

**ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
ABANDONED MINED LANDS RECLAMATION
CULTURAL RESOURCES EVALUATION**

**SOUTHERN COAL, COKE, AND MINING COMPANY
COAL WASHER
EAST ST. LOUIS, ILLINOIS**

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Introduction:

This report summarizes the archival research done by Fever River Research on a coal washer operated by the Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company on the southern edge of East St. Louis, St. Clair County, Illinois during the early twentieth century. All of the buildings and support structures associated with the coal washer have been demolished, but the gob pile produced from the washing process remains, and this feature is slated for reclamation as part of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' Abandoned Mine Lands Reclamation Program. The research on the washer was conducted at the request of the Department of Natural Resources and was aimed at determining more precisely dates of operation for the facility. Research was conducted at the East St. Louis Public Library, Belleville Public Library, Cahokia Public Library, Lovejoy Library (Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville), and the St. Clair County Recorder and Treasurer's offices. No field survey work was conducted.

Results of Archival Research:

The Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company was a subsidiary of the Southern Railway,¹ which was one twenty-eight railroads passing through East St. Louis during the early twentieth century. The company appears to have opened its first coal mine in St. Clair County in 1888 and eventually operated eight mines in the county, all located along the route of Southern Railway. The company also had a mine at New Baden (Mine No. 9), in neighboring Clinton County (Department of Mines and Minerals 1954:90, 98-99). The coal extracted from these mines was used to fuel Southern Railway locomotives, besides being shipped to other markets.

In 1906-1907, the Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company built a coal washer along the main line of Southern Railway at Centerville Station,² in the American Bottom east of East St. Louis. This facility was situated near one of the company's mines. Two other coal washers were in operation in St. Clair County at this date: one was operated by the Consolidated Coal Company at its No. 17 mine in Collinsville; while the other was run by the Bessemore Washed Coal Company on the south side of East St. Louis. The coal processed at these facilities was washed to remove unwanted materials, such as dirt and sulfur, from the fuel to make it burn more cleanly and efficiently. The washers run by the coal companies presumably processed material extracted from their own mines. Bessemore, however, purchased slack or screenings from various small mines in St. Clair and Madison Counties and cleaned it for sale to the St.

¹ The portion of the Southern Railway that serviced the coal washer is now part of the Norfolk Southern system.

² The 1907 *Annual Coal Report* indicates that this washer was located "on the main line of the Southern Railway, near Coulterville Station, in St. Clair County" (Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics 1907:308). Coulterville, however, is located in Randolph County and was not serviced by the Southern Railway. Hence, we believe that the report intended to say *Centerville Station*, since this town was in fact on the main line of Southern Railway and in St. Clair County. Furthermore, when the coal washer burned down in 1912, the newspaper article describing its destruction states that the washer was located "near the bluffs on the Southern railway"—a location matching Centerville Station (*East St. Louis Daily Journal* 19 November 1912, p. 1, col. 1).

Louis Market. The 1907 *Annual Coal Report*³ noted that, “The consumption of washed coal is largely on the increase” (Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics 1907:308).

The Centerville Station coal washer caught fire and burned to the ground in September 1912. Two months later, the Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company filed a building permit with the city of East St. Louis for the construction of a new washer—the subject of this report—located south of the Free (now MacArthur) Bridge, just inside the city limits. The company felt that this location would provide them with better access to all of the railroads coming into East St. Louis than their former site had. The estimated cost of the new coal washer was \$35,000 (*East St. Louis Journal* 19 November 1912, p. 1, col.1). The washer was located adjacent to a large grain elevator owned by the Southern Railway.⁴ In an unfortunate coincidence, the grain elevator was destroyed by fire in December 1912, representing a loss of \$100,000 (*East St. Louis Journal* 23 December 1912). It was never rebuilt.

At some point, the Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company constructed a barge terminal (or “river dump”) north of their coal washer for the shipment of coal (see Figure 2). This terminal was highlighted in a January 4, 1925 article published in the *East St. Louis Daily Journal*, which noted that, “Annually, thousands of cars of coal from the company’s string of mines go over the dump into barges providing a cheaper of cost of movement to the point of consumption, and permitting the company to compete in fields that otherwise would be closed to the organization.” The barge terminal was brainchild of W. K. Kavanaugh, the president of the Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company, who was a long-time advocate for reinvigorating commercial transportation on the Mississippi River. The coal shipped at the terminal came from the five mines the company was then operating in the region, four of which in St. Clair County⁵, while the fifth was located at New Baden, in neighboring Clinton County. At peak production, these mines employed 1,700 miners, though only 1,000 men were on the payroll when the article was written. Prior to being loaded on the barges, the coal was run through the washer. A photograph included with the newspaper article shows the barge terminal in the foreground and the coal washer in the distance. Coal cars moving between the washer and terminal were marshaled in a large rail yard lying between the two facilities (see Figure 2) (*East St. Louis Daily Journal* 4 January 1925, sec. 4, p. 1, col. 4).

A 1927 station map for the St. Louis Division of the Southern Railway illustrates the footprints of five buildings or structures at the Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company’s East St. Louis coal washer (see Figure 3). Three of the buildings are centered on a rail line, which appears to run through them. A second rail line is illustrated running along the east side of the

³ Each *Annual Coal Report* covered a period from July 1 of one year through June 30 of the year following. The reports were compiled and published in succession by the Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics (1884-1910), State Mining Board (1911-1916), and Department of Mines and Minerals (post-1916).

⁴ This grain elevator was the second located in this area. An earlier elevator, which is illustrated on an 1887 survey, was located directly west of it on the riverbank (St. Clair County Surveyor’s Record D:172).

⁵ Two of the company’s mines in St. Clair County were located in Shiloh Valley Township, east of Belleville. Another was located at Muren, on the east side of Belleville, while the fourth (the “Avery Mine”) was located on the Belleville Road, east of East St. Louis.

coal washer. Waste from the washer was dumped onto a gob pile lying directly to the east of the facility. The gob pile, however, is not illustrated on the station map (Southern Railway 1927). In addition to the coal extracted from Southern's mines, it is possible that the washer may also have process coal from various independent mines (Abandoned Mined Lands Reclamation Division 2002).

It has been speculated that the coal washer also cleaned coal for the Cahokia Power Plant, which is located along the riverfront a short distance to the south of the washer. Constructed in stages between 1923 and 1926, Cahokia was the largest electrical power plant in the Midwest upon its completion and was the first designed to burn low-grade Illinois coal in pulverized form (see Figure 4). When first brought on line, the plant was located in an unincorporated area outside the East St. Louis City limits, and the facility took its name from the old French village of Cahokia located two miles south of it. The property subsequently was incorporated into the town of Monsanto (now Sauget), a corporate town jointly founded by United Electric Light and Power Company—the owner of the power plant—and the Monsanto Corporation. The Cahokia Power Plant was equipped with fourteen boilers and consumed coal at the rate of one ton every 30 seconds. This represented seventy-six carloads of coal every day and 1,250,000 tons of coal per year. After arriving at the plant in train cars, the coal was dumped, run through a drier, and then crushed into a fine, pulverized powder that was blown into the boilers (*East St. Louis Daily Journal* 30 November 1924, sec. 4, p. 1, col. 5; 11 May 1930 p.10D, col. 8; Federal Writers' Project 1983:492). Much of the coal consumed at the power plant came from a company-owned strip mine located outside of Freeburg in St. Clair County (Department of Mines and Minerals 1929:166, 170).⁶ It is not clear from the documentary record, however, whether the plant burned washed coal, and, if so, whether Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company processed some or all of the coal for Union Electric Company.

Determining the length of operation for the Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company's East St. Louis coal washer is complicated by the fact that the annual coal reports published by State of Illinois provide no information on the facility and only scattered references to other coal washers. Likewise, East St. Louis city directories provide no specific listing for the facility. The directories don't even provide a general office address for the Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company in East St. Louis until after 1921 (McCoy Directory Company 1916; Lethem 1921). The earliest city directory found that does list the company was published in 1924.⁷ This directory places the East St. Louis office for the company in Room 624 of the Murphy Building, and also provides a St. Louis office address at 710-718 Security Building, 319 North Fourth Street. The company advertised itself in the business section of the 1924 directory under the headings for "Coal (wholesale)" and "Coke" (Lethem 1924:342, 671). By 1926, the company's East St. Louis office had relocated to 8th Street and Piggot Avenue. Two years later, however, the 8th and Piggot office had closed, and the only address provided for the company in the city directory was for its St. Louis offices. Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining was included with the

⁶ The United Electric Company acquired this mine from the Solar Coal Company in 1926-1927. By 1929 it had become the largest shipping mine in St. Clair County, with a total production of 422,821 tons for the year (Department of Mines and Minerals 1929:166, 170; 1954:90-91).

⁷ The directory research conducted for this report was done at the East St. Louis public library, whose holdings include directories from 1914, 1916, 1918, 1921, 1924, 1926, 1928, 1930, 1934, 1935, 1938, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1945, 1948, and 1950 for the period in question.

“Coal (wholesale)” and “Coke” dealers in the business section of the 1928 directory, but even this advertising had ceased by 1930 (Huber Directory Company 1928:431, 686-687; 1930). A search of later city directories found no listing of any kind in the East St. Louis for the company.

Annual coal reports do document a decline in coal production by the Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company during the late 1920s and 1930s. By 1929, the company was operating only two mines—Nos. 6 and 7—both of which were located in the vicinity of Belleville and Shiloh Valley. In 1939, Mine No. 6 was renamed North Side Coal Company, which suggests that the shaft had been sold to another party. The following year, Mine No. 7 was renamed the St. Clair Southern Coal Company; it is unclear whether this change also indicates a sale to another company or simply a change in names, reflecting the reduction of the Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company’s operations down to a single mine in St. Clair County (Department of Mines and Minerals 1954:90-91). Regardless, the later history of the East St. Louis coal washer appears to have been connected with Mine No. 7, which was referred to colloquially as “Little Oak.” The mine inspector’s ledger for this mine has a notation, dated January 12, 1942, stating that, “This Company has a washer at Cahokia” (Department of Mines and Minerals, Mine Inspector’s Ledger). Even though Cahokia is identified as the location, we believe that the mine inspector was referring to the East St. Louis coal washer. The former town may have been cited on account of the washer’s close proximity to the Cahokia Power Plant. Only 3,263 tons of coal were extracted from Mine No. 7 for the year 1941-1942, which was exceptionally low for a shipping mine (Department of Mines and Minerals 1942:144). Over the next decade, Mine No. 7 changed hands several times: being acquired and/or renamed by the Mascoutah Coal and Mining Company in 1943, the Little Oak Coal Company in 1945, and the Oak Coal Company in 1947 (Department of Mines and Minerals 1954:90-91). It is questionable whether any of these companies would have had either the interest in, or means of, operating the coal washer in East St. Louis. An April 25, 1953 notation on the mine inspector’s ledger indicates that Mine No. 7 had been sold by the Woolsey Equipment to John Young, of Royalton, so that they he could recover the rest of the “material” (coal?) in the mine. The next notation, dated May 1953, indicates that the shaft at the mine had been caved in and sealed (Department of Mines and Minerals, Mine Inspector’s Ledger).

There are no additional references to the coal washer in the mine inspector’s ledger for Mine No. 7 after January 1942. Circumstantial evidence suggests that the coal washer had ceased operating by the early 1950s. If the washer continued to be associated with Mine No. 7, then it certainly had closed by 1953 (the date of the mine’s closure). It may even have closed earlier, as the market for soft bituminous coal in St. Louis dried up. Until natural gas became readily available, Illinois coal represented the cheapest heating source available to St. Louis’ residents and businesses, and they consumed a vast amount of the fuel. This practice made St. Louis one of the sootiest cities in the nation, surpassing even Chicago and Pittsburgh in terms of coal soot emitted into the air. The city government made a number of efforts to reduce air pollution, starting with the passage of anti-smoke ordinances in the 1890s, but these efforts had little effect as the city continued to grow (and smoke emissions in conjuncture with it) and in the face of vigorous opposition to restrictions on the use Illinois coal—the principal culprit. In 1937 the St. Louis Board of Alderman mandated that all coal burned in the city be washed. While coal-washing did reduce the amount of sulfur in the air, it did not appreciably reduce overall smoke emissions. In late 1939, the city endured three weeks where the smoke hung low over the

city, blocking out the sun. One day, November 28, was so dark that it was referred to as “Black Tuesday.” The following spring, the Board of Aldermen followed the recommendations of its Smoke Commissioner, Raymond Tucker, and banned the use of Illinois coal except when mechanical stokers were used. To ease the financial burden of those citizens with furnaces lacking stokers, the city government made arrangements with the Frisco Railroad to ship hard Arkansas coal to St. Louis at a reduced cost. This decision resulted in a dramatic decrease in smoke emissions during the winter of 1940-1941. A natural gas pipeline from the South was completed to the city around this same time, thus providing a cheap alternative to coal in the future (Primm 1981:474-477). St. Louis finally banned the burning of all southern Illinois coal within its limits in 1951, restricting coal usage to hard anthracite (Nunes 1995:140). The restrictions on the use of bituminous coal in St. Louis represented a major blow to St. Clair County’s coal industry, and this setback was compounded by the gradual elimination of steam locomotives in favor of diesel-powered ones during the same period. Both of these changes would have resulted in a decreased need for the East St. Louis coal washer.

Another factor that suggests that the coal washer had closed by the early 1950s is its absence from the 1955 Sanborn maps for East St. Louis. This series of maps, which encompass four bound volumes, covers most of East St. Louis and sections of the communities directly adjoining it, including Monsanto (Sauget). The maps illustrate several commercial properties close to the coal washer, including G. J. Nooney and Company’s Mississippi Avenue Warehouse to the east and the Cahokia Power Plant on the south, but omit the washer. If the coal washer was still in operation in 1955, it is reasonable to assume that it too would have been illustrated on the Sanborn maps (Sanborn Map Company 1955, Vol 4:408, 410). The Cahokia Power Plant is believed to have shut down during the early 1970s.⁸

Summary and Conclusions:

The archival research found that the Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company’s East St. Louis coal washer was constructed in late 1912 and/or early 1913, and that the facility remained in operation through at least January 1942 (based on the coal inspector’s ledger). Although the research did not yield a similarly firm date for the closure of the coal washer, circumstantial evidence—the closure of the last mine associated with washer (Mine No. 7), the decline of the St. Louis soft coal market, and the absence of the washer on the 1955 Sanborn maps—strongly suggests that the coal washer ceased operating between 1942 and 1953. Given the frequent change in ownership of Mine No. 7 after 1942, it is possible that the washer may have closed as early as 1942-1943.

⁸ The exact date of the plant’s closure was not determined. However, a long-time Village of Sauget employee (questioned over the phone) believes the plant closed during the early 1970s. This is corroborated by a 1979 report on the impact of the 1977-1978 coal strike on electrical utilities in Illinois, which does not list Cahokia among the coal-fire power plants operating during the strike (Illinois Bureau of Budget and Office of Planning 1979:31).

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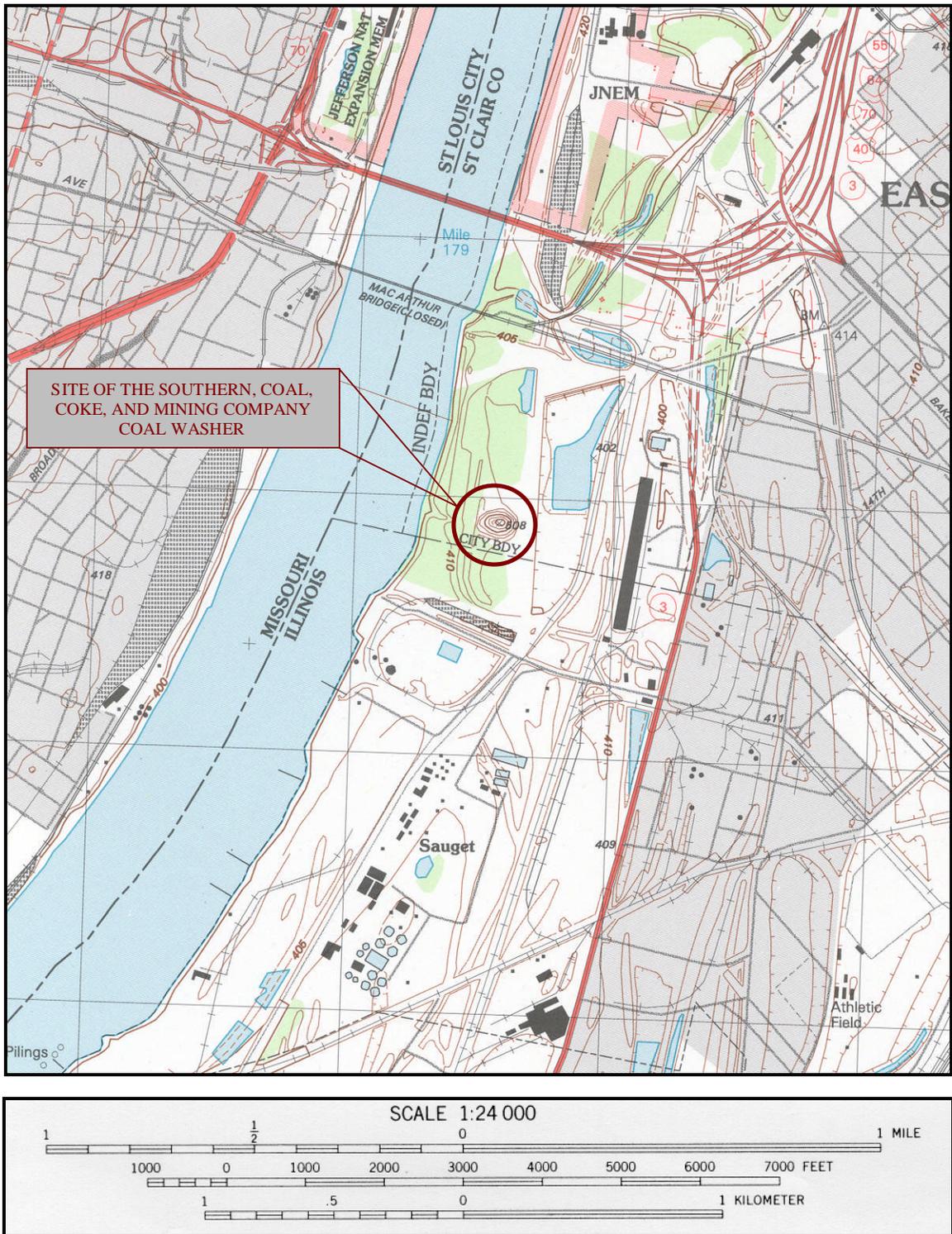


Figure 1. United States Geological Survey (USGS) map showing the location of the Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining coal washer in East St. Louis (USGS 1998).

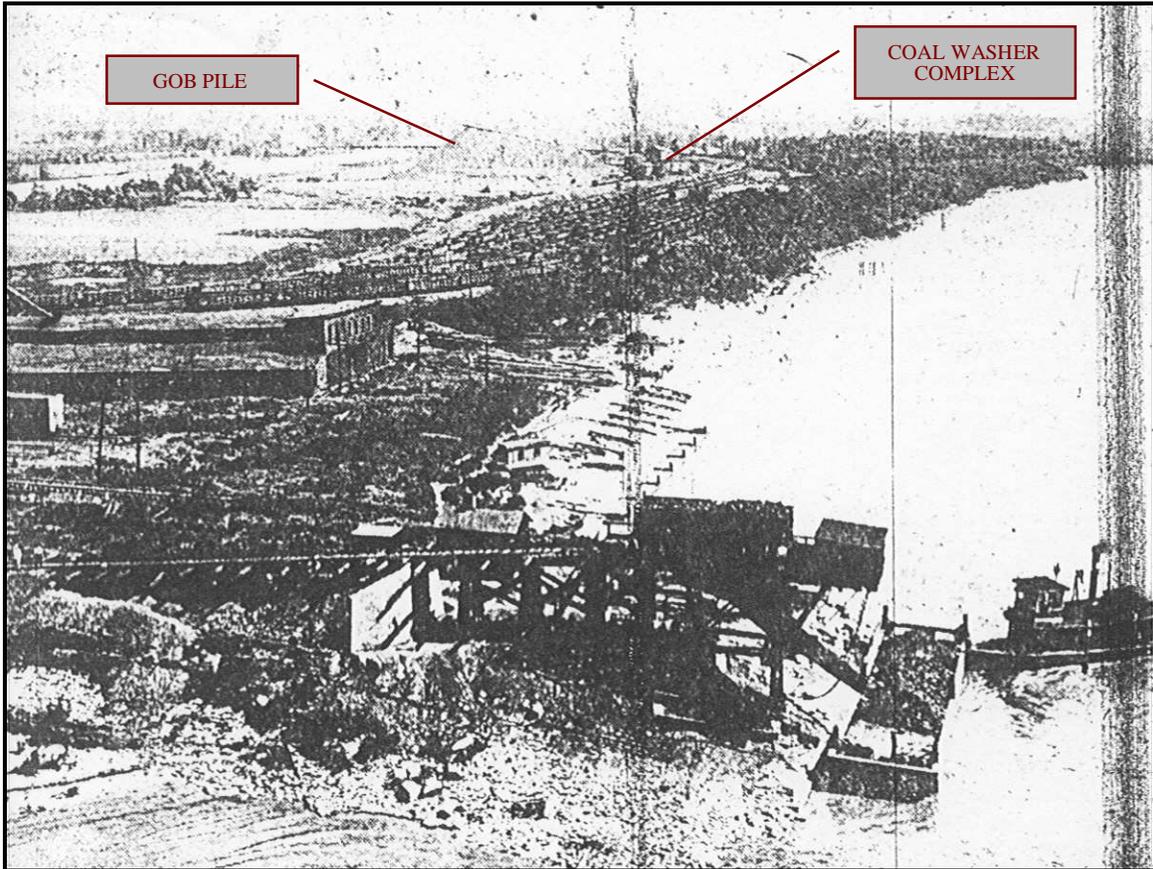


Figure 2. Copy of a 1925 photograph of the Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company's barge terminal in East St. Louis. The company's coal washer appears in the background (Labeling has been added). A large rail yard, filled with coal cars, lies between the barge terminal and washer. This photograph originally was published in the January 4, 1925 edition of the *East St. Louis Daily Journal* (sec. 4, p. 1, col. 4). The reproduction shown above was scanned from a microfilm copy of the newspaper.

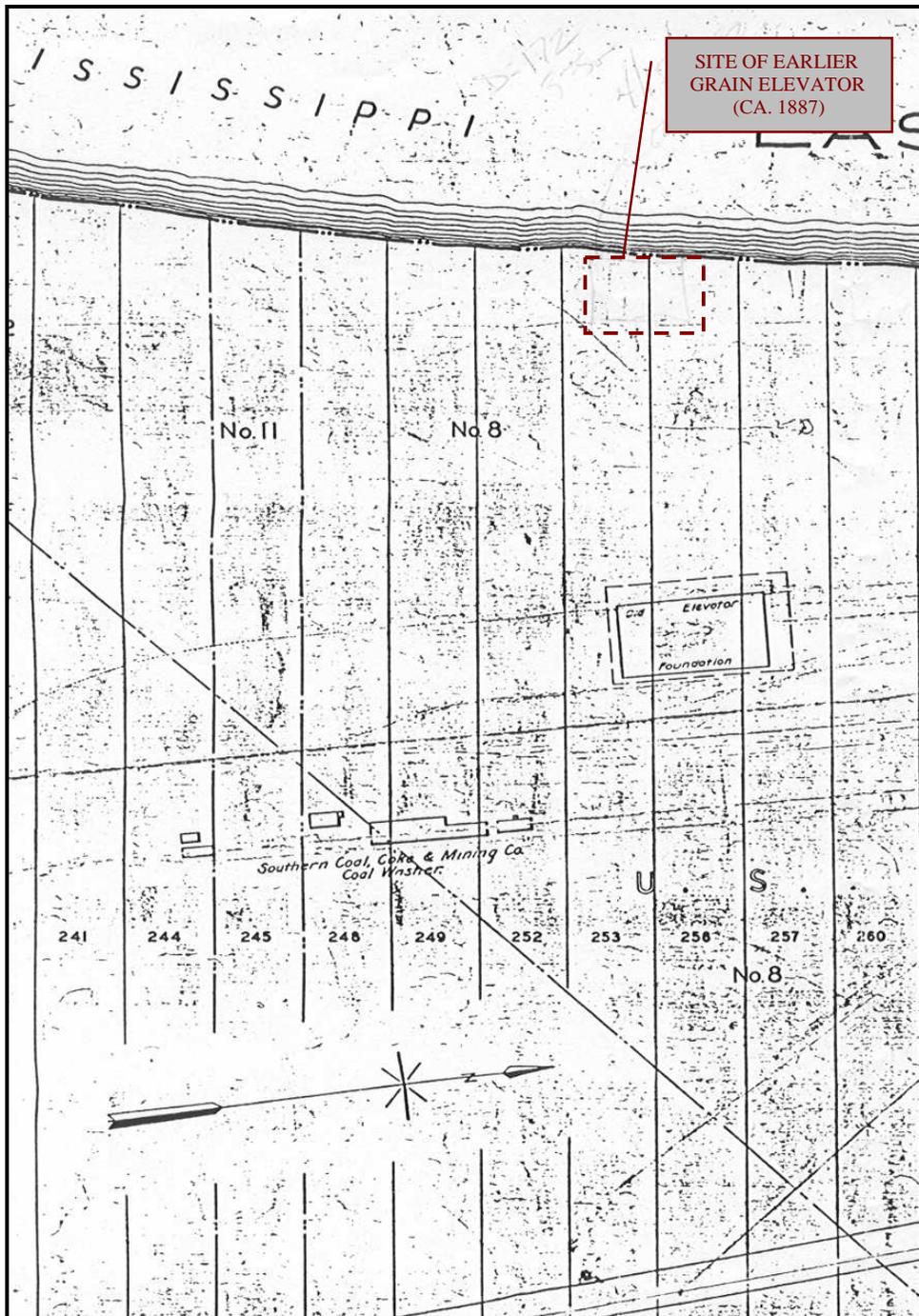


Figure 3. Detail from a 1927 Station Map for the Southern Railway, showing the Southern Coal, Coke, and Mining Company's coal washer. The footprints of five buildings at the facility are illustrated on the map. The gob pile associated with the coal washer is not shown. Also of interest on the map is the foundations of the grain elevator that burned down in December 1912. The site of an earlier river-based grain elevator also has been indicated, for general information purposes.

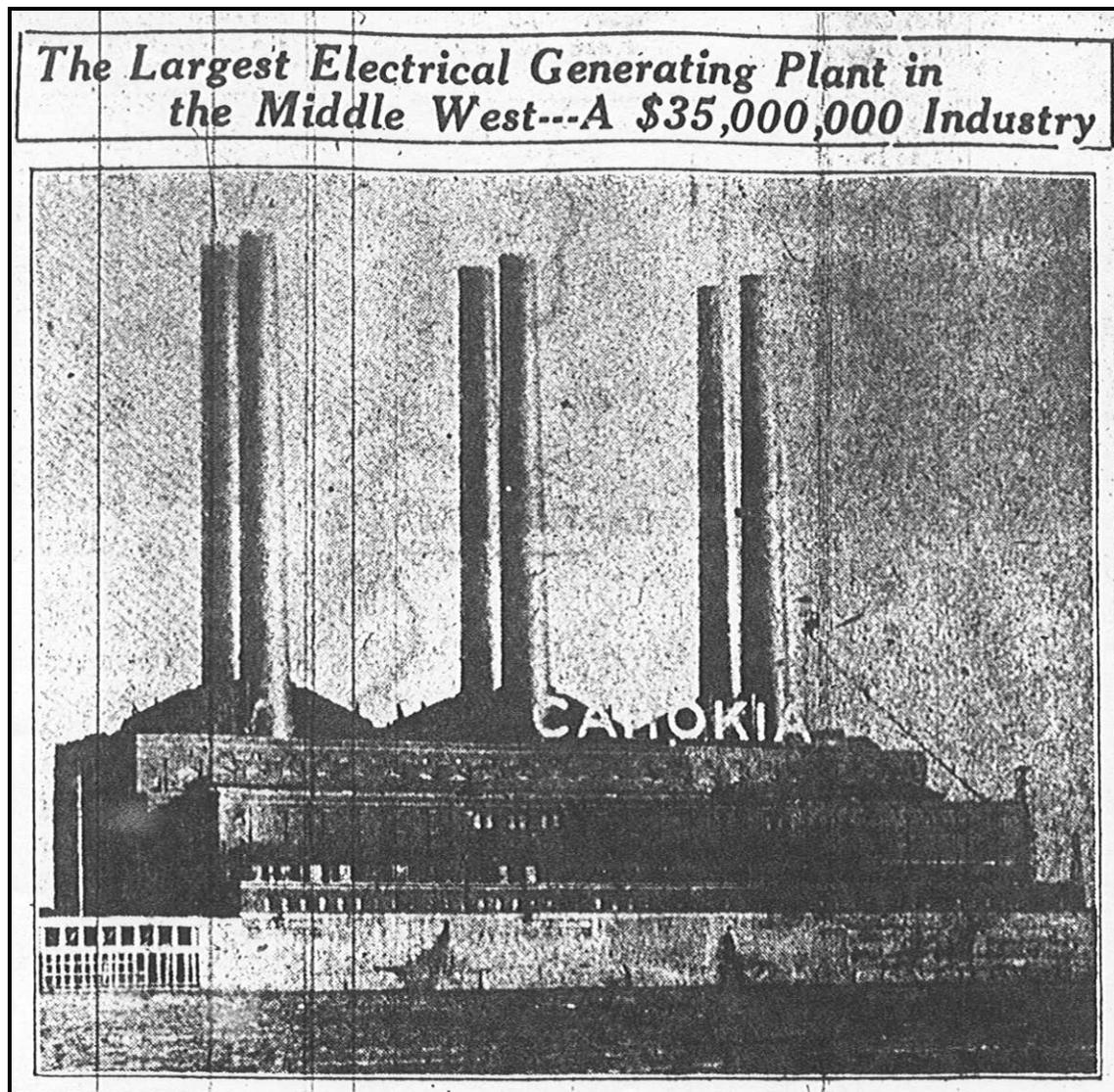


Figure 4. Copy of a photograph of the Cahokia Power Plant published in the *East St. Louis Daily Journal* on May 11, 1930 (p. 10D, col. 8). The power plant was coal-fired and possibly burned fuel processed at the adjacent coal washer, though this is not known with certainty. The plant is believed to have shut down during the early 1970s. The reproduction above was scanned from a microfilm copy of the newspaper.