WHILE MOST PEOPLE in the St. Louis region have probably heard the name “Fort Zumwalt” in connection with the school district in St. Charles County, they are probably less familiar with the story of the “fort” itself and the fascinating role it played in the Colonial and Frontier period history of the St. Louis region. Others may be familiar with the now reconstructed building that stands in Fort Zumwalt Park in O’Fallon. Despite its impressive name, “Fort Zumwalt” was actually no more than a log home constructed by the family of American settler Jacob Zumwalt beginning in approximately 1798. It was however used periodically as a fort during the tumultuous years of the War of 1812, when low level conflict between British-allied Native American groups and American settlers in the St. Louis region would occasionally burst into brutal violence. This is its story.

The political context that eventually gave rise to the fort begins in the Colonial period as the French, Spanish, and English fought for control of the region. French explorers, missionaries, and coureurs de bois were the first Europeans to utilize the interior of what is now the St. Louis metropolitan area. While the French made some early attempts to establish permanent communities west of the Mississippi, most 18th century French colonials initially preferred to live east of the river at settlements like Cahokia, Kaskaskia, and Prairie du Rocher. It was not until about 1740 that a group of habitants crossed the river and established a community at Ste. Genevieve, and in 1764 the trading post of St. Louis was founded. By that time, due to the outcome of the French and Indian War, France was forced to surrender its lands in Canada and the Illinois Country (east of the Mississippi) to Great Britain. Devastated by war debt, they also bartered their land west of the river to the Empire of Spain. Preferring to live under Spanish authority rather than submit to the hated British, many French colonists moved west across the river into what had become Spanish territory. St. Louis became an administration center for Upper Louisiana; the Territorial Government was centered in New Orleans, which, in turn, answered to Madrid.

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Forgotten, But Not Gone: Retracing the Steps of St. Louis’ Oldest Cemetery by Andrew Weil

FORGOTTEN, BUT NOT GONE, when St. Louis’ second Catholic Burial Ground was rediscovered by construction crews in 1990, a story going back to the founding of St. Louis was uncovered as well. William Stokes, who was founded in 1764, a town block (block 59) was set aside for the purposes of a church, rectory, and cemetery. A simple log church was hastily built on this block to serve residents as the rest of the town began to take shape. In 1776, a larger and more permanent log church was constructed to replace the earlier building. Constructed of vertical logs in the French Colonial manner, this church would have been very similar in dimensions and appearance to the surviving Church of the Holy Family (begun c. 1786) in Cahokia, Illinois (shown, right).

The 1776 church was located on the east side of the block, north of the midline with its narrow end facing on 2nd Street. The rectory (for the itinerant priest) was on its south side with a perpendicular orientation to the church, and would likely have been surrounded by dependencies like a chicken coop, bread oven, herb and vegetable gardens, and probably a grape arbor. The cemetery covered what was approximately the northern third of the block. An early map of the property shows the two functional areas of the church block (church/cemetery—domestic/agricultural) separated by a palesade wall, which also surrounded the boundary of the entire block. Such walls were less for defensive purposes and more to keep marauding animals like hogs from rooting around in the gardens, and burial ground. By overlaying the woodland on a current aerial of the Arch grounds, the original layout of the church block of 1776 is revealed on the modern landscape.

As St. Louis became more established, the old log church was replaced with a larger brick building. Under the direction of Bishop DuBourg, the third church to stand on block 59 was completed c. 1821 on the northeast corner of the property over a portion of the existing cemetery. According to a c. 1850 lithograph by Julia Hutson in the collections of the Missouri History Museum, by the time the new church was completed, the cathedral block had advanced substantially. According to Hutson's block contained extensive gardens, a grape arbor, stable, refectory, two wells, bath house, cemetery, the Bishop's home and a college building (which looks suspiciously like the former log church repurposed).

In 1823, St. Louis passed a law forbidding cemeteries within the city limits. Interestingly, this was not due to concerns about the spread of contagious disease, which was poorly understood, but associated with corporeal corruption. Rather the ordinance was passed in response to increasingly cramped conditions. The city limits were set at 5th Street and space for new development was at a premium. As a result, the cemetery on the cathedral block was disinterred and the remains of St. Louis’ founders moved 1.7 miles northwest to newly donated land on the St. Charles Road in the Prairie des St. Louis. By 1830, the former cemetery lot had been completely leased for commercial development.

The Second Catholic burial ground was established on four acres of land donated by William Stokes at the northwest corner of what is today Dr. Martin Luther King Avenue and Jefferson. Part of Stoker’s farm, this land was well suited for a cemetery on high, flat, well-drained ground on a major rural road, more than a mile from the city limits. Stokes and a woman he identified as his wife had arrived in St. Louis in about 1821. His real wife arrived in 1823 and sued him for divorce and alimony. In failing health and with a ruined reputation, Stokes decided to donate the land to the Church in the summer of 1823 shortly before his death.

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The cemetery served all walks of life. Historical records and osteological analysis from archaeological investigations conducted in 1990 indicate that people, presumably both free and enslaved African Americans, and Native Americans were buried there along with the likes of August Chouteau and Antoine Soulard. The area quickly became a cemetery district with a Methodist Episcopal cemetery established on the west side of the Catholics in 1828, and a Presbyterian burying ground in operation to the east prior to 1830.

Unfortunately for St. Louis, the timing of these cemeteries was prescient. The city’s first cholera epidemic hit in 1832 and subsequent plagues, peaking with the horror of 1849, overwhelmed the city’s capacity to deal with the dead. The cemetery district on the St. Charles road was heavily used and newspapers reported sextons across the city resorting to tactics like burying multiple people in the same grave or in shallow graves above earlier, deeper interments. In response to the ferocity of the cholera outbreaks, yet another, larger Catholic cemetery near Rock Spring was established in 1849. Bounded by present day Duncan and Clayton Avenues (north-south) and S. Sarah and Boyle (east-west), Rock Spring cemetery too was bounded by present day Duncan and Clayton Avenues (north-south) and S. Sarah and Boyle (east-west). Rock Spring cemetery too was essentially filled to capacity in less than 20 years with the victims of cholera outbreaks of 1849. 1854, and 1866 making up the bulk of its occupants. Another factor which could have led to the speed with which Rock Spring reached capacity was that (supposedly) the burials from the occupants. Another factor which could have led to the speed with which Rock Spring reached capacity was that (supposedly) the burials from the.

In 1876, the City’s current boundaries were established and with nowhere else to go, the ordinance prohibiting cemeteries inside St. Louis City was either formally repealed, or conveniently forgotten. In 1876, the City’s current boundaries were established and with nowhere else to go, the ordinance prohibiting cemeteries inside St. Louis City was either formally repealed, or conveniently forgotten. Rock Spring was closed in the face of industrial development pressure in 1879 and its burials (some of its burials) were moved to Calvary and the St. Bridget Crypt. After the dust settled, the march of St. Louis' early Catholic dead from the Old Cathedral to the edge of the Central West End, to their final resting places appeared to be over, and so it remained for nearly another century.

In 1990, workers conducting environmental remediation of a former gas station in advance of the construction of the new Second District Police Command uncovered wooden coffins and human remains. Lots of them. Per state burial law, archaeologists were called in to investigate, map, and remove the burials for reinterment. In 1991, the Archaeological Research Center of St. Louis began work at the northwest corner of Jefferson and MLK, the site of the Second Catholic Burial Ground. Only a fraction of the overall site required deep excavation for environmental purposes, so the archaeological work was limited in scope. In a 12x11 meter area, just 1,188 square feet, the remains of one hundred and twenty one individuals were recovered. This was a fractional burial density of almost 10 people per square foot. These findings clearly demonstrated that the newspapers of the cholera era were not slandering the City’s sextons with their lurid tales; they were accurately reporting the news.
For the most part, Spaniards recognized the improbability of populating the new territory with immigrants from Spain. Instead, they viewed the land as a geographical buffer that insulated their lucrative colonies further to the south from the British. Despite the initial influx of French Colonial settlers, the population of Upper Louisiana in the early days of the Spanish regime remained insufficient to deter the British threat. After the Revolutionary War established that the newly minted Americans hated the British as much as they did, the Spanish employed a risky gambit in a bid to increase settlement and make the Territory more secure. The strategy was rooted in the idea that they could grow the population by offering grants of free land, the settlers would logically defend their homes (and thus the Territory) against invaders.

By the 1790s, many Americans in frontier areas like Kentucky were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their new government. In many cases, taxation and other “intrusions” into people’s lives and affairs had increased since the end of the Revolution and with the threat of war fading and Native American groups largely pushed out, unscrupulous land speculators began to manipulate, buy and cheat land away from pioneer settlers. In 1796, the Spanish authorities began circulating advertisements throughout Kentucky, the Northwest Territory, and other areas of what was then the western frontier of American settlement. These ads promised that settlers who moved to Spanish territory would be given land for free and would pay no property taxes. Americans responded rapidly to the generous terms and began the journey to the west side of the Mississippi.

Rather than balk at the tide of settlers flowing out of country, the American government was largely pleased with the idea. Though the Spanish were obviously manipulating these settlers, Thomas Jefferson believed it would be the United States that would have the last laugh. Knowing the ferocity and independence of the pioneers who were moving west, the Spanish government would be rewarded by a涌入 that would not only far outnumber the Spanish settlers, but also divide them and instigate further conflict. Jefferson realized the Spanish were hopelessly outnumbered by American migrants, Jefferson wrote “I wish a hundred of our inhabitants would accept [Spanish settlement terms]. It may be the means of delaying to us peaceably what may otherwise cost a war.” In other words, he saw that the Spanish had unwittingly invited a Trojan Horse within their walls, and given it a comfortable stable.

Among the Americans who responded to the enticements of the Spanish were members of the Zumwalt family (like Andrew). They were among the many settlers who were offered land grants by the Spanish. The Zumwalts, who were apparently illiterate in their primary language of English, the immersion in this new world must have been trying. The evidence for this is intriguing, but circumstantial. If indeed any member of the Boone family played a role in the Zumwalt’s decision to move to Missouri, it should be noted that Daniel Morgan Boone (one of Daniel Boone’s sons) is the most likely candidate. He owned land near the town that was named for him in Kentucky. In the manner of people used to living on the fringe of Euro-American society, they seem to have maintained a pragmatic approach to Native peoples. While many of the Zumwalt men had fought Indians in the past, they also seemed open to peaceful relations and trade. Several stories told of Adam Zumwalt in particular illustrating the ability that many frontiersmen had to maintain perspective despite often severely strained relations.

Adam, who lived in constant contact with Native Americans, many of whom were among the best hunters at his distillery. He reportedly hosted the great Sauk Chief Black Hawk a number of times in his home and allowed the Chief to dance with his daughters. Another story recounts how an unnamed Native American chief died while visiting Adam Zumwalt and how he was buried in the family plot along with a loaf of bread, a butcher knife, and his sacrificial dag. These stories of Zumwalt welcoming Native Americans into his home, trusting them with his family, and tolerating their religious practices says something remarkable about the man, especially when one considers the violence of the Indian Wars he experienced in Kentucky. In general, success on the frontier was largely dependent on the capacity to adapt; Adam, and presumably the other members of his family seem to have possessed this quality.

Settlers on the frontier in the St. Louis area did not only have to adapt to the presence of Native Americans, but to a kaleidoscope of insider languages, cultures, and ethnicities. The English-speaking Zumwalts, for example lived in a region that was ruled by Spain, though most of the people in the towns were a mix of French colonials, creoles, and people of African descent (free and enslaved). French was a primary language, Spanish was used in official procedures, and Latin used for services in the only officially sanctioned (Catholic) Church. For the Zumwalts, who were apparently illiterate in their primary language of English, the immersion in this new world must have been trying.

THE AMERICAN PERIOD

In 1800, Spain returned Louisiana to France. With the stroke of a pen, the Zumwalts were now French subjects. Then, in 1803, the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France for the first time since leaving Kentucky, the Zumwalts were farming American soil. In March of 1804, the Spanish Lieutenant governor, acting as the agent of France (a paving example of frontier political elasticity), surrendered Upper Louisiana to American Captain Amos Stoddard at St. Louis. A few years after assuming control of the Territory, the United States government board of commissioners “adjusted” titles to land that had been granted by the Spanish. All those who had received land grants were required to petition the commissioners to recognize the legitimacy of their claims. This process was no easy matter. In an effort to avoid conflict, the American government made the standard of proof needed to confirm a grant very high and many notable personalities such as Augustin Chouteau and Daniel Boone initially had some of the grants rejected. Jacob Zumwalt’s petition floundered in the hands of the board for years before it was officially recognized in 1809.

Though it took several years, four members of the Zumwalt family (brothers Adam, Jacob, Christopher, and Jacob’s son Henry) had their Spanish land grants confirmed by the American government in what would become Dardenne Township of St. Charles County.

All the Zumwalt farms would have grown cereal grains, vegetables, and fruit in addition to raising livestock. In addition, it appears that the three brothers worked together in a vertically integrated system to produce food, flour, and whiskey. While Jacob appears to have primarily been a farmer, Charles set up a gin mill and, as mentioned previously, Adam operated a distillery. The conversion of corn into whiskey greatly increased its value; everyone had corn, but everyone

Daniel Boone and other early settlers at the disastrous Battle of the Blue Licks in 1782. It is very likely that Daniel Boone and Adam Zumwalt became acquainted at that time. It has been asserted that members of the Boone family (Daniel Sr. and Nathan) encouraged the Zumwalt migration to Upper Louisiana. The evidence for this is tenuous, but circumstantial. If indeed any member of the Boone family played a role in the Zumwalt’s decision to move to Missouri, it should be noted that Daniel Morgan Boone (one of Daniel Boone’s sons) is the most likely candidate. He owned land near the town that was named for him in Kentucky and, at the invitation of Spanish authorities investigated portions of Louisiana in 1799. Soon thereafter he was granted lands near Femme Osage Creek in modern day St. Charles County. Around the same time, most of the Zumwalt clan accepted the Spanish offer of free land and headed west themselves. Per Spanish policy, in order to qualify for a land grant, settlers typically had to occupy a property for one year and make measurable improvements like clearing trees and building a home. Adam Zumwalt along with family members Christopher, Jacob, Andrew, Andrew, Andrew, Peter, and Henry applied for their land concessions at St. Louis between October 27th and November 9th 1799, indicating that they likely arrived in the Territory in the fall of 1798.

In their migration, it is likely that the Zumwalts traveled along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers for much of their journey to Louisiana. Adam Zumwalt’s son Solomon remembered living on a farm in Kentucky using a large boat, which he and several hired hands paddled to the mouth of “Barrack” (probably a corruption of Perequie) Creek in St. Charles County. Perequie Creek arises near Warrenton and flows northeast into the Missouri River (today a damned section forms Lake St. Louis). Jacob moved onto grant number 55 (shown above) along with his wife Katherine (Quizzet), and their children Andrew, Henry, Jacob Jr., George, Dolly and Elizabeth. Katherine Quizzet Zumwalt died in July of 1799 and was buried near the log home that the family was probably still in the process of completing, in what today O’Fallon’s Fort Zumwalt Park.

When the Zumwalts moved into the St. Charles District, it was at the western fringes of American settlement, in “The Forks” (a reference to the land north of the Mississippi and west of the Missouri) the land was sparsely populated. French settlers had established some small communities in the area including

Distribution of Zumwalt family land claims, 1809. Jacob Zumwalt outlined in red at center. 

A later marriage of Andrew (aka Andrew) came to Philadelphia from Germany in 1737. He and his wife Mary then moved to the vicinity of York, Pennsylvania where they began a substantial family. Andrew and Mary had two sons and three daughters before Mary’s premature death. Andrew later married his second wife, a woman named Ann Regina, and the couple moved to Frederick County, Virginia. This couple had five more sons and a daughter, among these children was a boy named Jacob, who would eventually settle in what is now St. Charles County, Missouri.

Adam, who was born in 1752, Jacob Zumwalt grew up in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley and married Katherine (Quizzet) Miller in 1772. Jacob and three of his brothers (George, Christopher, and Adam) fought in the Augusta County militia during the Revolutionary War and later moved to Kentucky in the early 1780s (probably three of his brothers). Jacob’s brother Adam was apparently one of the first of the brothers to make the trek westward and fought along with Lieutenant Colonel

St. Charles District land claims filed by 1803 (Blue). Land claims approved by 1807 (Green). Jacob Zumwalt claim outlined in red at center.

 nodded his head at the Chief and allowed the Chief to dance with his daughters. Another story recounts how an unnamed Native American chief died while visiting Adam Zumwalt and how he was buried in the family plot along with a loaf of bread, a butcher knife, and his sacrificial dag. These stories of Zumwalt welcoming Native Americans into his home, trusting them with his family, and tolerating their religious practices says something remarkable about the man, especially when one considers the violence of the Indian Wars he experienced in Kentucky. In general, success on the frontier was largely dependent on the capacity to adapt; Adam, and presumably the other members of his family seem to have possessed this quality.

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Fort Zumwalt Continued...

wanted whiskey. Other advantages that whiskey had over corn was that it was more compact (large amounts of corn made small amounts of alcohol) and thus a harvested corn crop could be hauled to a more easily transported commodity. In addition, unlike corn, whiskey could be stored indefinitely. The system the brothers set up made great sense for the economic opportunities and the interest in increasing the size of the grain farms they probably made them both well known and relatively well off.

THE WAR OF 1812 AND THE BIRTH OF ZUMWALT’S FORT

At the time of the Louisiana Purchase, relations with Native Americans were tense in the St. Louis region. Though not common, violent (land well publicized) encounters between settlers and Native Americans did occur. Between 1805 and 1808, there were approximately ten white settlers killed in incidents in St. Charles County; the number of Native American casualties is not recorded.

In addition to Native conflicts, the acquisition of Louisiana by the United States created new tension with Great Britain. As anagomus noted in a recent article, for years prior to the Louisiana Purchase, British raiders and American settlers were in frequent contact: “It is likely that the house was adapted for defense with a surrounding palisade or rifle ports, physical evidence is lacking. It is most likely that those who sought shelter within the fort’s walls did so primarily for protection by other members of their immediate and extended families.”

There is significant debate with regard to how or if the building itself was modified into a fort during the War of 1812. The documentary record remains for the most part silent. Any discussion of a fortification of the Zumwalt property could be “used as a fort.” She also noted that both the spring and the icehouse were enclosed in a stockade during the War of 1812. The existence of rifle ports in the fort itself is a common theme in Fort Zumwalt lore. This aspect of fortification would have made sense from a defensive perspective and is generally documented in descriptions of other period Territorial forts.

Edna McElhiney Olson, a prolific historian of the fort who was affiliated with the St. Charles County Historical Society in the middle of the last century, indicated that Edward had built a corn crib that Jacob Zumwalt built two additions to the home during the war so that the property could be “used as a fort.” It should be noted that this description is more reminiscent of the Heald spring-house (dating to the late 19th or very early 20th century) in inherent in defending the fort’s water supply. However, historic photos of the Heald spring-house (dating to the late 19th or very early 20th century) in the area made the St. Charles District extremely vulnerable to this type of guerilla warfare. Such attacks undermined the regional economy while the area made the St. Charles District extremely vulnerable to this type of guerilla warfare. Such attacks undermined the regional economy while the area.
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