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The Forts of Palos

Investigations into Two
Fortified Sites Near Chicago

by William L. Potter,
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INTRODUCTION:

In the 1830s, the remains of earthwork fortifications were discovered in what is now Palos Hills, Illinois (a suburb some eighteen miles southwest of Chicago). The forts were located atop a bluff overlooking what was once the old Sagaunashkee Swamp, a vast, reed-choked marsh that had once stretched from the Des Plaines River eastward to the Calumet River. While local legend contends the forts were the work of the French explorers (a belief that conveniently explains the presence of fortifications in an area having no known military history), who built these works, when, and why are questions yet to be explained adequately. By about 1904, farming and other inroads of civilization had erased the physical features of the earthworks, and their precise locations became as clouded as their origins.

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTIONS:

(Please refer to FIGURE 2 for section map)

With no positive historical record of the construction of these fortifications yet found, and with all visible features having been erased some eighty years ago, the question of whether or not they actually existed arises. Fortunately, interest in Chicago area history had begun to develop before the earthworks were leveled, and a few people familiar with the sites made mention of them. One such person was Dr. Valentine A. Boyer (one of Chicago's earliest physicians) who wrote to the Chicago Historical Society on June 4, 1883: [Please note that comments found within brackets in all quotes to follow are mine. I have attempted to stick to original punctuation and syntax -for better or worse. Longer quotes only are in italics.]

"This is to point out the locality of the remains of an old Fort located in the town of Palos, Cook County Illinois, at the crossing of the old Sag trail, which crossed the AuSagaunashkee swamp, and was the only crossing available East of the Des Plaines River prior to the building of the Archer Bridge in 1836. The remains of the fort situated near this crossing were to be found on the elevated timber land, commanding a view of the surrounding country, and as a military hold would well command and guard the crossing; who built this fort I have never been able to find any account of it in any historical works I have had access to. I first saw it in 1833 & since then visited it often in company with other persons some of whom are still alive. I feel satisfied it was not built during the Sac War from its appearance when I first saw it, and that it may have been built by the Old French explorers who are known to have visited this region of country two centuries ago and more, is more than probable from circumstances connected therewith, in my mind, tending to substantiate that fact, the strongest evidence being the growth of trees a century old being found

growing in its environs. It was evidently the work of an enlightened people skilled in the science of warfare. As a strategical point it most completely commanded the surrounding country and crossing of the Swamp."

"The tracing herewith accompanying was made from the original United States Surveys prior to the year 1836, on which the course of the contemplated Ill. & Mich. Canal was traced out to which I have added the lines showing the Calumet Feeder, the old Sag Trail, and some minor additions not noted on the original map, which our Friend Mr. Alexander Wolcott the County Surveyor, was kind enough to permit to use --"

/s/ Valentine A. Boyer (1)

Boyer's crude map (Figure 5) showed a figurative representation of a fort on the line between the SE 1/4 of section 16 and the SW 1/4 of section 15, Palos Township (T37 N., R12 E. of 3rd P.M.) [for simplification, this location will be referred to as SITE A; see Figure 2.]. His supposition that Frenchmen built this fort unfortunately became "fact" in the minds of many throughout the years, thus inadvertently spawning a French "heritage" that has yet to be proven.

Early Chicago historian A.T. Andreas wrote in 1884:

"There is in the town of Palos the ruins now clearly discernable of what were once evidently French or Indian fortifications. These ruins, which are situated on the farm of Theodore Lucas, some three miles southwest [actually southeast] of Willow Springs, are yet so well preserved as to enable one to clearly trace their former extent and size. From their location on a rising piece of ground, and the area they once evidently inclosed, the conclusion is arrived at that they were of considerable importance and well designed in their construction for affording refuge and protection to a large number of persons. As to who built them, no one knows...." (2)

"The fort was located in the West half of section 15, town of Palos, on the farm of Theodore Lucas." (3)

Andreas also quotes the Boyer letter elsewhere in his book.

At the close of the 19th century, interest in area archeology was also emerging, with some primitive archeological surveys of the area taking place. Conducting one such survey was Karl August Dilg, whose notes mention "the remains of [a] former cabin or stockaded fort dating back to the French period". He states this feature was "West of the Sag Indian village", however he also makes a margin note to the effect that the features he was describing were in Palos Township; this would place them, in point of fact, east of the Sag Indian village, not west. (4) Dilg's papers are not very precise and his conclusions often misguided.

On the other hand was Albert F. Scharf, a German immigrant who, from the time he arrived in Chicago as a boy in 1853 until his death in 1929, spent a great deal of time traveling Cook and Will counties talking to farmers and long-time residents, visiting, recording, and mapping Indian sites; his volumes of notes written over the last quarter of his life form an early archeological survey still used by

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archeologists today. Archeologists I have talked and worked with have found Scharf's placement of Indian sites to be quite accurate, although some of his writings get a bit romantic. Of the Palos fortifications, Scharf says:

"The ruins of this supposedly French fort in Sec. 15, town of Palos, Cook County, first described by Dr. V.A. Boyer, were found in the same condition in 1837, by A.J. Mathieson [Mathewson], of Lockport, Ill. But Mr. Mathieson says there were two forts, the other being similarly situated, one mile to the northeast in section 14, same town."

"Ruins of a French fort, or stockade, were also found in sec. 8, town of New Lenox, Will County, Illinois. Of the original formation of these ruins, Mr. Mathieson can give an accurate description, having surveyed and platted them at that time. To some extent, the first two mentioned can be traced today, but the last mentioned one is well preserved and covered with timber." [refer to footnote this quote for notes on the New Lenox fortification]

"The location of the Boyer ruin can be found on the northeast corner of the Southwest quarter of sec. 15, town of palos, Cook County, on the farm of Theodore Lucas. For A description of this ruin and also the following, which are partially defaced, the writer is indebted to Mr. A.J. Mathieson, who says: 'The earthwork in sec 15, formed an equalateral triangle, pointing to the forks of the Sag, having three sallyports.'"

"The location of the Mathieson ruin (1837), is in the northeast corner of the northwest quarter of sec 14, town of Palos, on the farm of Mr. Theisen. This ruin Mr. Mathieson says was 'an earthwork in the form of a square, true to the points of the compass, and having four sallyports.' Both of these ruins are well known to the early settlers...." (5)

Also with the above quote, Scharf mentions the possibility of another fortification of some sort in Willow Springs, IL., near the DesPlaines River, at the southeast corner of section 32, Lyons Township, but states the site was obliterated by the building of the "Drainage Canal". (I do not recall finding any other reference to this fortification). Writing at an apparently later date (many of Scharf's writings are not dated), Scharf says:

"On the S.W. quarter of section 14, there is said to have been a square enclosure ('fort') of small size, having openings in the middle of each of the four sides. This earthwork was about two-hundred feet square and was surrounded by a ditch. No trace of it now exists...."

"A triangular earthwork, the point of which directed toward the water, was located just where the Ausaganash trail crossed the swamp... This earthwork had openings in each of its three sides. It also has long since disappeared." (6)

Scharf's map, "Crossing of the Old Sag Trail, Detail 28", (see Figure 7) shows a triangular fort on the N.E. quarter of the S.W. quarter of Section 15 extending slightly into the S.E. quarter of the N.W. quarter of the same section, Palos Township. [This fort henceforth to be referred to as SITE B (see Figure 2)]. The map also shows a square fortification on the border between the N.W. quarter of the N.W.

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quarter of Section 14 and the S.W. quarter of the S.W. quarter of Section 9, same township [this fort to be referred to as SITE C].

It should be noted that the locations shown on Scharf's map do not jive totally with his written descriptions; in both cases, the map figures are shifted slightly (perhaps a matter of yards) to the north of the locations described in his writing. This is probably because the size of the forts on the map was exaggerated somewhat for the sake of illustration --artistic license-- and would therefore take up more space than if drawn to scale. Although (assuming momentarily they are drawn to scale) forts of this size may have existed, they would probably have received more attention in historic record.

Although the map is undated, its drawing can be placed sometime prior to 1904 by Scharf's placement of Sacred Heart Church on Kean Avenue in Section 10. The church at that location burned in 1903, and was rebuilt in 1904 on or near where he shows the triangular fort (SITE B). Scharf would surely have noted this had the building been there for awhile.

Scharf's notes mention interviewing "A.J. Mathieson" at the man's office in Lockport, IL., in 1903. Other details gleaned from Scharf indicate that his Mr. "Mathieson" must have, in fact, been Artemus Julius Mathewson, a civil engineer and official with the Illinois-Michigan Canal commission and (at times) County Surveyor for Will County. In 1837 (and later), Mathewson was involved with work on the Calumet Feeder (a channel cut through the Sag swamp to provide additional water to the I&M Canal) and would certainly have been familiar with the Palos area. Scharf says Mathewson surveyed and platted the earthworks in sections 14 and 15, and that he willed his papers to his grandson Arnold (see Figure 3). In a conversation with a member of the Illinois & Michigan Canal Museum staff in 1975, I was told that, following Mathewson's death, a legal dispute arose over who had jurisdiction to his papers, the result apparently being that his Canal and government-related papers were eventually split between the I&M Canal Museum, the Illinois State Archives, and possibly some other offices, while his private papers --if any actually existed-- would have been retained by the family. In short, his papers were scattered.

The Mathewson papers at the I&M Museum consist mainly of his survey notebooks for the Canal proper and have no direct relation to the Palos area. At the Illinois State Archives, however, Director John Daly was able to turn up Mathewson's survey and plat notebook for the Calumet Feeder dated 1849 (at which time the Feeder was already operational), as well as a Mathewson map of Palos Township delineating the Feeder route through the Sag swamp.(7) The survey notebook reveals nothing related to the fort sites. However, near where the Scharf map shows the "Mathieson" fort (Site C) in section 14, the Mathewson map shows a peculiar (and unexplained) symbol resembling a hollow, four-pointed star. Although it could be some sort of surveyor's marking, this symbol does not appear anywhere else on either Mathewson's map or in his notebook; I do not think it is a coincidence this mark should appear where it does, especially considering Scharf's contention that Mathewson had surveyed the forts. On the other hand, though, nothing of note appears in sections 15 or 16 (where the "Boyer" earthwork could be expected to turn up) on this map. Mr. Daly added that the notebook and map were all the related Mathewson material on file at the Illinois State Archives. If Mathewson did make more extensive drawings of both sites, they are either lost to history or with some unknown descendant.

Around the turn of the century (and later), historians were arguing over the placement of the Chicago Portage route. While most favored the traditional Chicago River/Mud Lake/Des Plaines River route, some people supported a Calumet River/Sag Swamp/Des Plaines River placement of the portage. In the latter camp was newspaper editor Henry W. Lee, who stated his case in a paper presented to the Illinois State Historical Society in 1912; the "Boyer" fort was included in his argument. He quoted passages from Boyer and Andreas, then stated:

"I have personally visited this site [Site B] several times and have a number of relics, including a skull, arrowheads, and spear heads, and a curious old iron axe, said to be of French make. Mr. Peter Lucas of Palos has a similar axe...."

"...it is more than likely that the original French fort at Chicago was located at Palos. There is today a Roman Catholic church on the crown of the hill, just above the fort...." (8).

The Catholic Church referred to here was Sacred Heart Church (now the Sacred Heart-Chapel Hill Newman Center) --the one built in 1904 at Site B. However, a pamphlet published by the Sacred Heart Parish in 1933 mentions "...the local tradition to the effect that the old 'French Fort'... stood on the Lucas farm, a few feet from our present Church...." (9).

In addition to the above references, I was able to interview Ann Busch Wilson. Mrs. Wilson is the daughter of Charles J. Busch, one of the Busch/Lucas clan mentioned in Scharf's notes. The Lucas and Busch families are among the oldest in the area. Ann Busch Wilson was born around 1907 and grew up on her father's farm located at Site B just west of the Sacred Heart Church building previously mentioned.

Mrs. Wilson stated her father had told her that a fort had existed on their property west of their house.(10). She and her son, Mark, recalled that visitors often came out to look around the farm (probably for artifacts), but usually searched near the bottom of the hill south of the buildings.

Also interviewed was Mrs. Clara Thiesen Kuelczo, who grew up on the Thiesen farm mentioned by Scharf in relation to the "Mathewson" earthworks in section 14(Site C). Mrs. Kuelczo referred to the fort as "the Indian Fort" and said it was located where the Palos Hills City Hall stands today. She also stated all traces of the fort had disappeared by her time. Clearing up a local legend, she stated that a log cabin once standing on the site was the Thiesen homestead and was not part of the fort as some old residents claimed. (The cabin was razed in the 50's, although Mrs. Kuelczo now wishes it had been saved). The Palos Hills City Hall is south of 103rd Street at 86th Avenue (Site C) --a few yards south of where Scharf's map shows one of the forts to be, and almost exactly where the Mathewson map indicates something.

One long-time resident of the area once told me that one of the forts had been on "Lady Brith Road", although he couldn't --or wouldn't-- tell me where that had been. That problem might be cleared through the following reference (in a 1940 town history article) to the above mentioned cabin: "This house stands but a few yards from one of the old Indian forts before mentioned..." at "...103rd St. near 86th

Avenue (Ladies' Lane)...."(11). The same article mentions the Site C fort in a discussion of a possible (but very improbable) camp of Father Marquette near "...Stony Creek, later known as the 'Feeder', and now the Sag Canal, where it was crossed by the Saugaunash Trail and ford, and above which is the site of one of the old Indian forts. It was near this spot that on what was later the Theodore Lucas farm that two French axes were found some years ago."(12).

DISCUSSION:

Were there actually two forts? Before about 1900, farms in the area surrounding the Sag swamp were few and far between, therefore much --if not most-- of the area discussed here was covered with dense brush and timber. And, it may be added, with the coming of the Cook County Forest Preserves, much of the area has been restored to that condition today. Boyer's visits to his site were done before there were any real landmarks, and he attempted to pinpoint the site using a map long out of date even at his time. Wandering through miles of underbrush, it is quite believable he and his contemporaries would not have found another fort unless they knew it was there. It is even conceivable some parties may have seen (at different times) both sites yet not realize they weren't the same....

The only man who actually saw the two different works (in their entirety) on two different sites was Mathewson, and on that fact we must trust Scharf's account. Mathewson was a trained engineer who must have spent much time on the bluffs of the Sag while surveying the Calumet Feeder route. Perhaps he is the only early visitor to the area to realize there really were two fortifications. Mathewson would also have been capable of determining and remembering the planform of such works....

Scharf himself seems to have briefly seen only bits of two forts before their visible features were forever leveled by "progress". According to members of the Lucas-Busch family, their ancestors (who occupied Site B --the Boyer/Scharf site in section 15) may have looked on such ancient works with curiosity, but would not have hesitated to level them if they stood in the way of plowing or other projects. Perhaps the Thiesens of the section 14 site (Site C) felt the same. A.F. Scharf came along just a little too late and therefore was dependent on Mathewson for his descriptions of the works as they were. I believe Scharf's map exaggerates the size of the forts for the purpose of depiction, but is accurate in placing the sites (within, perhaps, a few hundred feet).

Taking into account references made after the sites were erased (but while people who had seen the features --perhaps even those responsible for their leveling-- were still alive), as well as statements made by descendants of the owners of the sites, it is fairly certain there were indeed two separate earthworks forts found in Palos. Their probable locations being Site C --the Palos Hills City Hall/Green Hills Library property at 86th Avenue and 103rd Street (the "Mathewson" fort, NE 1/4 of NW 1/4 of Sec. 14, formerly the Thiesen farm), and Site B --west of the Sacred Heart/Newman Center at 107th Street and Kean Avenue (the "Boyer/Scharf" site, NE 1/4 of SW 1/4 of Sec. 15, formerly the Lucas-Busch farm). However, the original "Boyer" site as shown on his 1884 map (Site A) should not be totally ignored, for archeologists found some items there that could possibly be fort related.

THE SITES TODAY:
(Refer to Figure 2)

SITE A

Boyer's depiction of the fort (rectangular walls with corner bastions and a flag, no less) on his map was for the sake of illustration only, and the works would have to have been of grandiose proportions if drawn to scale. While it is probable Boyer missed his mark slightly in placing the site where he did, it still deserves some consideration as a legitimate location. Today the site is owned by the Cook County Forest Preserve District; it is on a high bluff overlooking the Calumet Sag Channel and the Sag Valley (once the Sagaunash Swamp). The valley forms a narrow neck at this point. A great portion of the hillside along the north-south section line was entirely removed for the construction of the four lane Route 45. The adjacent area in section 15 was completely removed by a deep gravel quarry operation, only to be re-filled as a garbage dump or "sanitary landfill" (the ground contours you see today are original, only the artifacts have been changed). On the west side of the highway cut, the land is more or less at its original contour, forming the bluff extending westward into section 16. There was an Indian village on this site (the Palos Site, Illinois Archeological Survey # 11-CK-26); it was partially excavated by members of the Chicago Field Museum's Summer Archeology Program in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although the site proved to have had longstanding intermitant occupation, the bulk of the artifacts were of the Upper Mississippian culture, Blue Island subculture, with some items definitely assignable to the Early Historic period; the principal occupation was figured to be late 17th century. Along with Indian artifacts, a limited number of European trade goods were found, including 17th century beads, a 17th century "Jesuit" ring (found on the finger of an 18 year old male skeleton), and a silver musket triggerguard tentatively identified as 18th or possibly 17th century French. Also found was a possible clasp knife and a few brass fragments. Of particular interest was a mass burial of 13 men, women, and children ranging in ages from 1 to 58; all appeared to be buried at one time with little order. Although no marks of violence were apparent, many body parts were missing. Archeologists believed this to have been the spring burial of dead accumulated over a particularly devastating winter; this certainly makes sense, although there is the possibility that, if some sort of foul play had occurred, no evidence may have been left on the skeletal remains found. Traces of a previous farm also are present here. (13).

SITE B

This site is also owned by the Forest Preserve District, although the eastern portion may be under the control of the Sacred Heart Newman Center, whose building is on part of the possible site. About 1/2 mile northeast of the Boyer site, this one is on an upper bluff overlooking a lower bluff (the remaining beachfront of the Calumet Stage of ancient Lake Chicago). West of the old Church is a small asphalt parking lot. West of that is the overgrown remains of the Busch farmyard, where bits of old buildings are evident. Since the majority of these buildings were constructed before earthmoving equipment was in common use, it is possible that soil disturbance was kept to a minimum, excepting the machinery used by the Forest Preseves during building removal and during mass tree-planting operations. Previous archeological inves-

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tigation of this site is not known at this point (The Illinois Archeological Survey has yet to cooperate with attempts to determine the site's status).

SITE C

Also situated on the blufftop approximately one mile northeast of the Boyer/Scharf site; no original ground remains in this area, it having been completely recontoured during various periods of construction in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The exception is a narrow strip of land (about 20 by 75 feet) between the City Hall and the Library; this piece is believed to be at its original level (although there may be some soil disturbance --including the burial of a "time capsule" in the form of a burial vault), and seems to be about dead center in the possible fort site. The site is immediately adjacent to the Knoll Springs/AuSagauaskee Indian village site (IAS 11-CK-19) excavated in the 1960s by archeologist Charles Slaymaker III of the Treganza Museum of Anthropology, San Fransisco. This site, like 11-CK-26, was a long-used village area with a principle occupation by the Upper Mississippian culture, Blue Island subculture, early in the Historic Period (Slaymaker estimated a period pre-1750). Among the European-related artifacts found were a musket ball of .51 caliber (unfired, sprue attached), an iron arrowhead, a brass strip, and clay pipe fragments. Four well-ordered burials in two different areas were found. The entire site was not excavated. (14).

BITS AND PIECES:

There are a few other matters relating to the forts of Palos that should also be mentioned since they may or may not have some bearing on the issue.

In 1963, three children were playing in a freshly-cut ditch at 87th Avenue and 103rd Street (west of Site C, see Figure 2) when they found three "cannonballs" partially imbedded in the clay bottom of the shallow ditch. (15). This spot was about one block from the supposed site of the square "Mathewson" earthworks in section 14 --just beyond reasonable musket range (16), but still well within the bite of small cannon. (17). Unfortunately, an iron ball is an iron ball, and it is impossible to tell an industrial iron ball (intended for use in a ball mill) from a cannon ball unless there is some marking cast into the latter, such as the French fleur-des-lis, an English broad arrow, or a lettered U.S. mark. Such markings were often cast or stamped into some (but by no means all) shot for each of these nations. None of these marks are present on the balls in question. The three balls are of two calibers, one measuring 2.100 inches, the two smaller ones measuring 1.543 and 1.550 inches. It is very interesting (but certainly not conclusive) to note that the theoretical standard size of 1/2 pound shot listed by the English Ordnance Board in 1764 was 1.52 inches (18), while another English shot table of 1780 shows 1-1/2 pound shot to be (theoretically) 2.201 inches (19). Both of these calibers (plus or minus a little) were in common usage by many nations in the 17th and 18th centuries, usually in the small, relatively portable cannons called "swivel guns". It would appear these balls are within what may be considered allowable manufacturing tolerances for ammunition of this period, as artillerists always called for a generous amount of "windage" between ball and bore to prevent accidents caused by

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irregular shot jamming in the barrel on firing. Perhaps the similarity in sizes to these calibers is a coincidence, perhaps not. It must also be mentioned that certain types of Civil War shot (notably 12 pounder Grape and 12 pounder Cannister) come close to these sizes, making it possible (though not probable) that someone's war souvenirs may have found their way into the ground there. We may never know.

Although the "cannonballs" described above definitely exist, some other interesting artifacts have become lost to history --if they ever really existed to begin with. Fitting into this category are --or were-- the artifacts found by one Thomas Kelly, as described by Andreas in 1884, by Scharf c.1900, and Hattie Sinnard Pashley, 1940:

"Thomas Kelly, a farmer living in Section 18, says that in some researches he has made among the ruins [of the Boyer/Scharf fort, Site B] not long since, he found a number of relics, among which was a curiously wrought powder horn, evidently of an antique pattern, and having on its surface inscriptions in a language which he was unable to read." (20).

"Here [on the Charles Bush/Theodore Lucas farm in the southwest quarter of section 15] is where Thos. Kelley, of Sec. 18, Town of Palos, dug up Indian relics and a powder horn (Copper flask, found in Sec. 18, as related by his son John. [Scharf's note])." (21).

"At 107th St. in section No. 18 Mr. Thomas Kelly in 1856 found a pair of metal soles, such as the French [sic] soldiers wore in olden times, and he discovered the skeleton of a man with an ancient French gun and copper powder horn with the inscription 'Frary Binhem,' etched upon it." (22).

It is somewhat distressing to note how the amount of information regarding the Kelly finds grew over a span of decades. Perhaps all of the items attributed to Kelly were in fact found, or maybe the stories about the finds were embellished as they were retold over the years; I have not been able to track down the source of Sinnard's information to make judgement on its validity. However, taking all of the reported Kelly finds as gospel, I have these comments: Andreas and Scharf differ on where the powder horn/flask was found, while Sinnard was noncommittal. I am not familiar with metal shoe soles being found at other fort sites in America, but, considering the drastic wear put on leather shoes by foot soldiers through the centuries, it would not be surprising to find such an expedient in use somewhere. It is very unlikely a powder horn could have survived very many years exposed to the weather, but a powder flask made of brass or copper is another matter. Many armies over the centuries used such flasks at various periods; however, there is no way of identifying the flask from the information available. Concerning the "ancient French gun", I seriously doubt that anyone but an expert on colonial guns could pick up a musket that had been buried for perhaps a century and reliably identify it as French, especially considering that many United States military arms up through the early 1800s were patterned after certain French weapons. If the skeleton accompanying the gun did exist (and it is certainly fishy that the first known mention of both comes nearly a century after their purported find), it is clear the man died alone, for otherwise his belongings --especially a gun and powder-- would not have been left with him. However, Indians did occasionally bury firearms with their

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dead; such burial guns were almost always either missing key parts or deliberately broken, possibly to discourage others from coming back to dig them up. We do not have enough information to judge if this might be such a case.

Another persistent legend mentions caches of French and Spanish coins being found in the vicinity; these legends are occasionally trotted-out to "prove" the French (or Spanish) origins of the forts. It is strange that (if such coins really were found) no one bothered to record their dates. It is also slightly improbable that any soldier of the 17th or 18th century --French, British, Spanish, or whatever-- would even have enough coins to make a "cache", let alone carry them miles into the wilderness and bury them. If foreign coins were found in the area, their origins probably date back to one of the periods in the 1800s when shortages of "hard" money made usage of foreign coins common, or when immigrants from many nations began to settle the area in the 1840s.

Many longtime residents claim to have dug up "French" lances, "French" guns, etc., in days long passed; it would appear that every piece of rusty metal a farmer ever hit with a plow around Palos was a "French" something --and possibly they were! But, as far as I know, such items have never been brought forward for examination, and probably no longer exist --if they ever did. I do know of one exception, that being a possible sword discovered by a Mr. Max Dunlop while working in his yard in 1969. Mr. Dunlop lived about one third of a mile east-northeast of the Mathewson fort (Site 3) in an area that would have been on the edge of the Sag swamp many years previous; the fort site would have overlooked the future location of the man's house. I saw the "sword" shortly after its discovery. I remember it as being very crude. It had a straight blade, no taper, about 18 inches long; it appeared to have been made from a piece of strap steel or iron of rectangular cross section (not triangular) and had a rounded --not pointed-- tip. I do not recall if it had a cutting edge. The handle was crudely wrapped with wire (probably over a piece of wood) to form a grip, and had a knuckle guard made of steel or iron rod pounded flat on bottom end and drilled to accept what appeared to be a common screw which was sunk through it into the handle lengthwise. The consensus of opinion was it was either a homemade toy or a makeshift machette for whacking weeds. Swords of similar size, referred to as "fighting knives", are known to have existed, but configuration of these seems to have been far more "swordlike" and of better quality. Even so, there may always be some doubt, since no one thought to photograph Mr. Dunlop's crude sword, and he has since moved away. The "sword" probably no longer exists.

THE PALOS FORTS: WHEN AND WHY?

Still the questions remain: why was the Sag fortified at two locations, either at the same or different periods? Who built them? When? It is likely the construction of either --or both-- of these forts fit into one or more of the following categories:

1. Aboriginal village fortifications: blaming these forts on the Indians is the easiest route to take, and in many ways the most logical. Various Indian cultures did build earthworks forts; some, such as the Fox, even built theirs in a similar manner in the historic period. (23). Square or round Indian forts seem to be relatively common in the midwest, but that triangular fort at Site B poses a problem. Archeologists I have talked with to date could not recall any other examples of triangular Indian forts in the midwest. If such forts aren't totally absent, they are at least rare.... Take a look at Figure 3 (the sketch of the triangular fort drawn by Mathewson for Scharf in 1903), then take a look at Figure 4 (a drawing of common field works or redoubts from a 1780's manual on fortifications) (24). Is their similarity totally coincidental?

And then there's the problem of the "cannonballs" found near the site of the square fort in section 14 (Site C). Perhaps they had nothing to do with the earthworks, in which case their presence is a remarkable coincidence. But it is certain that, if they were cannonballs, the Indians sure didn't leave them there.

Although the very circumstantial evidence introduced above by no means disproves possible Indian construction of one or both fortifications, it certainly points out the folly of hastily labeling them as Indian forts and dismissing them as such without further research.

2. Late 17th century French fortifications: Whether or not a French fort existed at Chicago --particularly Duranteye's 1685/86 fort-- is a question beat to death by historians years ago, all using the same skimpy references to reach their sweeping conclusions. I have nothing to add, except the thought that no one has yet proven Duranteye (a French soldier) didn't build his fort somewhere in the Chicago area. The arguments against Duranteye having built a fort at Chicago seem to be based largely on interpreting "Chicago" as meaning at the mouth of the Chicago River. But, in centuries passed, the term "Chicago" was also used as a general term for any area near the tip of Lake Michigan, not necessarily an exact location. For this reason, this period should not be dismissed, but no conclusions should be drawn unless some positive documentation surfaces. (25).
3. Forts guarding a possible portage route: Authors like Zeuch and Knight (Location of the Chicago Portage Route) have tried to set the Chicago portage route in stone, while an occasional maverick like Henry Lee (see footnote 8) has taken much of the same raw material to show something different. Was the Sag a portage route? The Sag swamp doesn't start appearing with any consistency on maps until the 19th century; in addition, early names for the Sag, such as Tall Grass Valley, Grassy Lake, Reed Lake, etc., do not produce visions of easy passage through its midst. However, one must not overlook the comments of James M. Buckin, another early I&M Canal engineer, who (in the company of famous Chicago halfbreed Billy Caldwell and one other Indian) did a preliminary survey in 1830 for a possible canal route through the Sag. He stated:

"The Indians further assured me that in certain seasons of high water there had been a water connection between the DesPlaines and the Calamic [Calumet River] through the valleys of the Sauganash and Stony creek." (26).

It is most likely that there was not one portage route at Chicago, but several, their use being governed by factors such as the season, the weather, etc. There was no big sign in Lake Michigan saying "Turn Here for Portage"; in short, any route between Lake Michigan and the DesPlaines or Illinois rivers became a portage if somebody used it. Although the bulk of the traffic probably used the traditional Mud Lake route, the above information does open the possibility that the Sag (only a few miles south of the Mud Lake route) could also have served at times as a portage route, and therefore the possibility of someone building a fort to protect it --particularly one covering an important crossing point (possibly the only one for miles) for a north-south trail-- can not be quickly dismissed.

4. French military field fortifications of the Fox Wars:

The French-Fox wars of the early 18th century are particularly interesting in relation to the problem at hand because of numerous expeditions (both Indian and French) through the Chicago area at various times between 1715 and 1732 (27), with several mentions of temporary forts.(28). The French are also known to have used small artillery pieces in some of these conflicts. Also interesting is the fact there were several major battles and skirmishes between the French and the Fox-related tribes that occurred in the Illinois-Wisconsin-Indiana area that have not been pin-pointed; even more of a curiosity, a number of battlefield sites are in historical contention for the same battle! (29).

One interesting bit of information comes from Clarence Alvord's book, the Illinois Country. In discussing an attempt at a coordinated assault on the Fox in the spring of 1728, French troops from three different commands were to combine forces, but the venture was a failure. The Commandant, de Lignery, tried to put the blame on the commander of the troops from Ft. des Chartres, Sieur de Liette, who failed to make the rendezvous. According to Alvord:

"...Liette, accompanied by a Jesuit, Father Dumas, did lead twenty soldiers and as many habitants and some Indians as far as Chicago, where he defeated a band of Foxes and Kickapoo, killing twenty and taking fifteen prisoners, with the loss of one officer and two soldiers." (30).

Such an incident could well explain two forts on a seemingly dead-end swamp. The French-Fox wars are nearly virgin ground for historians; only a handful of related documents have been translated and/or transcribed. Perhaps some researcher will someday either prove or disprove the possibility of the Palos forts having anything to do with this series of conflicts.

5. French or American forts of the French and Indian War: I have yet to come across anything indicating military activity in the midwest during this period. If anyone has knowledge of such, I would appreciate hearing from them.
6. Forts of the British Occupation: Same comment as for 5. above. Although the British did occupy Ft. deChartres downstate, they appear to have been more interested in divesting themselves of the responsibilities of maintaining garrisons in the Illinois country, not

creating more of them. I do not know of any military activity in the Chicago area in this period.

7. American or British forts of the Revolutionary War period: This is another interesting period, with troop activity on both sides in the Chicago vicinity. Expeditions of British and/or their French agents to raise Indians in the British cause were in the area in 1779 and 1780; the latter year also saw a full-scale military retreat through Chicago by British-allied forces after their defeat at St. Louis during the British spring offensive. Although a two-pronged assault out of Michilimackinac had been planned, only the force under Hesse --moving down the Wisconsin and Mississippi rivers-- reached St. Louis; the force under Langlade, which was to travel through Chicago and down the Illinois river, didn't arrive, raising some speculation as to whether or not they may have been holding someplace in route --possibly Chicago-- as a back-up. Hesse's force retreated up the Illinois river to the Chicago area, then back to Michilimackinac.... Unsubstantiated rumors of Americans active near Chicago building forts and stirring up anti-British sentiments kept filtering back to the commandants at Ft. Michilimackinac; no confirmation of such activities has ever been found. At least one American retreat took place in the area in 1780 following a raid on the British outpost of St. Joseph (Niles, MI). The raid was a success but the retreat was a disaster: British-allied Indians and Frenchmen caught and slaughtered the American force somewhere around the tip of Lake Michigan, and only three of the raiders made it back to American-held Cahokia. In 1781, a party of American-allied Spanish also successfully attacked St. Joseph, but made a clean getaway back to St. Louis; it is not known if this party passed by way of Chicago, or if it traveled the frozen Kankakee river. (31). Of all of these instances, it would appear that only Langlade's 1780 expedition would have had time to throw up earthworks. Unknown documents will have to turn up to prove or disprove such a hypothesis. It should be kept in mind that in the previous periods, the term "Chicago" was a somewhat ambiguous term that could mean either the mouth of the Chicago River or anything near the tip of Lake Michigan.
8. American forts of the early Indian wars (late 18th century): I am not familiar enough with this period to comment on possible military actions in the Sag area, although people knowledgeable of this period I have talked with doubted there was any activity here. If someone has such information, please contact me.
9. Forts of the 1812 War: With the exception of Chicago proper (and the Ft. Dearborn Massacre), I am unaware of any military actions that could involve the Sag area. However, I am not familiar enough with this period to make any definitive comments. If anyone has information linking 1812 War activity to the area southwest of Chicago, please contact me.
10. Fortified trading posts: There is a remote possibility of such a thing existing here in the 18th century, for small trading posts did exist at other places in the midwest, but I have yet to find any documentation to suggest this is the case. Although there were some trading posts in the Chicago vicinity in the early 19th century (such as Laughton's, Friend's, etc.), it is unlikely they would have created earthworks with "trees a century old" growing in their midst by 1833,

as Boyer states. This somewhat effectively precludes later periods.

DISCUSSION:

As may be obvious, some of the above possibilities are more plausible than others. The one period that best fits the circumstantial evidence at hand is the French-Fox Wars, particularly de Liette's 1728 expedition to Chicago.

Consider this hypothetical situation: A small band of Fox and other allied Indians, hoping to elude possible pursuers, take refuge on the backwaters of a large swamp. A force of French troops, making their way to join a larger expedition against the Fox, discovers this band. Cornered, the Fox are forced to dig-in and fortify, as was their custom. Nearby, the French throw up a second fort, a field fortification for use as a base of operations by the besiegers. A siege line, or first parallel, is established by the French just outside of musket range of the Indian fort; the French set up their swivel guns and the siege commences. Many Indians are killed; perhaps the Fox attempted to escape and were hunted down and annihilated by the Frenchmen (as occurred during other Fox War conflicts). Delayed by this episode, the French force marches on in an unsuccessful attempt to rendezvous with their main force and, after waiting awhile, content themselves with their own victory and return to their post on the Mississippi River.

Several factors neatly fit this scenario: the seemingly European triangular fort at Site B, the proximity of the second fort to the first, the cannonballs lying together beyond the fort at Site C, and perhaps even the mass Indian burial at site A. The dating of known European artifacts found by archeologists at adjacent Indian site would be compatible with this period.

BUT there are some problems with this supposition. Although it seems certain there were two earthworks forts, a primary question is whether or not they coexisted. From their similar states of decay, from their similar situations, from their proximity to Indian sites of common culture and period, it would appear (though only through bare circumstantial evidence) the two works do bear some relationship to each other. A weak argument, to be sure. Another problem is whether or not a triangular-planform fort can be considered uniquely whitemen's construction in the midwest; the evidence to that effect is based solely on lack of evidence to the contrary. And if a battle as outlined above really occurred at these sites, why haven't more bullets and such turned up? Perhaps because it never happened, perhaps because no one ever looked for them....It is possible that if the 1728 fight did occur here, it may have been scattered and not centered at any one place. Assuming this fight really did take place here, another explanation for the lack of bullets may be that, in 18th century warfare, the amount of ammo carried and the rate of fire was surprisingly low; a man might perhaps fire less than twenty rounds in anything less than a prolonged battle. That, coupled with the small amount of people firing over a vast expanse, makes it unlikely many bullets would turn up. This theory was supported somewhat by a conversation with an archeologist familiar with the Tippecanoe Battlefield (1811) area in Indiana. Although there had been a major battle involving several hundred soldiers and Indians there, bullets rarely turn up in the immediate area.

Needless to say, the above is offered only as informed speculation to explore one seemingly plausible explanation for the Forts of Palos.

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Far more research (both archival and archeological) needs to be done before the French-Fox War theory can be totally believed. Until that time, the other possibilities dealt with in this paper may also have validity and, therefore, should not be dismissed unless proof to the contrary is found.

CONCLUSION:

The mysterious forts of Palos did exist, but they are still mysterious. Unlike other historic archeological sites already excavated in the midwest (where it was pretty well known what was there and what excavation would find), the Palos sites offer a definite opportunity for the relatively new discipline of Historic Archeology to prove its merit and produce useful answers to some challenging questions. On the documentation side of the coin, there still could exist some document awaiting a researcher that would reveal the secrets of these forts. However, if ever it will be determined who built these forts, when, and why, it will most likely come through the combined labor of both the archeologist and the researcher. Until that time, the origins of the Forts of Palos will remain conjecture.

I would appreciate hearing from anyone who has information or comments on anything discussed in this paper. My address is:
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FOOTNOTES:

1. The original of this letter and an accompanying map are in the Manuscript Collection of the Chicago Historical Society (CHS).
2. Andreas History of Cook County, A.T. Andreas, Chicago, 1884. Page 824.
3. Andreas History of Chicago, A.T. Andreas, Chicago, 1884. Page 56.
4. Dilg Papers, Manuscript Collections, CHS. Page 90.
5. Scharf Papers, CHS.; Scharf Folder 5, paper "French or Indian Forts near the Chicago Portage", pages 5 and 6. The New Lenox fort mentioned here and in quotes to follow refers to an earthworks found in Higginbotham Woods east of Joliet, IL. This work formed a circle or, more properly, a spiral with a slight overlap where the walls would meet if truly circular, thus forming an entrance. This planform is fairly common to Indian fortifications and often appears in prints and embellishments on 17th and 18th century maps. However, after Chicago area archeologists expressed a lack of interest in the site, a group of Joliet area amateur archeologists excavated the site and found some artifacts and characteristics attributable to the French, to wit: rings, a sword fragment, a matrix molding of a metal insignia plate (which appeared to have an anchor and/or porpoise motif), charred-bottom post fragments, and the postmolds of a Vauban-style Cavalier tower. A report of their findings is believed to be on file at the Pilcher Park (Joliet) office. There is heated controversy between historians in that region over that fort's Indian or French occupation.
6. Scharf Papers, CHS.; Scharf Folder 16, "Ausaganashkee Sites", pages 1 & 2.
7. Illinois State Archives, Records Series 491.6 and 491.108.
8. Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society, 1912, Springfield, IL., 1912. Article: "the Calumet Portage" by Henry C. Lee. Pages 35 and 36. Like virtually every writer of local history in the Chicago vicinity at that period (and later), Lee uses the same vague maps and documents to "prove" Marquette and Jolliet came through his community (poor Father Marquette would had to have spent all day hopping in and out of canoes to have said mass at as many spots as community historians have "proved" him to have been!). However, the idea of a Calumet Portage route should not be so quickly discarded despite Lee's romanticism.
9. Pamphlet: "History of the Parish", 1933; author and publisher unknown. I have a copy in my files.
10. Mrs. Wilson, her son Mark Wilson, and her nephew, Robert Busch were able to provide a fairly detailed accounting of where the site was purported to be in relation to various farm buildings. Because of the possible importance of this site, and because of the danger of site looting, I am withholding this information and will make it available if and when professional archeological investigation is feasible.
11. Booklet: "Dedication Ceremonies, Community House of the Village of Palos Park", 1940. Article, "Historic Palos", by Hattey Sinnard

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- Pashley, page 6.
12. Ibid, page 2.
 13. Although the site report has not been published, excerpts have appeared. Information here taken from Bulletin of The Field Museum of Natural History, Vol. 40, No. 3, March, 1969; article: "Palos Site: An Early Historic Indian Village Near Chicago" by Cheryl A. and Patrick J. Munson, and from conversations with the archeologists in charge.
 14. The first half of Slaymaker's Knoll Springs site report was published in Mississippian Site Archeology in Illinois I, Ill. Archeological Survey Bulletin No. 8; University of Illinois, Urbana, 1971. The second half is still awaiting publication. Slaymaker describes the musket ball as "13 Caliber". I believe he meant 13mm (.51 inches) since length with sprue was 16mm, and 13 caliber is smaller than a BB. I spent the summer of 1969 working with him on this site.
 15. The children were Dale Young, Gery Fawkes, and my brother John. They showed me where they found them later that day, and the impressions in the soil were still clearly visible forming a cluster less than a foot apart. These iron balls are now in my possession.
 16. I am somewhat experienced at hitting things with a flintlock musket, and feel this is a reasonable statement.
 17. I have also managed to hit things with 18th century artillery, and think I know of what I speak.
 18. Roundshot and Rammers by Harold L. Peterson, Bonanza Books, New York, 1969. Page 42.
 19. British Artillery Ammunition, 1780, by Adrian B. Caruana; Museum Restoration Services, Bloomfield, Ontario, 1979. Page 14.
 20. Andreas History of Cook County, op sit, page 824.
 21. Scharf Papers, CHS; Scharf paper titled "Indian Village No. 17 --Sag Bridge-- The Lower Sag Valley.", page 3. Scharf credits Andreas, above, but must have talked to Kelley's son personally for the extra information. Although this paper was undated, it was probably written in the early 1900s.
 22. "Dedication Ceremonies" booklet (see no. 11 above), page 2 of Pashley's article in that booklet.
 23. A good example is shown on the 1730 map by Chaussegros de Lery, Plate no. XX in Indian Villages of the Illinois Country Atlas, Illinois State Museum, Springfield, 1942.
 24. A Treaty of Fortifications by John Muller, reprinted from the original 1746 London edition by Museum Restoration Services, Ottawa, 1968. Plate XXXIII.
 25. For samples of the Chicago French Fort controversy, see "Chicago Under the French Regime", by Gilbert Garraghan, I.S.H.S. Transactions, 1930, or "Was there a French Fort at Chicago?" by Milo M. Quaife,

I.S.H.S Transactions, 1912.

26. "An Unpublished Chapter in the History of Chicago", as told to Jesse Weik by James M. Bucklin; I.S.H.S. Journal, Vol. 7, No.4, 1915. Page 342.
27. Refer to Wisconsin Historical Collections Vol. 16, pages 313, 319, 323, 324, 341, 342, 343, 465, and 467.
28. W.H.C. Vol. 16; pages 465, and 467; also Vol. 17, page 149.
29. Refer to the article by Dr. Joseph Peyser on the 1730 Fox Fort battlefield controversy (I.S.H.S. Journal, Vol. LXXIII, No. 3, Autumn, 1980, pages 201-213 for a discussion of one such situation.
30. History of the Illinois Country, by Clarence Alvord, reprinted by Loyola University, 1965. Pages 162 and 163. Unfortunately, Alvord didn't completely footnote this passage. It is obviously based on specific information, but I haven't been able to track down its source. Before his death in 1928, Alvord had access to massive numbers of Illinois-related French manuscripts (the "Cahokia Records", the "Kaskaskia Manuscripts", and the "Menard Papers"); I am by no means sure these were all translated and/or transcribed, and it is possible some no longer exist. If anyone recognizes his source of information, please clue me.
31. A good rehash of this period --with detailed footnotes-- is found in At the Crossroads, by David Armour and Keith Widder, Mackinac Island Park Commission, Mackinac Island, 1978. This sums-up the Revolution out of Michilimackinac much more than I can do here.

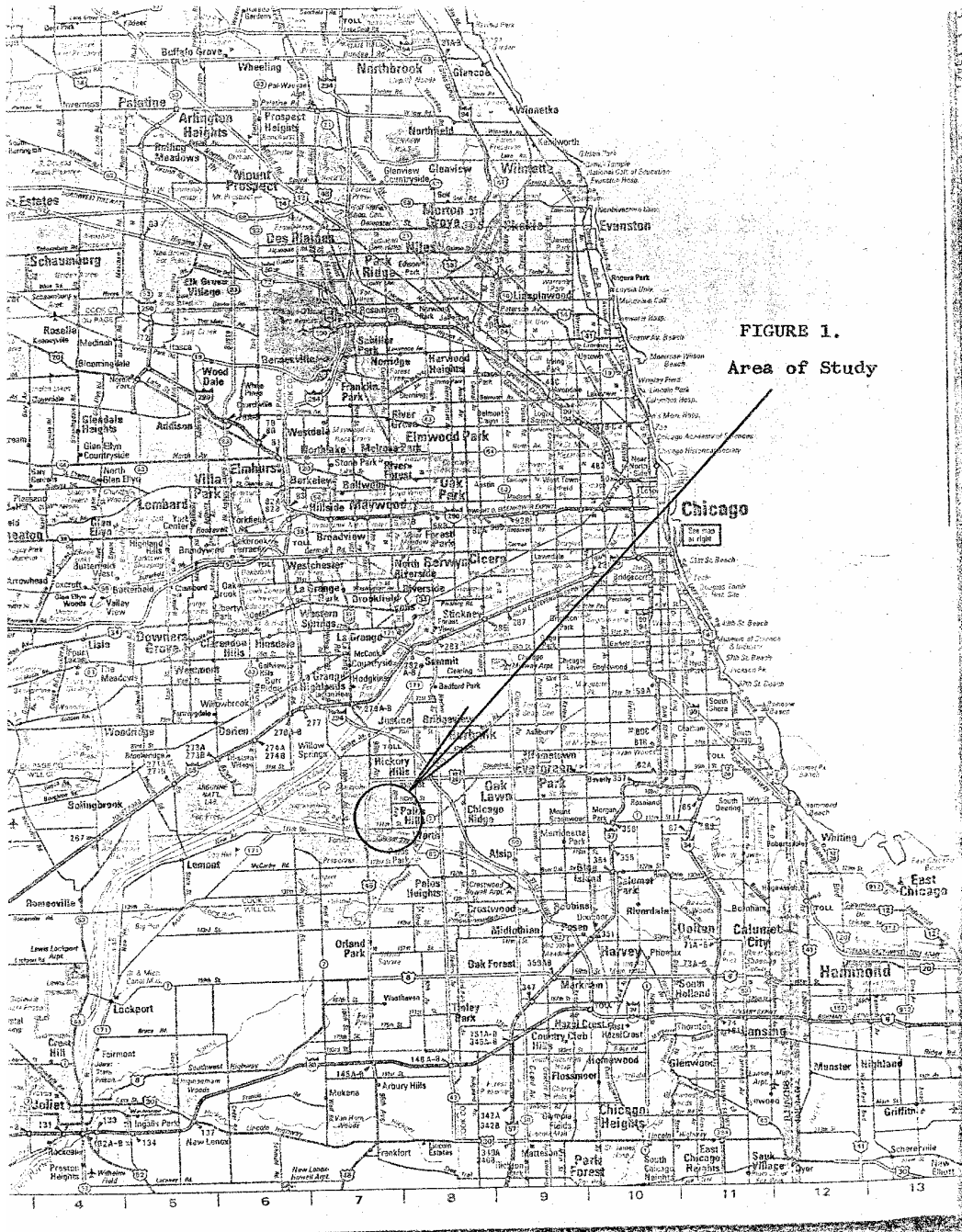


FIGURE 1.
Area of Study

Forts of Palos
 IN PALOS TOWNSHIP
 T. 37N. R. 12E. 3P.M.

FIGURE 2.

POSSIBLE SITES OF EARLY
 FORTIFICATIONS, PALOS
 HILLS, ILLINOIS.
 Land features as shown on
 A.F. Scharf map, c.1900.
 Some modern roads added.
 Refer also to figures 5,
 6, 7, and 8.

- A. Approximate site of earthworks shown on Boyer's map.
- B. Site of Boyer's earthworks as shown on A.F. Scharf's map.
- C. Site of Mathewson earthwork as shown on Scharf map and indicated on the Mathewson map.

Drawn 1983 by Wm. Potter

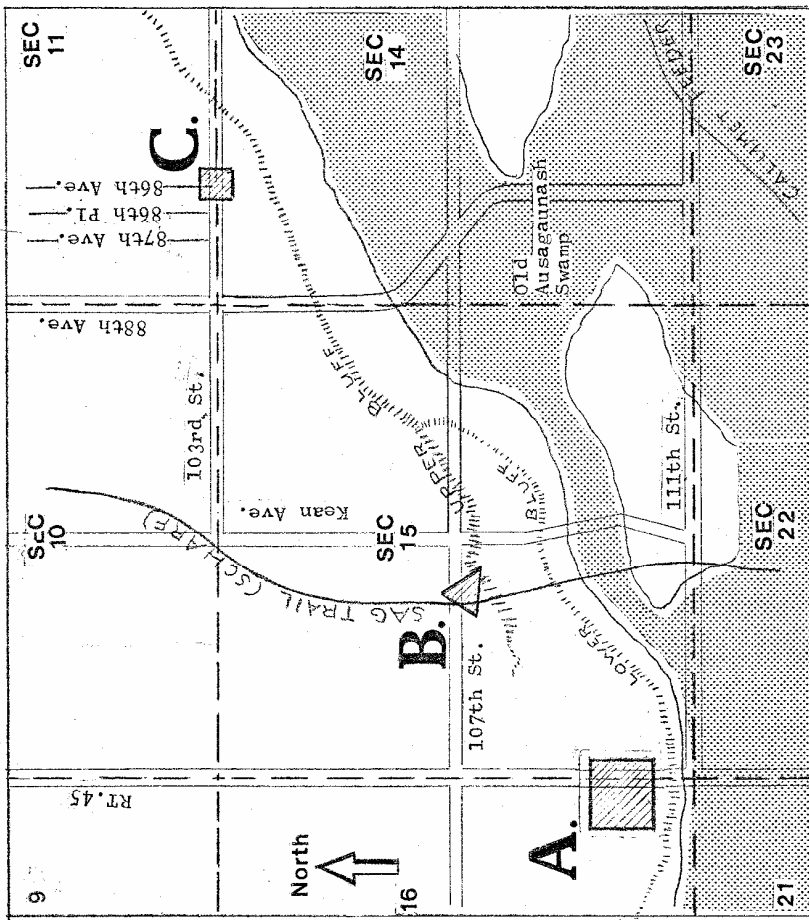


FIGURE 2.

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1837
1833
Sec 15, Township Palos
Cook County Illinois

1837 - A. J. Mathieson Lockport
1833 - Wm V. A. Boyer Chicago

Sec 15, T. 1 P. 1

FIGURE 3.

A drawing found in A.F. Scharf's notes. According to Scharf's writing on this sheet, this drawing of the fortification in the N.E. $\frac{1}{4}$ of the S.W. $\frac{1}{4}$ of sec. 15 was "drawn by A.J. Mathieson of Lockport 1903 for Albert F. Scharf, Chicago". Also: "Mr. Mathieson also stated that he surveyed - platted this earthwork & also the one in Sec. 14, same township." Scharf quotes Mathieson here, "My papers are all willed to young Arnold, my grandson."

points of the

W



The above outline "to the the points of the Couepas, with three sallyports," of the old French fort found in Sec 15, Town 26 N of Palos Cook County was drawn by A. J. Mathieson of Lockport 1903 for Albert F. Scharf, Chicago.

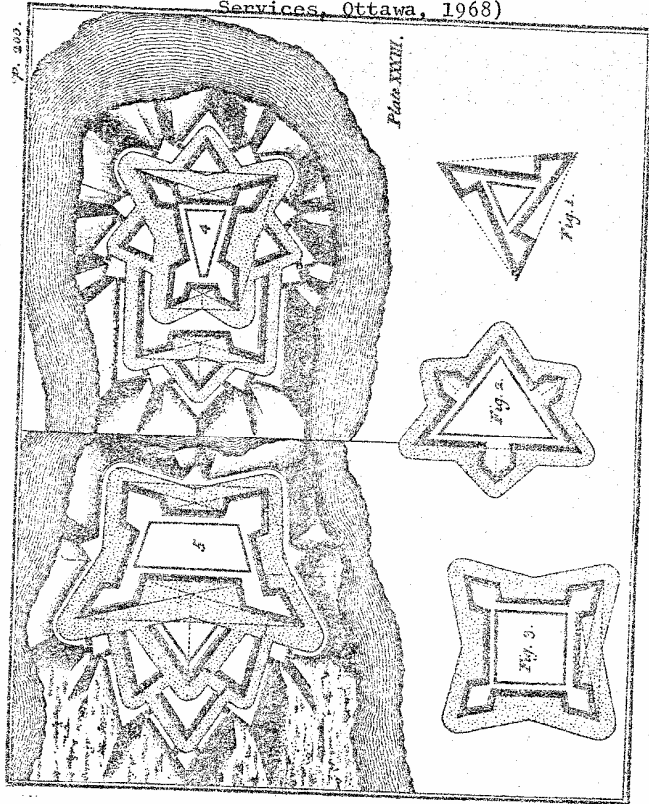
Mr. Mathieson also stated that he surveyed - platted this earthwork & also the one in Sec 14, same township.

My papers are all willed to young Arnold my grand-



FIGURE 4.

(from *Treaty of Fortifications*
by John Muller, London, 1746;
Reprinted by Museum Restoration
Services, Ottawa, 1968)



TAKE
NOTE!!!

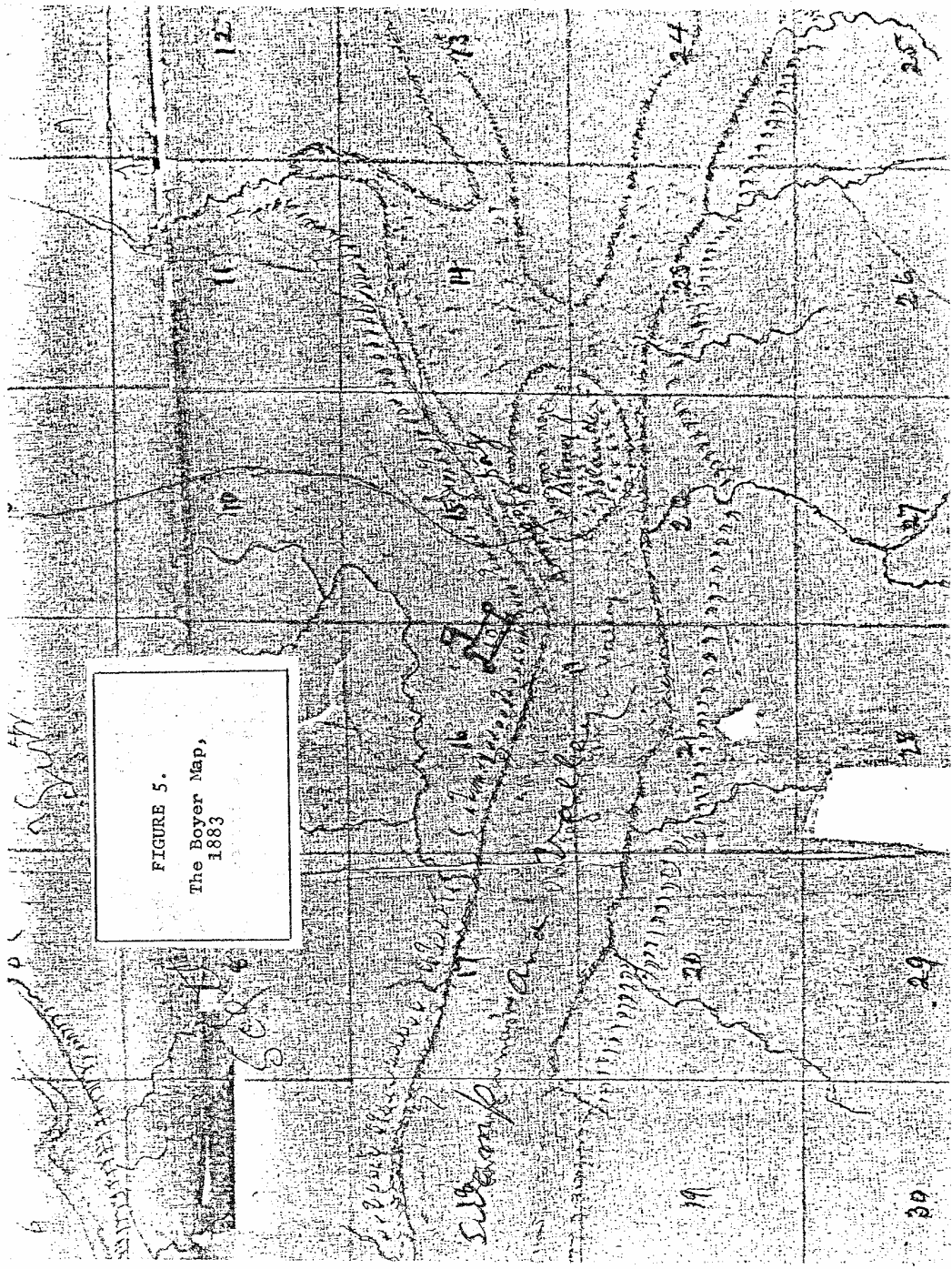


FIGURE 5.
The Boyer Map,
1883

THE BOYER MAP
1883
BY J. H. BOYER
PUBLISHED BY THE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF CANADA

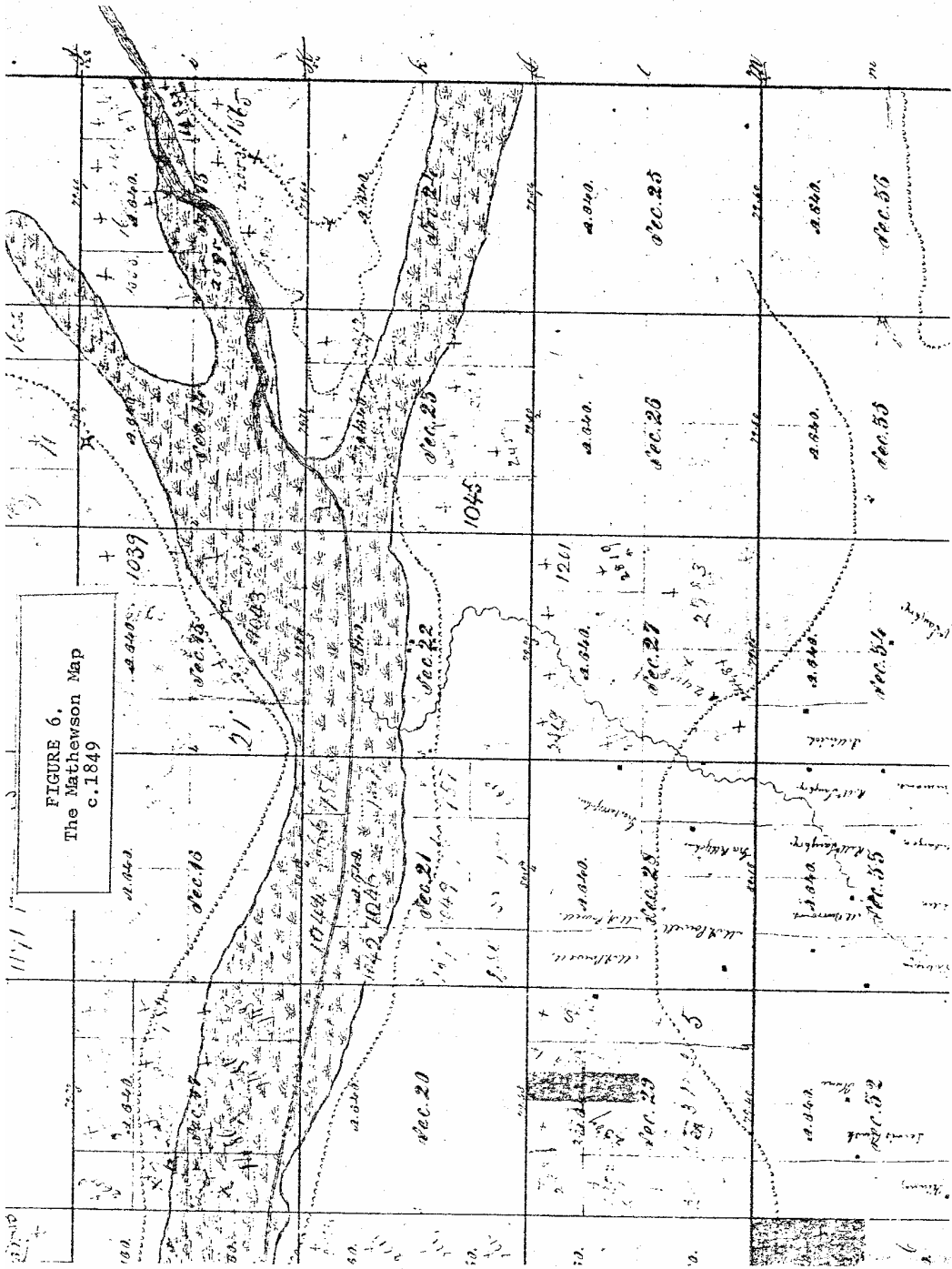


FIGURE 6.
The Mathewson Map
c. 1849

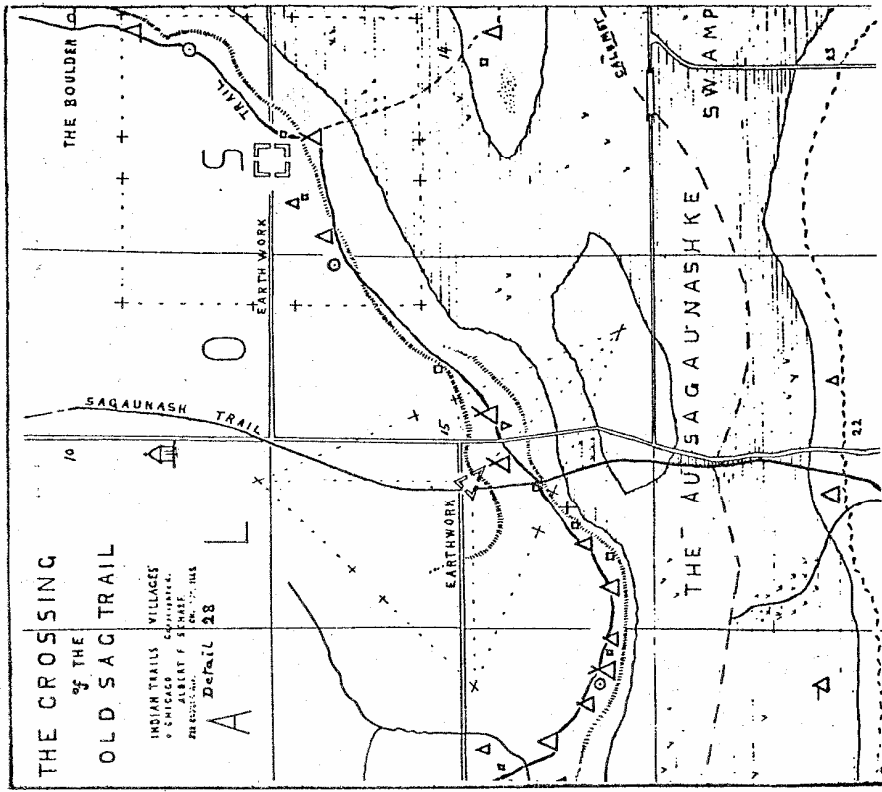


FIGURE 7.
The A.F. Scharf Map.
Drawn sometime prior
to 1904 by Albert F.
Scharf, Chicago

FIGURE 7.

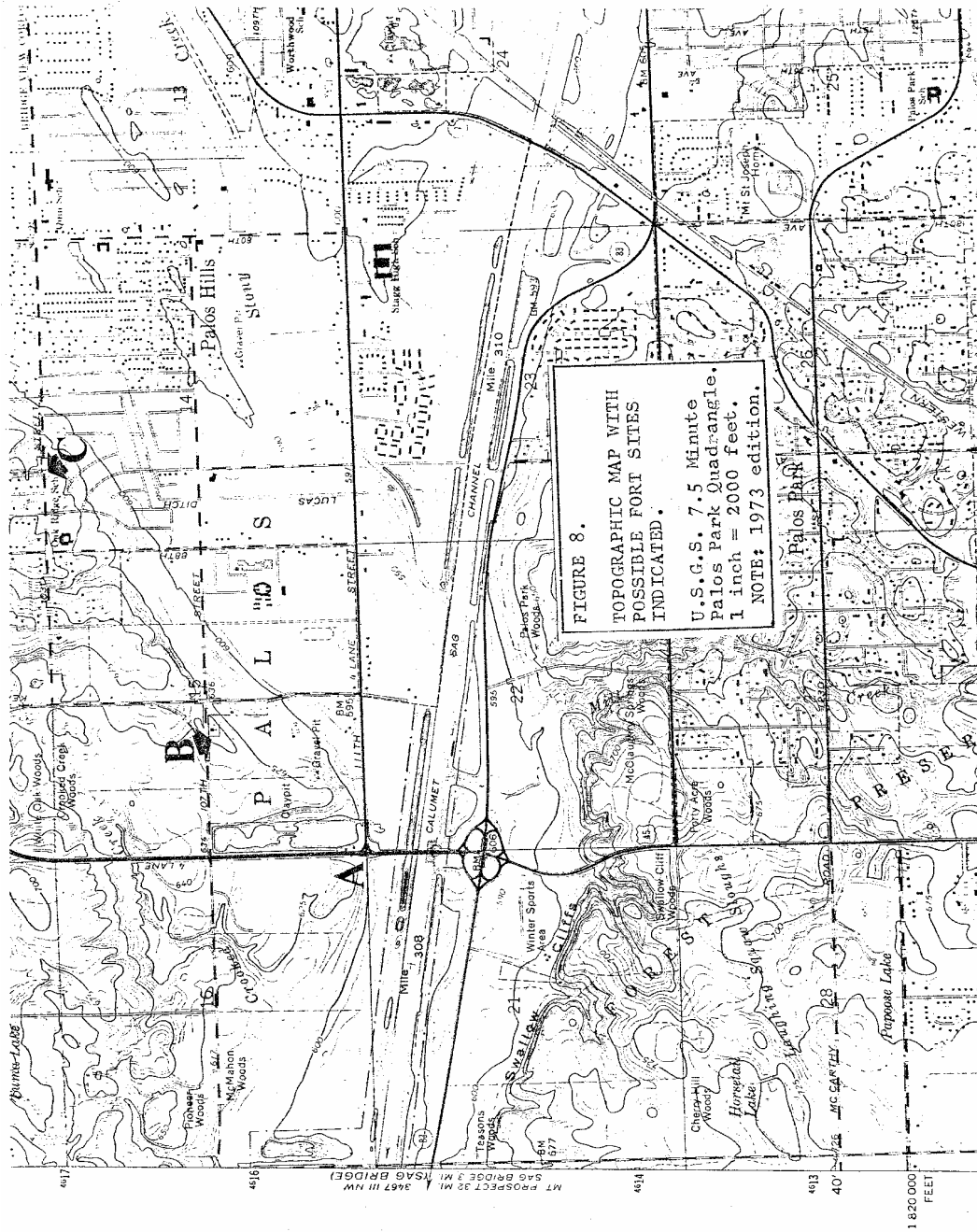


FIGURE 8.
 TOPOGRAPHIC MAP WITH
 POSSIBLE FORT SITES
 INDICATED.
 U.S.G.S. 7.5 Minute
 Palos Park Quadrangle.
 1 inch = 2000 feet.
 NOTE: 1973 edition.