

# Archaeological Mitigation of the 78th Street Site (11S821): A Look at Initial Settlement Period Sites in Illinois

by

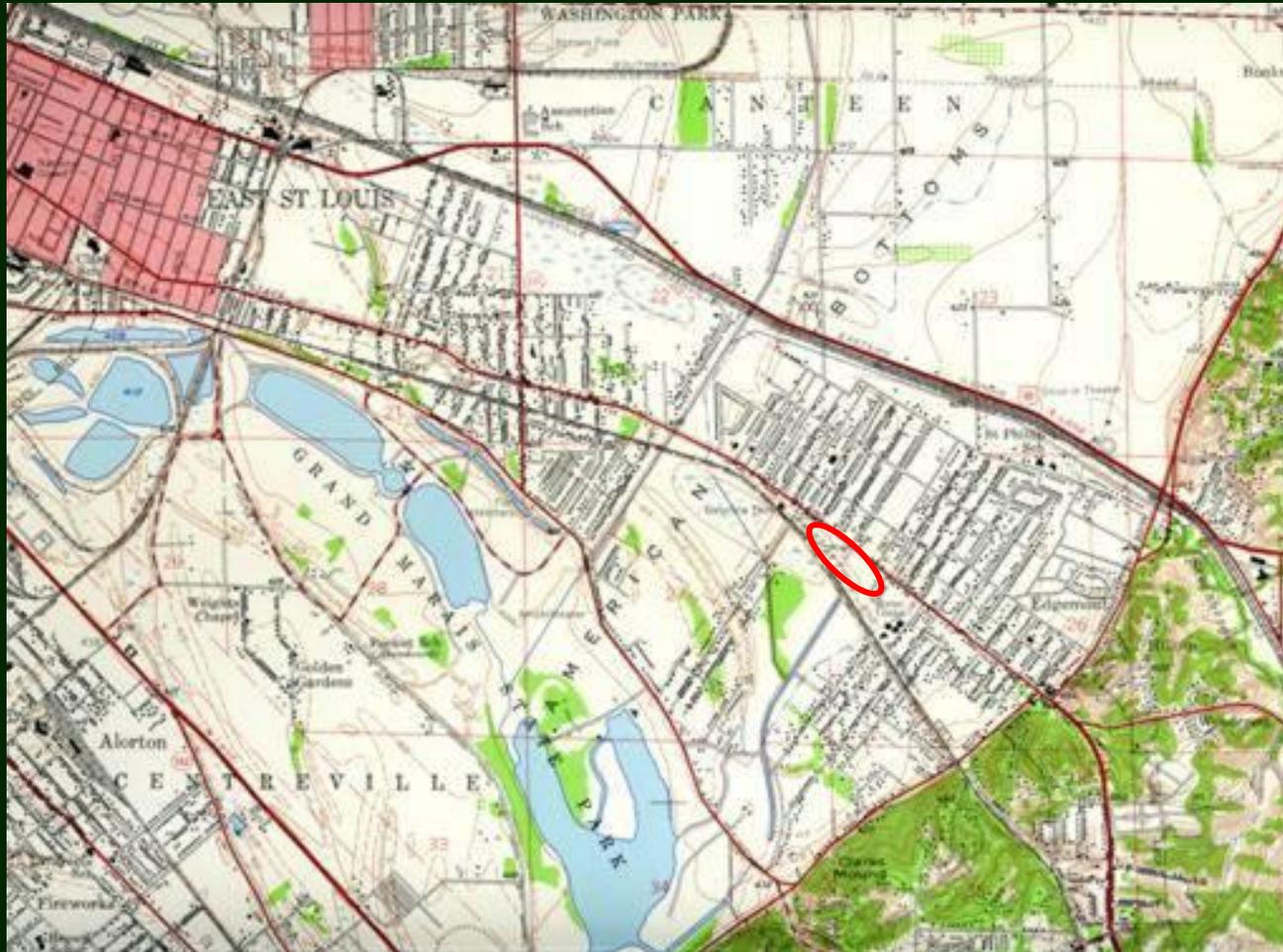
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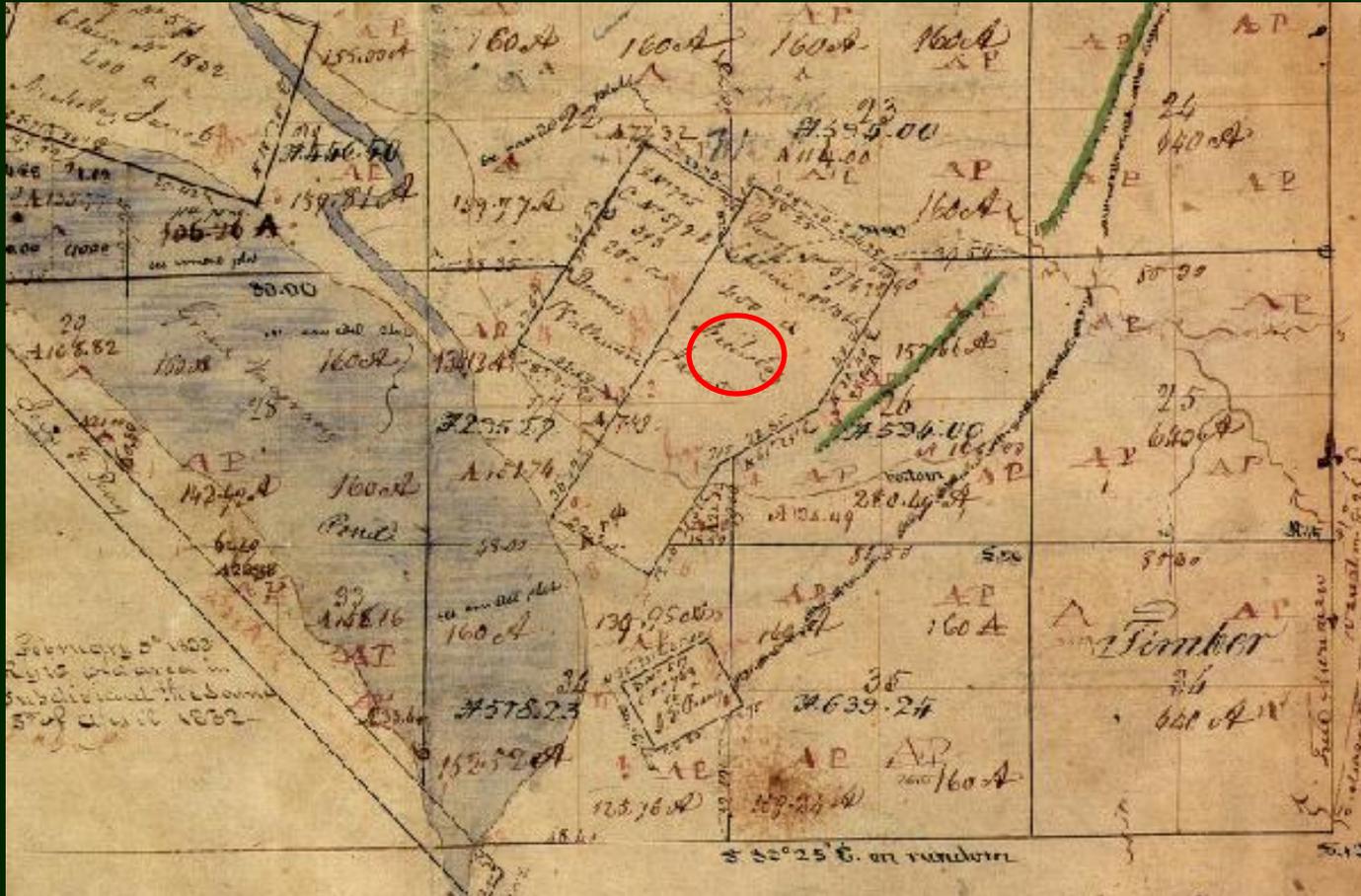
Location of the 78<sup>th</sup> Street Site illustrated on the 1954 U.S.G.S. topographic map. The site area is circled in red.



Approximate location of the 78<sup>th</sup> Street Site on de Finials 1796 map of the American Bottom region. The approximate site location is circled in red.



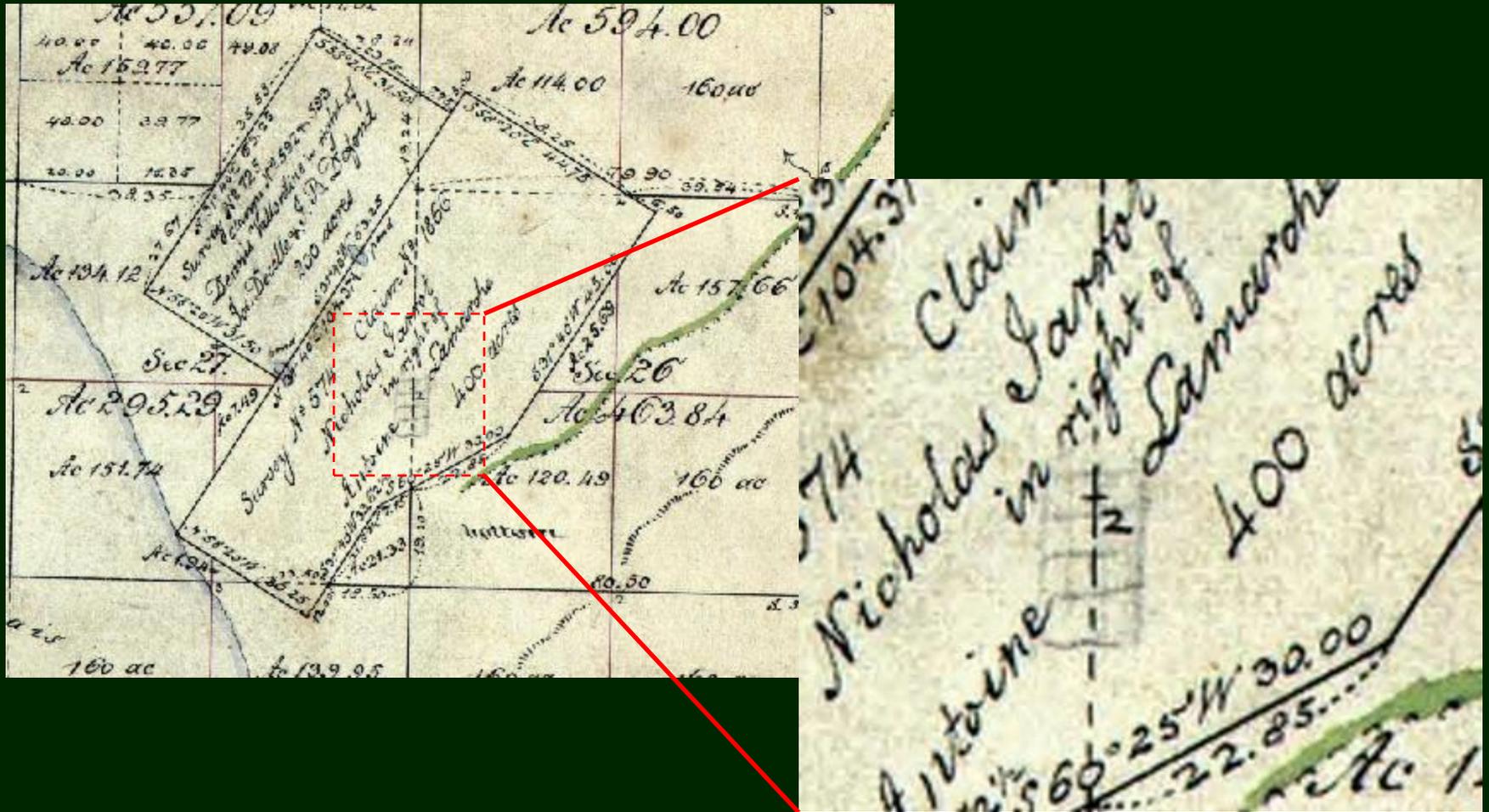
The 78<sup>th</sup> Street Site is centrally located within an early (circa 1790s) improvement claim (Survey Claim 574) located within the Mississippi River Bottom. The approximate site limits are circled in red.



Detail of a circa 1830 survey plat illustrating the appellation of “*Little French Village*” centrally located within Survey Claim 574.



Detail of a later redrawn U.S. General Land Office survey plat (dating from circa 1853) illustrating the potential depiction of Little French Village centrally located in Survey Claim 574.



By 1800, the overland St. Louis to Vincennes Road (illustrated here heading due east from St. Louis) had been established. State Street is a remnant of that early road. The 78<sup>th</sup> Street Site project area, located along State Street, is circled in red.



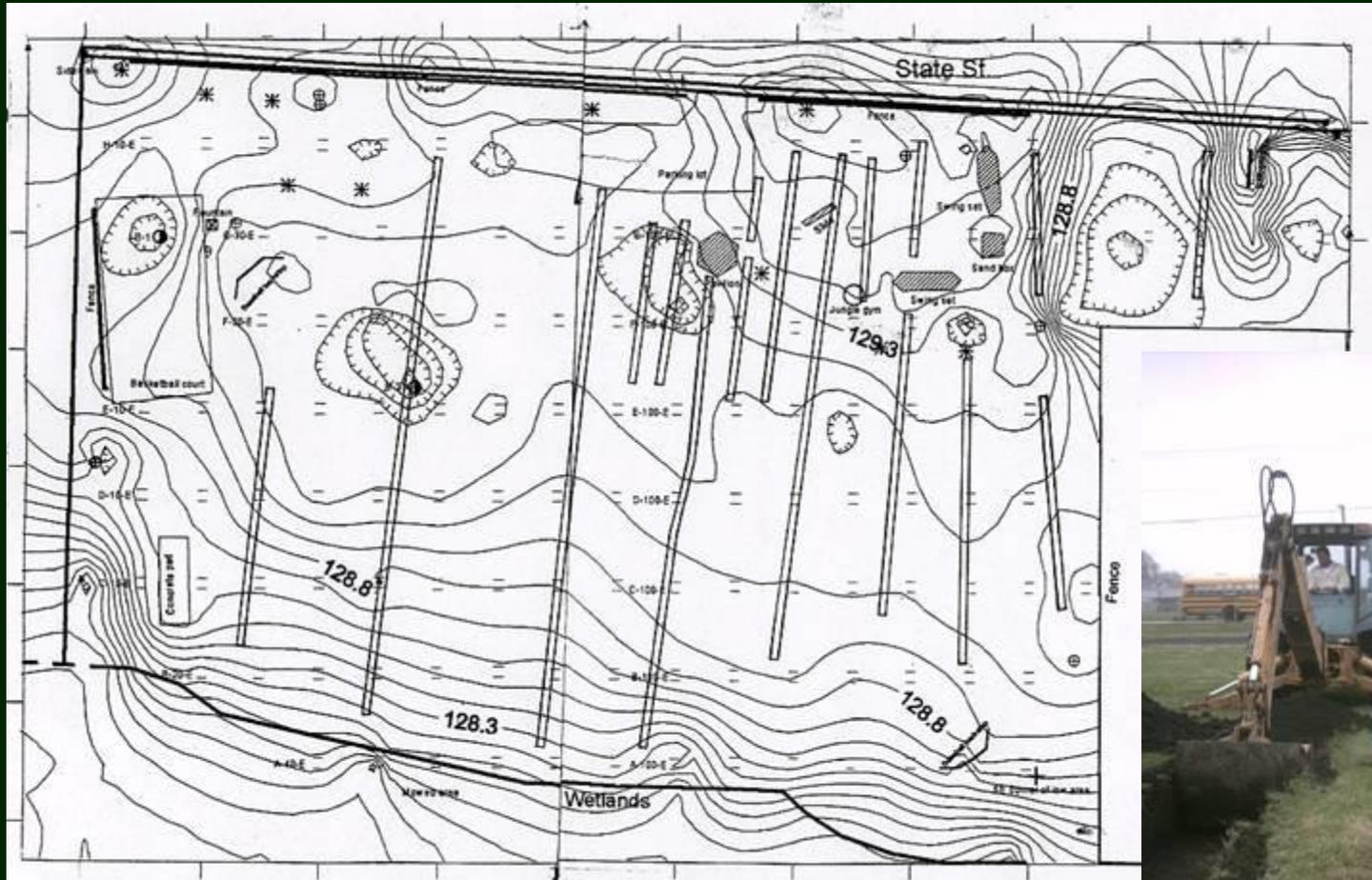
The 78<sup>th</sup> Street locale as depicted on the 1863 (left) and 1874 (right) historic atlases of St. Clair County. Both maps depict the small community of *French Village*.



By the late 1920s/early 1930s, the project area had been established as Jones Park, complete with a baseball diamond.



Phase II testing consisted of the excavation of a series of backhoe trenches across the grassed park.



A series of backhoe trenches was systematically excavated across the project area to inspect for subsurface archaeological features.



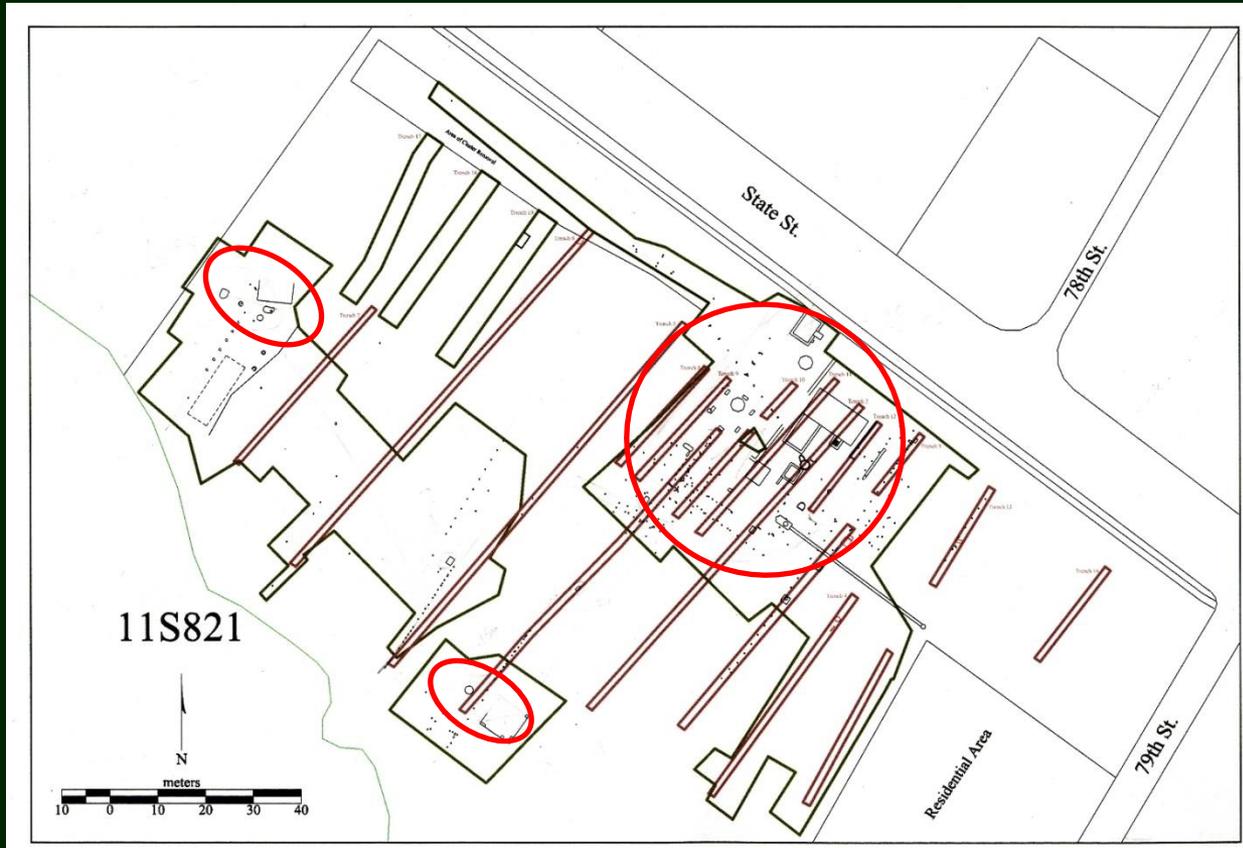
The Phase II testing uncovered a series of late prehistoric and nineteenth century historic features, and mitigation of both the prehistoric and historic components was recommended..



Mitigation of the 78<sup>th</sup> Street Site consisted of the removal of the topsoil by machinery and the hand excavation of features.



The 78<sup>th</sup> Street Site illustrating the location of backhoe trenches and large-scale block excavations. Three historic feature clusters were identified and are circled in red.

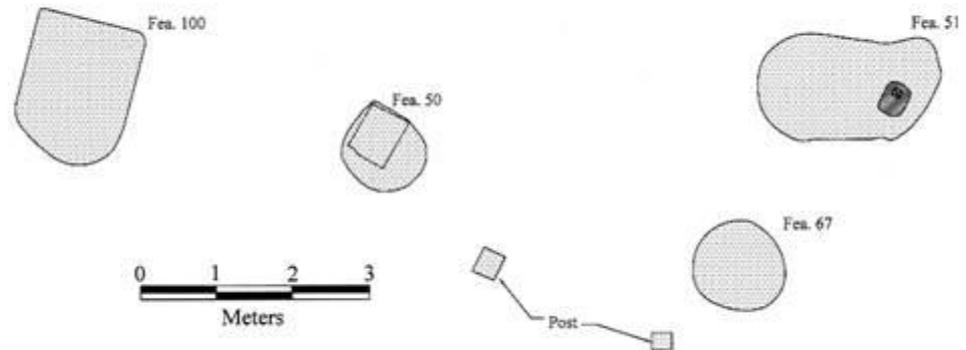
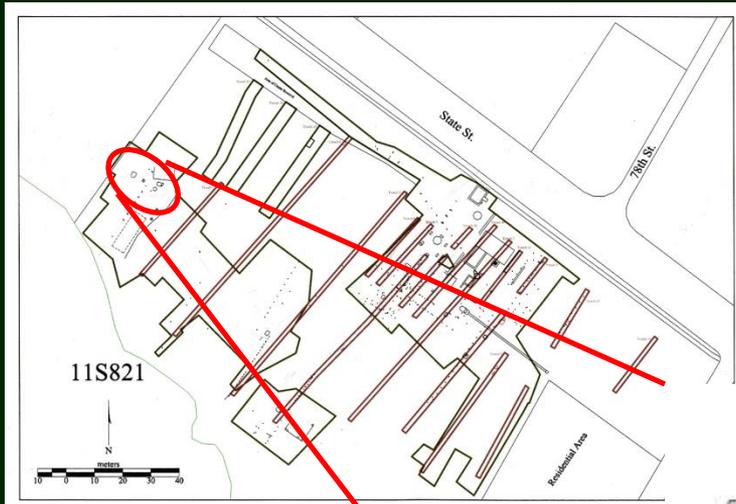


The North Feature Cluster, which was the largest, fronted State Street and represents the remains of the circa 1830 through 1920s Boneau family's commercial ventures—which included a tavern and inn strategically located along the roadway. This component is not the focus of this paper.

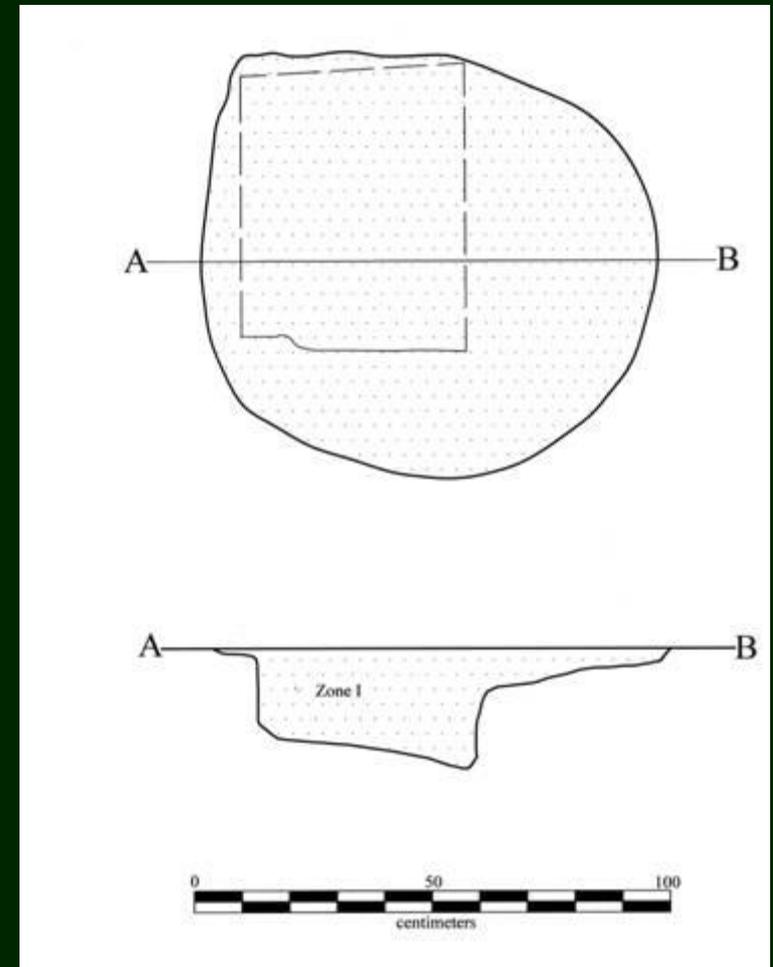


Tavern artifacts from a circa 1860 component.

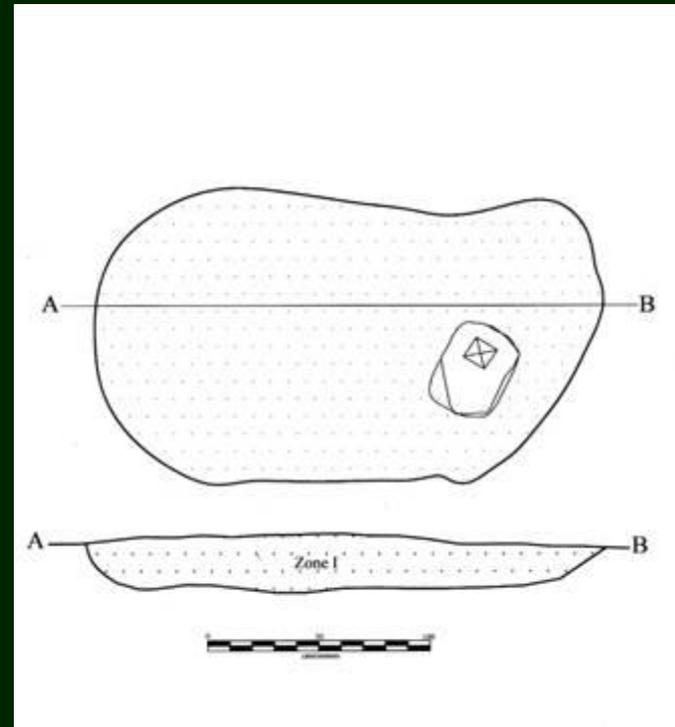
The West Feature Cluster, which consisted of four shallow pits located in a tight cluster, appears to have fronted the wetlands to the south.



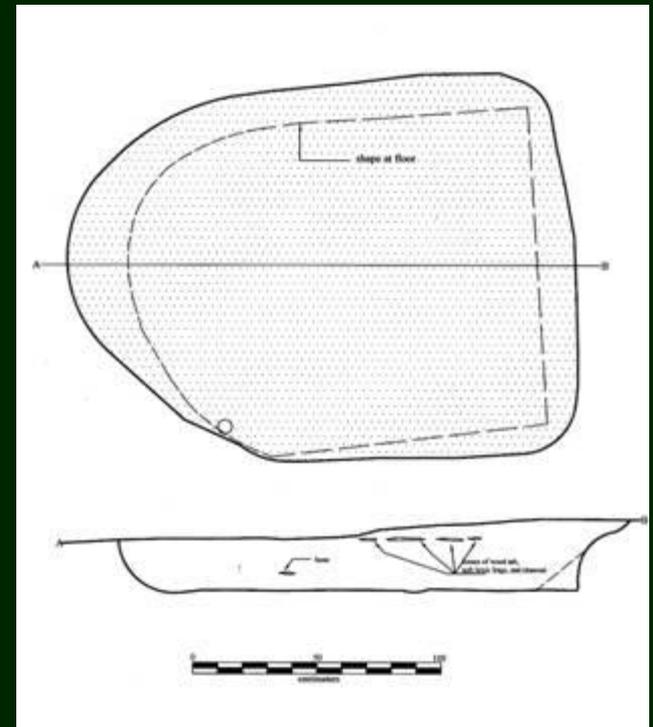
# Details of Feature 50, West Feature Cluster, 78<sup>th</sup> Street Site.



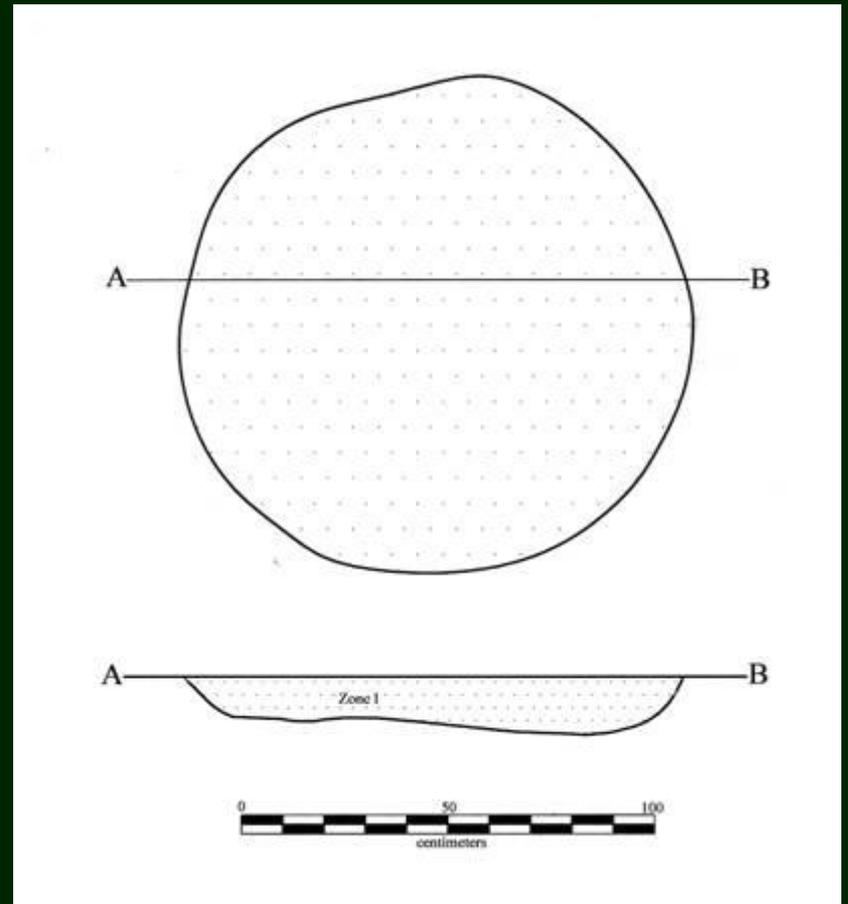
# Details of Feature 51, West Feature Cluster, 78<sup>th</sup> Street Site.



# Details of Feature 100, West Feature Cluster, 78<sup>th</sup> Street Site.



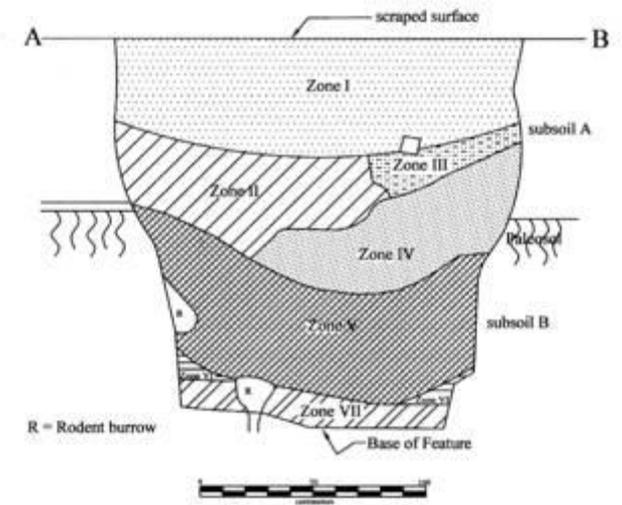
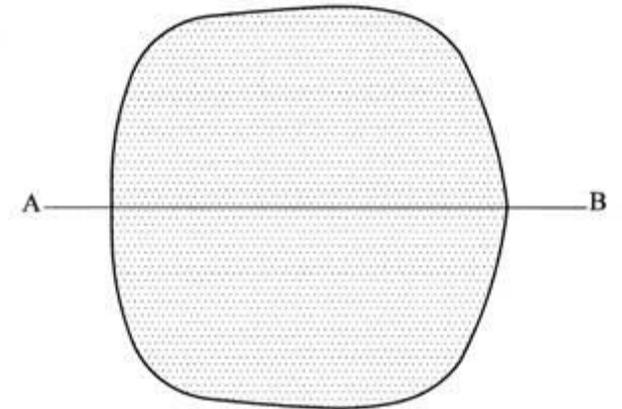
# Details of Feature 67, West Feature Cluster, 78<sup>th</sup> Street Site.



The South Feature Cluster consisted of several substantial stone piers representing a large, substantial structure, and a single deep circular pit—here illustrated in yellow.



# Details of Feature 156, South Feature Cluster, 78<sup>th</sup> Street Site.



Few ceramic and glass vessels were identified within this early historic component. The majority of the ceramic and glass vessels were recovered from Feature 50.

**Feature 50**

- F50-1 plate / platter (undecorated creamware, scalloped edge)
- F50-2 saucer (painted, polychrome, brown stemmed floral pearlware; nicely "cut" foot ring; stylized "King's Rose" floral pattern)
- F50-3 bowl (painted, polychrome, brown stemmed floral and brown lined pearlware; Chinese bowl shape?)
- F50-4 bowl (annular decorated or "dipped" pearlware; unknown shape)
- F50-5 unknown (slip decorated interior, redware, glazed exterior and interior; body sherd only)
- F50-6 bottle (clear / lead glass; rolled or beaded lip, lip on)
- F50-7 cup (painted polychrome, brown stemmed floral : bowl shape) [stylized "King's Rose" floral pattern;
- F50-8 small plate (?) edge decorated, green, scalloped edge
- F50-9 bowl (undecorated creamware, Chinese bowl shape)
- F50-10 bowl (undecorated creamware, rolled rim unknown)
- F50-11 bowl (undecorated, redware, refined tableware bowl)
- F50-12 bowl (undecorated redware, utilitarian / kitchenware)
- F50-13 tumbler or bottle (clear / lead glass, round, ground l

**Feature 51**

- F51-1 saucer (painted, polychrome, brown stemmed floral stylized "King's Rose" floral pattern; same pattern)
- F51-2 cup (painted polychrome, brown stemmed floral and bowl shape) [stylized "King's Rose" floral pattern; Vessel F50-2)

**Glass and Ceramic Vessels by Feature**

	<u>Ceramic</u>	<u>Glass</u>	<u>Glass/Ceramic</u>
<b>Feature 50</b>	11	2	18.1
<b>Feature 51</b>	2	0	0.0
<b>Feature 67</b>	0	0	0.0
<b>Feature 100</b>	0	0	0.0
<b>Feature 156</b>	0	0	0.0

Artifacts from this early component include undecorated (left) and edge decorated (middle) creamwares, and polychrome painted pearlwares (right). Vessel forms include bowls, plates, cups, and saucers. Glassware was nearly absent from the assemblage.



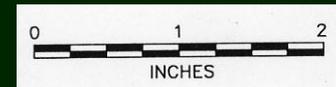
The teawares are predominately polychrome painted pearlware cups and saucers.



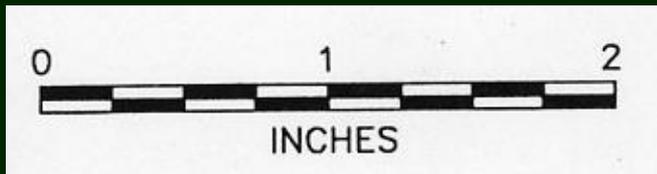
Redware vessels, consisting predominately of bowls and potentially plates, are also present. Some of these are slip decorated.



A variety of non-ceramic artifacts was also recovered and includes straight pins, buttons (bone sew-through and brass loop shank), melted lead, ball clay smoking pipes, and gun parts (gun flint and trigger guard finial). Also recovered was this extremely battered brass spigot.



This silver “piece of eight” (left), also recovered from this early component, was chisel-cut from a late 18<sup>th</sup> century 2-reales coin similar to that illustrated at the right.



## Summary and Conclusions

- These two feature clusters probably were occupied by French families from Cahokia during the years circa 1790-95 to 1825-1830. These feature clusters represent activity areas within the early community of *Little French Village*.
- This site was located at the juncture of the Vincennes Road and the Grand Marais backwater lake. The early components appear to have been oriented to the roadway, but in close proximity to the lake. Potentially, other contemporary feature clusters from this community may have been oriented to the adjacent roadway. By the late 1830s, the community was oriented to the roadway which was becoming more significant.
- Not unexpectedly, although inhabitants of French descent, material culture dominated by non-French artifacts (i.e., ceramics).
- Although material culture was dominated by non-French items, structure of community (agglomerated village setting with use of long lots) may reflect French heritage.

## Summary and Conclusions (con't)

- Sites of this initial settlement period in Illinois are characterized by low feature and artifact densities. Sites of this era, due to their ephemeral character, are poorly documented in Illinois. Few have been excavated, and those that have been excavated are poorly reported.
- Current belief in Illinois by some historical archaeologists (cf. Mazrim 2002) is that the archaeological record of these early settlement sites is relatively homogeneous with regard to site structure and material culture. Such is not the case, as both site structure and artifact assemblages illustrate great variability.
- The West and South Feature Clusters document substantially different “site” types, and illustrate the variability in site structure typical of these early period sites. The West Feature Cluster documents a impermanent structure with shallow pit features and no source of water. The South Feature Cluster documents a more permanent structure complete with a potential well, yet lacks the shallow pit features.

## Summary and Conclusions (con't)

- A significant problem in Illinois is that many historical archaeologists in the state confuse the process of *description* and the process of *interpretation*.
- To many archaeologist in Illinois, the deep, circular, unlined pit identified as Feature 156—which is a common feature type on early historic sites in Illinois—would be simply *described* as “an unlined cistern.” On the contrary, several potential *interpretations* of the function of this deep pit are possible—only one of which is that of a cistern. We believe that such features represent shallow wells that have gone dry with the dropping of the water table, and which were robbed of their stone linings prior to abandonment. Such practice represents poor scholarship, and has lead to the potential misinterpretation of many sites in Illinois.
- Similarly, the interpretation of the shallow pit features identified as Features 50, 51, 67, and 100 (in the West Feature Cluster) is difficult at best, and not done with much confidence. Several interpretations of the original function of these shallow pit features are viable. Whether they represent sub-floor cellars, exterior root storage pits, or simply daub preparation pits is unclear.



Excavations at the 78<sup>th</sup> Street Site have contributed to our understanding of the variability in the lifeways and/or quality of life associated with the early inhabitants of this region. Further analysis of the artifacts (especially the substantial faunal assemblage recovered from these features) will contribute significantly to our understanding of the initial settlement of the region.

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Thank You.

