

Archaeology, the Civil War, and the Home-Front in Springfield, Illinois

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Though located far from the battlefields of the American Civil War, Springfield, Illinois made an important contribution to the Union's successful war effort. For a variety of reasons—including its role as State Capital, its rail connections, and the equally important political consideration of it being President Abraham Lincoln's hometown—Springfield was selected by the U. S. Government to serve as a military training and supply center during the war. Camp Yates was established on the west side of the city in April 1861, and it was here that Ulysses S. Grant received his first commission during the war. This encampment shortly was succeeded by Camp Butler, which was located six miles east of Springfield and served as one of two primary training centers in Illinois (the other being Camp Douglas in Chicago). Ultimately, an estimated 200,000 Illinois troops would process through Camp Butler, which also was used as a Confederate prisoner-of-war camp for a time. Aside from this, several prominent Springfield industries were awarded government contracts to supply war materials, including uniforms and general commodities.

Less known or well documented is the character of the home-front in Springfield during the Civil War. This conflict eclipsed all others previously experienced by Americans in terms of number of enlistments, casualties, and the sheer logistics involved in waging war. It also raised deep political questions about the United States itself, regarding states' rights, slavery, and the extents or limits of federal authority—issues over which the editors of Springfield's newspapers sparred on a daily basis. Springfield was home to the *Illinois State Journal*, a newspaper Lincoln had been allied with from his earliest days in politics and was an organ through which his administration's war-time policies could be articulated and emphasized to the people of Illinois. The battle for the hearts and minds of Northerners was a real one during the war, and the "loyal" press played a vital role in the Union's ultimate victory.

Although Springfield was never on the front-line of the war, the city still regularly was exposed to the conflict through its war-related facilities/encampments and industries, the steady stream of soldiers passing through it, and the volatile political climate of the period. The war, for all of its destructive tendencies, was a decided boon to the local economy on multiple levels. Major industries were obvious benefactors, but the war also generated opportunities for more mundane, if not illicit, businesses. Concentrations of single young men in a community required outlets for leisure activity, and this need became more pronounced in a war-time setting. Bars, saloons, and houses of prostitution were available for their use in Springfield. The number of such businesses present in the city prior to 1861 is unknown, but it undoubtedly increased during the war when

Camp Butler barracked several thousand troops at any one time and many other veterans were passing through Springfield on their way home on furlough or after mustering out.

Excavations conducted by Fever River Research (Springfield, Illinois) in the spring of 2001 for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) exposed several aspects of the home-front activity that occurred in Springfield during the Civil War years. Although not “official”, in the sense of being directly related to the federal government, the activities documented by the archaeology occurred during the war years and document both the character of everyday life during the Civil War years, as well as the quick pace of the changing urban landscape (city’s central business district) at this time. Ultimately, the ALPLM project area covered portions of three city blocks with excavations being conducted over a four-year period between 2001 and 2004. The area of interest for this article is the north half of Block 12 of the Original Town of Springfield, which was excavated in 2001 and is presently occupied the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. This half-block area, located adjacent to the Public Square, was designated as IAS Site No. 11SG1286.

The north half of Block 12 consists of four lots, numbered 1-4. These lots are bounded by Jefferson Street on the north, Seventh Street on the east, Sixth Street on the west, and an alley to the south. The archaeological discussion presented here focuses on Lots 3 and 4, located on the northwest corner of Block 28, Original Town Plat. The southwest corner of Block 28 fronts the public square, which at the time of the Civil War was the location of the Illinois State Capitol. Approximately 50% of the archaeological deposits on Lots 3 and 4 had been compromised by post 1870s construction activity. The remaining 50% of these two lots exhibited excellent archaeological integrity, and the excavations on these lots revealed multiple components dating from the earliest days of Springfield. Of particular interest is the fact that this urban site had never been plowed, and rather shallow—albeit fairly significant—features were well preserved beneath later nineteenth century deposits. Such features would not have been preserved if the site had been plowed.

In December 1827, Jabez Capps purchased Lot 4 and in the following October 1828 he purchased the adjacent Lot 3. Capps was an English immigrant who arrived in the United States in 1817, and in Sangamon County in 1819. Capps initially tried his hand at teaching school, but eventually established one of the first stores in Springfield. Although Capps commercial endeavors were unsuccessful in Springfield, his luck changed for the better when he relocated to Logan County in 1836 and established the town of Mt. Pulaski. The earliest archaeological features documented during the ALPLM investigations were, no doubt, associated with the late 1820s through 1832 Capps ownership. Two distinct middens were excavated and included 1) a dense concentration of shelled pearlware plate fragments (manufactured by William Adams) (Feature 41) and 2) redware waster sherds and kiln furniture associated with the redware potter John Neff Ebey (Feature 40). Both artifact scatters, which were located on the north half of the two lots, were probably contemporary and associated with John Ebey’s short-term redware pottery workshop (1830-32). A domestic component potentially occupied by John Ebey during the same time period was located on the South half of the lot.

In July 1832, prior to moving to Logan County, Capps sold the two lots (Lots 3 and 4) to a local doctor named Thomas Houghan. Houghan, in turn sold the South 57’ to Joseph Klein in October

1832 (for \$174), and the North 100' to Nathaniel Ware in June 1833 (for \$300). Ware, in turn sold the North 100' to Simeon Francis in November 1833 for \$359. The increase in price may suggest that the property had been minimally improved by this time. Similarly, though, the price may simply indicate the increased price for a nice corner lot near Springfield's developing downtown business district (and its newly developed Public Square).

The earlier domestic component—believed to have been initially established in circa 1830 by, or for, John Neff Ebey and noted above—persisted on the South 57' of Lots 3 and 4 through the early 1850s (circa 1852). A small earthen cellar (Feature 22), two wells (Features 23 and 27), and a substantial domestic midden (Feature 39) were all that remained from a small log dwelling that once was located here. Artifacts recovered indicate a Catholic family of relative status may have lived here at one time. Throughout most of this period, the South 57' was owned during this time by Joseph Klein, a relatively successful real estate developer, and the occupant of this property is unknown.

A native of Connecticut, Simeon Francis arrived in Springfield in 1831 and established the *Sangamo Journal* in partnership with his brothers. Anti-Jackson in orientation, the *Journal* soon became the leading Whig newspaper in the state, one to which the young Abraham Lincoln was a subscriber and frequent contributor. Lincoln ultimately developed a close friendship to Simeon Francis and enjoyed the support of the *Journal* in his various political campaigns. In 1833-1834, Francis constructed an upscale residence on the southeast corner of Jefferson and Sixth Street (on the North 100' Lots 3 and 4), only a block north of the Public Square. In 1847, the Francis brothers renamed their paper the *Illinois Journal*, and in 1853 relocated the business to a new three-story brick building constructed on the South 57' Lots 3 and 4. Joseph Klein apparently had constructed a new commercial building in circa 1852, and sold it with the South 57' to the Francis brothers for \$3,000 in May 1853. This building was located immediately south of Simeon Francis' personal residence and was comprised of three storefronts, the southern of which was occupied by the *Journal* offices. Simeon Francis sold his interest in the paper in 1855, at which time it was renamed the *Illinois State Journal*. Francis remained in Springfield for another four years before moving to Oregon in 1859. There he renewed his newspaper career, publishing the *Oregon Farmer* and the *Daily Oregonian*. His old friend Abraham Lincoln later appointed him Paymaster in the United States Army for Washington Territory.

Simeon Francis and Abraham Lincoln were more than passing acquaintances. Their interaction began purely as an anonymous business relationship when Lincoln, while living in New Salem, would sell subscriptions to the *Journal* and write letters to the editor. It was not until 1837, when both men lived in Springfield that their friendship would truly grow, fueled in large measure by Lincoln's political aspirations. Lincoln is quoted as saying, "the *Journal* paper was always my friend; and of course, its editors the same"—no doubt referring to Francis. Politically Francis and Lincoln were quite similar. Both were dedicated Whigs who later joined the Republican Party, often attending local party activities and campaigning together. On a more personal level, Lincoln and Francis acted as though they were blood brothers, each taking a keen personal interest in the other's life. Legend has it that Francis' wife (Mrs. Eliza Rumsey Francis) was responsible for the reconciliation of Mary Todd with Lincoln after their romance had broken off. After a separation beginning in January of 1841, the "courtship [was] renewed in secret" with

Mary and Abraham being reunited in the Francis home (on the N100' Lots 3 and 4). The couple were subsequently married in November 1842.

The Francis residence is documented on the North 100' Lots 3 and 4 on both an 1854 and 1858 *Map of Springfield*. Although physical remains of the actual residence were not located during the ALPLM investigations, ancillary features including privies (Features 5, 6, 35), cisterns (Features 3B and 12/14) and a well (Feature 20) once associated with this residence were uncovered. In overlaying the footprint of the house from these early maps onto the archaeological base map, the domestic site plan from the 1830s became readily visible. Of particular interest was the presence of the shallow privy pits along the back property line, and their contents that were once associated with the early Francis occupation. Also documented at this early residence were multiple cisterns for collecting and storing rain water—one of which was an enormous state-of-the art system built in circa 1853. This large cistern (Feature 14) was connected to an adjacent filter (Feature 12), which was as large as most domestic cisterns of its day and dwarfed the earlier mortar-lined cistern (Feature 3B). Given that Francis had a strong interest in agricultural literature, and also was co-owner of an agricultural implement dealership (titled “Francis and Barrel”) located in the adjacent commercial building to the south, the large cistern may have been inspired by his agricultural pursuits.

To the south of the Francis residence, the ALPLM investigations uncovered the nearly complete footprint of the *Journal* building (on the South 57' of Lots 3 and 4). Constructed in circa 1853, this building persisted through circa 1968 when it was demolished along with the adjacent buildings to make a surface parking lot. Features associated with this commercial structure were few in number and consisted predominately of a shallow stone perimeter foundation (Feature 42) outlining the three distinctive bays (storefronts) comprising this commercial structure, three wells (Features 28, 32, and 33), an underground drain (Feature 53), and a later brick addition (Feature 43). Lacking any form of cellar or basement, this structure had effectively encapsulated the earlier domestic component discussed above. One particularly exciting feature uncovered during the excavations was a large, thick brick pad (identified as Feature 21) centrally located within the southern-most bay of this building. This pad has been interpreted as the support foundation for the steam printing press (and/or boiler) installed in the building for use with the newspaper. Several pieces of lead type were recovered from around the feature and attests to its association with the printing press. Even though Francis had sold the paper in 1855, Lincoln still retained connections to the periodical throughout his stay in Springfield, as well as during his occupancy of the White House. It was in the *Journal* offices, and on this press, that Lincoln, the new President-elect, had his inaugural address put into type and a few proofs printed so that he could hand it out to party leaders to get their advice before delivering his address. It was thus at this site that one of the most pivotal addresses in American history was first put into print.

By the Civil War era, Francis had sold his Springfield property and relocated with his family to Oregon. Located along Jefferson Street, in close proximity to the Central Business District, the land on which the Francis residence sat (the North 100' of Lots 3 and 4) was prime real estate. Over the previous 20 years, the block on which this property sat had transitioned rather quickly from an industrial neighborhood on the outskirts of the village, to a residential neighborhood adjacent to the Public Square, to a commercial neighborhood. In September 1859, in hopes of constructing a new city hall and market house at this location, the City of Springfield purchased

the older Francis residence with plans of demolishing the structure. The City paid a hefty \$10,000 to purchase the house and associated land, and in December 1861, in anticipation of a new city hall, they also bought the northern bay (storefront) of the adjacent *Journal* building to the south. But construction of a new city hall at this location never materialized, and the Francis lot remained undeveloped through the Civil War years. With a change in the city administration during the spring of 1864, plans to build a city hall at this location were scrapped, and demands to recoup the \$10,000 purchase price of the so-called “elephant” were expressed by many. The *Illinois State Journal* reported in early March 1864 that the Francis Lot had been rented to O. M. Sheldon “until such time as the city shall want it, for \$120 per year.” Later that year, in early September 1864, the large Francis property was partitioned into five 20’ lots fronting North Sixth Street and sold at public auction. The northern three of these lots were purchased by Robert Rudolph, a prominent brewer in Springfield who proceeded to construct the opulent Rudolph Opera House at this location. The two lots immediately south of those purchased by Rudolph were purchased by Oliver M. Sheldon, a local wholesale liquor dealer who occupied the northern storefront in the adjacent *Illinois Journal* office building since at least May 1856. He apparently purchased this commercial storefront from Francis in October 1859. By early 1865, the Francis residence had been demolished and the opera house was under construction. Within a few years, two more commercial structures were constructed along North Sixth Street, forming a solid wall of brick commercial structures from the alley north to Jefferson Street. The commercial transformation of this portion of the block was completed by the late 1860s.

The home-front in Springfield during the Civil War years was a vibrant place particularly within the downtown central business district. The large influx of young males in Springfield during these years caused quite a commotion and the local newspapers are full of stories about the soldiers and their exploits in town. Bars and/or saloons, as well as more notorious houses of prostitution—the most infamous two being known as “Fort Taylor” and “Fort Johnson” (named after the madams of the house)—were doing a brisk business during the Civil War years, catering to the transient soldiers. One recent author noted that “the battles at ‘Fort Taylor’ made the news nearly as often as those being fought by Generals Grant and Lee.”

The use of the Old Francis Lot through the early years of the City’s ownership (1859-1863) are unclear. Records suggest that the property was fenced in 1862, and brick sidewalks were constructed around it in 1863. By early 1864, the wholesale liquor dealer (O. M. Sheldon) who was occupying the northern store in the adjacent *Journal Building* had rented the Old Francis Lot (and presumably the still intact residence). The archaeological investigations have given us some insights into how this property was used during at least some of these intervening years (minimally 1864-65). Several features once associated with the Francis family’s domestic occupation of the residence were abandoned and filled with predominately bar-related artifacts during the early to middle 1860s. The large cistern (Feature 14) built by Francis in the early 1850s was filled with bar-related artifacts dating from the early to middle 1860s. Similarly, the initial fill within the family’s well (Feature 20) consisted of bar-related trash dating from the very late 1850s and early 1860s. Similarly, a new privy pit (Feature 18) was constructed on the east side of the Francis residence. Unlike the earlier privy pits located on the south side of the residence, the placement of the privy towards the east side of the house indicates a reorientation of the Old Francis Lot during these years from Jefferson Street on the north, to Sixth Street (and the Public Square) on the west. Like the well and the cistern, this privy pit also was filled with a

variety of bar-related artifacts. Although the archaeology documents a reorientation of the lot, and a major change in the use of the lot (from residential to commercial), it is unclear as to when this transition took place. Most likely this transition occurred in early 1864 under the tenancy of Oliver Sheldon, but it is not unreasonable to suspect that it may have occurred a few years earlier. The use of the house as a saloon, and the adjoining space between the old house and Sheldon's store in the Journal building would have complimented his nearby wholesale liquor business, and would have been well situated along Jefferson Street and the Public Square to take advantage of the multitude of individuals in need of refreshments in the downtown district.

Artifacts from this suite of features located on the Old Francis lot were all fairly similar in character, and representative of trash discarded from a commercial saloon or bar. These features contained numerous salt-glazed stoneware jugs (which generally contained whiskey), small whiskey flasks typical of the Civil War years (decorated with a range of motifs stressing nationalistic elements and the reunification of the Union), black glass bottles (often associated with ales, stouts, and brandies), large black glass demijohns (typically used to hold bulk wines), small tumblers typically associated with distilled liquor consumption, and smoking pipes. Of particular interest was a U.S. military belt buckle dating from the Civil War years, believed to have been discarded in the fill of the large cistern. One can only imagine how a soldier lost his belt at this downtown location. The well was a rather deep shaft feature and was filled over a period of several decades (circa 1860-1910) by refuse generated predominately from a bar or saloon. Beer mugs from the lower levels of the well were not as common as in the upper levels of the well, indicating a strong preference for distilled liquors during these Civil War years, which was a very vernacular American pattern of alcohol consumption. The limited number of beer mugs that were present in this Civil War context were short and wide—more typical of heavy ale and stout consumption. In contrast, the upper levels of this well, which date to the later nineteenth century (1880s), were represented by tall, narrow mugs generally associated with lager beer consumption. It was during this time period that the American public began to accept the new German lager beers, as they were perceived as nutritious, and often more healthy than drinking tainted water from local wells. Although lager beer was becoming well accepted by the non-German citizenry of Springfield by the 1870s, it would appear that it was not, as yet, available to the patrons of Sheldon's establishment. The *Illinois State Register* ran a short notice in their May 19th, 1865 paper, which stated "Thanks—To Jacob Joerger, of the Washington saloon, opposite the post office, for a dozen bottles of his excellent lager. This beer is put up expressly for family use, and can be delivered to families at reasonable rates. This healthful beverage is destined to supplant all other drinks, and ceasing to be Teutonic, will soon be classed as American."

Shortly after the end of the Civil War, the immediate project area was dramatically altered. The older Francis residence was torn down to make way for the construction of the modern Rudolph Opera House in early 1865 (later rebuilt after a disastrous fire in 1876, and renamed the Chatterton Opera House after its new owner). Additionally, two new commercial buildings were constructed in the narrow lots located between the Opera House and the *Illinois Journal* building. These new buildings, which were to remain at this location through circa 1968, housed a variety of bars/saloons and restaurants through the years catering to the demands of the changing neighborhood. A series of sequential, well preserved privies were identified behind the

foot print of these two buildings and the excavation of these features document changing commercial character of this neighbor through the nineteenth and early twentieth century years—and the development of what became known as the Levee District. Springfield's Levee District became infamous for its nefarious activities and persisted through the 1960s before succumbing finally to large-scale urban renewal efforts.

The first season of the archaeological investigations for the ALPLM were extremely fruitful, documenting a variety of features and activities associated with the initial years of settlement of Springfield. The archaeological investigations documented the rather fast pace of the transition of this urban neighborhood during the Civil War years, as it evolved from its earliest residential beginnings to the commercial character we envision today. This transition began during the 1850s and was relatively complete by the late 1860s, and was in part due to the increased commercial activities that occurred in Springfield during the Civil War years. The archaeology of this block has given us a tangible connection to the past events and how they transformed the lives of many Springfield residents. Similarly, it has provided a richer, fuller picture of Lincoln's Springfield, one where aspects of the city's development that have been ignored or glossed over by traditional histories of the president's hometown (i.e. alcohol consumption, prostitution, etc.) are illuminated. Side by side with the seamier side of the community's development was the *Illinois Journal*—one of the prominent Whig/Republican newspapers of the period which played a significant role in the development of Abraham Lincoln's political rhetoric. The archaeology of the Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum has given us insights to this tumultuous period—contrasting the everyday leisure activities of the citizenry (including many of the soldiers passing through the community) with the political writings of Abraham Lincoln himself.

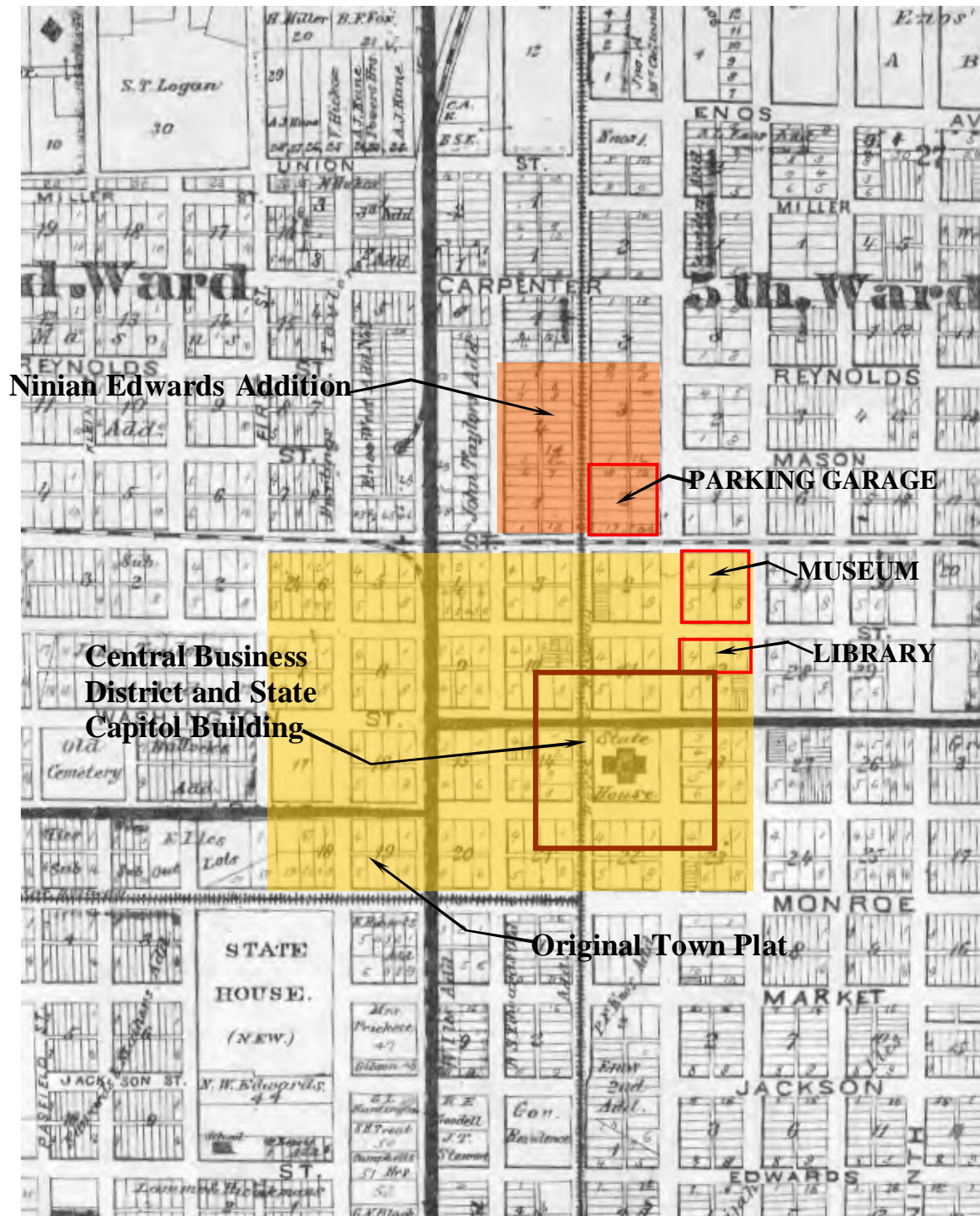


Figure 2. Location of the ALPLM project areas in relationship to the Original Town Plat (shaded in gold) and the community's central business district (outlined in red) (Brink, McCormick and Company 1874:50).



Figure 3. Lincoln Presidential Library project area as illustrated on the 1854 *City of Springfield* map (Potter 1854). This is the earliest map that illustrates buildings within the project area. Note how the area was fairly well developed with a combination of commercial, residential, and institutional buildings by this date. The Library project area is outlined in red.



Figure 4. Overview of the archaeological excavations at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. Left: View looking east towards Sixth Street, and the initiation of backhoe excavations to open up the large excavation blocks. Right: View looking east towards Seventh Street down the center of the north half of Block 12, as the excavations are nearing completion.



Figure 5. Miscellaneous images depicting the excavation of features uncovered during the Library investigations. Top: Excavating Feature 23, an early well associated with the *Pre-Journal* domestic component on the south portion of Lot 4. Middle: Completion of the first half of Feature 7, a later nineteenth century privy. Bottom: Excavating the second half of Feature 5, an early 1830s privy associated with the Simeon Francis occupation of Lots 3-4.



Figure 6. There was a great variety in size, depth, and artifact content of the features excavated within the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library project area. The top feature (Feature 14) represents a large brick-lined cistern constructed for use by Simeon Francis at his residence in circa 1853. The cistern was abandoned during the early to middle 1860s and filled with a variety of bar-related artifacts. The lower image depicts a small, shallow privy pit (Feature 5, incorrectly labeled in the photo-board as Feature 2). Feature 5 probably dates from the 1830s, and was associated with Simeon Francis and his family.

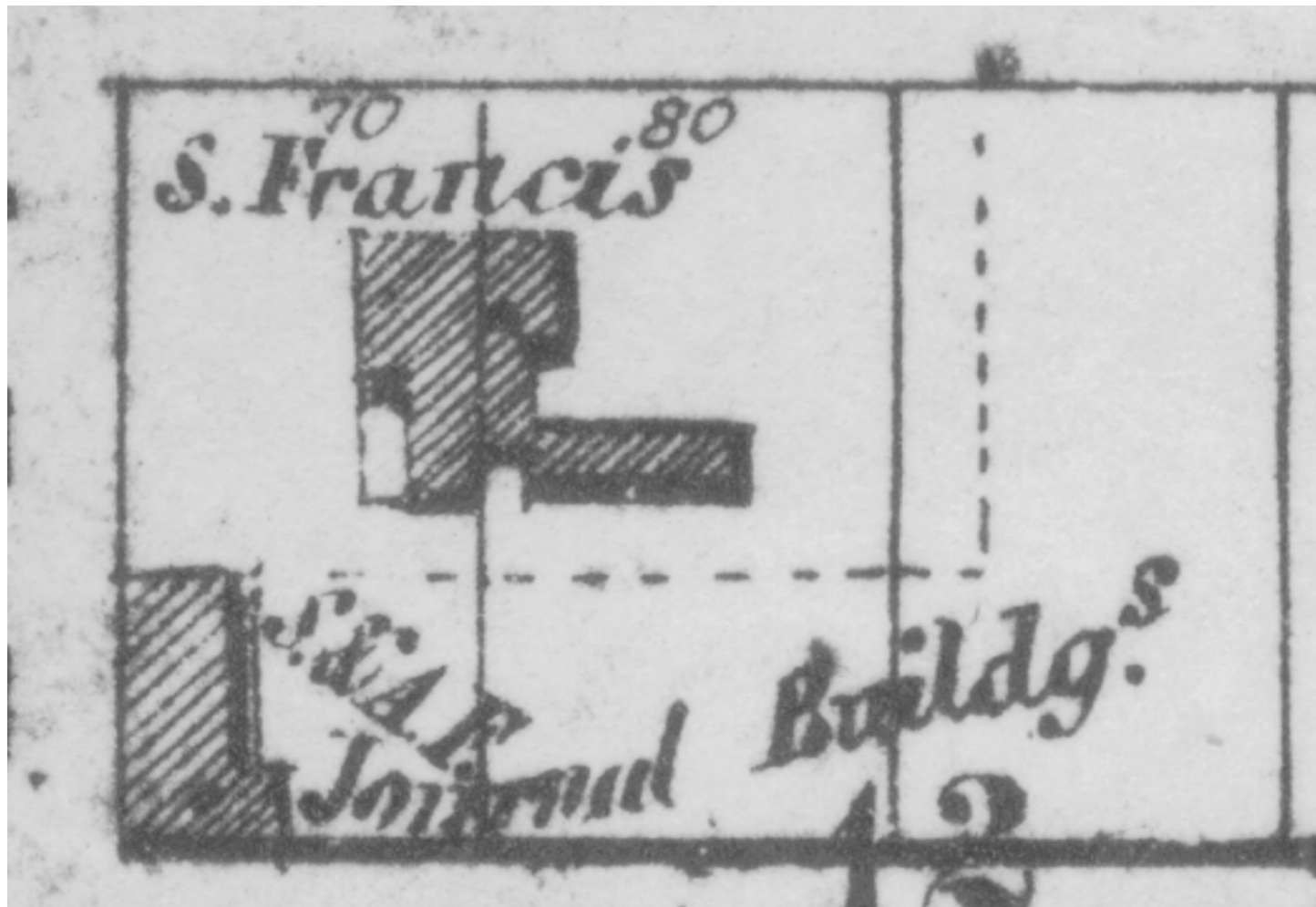


Figure 7. View of the Simeon Francis residence (top) and Journal Buildings (bottom) as illustrated on the 1858 *City of Springfield* map. The 1854 *City of Springfield* map is nearly identical to this map. This map is depicting the northwest quarter (Lots 2, 3, and 4) of Block 12.



Figure 8. Detail of the “Office of the Illinois State Journal” as depicted on the margins of an 1858 landownership map of Sangamon County (Ledlie 1858). It is interesting to note that the “Journal Office” sign was located over the south two of the three commercial bays.

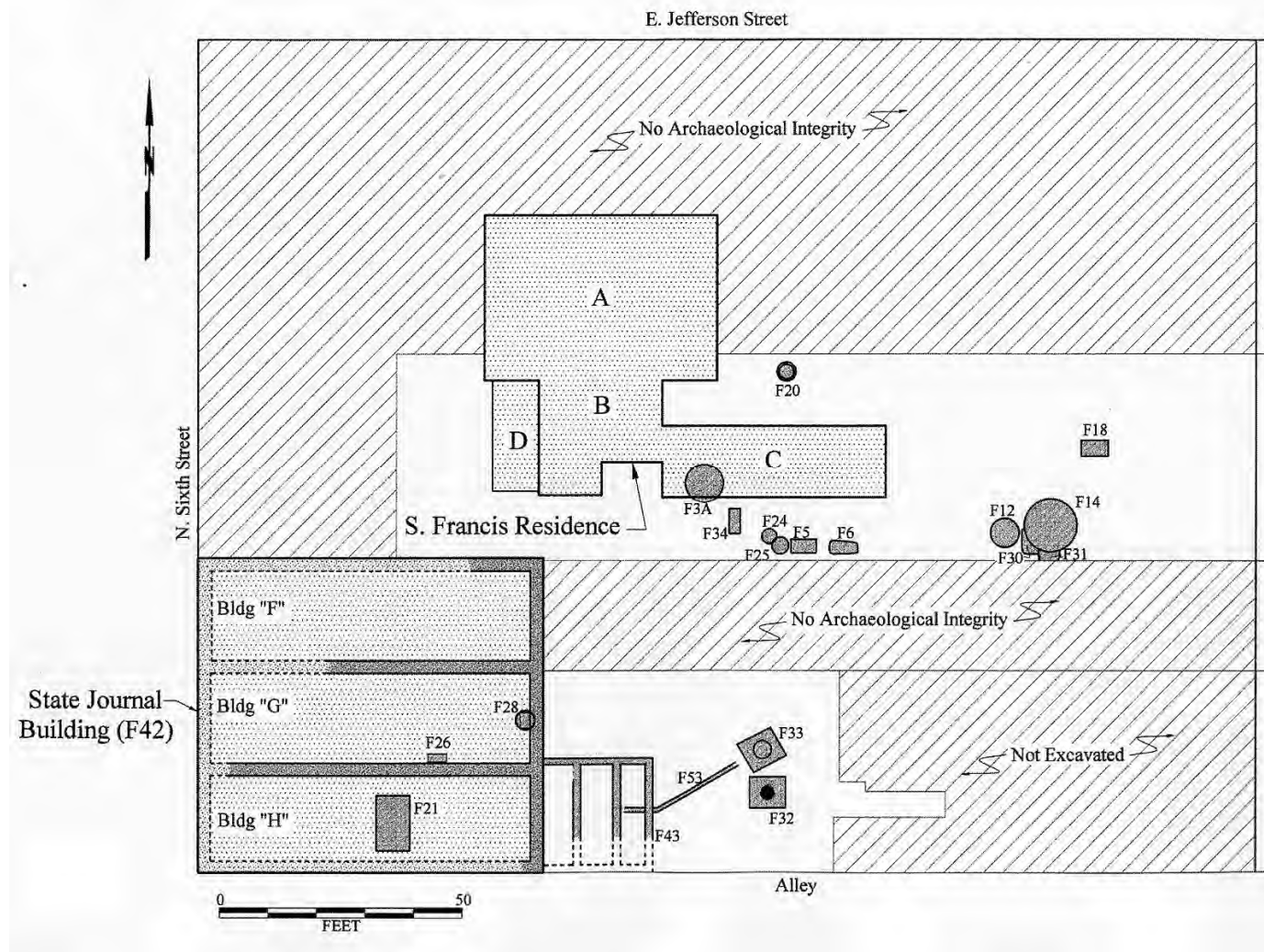


Figure 9. Archaeological site plan of the east half of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library project area, Springfield, Illinois. The illustrated area consists of Lots 3 and 4, Block 12, Original Town Plat.



Figure 10. Primary artifacts from Feature 5 (top) and Feature 6 (bottom). Both features were privy pits associated with the Francis domestic occupation, and located towards the rear of the house. Feature 5 dates from the 1830s, whereas Feature 6 dates from the 1840s. Both assemblages document a fairly well-to-do family.

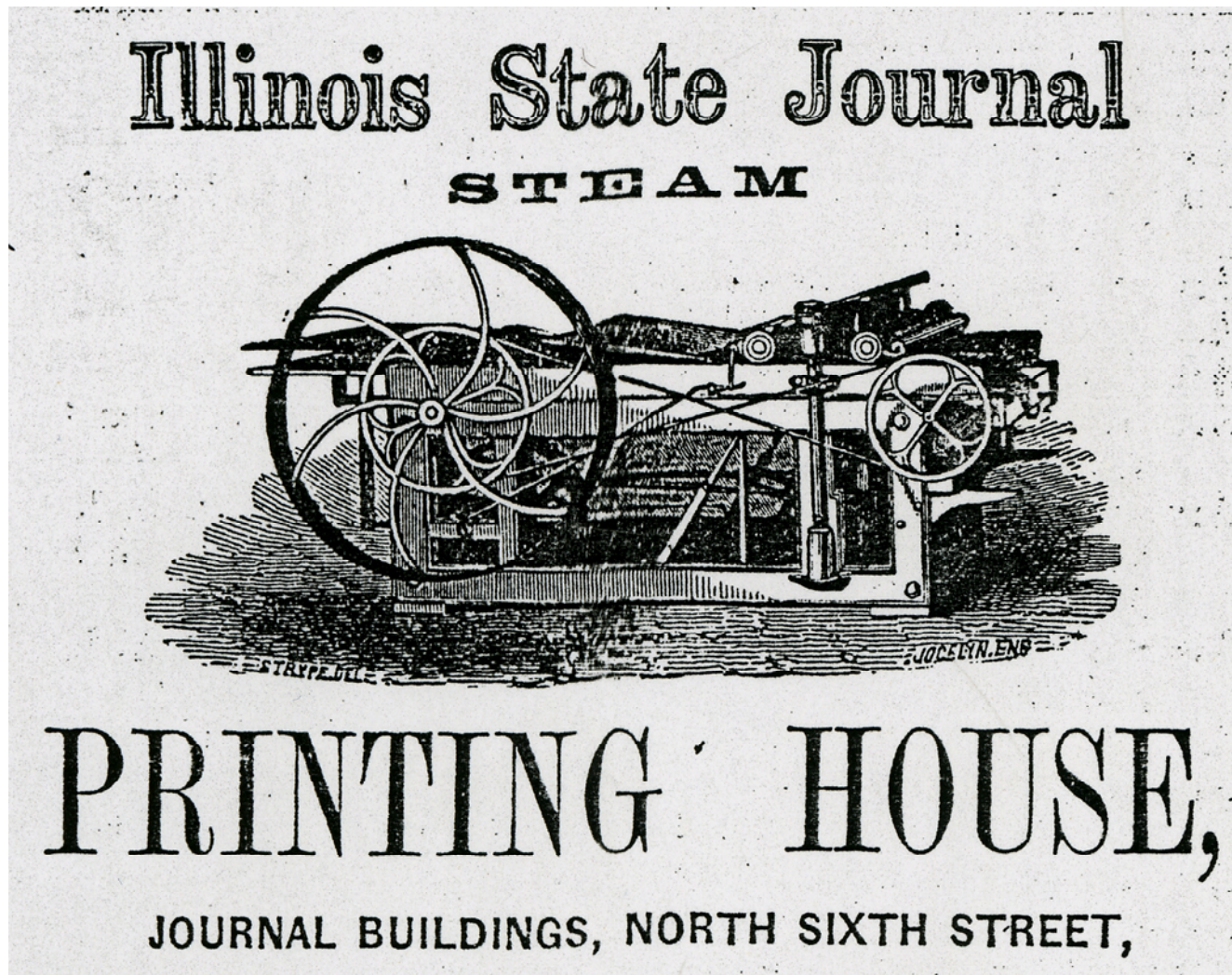


Figure 12. Advertisement for the *Illinois State Journal's* Steam Printing Press published in the 1860-61 Springfield City Directory. The large brick pad identified as Feature 21 probably functioned as the foundation for this printing press, and/or the steam boiler that powered it.



Figure 13. Bar related artifacts recovered from Feature 14, a large cistern constructed by Francis during the early 1850s and abandoned during the early to middle 1860s. This large subsurface feature, as well as several adjacent features in the yard of the Francis residence, were filled from waste generated from an adjacent bar or saloon—potentially located within the older Francis residence and operated by Oliver Sheldon. It is interesting to note that not one whole whiskey flask was found, suggesting that the discard was coming from breakage within the saloon. Often a saloon keeper would purchase empty flasks and fill them on demand from the larger stoneware jugs in which he had purchased the liquor. It is not known whether the breakage was caused by the patrons after the flasks were filled, or prior to their purchase and filling by the tavern keeper.



Figure 14. Primary artifacts from the base of well (Feature 20) that serviced the Francis residence. This assemblage was probably deposited during the early 1860s, and potentially originated from a saloon operating from within the older Francis residence.

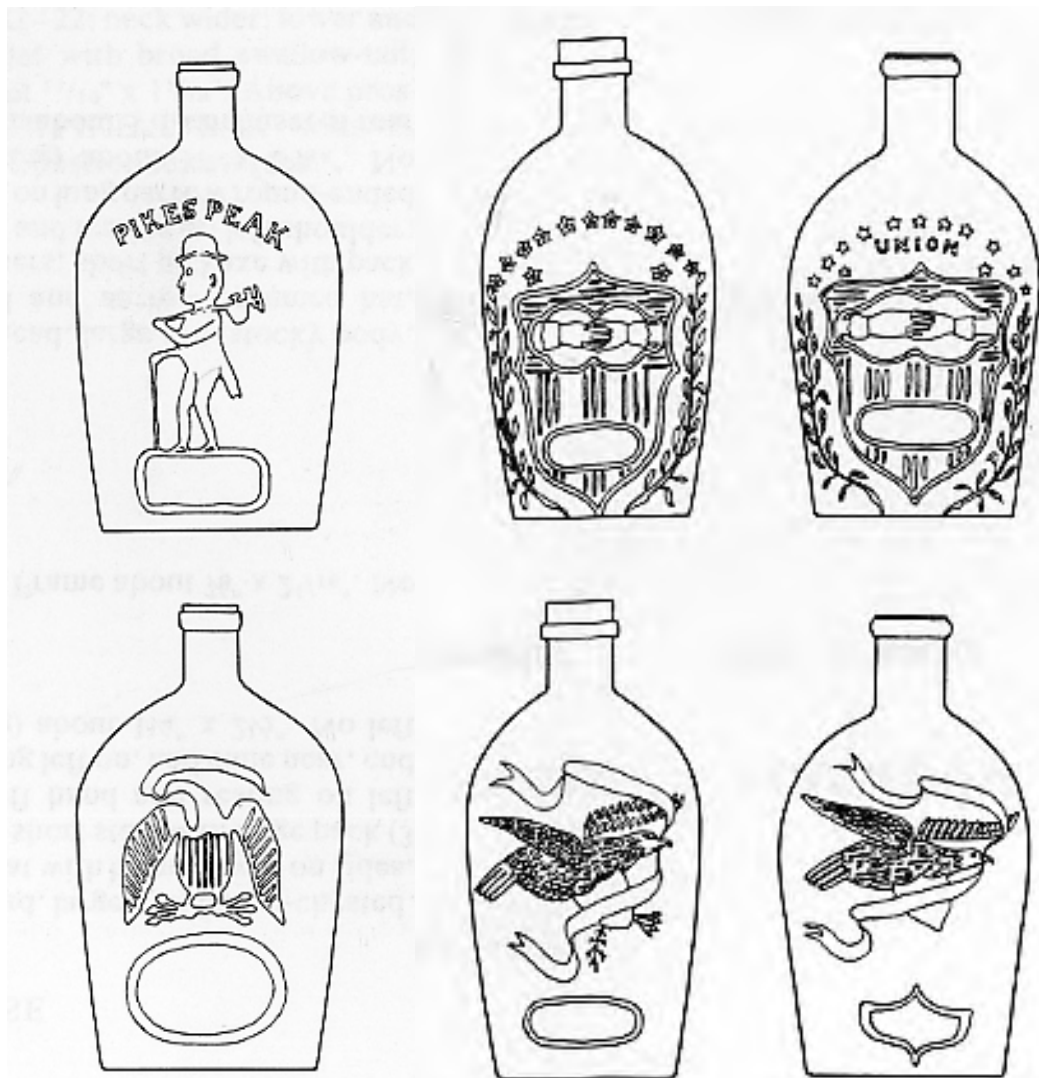


Figure 15. Whiskey flasks from the various features on the Francis lot which were filled during the early 1860s were generally of the “Pike’s Peak”(left), or “Union” (also known as the “Shield and Clashed Hands”) (right) design. The Pike’s Peak flasks became common after 1859, whereas the other two designs were very common during the Civil War years (and into the early 1870s). Both designs emphasize nationalistic elements (American Eagle with banner), and the “Union” flasks emphasize the reunification of the North and South (clashed hands and word “UNION”)—all of which would have been well received by the Union soldiers passing through Springfield.



Figure 16. Bar glass was not overly abundant from the Civil War era assemblage, but did include small fluted tumblers (as illustrated to the left) and a limited number of beer mugs. Beer mugs consisted of a small tapered variety with applied handles. Bar glass reflects the heavy consumption of whiskey over beer. Beer glasses were typical of English-style glass ware associated with heavy ales and stouts—unlike the beer mugs from the upper levels of the well.



Figure 17. Stylistic difference in beer mugs from the base (Zone IV, right) and top (Zone II, left) of the well (Feature 20). These two mugs document a shift during the 1860s to 1880s from heavy ales and stouts (served in shorter mugs) typical of an English or American palette towards lighter lager beers (served in larger, taller mugs) typical of the German immigrant during the later nineteenth century. Additionally, the dramatic decline in the presence of bar tumblers at this time reflects the shift away from whiskey consumption to beer.



Figure 18. Top: U.S. military belt buckle recovered from re-deposited fills from Feature 14. This belt buckle apparently was lost during the Civil War years, and was deposited with bar related debris into this large cistern during the Civil War years. Bottom: Non-archaeological example of similar belt buckle.