

# SEARCHING FOR THE SLAVES QUARTERS: ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE PIERRE MENARD HOUSE STATE HISTORIC SITE, RANDOLPH COUNTY, ILLINOIS

*By Christopher Stratton and Floyd Mansberger*

## INTRODUCTION

The Pierre Menard Home State Historic Site is located in southern Randolph County, Illinois, approximately six miles northwest of the city of Chester. The site lies on a colluvial terrace facing the Mis-

Menard resided in this house from 1802 until his death in 1844. In 1929, the Pierre Menard home was purchased by the State of Illinois and was designated a state historic site (Figure 8), (Fort Kaskaskia State Historic Site).

One aspect of the Pierre Menard Home that has been acknowledged, but little researched in the past, is the presence of enslaved Africans on the property between 1802 and 1848. Purchased prior to statehood, these Africans continued servitude was insured by the 1818 Illinois state constitution. Slave labor was probably employed in the construction of the house, and slaves were later engaged as house servants and as farm laborers. Although the presence of enslaved Africans at the site is well documented in census records, virtually nothing is known about their living quarters, diet, and material culture. The lives of enslaved Africans in the United States have been the subject of increased study by historians in recent years. Due to the paucity of traditional historical sources pertaining to the lives of these individuals, archaeology has the potential to play an important role in this endeavor. Aside from providing valuable site-specific in-

Flesher 1999). The objectives of this archaeological project were threefold: 1) locate the remains of the early nineteenth-century cabins occupied by the Menard family's slaves and/or servants; 2) assess the integrity of these subsurface archaeological remains, if present; and 3) work with volunteers to promote the history of the site and an appreciation of historical archaeology. To promote the volunteer participation, we conducted the initial excavations over two weekends (June 12-14 and 20-21), followed by three days in mid-week (June 24-26) to complete the initial investigations and backfill the excavation units. Both weekends were partially rained out, making volunteer attendance limited, and by midweek, the temperatures had soared

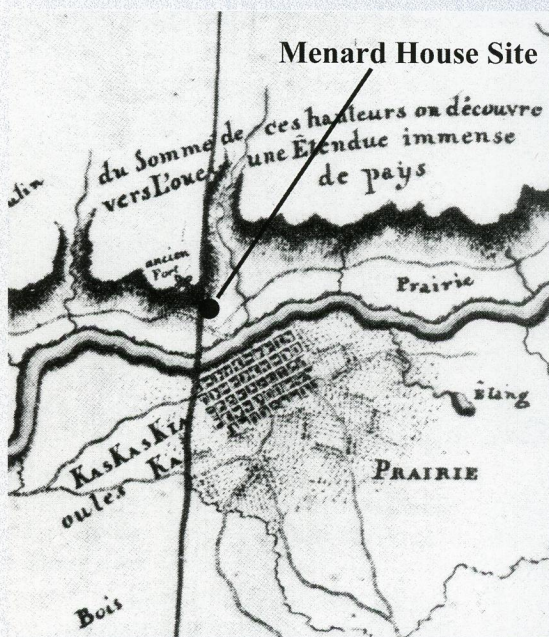


Figure 1. Location of the Menard House, as illustrated on the 1797-1798 de Finel map. This map was drawn just a few years before the Menard Home is believed to have been constructed. Significant features on the map include the town of Kaskaskia and the long-abandoned French fort on the bluff opposite the town. Although the map illustrates no houses on the east bank of the Kaskaskia River, historical accounts suggest that there was a dwelling(s) opposite the town during the eighteenth century. This is also suggested by the discovery of French-era faience in the east yard of the Menard Home (map on file, Fever River Research, Springfield).

issippi River and Kaskaskia Island beyond (Figure 1). The center piece of the historic site is the mansion believed to have been completed by Pierre Menard (Figure 2) in 1802. This residence is regarded as one best examples of French-colonial architecture in the upper Mississippi River valley. Menard, an affluent merchant and prominent politician, is best known for his service as Illinois first Lieutenant Governor (1818-1822).

formation, the archaeological record can provide useful comparative data for other slave-related sites and also challenge long-held assumptions about slave life.

In March 1998, Fever River Research was requested by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency's Historic Sites Division to conduct archaeological testing in the yard lying to the south of the Menard House and within that area of the suspected cabins (Stratton and



Figure 2. Pierre Menard (Buck 1917: opposite 312).

into the upper 90s. Based on the success of this fieldwork, though, it was decided to return to the site in the fall and excavate two more test units. These final test units were excavated over a three-day period in mid-November (November 11-13).



## HISTORICAL SETTING

The early history of the Menard house and its original owner, Pierre Menard, are intimately tied to the old town of Kaskaskia, which was situated on the opposite side of the Kaskaskia River. Founded in 1703 by Jesuit missionaries, Kaskaskia was the largest town in the Illinois Country during the French period. Although Kaskaskia suffered a slow decline throughout the British and American periods, the community remained the center of the political and social life in Illinois into the first decades of the nineteenth century. Between 1809 and 1818, the town served as the capital of the Illinois Territory and subsequently served as the state capital during the first year of statehood (1818-1819). After the removal of the capital to Vandalia in

cated to Kaskaskia and opened a store in partnership with Toussaint Du Bois. In addition to his mercantile business, he continued in the fur trade (*Outdoor Illinois* 1964:16).

Menard quickly rose in social and political prominence in Kaskaskia, and he was able to adapt to and flourish under the American regime far more successfully than the majority of his fellow Frenchmen. Aside from achieving success in his commercial

major in the Randolph County militia by



Figure 3. Detail of circa 1870s photograph of the Pierre Menard House illustrating the corner of the suspected slave quarters (at right) (Holbrook 1893: opposite page 218).

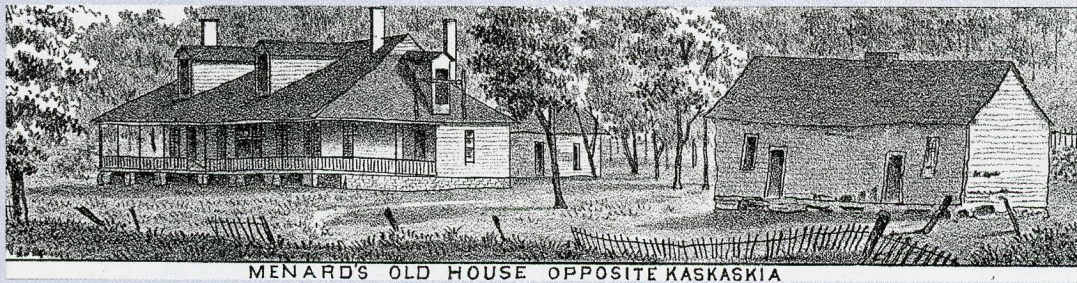


Figure 4. Vignette from an 1875 lithograph of Kaskaskia, Illinois depicting Menard's Old House Opposite Kaskaskia. The building illustrated at the far right of the vignette is suspected to be one of the former slave quarters (Brink 1875). Note the central chimney, stone foundations, and double-pen footprint of the dwelling.

1819, Kaskaskia continued to function as the county seat of Randolph County. It served in this capacity until 1844, when the devastating flood of that year prompted the removal of the county offices to the town of Chester.

Pierre Menard's association with Kaskaskia lasted for more than half a century. Menard was born in St. Antoine-sur-Richelieu, near Montreal, Canada on October 7, 1766. At the age of fifteen he entered the fur trade, and in 1787 he moved to Vincennes, Indiana where he was employed by Colonel Francois Vigo, a merchant and fur trader. Two years later, Menard relo-

ventures, Menard had a notable political career. In 1795, a mere four years after his arrival in Kaskaskia, he was appointed

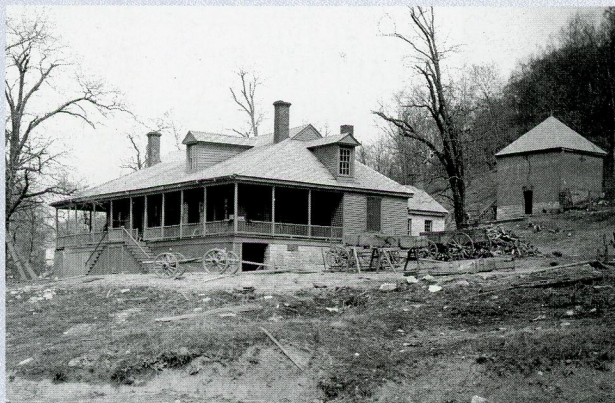


Figure 5. The Pierre Menard House during the middle to late-nineteenth century (Photograph on file, Menard House State Historic Site). Note the removal of the western dormer. The east side yard immediately adjacent to the house is being used as a staging area for wagons and fire wood. Note the relatively uniform slope along this area and its relative height to the adjacent building. Today, this area appears to have a much different slope with a surface that is much higher in relationship to the building. As such, it appears that the side yard has received considerable amount of fill during the very late-nineteenth and/or early-twentieth centuries.

Governor Arthur St. Clair. He was reappointed to this position in 1800, and in 1806 he was elevated to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the militia. In 1801, Menard was appointed judge of the Court of Common Pleas, a position which he would hold for the next ten years. Between 1803 and 1809, he was elected to consecutive terms as Randolph County's delegate to the legislature of the Indiana Territory. He continued to serve as the county's delegate following the formation of a separate Illinois Territory in 1809. Despite the intense factionalism that characterized this period of Illinois politics, Menard appears to have largely remained a political independent and was able to rely on his personal popularity to assure his success in politics (Buck 1917:202). An often-cited indicator of his popularity is the fact that the 1818 state constitutional convention specifically altered the constitution's citizenship statute for state officers in order to allow him to become the state's first lieutenant governor. As originally written, the statute required that the officer be a United States citizen for thirty years. Menard, however, had become a citizen only two years before. Menard served as lieutenant governor for one term (1818-1822) before retiring from elective office.

Emblematic of Pierre Menard's financial and political success was the house he erected on the east bank of the



Kaskaskia River in 1802. Located on a terrace below a long-abandoned French-era fort, this spacious one-story, timber-frame house was built in the French-colonial style and occupied a prominent position facing the town of Kaskaskia. Menard had ready access to Kaskaskia via a public ferry he operated a short distance upstream from his house.

In addition to his own family, Pierre Menard's household is known to have included a number of enslaved Africans. Under the terms of the 1818 state constitution, any Africans enslaved in Illinois prior to statehood remained in servitude indefinitely, unless freed by their masters. The children of slaves born after 1818 also remained in servitude until reaching a fixed age, which was set at age 30 for males and 21 for females (Buck 1917:277). Census records from 1810 indicate that Menard

26-44. By 1830, the number of slaves on the Menard property had grown to 22. There is no evidence of Pierre Menard



*Figure 6. Middle to late-nineteenth century photograph of the Pierre Menard House illustrating use of the side yard as a hog butchering area. Iron scalding kettles with wood fires beneath them are in the foreground. Scalded and recently gutted hog carcasses are trussed up on temporary cross arms positioned in the side yard. The recovery of numerous hog teeth within Test 2 confirms this activity within this area.*

ever emancipating any of his slaves during his lifetime (Erin Bishop, personal communication). Menard died in 1844, and it is possible that his heirs held slaves until slavery was finally abolished by the 1848 state constitution. Even after that date, it is possible that some of the emancipated Africans may have remained on the property in the employ of the Menard family.

## THE SLAVES QUARTERS

Unfortunately, very little is known about the location or configuration of the slave quarters that were once located at the Menard

Home. Given the fact that 22 enslaved Africans are known to have resided on the property in 1830 (a number which potentially grew, due to new births, over the next decade), there were probably multiple slave dwellings present on the property at

one time or another. Presently, only two images are known that illustrate dwellings that have been interpreted as the slave quarters. The first is a black-and-white photograph labeled Menard's Mansion, Kaskaskia, Illinois which illustrates the south and east sides of the Menard Home (Figure 3) (Holbrook 1893:opposite page 218). Partially exposed within the right margin of the photograph, is a single-story, frame structure located in the east side yard of the house. This structure appears to be sitting on relatively tall stone piers. The only opening visible on this structure in the photograph is a single window. The photograph seems to indicate that the roof has a slight bell to it, suggesting that the structure was quite old at the time the photograph was taken.

The second illustration of the servants quarters is a small vignette included with the 1875 bird's-eye view of Kaskaskia. The vignette is labeled Menard's Old House Opposite Kaskaskia (Figure 4) (Brink 1875). This detail of the Menard Home appears to have been contemporaneous with the photograph discussed above. The similarity in the two images (note the presence of what appears to represent frame scaffolding in front of the east dormer in both images) suggests that the lithograph may actually have been drawn from a photograph taken at the same time as the one presented here. The lithograph depicts two structures within the east yard of the Menard Home. The structure closest to the Menard Home is a single-story, double-pen, frame dwelling with a large central chimney. The presence of the large central chimney suggests that the



*Figure 7. View of the Pierre Menard House during the flood of 1903. The building to the left of the photograph is the Illinois Southern Railroad depot (On file, Pierre Menard House State Historic Site).*

had seven slaves on his homestead. By 1820, this number had grown to 13. This number included nine males, two of whom were under age 14, two aged 14-25, four aged 26-44, and one who was over age 45. The four female Africans present included two women between the ages of 14 and 25 and two who were aged



*Figure 8. Photograph of the Menard Home, showing present conditions.*



two rooms within this dwelling were separated by large, back-to-back fireplaces that serviced each room. Each of the two rooms has a single window and exterior

sible that this structure may have quarantined slaves and/or servants at one point in time, the general form of the structure is atypical of a domestic building, and

ing the 1970s excavations (some of which probably dated from the early years of the nineteenth century), no cultural features were discovered (Brown 1975). The only other archaeology conducted at the Menard House was a survey by American Resources Group (ARG) in 1994 for the placement of a water line through the site (Howe 1994). This survey transect cut through the area east of the house in that area of the suspected servant quarters but failed to document their archaeological presence.

The objectives of the 1998 investigations conducted by Fever River Research at the Menard Site were to identify the location of the slave and/or servant quarters, and to assess their archaeological integrity. The 1998 research design consisted of two separate strategies. Initially, a series of screened shovel tests were excavated across the eastern yard in hopes of isolating a midden, or layer of refuse deposits, with the appropriate early nineteenth century signature. Hopefully, with the identification of an appropriate midden, the next phase of the work was to consist of the excavation of a series of 1-x-2 m (3.3 ft. x 6.5 ft.) excavation units to expose potential subsurface features (such as foundation remains) (Figure 9).

Our initial investigations consisted of excavating a series of screened post

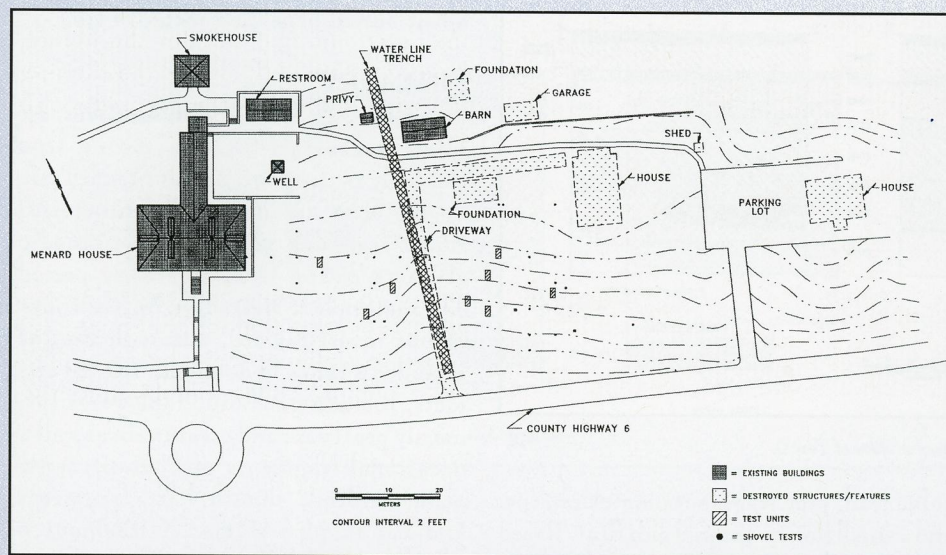


Figure 9. Site map showing intrusions in east side yard of the Menard Home and locations of test units and shovel units excavated by Fever River Research in 1998. The water line trench surveyed by American Resource Group in 1994 is shown at the left-center of the figure.

door on the front of the building (the west elevation). No openings were present within the east elevation. The sash within the west bay's window appears to be missing. Similarly, apparently loose and missing weatherboards suggest that the dwelling was in an abandoned or dilapidated state by 1875. It is difficult to determine whether the building rested on stone piers or a perimeter foundation from this illustration. The southwest corner of a second structure is also illustrated in the far margin of this lithograph. Very little can be determined about this second, single-story structure other than it appears to be sited slightly closer to the road than the previous dwelling.

Later photographs of the Menard Home (Figures 5, 6, 7) do not show either of the ancillary dwellings depicted in the 1875 vignette. Based on their dilapidated appearance in 1875, the dwellings were likely destroyed prior to 1900. Following the purchase of the Menard Home by the State of Illinois in 1929, the large two-story, hip-roofed, brick structure located at the rear of the house was interpreted as the Slave Quarters. Even today, many local residents refer to this building as such. Although it is pos-

historic photographs indicate that it was originally devoid of window openings. This structure is currently interpreted as a large smoke house.

## ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE MENARD HOME

Previous archaeological investigations at the Menard Home have been limited in scope. During the summer of 1974 several students, under the guidance of Dr. Margaret Kimball Brown, conducted two weeks of investigations at the site. The Brown excavations were conducted in hopes of discovering the remains of outbuildings once located around the house. The researchers excavated a broad pattern of randomly placed test units around the main house, and then concentrated on the area east of the house. Although a wide range of cultural material was encountered dur-



Figure 10. View of the shallow trench feature encountered at the base of Test 5. The fill in this trench included brick, stone, and possible daubing, all of which are indicative of construction and/or demolition activity. It is possible that the trench represents either a drip line (potentially one associated with the southern of the two outbuildings illustrated in the 1875 vignette of the Menard Home) or a mud sill.

holes on a 10-m (33 ft.) grid in hopes of locating intact midden deposits and possible features. Near the house the nine-



teenth-century ground surface (and associated midden) seemed to be intact at or near the existing surface. Proceeding far-

whitewares, as well as an unusual piece of Egyptian Black from a suspected teapot), early container glass, both melted and

sumed, the historic ground surface in this part of the yard was in fact preserved beneath nearly one meter (3.3 ft.) of overburden and intact subsurface features from this period may, indeed, be present, albeit buried beneath a meter of fill.

## SUMMARY

Although we did not uncover any intact subsurface features dating from the early occupation of the Menard Site in the first decades of the nineteenth century, we did uncover a wide range of artifacts dating from this early period. The materials recovered during the course of our investigations, although limited, included a range of domestic-related artifacts, including ceramic tablewares (primarily pearlware and creamware as well as occasional fragments of faience), bottle glass, multiple mouth harp fragments, and kaolin pipe stems. A fragment of what may be an Egyptian Black teapot was also recovered. The Egyptian Black sherds (similar to ones recovered from the Jarrot Mansion in nearby Cahokia) represent fairly high status items for this

Colonial period. Arms-related artifacts were also recovered; these include a small honey-colored gunflint as well as several pieces of melted and cube lead potentially associated with the manufacture of musket balls. The faience and heavily patinated dark green/black container glass recovered offers tantalizing evidence for a late eighteenth-century component on the site. The material recovered during the course of these investigations leads us to believe that we were very close to the location of a struc-

ture in the east side yard, just southeast of the knoll on which the Menard House sits. The midden data coupled with the

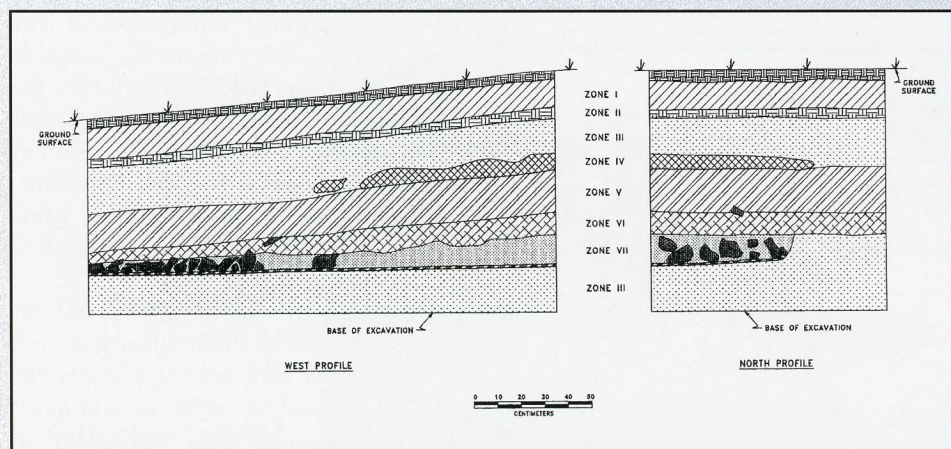


Figure 11. North and west wall profiles of Test 6.

ther east, approximately 35 to 60 meters (116 to 198 ft.) east of the Menard House, the shovel tests indicated that the original ground surface (and its early nineteenth-century midden) dipped substantially, and was buried by approximately one meter (3.3 ft.) of twentieth-century fill deposits (Figure 5). Three 1-x-2 m (3.3 ft. x 6.5 ft.) test units were then excavated in the side yard immediately adjacent to the extant house, in that area where the historic midden was at the present ground surface. Historic photographs dating to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries indicate that this area of the yard was utilized as a multi-purpose work area, including such diverse tasks as hog butchering, fire wood storage, and wagon repair (Figure 6). Unfortunately no features or significant early midden were located in this area.

Initially, two additional 1-x-2 m (3.3 ft. x 6.5 ft.) test units were excavated further downslope to the east, in the area of the potential buried midden. As the shovel tests had indicated, the early nineteenth-century ground surface we were seeking was much deeper in this area than anyone had previously supposed. Although no features were found in these initial tests, and the size of the material recovered was small, the artifact density in one of these tests was fairly high. A number of interesting late eighteenth and early nineteenth century artifacts were found, including a wide range of ceramic tablewares (faience, creamware, pearlware, and

cubic lead, pipe fragments, mouth harps, and a small honey-colored gun flint. Based on the results of these two initial tests in this area, we subsequently excavated three additional tests nearby.

In addition to recovering similar late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century artifacts, we encountered in one of the test units a shallow trench-like feature, running northwest by southeast, perpendicular to the orientation of the test unit (Figure 10). The fill in this trench included a concentration of burned stone, small pieces of bone, brick, metal fragments, and a piece of what may be mud daubing. This feature may represent a drip line or a depression left by the sill plate of a frame or log structure. In another one of the tests, we found a concentration of stone and mortar that may represent a collapsed building pier (Figures 11 and 12). Hence, rather than being stripped away or badly disturbed as initially pre-

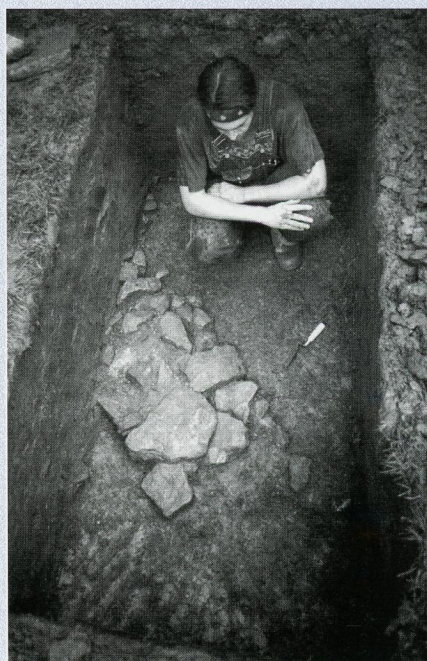


Figure 12. View of the concentration of stone and mortar encountered near the base of Test 6. Although this stone was not in-situ, its linear character—coupled with the density of mortar between the stones—suggests that it may represent a collapsed pier or similar demolition-related activity.



structural debris especially the presence of mortar in context with stone strongly substantiates this hypothesis.

The results of the 1998 archaeologi-

should focus on identifying this buried surface and determining the presence of intact features (such as foundation remains). Although we are confident that

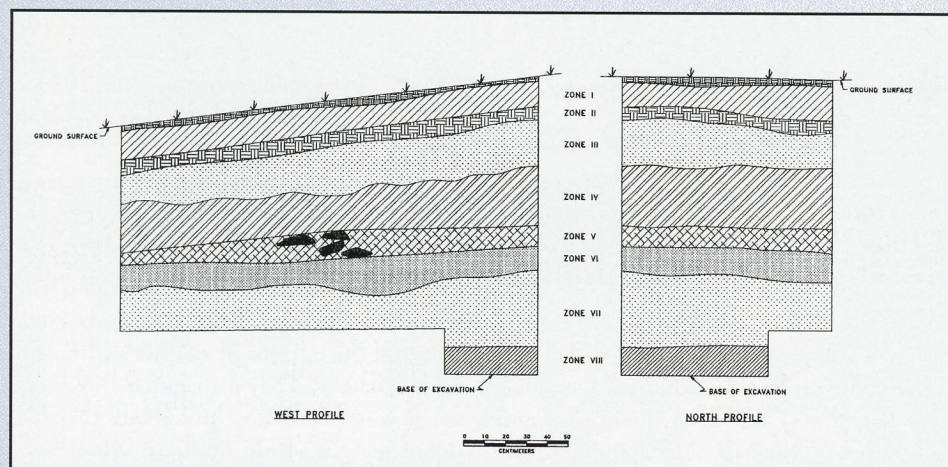


Figure 13. North and west wall profiles of Test 7.

cal investigations at the Menard Home suggest that the remains of the slave and/or servants quarters may indeed lay fairly well preserved, but buried, under approximately one meter (2-3 ft.) of post-1890s fill (Figures 13 and 14). Although we had initially suspected that this area had been impacted by the construction and subsequent demolition of multiple buildings during the early to middle twentieth century, these deposits appear to have been partially preserved beneath this fill. Presently we do not know if this material (which appears to be resting on an intact ground surface) has been re-deposited from farther upslope. This may have occurred during the early twentieth century, when the caretaker's residence and other buildings were constructed. Nonetheless, based on the results of the current work, we suspect that intact deposits will be located.

Additional investigations will be necessary to determine whether these deposits are indeed *in situ*, or in their original undisturbed placement. Future research

an early- to mid-nineteenth century ground surface is intact in the east yard, we cannot be certain how much structural integrity might remain of the buildings that are depicted in the circa 1875 lithograph and photograph. This site has the potential to reveal much that is unrecorded about both the enslaved Africans



Figure 14. View of the west wall profile of Test 7. Note the deep character of the fills and the concentration of stone lying on top of the ca. 1800-1890 ground surface.

known to have lived there, as well as the family of a prominent business and political leader of the Illinois Territorial period. More extensive excavations would be needed to assess the integrity of the structural remains and activity areas associated with the early occupation of the Pierre Menard Home.

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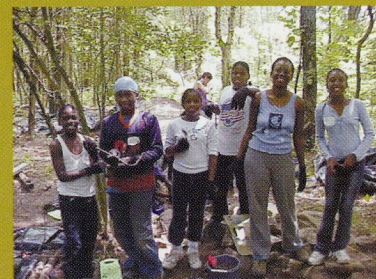


## Archaeology and African-American Heritage: Places on the Pathways of Freedom

Illinois Archaeology Awareness Month - September 2005

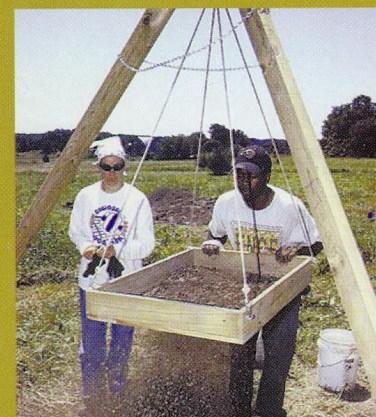


Above: This ornate milk glass lid liner is part of an assemblage of domestic artifacts discovered at a 19th-century African-American dwelling at New Philadelphia.



Above: Students and teachers are learning about the surprisingly diverse heritage of southern Illinois from excavations at Miller Grove, an antebellum free African-American community settled by freed slaves from Tennessee. The Millers, Sydes, Dabbs and Singletons all came to southern Illinois during the 1840s, and were soon followed by other free people of color. Miller Grove consisted of scattered farmsteads on land that is now included within the Shawnee National Forest.

Below: College students from across the country, working with archaeologists and historians, are exploring the social history of the many residents of New Philadelphia in Pike County, the first town legally founded by a free African American. Planned and platted by Free Frank McWorter in 1836, New Philadelphia likely served as part of the underground railroad in western Illinois, and existed as a multi-racial community through the 1920s.



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Murrah Kathleen Farrell, Friends of Community Public Art, Joliet, Illinois



# Places on the Pathways of Freedom

## FROM THE EDITOR . . .

With *Archaeology and African-American Heritage in Illinois: Places on the Pathways of Freedom*, we present the vital role of archaeology in telling stories of Illinois past, stories that are usually confined to the realms of history and tradition. From Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable, founder of Chicago, to the residents of Miller Grove in southern Illinois, archaeological investigations give tangible evidence of the everyday lives of pioneering families. Sometimes, we can link modern-day descendants to their ancestors. The articles here give historical background to diverse investigations, some of which are just starting to unearth the bits and pieces of broken artifacts that together provide a window to the past.

When I've spoken to friends and colleagues about this issue's theme, many expressed surprise that African-American archaeology exists in Illinois. Those who are aware of recent investigations are surprised that we gathered six articles on the topic, ranging from the search for slave quarters at Pierre Menard's home site, to the broader implications of heritage tourism development as New Philadelphia draws greater national recognition. We extend our appreciation to the archaeologists, historians, and graphics artists who prepared the articles, and to Kelvin Sampson, who prepared the layout and design of this expanded issue. Thanks to their efforts, we are able to present a broad perspective on African-American ethnicity and archaeological sites, a fitting recognition for this year's Illinois Archaeology Awareness Month.

*Alice Berkson*

## ON THE COVER . . .

The 2005 Illinois Archaeology Awareness Month (IAAM) poster, created by Jason W. Howell of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, is available by getting in touch with Karen Poulson, Chair of the IAAM committee, at [klpoulson@netzero.com](mailto:klpoulson@netzero.com), or 773.384.8134.

IAAM is held annually in September, presenting opportunities for the public to learn about the state's remarkable prehistoric and historical heritage. Professional and amateur archaeologists join together to present programs and exhibits throughout the state. There are archaeological sites, historic parks, local museums and historical societies where you can learn first-hand about archaeology in Illinois. Visit the IAAM web site <[www.illinoisarchaeology.org](http://www.illinoisarchaeology.org)>.

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