

The Old Mobile Project Newsletter

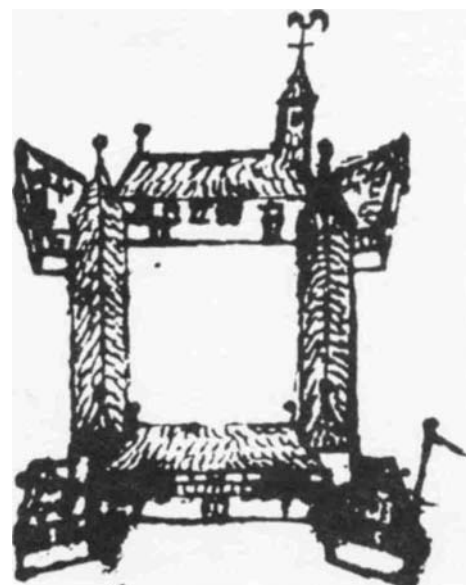
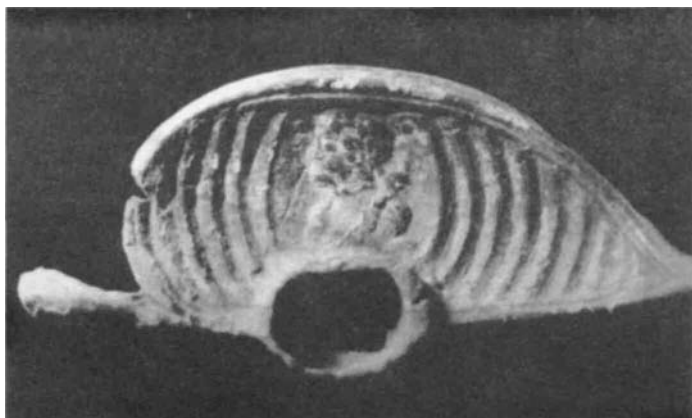
Issue 7

Summer 1992

NSF Young Scholars Program Continues at Old Mobile

The National Science Foundation has renewed a grant to the University of South Alabama to continue the Young Scholars Program in French Colonial Archaeology at Old Mobile for another year. Once again, high school science teachers from across the country were invited to nominate outstanding science students, fifteen of whom were selected to participate for four weeks in excavations and analysis. This year's Young Scholars were Marian Cannon, Brandon Downey, Jeff Lawley, Sharon Metzger, Sonya Minor, Michelle Pcrez, Soren Rodning, Jody Scanlan, Eric Seckinger, Matthew Smith (all from Alabama), Quynh Le and Jamie Sokolis (from California), Montgomery Gilchrist (from Florida), Christine Smith (from Louisiana), and Ryoko Kita (from Tennessee). Program leaders included Greg Waselkov, Marvin Smith, and Audwin Anderson. Old Mobile Project staff members Amy Carruth and Warren Carruth served as counselors to the students.

The Young Scholars initiated excavations at a previously unexplored house location, presently known as "Structure 14." (Long-time **Friends** will note that, having dug at Structures 1 through 5, we now jump to Structure 14. Individual structures have been arbitrarily assigned number designations during the course of our site survey. Only a sample of the identified houses will be excavated in the next few years, and their numbers, from here on, will not follow in sequence.) Although this structure



usually sits in the midst of a small swamp, a relatively dry spring has allowed us to investigate this peculiarly placed site. Between 1702 and 1711, many of the town's inhabitants complained frequently of the miserable, boggy environment that Iberville and Bienville had chosen for this rude capital of the new-found Louisiana colony. Now these high school students have helped us apply archaeological methods to discover how one colonist dealt with the almost intolerable living conditions that contributed to the decision in 1711 to relocate the town twenty-seven miles down river, at the head of Mobile Bay.

Although excavations at Structure 14 began only a few weeks ago, several very interesting artifacts have already come to light. For instance, a cast-brass knuckle guard from a French naval boarding sabre was quite unexpected because the style, decorated with a classical bust in profile, was not known to date to such an early period. An identical specimen was recovered from the Canadian wreck of the **Machault**, a French frigate scuttled after a battle with a British fleet in 1760.

This summer's special activities included traditional Indian craft studies by Tamara and Larry Bean (from Russell Cave National Monument), a colonial French living history demonstration by Ned Jenkins (from Fort Toulouse/Jackson State Park), and a tour (led by Philippe Oszuscik of the University of South Alabama) of the oldest surviving French-style house on the Gulf coast, in Pascagoula, Mississippi. The students applied such newly-gained skills as pottery making and French house building techniques to replicate items recovered from the archaeological record. Others investigated soils analysis and electrolysis; the latter is a treatment for stabilizing corroded metals.

This will be the final year of the NSF Young Scholars Program at Old Mobile. But we will continue to provide opportunities for participation by secondary school students and university undergraduates in excavations scheduled for the next two years.

A brass knuckle-guard from a French naval boarding sabre; Structure 14, 1MB94.

The Chauvins

For quite a few Friends of Old Mobile, personal ties first drew their attention to a site that also happens to have great historical and archaeological importance. Among the original Old Mobile families from which many modern Americans can trace their genealogical descent, the Chauvins, Montreal Canadians, are especially notable. According to Jay Higginbotham's magnum opus, *Old Mobile: Fort Louis de la Louisiane. 1702-1711* (University of Alabama Press, 1991), four Chauvin brothers eventually reached the colony, beginning with Jacques and Joseph at Fort Maurepas in 1699. These pro-Bienville partisans trapped and traded in the Mississippi Valley, smuggled forest products to Veracruz, and gradually accumulated sufficient capital to establish themselves as independent merchants. Brother Nicolas acted as their agent in France, forwarding manufactured merchandise through the port of La Rochelle. In 1709, he moved to Louisiana (settling on Dauphin Island), as did the fourth sibling, Louis, who travelled from Canada by way of Detroit and Kaskaskia with a valuable cargo of beaver pelts. The family also acquired several Indian slaves, including some Chitimachas captured in 1707, who lived with them in their households at Old Mobile. Joseph and Hippolyte Chauvin's son, Joseph, born on October 16, 1709, was the first Louisiana Creole member of this large clan.

The image of a frontier populated entirely by rebellious loners suffering from acute anomie is a widespread misconception. A close look at most frontier settlements, including the newly established French colony of Louisiana, typically reveals the presence of many large extended families, interconnected by marriage. The access to cooperative labor and shared resources provided by such a network must have been a major advantage in adapting to a harsh frontier environment. The long-term success of the Chauvins, the Le Moynes, and others indicates how critical to survival familial relations could be.

Natchitoches Meeting

The **Center for French Colonial Studies** will meet at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana, on October 17, 1992. Scheduled speakers include:

Jay Edwards and Eric Mack

"Louisiana's Creole Architecture and its Construction Technology"

Gregory A. Waselkov

"Archaeology at the Original Site of French Colonial Mobile"

Carl A. Brasseaux

"French Louisiana's Garrison:
A Demographic Overview"

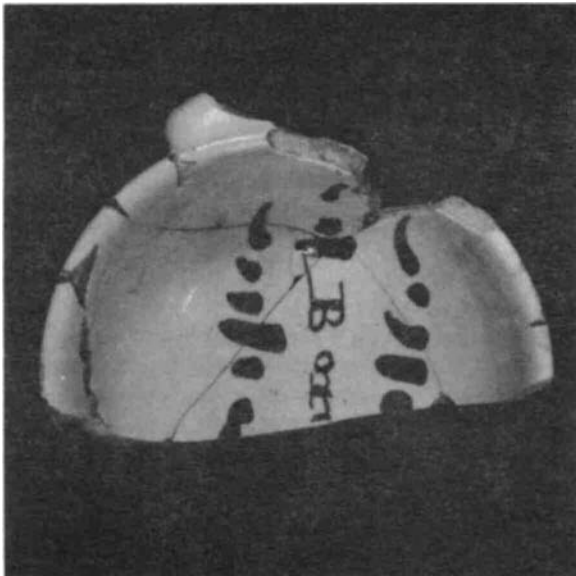
Glenn R. Conrad

"Administration of the Illinois Country:
The French Debate"

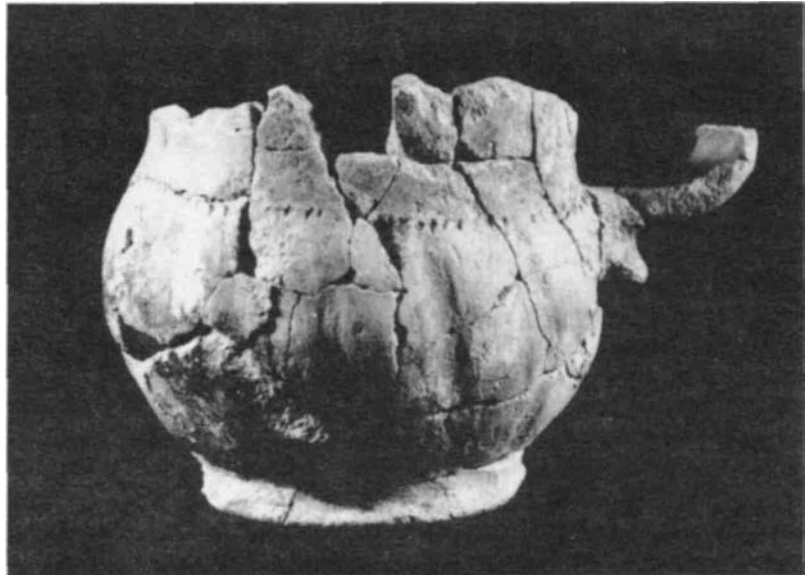
Carl Ekberg

"Frontier Democracy: les assemblees generates des habitants au pays des Illinois"

A banquet, featuring Louisiana colonial fare, and a tour of colonial houses in the Natchitoches area follow the program. To learn more about the Center and its meeting, write to the Center for French Colonial Studies, R.R. 1, Box 12, Prairie du Rocher, Illinois 62277, or the program chair, Judge Morris S. Arnold, United States Court of Appeal, P.O. Box 1606, Fort Smith, Arkansas 72902.



A French faience porringer (or tin-glazed drinking bowl with the partial legend "Bon..." visible inside, Structure 5, 1MB94.



A restored ceramic vessel, probably either a pitcher or mug, found at Structure 5, 1MB94. While the Indian potter who produced this vessel copied a European form, she employed traditional Native American techniques of clay preparation, decoration, and firing.

Become a Friend of Old Mobile



Archaeological investigations at the site of Old Mobile depend on community support. Because of the economic recession, the project did not receive funding from the state of Alabama, as it did last year. So contributions from individuals, private foundations, 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)
- Family** (\$40)
- Institutional** (\$100)
- Benefactor** (\$500)
- Patron (\$1,000)

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

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

or

Dr. J. Stephen Thomas
College of Arts & Sciences
University of South Alabama
Mobile, Alabama 36688-0002

New Publications

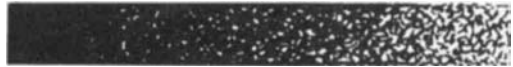


The recent publication of three books on French colonial Louisiana reflects a growing interest among both historians and archaeologists in that under-appreciated component of our national past. In *Indians, Settlers, & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783* (University of North Carolina Press, 1992), Daniel H. Usner, Jr., explores the ethnic complexities of the French colony. His comprehensive discussion of economic and social interactions between Europeans, Indians, and African slaves in Louisiana -with considerable attention devoted to the formative years at Old Mobile - offers a refreshingly balanced view of our colonial past, which has been dominated far too long by Anglocentric writers.

French Colonial Archaeology: The Illinois Country and the Western Great Lakes, edited by John Walthall (University of Illinois Press, 1991), documents archaeological research at a dozen sites located in the northern portion of the colony.

And that same region is the subject of *The Time of the French in the Heart of North America, 1673-1818* (Alliance Francaise de Chicago, 1992), by Charles Balesi. The publisher has generously offered to contribute \$4.00 to **The Friends of Old Mobile** for every copy sold through our organization. This 346-page book can be obtained for \$19.00, payable to "The Time of the French," from Alliance Francaise, 810 North Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois 60610. Be sure to mention *The Old Mobile Project Newsletter* in your order.

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



Dr. James Axtell, Williamsburg, VA
Mr. Alan Blake, New Orleans, LA
Mr. Stan Barras, Metairie, LA
Dr. Thomas E. Emerson, Lincoln, IL
Jefferson Genealogical Society, Metairie, LA
Lewis Public Relations, Mobile, AL
Mississippi Coast Historical & Genealogical Society,
Biloxi, MS

Mrs. Gloria Smith Moran, Pass Christian, MS
Ms. Lynn L. Morand, Mackinaw City, MI
Mr. William L. Potter, Palos Hills, IL
Mr. Robert Pratt, Slippery Rock, PA
Ms. Ellen Shiasko, New Haven, CT

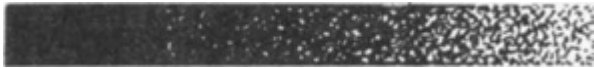
Old Mobile Project Contacts

University Liaison:

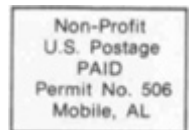
Dr. J. Stephen Thomas
College of Arts & Sciences
University of South Alabama
Mobile, AL 36688-0002
(205) 460-6280

Archaeology Director

Dr. Gregory A. Waselkov
Department of Sociology/Anthropology
University of South Alabama
Mobile, AL 36688-0002
(205) 460-6911



The Old Mobile Project
Dr. J. Stephen Thomas
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Alabama
Mobile, Alabama 36688-0002



Address Correction Requested