

Samuel Lindsay: Insurance Agent (104 S. St. Asaph St.)

Samuel Lindsay was an insurance agent who moved into the house at 104 S. St. Asaph Street in 1843 (Figs. 1 and 2). Lindsay died in 1857 but his wife Jane and one of their daughters continued to reside on the lot until 1864.



Fig. 1: 104 S. St Asaph Street (front) in 1967 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)



Fig. 2: 104 S. St.Asaph Street (rear) in 1967 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

As renters, Lindsay and his family are representative of a larger trend that characterized the S. St. Asaph Street frontage starting in the middle of the 19th century. Whereas the homes on Prince and S. Pitt Streets were generally occupied by their owners, the residents of King and S. St. Asaph Streets were more likely to be renters. Short-term renters were particularly common on S. St. Asaph Street and research has shown that they were also generally less prosperous than the other inhabitants of the 500 Block (Terrie 1979) (Learn more about the block at this time on p. 45 of the [Social History](#)).

Although the Lindsays were not the wealthiest residents of the 500 Block, they were by no means destitute either. In fact, records indicate Samuel Lindsay owned at least one slave, Harriet Williams, for whom he rented a house just a few lots down the street.

We know little else about the life of this family, a fact which renders the archaeology all the more exciting. In the backyard of Lindsay's home, archaeologists uncovered the remains of a well that was turned into a privy and waste disposal around the 1820's, and used as such until the middle of the 19th century (Fig.3; see Site Map). Numerous artifacts from various time periods were recovered from the well, some of which were associated with the Lindsays' occupation of the house.



Fig. 3: The inside of the well/privy, about 10 feet below the surface, AX 1 Ft.7 Level 14 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION).

The well/privy was brick-lined and was excavated to a depth of about 24 feet. It was located a good distance from the house in the backyard, where the noisome odors would not have created a significant inconvenience.

The artifacts recovered from the well led archaeologists from the 1820's through to the 1850's, at which point the historic continuity was interrupted and replaced by modern rubble and objects. It seems likely that the privy was capped in the 1850's, and then disturbed and filled with rubble when the site was demolished in the 1960's. Evidence of its disuse as a privy in the 1850's is further supported by the recovery of two wooden lids at the top of the organic privy fill (just before the rubble). These were identified as privy seat lids, presumably thrown into the shaft at the time it went into disuse.



Fig. 4: Whiteware dinner set artifacts, AX 1 Ft.7 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION).

Among the many artifacts found in the privy were pieces of a whiteware dinner set decorated with transfer-printed brown and green motifs (Fig.4). These “Select Sketches” were probably manufactured by J & J Jackson between 1831 and 1835 in Burslem, England, a town in the Staffordshire region (Baker Larsen 1975: 166). The pattern was not hand painted but transferred by means of ink on transfer paper from copper plate engravings or lithographs, a technique first developed and applied on white salt-glazed stoneware and porcelain in the 1750's (Magid, AAF).

Two of the plates (far left and right on Fig.4) feature a scene from “Rhodes,” a decoration which contained a mixture of neo-classical and Victorian themes: it depicted both a powerful symbol of the ancient world, but also a contemporary and exotic far away place where trade continued to flourish (Lazar 1983).

Whiteware is a refined earthenware that was developed in Staffordshire in the 1820's and mass produced. Hard, durable, and relatively inexpensive, it was most commonly used for tableware. In this case, the dinner set was presumably used for a good number of years until it was finally discarded in the privy around the time of the Lindsays' occupation of the site.



Fig. 5: Yellow ware ceramics with dendritic patterns, AX 1 Ft.7 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION).

Another popular utilitarian ceramic was Yellow Ware, a high-fired buff-yellow coarse earthenware with yellow glaze, most commonly used for kitchen wares and chamber pots. Figure 5 shows several pieces of yellow ware, including a chamber pot (back left), a wash basin (back right), a mug, and a kitchen bowl. They are all decorated with a blue on white dendritic pattern, a design manufactured on Yellow Ware from about 1840 to 1900. This popular design was created by a drop of acid that would carve a tree-like pattern into the ceramic object (Magid, AAF).

Another artifact that may have been associated with the Lindsay family is a wooden pin or skittle, almost perfectly preserved in the airless, water-logged privy fill (Fig.6). The pin would have been part of a larger set belonging to a game of “Tenpins”. Ten wooden pins were placed in rows at the end of an alley and bowled at with a ball. The game persists today as indoor bowling. Documented history shows the game to have existed since at least the 12th century in England, when it was called “Ninepins.” Ninepins was outlawed in New York at the beginning of the 19th century when the game was moved to the indoors and gambling ensued. Not to be discouraged, game players soon found a way to bypass this law: they added another pin, and named the new game “Tenpins” sometime before 1849 (Martin 1986).

A game such as this could easily have been played by Lindsay and his family and friends in the backyard of his house.



Fig. 6: Wooden pin, AX 1 Ft.7 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

(Written by Amanda Iacobelli, 2006)

References

Unless otherwise indicated, all artifact identifications were made by Barbara H. Magid, Alexandria Archaeology. Historical information was extracted from the Alexandria Archaeology Files (AAF), mostly compiled by Ruth Sinberg Baker, Vivienne Mitchell, and Nancy Sennewald).

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