

The Old Mobile Project Newsletter

Issue 5

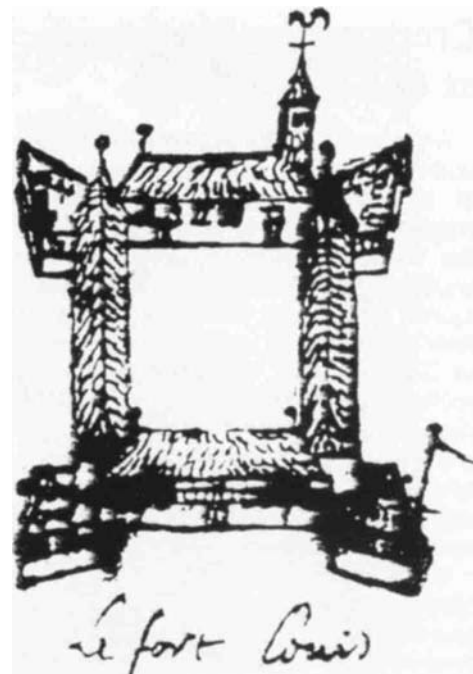
Summer 1991

National Science Foundation Young Scholars at Old Mobile

A grant to the University of South Alabama from the National Science Foundation has brought fifteen high school students and two high school teachers to dig at the Old Mobile archaeological site this summer. During this first year of a two-year program, high school science teachers from the region were asked to nominate outstanding science students as NSF Young Scholars. The participants are Evan Duffy, Jennifer Fentress, Greg Haase, Diane Hickey, Stephanie Hicks, Keeli Lyies, Erica Owens, Danny Palacio, Rebecca Patrick, Christa Rawlins, Julie Robinson, Jennifer Vest, and Stephanie Walker (all from Alabama), Christopher Walker (from Georgia), Kerri Killingsworth (from Mississippi), and teacher/counselors Rob Garner and



Iron gunlock with flint, from a Spanish miquelet or blunderbuss, Structure 2, 1MB94



Betty Shinault (both from Alabama). Program leaders included professors Greg Waselkov, Marvin Smith, and Audwin Anderson.

This year's project was to continue excavating Structure 5, a house site that was partially excavated by a University field school this spring. The Young Scholars learned how scientific methods and goals can yield information about life in French colonial Mobile three centuries ago. They also conducted projects of their own, including studies of soil phosphorus and pH at several excavated structures. These projects will tell us about landscape use at the site, particularly about gardening and animal husbandry practices. For example, we suspect that some of the fenced enclosures found near the excavated buildings served as animal pens, perhaps for chickens; if so, the soil chemistry would have been altered by poultry droppings, a change that can be detected by the students' experiments even though no direct evidence of the animals has yet been found at the site.

Other activities include replication studies - attempts to reproduce or replicate the methods used by local Indians and colonists for pottery making and house construction. Philippe Oszuscik, an architectural historian, and Richard Bowman, a ceramicist, are directing attempts to rediscover this lost technology. Future reconstructions and living history activities at Old Mobile will benefit from this summer's efforts.

The NSF Young Scholars Program is our first opportunity to open the site to a small segment of the public. Next year another group of high school students will have an opportunity for a "hands-on" experience in archaeology. Through these students and their teachers we hope to begin to convey to the public at large the excitement of archaeological discovery at the site of Alabama's oldest colonial town.

Crafts of the Blacksmith at Old Mobile

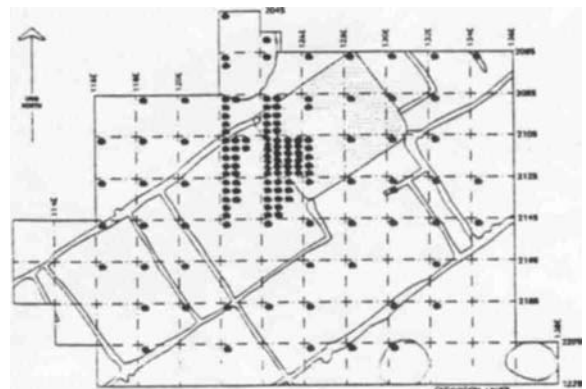
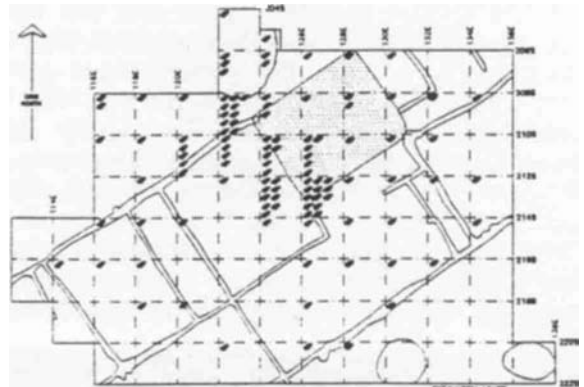
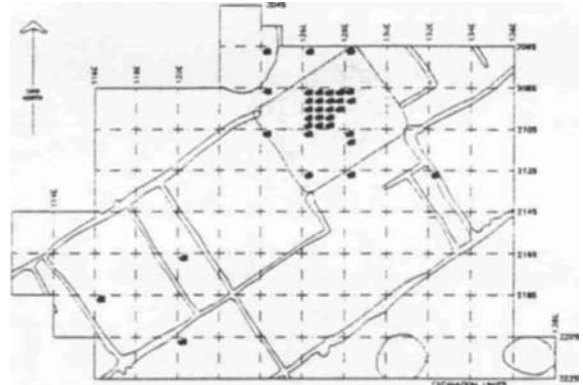
Archaeological fieldwork, in the form of shovel testing survey and intensive excavations at the sites of several structures, has been underway almost continuously since April 1989. While there is no denying the thrill of discovery that one experiences when another French house site is located (26 have now been found) or when a particularly fine artifact (such as the nearly complete Indian-made pot recently recovered at Structure 5) is unearthed, a large part of an archaeologist's job takes place in the laboratory, in the library, and in front of a computer. Most of the archaeological teams' efforts during the last six months have been of this indoor variety, cleaning and piecing together and identifying the artifacts found at the first two structures excavated in the 1989 and 1990.

Most of the surprises came from Structure 2, the blacksmith's shop dug last fall. Although the forge itself had evidently been dismantled, probably in 1711 when bricks were salvaged for the move downriver to the present-day site of Mobile, its approximate location became evident from artifact distribution maps produced by Terry McClung, our computer drafting specialist. A supply of coal was stored inside the small shop, which measured about 16 by 20 feet. This may have been the "English coal" mentioned in an inventory of supplies sent to the colony in 1701. Along the southwestern wall were found large quantities of brick fragments and iron slag. Some of the slag consisted of large discs, concave on one side and convex on the other, that accumulated in the forge fire box just below the tuyere, or heated bellows pipe. Specialists in historical metallurgy will analyze the slag and discarded iron, from which much can be learned about smithing techniques.

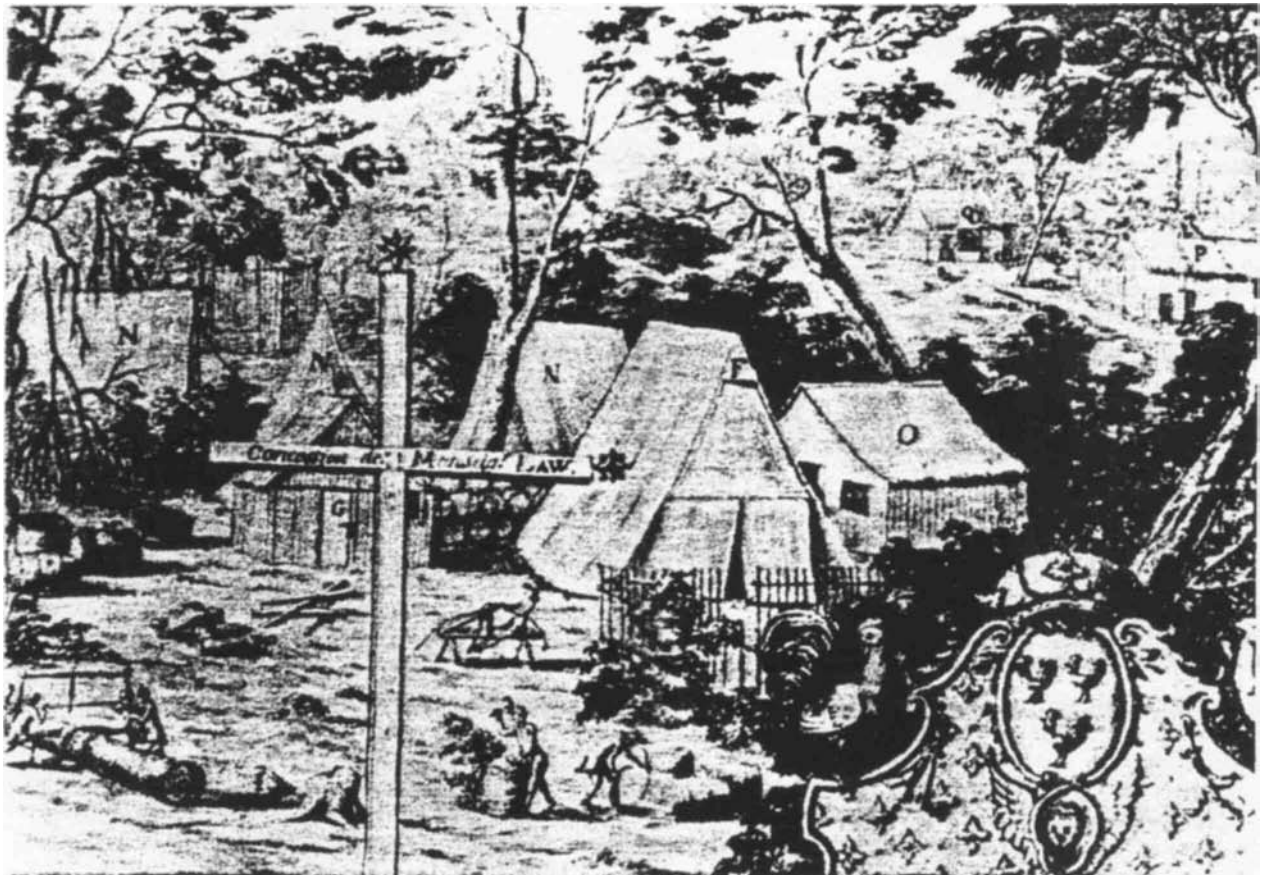
Apart from the abundant evidence of iron working, the blacksmith also left behind some clues of his other activities. Copper and brass scrap from kettle repair was quite common. Gunsmithing was another of his skills. At least one gunpart, a cock from a Spanish **miquelet**, a type of blunderbuss that likely would have been mounted as a swivel gun in the fort or on a ship, has been identified. Cleaning and stabilizing of the heavily corroded iron has just begun, so more gunparts probably await recognition.

Somewhat more surprising is recovery of several cubical pieces of **galena**, a lead ore that can be found at several places in the Mississippi River Valley. The prehistoric Indians of eastern North America had long known about galena, valuing the metallic ore as a paint source and as a naturally shiny curiosity, and traded it great distances. In the last newsletter, it was noted that Pierre-Charles Le Sueur may have been responsible for introducing another exotic stone frequently found at Old Mobile, catlinite, also from the upper Mississippi Valley. Transcripts of his journals indicate that Le Sueur was taken by Indians in 1700 to several lead mines in the area of present-day northwestern Illinois, from which he gathered samples for later assay. So we suspected that the blacksmith at the excavated shop may have been experimenting with galena obtained by Le Sueur. However, analysis by Dr. Wayne Isphording of trace elements in the lead ore, such as the relative quantities of silver and nickel, suggest that the source of this galena was actually southeastern

Missouri, an area that later became an important lead mining region of that French Louisiana. At any rate, it now appears that lead smelting, brickmaking, and blacksmithing were the earliest manufacturing activities practiced in the colony.

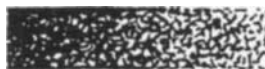


Artifacts found at Structure 2, the blacksmith shop, were distributed across the site in different patterns that reflect different activities that occurred inside and around the shop. For example, coal (top map) was mainly found inside the shop, indicated by the shaded area, where it was stored. Brick fragments (middle map) and iron slag (bottom map) were clustered in the area of the forge.



This drawing of the Law Concession at the French colonial town of Biloxi in 1720 shows a blacksmith shop (Q) in the background (Newberry Library, Chicago).

Become a Friend of Old Mobile



Current archaeological investigations at the site of Old Mobile depend on community support. Because of the economic recession, the project may not receive funding from the state of Alabama, as it did last year. So contributions from individuals and corporations will largely determine the pace of field activities in the coming months. Join **The Friends of Old Mobile** and help us learn more about colonial life along the northern Gulf Coast. A variety of membership types are available:

Individual	(\$25)	Benefactor	(\$500)
Family	(\$40)	Patron	(\$1,000)
Institutional	(\$100)		

All memberships are tax-deductible. Please direct all correspondence to:

The Friends of Old Mobile
P.O. Box 6685
Moone, Alabama 36660

or

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New Publication

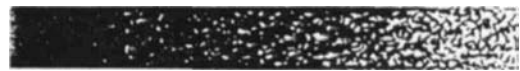


Jay Higginbotham's book, *Old Mobile: Fort Louis de la Louisiana, 1702-1711*, has just been reprinted in a paperback edition by the University of Alabama Press. This excellently written account of life in the original capital of French Louisiana, based entirely on documents of the period, was first published in 1977 by the Museum of the City of Mobile. The reprint is priced at \$23.50 and can be obtained from your local bookstore.

Recent Grants for Old Mobile

Since the last newsletter, the Old Mobile Archaeology Project has received substantial support from the Mitchell Foundation and the first installment of a three-year grant from the Alabama Power Foundation. These funds, plus contributions from the **Friends**, have helped to meet the challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, releasing half of the matching federal funds for the project.

*The Friends of Old Mobile Surpass 100 Members
We are Pleased to Welcome the Following
New and Renewing Members:*



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Mr. Thomas C. S. Wixon, Jr.,
Pascagoula, MS
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