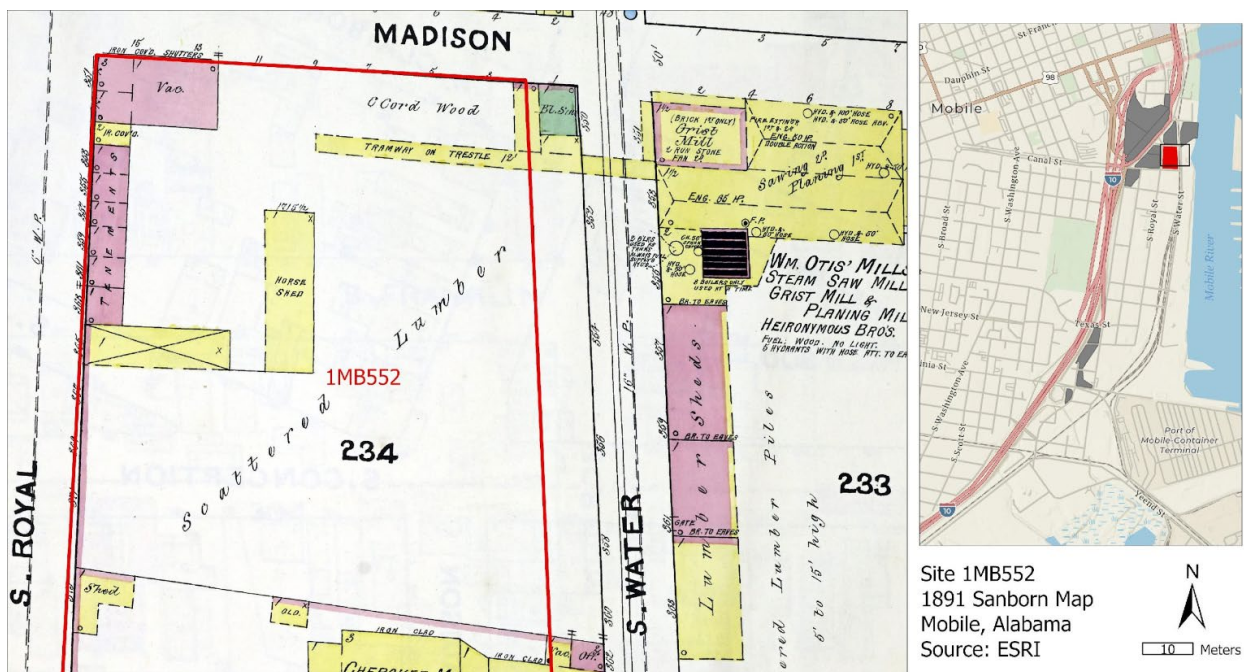


Bricks Down the Bay: Archaeological Investigations of a Brick Tenement House Structure

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Introduction

Archaeological investigations at site 1MB552 prioritized the remains of a large brick structure at the north end of the site. Originally built as an industrial complex in the mid-nineteenth century, a portion of the L-shaped building was used as a nine-room tenement house between 1878 and 1885. Historical maps classify the tenement as a brick structure with a tin over slate roof. The northern most room was three stories, and there was also a two story 'Iron Clad' room. The substantiality of the building demonstrates variation in those labelled as a "tenement."



Site 1MB552 and location of tenement structure and associated industrial buildings within William Otis' properties in downtown Mobile.

This portion of the complex was utilized as rental rooms until sometime between 1904 and 1915, based on fire insurance maps. Otis left control of his holdings to his step-son Charles Bancroft, upon his death in 1889. Bancroft died in 1895, and yet the facility was still rental rooms for at least another 10 years. Meanwhile, the structures surrounding the tenement continued to be used in support of the lumber industry owned by Otis/Bancroft. By 1924, the property had been converted to a sheet metal works.

1MB552 Excavations

Seven of the nine rooms were hand excavated. Identified features included linear articulated brickworks, including interior walls that separated rooms and the exterior walls of the structure itself.

The remains of an in situ wood floor was found beneath the demolition rubble. Intermixed were plaster and mortar, as well as some possible structural cross beams that likely fell from the ceiling when the building was demolished.



Feature 104, one of the brick walls separating Rooms 2 & 3.



Rooms 5 & 6 at the interface of the wood floor and subfloor.

All of the brickwork is spread footing with a spread of coarse shell since the building is constructed on the former Mobile River marsh, a sandy substrate that is frequently inundated by the water table. The shell likely helped prevent settling of the building.



Feature 133 with crushed shell lining the Feature 104 builder's trench, possibly to prevent sinking in the sand and water table.

Tenement Transformations

Excavations of wall features revealed episodes of remodeling and repairs. Evidence of repairs were identified along the exterior walls, possibly the result of hurricane damage. At some point, Room 3 was converted to exterior walls and that conversion is identifiable in the wall trenches and brick construction.



Redug builder's trench within original builder's trench between Rooms 2 & 3.

Future Research:

- Analyze material culture from tenement deposits to further understand material culture of underrepresented persons.
- Detailed analyses of bricks used in construction, size, materials, pXRF, and location of production if possible.
- Identify similar sites in the archaeological literature of tenement houses within industrial landscapes.

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