

## **Riverfront Construction Unearths Colonial Buildings In St. Louis** **News**

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([stltoday.com](http://stltoday.com)) - Most historians concluded long ago that all physical traces of this city's colonial past had been obliterated by generations of development.



A "stain in the earth" is changing that.

An archaeological dig beneath the Poplar Street Bridge by the Missouri Department of Transportation has uncovered evidence of two homes that were built about 1770, only six years after St. Louis was founded as a fur-trading post. They were made of logs placed together vertically in the French style.

The evidence is not much to untrained eyes - dark lines across carefully exposed soil 5 feet below ground level. But Bob Moore, historian at the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, said there is little doubt of the state crew's finding.

"This is big stuff," Moore said. "We thought anything colonial was long gone, and it isn't."

Michael Meyer, senior historic preservation specialist for MoDOT, said the dark lines constitute outlines of two houses at today's Second and Poplar streets. The logs rotted away long ago, leaving what Meyer called "just a stain in the earth."

The houses were owned by colonial residents Joseph Bouchard and Louis Beaudoin, the latter a fur trader. Beaudoin's house, on the east side of Second, was 15 feet by 18 feet. Bouchard's, to the west, was about 18-by-20.

Meyer said his crew also found evidence of cooking pits and some artifacts, including bits of French colonial tableware and a small lead seal, the sort used in tying up bundles of furs for shipment down the Mississippi River.



St. Louis was founded by Pierre Laclède as a fur-trading post in 1764. Only briefly a colony of his native France, the region was ruled by Spain for most of the four decades until 1804, when it became part of the United States through the Louisiana Purchase. (Spain had returned it to Napoleon, who sold it to America.)

At that time, the town of about 1,000 people, including slaves, consisted of 180 buildings of wood or stone. They were along three main streets paralleling the Mississippi River, and most were on land now occupied by the riverfront park.

MoDOT's dig is immediately to the south.

The churned-up history of old St. Louis made the quest daunting.

Almost all of the colonial town, including the limestone mansions of its leading citizens, had been demolished by 1840 to make way for the frenzied growth of the steamboat era.

A firestorm in 1849 destroyed 418 buildings across 15 blocks. And the city began leveling the district in 1939 to make way for the Arch, which itself required digging deep into old colonial soil.

Meyer said one stroke of luck was that subsequent construction near Second and Poplar was of smaller buildings that didn't have deep basements, which kept destruction to a minimum.

"I thought there was a small chance of finding something original," he said. "The surprise was that we found so much."

When the two colonial houses were replaced isn't known. At the Bouchard site, Meyer's crew dug through remains of a brick building once operated by Eliza Haycraft, a prominent madam in the mid 1800s. She had several brothels and taverns in that area, which Meyer nicknamed the Madam Haycraft Site.

Moore, the federal historian, said Haycraft's enterprises were sufficiently notorious that Union army commanders made it off limits to soldiers during the Civil War or at least tried.

The archaeological dig is mandated by federal law before work can begin to rework some of the Poplar Street Bridge ramps. That project, costing about \$25 million, will replace the two westbound ramps connecting the bridge to the depressed lanes and Interstate 55 to the south. It also will remove the eastbound ramp that connects the depressed lanes to the bridge. That work is scheduled for completion by early 2016.

Moore said some of the artifacts are destined for an expanded museum beneath the Arch, part of the \$380 million in improvements planned for the riverfront park.