

An Historical Archaeologist's View of Early Illinois Foodways: Some Initial Ramblings by a Lover of Food

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November 12, 2009



The basics of human life include *Food, Shelter, and Clothing*. Of these three, *food* (and the associated liquid drink) is obviously the most important. Historical and anthropological studies of the variety of foods eaten, as well as the ways its prepared, stored, and consumed, can tell social scientists a great deal about the peoples consuming that food.



Traditional historical and/or archival resources have contributed dramatically to our understanding of past foodways practices.

Sources include, but are obviously not limited to

- 1) written travel accounts and histories,
- 2) newspaper advertisements,
- 3) diaries,
- 4) genre paintings, lithographs, and period photographs
- 5) cookbooks

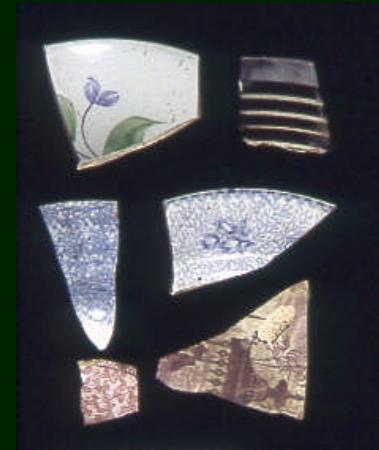
Unfortunately, published sources can often be biased and/or reflect an ideal that was seldom achieved, or overly exaggerated (as with the primitive character of early foodways and the perception of frontier living conditions).

Ethnographic Research and/or the study of the current eating traditions of modern peoples has also contributed significantly to our understanding of our eating habits. Ethnic and/or regional differences are easily recognizable in central Illinois foodways today. Such culinary delights as burgoo, corn bread, sauerkraut, Pad Thai, and pasty are all foods created by different ethnic groups during earlier times, but enjoyed by individuals from various backgrounds today.



Author enjoying traditional Uzbek meal of plov and lepushka in Tashkent—comparing street food (left) to home-cooked version (right).

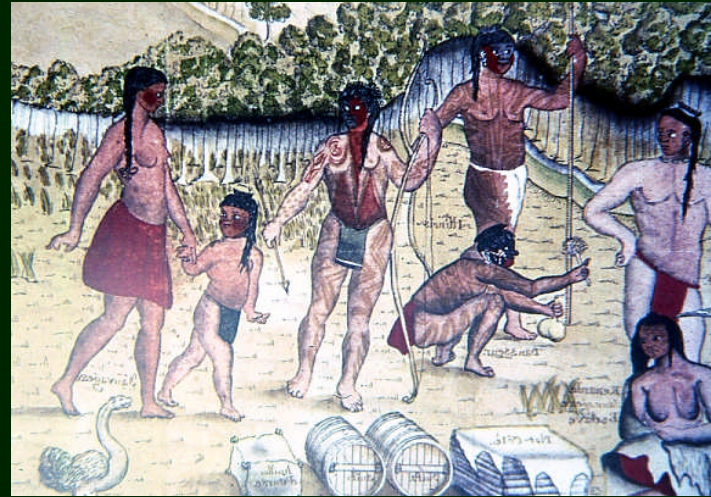
Archaeology is a methodology that brings a *material culture approach* to the study of foodways. It is the goal of archaeologists to understand man's past lifeways through the study of the artifacts used and discarded by those past peoples. By adding the dimension of time to the study of mankind, archaeologists are, in essence, creating ethnographies of the past.



And ultimately, archaeology
is about people...

—whether prehistoric
Native Americans or more
recent European
Americans—

... and their adaptation to
the environments in which
they live in.



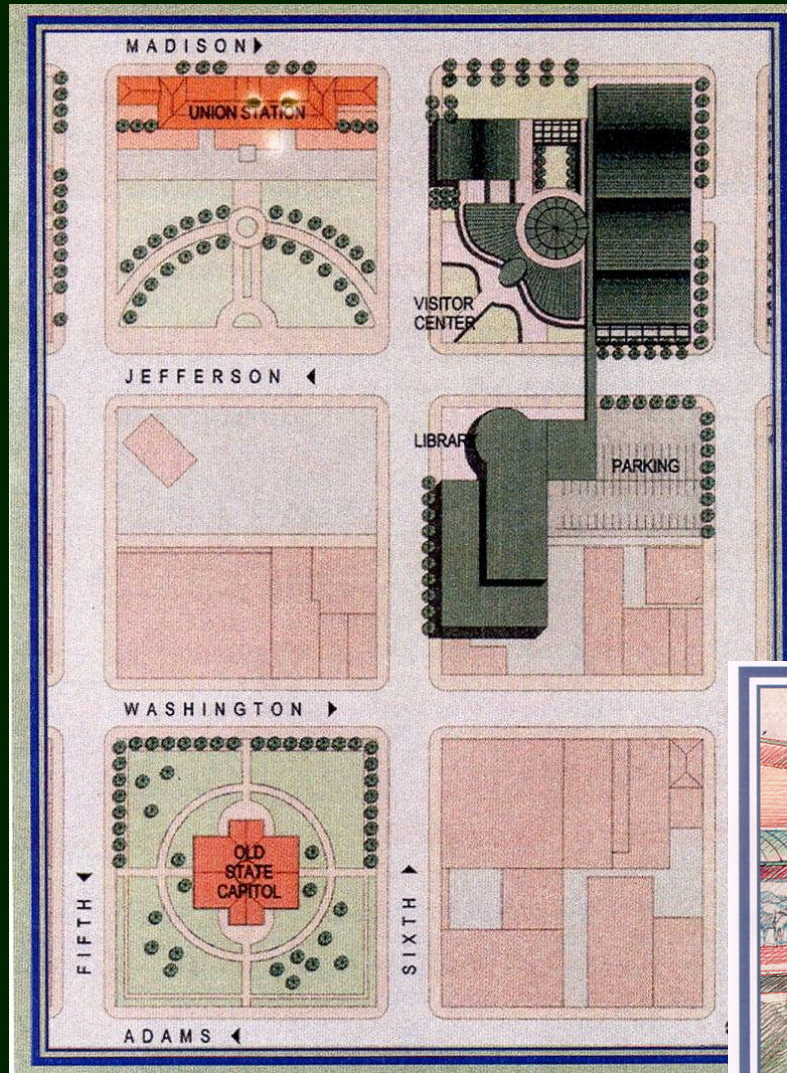
Archaeologists study artifacts and artifact assemblages. Although individual artifacts can often be significant, to the archaeologist *artifact assemblages* (a collection of artifacts from a single *context*) often contain greater research value, as they convey information relevant to a specific *time* and *place*. Archaeologists use the term “feature” in reference to non-portable artifacts such as pits and structures. These “archaeological features” often contain large artifact assemblages.



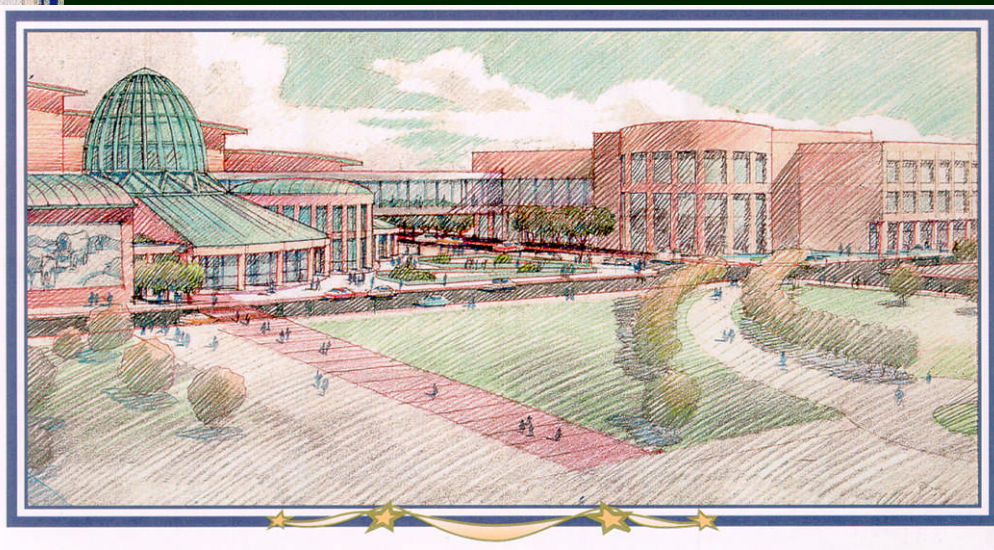
Middle Woodland pit (100 A.D.)



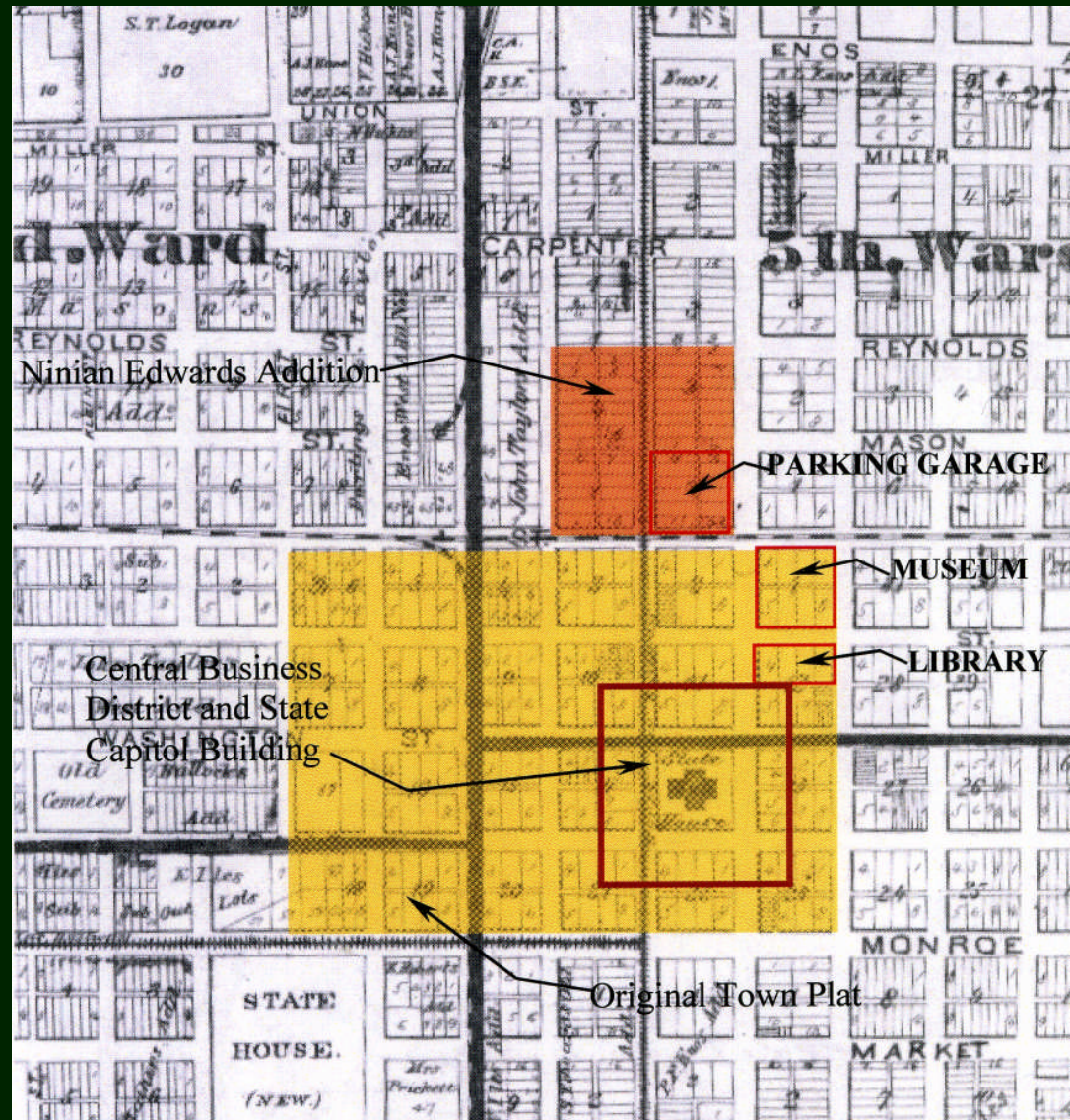
1840s house basin



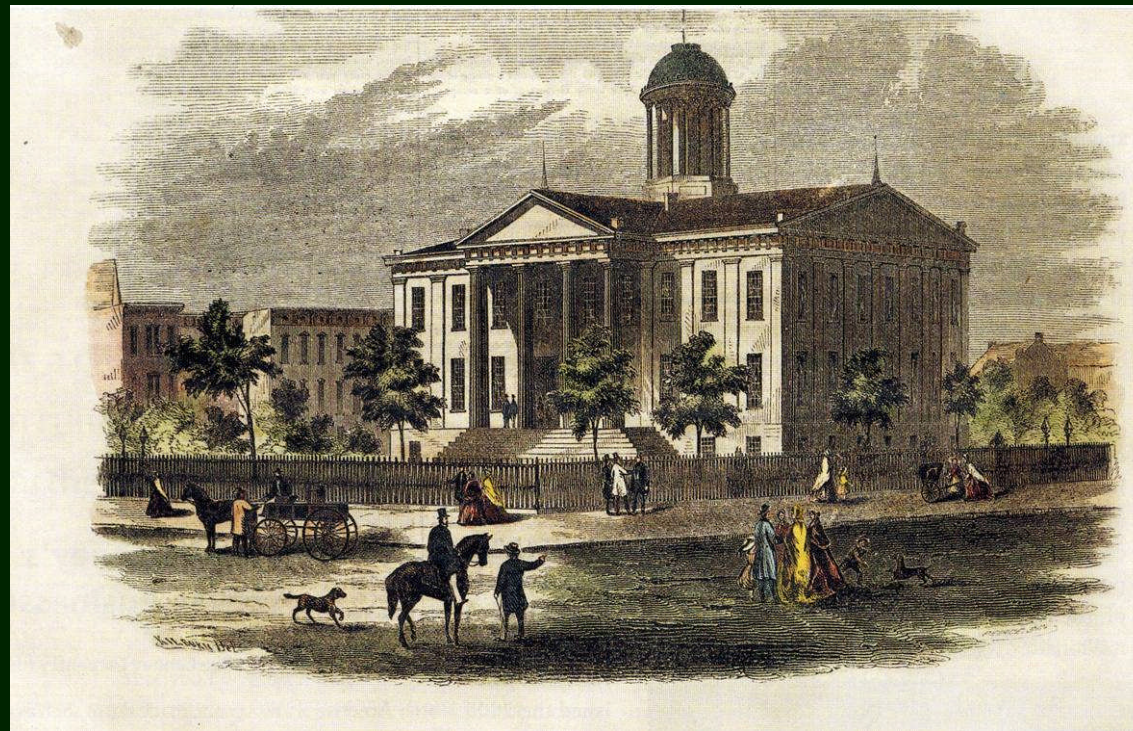
Beginning in early 2000, plans were underway for the construction of a Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) complex in Springfield to commemorate the life of the city's favorite son, Abraham Lincoln.



Between 2001 and 2004, four major mitigation projects were undertaken within three city blocks—for construction of the Library, Museum, and Parking Garage complex.



The ALPLM project area was located immediately adjacent to the central business district, which surrounded the county courthouse square (and was to become the location of the Illinois State Capitol building in 1839). Improvements to this area of the town began during the later 1820s and 1830s.

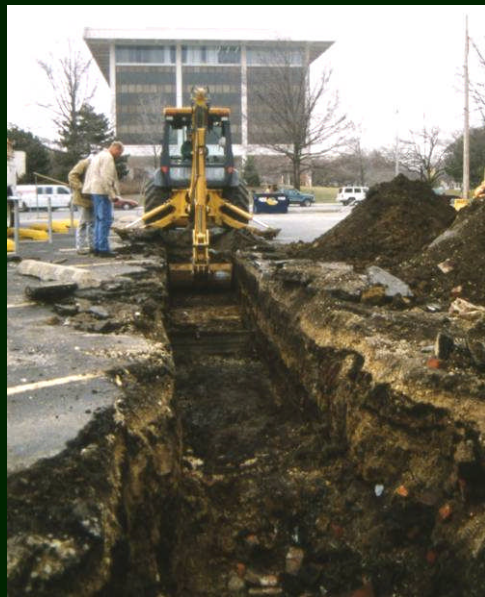


Newly constructed Illinois State Capitol building.

The project area had initially been settled in the late 1820s, and by 1867, it had developed into a mature urban landscape.



Each project began with backhoe trenching (left) to assess integrity. This was followed by the removal of overburden with a large track hoe in select areas that had good integrity (middle), and subsequent excavation of features within those block excavations (right).



In many places, the archaeological integrity was excellent. The pre-1870s archaeological resources were relatively well preserved and, in places, very complex.



Over 370 subsurface archaeological features were recorded and/or excavated—often under some fairly adverse conditions. The vast majority of the features pre-dated the circa 1890s.



Structural Features included a variety of masonry (brick and stone) perimeter foundation walls, segmental walls, and piers.



Structural features associated with the Rudolph/Chatterton Opera House (left).



Rudolph/Chatterton Opera House as illustrated on the 1867 *Bird's Eye View of Springfield* (right).



Less substantial house and outbuilding foundation systems were also documented.



Food and/or commodity storage pits (pit cellars) were also documented. These shallow, rectangular, straight-walled and flat bottomed pits may or may not have been located beneath an early structure.



More substantial, and probably later cellars have a small projection off one end for stair access (bulkhead entranceways). These cellars are often referred to as “keyhole cellars.” Common in a rural setting, they seem to be less common within the urban setting.



Numerous features associated with water acquisition (wells) and storage (cisterns) were also present. A total of 24 wells and 15 cisterns were documented. Several of the earlier wells were hand excavated and have yielded excellent domestic and commercial (tavern) artifact assemblages.





Privy pits represented one of the more common feature types discovered during the investigations. Over 115 privy pits, dating from ca. 1830 through ca. 1930, were excavated during the course of these investigations.

This view illustrates a row of privies being excavated at the site of the Presidential Museum.

The earliest privy pits were shallow, unlined pits that were often trapezoidal in plan. A distinctive characteristic of all of these pits was the presence of a humic, organic-rich fill (fecal material) in their bases.

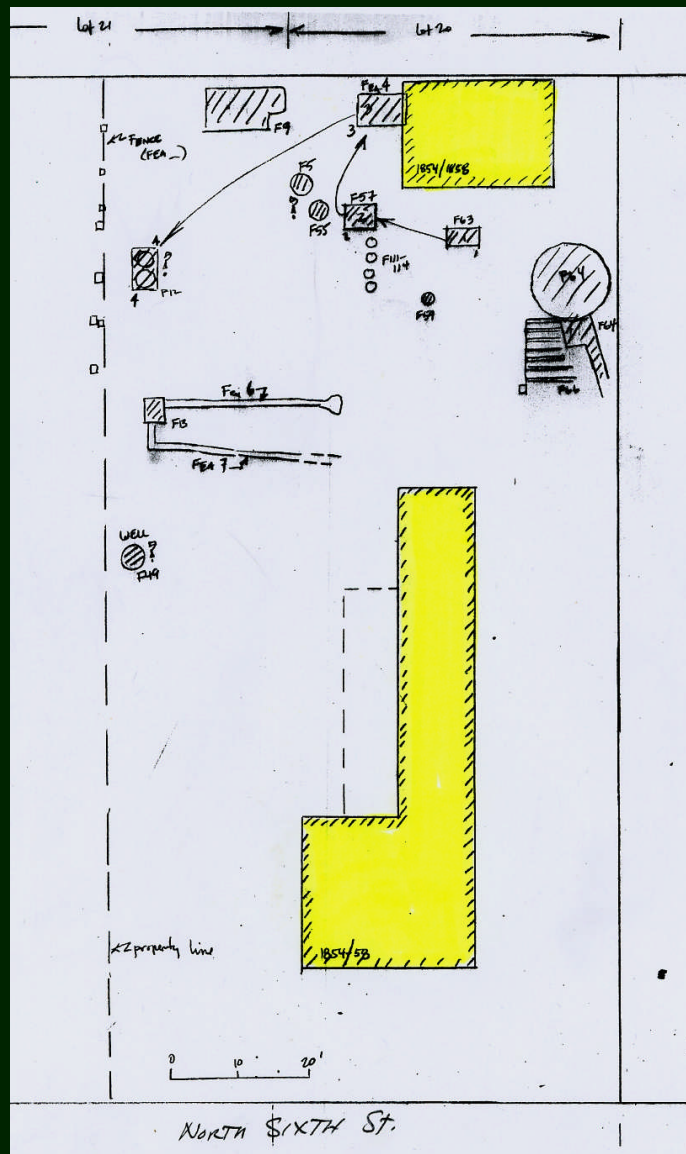


The privy pits associated with higher status families were often brick-lined. Several of these small, rectangular privy pits from the middle nineteenth century were excavated.



The most common type of privy pit uncovered during the investigations was the plank-lined box typical of the later 19th and early 20th centuries. These pits came in a variety of sizes and depths.





One of the more significant aspects of the archaeological investigations was the excavation of multiple lots in their entirety. This figure depicts the Lively and/or Sheldon landholdings from circa 1845-c.1868.

Of note was the identification of four sequential privy pits that were associated with these two families from 1845 through circa 1868.

Yellow rectangular blocks indicate the location of the house and carriage barn as documented on both the 1854 and 1858 *City of Springfield* maps.

Feature 5



As noted earlier, these privy pits, and their contents (artifact assemblages) represent unique time capsules that lend themselves to a variety of social history studies.

Primary artifacts from Feature 5 (Library) dated from the mid-to-late 1830s.

Feature 6



Primary artifacts from Feature 6 (Library) dated from the 1840s.

Both features document a fairly well-to-do household (Simeon Francis family). Note the increase in the number and variety of artifacts during this time period—both of which suggest increased access to goods by the Francis family during these years.

Fea. 57 (E¹/₂)



Primary artifacts from Feature 57 (left) were relatively numerous, and consisted of a diverse assemblage of ceramic and glass vessels from the 1850s. These were probably associated with the Lavelly or Sheldon family.

Fea. 4 (E¹/₂)



Primary artifacts from Feature 4 were even more numerous, dating predominately from the 1860s, and no doubt associated with the Oliver Sheldon Family.

Historical archaeologists use a wide range of data sets related to the preparation, storage, and consumption of food to interpret past lifeways. They are not simply interested in the types of food consumed, but also in how it was prepared, how it was stored, and how it was consumed—all of which tells archaeologists and other social scientists about the quality of life and social customs that was associated with that particular individual, family, and cultural group.

Archaeologists use a holistic approach that uses a variety of data to gain insights into a families foodways habits. This data includes—but clearly not limited to—1) Architectural Remains, 2) Faunal Remains (Bone), 3) Floral Remains (Seeds), and 4) Ceramic and Glass artifacts.

Our architectural research throughout Illinois has focused on documenting the changing character of the domestic environment—both within the structure of the house, as well as the working yard.



Documenting the presence of cooking fireplaces within the early housing of Quincy, Illinois.

Our archaeological research in Springfield and across the state has focused on documenting:

- 1) the size and structure of the kitchen,
- 2) the presence/absence of summer kitchens, wash houses, exterior bake ovens, smoke houses, exterior storage cellars, and other ancillary outbuildings and exterior work areas, and
- 3) changing cooking technologies and their affect on the structure of the house, working yard, and family's quality of life.



Bones (or “*faunal remains*”) recovered from the archaeological features tell us a considerable amount about the diet and/or foodways of the past inhabitants of early Springfield. One area of interest to archaeologists is the variety of different species represented in each feature (*species composition*) and how it changes through time and between social groups.



Beef and other large mammal remains from a feature.

Chicken bones from another feature.



Of particular interest with regard to species composition is the relative importance of domestic animals (particular beef, pork, sheep/goat, and fowl) to wild species. Wild foods such as large mammals (deer in particular) as well as fish and fowl remained part of the Springfield diet far longer than expected—and often associated with upper class families.



Chickens heading to market

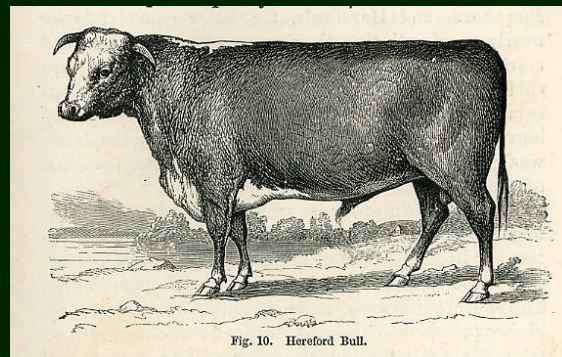
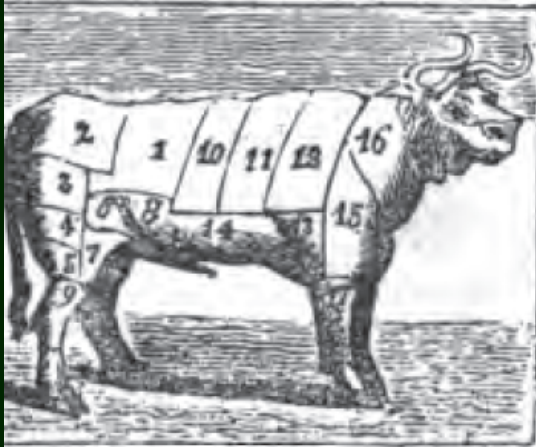


Fig. 10. Hereford Bull.



Deer antler from Feature 36 (Museum) dating from a late 1830s or 1840s context.

BEEF.



Hind Quarter.

1. Sir Loin.
2. Rump.
3. Aitch Bone.
4. Buttock.
5. Mouse do.
6. Veiny piece.
7. Thick Flank
8. Thin do.
9. Leg.

Fore Quarter.

10. Fore Rib, 5 Ribs.
11. Middle do. 4 do.
12. Chuck, 3 do.
13. Shoulder, or Leg Mutton piece.
14. Brisket.
15. Clod.
16. Neck, or Sticking piece.
17. Shin.
18. Cheek

Another avenue of great interpretive value consists of the ranking of meat cuts from various species, particular beef and pork. The relative proportion of high quality cuts of meat to low quality cuts gives interesting insights into the status of the household consuming the meat.

PORK.



1. The Sperib.
2. Hand.
3. Belly, or Spring.
4. Fore Loin.
5. Hind do.
6. Leg.



Beef and pork cuts (*American Frugal Housewife* 1841)

Some unexpected and contradictory results have been noted from assemblages associated with upper class families (such as the Lincoln family). Although high quality beef remains were present (as expected), a number of lower status hog foot bones also were recovered from these sites. Combined with the presence of glass stemware vessels, these lower quality meat cuts may suggest the preparation and consumption of jellied desserts (which were common at the time). The pig's feet may have been used to produce gelatin for use as a jelling agent similar to Knox gelatin is used today.

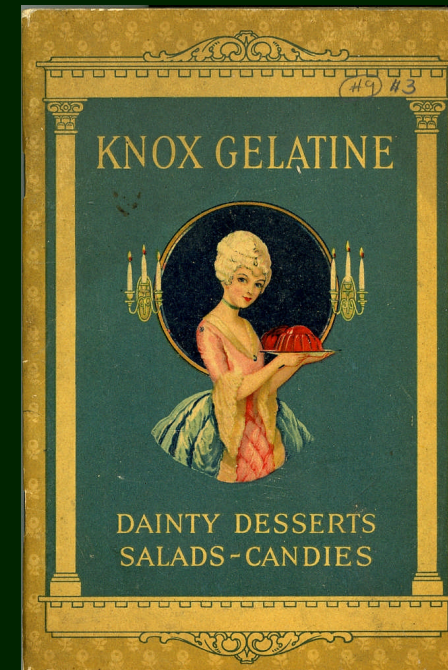
JELLY OF TWO COLOURS.

1441. INGREDIENTS.—1½ pint of calf's-feet jelly No. 1416, a few drops of prepared cochineal.

Mode.—Make 1½ pint of jelly by recipe No. 1416, or, if wished more economical, of clarified syrup and gelatine, flavouring it in any way that may be preferred. Colour one-half of the jelly with a few drops of prepared cochineal, and the other half leave as pale as possible. Have ready a mould well wetted in every part; pour in a small quantity of the red jelly, and let this set; when quite firm, pour on it the same quantity of the pale jelly, and let this set; then proceed in this manner until the mould is full, always taking care to let one jelly set before the other is poured in, or the colours would run one into the other. When turned out, the jelly should have a striped appearance. For variety, half the mould may be filled at once with



JELLY OF TWO COLOURS.

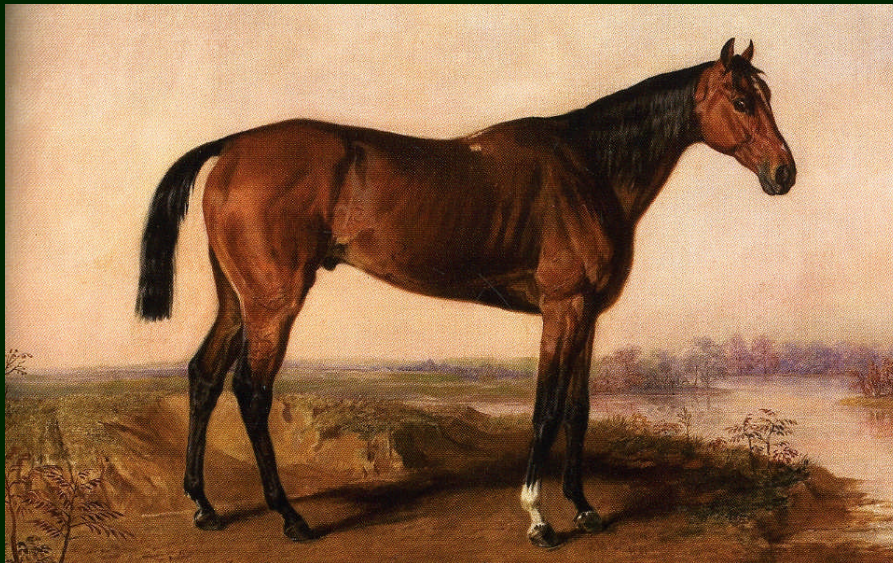


Faunal analysis also gives insights into the various processing techniques used through the years (saw cutting versus cleaver techniques) as well as to the presence/absence of home butchering.



The recovery of a cow mandible from Fea. 47 (Museum) suggests that the processing (and/or butchering) of cattle was being conducted at this site during the 1840s. Although hog processing appears to have been common in town, the processing of cattle was much less prevalent.

One unexpected surprise recovered from an 1830s midden associated with a fairly upscale family in early Springfield was the remains of *butchered horse*. Although eating of horse meat is often considered taboo in the United States, it is consumed by a wide range of peoples around the world—including many European and Asian peoples. It apparently was also consumed in 1830s Springfield, too.



Horse meat for sale in Montreal, Canada.

Additionally, *floral remains* (consisting of both small seeds, fruit pits, and larger plant remains) are extracted from feature fills using a water screening process known as “flotation.” These small scale remains also contribute to our understanding of the early foodway patterns of the city’s early settlers.





Unground, roasted coffee beans from Fea. 63 (E^{1/2})—probably associated with the early Lively component.



Coconut husks from Fea. 64 (E^{1/2})—probably associated with the Oliver Sheldon component..



Ceramic and glass assemblages within a feature also can tell us a considerable amount about the individuals that used them. Tableware settings can give us insights into both the status of the household, as well as the ethnic background of the users—unfortunately, the variations in artifact assemblages are not as dramatic as suggested by this 1850s image.



For example, does this assemblage give you any insights into the ethnic background of the individuals that used and discarded these artifacts?

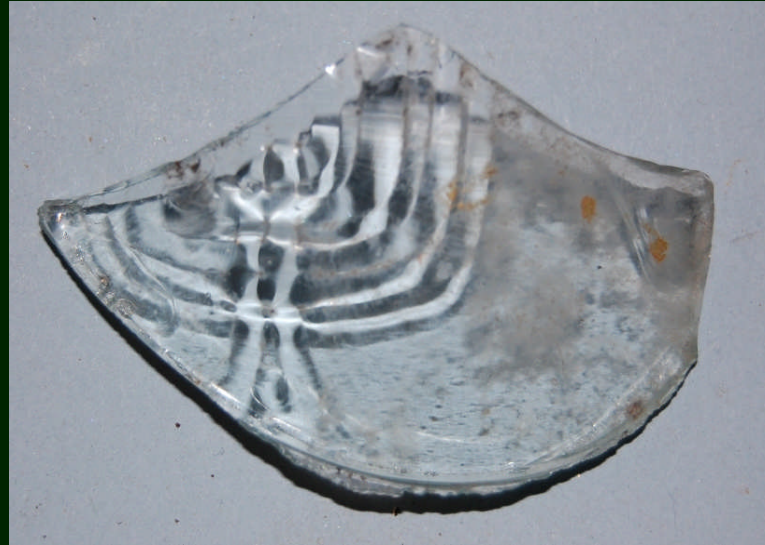


Primary artifacts from Feature 84 (W¹/₂)



Feature 84 contained a rather unique assemblage of German manufactured ceramics (including this large charger), distinctive glass stemware (probably non-American in origin), yellowware pipkins, and German hock-style wine bottles. This assemblage was probably deposited by a recent German immigrant who had brought both ceramic and glass tablewares from the Old World, and continued to consume food and liquor familiar to the family's cultural tastes. And traditions.

How about this single artifact recovered from a feature...



Fea. 6 (W^{1/2})

This unidentified glass container with the image of a menorah probably contained a kosher product. It probably was associated with the conservative Orthodox Jewish Levi family, which lived on the lot associated with this find during the late nineteenth century.

Reconstructed table setting from Feature 4—circa 1865. The sheer volume of vessels, the diversity in vessel forms, and the presence of tableware glass clearly bespeaks of the status of this family...



Fea. 4 (E^{1/2})

... and contrasts dramatically with more middle of the road, and lower status families represented here.

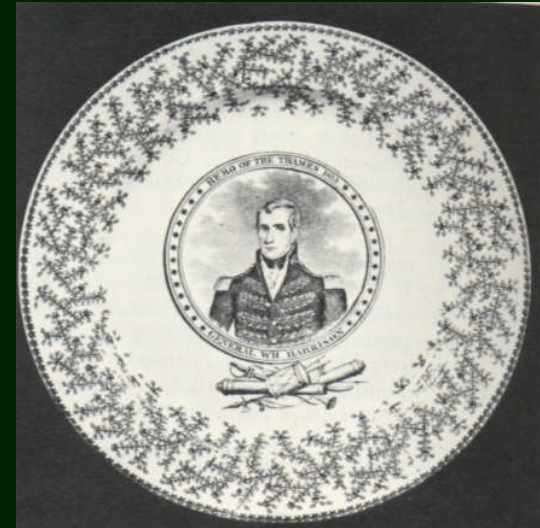


Fea. 46 (E¹/₂)

Fea 86 (W¹/₂)



Ceramics illustrated with a distinctive rim design and central medallion were recovered from several contexts from these investigations. These 1840-era sherds commemorated William Henry Harrison's Battle of the Thames, 1813.



Ceramics such as the Harrison plate represented more than just souvenirs, but rather were open expressions of the owner's political allegiance and were intended for public display just as earlier items associated with George Washington had been. The extensive production of political-oriented ceramics in association with the Whig campaigns of 1840 and 1844 illustrates a willing acceptance of party politics within the domestic sphere during this brief period in which female involvement was actively encouraged. These ceramics stand in contrast to the distinctly male-oriented whisky flasks of the period.

During the middle-to-late 19th century, kitchenwares were limited in number, and consisted of small jars, bowls, and an occasional jug. Large jars (or crocks) were seldom present indicating little processing of food within the urban household.

Fea. 5 (Museum)



Fea. 12 (E^{1/2})



Fea. 4 (W^{1/2})



Fea. 47 (W^{1/2})



Fea. 93 (W^{1/2})



Fea. 33 (W^{1/2})



Fea. 58 (W^{1/2})



This pattern of urban kitchenwares differs dramatically from contemporary rural farm families. This assemblage is from a circa 1890s rural household near Decatur. The presence of numerous milk pans, canning jars, and large jars/crocks all document the family's processing and storage of a wide variety of foodstuffs.



Crockery and/or kitchenwares from Fea. 5, Rife Site (11M235). [ca. 1890-1910]

Both ceramic and glass “canning” jars were poorly documented within the early Springfield assemblages. Home processing of foods was not a common practice in these upscale households. Canning jars did not become common in these urban settings until the later nineteenth and/or early twentieth centuries.



Fea. 4 (W^{1/2})

Processed and/or commercially manufactured foods remain limited throughout much of the nineteenth century. Condiments such as relishes, pickles, and sauces (such as mustard and catsup) are some of the earliest commercially prepared foods that are found.



Fea. 4 (E¹/₂)



Fea. 8 (W¹/₂)



By the early years of the 20th century, processed food containers, and home canning jars both become much more prolific in the Springfield project area.



Fea. 55 (W1/2)

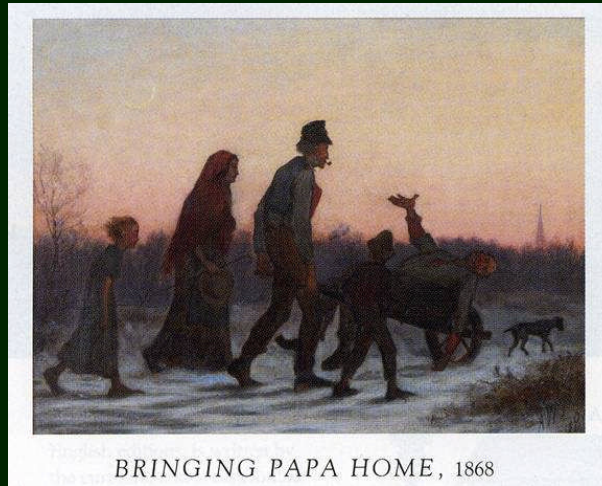


Fea. 4 (W¹/₂)

And let's not forget liquid refreshments or *Drink*. Documenting differential patterns of alcohol consumption from the artifacts deposited in these features has been another avenue of research.



This artifact assemblage documents a traditional pre-Civil War, working class American pattern (which consists predominately of the consumption of distilled American whiskey from flasks).



This pre-Civil War artifact assemblage documents an upscale American family's more formal consumption of distilled liquor (via a decanter) and wines.



The great variety of mid-century liquor bottles recovered from Feature 4 (E^{1/2}) strongly hints at Oliver Sheldon's occupation (wholesale liquor dealer). Also present at the site was a large, deep pit interpreted as a mid-century ice house.



Several patterns in alcohol consumption have been recognized, and, as expected, probably represent differential tastes. These assemblages probably all represent social drinking practices.





This rather unique late nineteenth or very early twentieth century assemblage contained a non-local Peoria beer, a small individual serving-sized wine bottle, and a distinctive whimsical liquor bottle in the shape of a pistol.



Fea. 48 (Museum)

These earlier assemblages contrast dramatically to the later 19th and/or early 20th century pattern noted in these two assemblages, which probably were associated with “maintenance drinking” by an alcoholic individual or individuals. Both assemblages illustrated below were associated with a potential boarding house.



Fea. 55 (W^{1/2})



Fea 50 (W^{1/2})

And let's not forget about narcotics. This presumably Chinese manufactured opium pipe also was recovered from Feature 55—and documents the use of illicit drugs in early Springfield.



Infants also needed to be nourished in early Springfield...



Fea. 3A (Library)

Can you identify this artifact?



The multi-year archaeological excavations conducted for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield have contributed significantly to our understanding of the variability in the lifeways and/or quality of life associated with the early inhabitants of this region. The data is an invaluable comparative data base for understanding urban lifeways in central Illinois.

Copies of this paper can be requested at either:
IllinoisArchaeology.com or *fmansberger@comcast.net*

Thank You.

