

Site work near Mid-America reveals artifacts

By Susan J. Meister

Advocates for the move of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency to the Illinois side of the Mississippi River cite multiple advantages to the move over three potential locations in St. Louis City and County.

Mark Kern, chairman of the St. Clair County Board, has not only offered 182 acres beside Scott Air Force Base (SAFB) at no charge to the agency, but also offered an additional 200 acres for future expansion.

"St. Clair County has enhanced an already strong proposal with the additional land," said U.S. Senator Dick Durbin, (D-Ill.) at a press conference two weeks ago. "Scott Air Force Base provides several advantages for the NGA and is a natural fit."

A published list of benefits versus other choices include the synergies with national security groups already located at SAFB and a secure communications structure; the least cost alternative with availability for immediate construction; and a convenient location with expanded transportation opportunities (MidAmerica St. Louis Airport and MetroLink).

One of the few negatives for the St. Clair County site was referenced in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement published by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and presented at public hearings in October. The report noted the potential impact of the relocation on an archaeological site on the original 182 acres.

According to a St. Clair County Public Building Commission memo, part of the site has "significant research value, and is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places."

Dan Trapp, MidAmerica Airport director of planning, said that artifacts were previously discovered during a survey for the Reider Road interchange construction. The artifacts are said to be from mid-19th century homesteads of German settlers.

Brad H. Koldehoff, chief archaeologist, Illinois Department of Transportation, said that the site could provide important historic information about Euro-American pioneer settlements in the greater Lebanon-O'Fallon-Shiloh area from that time period.

"It could give data on life on the Illinois frontier," Koldehoff said, "when there was a wave of German immigrants before the Civil War."

Archaeologists will look for intact remnants on the site, which will give insight into the everyday routines of early farmers on the prairie, and evaluate their findings in light of diaries and journals from the period.

Provisions in the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act govern the determination if a resource is eligible for registration. The Act created the National Register of Historic Places, the list of National Historic Landmarks, and the State Historic Preservation Offices. The corresponding Illinois agency is the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

All of the 102 Illinois counties have at least one property or historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The properties represent a cross section of the state's history from early settlement through the 1960s.

Three Lebanon sites are among the 27 St. Clair County landmarks: Emerald Mound and Village Site, Lebanon Historic District and Mermaid House Hotel.



Of the over 85,000 places listed on the National Register of Historic Places, about 2,500 are recognized as National Historic Landmarks. There are 1,700 properties and districts in Illinois designated as historic places, of which 85 are landmarks.

National Historic Landmarks are places "where significant historical events occurred, where prominent Americans worked or lived, that represent those ideas that shaped the nation, that provide important information about our past, or that are outstanding example of design or construction."

Four sites in the Metro East area have been named National Historic Landmarks including Cahokia Mounds, Church of the Holy Family, Cahokia, Eads Bridge and the Nicholas Jarrot Mansion, Cahokia.

The 1966 National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies, including the NGA, to evaluate the impact of all federally funded or permitted projects on historic properties.

Koldehoff explained that the location of the identified archaeological site near SAFB is protected by law and the exact location cannot be released to avoid treasure hunting or other disturbance. The task of the engineers considering the site for building new NGA facilities is to avoid impact as much as possible or mitigate any adverse effect.

The St. Clair County Public Building Commission has authorized just over \$160,000 for a mitigation plan. Work would be done by the Illinois State Archaeological Survey, Prairie Research Institute at the University of Illinois, Urbana.

While the site is of enough interest to provide information, Koldehoff doesn't see it as unique.

"There are others like it," he said.

Trapp added that any artifacts recovered would be displayed at the MidAmerica Airport passenger terminal.

More information about the relocation at the NGA is at www.nextNGAwest.com. A decision about the relocation of the agency is expected in the spring of 2016.