

The Davis Bottom History Preservation Project

Archaeology/Fieldwork

The fieldwork in Davis Bottom was conducted in phases from 2009 to 2011. Dr. Tanya Faberson, Principal Investigator, Cultural Resource Analysts, Inc. divided the Davis Bottom site (15Fs284) into eleven analytical areas consisting of over 100 parcels. During Phase 1 of the investigation, Dr. Faberson conducted initial surveys to target the most promising parcels for fieldwork. Most of the archaeological sites were heavily impacted by decades of flooding and construction.



Figure 1: Aerial of Davis Bottom (foreground) taken on November 19, 2010.

The most extensive investigations were conducted in Area 3 and Area 5 (figure 2). Faberson's team excavated a series of test units in the front yards of many homes. More extensive excavations were conducted after homes were demolished. "The excavations resulted in the discovery of 33 features and 28 post holes across the project area. The features included 10 foundation/building remains, 2 patios/walkways, 1 yard depression/animal wallow, 1 pet burial, 7 trash pits, 1 building drip line, 1 builder's trench, 2 outbuildings floors/depressions, 5 pipe trenches, 1 chimney pad, and 2 privies." (Faberson 2011).



Figure 2: Schematic plan view of Davis Bottom site (15Fa284) with archaeological research areas. Courtesy, Cultural Resource Analysts, Inc.

Shotgun homes – Area 5

During the winter of 2010, archaeologists began the excavation of two shotgun homes at 710 and 712 DeRoode Street in Area 5. Faberson's team uncovered several intact features, including wood post piers and two privies.

Fieldwork



Figure 3: Shotgun homes at 710 and 712 DeRoode before demolition on 11/17/2010.



Figure 4: Fieldwork at the same site after demolition on 12/17/2010.



Figure 5: Screening materials from front yard test units on 12/07/2010.



Figure 6: Documenting backyard test units on 12/17/2010.



Figure 7: Screening and bagging materials from backyard test units on 12/28/2010.



Figure 8: Flagging wood-pier posts uncovered from subsurface excavations on 12/29/2010.

Wood-post piers

Archaeologists uncovered several important features during excavations around the homes at 710 and 712 DeRoode Street. Each feature contains data that provides insights about life in Davis Bottom from the early to mid 1900s. Dr. Faberson's team discovered the remnants of wood-post piers from the shotgun home at 710 DeRoode. "All of the shotgun houses, or the remains of the shotgun houses, had been build up on these wood-post foundation piers," says Dr. Faberson. Wood-post piers were an inexpensive way for landlords and homeowners to raise the floor of their homes to prevent damage from the flooding that plagued residents in Davis Bottom.



Figures 9: A wood-post pier uncovered during excavations at 712 DeRoode Street.



Figures 10: The wood-post pier during laboratory analysis (brick added for scale).



Figure 11: Residents on Chair Avenue in Davis Bottom during a flood in 1932. Some homes sit on raised foundations (behind wood slats) just above the water line. Courtesy, Long (Robert J) and Lafayette Collection, University of Kentucky.

Privies

In December of 2010, archaeologists uncovered a trash pit behind the home at 712 DeRoode Street. After further excavations, Dr. Faberson discovered the trash capped an intact, wood-lined privy. The double-seat privy was filled with important artifacts dating from the early to mid 1900s, ranging from glass bottles, medicine bottles, and ceramics to faunal remains and seeds. "Privies are wonderful features for understanding human behavior at any site," says Faberson. "We can see what kinds of things people are using, what kinds of things they are throwing away while using the privy. Approximately 38,000 artifacts were recovered from Area 3 and Area 5. Roughly 20,000 of those artifacts came just from the privies."



Figure 12 (above): Dr. Faberson discovers the wood-lined privy beneath a layer of trash at the site of 710 DeRoode Street.



Figure 13 (top right): The privy stratigraphy as Faberson recovers cloth fragments from deeper layers.

Figure 14: The slate-lined privy found behind the home at 712 DeRoode Street. Dr. Faberson learned later that the slate was from old pool tables salvaged by the homeowners from a local bar before it was demolished.



References Cited

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