

In Search of the 1836 McLean County Courthouse: Archaeological Investigations on the Public Square, Bloomington, Illinois

by
Floyd Mansberger

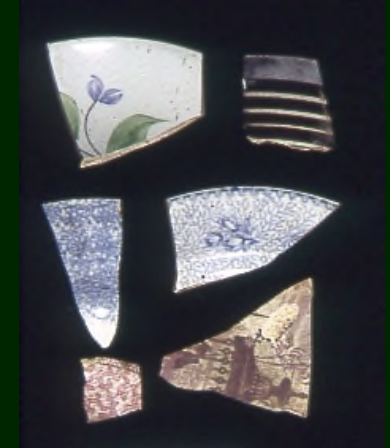
Fever River Research
Springfield, Illinois

McLean County Museum of History
Bloomington, Illinois
February 28, 2015



Second McLean County Courthouse, circa 1865-67

Archaeology is a methodology that brings a *material culture approach* to the study of past lifeways. It is the goal of archaeologists to understand the past through the study of the artifacts used and discarded by people in times past. 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.

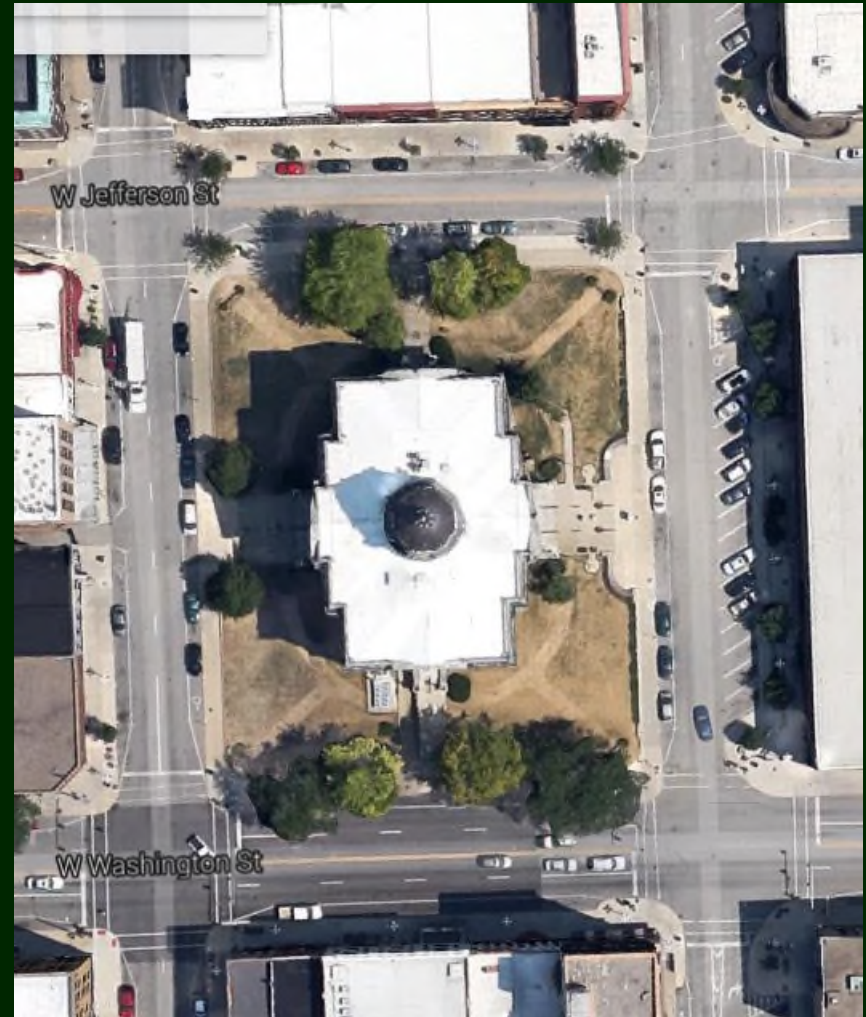


Middle Woodland pit (100 A.D.)



Euro-American house basin (1840 A.D.)

So, what does that
have to do with
Bloomington's
Courthouse Square?

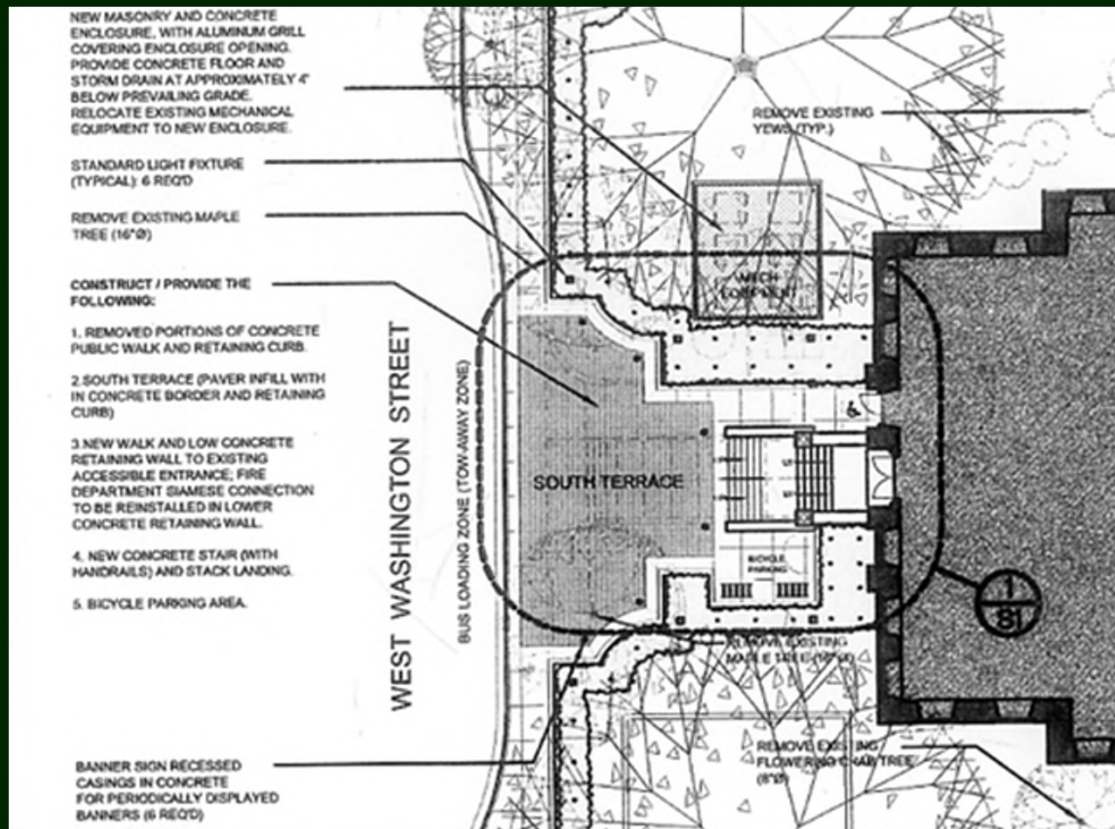


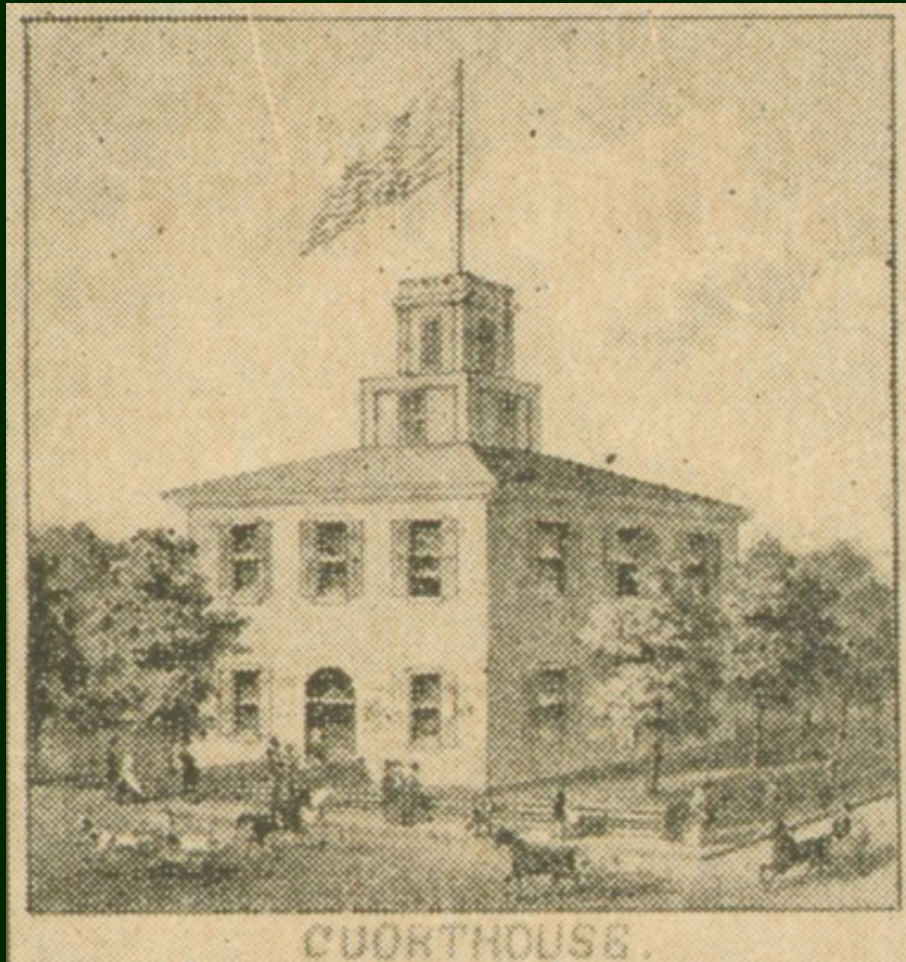
Cruisin' With Lincoln on 66: The Bloomington-Normal Visitors Center/ Heritage Tourism Center



Funded in part by Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (Office of Tourism), Bloomington/Normal Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the McLean County History Museum. The new Visitor's Center was design by Francois and Associates, AIA (Bloomington).

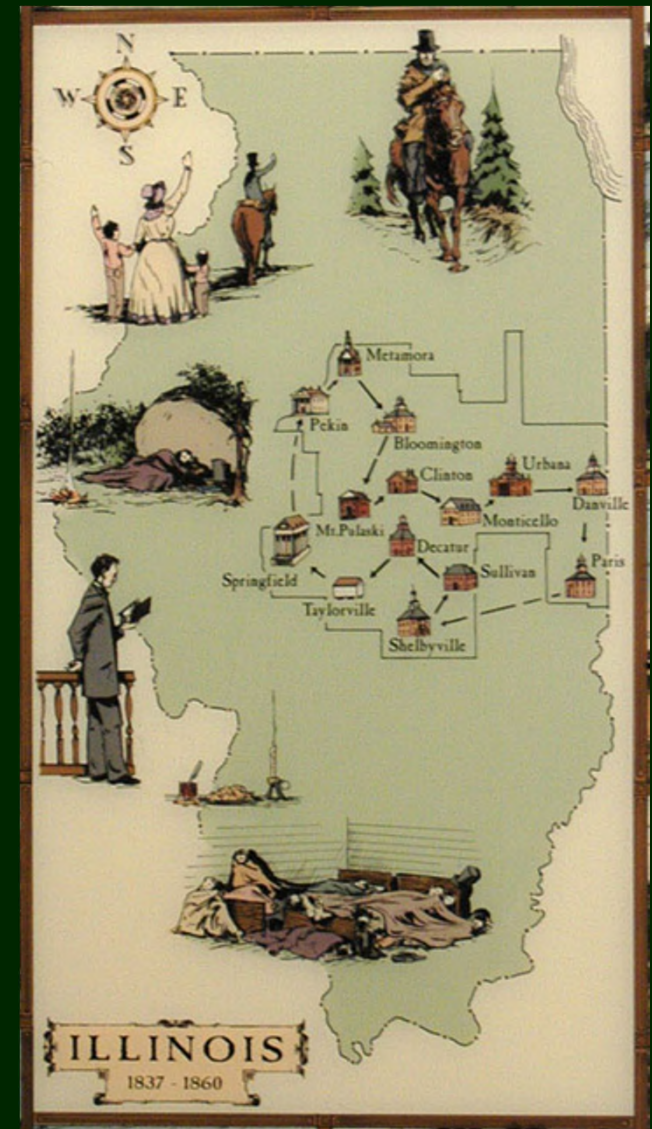
Creation of a Heritage Tourism Center in the lower level of the McLean County Museum of History building and the creation of a new south entrance into the facility...





The second McLean County Courthouse was constructed in 1836 on the grounds of the Public Square. It was of brick construction and replaced a much smaller frame structure that had functioned as a courthouse for a few short years. This courthouse was constructed in a “Coffee Mill” design common for early Illinois courthouses.

The McLean County Courthouse was an integral part of the Eighth Judicial Circuit, where a young lawyer named Abraham Lincoln practiced law, honed his legal skills, and met many influential men along the way.



Two views of the 1836 Courthouse at mid-century (after construction of the West and East Wings in 1863).



Undated, mid-1860s photograph.

Bird's Eye View of Bloomington (Ruger 1867)



View of the backside of the Courthouse, April 1865.



This picture was taken on April 19th, 1865 at the Lincoln Memorial Meeting (mourning Lincoln's death).



The 1836 Courthouse was demolished to make room for a substantially larger building constructed in 1868 and designed by Alfred Piquenard.

Illinois State Register (March 31, 1868)

MISCELLANEOUS.
'TO CONTRACTORS.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the McLean county court house commissioners will receive bids for the following work, in connection with the erection of a new court house, at Bloomington, Ill; the bids to include the excavation, masonry, cut stone, brick work, iron work, and roofing entire, or for each of the above items separately as per plans and specifications, to be seen at the office of Cochrane & Piquenard, architects, No. 33 Lombard block, (Chicago, until April 2, and at the office of the commissioners in Bloomington, after that date.

Tenders to be sealed, and accompanied with a satisfactory bond to the people of the county of McLean, of \$5,000, that the party making the bid will, if said bid is accepted, execute, within ten days of the date of said acceptance, a bond, with good and sufficient sureties, to such an amount as may be required by the said board.

Tenders to be sealed and sent to O. M. Colman, secretary of the board, at Bloomington, Illinois, on or before 12 o'clock M., the 14th day of April, A. D. 1868, at which time said bids will be opened.

The board of commissioners reserve the right to reject any or all bids, if deemed best for the interests of the county.

By order of the board.

E. HERR, President.
O. M. COLMAN, Secretary. mh14d50d

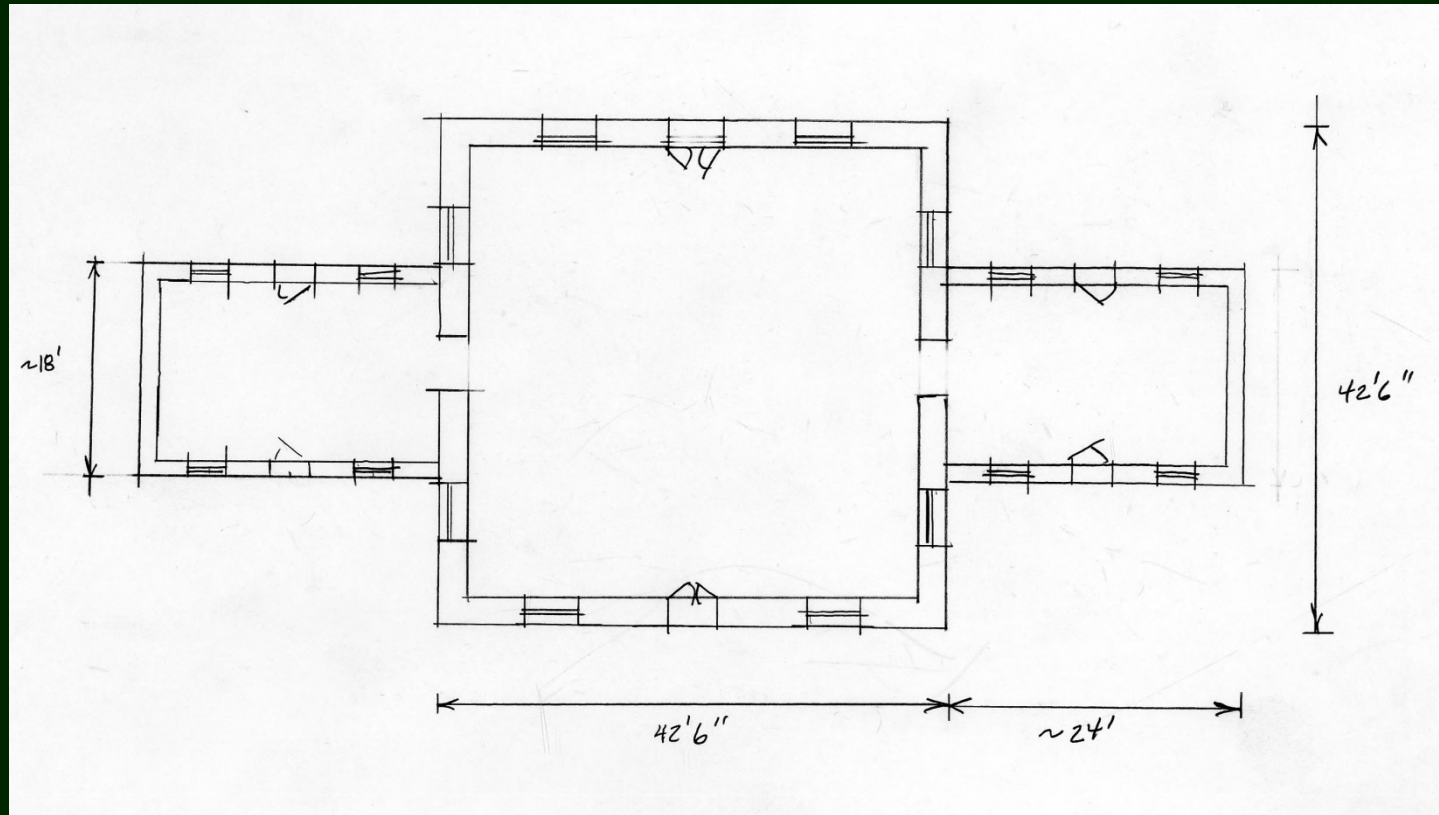


No. 10—New McLean County Court House, Bloomington, Ill.

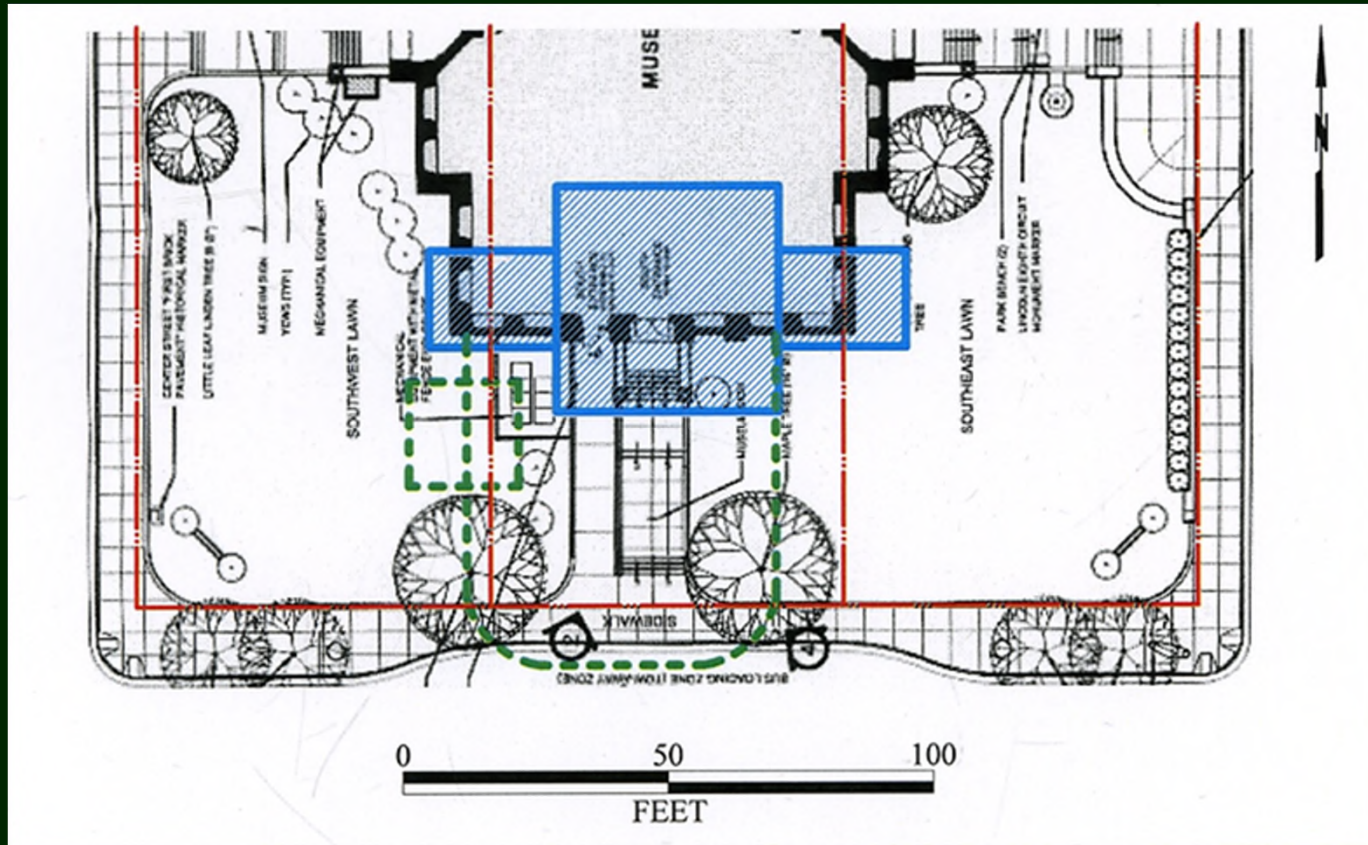
Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Co.

To the dismay of Bloomington citizens, a catastrophic fire engulfed the downtown in June 1900 destroying a large portion of the commercial district as well as the 1868 Courthouse (left). The current courthouse (top) was constructed on the foundations of the earlier building in 1903-04.

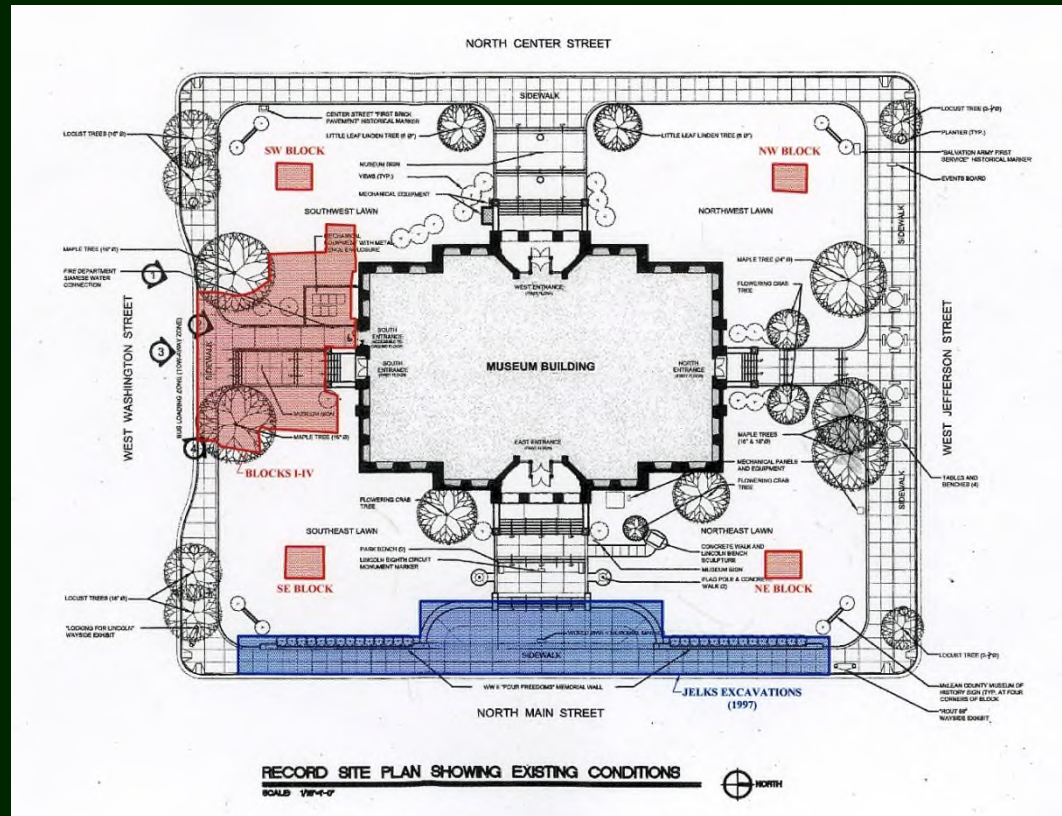
With the aid of the County Commissioner's Records, this sketch plan of the 1836 Courthouse with side wings was created...



... and overlay onto the current landscape. Its position on this plat was based on the description from the Commissioner's Records.



Pre-field archival research strongly suggested that the proposed improvements may encounter remains of the 1836 Courthouse. With this in mind, archaeological investigations were conducted on the Courthouse Square.



The areas marked in red represent areas excavated by Fever River Research in 2014 on the Courthouse Square. The area along the east edge of the Square (here marked in blue) had been excavated earlier by Dr. Edward Jelks (Professor Emeritus, Illinois State University) in 1997.

The current excavations began near the suspected southeast corner of the 1836 courthouse...



Although much archaeological work is done with trowels and brushes, initial exploratory work often is conducted with a backhoe. Nonetheless, the work is conducted in a slow, methodical manner designed to come down flat on the original (circa 1830s) ground surface to expose archaeological features.

...and within a few hours the southeast corner of the 1836 courthouse had been located and exposed. No one had seen this structure since its demolition in 1868.





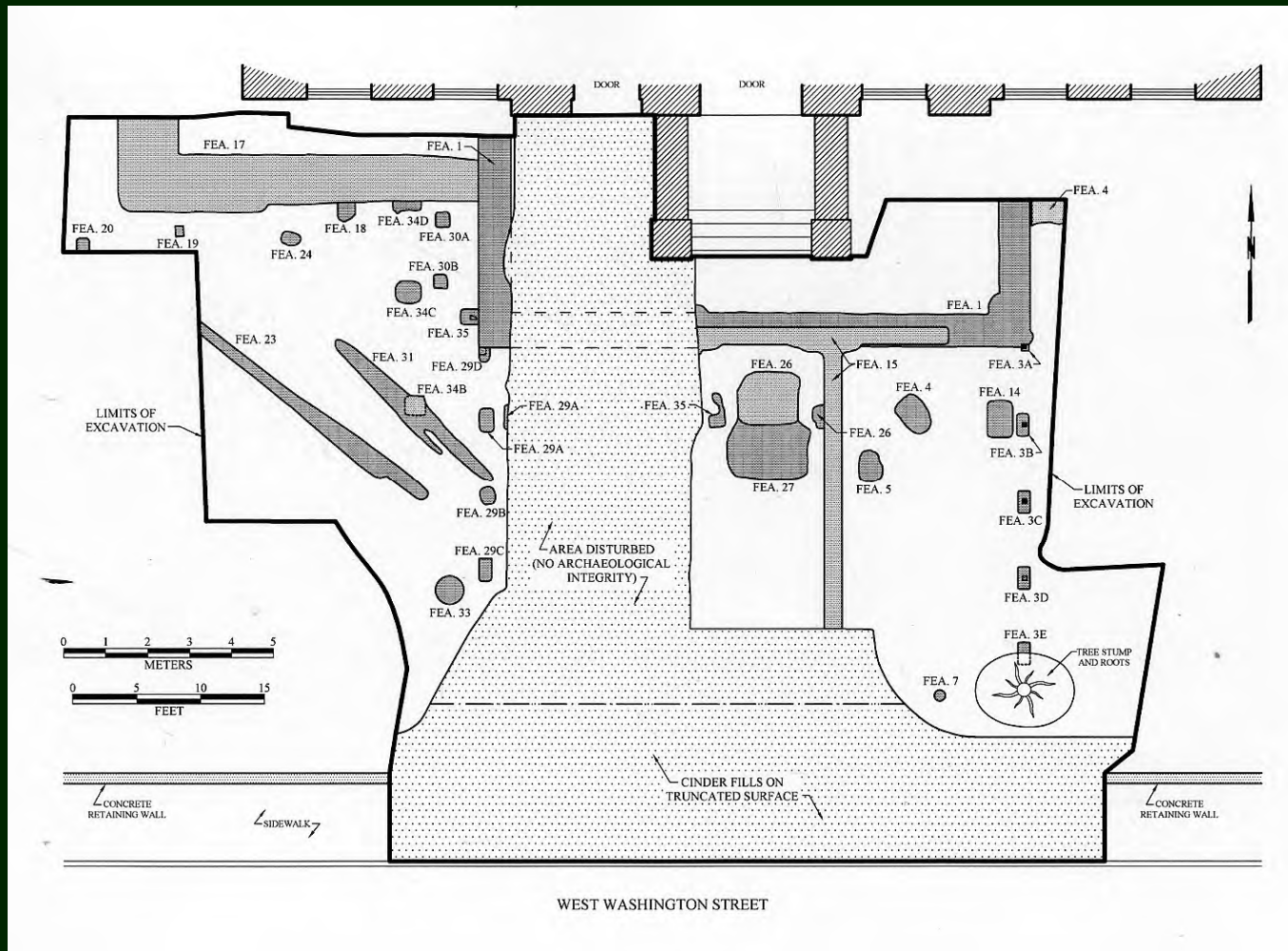
The project as it progressed...



...and a view of the completed courthouse excavations from on top of the courthouse...



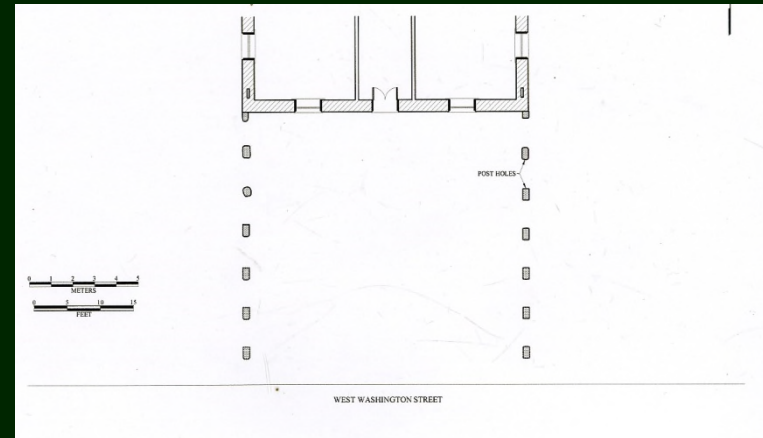
South Entrance base map illustrating area excavated and features.



Archaeological features included...

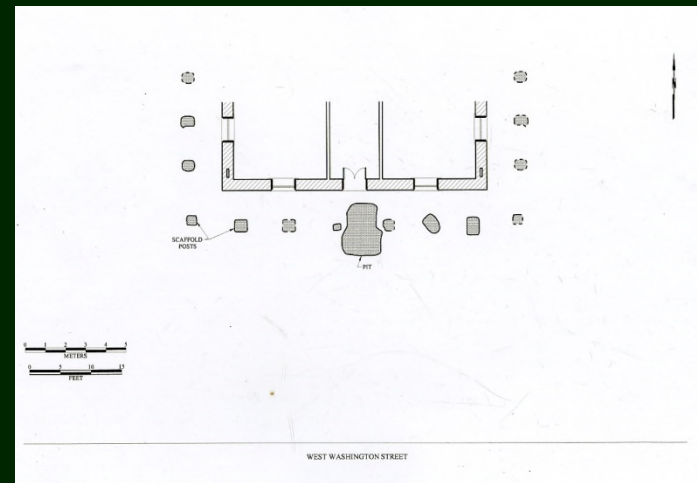


Small posts associated with multiple fence lines—which connected the SE and SW corner of the Courthouse with the street. These post holes contained very few artifacts.





Large posts arranged around the perimeter of the Courthouse which functioned as scaffolding supports for construction activities in 1836. These posts, which were much larger than the fence line posts, had a large amount of brick rubble in them.



Robbed foundation walls, from both the 1836 Courthouse (top left) and the 1863 Wings (bottom left and right). Note the brick impressions in the base of the wall at right.





This is the south wall of the 1836 Courthouse, looking west from the southeast corner of the building. This trench contained a variety of nail fragments, window glass, plaster, mortar, and brick.



This is the south wall (and southwest corner) of the West Wing, which was constructed in 1863. Note the location of the original brick wall (running down the center of the trench), the original builder's trench on each side of the wall (in background), and the "over dig" trench dug at the time the wall was dismantled in 1868 (in foreground).



Surface (right) and subsurface (left) *drainage lines*. The deep subsurface drainage line probably had a wood conduit in the base.

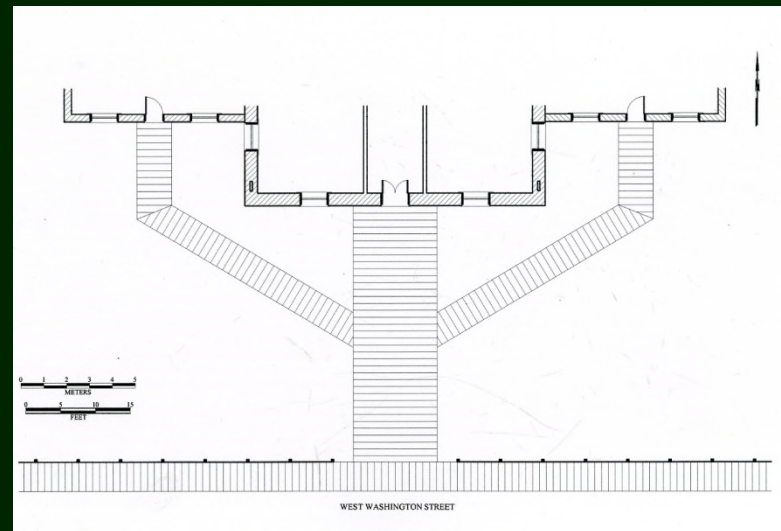
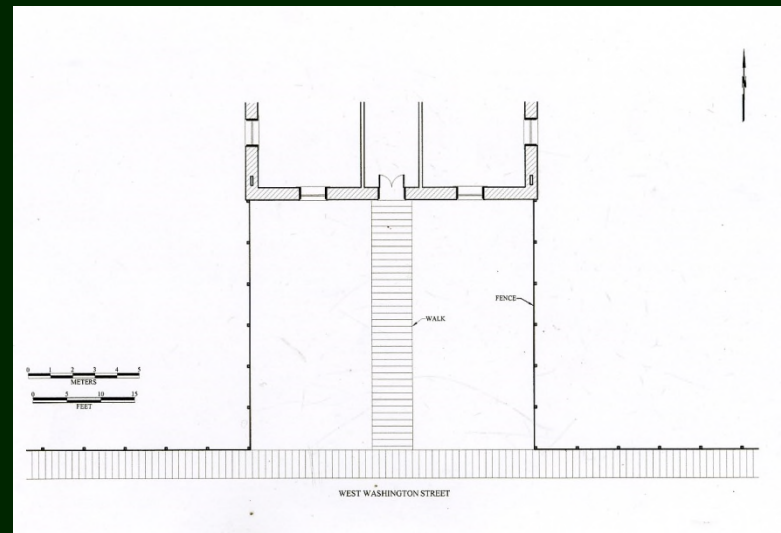


A single *large, deep oval pit*, probably associated with construction activity in 1863 remodeling. At the scraped surface, this feature appeared to represent two overlapping pits. Upon excavation, it was determined that it was one large pit filled with construction waste (brick). Many of the brick were deformed from over-firing; others appear to have been paving brick.

Similarly, a single *small, shallow circular pit* was located alongside the western fence line. This shallow pit may represent an ornamental planting. Several small whiskey flask fragments were found in this pit.



The archaeological data, combined with the available archival information, allows us to speculate on a landscape plan for the Courthouse as originally constructed (top, circa 1836-1862), and after construction of the East and West Wings (bottom, circa 1863-1868).





Small block excavation units were placed in the SW, NE, and SE quadrants of the Square. These were the location of new burr oak tree plantings. Features pre-dating 1870 were few in number within these three excavation units.

Excavation of the Northwest Block uncovered the east end of a shallow brick-walled cellar, which was located beneath the 1848 Jail. This cellar appears to have been filled in circa 1868, after the building was converted into county offices.



Looking West



Looking South/Southwest (prior to excavation)

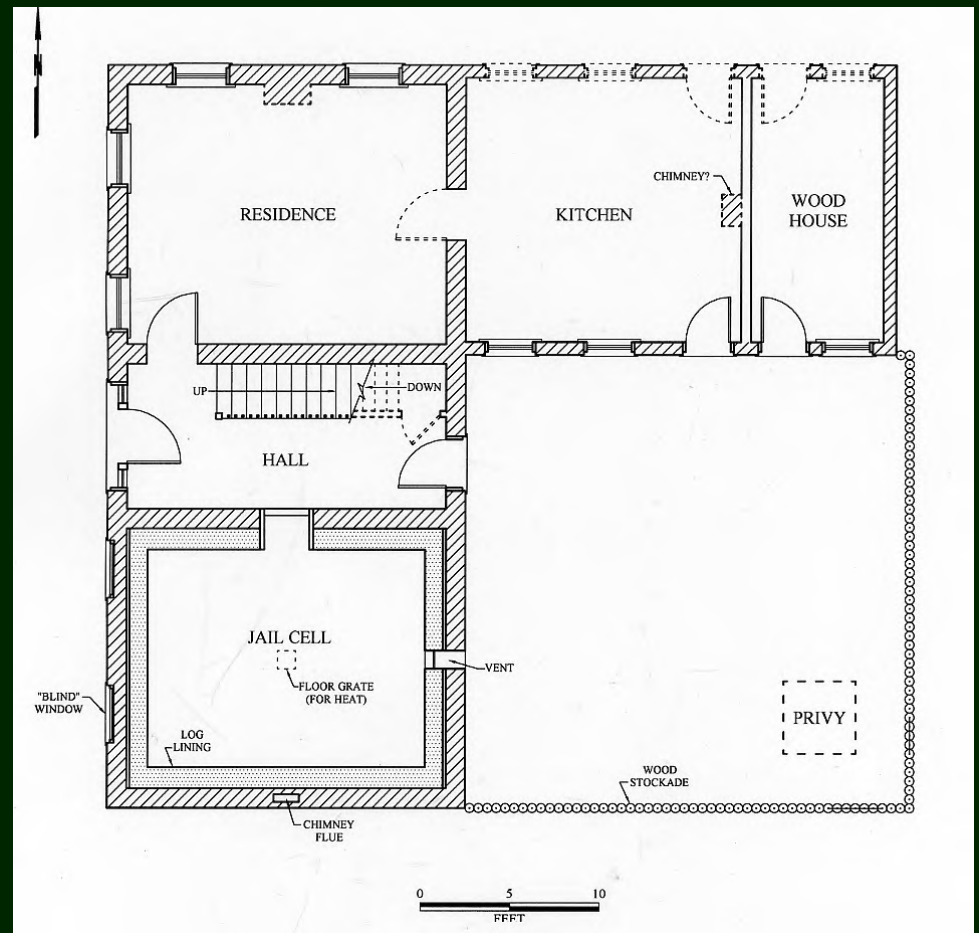


Looking North (after excavation)

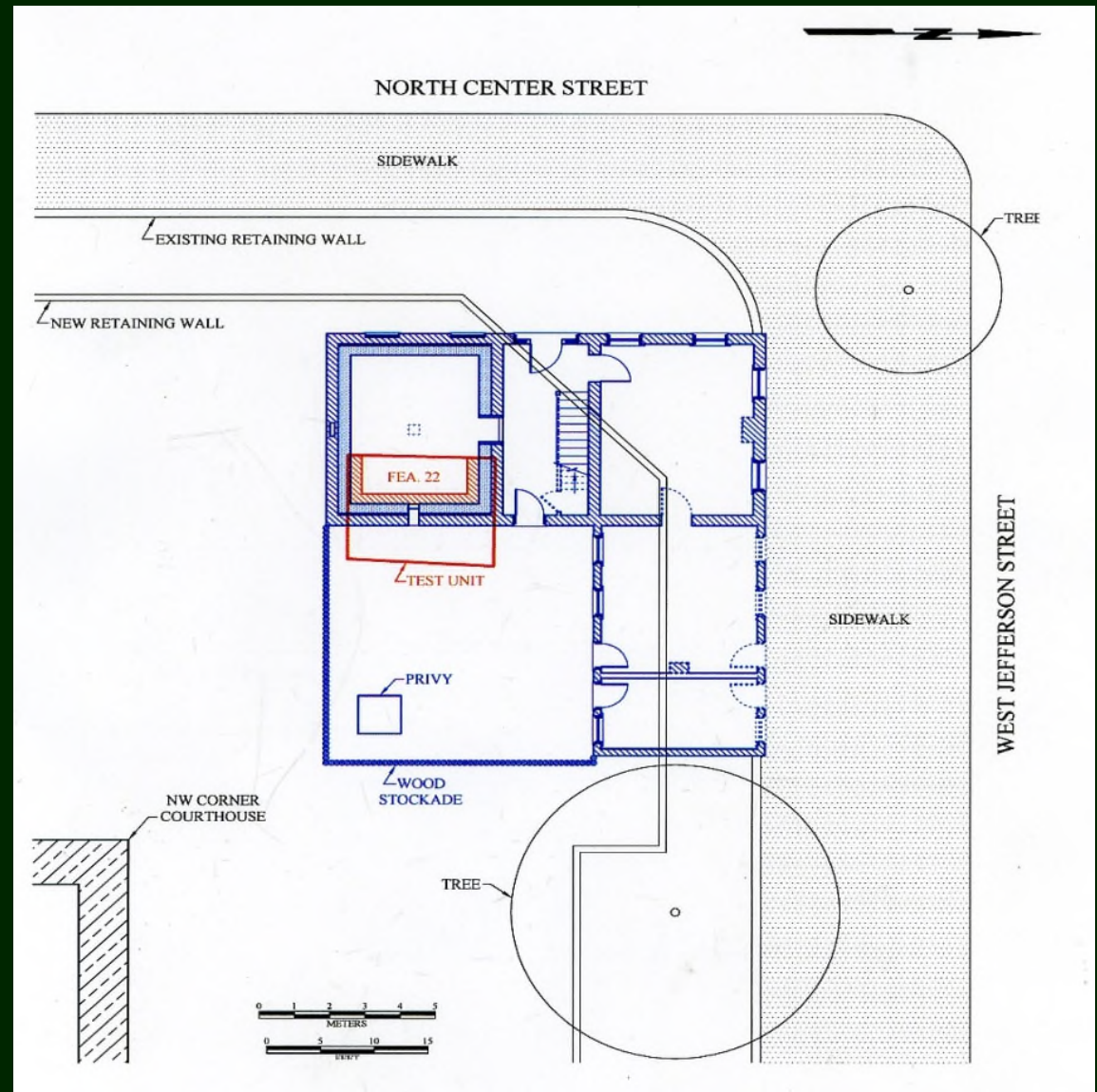
Three views of the Jail cellar excavations...



With the aid of Prince's (1899) published description and sketch (top left), supplemented with the 1867 *Bird's Eye View* detail (bottom left), we were able to create this floor plan of the 1848 Jail (right), ...



...which we superimposed onto the existing site map and archaeological data—resulting in a site plan for the Third McLean County Jail (1848-1858).



Archival research conducted also has given us new insights into the use of the building from the time it was abandoned as a jail in 1858 until it was demolished in 1868.

J. N. LARRIMORE,
NOTARY PUBLIC, AND COMMISSIONER
for the following States:
NEW YORK, WISCONSIN,
OHIO, PENNSYLVANIA, KENTUCKY,
MICHIGAN, MISSOURI.

And having been furnished by the Governors of the several States with the

Laws and Forms for taking Depositions,
&c., will pay particular attention thereto.
Also, to

**MAKING AND EXECUTING
DEEDS, MORTGAGES, &c.**

Will continue to make personal
Examination of the Co. Records,
as heretofore.

Office in the South room of the Old Jail Building, North west corner Public Square.
Commissions for other States and Territories are expected daily.
Bloomington, Oct. 11, 1858. dly

Taxes! Taxes!
THE TAXES FOR 1859 ARE NOW DUE AND must be paid promptly. It will be recollected that the stay law of last year is not in force this, and consequently the collector will be compelled to act promptly in his duties. He hopes he will not be forced to make rigorous collections.
Office in the old jail building on the public square.
JOHN L. ROUTT,
Collector of Town and City of Bloomington.
Nov. 30, 1859. d3w

EXCITING RUNAWAY.—On Saturday afternoon a horse belonging to D.W. Winsor, caused great excitement in the business part of the city. He broke loose from a sleigh, in front of Winsor's stable, on East street; ran south to Jefferson; took the sidewalk to Main, and scattered the loungers on the postoffice corner; crossed Main to the public square, and drove the workmen away from the big derrick; rushed into and out of the old jail; crossed Center street, and ran along the sidewalk to Madison; crossed over to Mr. Ashley's house, and entered the side gateway; paused a mo-

Although artifact density was low, and individual artifacts were generally very small in size, many artifacts were recovered from good mid-19th century contexts. These artifacts lend themselves well for interpretation (and tell us about both the character of the structures located at this site, as well as the activities undertaken there).



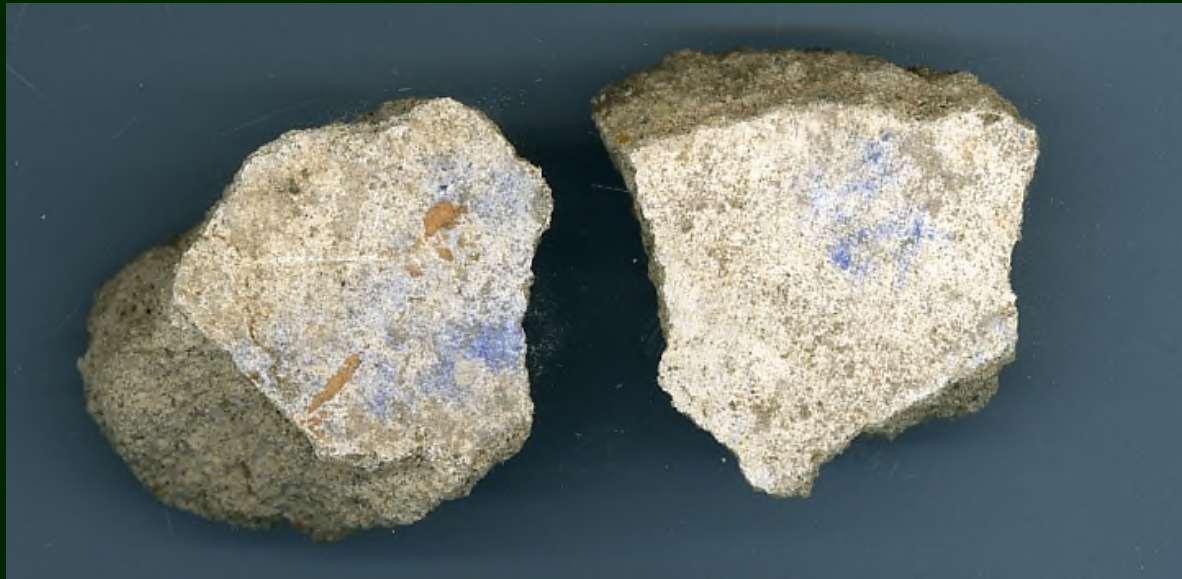
Most artifacts recovered from the excavations were associated with Architectural remains (consisting of structural items once associated with buildings—such as these heavily corroded iron nails). Window glass and brick were also common.



Of particular interest were several brick fragments that have remnants of paint on their exterior surface, suggesting that the original courthouse was painted a brick-red during its early years, and later was painted a buff or tan color. The original courthouse had probably attained its light color by 1865, and contrasted dramatically with the unpainted wings (see attached photographic detail).



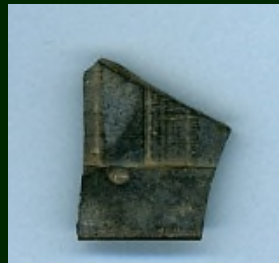
Several small fragments of painted wall and ceiling plaster were found and indicate that several of the rooms within the Jail had been painted a traditional “Prussian Blue” color—which was a common interior color during the middle nineteenth century.



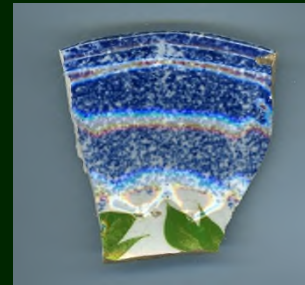
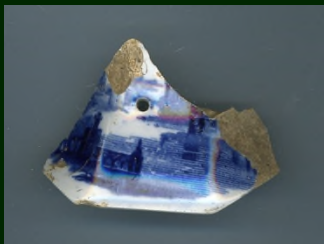
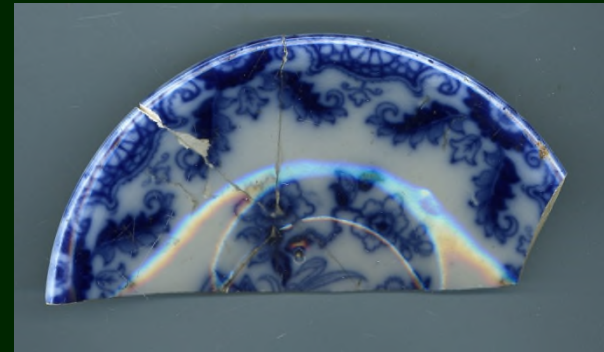
Ceramic table and kitchen wares are common artifacts found at domestic sites. These items were also recovered in limited number from contexts around the early Courthouse. As with most middens, the artifacts recovered from this location were small in size, and included a variety of plates, saucers, cups, and utilitarian bowls and jugs. The majority of these artifacts appear to have been deposited during the later 1830s and 1840s.



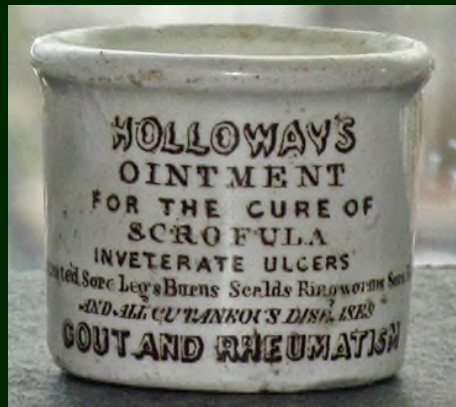
Nonetheless, an interesting assemblage—atypical of such a small assemblage—was noted, and such unusual items as a French manufactured faience salve or ointment jar (top) and a fragment of an Egyptian Black hollowware item (potentially a mug or teapot) were found in association with the Courthouse.



Artifacts from the Jail were found in a shallow cellar and, although not abundant, were considerably larger in size. These artifacts included painted, printed, and molded wares typical of the late 1840s and 1850s. They were probably deposited in the cellar during the very late 1850s and 1860s. .



An small jar (or “pot”) with a printed label for Holloway’s Ointment also was recovered from the Jail cellar...



Medical.

**NEVER FAILING REMEDY!
HOLLOWAY'S OINTMENT!**

A CRIPPLE SETS ASIDE HIS CRUTCHES AFTER TEN YEARS SUFFERING.
Copy of a Letter from Mr. Thompson, Chemist, Liverpool, dated August 20th, 1852.

To Professor HOLLOWAY,
DEAR SIR—I am enabled to furnish you with a most extraordinary cure effected by your invaluable Ointment and Pills, which has astonished every person acquainted with the sufferer. About 10 years ago, Mr. W. Cummins, of Saltney Street, in this town, was thrown from his horse, whereby he received very serious injuries; he had the best medical advice at the time, and was afterwards an inmate of different infirmaries, yet he grew worse, and at length a malignant running ulcer settled in his hip, which so completely crippled him, that he could not move without crutches for nearly ten years; recently he began to use your Ointment and Pills, which have now healed the wound, strengthened his limb, and enabled him to dispense with his crutches, so that he can walk with the greatest ease, and with renewed health and vigor. (Signed) J. THOMPSON.

A MOST EXTRAORDINARY CURE OF A DREADFUL SKIN DISEASE WHEN ALL MEDICAL AID HAD FAILED.
Copy of a Letter from Mr. Hird, Draper, of Keady, near

The Pills should be used conjointly with the Ointment in most of the following cases:—

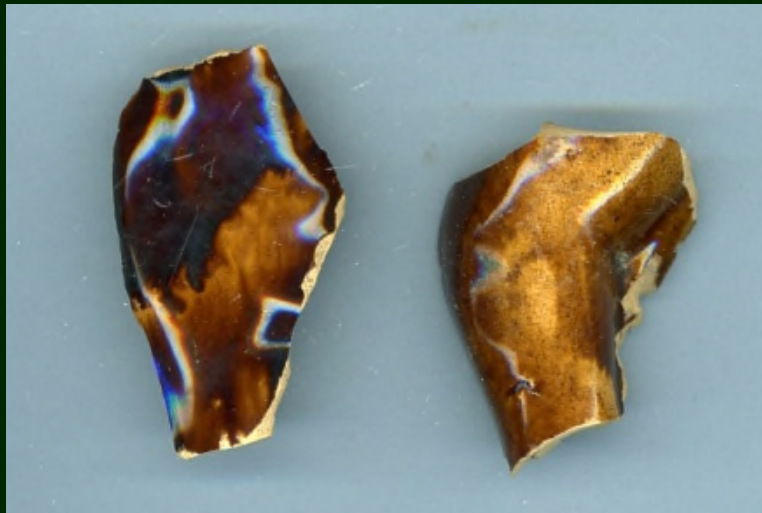
Bad Legs	Chilgo-foot	Pistulas	Sore-throats
Bad Breasts	Chilblains	Gout	Skin-diseases
Burns	Chapped Hands	Glandular Swelling	Scurvy
Bunions	Corns (Soft)	Lumbago	Sore-heads
Bite of Mosqui-	Cancers	Piles	Tumours
toes and Sand	Contracted and Rheumatism		Ulcers
Flies	Stiff Joints	Scalds	Wounds
Coco-bay	Elephantiasis	Sore Nipples	Yaws

Sold at the Establishment of Professor HOLLOWAY, 244, Strand, (near Temple Bar,) London, and by all Vendors of Medicine throughout the United States, in Pots at 37 1-2c., 87c., and \$1.50c. each. Wholesale by the principal Drug houses in the Union; and by Messrs. A. B. & D. SANDS, New York.

H. Blakely, St. Louis, general agent for Missouri, Illinois and Iowa. M. M. VAN DUSEN, agent for Springfield, Ill.

Advertisements from Springfield's *Illinois State Journal* (1853)

Rockingham-glazed yellowware fragments from a large figurine—potentially representing the legs of a dog similar to the one illustrated here—were also found in the Jail cellar. Such items are rare on nineteenth century archaeological sites.



Glass bottles from the Jail cellar...



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No.
ing

Helmbold's Fluid Extract Buchu

Is a certain cure for diseases of the
**BLADDER, KIDNEY'S GRAVEL, DROPSY,
ORGANIC WEAKNESS, FEMALE COMPLAINTS
GENERAL DEBILITY,**
and all diseases of the
URINARY ORGANS,
whether existing in
MALE OR FEMALE,
from whatever cause originating and no matter of
HOW LONG STANDING.
Diseases of these organs require the use of a di-
retic.
If no treatment is submitted to, Consumption
or Insanity may ensue. Our Flesh and Blood are
supported from these sources, and the
HEALTH AND HAPPINESS,
and
that of Posterity, depends upon prompt use of a
reliable remedy.

HELMBOLD'S EXTRACT BUCHU,
Established upwards of 18 years, prepared by
H. T. HELMBOLD,
DRUGGIST,
594 Broadway, New York, and
42y1 104 South 10th Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

**TAKE NO MORE UNPLEASANT AND UN-
SAFE REMEDIES** for unpleasant and dangerous
diseases. Use Helmbold's Extract Buchu and
Improved Mouth Wash. 42y1

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1870 FEB. YEAR 1. We want Agents

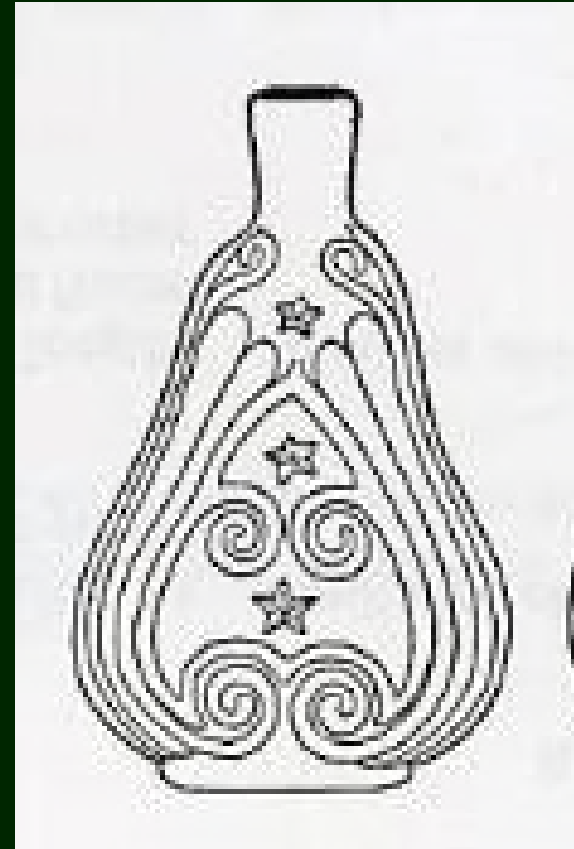
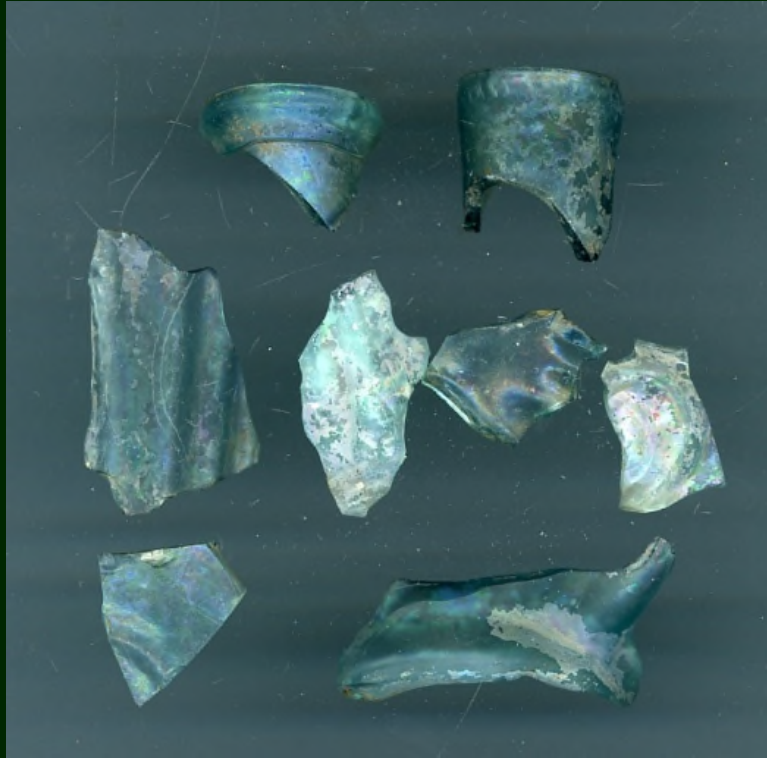
Smoking pipes were extremely common in both the Jail cellar, as well as around the Courthouse. Tobacco smoking seems to have been a common leisure activity around this public site. The majority of the pipes originated from northern Europe (including several with French marks).



One interesting pipe stem from within the builder's trench of the West Wing of the Courthouse had a molded reptile on its stem (potentially representing a crocodile or alligator). The symbolism of this reptile on this pipe is unknown.



Alcohol consumption was well documented at both the Courthouse and the Jail. Fragments of numerous whiskey flasks (predominately of the scroll variety) and tumblers (drinking glasses) were recovered during the excavations.



Not unexpectedly, writing activities also were well documented at both the Courthouse and Jail locations. Slate writing styluses and writing slates (left two images) were present in relative high quantity. Additionally, two copper alloy tubes (one marked COLUMBIAN) (right; middle) probably represent writing pens (like the example noted at top right), and an ink pen nib (right bottom) were found in the robbed builder's trench of the Courthouse.



Also very abundant, and located within the midden around the Courthouse, were fragments of salt-glazed stoneware ink bottles (left) (similar to the whole example at right; not from the excavations). These bottles once held ink manufactured by P. and J. Arnold of London, England.



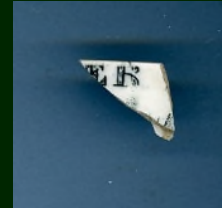
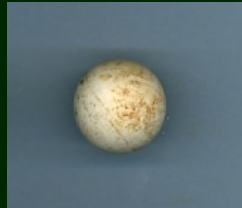
Bone preservation was very good at the Old Courthouse Site, and a wide range of it was recovered from the excavations—and will lend itself well for interpretation . This is some of the bone from the Jail cellar (Feature 22). The assemblage documents a variety of large mammal (beef and pork) as well as bird or fowl (particularly chicken) remains.



As the previous image depicted, a variety of meat cuts were present, including high-value beef cuts. But the assemblage also indicates that on-site butchering of hogs may have occurred (as indicated by foot and cranial elements at left), and that the pesky rat was ever present (middle). Additionally, fresh oysters from the Gulf of Mexico were consumed (right).



As expected, children and women were poorly represented in the artifact assemblage. Two items found might suggest the presence of children, and include a marble (top left) and a fragment of what appears to have been a child's cup (top right). Similarly, women appear to be represented by several copper-alloy clothing stays (bottom left), which are generally associated with hoop skirts and corsets, and a scent/perfume bottle (bottom right). The marble, clothing stays, and scent bottle were found in the Jail cellar, whereas the cup fragment was found at the Courthouse.



Printer's Lead Type



Several pieces of printer's lead type (like these illustrated here) were found during the excavations in contexts associated with the demolition of both the Courthouse and Jail (circa late 1860s). These may have been disbursed around the Square in August 1862 during the mob action that destroyed the newspaper office and printing press of the *Bloomington Times*, which was located across the street to the west of the jail. The editors of the newspaper sided a bit too closely with Copperhead sympathies.

Security was apparently an issue, as two padlocks were found in an early context—both at the Courthouse and at the Jail. The larger lock was a British manufactured item (marked with an impressed crown, the letters “V.R.”, and the word “SECURE” on the drop plate)—and contrasts with the American-made example at right advertised in the 1865 *Russell and Erwin* catalog.



Artifacts associated with firearms were also found at the Courthouse Site, and include...



- A. Small caliber lead ball (36-caliber pistol?)
- B. Small caliber brass shell casing (center fire; 32-caliber Smith & Wesson)
- C. 30-caliber Danish surplus “blank” round (center fire; post-1950)
- D. Unfired Springfield Model 1873 cartridge (center fire; 50-caliber ; from Frankfort Armory, 1887)

None of the munitions recovered from the Courthouse excavations would have been associated with the 1917 encampment of the National Guard on the Courthouse Square.





The archaeological excavations conducted for the new McLean County Visitor's Center have contributed significantly to our understanding of early use of the Courthouse Square, as well as insights into the mid-century lifeways of the early inhabitants of this region. The data is an invaluable comparative database for understanding urban lifeways in central Illinois.

But, also... there was a great deal of interest in our work, and the project proved to be an excellent opportunity for public outreach illustrating the benefits of archaeology, local history, and historic preservation.



This project was especially rewarding for me in that two of my mentors from graduate school (Illinois State University) were both able to visit.

Dr. Edward Jelks (Professor Emeritus, Department of Sociology and Anthropology)

Dr. William Walters (Professor Emeritus, Department of Geography)



Dr. Jelks with Museum Director Greg Koos



Dr. Walters

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

Thank You.

