

Ceramics From 2017-2018 SIU Field School Investigations at Ft. Kaskaskia I (11R326) in Southern Illinois

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Introduction

Ft. Kaskaskia I (11R326) is a grass-covered rectangular earthworks in southern Illinois that represents the remains of a wooden log fort built by the French in 1759 to protect the nearby town of Kaskaskia during the Seven Years War (1756-1763). The French stopped construction on the fort in 1760 upon learning of the loss of Canada to the British that same year. British soldiers sent to Illinois in 1765 found the fort in an uncompleted state. Rather than repair it, they opted to build a new fort within the town of Kaskaskia. An American adventurer named John Dodge later reportedly rebuilt part of Ft. Kaskaskia I and mounted cannon to control the town of Kaskaskia between ca. 1781-1789. Finally, more recent (2021) investigations have revealed that American soldiers lived in the fort while building Ft. Kaskaskia II (11R612) 100 m to the north in 1802.

Charles Orser (then at SIU Carbondale) first conducted archaeological investigations within Ft. Kaskaskia by in 1974 (Orser and Karamanski 1975). More recently, the 2017-2020 SIU Carbondale archaeological field schools have conducted remote sensing and test that resulted in the discovery of the stone foundation to the 1759 French barracks; an eighteenth century midden surrounding the barracks; an earthen cellar within the barracks that contains both colonial and late 19th to early 20th century deposits; and a sheet midden south of the French barracks that contains late 18th to early 18th century artifacts including U.S. Army uniform buttons.

Among the artifacts found in 2017-2018 was a small quantity (N=44) of European-made ceramics. Analysis of paste, glaze, decorative, form, and other elements revealed that this assemblage consisted of six separate mid-18th to early 20th century ceramic types. Definition of these ceramic types subsequently allowed us to examine their spatial patterning both within and outside the fort walls. As discussed in the conclusion of this study, the distribution of the six ceramic types along with other archaeological data both support and challenge parts of the traditional historical narrative of the occupation and use of Ft. Kaskaskia presented in the first paragraph of this introduction (Wagner et al 2018).

Methodology

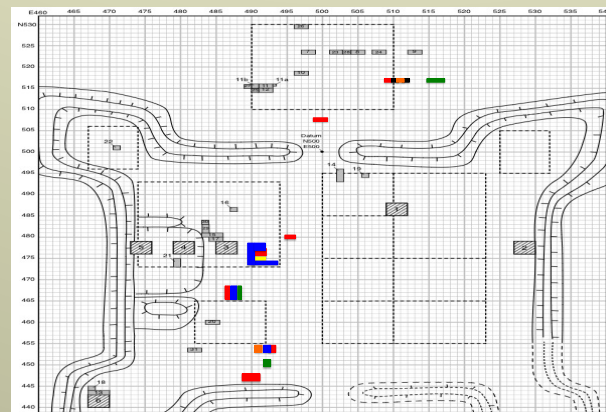
Data recorded for each sherd included ceramic type, vessel form, vessel part, paste characteristics, glaze type, and decoration. Paste color was systematically recorded using Munsell color charts. Paste characteristics were examined using a Dino-Lite Premier digital USB microscope with FC-Z-OC2 polarizing cap connected to an Apple computer. Use of the Dino-Lite digital microscope allowed us to confidently identify even very small sherd fragments to ceramic type.

Ceramic Types



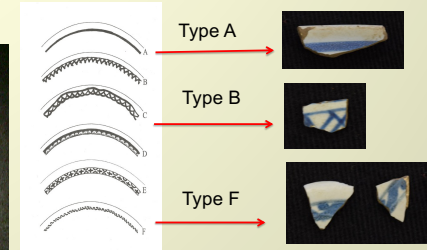
1. Faience (N=20): Faience is an 18th century French type that has been previously recovered on colonial French sites in Illinois (Walthall 1991; Waselkov and Walthall 2002)
2. Creamware (N=10): Creamware is a British ceramic type invented in 1765 that occurs on British and American colonial sites in Illinois dating between ca. 1770-1820.
3. Pearlware (N=2): 3. Whiteware (N=5): 4. Redware (N=1): 5. Stoneware (N=6):

Spatial Distribution



Map 1:
Layout of Ft.
Kaskaskia
with color-
coded units
associated
with ceramic
excavation.

Faience Rim Types



Normandy Blue on White Faience Ceramics Ft. Kaskaskia I (Waselkov and Walthall 2002)

Discussion

The distribution of European-made ceramics within and outside the fort walls adds new layers of meaning to the history of Ft. Kaskaskia I. **First**, the co-occurrence of French faience and English made creamware, pearlware, and stoneware outside of the fort walls in the same area where a British Revolutionary War 8th Regiment of Foot uniform button was found suggests that Virginia soldiers under the command of Colonel George Rogers Clark may have camped in this area in the late 1770s. **Second**, the recovery of a small number of French faience ceramics suggests a possible French presence inside the fort during the mid to late 18th century. These may have been discarded during the construction of the fort in the 1750s or during its later occupation by American adventurer John Dodge in the 1780s. **Third**, the recovery of both French faience and British-made creamware and pearlware) ceramics from beneath the collapsed stone walls of the French barracks suggests that parts of this structure may have survived or been rebuilt by American adventurer John Dodge in the 1780s. **Fourth**, the recovery of English-made ceramics together with U.S. Army uniform buttons south of the French barracks in the western part of the fort further suggests that American soldiers also lived within the fort walls in 1802-1803 while building Fort Kaskaskia II (11R612) to the north

References

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- 1991 Walthall, John A.
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- 2002 Waselkov, Gregory A. and John A. Walthall
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