

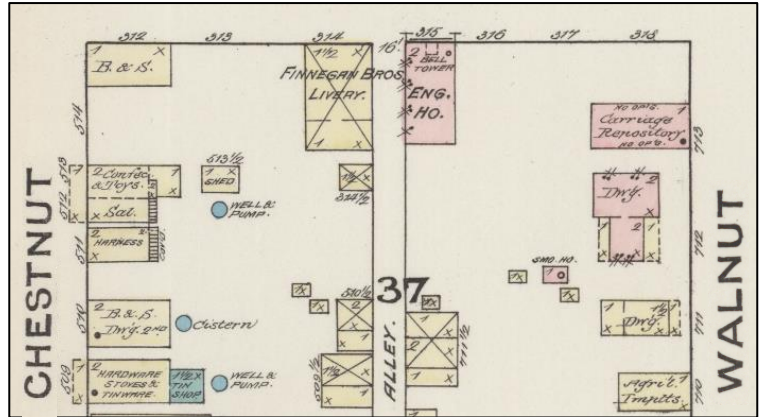
A Historic Livery & Auto Garage in Downtown Chaska



1885 newspaper ad for the Finnegan Bros. new livery stable business (*Weekly Valley Herald*, 8 January 1885)

Historic Downtown Chaska-Block 37 Site (21CR0173)

Chaska is full of history and evidence of the city's early residents can be found beneath your feet! Site 21CR0173 was identified by archaeologists during downtown construction improvements in 2022. Research revealed that the brick building foundation and glass bottles they found belonged to a 19th century livery (public horse stable) that was later converted to an automobile garage/dealership in the early 1900s. The City of Chaska and the archaeologists then developed a plan to investigate and protect this important site.



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Chaska, Historic Block 37 in 1885 – Finnegan Bros. Livery noted in top center (Sanborn Map Fire Insurance Company)

A Livery – turned – Auto Garage

This building lets us see the important transition from horsepower to automobiles through its construction!

Jerry Ehman built his brick livery stable around 1880 and advertised the opening of his business in the local newspaper. However, only four years later he sold the business to the Finnegan brothers. The Finnegans provided horse-drawn transportation to prominent events and hosted other services like veterinary clinics. The brothers owned the livery for several years, before they too listed is for sale. It is unclear who owned the building for the next twenty years, but by 1911, a concrete foundation had been poured to accommodate cars, showing that the building had been converted into an automobile garage. The garage closed in the 1920s but reopened after the Great Depression in 1933. The garage was then converted again in the 1950s into a car dealership, but by 1970, the building was demolished.



Only known photo to include original livery, taken from SE corner of Chestnut & 3rd Street around 1890 (LaVonne Barac. 2019. *Chaska: A Minnesota River City, Prehistory to 1950*, p.178)

1880

Jerry Ehmann announces opening of his livery

1884

Finnegan brothers, Peter and John, buy the livery

1911

Livery is converted into an automobile garage

1933

Garage reopens after being closed for a few years

1944

Garage renovated; becomes Schmidt Parkside Garage

1949

Garage becomes automobile dealership

1968

Dauwalter Motors relocates

1970

Building is demolished

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The Phase III Archaeological Data Recovery of Site 21CR0173

Excavation of the site took multiple weeks in May 2024. Archaeologists worked together with the construction crew to remove the paved surface of the parking lot, one half at a time. Once the pavement was removed, they took away the dirt about two inches at a time, carefully examining the ground for any artifacts or features that might be exposed. After every level, the archaeologists would record the position of everything they found (even brick fragments like the ones shown below) by taking photos, drawing maps, marking points on the GPS, and taking extensive notes. All this information is extremely important during archaeological excavations because once things have been dug up, they can never be put back exactly the same way again. That means we would lose all the information we might get from the artifacts about what happened at this site unless we make sure to record everything first. Once recorded, every artifact was collected and brought back to the lab for careful examination. At Site 21CR0173, the archaeologists only excavated as deep as the construction crew needed to complete their work, about 10 inches, but they still found hundreds of artifacts!



Brick foundations found in the northeast corner of the site (likely damaged when the building was demolished in 1970)



Artifacts found in 2024 related to the demolition of the building included rusted pieces of metal, glass, and Chaska brick

What Did We Learn?

Even though the archaeologists only uncovered the top portion of the site, they found over 1,800 artifacts! These artifacts including Chaska bricks, glass, pottery, car parts, and much more. Each item tells us a little bit more about what people were doing in and around this building over the course of its 90-year history.

Important Findings

While most of the artifacts were fragments of the demolished building or items that had been discarded (see above-right), some items could be linked to when the building was a livery or when it became a garage (see right).

There is still more to find! Because this investigation was designed to mitigate the impacts of current construction, the lower portions of the site, particularly those related to the livery, were left undisturbed. These deposits are now preserved for future archaeologists!



Artifacts found in 2022 at Site 21CR0173 linked to its use as a garage, (top) a portion of a graphite core from an early car battery, and as a livery, (bottom) a metal curry comb used for grooming horses

