

Food and a Frontier Community: History and Faunal analysis on Samuel H. Smith Site in Nauvoo, Illinois

NWAC Conference March 2019 – Kennewick, Washington

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Slide 1

Nauvoo, Illinois is a small town in west-central Illinois. It is known today as a summer tourist destination because of its rich history associated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the splintering factions including the Community of Christ church. It is also a town that has been engaged in historical archaeology for over 40 years. Archaeological excavations in Nauvoo began in the 1970s and continues today as part of a long-term renovation project to restore the town as it looked during the Mormon era from 1839 to 1846. However, this area has been occupied by many other groups since the Mormons as well as for thousands of years prior. The last five summers of the project were spent excavating the property of Samuel H. Smith, brother to Joseph Smith who was the first LDS prophet and organizer of the church. These excavations have revealed a foundation to a Mormon period structure, likely the home, as well as around 40,000 artifacts. A closer look at the faunal remains and the ceramic artifacts for analysis will help to understand pieces of what life was like for Samuel Smith and others living on the frontier during the brief Mormon residency of Nauvoo before the church members trekked West on the Mormon Trail.

Slide 2 – Indian Chiefs

Many American Indian tribes inhabited the Nauvoo area for thousands of years. Among the earliest recognized after contact was the Winnebago. More recently the area was inhabited by members of the Sac and Fox tribes (Cuerden 2006:9) and these were the chiefs of those tribes at the time. Since the 1500s, many travelers, trappers, and explorers passed through the Nauvoo area, most from either France, Britain, or Spain. After the French and Indian War and the British took claim to the land east of the Mississippi River, Indians' lives in that area changed forever. In a treaty signed in 1804, they were removed from their ancestral lands and moved west of the Mississippi River to make room for the incoming settlers (Cuerden 2006:11-16).

Slide 3 – Early Homes of Hancock County

Captain James White was the first permanent settler of the Nauvoo area in 1824. Before him, there were only trading posts and a surveyor's cabin. After he settled a few other settlers followed and built some cabins along the river and called the town Venus. By 1834, Venus had expanded and was mapped out by White's son, Alexander, and the town was renamed Commerce. Soon after that, the nation hit a financial crisis and the town ceased to expand until the Mormons purchased Commerce in 1839 (Cuerden 2006:21-29).

Slide 4 – Maps

Prior to coming to Nauvoo, the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints were forced out of Missouri and had to relocate to a place of refuge. Joseph Smith purchased Commerce and moved all the church members there to create their own community in 1839 (Cuerden 2006:30). Church members renamed Commerce to Nauvoo, which means

“beautiful habitation” in Hebrew. From here on, Nauvoo began to grow and thrive. The population grew to about 12,000, which was at one point larger than Chicago. Nauvoo continued to grow and expand until the big move to the Salt Lake valley in 1846.

Slide 5 – Conflict in Nauvoo

Despite the success of both the religion and the town, many members chose to leave the church and attempt to reform it because they disagreed with many of Smith’s actions. One group of these former members started their own newspaper called *The Expositor* attempting to call out Smith on controversial actions and stir up tensions amongst other non-Mormons. Only one issue of the paper was published because Joseph Smith ordered its immediate destruction as it heavily disrupted the town. Following this event, however, Smith was charged with rioting and treason for violating the rights of the press (Cuerden 2006:39). Eventually Joseph Smith, his brother Hyrum, John Taylor and other members were incarcerated in the Carthage Jail on those charges awaiting a trial. An enraged group of anti-Mormons stormed the jail in 1844, killing Joseph and Hyrum and injuring the others.

After the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints faced some opposition when assigning the church a new leader. Some believed that God assigned the new leader as Brigham Young, while Joseph Smith’s other brother, William, believed that leadership should remain in the Joseph Smith bloodline. While the followers of Brigham Young crossed the plains to the Great Salt Lake Valley, the others unwilling to cross the plains (such as Joseph’s first wife, Emma Smith) remained in Nauvoo, many eventually resettling and establishing the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints headquarters in Independence, Missouri (Allen and Leonard 1976:202).

Slide 6 – Etienne Cabet

The next major group that inhabited Nauvoo was a French socialist group known as the Icarians led by Etienne Cabet. The Icarians supported an extreme social movement that was believed to create a perfect utopia. Their radical beliefs created tensions for them in France, forcing them to find somewhere to experiment with this socialist community (Gauthier 1992:5). The Icarian people moved around to several locations like Dallas and New Orleans before finally settling in Nauvoo in 1849. They wanted the location of the town for many of the same reasons the Mormons did: it was in an area that allowed them to live in peace. Plus, the town was already built up, making it easy for them to simply move in. Overall, the town was a success for the first few years. A lot of their struggles were due to the fact that most of them only spoke French leading to communication challenges in their business and legal interactions (Gauthier 1992:15-27).

Slide 7 – Nauvoo 1855

In 1851, the town fell into disorder and the leaders lost all trust and control of the people. They tried to take back control by trying some things that went against the town's constitution, but this only enraged the people more, putting them at the brink of violence. Eventually the majority of Icarinas left Nauvoo in 1856 either leaving behind the whole Icarian ideals entirely or moving to another Icarian settlement in Iowa or California (Gauthier 1992:28-44). This is an artwork of how Nauvoo appeared around the time that the Icarians left.

Slide 8 – Grape and Wine Industry

In the short period between the Mormon and the Icarian occupations, a wave of immigrants moved to Nauvoo. Most of them were Catholic or Lutheran Germans escaping the political and economic disturbances in their home country. Other immigrants included some Swiss, Irish, and English. With this large influx of German immigrants, Nauvoo became one of the largest German-speaking communities in Illinois. Even though the Icarians came in 1849, many German and Irish immigrants remained in Nauvoo and started a grape and wine industry that still thrives today (Cuerden 2006:45-46).

Slide 9 – Samuel Smith

The point of this lengthy history of the town is to highlight two points. One being the centrality of the town in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The second being the complexity of the town's history beyond the church-related past.

While the history of the Samuel Smith site has stretched many years and several different groups of people, the focus of the project is the home as it was during Samuel's occupation. Samuel was involved with some church and Nauvoo leadership before his brothers, Joseph and Hyrum, were killed. He had four children with his first wife, Mary, and remarried after her death and then had three more children (Jenson 1901:282). He lived both in Nauvoo and with his brother, William, in Plymouth where he could farm.

On the day that the mob killed Joseph and Hyrum, Samuel took his horse as fast as he could to Carthage to try to help. As soon as he came, the mob pursued him, but he got away

without getting shot. However, he was somehow still injured internally in his side, whether from injury or distress, and died a month later (Anderson 1979). Little is known about what happened to his home specifically after his death and the LDS members left Nauvoo, but this is one of the things I to find out as I continue this research project.

Slide 10 – Nauvoo Today

The LDS church's interest in the historic sites of Nauvoo began early in the 20th century around the same time of the Antiquities Act which put much of the nation into a new interest in preserving sites with historic and cultural value. In 1934, the National Park Service did a survey for the Historic American Buildings Survey in Nauvoo and it was later added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1977 (Schroer 1977). Many of the original structures were still standing, and still are today, while many other buildings have been excavated and rebuilt as a memorial to the Mormon occupants of the time. Not only would a restored Nauvoo commemorate the Mormon community, but it could also symbolize American perseverance amid hard times, while also depicting the church as a significant player in American history.

Slide 11 – Site Excavation

Because both the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and the Community of Christ share the history in Nauvoo, both churches have ownership of land there. The Samuel

Smith site lies on the property of the Community of Christ, who in cooperation with an organization called I Dig Nauvoo, made the excavation of this site possible. I Dig Nauvoo staff is made of a few members with various backgrounds such as members of the different splinters of the Mormon church all having different levels of archaeology experience. I Dig Nauvoo welcomes volunteers of all kinds and especially appeals to the tens of thousands of tourists that visit Nauvoo during the summer season. The site has now been fully excavated and awaits reconstruction of what Samuel H. Smith's home in Nauvoo as it once looked like during the Mormon period.

While much is known about Samuel Smith and his involvement with the church and public affairs, less is known about his day-to-day life on the American plains. A topic that particularly interests me is the food that was consumed, desired, what was affordable, what was popular and why. These are topics of interest because they govern so many areas of life such as game that is hunted, crops that are farmed and how, eating utensils used, practical and usual dishes, food preparation, kitchen technology and tools, food storage, and food disposal. Naturally, evidence of all these elements unlock clues as to what was valued in a society as well as social standing and economic class, and likely how government and religion played a role in how these settlers carried out these food practices.

Slide 12 – Project Material

In hopes of gathering all these aspects of culture of Samuel Smith, I am studying the ceramics and the faunal remains found during the excavations. Excavations at this site just concluded last summer after five summers of excavation. I helped with the excavation last

summer and volunteered to take some of the artifacts back to the University of Idaho for analysis and as my master's thesis project. There are approximately 9 – 10,000 ceramic fragments and about 5,000 bone fragments that I have to analyze.

The analysis of the ceramics from the site are still in progress, so what I am reporting here is approximate percentages done based on the small amount already analyzed, what I observed while presorting, and in consultation with my faculty advisor, Mark Warner, - so at this point if you have concerns or questions about this data blame him. The excavated ceramics are unexceptional from what one commonly sees in mid-nineteenth century assemblages, though my hope is that as I complete the vessel counts for the assemblage some more nuanced information will be revealed. Approximately 45 percent of the assemblage (by sherd count) consists of undecorated redwares with colorless glazes. Approximately 30 percent consists of undecorated whitewares and pearlwares and 20 of decorated whitewares and pearlwares. The decorations identified consists largely of transfer prints (in a variety of colors) and hand painted polychromes. There is a large variety of the colors of the transfer print. They include red, green, blue, brown, black, and purple; blue and red have the largest quantity compared to the others.

As I progress in this work, I am interested in identifying the vessel forms in the redware assemblage. These are also the most prevalent utilitarian ceramic. Again, I don't have specific numbers at this point, but it is not so striking that stonewares are quite infrequent – I would estimate that these are only at about 5 percent of the assemblage. This seems to make sense since Nauvoo had its own brickyard and therefore may have had an abundant supply of the red clay, probably making redwares quite affordable. I believe they may have also manufactured their own redwares, but I'm still checking on that.

Something to note is that many of the decorated whitewares may have had matching sets, but a fair amount had similar designs, but not identical. This leads me to think that the residents of this home site had the means for a few fancy dishes yet still lived a simple lifestyle, as opposed to something more fancy and having complete matching sets.

One of the key issues that I am wrestling with is working to differentiate materials associated with the Smith family with other groups. Obviously, the Smith family is the priority for project sponsors, but preliminary analysis of the ceramics indicates there is a considerable percentage of materials that post-date the Smiths. There is still much research and analysis that needs to happen, but I have been able to extract a couple dates from the ceramics, and most of the material culture likely came from the 1850s or later. Such findings will have significant implications for focusing on Smith/church history, but beyond that the assemblage is a significant opportunity to examine broader questions of mid-nineteenth century life.

Slide 13 – Faunal Data So Far

I am in the process of cataloging 5000 bones and overall the assemblage is dominated by mammalian remains. Thus far in my analysis mammal bones account for 73 percent of the total bone count but 96 percent of the bone weight. Birds have 23 percent of the bone count, but 3 percent of the bone weight.

To delve further into the fauna of what isn't cataloged yet, not surprisingly cow and pig represent the majority of the assemblage. Of particular interest, however, is the body part representation. Specifically, there are multiple pig skull fragments in the assemblage. I have not

yet completed the MNIs for it, but I would estimate that there is a minimum of six pig skulls represented. Further investigation will hopefully shed more light as to why this site contains so many, but my suspicion is that what I have is not just food from a household but possibly something associated with either a butchering event (e.g. hog killing time in the fall) or it is somehow refuse from a nearby butcher shop.

It is still too early to make any conclusions about the food patterns or any other societal values but I anticipate that as the project progresses, much will be revealed about these things as well as many other historical and cultural aspects. The preliminary analysis has led me to assume that the residents of this home relied mostly on pork and beef, led a rather simple lifestyle commonly seen with the middle class in 19th century midwestern United States.