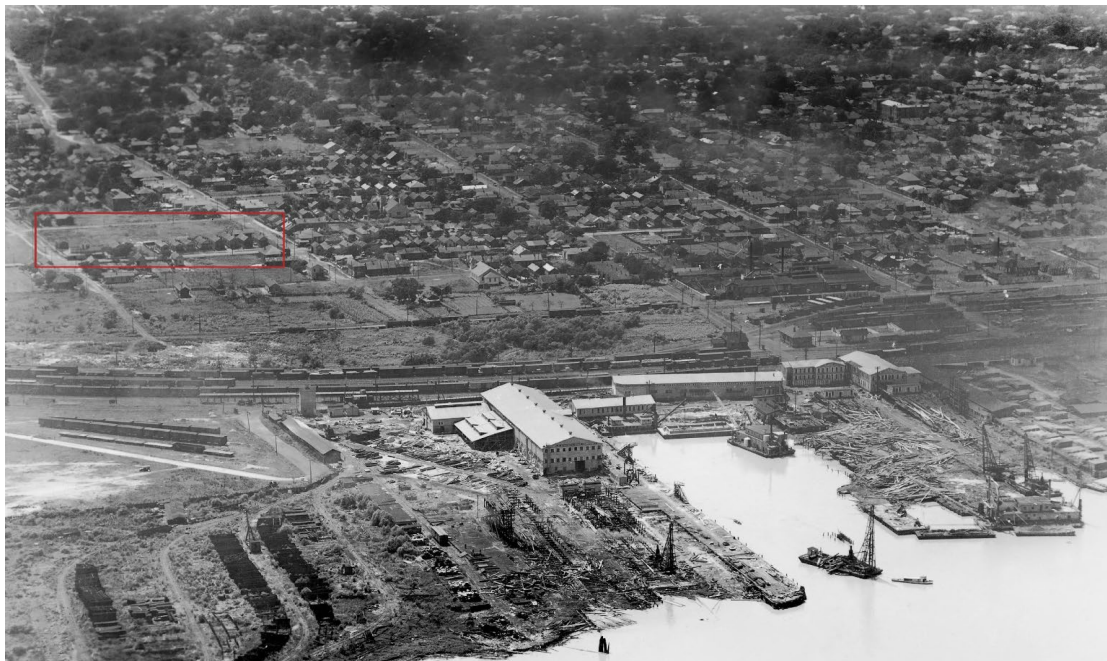
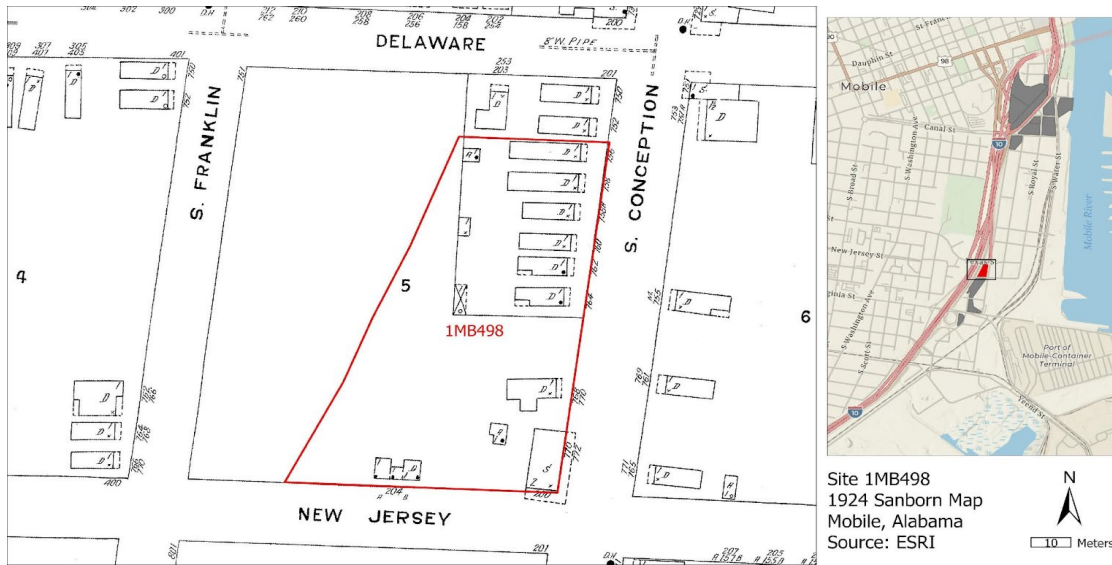


Towards a Better Understanding of African American Yardscapes at 1MB498

James D. Norris

Background

Site 1MB498 is a portion of what was a city block containing six 20th century shotgun houses. Unlike the rest of the sites covered in this poster session, 1MB498 has not been fully investigated. The focus here is approaches to yardscapes, the African Americans residents who created them, and how we can recover the archaeological evidence to create synergy with the archival and oral history data.



Approaches

In order to better understand yardscapes of 1MB498 we can apply models to collect historical data (Clarke 1968). For example, Amos Rapoport's (1993) model focuses on categorizing features into two types: fixed and semi-fixed.

Fixed features are permanent and include fences, sheds, pens, or trees. Semi-fixed features, or yard furnishings, include rain barrels, wood piles, benches, and moveable or transient activity areas such as cooking pits, trash pits, flower beds, and gardens (Heath & Bennett, 2000).



While we are fortunate to have images of several of the structures that stood at 1MB498 (see above), these photos only show the front street view. Other than historic maps, the backyards are largely unknown, especially regarding semi-fixed features. Therefore, archaeology is necessary to help us reconstruct how the rear spaces were used and treated by the occupants.

Questions to Consider

For the residents of S. Conception Street, did they keep swept yards, which reduced bugs and other pests? Were the backyards physically separated from one another or treated as a communal space? Was there formal landscaping or was it a natural setting? When you look at the aerial of 1MB498, did they create an oasis of vegetation and hardscape around their homes to block out the unsightly industry to their east? How did the yardscape change through time?

Thoughts for Future Field Investigations

Excavations of other historical sites have advanced models that can be tested at 1MB498. These models may provide us with evidence of traditions originating prior to or during enslavement and transmitted through generations. Focusing on the organization of this neighborhood's yardscapes has the potential to root us in place and time, as well as provide new insights as to how the occupants held agency over what they shared and kept private from the surrounding area.

The yards of 1MB498 give us a significant opportunity to better understand the lives of the African Americans who made these places their homes. Investigating marginalized cultural spaces allows for recognition of what could be accomplished within the confines of these "small spots."

References Cited

Clarke, David L. 1968 *Analytical Archaeology*.

Heath, Barbara J., and Amber Bennett 2000 "The Little Spots allow'd them": The Archaeological Study of African-American Yards. *Historical Archaeology* 34(2):38-55.

Rapoport, Amos 1993 *Systems of Activities and Systems of Settings*. In *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space, an Interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Study*, Susan Kent, editor, pp. 920. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.