FOOTWEAR CONSUMPTION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY DETROIT: A CASE STUDY FROM THE BEAUBIEN PRIVY

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ABSTRACT

Archaeologically-derived footwear has been customarily treated as an insignificant artifact type in terms of intense analysis and study. Within the past few decades, only a handful of investigations have attempted a thorough examination of this material; Brose (1967), Anderson (1968), Grimm (1970), Petsche (1974), and Huddleson and Watanabe (1990) represent the major researchers in this area. Despite detailed descriptive information, however, there has been a conspicuous deficiency in a comprehensive economic, socio-cultural and environmental synthesis of the evidence, with the possible exception of Huddleson and Watanabe (1990).

The present research was undertaken in an effort to remedy this situation and to bring about a greater understanding of early nineteenth-century pre-mass produced ready-made footwear. Archaeological investigations at the Renaissance Center site in Detroit generated a large assemblage of utilitarian and inexpensive footwear and footwear material from 1820-1850 contexts. The examination of this material, with special emphasis on the Beaubien deposit, not only revealed crucial information concerning extant construction techniques and styles during the early years of mass production, but also important data relating to economic and socio-cultural origins (i.e. family and class associations), as well as environmental factors, such as contemporary street and sidewalk conditions.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Archaeological salvage and construction monitoring operations were conducted at the Renaissance Center Development site along the downtown Detroit riverfront during the 1973-1974 season. Of the 14 total acres encompassing the site, approximately 6 acres were subjected to archaeological examination. Due to the nature of this salvage/monitoring approach, the research program was confined to
the investigation of distinct feature locations of limited dimensions such as privy vaults and middens (Demeter 1990:1).

These procedures established the existence of 29 archaeological features that were investigated utilizing a combination of heavy equipment and hand excavation techniques. This series of features included 16 privy vaults, all of which are attributable to a ca. 1825-1850 temporal context. Finally, these features, particularly the Beaubien privy, furnished attractive research potential because of their short term usage and post-abandonment lack of disturbance (Demeter 1990:4).

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

Overview

During the eighteenth-century, Detroit represented a major focal point of the French landholding pattern; French settlers maintained long, narrow farms or "ribbon farms" (such as the Brush and Beaubien properties) where the river frontage spanned 400 to 900 feet (ca.2 to 5 arpents) in width along the riverfront, with an average depth of 1.5 miles (ca.40 arpents) into the interior (S. Farmer 1890:17-18, 21). It seems likely that as a result of initial cultivation and stock grazing activities, the riverfront area (including the area corresponding to the project site), experienced its earliest impact. It is also unlikely that occupational use extended beyond the line of present-day Gratiot Avenue (Demeter 1990:22-23). The Renaissance Center project site, bounded by the Detroit River (south), Jefferson Avenue (north), Randolph Street (west), and St. Antoine Street (east), contained portions of three such "ribbon" farms fronting onto the river; an eighteenth-century British donation lot is also included within the property boundaries (Demeter 1990:2).

Following the end of the British tenure in Detroit in 1796, the subsequent American occupation placed these properties under the power of the Federal Land Commission as Private Claims 1, 2, and 94 (Figure 1) (Lowrie and Clark 1832:306-307, 328).

By 1820, the Renaissance Center district was rapidly developing into one of the principal commercial and mercantile sectors of Detroit, a position it maintained until May 9, 1848, the date of the great fire which levelled the area (S. Farmer 1890:17-18).

The 20-year period between 1820 and 1840 saw Detroit's population rise dramatically from 1,442 to 9,102 (S. Farmer 1890:336). The concentration of community settlement up through the early 1830s was chiefly limited to a zone extending from the riverfront to just beyond the line of Jefferson Avenue (Demeter 1990:8) which encompassed the Renaissance Center project area as well.

Figure 1. Renaissance Center Project Area: Privite Claims and Shoreline Development

(Sources: Hull 1808; Farmer 1825; Farmer 1835; Hart 1853)
Private Claim 2: Lambert Beaubien Farm

The Lambert Beaubien tract formed the western portion of Private Claim 2 which was originally granted to Jean Marie Barois on May 1, 1747 (S. Farmer 1890:20). Transference of the property to the influential Beaubien family included two farm units. The westernmost of these units was originally an element of the estate of the family matriarch, Genevieve Beaubien, and was later consigned to a younger son, Lambert (Demeter 1990:2; Hull 1808).

In response to the significant population expansion during the 1820s, riverfront property was placed at a premium. It was not until January 13, 1835, however, that a Lambert Beaubien tract plat was officially registered with the county, which was in fact based on a subdivision survey drawn several years before in July 1831 by John Mullett (Figure 2) (Demeter 1990:69).

The fact that lots were being rented prior to the 1835 plat registration is indicated by the following notice:

**NOTICE.**

LAWTON, of Troy, Utica, and Buffalo, an experienced Carpenter and Joiner, has established a new Saw-Pit on the Beaubien Farm, a few feet without the limits of the Corporation of Detroit. House Frames will be made, and Buildings removed, as usual. No allowance made on account of the weather. Detroit, May 27, 1829 (Lawton 1829:1)

The long term nature of the agreements are further revealed in the following:

**FOR SALE,**

A house, on the Beaubien Farm, with an unexpired lease of seven years, also another house on the same lot, which is not finished, the first mentioned building is well situated for a grocery and a dwelling house, being near the river, and on one of the best business streets. For particulars enquire of R. Gillet, or the subscriber living one mile above this city in Hamtramck. ANT. DURDURAND.

Detroit, April 13, 1831 2W21

[Demeter 1990:69, 71; Durdurand 1831:3]

Lot 22, corresponding to the Beaubien holdings, was rented out on a long-term lease to Jean Baptiste Auloir dit Lapierre beginning in May 1833. Lapierre occupied the lot for seven years until August 6, 1840, when he sublet the lease for $900.00. The rental property located within lot 22 measured 33 feet along Franklin Street and extended south along the lot 21 division line for 55 feet, just 21 feet short of the Atwater Street frontage. This lease agreement also described "a wooden house of irregular form part log and part frame" (Lapierre 1840:256). It was within the Lapierre rental segment of lot 22, as arranged with Robert Beaubien, that the Feature 4G privy deposit was situated (Demeter 1990:74).

The household of the ethnically French Beaubien family was probably also associated with both social and economic prominence. This is substantiated through
historical sources; the Beaubiens maintained key positions in the local social hierarchy and also occupied significant civil and military positions during the first half of the nineteenth-century (Demeter 1990:78). Jean Baptiste Beaubien, for example, was related to the prominent Campau and Williams families through marriage. John R. Williams was an especially influential individual, serving as the first president of the Bank of Michigan (1818), the first elected mayor of Detroit (1824) and again as mayor in 1830 and 1844-1847. Jean Baptiste Beaubien probably acted in a clerking or accounting capacity for Williams. This translated into an important social and economic connection for Beaubien. Beaubien's subsequent position as administrator of the Lambert Beaubien farm would have represented an important variable (Demeter 1990:78). However, while the ownership of generous tracts of land may have inferred social standing, the Beaubiens appear to have been financially strapped in terms of liquid assets. In fact, in the milieu of the credit system of that time "...the Beaubiens were able to borrow heavily on the basis of this assumed wealth potential" (Demeter 1990:79; Torrey 1831).

Footwear Manufacturing

Wilcox (1948:131) characterizes the nineteenth-century as "...the most important period in the history of shoemaking."

America of the pre-1800 era was principally supplied by European-made footwear produced specifically for American consumption. By about the second decade of the nineteenth-century, however, this situation was recognizably waning as domestic manufacture of footwear began to supersede the European import.

American custom, particularly in the rural areas during the summer, had been one of "shoelessness". This was not necessarily in response to economic deprivation but derived from the habit which associated footwear with "dress-up" occasions such as church and social functions. This widespread tendency began to subside at the onset of the nineteenth-century in the face of the rapid growth of American ready-made shoe production. The organization of New England handcrafted shoe manufacture on an increasingly massive scale, accelerating in the mid-1820s, provided increasingly lower-priced footwear. By 1835, Yankee shoemakers were generating 15 million pairs of relatively inexpensive, ready-made shoes per year (Larkin 1988:185,189).

Shoe production during the nineteenth-century can be divided between three distinct phases: 1) 1800-1850: hand-operated/low level techniques closely aligned with the original Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth-century (Anderson 1968:59; Huddleson and Watanabe 1990:95; Knight 1874:2162; Regan 1991:1; Wright 1922:223); 2) 1850-1880: transition era between hand/low level and mass production phases (Mulligan 1982); and 3) 1880-1899: mass production methods (Anderson 1968:59,64; Regan 1991:1). Construction techniques and subsequent production methods characteristic of the first phase (i.e., 1800-1850) are most clearly associated with the Renaissance Center footwear assemblage (Taylor 1992:126).

Due to the urgency for large numbers of shoes, beginning in the nineteenth-century, machine-produced shoes become more common, enabling the country to rise to a higher standard of mass production much quicker than the Europeans. Fashionable styling was therefore rapidly incorporated into the repertoires of the factories which were already turning out shoes by the thousands (Larkin 1988:189).

During the first half of the nineteenth-century, the basic black boot dominated in both civilian and military sectors, being worn by all classes. Workmen and farmers wore heavy-soled, hob-nailed work shoes. However, regardless of style, sizes were limited. No manufacturer produced half sizes and only two widths, slim and wide, were readily available (Huddleson and Watanabe 1990).

Typical American shoe styles first made their appearance in the 1850s. During this era, low cut boots of kidskin leather made with stub toes and fastened with five to eight buttons were quite popular. From the founding of the country to about the Civil War, men's and women's shoes were quite similar for the vast majority of the population. After the War, however, numerous styles not only for men and women but also for children increasingly came into vogue. Distinctly different women's footwear, for instance, has been retrieved from both the Tucson urban renewal operations (ca. post-1875) (Anderson 1968) as well as from the Johnny Ward's Ranch site (1859-1903) (Fontana and Greenleaf 1962), although, on an infrequent basis.

The first great test of the machine-made shoe came with the outbreak of the Civil War and its tremendous demand for soldiers' boots. It has been suggested that as a result of the war, straight-last footwear virtually disappeared and "crooked" shoes (i.e., distinct rights and lefts) became popular in the civilian segment. The appearance of right and left styles has frequently been employed as an archaeological dating technique. Yet, there are clear discrepancies in this assumption as seen in the Hoff Store site (crooked lasts as early as 1851) (Huddleson and Watanabe 1990:99); the 1865 Steamboat Bertrand inventory (700 pairs of straight styles) (Petsche 1974); crooked styles from various downtown Detroit People Mover sites of the pre-Civil War period (Demeter 1985); and the predominantly straight style inventory from the Custer Road Dump site of the 1876-1896 era (Brose 1967:66).

Advertising Patterns

Until about 1830, the mercantile pattern evidenced in the Detroit shoe and boot trade emphasized small retail shops and/or shoemaking establishments. As such, the footwear produced for public consumption was probably locally manu-
factured. The majority of these shoemaking/shoe outlets were, in fact, located in and around the Renaissance Center district, the city's central business core at that time (Taylor 1992:132).

Beginning about 1830, other strong patterns emerge which are reflected in contemporary advertisements: 1) large volumes of ladies', gentlemen's, and children's boots and shoes were offered publicly; 2) substantial increase in footwear imports from New York City, Boston, England, France, India, etc.; 3) diversity in types of commercial establishments offering footwear, including general goods stores, leather goods stores, dry goods shops, hardware concerns, in addition to actual boot and shoe outlets; and 4) increased availability of large quantities of raw footwear leather and shoemaker's equipment. A great deal of this activity is attributable to the opening of the Erie Canal (1825) which created significant market changes by the 1830s (Taylor 1992:132). As a result of the opening of the Erie Canal and the advent of steam navigation, a viable link was forged between lake dependent settlements of the Northwest (such as Detroit) and the eastern market places represented by Albany and New York City.

A brief examination of contemporary boot and shoe advertisements (primarily the Detroit Journal and Michigan Advertiser [1830, 1832, 1833, 1834, 1835], Digest of the Detroit Daily Advertiser [1836-1837] and the Directory of the City of Detroit [MacCabe 1837]) reveals a very generous selection of available styles. Yet, no such range came to light during excavations. None of the associated structures are of the type considered to be high-class or even upper-middle class buildings; the styles and types of footwear recovered in the Renaissance Center district certainly reflect lower to middle class economic circumstances.

The most conspicuous characteristic of the early nineteenth-century Detroit footwear advertising pattern pertains to the increase in volume through time. Newspapers for particular years, especially those of the 1830s, carry a number of advertisements of this sort, with dramatic increases commencing in 1830. In addition to the expansion in pure advertising volume, there is an analogous upturn in both variety of footwear and in descriptive detail. Some of this volume and lengthy description can be attributed to the introduction of spring and fall lines, while other increases simply appear to have been a result of expansion in both quantities and types during the period. The general escalation in volume during the 1830s, however, is undoubtedly associated with the earliest attempts at mass production characterized by the burgeoning New England factory system as well as the landmark opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 (Taylor 1992:130-131).

Examination of the advertisements illustrates the fact that Detroit was a small but relatively thriving general goods, clothing, and footwear market, particularly during the 1830s. There also appears to have been a consistent range of fashion requirements for the region in all manner and styles from shoes to brogans to boots to moccasins, etc. A number of these advertisements describe an array of fine and first-rate fashions (and construction methods) as well as large numbers of plain and utilitarian styles (Figure 3). The Renaissance Center assemblage clearly demonstrates a preponderance of plain and utilitarian types of shoes and brogans and it is equally clear that the site's footwear material is not representative of the "carriage trade" (i.e., higher class). The economic profile of the district during this era, however, stresses the existence of a lower-to-middle class neighborhood populated by functionally mixed elements such as boarding houses, small shops, and store houses (Taylor 1992:131-132).

Although the Renaissance Center assemblage is heavily weighted towards the plain and utilitarian variety of footwear, this does not necessarily indicate that fancier, more expensive styles were not in use. It is likely that in the normal cycle of everyday life, plain, utilitarian styles saw extensive use and it could therefore be expected that these types would dominate the footwear refuse inventory. The very fact that fancier types were rarely worn (probably largely limited to Sundays, for instance), would essentially keep them out of the routine disposal process (Taylor 1992:108).

If finer styles were in use, as the advertisements purport, they were not apparent within the Renaissance Center archaeological record. It is obvious that the site's footwear assemblage is not representative of the "carriage trade" as noted in a number of advertisements. This conclusion, of course, may be suspect from an archaeological standpoint in that the more common, expendable, everyday material was more rapidly disposed of. In any case, there is little physical evidence at the site for higher quality items as portrayed in newspaper and directory advertisements. A number of explanations for this phenomenon are suggested: 1) lower to middle class economic status of the majority of the local residents and commercial establishments; 2) simple expendability and disposability of common inexpensive footwear; and 3) poor street and sidewalk conditions extant in the city at that time (Taylor 1992:122).

The majority of footwear from archaeological contexts, contrary to the promotion of finer types, is utilitarian, plain, relatively durable, and inexpensive. In fact, these styles constituted the bulk of the footwear recovered not only from Renaissance Center but from the Millender Center site (ca. 1810-1860 context), the downtown Detroit People Mover project (ca. 1845-1855 and post-1850 deposits), and the 1851 Hoff Store site. San Francisco of the early 1850s era, as represented by the Hoff Store site, was a male-dominated society in which heavy labor played a significant role in the development of this frontier outpost. Typically, brogans were worn by laborers and workmen engaged in construction, cargo transport, etc. in the urban areas. It is likely that these heavy shoes were probably worn by mechanics and clerical workers as well. Boots tended to be more suitable in the gold fields. In general, both the prevailing social conditions and the environment played roles in the Hoff Store and early Detroit footwear assemblages (Huddleston and Watanabe 1990:94,99; S. Farmer 1890:928).
THE BEAUBIEN PRIVY DEPOSIT (FEATURE 4G)

Description

Figure 4G, identified as the Beaubien privy deposit (ca. 1833), was located south of Feature 2 and southeast of Feature 3 in Sector G, a five-sided tract, approximately 125.0 feet along Atwater Street (south side) approximately 125.0 feet along Franklin Street (north side), approximately 87.0 feet along Brush Street (west side), and its eastern boundary is approximately 75.0 feet north and south (Figure 4). While some footwear material was recovered from level 2, a grey sand cap over a fekal level, the greatest amount originated in level 3, a provenience composed chiefly of fekal matter. This feature is positioned within the northeasterly portion of lot 22 of the Lambert Beaubien farm subdivision in an area considered to be the Beaubien homestead site. Feature 4G is, in fact, a two-hole privy type. A probable date for the two bottom layers (levels 3 and 4) was established through the presence of a local Detroit newspaper scrap dated to April 3, 1833, the approximate period of the Beaubien family removal from the location (i.e., the closing phase of occupation) (Demeter 1990:85, 87).

In any event, the Beaubien household, as opposed to a shoemaker's shop, appears to have been the most probable source of the Feature 4G/level 3 deposit which contained a large array of footwear debris (accounting for approximately 45
The consequent removal of the family in 1833 does not appear to have been a result of the 1832 cholera outbreak in the city. For instance, there is no documentary evidence to support the idea that deaths occurred in the Beaubien family during 1832 (Dfenissen 1987:55-58). Demeter (1992: personal communication) suggests that the Beaubien removal at this time was more likely associated with accumulated debts; the family’s vacating of the premises seems to have stemmed from the inability to pay these obligations.

**Footwear Inventory**

The extensive Beaubien footwear inventory, in terms of both quantity and type, is suggestive of lower-to-middle class circumstances. In addition to a large number of detached footwear elements, Feature 4G/level 3 produced 21 complete shoes or brogans (58.33 per cent of the site total), two complete boots and a semi-deteriorated moccasin (Figure 5). Of this grouping, 18 were adult-sized, two corresponded with young adult measurements and four were children’s-sized. In addition, two-thirds of the complete footwear from this provenience were manufactured on “crooked” lasts (i.e., distinct rights and lefts) while the remainder were straight-styled. Analysis of this grouping indicates the following: 1) a preponderance of masculine type footwear, although women undoubtedly used them as well; and 2) overwhelming evidence for utilitarian and/or typically inexpensive footwear (Taylor 1992:135-136).

Both the nature and relative quality of the footwear material indicate that despite the recovery of a large quantity of complete shoes and shoe parts, almost the entire grouping consisted of common but limited and probably inexpensive varieties. This distribution held constant whether children’s or adults’ sizes were considered. In addition to the large quantity of plain, standard, and inexpensive footwear, it must also be stressed that typical women’s footwear was essentially nonexistent (Taylor 1992:107).

The majority of the intact boots and shoes also demonstrate attachment via outsole pegging, in about 80 per cent of the cases. These examples correspond with the 1820-1840 period or just prior to the dominance of mass produced sewn footwear which began sometime in the 1850s/1860s (Taylor 1992:134).

At least 20 per cent of the complete footwear exhibited nailed attachment techniques as opposed to the commonly used pegging method. Nailed shoes in the Renaissance Center contexts may be associated with workmen or laborers (as they were at the Hoff Store site 15 to 25 years later [Huddleson and Watanabe 1990]), providing an added degree of utilitarian sturdiness (Taylor 1992:134).

Other observed style variables include toe shapes which mainly consisted of square, round, pointed, and some combination of all three, although the square and round forms remained the preferred styles (Taylor 1992:134).
INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Economic and Socio-Cultural Factors

In relating the midden and privy contents to social class and occupations a number of potential variables are apparent: 1) quality of the recovered footwear; 2) type and economic class of associated structures and inhabitants; 3) nature and dates of footwear-related features; 4) availability of footwear in early nineteenth-century Detroit; 5) types and styles of available footwear; and 6) conditions and lifestyles of the urban environment during this period (Taylor 1992:107).

The Renaissance Center footwear assemblage can be considered a product of prevailing economic conditions. In this regard, footwear type may be related to an area's economic profile. Examination of this district for the 1820-1848 era, discloses a pervasive lower to middle class neighborhood comprised of functionally mixed elements such as boarding houses, small shops, store-residences, warehouses, etc. These circumstances are reflected in the footwear inventory, typically featuring evidence of repair work (i.e., half-soles, nailed heels, etc.) and frequent occurrences of well-worn items in the form of wear holes, worn-down heels, etc (Taylor 1992:105).

Demeter (1990:117, 151-153) categorizes the Beaubien household as comparatively low on the economic scale in light of the utilized ceramic types. Mudar's faunal study (1978) which associates specific meat cuts with assignable economic rankings, assigns a somewhat higher status to the Beaubien household. This, according to Demeter (1990:151-153) may have been a result of the Beaubiens supplementing their diet with expensive cuts of meat as a direct result of their working association with higher status employers such as John R. Williams. Mudar (1978:324) asserts that the analysis of specific faunal samples

...may support or refute hypothesis concerning social status, occupational season, political relations, or trade routes.

Mudar's analysis of the Renaissance Center faunal assemblage in the context of known documentary evidence on specific residents of the Market District in nineteenth-century Detroit has, of course, immediate implications for the present study. Through both archival and artifactual investigation, Mudar (1978) and Demeter (1990) have provided critical groundwork for any subsequent examination of the Renaissance Center site, including the present work. The identification of various cultural inventories with specific families is a key step in analyzing the relationship between economic/socio-cultural status and the footwear assemblage. For the present purposes, features containing footwear and/or leather remains from the Beaubien deposit have been compared to the results obtained in both the Demeter (ceramics) and Mudar (faunal) studies as well as with the extensive background and documentary research also provided by Demeter (1990).

The 1830 Federal Census indicates that 13 individuals were then residing at the Beaubien household, including the two widows and eleven of their children, aged one to 31 (Harlan, Millbrook and Erwin 1961:9). Ceramic evidence places Feature 4G in the ca. 1833-1834 temporal frame; the presence of a newspaper scrap (dated April 3, 1833) further establishes a possible terminus ante quem for the feature (Demeter 1990:85, 87). Although, documentation of the Beaubien family clearly failed to define economic status during this period, it is suggested that they were lower to middle class. Yet, Mudar's examination of the Beaubien faunal material indicates that:

...it seems most likely that the Beaubien family was well-to-do, as their dietary habits indicate this status (Mudar 1978:369).

As previously suggested, the Beaubiens may have supplemented their diet with expensive cuts of meat; a possible result of their working association with higher status employers such as John R. Williams. In this regard, it seems unlikely that few if any of the Beaubien landholdings were utilized to raise livestock for private consumption. However, Silas Farmer (1890:338) and Dain (1956:133) indicate that the crippling effects of the War of 1812 and for at least twenty years thereafter, meant that very little livestock was raised in the Detroit vicinity; the majority was, in fact, imported from Ohio, New York, and Kentucky.

In the archaeological record, the privy associated with the lower economic class Beaubien family failed to produce footwear of recognizably fine or high quality. With the exception of a few examples, the majority of the Beaubien sample exhibited well-worn, repaired, and generally plain styles of shoes and boots from an age-mixed source.

Environmental Factors

Another determining factor for the dominance of the plain, standard, and inexpensive types of footwear from the Beaubien context relates to the environmental and urban conditions extant at the time.

In this regard, Silas Farmer (1890:928) mentioned that up until 1835 and probably as late as 1850, the condition of Detroit's streets

...was such as to preclude all unnecessary use. Especially in the spring and fall, the fine black soil, saturated with water, and in places mixed with clay, made the roads almost impassable.

Recollections of Thomas Palmer in 1897 (referring to the 1830s) depict the poor condition of the city's sidewalks and roads. The Grand Circus area, for example:
...was a swale, and in muddy weather, where it was not corduroyed, a veritable slough of despond (T. Palmer 1922:12-13).

Palmer also characterizes Detroit's thoroughfares of that period as:

...frightful in spring and fall; where they were much travelled, they were bottomless, and where they were not travelled the clay was of that plastic character which would mire a horse or pull a boy's boot off if he happened to strike right. The usual method of getting around in such weather was by two wheeled carts; the ladies went to church and parties in carts, the children to school in carts, and the people to picnics in carts (T. Palmer 1922:26).

And also according to Palmer:

The only piece of pavement I can remember before 1840 was a small piece in the Berthelet market. Between 1840 and 1850, an attempt was made to pave with octagon pine blocks over a foot diameter. I well remember a sidewalk made of this material in front of the Methodist Church on Congress Street; this was not a success (T. Palmer 1922:29).

In 1835, Atwater Street, between Woodward Avenue and Randolph Street, was paved with cobble stones, through the efforts of a certain R. E. Roberts (F. Palmer 1906:717). The first attempt at wood pavement, as originally discussed by Thomas Palmer (1922:29) was made by Julius Eldred, in front of his hardware store on Jefferson Avenue. It was composed of octagon shaped blocks of pine wood, approximately a foot and a half each way. They apparently remained down some years and were quite durable. The city again attempted paving, but with stone; cobble-stones were laid down at the intersection of Woodward and Jefferson Avenues. This scheme also extended about twenty feet in width into the center of Jefferson Avenue and down as far as some point just below the old Michigan Exchange to about First Street. This paving remained down for some time (probably two or three years) or until Jefferson Avenue was paved with the same kind of stone from curb to curb its entire length, as far up as Dequindre Street (F. Palmer 1906:718).

On February 1, 1837, the city council voted to pave Randolph Street from Jefferson Avenue to the river, and Atwater Street from Randolph to Brush Street (S. Farmer 1890:929).

Sidewalk improvements, at least in some areas of the city, occurred slightly earlier than those effected on the streets. An ordinance of July 7, 1828, for instance, indicated that sidewalks along Woodward Avenue were to be all one width and laid next to the houses. This coincided with a general awareness concerning the desires of foot-travelers; some shop owners recognized these needs and laid a few planks down. On the whole, however, it was not a common practice, with the result that:

...calling and churchgoing were sometimes impracticable to ladies because of the lack of walks (S. Farmer 1890:930).

It was noted on June 13, 1836 by an English woman, Harriet Martineau, that:

The streets of the town (i.e., Detroit) are wide and airy, but the houses, churches and stores are poor for the capital city of a territory or state. Wooden planks, laid on grass, form the pavement in all of the outskirts of the place. The deficiency is of store, not of labor (Catlin 1926:308).

As was the case across much of the frontier at this time, early nineteenth-century Detroit characteristically represented an inconvenient place to traverse without the sturdiest footwear. It is quite likely that the types and styles of ca. 1825-1850 footwear were especially geared towards these street and sidewalk conditions, although finer and more fashionable types were readily available. It is equally plausible that footwear types and styles were dictated by poor urban conditions as they were by any of the other possible factors (i.e., available types and styles, economic class of residents, etc.). The natural response to this crude urban environment would have been along the lines of more practical and utilitarian footwear; sturdy construction techniques would also distinguish such environmentally-oriented footwear. Evidence from the site strongly confirms this supposition. The frequent appearance of repair work (seen in the relatively large numbers of half-soles) also points to economic determinants. The types and styles of footwear recovered from the site therefore appear to have been a result of: 1) the lower to middle class level of the district's commercial establishments and dwellings houses, and 2) the poor street and sidewalk conditions extant in a "frontier", albeit urban, atmosphere.

Huddleson and Watanabe (1990:94), in their study of the footwear from the Hoff Store site in San Francisco (1851), ascribe a similar explanation to the predominance of plain, utilitarian shoes and boots:

In San Francisco, winter rains and an organic, silty substrate made 'navigating' even planked streets a challenge.

They also indicate that during the harsh winter of 1849-1850, San Francisco was dominated by the use of high top heavy riding boots. In anticipation of yet another wet winter, many streets were subsequently planked. The winter of 1850-1851, however, was unusually mild with little rainfall. Boots were required only during storms, and then mid-calf jack boots sufficed (Huddleson and Watanabe 1990:99).

The complete footwear assemblage is strongly characteristic of wider early-to-mid-nineteenth-century shoemaking developments. The Renaissance Center intact inventory is not only consistent with the economic circumstances of the feature-associated residents, but also provides strong evidence of the existing en-
vironmental conditions of the 1820-1850 period. The preponderance of the complete footwear assemblage from the site displays typical characteristics of the early-to-middle nineteenth-century, particularly in terms of construction and style. The majority of the intact specimens are notably deteriorated, torn, crushed and otherwise in poor condition, which probably accounts for their disposal (Taylor 1992:133).

Analysis of the Beaubien inventory demonstrates high percentages of utilitarian and inexpensive styles coupled with decidedly low numbers of strictly feminine styles. In terms of economic indicators, the assemblage exhibits a relatively large quantity of both repaired specimens or repair material (i.e., half-soles, nailed heels, etc.) and frequent instances of extended-use attributes such as wear holes, excessively worn heels, etc. A portion of the repaired and repair-related items recovered from the site may be assignable to local shoemaking establishments (Taylor 1992:136).

SUMMARY

Street and sidewalk conditions in Detroit during the pre-1850 era were typically crude and largely off-limits to pedestrian traffic. This was particularly evident during the spring and fall months when the fine black soil, saturated with water (and mixed with clay in some places), caused the roads to become practically impassable. There were a few limited attempts at street paving during the 1840s and as early as 1837 the City Council voted to pave parts of Randolph Street and Atwater Street (S. Farmer 1890:929). On the whole, however, the vile conditions of the streets and sidewalks, particularly in the riverfront/Renaissance Center district, precluded, amongst other things, the general use of finer types of footwear. The citizenry subsequently adapted to these environmental circumstances through the widespread usage of utilitarian and inexpensive shoes and boots, even in the face of available higher quality products. This pattern is consistent with other contemporaneous urban sites, and is especially comparable to both the downtown Detroit People Mover and the Hoff Store assemblages. The People Mover collection is noticeably similar to that of the Renaissance Center particularly in the sizeable occurrence of plain and functional types of footwear, obviously reflective of the local street, sidewalk, and prevailing economic conditions during the ca. 1845 - ca. 1867 period (Demeter 1987:237).

Analysis of the 4G footwear material verifies the real estate-rich/cash-poor thesis since a sizeable portion of the sample exhibited some form of homemade repair or repair-related pieces. The contrasting faunal evidence, however, suggests a "well-to-do" family, while footwear refuse collected from the Beaubien privy alternately implies lower-middle class status (Taylor 1992:111).

It appears then that the two overriding factors contributing to footwear assemblages such as those found in these sites are economic and environmental conditions. However, we must also emphasize that the majority of the Renaissance Center material was located in direct association with the Beaubien privy, presumably a household of lower-middle economic status (Taylor 1992:137).

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