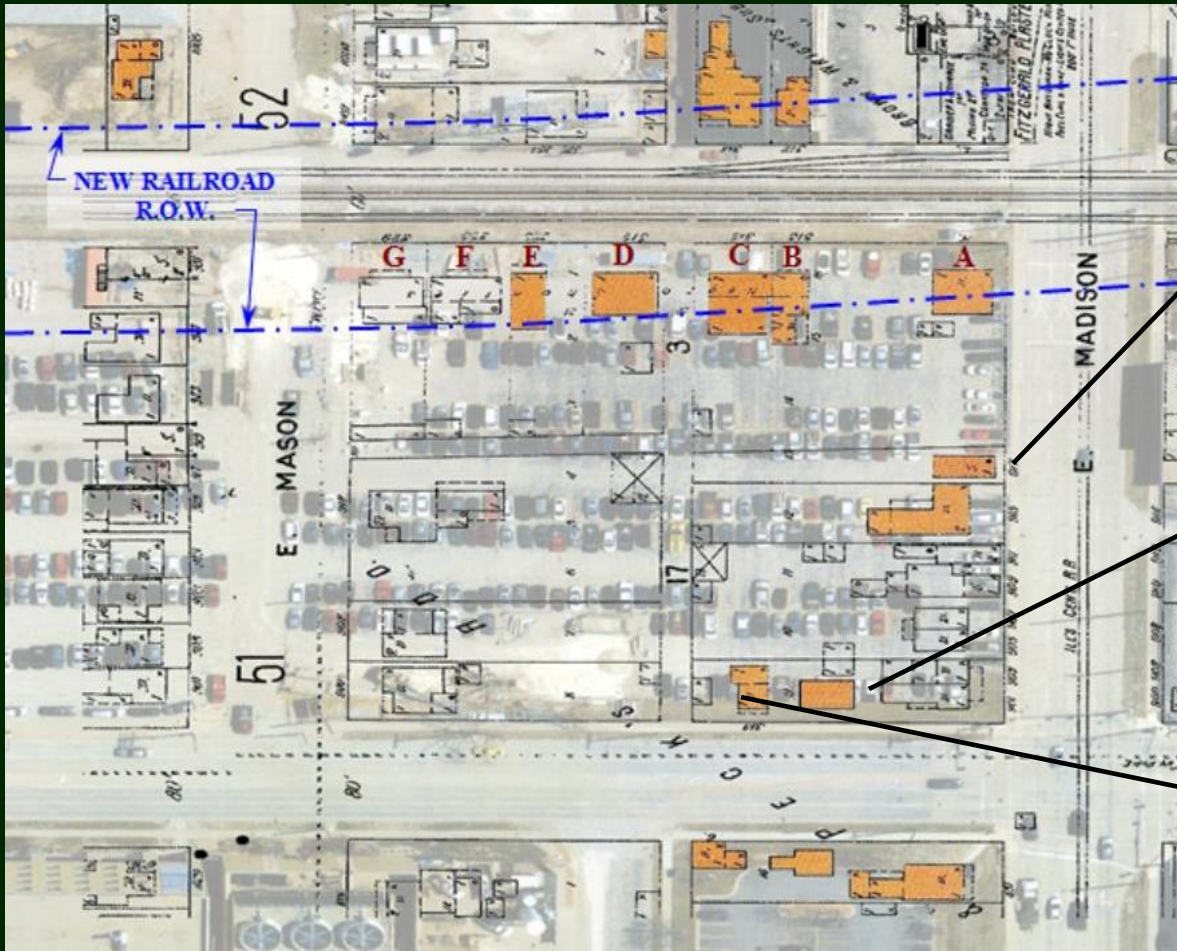


Looking west

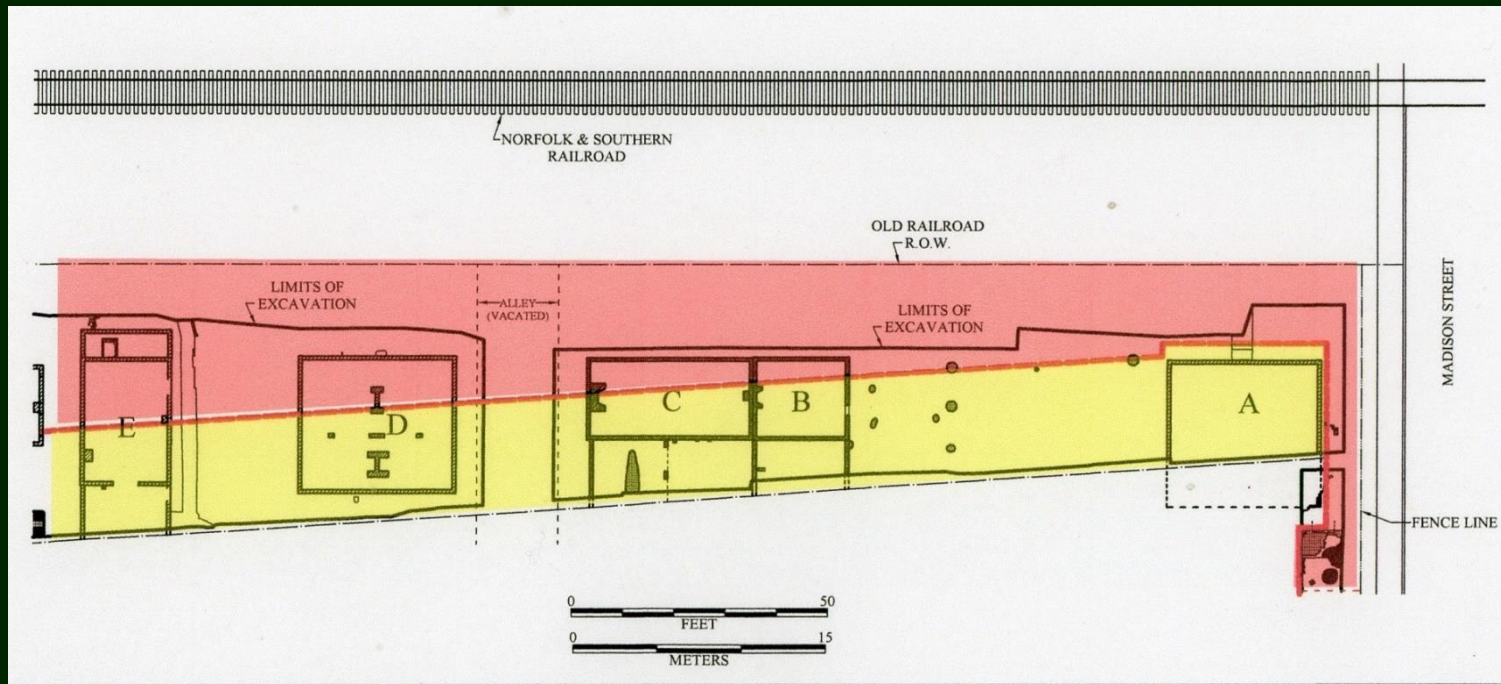


Looking south

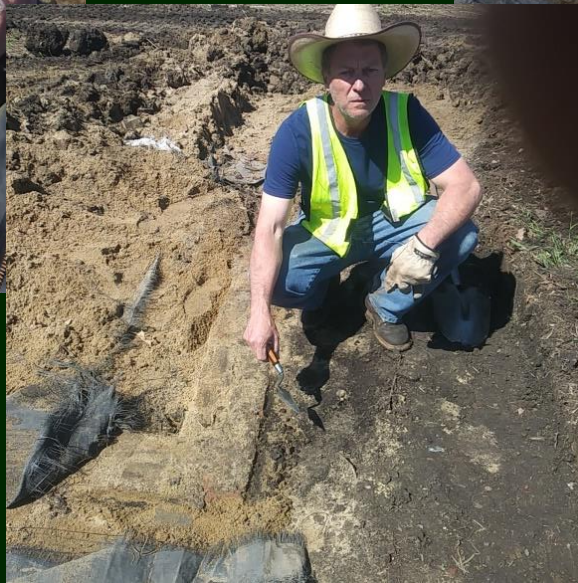
Location of burned (A-E) and unburned (F and G) houses in the Tenth Street Corridor, overlain on existing aerial view. Buildings highlighted in orange were destroyed by fire in the August 1908 Springfield riot. The railroad right-of-way depicted here was the original proposed right-of-way as envisioned 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.



A key aspect of the archaeological excavations was understanding the depositional sequence within the houses and the different contexts the artifacts recovered were associated with (i.e. Pre-Fire; Fire; and Post-Fire). A distinct “fire zone” associated with its 1908 destruction was readily observable in House E, as seen below.



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.



The next paper, presented by Chelsea Coates, will summarize the variety of the artifacts recovered from these excavations.

