RECORDING THE PAST
WHILE BUILDING THE
FUTURE

Elizabeth L. Davoli
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2009 Louisiana Transportation Conference
LOCATION OF PROJECT AREA
(Lafayette to Touline)
PROJECT BACKGROUND

- In 1992, the City of Natchitoches applied for Federal Enhancement funds to make repairs to Front Street.
- Previous repairs had left broken bricks and concrete patches in the street.
Local historic preservation groups feared that the project would destroy the appearance of the historic district.

Local merchants feared that they would lose customers and income during construction.

Residents feared that construction would remove access to homes, businesses, and the university.
The Mayor formed a Task Force composed of local merchants, local historic preservation organizations, DOTD, and the National Park Service.

Brick strength was tested, design issues were worked out, brick removal/replacement issues were agreed on.
MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

- Signed during a ceremony in Natchitoches in December 2005
- Stipulations included how bricks would be removed and stored, design of crosswalks and handicap ramps, and use of new bricks
- Plan for archaeological investigation was included
WHY ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING?

Section 800.13 of the National Historic Preservation Act states: When the agency official’s identification efforts in accordance with Section 800.4 indicate that historic properties are likely to be discovered during implementation of an undertaking. . . the agency official shall include in any. . . memorandum of agreement a process to resolve any adverse effects upon such properties.
WHAT’S THAT MEAN IN PLAIN ENGLISH?

- Archaeological sites are historic properties in the National Historic Preservation Act.
- No artifacts, archaeological features, or archaeological sites would be encountered during the Front Street project until the brick street surface was removed.
- FHWA, DOTD, the National Park Service, and the State Historic Preservation Officer agreed in the MOA that the only way to assess project effects to archaeological features/sites was to have a qualified archaeologist on-site during construction to monitor earth-moving activities.
ARCHAEOLOGICAL PLAN FOR INVESTIGATIONS

- Shovel testing in specified intervals after brick surface removed
- Monitoring of earth-moving activities associated with construction of utility trenches and road base removal
- Excavation and recordation of archaeological features found below the road base
- Evaluation of archaeological features found below the road base in order to determine if additional excavation to be required or if preservation in place would be appropriate
AREAS OF FRONT STREET WITH HIGH ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL
NATCHITOCHES OVERVIEW

- Natchitoches founded in 1714 by St. Denis as a frontier trading post/fort to prevent Spanish incursion into French Louisiana
- Settlement of Natchitoches was composed of French soldiers, traders, and craftsmen, Native Americans, and African slaves
- Community of Natchitoches composed of descendants of French soldiers, traders, and craftsmen, Native Americans, enslaved Africans, and Free People of Color
NATCHITOCHES OVERVIEW

(Cont’d)

- Community expanded from frontier settlement to largest community in NW Louisiana
- River Street, dirt road, ran along a bluff on the edge of the Red River
- River Street later renamed Front Street
TOWN LOTS IN NATCHITOCHES IN RELATION TO PROJECT AREA
1892 SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAP OF NATCHITOCHES
1904 SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAP OF NATCHITOCHES
Artifacts discovered in construction trench in April 2008
CONSTRUCTION

- Construction began in March 2008
- Archaeological investigations and monitoring began on April 2, 2008
- Monitoring included excavation of utility trenches, removal of road base, and investigation of spoil piles
REMOVAL OF ROAD BASE
RECORDING STRATIGRAPHY OF UTILITY TRENCH
SHOVEL TESTING AFTER REMOVAL OF ROAD BASE
RECORDING FEATURES UNDER FRONT STREET
SOME OF THE ARTIFACTS
INTEREST IN THE PROJECT
A project to rebuild the city of Natchitoches' signature Front Street has uncovered Indian artifacts and the remains of old buildings dating back to the 1700s.

Two crews are working on Front Street. One is a street crew re-laying the century-old bricks; the other is a group of archaeologists reclaiming what has been found buried underneath the bricks.

"Indian pottery, old artifacts, shells -- different artifacts like that," project manager John Bell said. Among the building foundations that were found is one dating to the 1700s.

Thurston Hahn, the head of the team of archaeologists, said all their work is done by hand in order to preserve what's been uncovered. Among the things they have found is a bottle of "soothing cream," which dates to the middle 1800s and was used to comfort babies when they were teething.

Some of the artifacts have been found six feet below the street. Others, like a 1900 silver dollar, were right under the bricks.

The brick street was built in 1904. The building foundation's can't be moved. Archeologists will photograph them and they will be covered by the front street bricks again.

The discoveries caused a slight delay in the project but Natchitoches officials said the Front Street project will be finished by the start of the Christmas lights festival.
Historic downtown Natchitoches gets a face-lift

BY VICKIE WELBORN • VWELBORN@GANNETT.COM • JUNE 23, 2008

NATCHITOCHES — This city’s past, present and future are being revisited, improved and anticipated.

A series of projects in the downtown area has archaeologists, road contractors and commercial builders working almost shoulder to shoulder. The archaeologists are unearthing artifacts related to the city’s rich history in concert with road contractors who are involved in the tedious process of renovating the bricked Front Street. And towering overhead is the quick and steady construction of an unrelated multifloor commercial project that will add more businesses, residences and a tourist attraction.

Chris Smith (forefront, left) and Cedric Lewis replace bricks that were removed from Front Street so that repairs could be made to the road base. The $3.2 million project is slated to be completed in November (Vickie Welborn/The Times)

WHAT’S NEXT? Unrelated to the street renovation and archaeological projects but adding to the city’s landscape and future is the construction of a three-floor commercial building on the north end of Front Street. Developer Ken Starks is building a two-phase project.
Natchitoches street project yields artifacts

BY RT MORGAN  RTMORGAN@THETOWNTALK.COM  JUNE 20, 2008

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NATCHITOCHES -- Renovation of Natchitoches' bricked Front Street has turned up some interesting findings -- bones, pottery, the original foundations of buildings long gone.

It's nothing that wasn't expected, though, said Courtney Hornsby with the city of Natchitoches.

The bricks that line Front Street were laid 100 years ago in a city that was founded in 1714. There was a high chance of significant findings, Hornsby said.

This chance of such findings brought Coastal Environments Inc., a Baton Rouge-based archaeology firm, into the road project, which is being handled by Progressive

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Front and center: Facelift for Natchitoches historical street nearly done

BY LEIGH GENTRY • LGENTRY1@THETOWNTALK.COM • NOVEMBER 10, 2008

NATCHITOCHES -- An eight-month project that has caught the attention of many is coming to a close this week.

The rehabilitation of Natchitoches' historical Front Street began March 10 and most likely will be completed by Thursday, Progressive Construction Company Inc. project manager John Bell said.

The project consisted of removing all the roadway bricks and cleaning them by hand. The workers added a 6-inch concrete bed for the road with a 1-inch layer of sand and then the ancient bricks were placed back into the road, Bell said.

The Front Street project earned a nomination from the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development as one of the top road projects in a contest by "Roads and Bridges Magazine," and Natchitoches' main street was ranked No. 3.

"We are thrilled with it (the nomination)," Bell said.

DOTD transportation enhancement manager Valerie Horton said the department wanted to nominate Front Street for the contest because it was a deserving project, and she has been pleased with the outcome.

"I think each person who worked on it did an outstanding job," Horton said.

Front Street in Natchitoches with its quaint restaurants and novelty stores is a popular tourist attraction. The completion of the historic street's eight-month renovation will be celebrated on Thursday.

Workers with Progressive Construction replace brick sidewalks along Front Street in Natchitoches earlier in November. The city will celebrate the completion of its Front Street project on Thursday.
Ceremony marks rebuilding of Natchitoches' Front Street

The city of Natchitoches today is holding a ceremony marking completion of the rebuilding of Front Street, the signature brick street that runs through downtown.

The rehabilitation project began in March. Bricks were removed and pulled up so that the street's base could be smoothed. Utility lines were repaired and sidewalks were upgraded before the bricks were put back in place.

Natchitoches is the oldest city in the Louisiana Purchase and was founded in 1714. Front Street runs through Natchitoches’ National Historic Landmark District.