



Archaeology at the McKenzie- Townsend Site



Archaeology

Archaeology is learning about how, when, & where earlier people lived using the things that they left behind—things such as their toys, forks, spoons, bottles, bricks, nails, and jewelry. Artifacts are the portable objects that people made or used. Features are the nonportable objects that people made—campfires, storage pits, house foundations. Archaeologists study the contexts in which artifacts and features were left behind in order to reconstruct past cultures. Without context, we can't place the things people used in time or space. Without that information, we can't reconstruct past cultures. Culture is all of the things that make up how people lived—how they dressed, cooked, slept, played, worked, and worshipped.

Archaeology's Importance

Most of the world's history happened when the majority of people didn't know how to read or write, so archaeology is the only way to find out how those people lived. Also, history books usually only tell one side of the story—that of the person they are about. Archaeology can tell everyone's story. Written documents are still important, but they are most helpful when combined with the results of archaeological research.

The McKenzie-Townsend Site

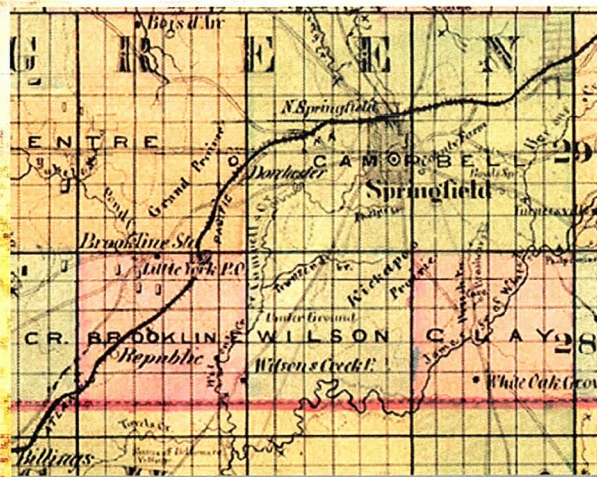
The McKenzie-Townsend site (23GR2048) represents one of the earliest Euroamerican sites in Greene County, Missouri. The property was owned for a short time by Alexander McKenzie. In 1832, he sold it to William Townsend. Both men were from Pulaski County, Kentucky, so they perhaps knew one another. When William Townsend and his family first arrived, "where Springfield now stands, was a fine forest of red-oak timber, with but a small clearing around the residence of John P. Campbell, which was a small log cabin, and at that time the only house in what is now the business part of Springfield." Thus when William Townsend and his family moved to southwest Missouri, it looked very different than it now does.

We know from historic documents that William and his first wife Mary had 13 children. After Mary died in 1842, William remarried a woman named Emily Rainey. Emily had 6 children of her own; she and William also had one child together. The family also owned 8 slaves. William, Emily, and several of their children moved to California in 1856.

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Old maps can help archaeologists learn about the historic landscape on which people lived.

Those same maps may also show archaeologists how early settlers influenced mapmaking.



Many streams in Missouri were named for the early settlers who lived along them.

We know the Townsend family lived in the area at the center of this map because the stream bears their name. Archaeologists call the places where people lived archaeological sites; they are where concentrations of artifacts and features exist.

This 1873 map also shows us that the Townsend family settled to the west of the White River Road. That road stretched from Springfield, Missouri to Fayetteville, Arkansas. To learn more about the White River Road, go to:

<http://delawaretown.missouristate.edu/roads.html>

Artifacts and the contexts in which they are found help us reconstruct the everyday lives of the people represented by archaeological sites.



Most early and middle 19th century sites outside of large cities consisted of several structures that included a house, smokehouse, barn/stable, springhouse, and privy or outhouse. Sites on which extended families lived might contain multiple houses. Prior to the Civil War, some sites might also contain the houses where enslaved persons lived. Archaeologists determine what parts of sites were used for certain purposes based on where different types of materials are recovered.

Excavations at the McKenzie-Townsend site detected buried deposits that contained pieces of broken pottery, smoking pipe fragments, buttons, and other items. These artifacts can tell us about how the family spent their time. In the photo above, many of the artifacts came from the darkly colored soil (a feature), which has been carefully recorded. You can see how close to the modern surface this feature is. Sometimes materials from features are found at the surface. Often, people innocently pick up interesting items from the surface, thus removing them from their contexts, making interpretation hard.



The above picture is of a pre-Civil War (1830--1840) uniform button that was found at the McKenzie-Townsend site. It suggests that a family member served in the military.



The above photo shows examples of dish and bowl fragments found at the site. They tell us when the site was occupied and that a kitchen was located in the area. The number of decorated ceramics found at a site can also tell us about the wealth of site inhabitants because decorated dishes were more expensive than plain ones.

More information about the McKenzie-Townsend site can be obtained from the Center for Archaeological Research at Missouri State University, 901 S. National Ave., Springfield, MO 65897, 417-836-5363. Funding was provided by the National Park Service and MoDNR. Work was conducted at the request of the City of Springfield.