

A Lost Religious Pendant: Linking Mobile's Past to the Present

Erin Lister

Introduction

Excavations at 1MB552 revealed the intact remains of a tenement structure. Excavation of individual rooms provides a glimpse of the scant material culture discarded by the occupants over a two-decade period. Of the artifacts recovered, a Catholic saint pendant provides a tangible connection to an individual person who resided in that building.

This very personal item raises many questions about its owner. Mobile is historically a Catholic population, and there are numerous Catholic churches even today. Was this person religious? Did they attend the church with the same name as the pendant's saint? For the owner, did it convey an identity as Catholic or was it a secular piece of jewelry?



Saint Rosa de Lima Catholic pendant from 1MB552: (left) images of both sides; (right) artist rendition of the pendant.

Preliminary Research

To date, the 1900 Federal census is the only historical record that ties individuals to the rooms. In the first room is a 51 year old African American woman, Louis Tickey [sic], who is listed as the manager, and her widowed daughter Adelle Williams. The 1880 census predates the use of the building as a tenement, and the 1910 census does not list individual occupants. To date, none of the 1900 renters have been located in other records.



1891 Birdseye View map with the converted industrial structure converted to tenement building highlighted.

The Archivist of the Archdiocese has been contacted regarding any records associated with Louis Tickey (likely Louisa). More information on the pendant itself and the distribution of the pendant around the turn of the century will be sought in church records.

Mobile's Catholic churches were not segregated prior to the 1840s, many had open and equal attendance for all races. One possible connection with the pendant, or medallion, is the St. Rose of Lima Church on Mon Louis Island, a historically African American church established by a French creole Maximilien Colin [sic] that served a small Free People of Color settlement on the island; this church continues to serve the community today. Saint Rosa is the patron saint of embroiderers, gardeners, and florists, as well as those who suffer ridicule for their piety and family problems.

Conclusion

While the census records provided names of those who lived in the tenements, the older records kept by the Catholic Church of Mobile are not indexed. Due to this, further research will include the lengthy examination of those records. For now, this single artifact generates questions about Mobile and its owner such as religiosity, Catholicism, support for the poor, race and racism, among others.



References

1891 Map Of Mobile, Mock Aerial View. Courtesy of Arthur Pope, The Doy Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of South Alabama.

Gould, V. M. (1996). The Parish Identities of Free Creoles of Color in Pensacola and Mobile, 1698-1860. *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 14 (3)1–10.