

An Apple a Day Keeps the Doctor Away: A Reanalysis of Seeds Recovered from Mobile's Banana Docks Site 1MB564

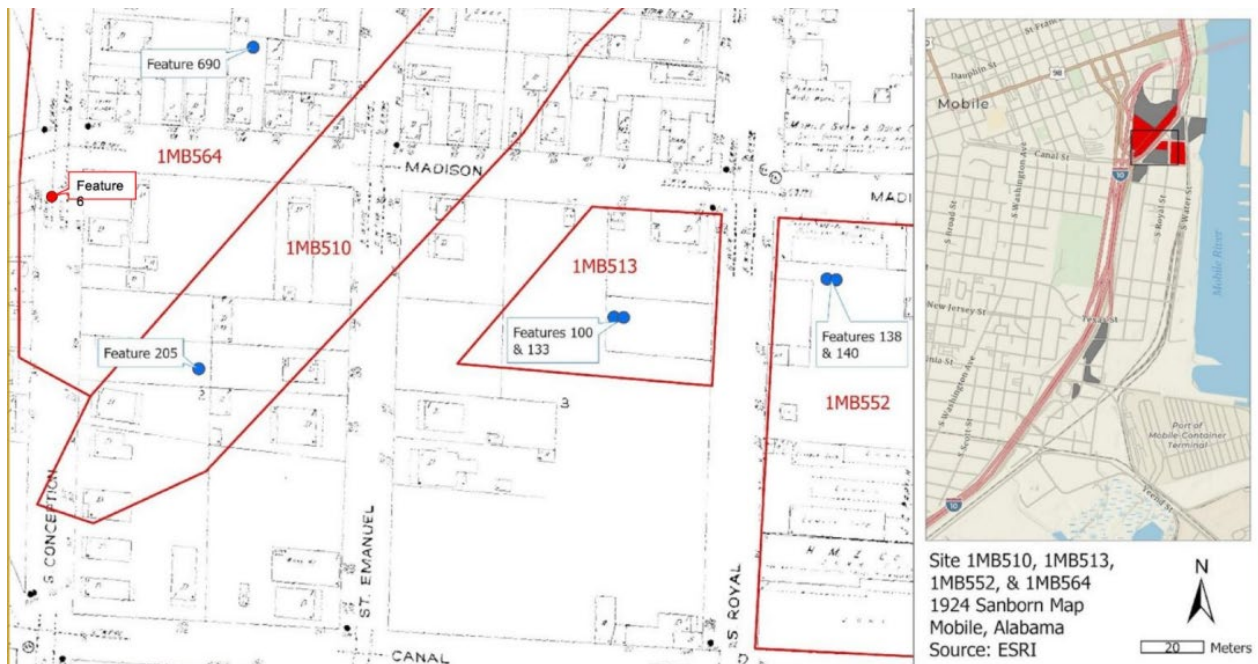
Peggy Humes

Introduction

Further analysis conducted on the Phase II macrobotanical remains from the Feature 6 privy deposit focuses on identification of previously unidentified seeds and tentative identifications of historic fruit subspecies. The large deposit of fruit from one 10L flotation sample highlights the wealth of botanical data in interpreting these preliminary findings for how these native and imported plants were associated with landscape uses and foodways from late 1800-early 1900s as well as potential future macrobotanical identifications.

Site and Privy Feature

The botanicals from 1MB564 Phase II excavations were recovered from a wood lined Privy (Feature 6) located in the southern portion of Trench 14. From the following 1924 Sanborn Insurance map, the Privy likely correlates with the 300 or 303 block of tenant buildings at the intersection of South Conception and Madison, but the deposits used to fill the privy may have come from trash piles nearby. Only half of the privy was excavated, but this feature yielded a variety of artifacts dating to the mid to late 1800s. Feature 6 appears to be one deposit, but may have been created through multiple filling events of trash deposits surrounding the privy structure.



View Botanicals:



Banana Docks History

The Mobile Banana Dock's were a large open-air city market constructed in 1857, six blocks north-northeast of site 1MB564. Historic maps and directories show this neighborhood, known as Down the Bay, was first settled in the late-1800s. The market, historically called the Banana Docks, was associated with The Port of Mobile; of which brought large shipments of fruits and vegetables from southern regions of the world. In the early 1900s, The United Fruit Company docked their boat fleets at the Banana Docks where primarily black migrants would gather for a daily wage unloading, counting, and sorting bananas from boats to railcars (Pinney 1989).



Banana Docks fruit spoilage pile



Banana dock workers loading bananas. Erik Overbey Collection, The Doy Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of South Alabama.

Trains exported bananas north bound and returned south bound to Mobile with grapes and apples (Blejwas 2019; Pinney 1989). Two surrounding colonies of Daphne and Lambert began in the 1890s through Italian immigrant communities. The colonies grew grapes and made wine that became successful in Mobile markets (Blejwas 2019).

Table 1 - Botanical Remains Analyzed from Feature 6 at 1MB564

Botanical taxa recovered from Phase II privy pit (Feature 6) at 1MB564.			
Common Name	Scientific Name	Count	Classification
Animal Feces* ¹	Caprolite	1	–
Blackberry/Raspberry* ²	<i>Rubus sp.</i>	4	Native
Cherry* ³	<i>Prunus avium</i>	8	Native
Cherry/Plum cf.	<i>Prunus sp.</i>	6	Native
Coconut	<i>Cocos nucifera</i>	2	Native/ Import
Coffee	<i>Coffea sp.</i>	4	Import
Grape* ⁴	<i>Vitis sp.</i>	879	Native/ Import
Grape cf.* ⁵	<i>Vitis sp.</i>	2	Native
Hackberry* ⁶	<i>Celtis sp.</i>	1	Native
Hackberry cf.* ¹¹	<i>Celtis sp.</i>	6	Native
Muscadine* ⁷	<i>Vitis rotundifolia</i>	626	Native
Nectarine * ⁸	<i>Prunus persica sub nucipersica</i>	1	Native
Nectarine/Peach cf.* ⁹	<i>Prunus sp.</i>	10	Native
Peach	<i>Prunus sp.</i>	4	Native
Plum* ¹⁰	<i>Prunus domestica</i>	10	Native
Indeterminate seed, rounded * ¹¹	–	1	–
Unidentifiable seed frags* ¹¹	–	32	–
Watermelon	<i>Citrullus vulgaris</i>	9	Import/Native
Wood frag-Yellow Pine* ¹¹	<i>Pinus ponderosa</i>	1	Native

*¹ Previously IDed as Common Bean
*² Previously not IDed and attached to burned cherry pit
*³ Previously IDed as Cherry/Plum
*⁴ Previously IDed as all Grape, has Muscadine mixed in
*⁵ Previously IDed as Buckthorn and Honeysuckle
*⁶ Previously IDed as Blueberry

*⁷ Previously IDed as all Muscadine, has Grape sp. mixed in
*⁸ Previously IDed as Peach
*⁹ Previously IDed as Peach
*¹⁰ Previously IDed as Peach
*¹¹ Previously Unidentified

Preliminary Findings

The botanical assemblage recovered from this privy contained a variety of fruits, specifically large quantities of muscadines and grapes. Future analysis can identify the grapes into further sub species used for Wine versus Table grapes.

This additional analysis will support the correlation between what these grapes were used for, and if there is any connection between the early Italian wine industry and these deposits.

Further analysis identified evidence of animal feces. This identification supports a hypothesis of fruit spoilage piles as trash dumps discarded near the privy likely attracting animals.

The majority of identifiable botanicals in this assemblage are native to the Mobile Bay Area or were undoubtedly shipped into the region. Future comparative analysis may identify differences and similarities between the botanical assemblages recovered from surrounding sites also associated with the Banana Docks.