My paper today is going to be very short, because when I sat down to put it together, I found out I had even less to say that I thought I did. So, here goes.

The Wickliffe Mounds Research Center conducted archaeological investigations in two historic sites in western Kentucky during the summer of 1995. These projects, supported by a grant from the Murray State University Committee on Institutional Studies and Research, were the focus of the 1995 summer field school sponsored by the Middle Mississippi Survey, a consortium of Wickliffe Mounds and Southeast Missouri State University. Students from both universities took part in the field school.

We have catalogued the artifacts from only one of the two sites, so analysis is obviously lacking. What I’m reporting here is preliminary, basically just a summary and progress report.

Curtis-Sullivan House

The Curtis-Sullivan House was recently purchased by Joe Don Curtis, who gave permission for a set of test excavations in the house lot. This is a hard one to get much of a picture of. I had to go back during the winter to photograph it with the leaves down.

The house is one of the historic structures of Ballard County. It was one of two houses built by a pair of brothers, John Henry Sullivan and William Zachariah Sullivan, who came to
Ballard County from Tennessee. The brothers first built log homes, and replaced them with substantial brick houses in the late 1840s or early 1850s. The bricks are said to have been fired on-site. The J. H. Sullivan house is still occupied. William Sullivan’s house, the one we investigated, is a few miles away, and is a virtual twin of the J. H. Sullivan house except for the brick wing on the back (Kentucky Heritage Council 1978).

The last occupant of the Curtis-Sullivan House died recently at an advanced age, having let the house fall to a near-ruin. The present owner does not have the considerable funds it would take to renovate the house to livable condition. I decided to add this site to the summer 1995 program because it should have made a good comparison to other sites already tested in the Jackson Purchase (Whitehaven [Wesler 1984], the Moore house [Wesler 1987], and the Tilghman house [Wesler 1993], which I have already reported on) and to the David Morrill house, also tested in 1995 (which I’ll talk about in a few minutes). Given the ruinous condition of the Curtis-Sullivan House and the overgrown condition of the yard, both of which we expected to get considerably worse by the next year, it seemed advisable to get in and do a project while we had the chance.

The yard has a rather obvious twentieth-century occupation, characterized by, among other things, piles of cat food cans and even a few dead cats in plastic bags, remarkably well preserved, junk furniture and appliances, and other materials not easily or palatably summarized. Now, I realize that there is a theoretical argument for mapping everything in the yard as an example of late-twentieth-century refuse disposal by a senile recluse, but I just couldn’t get up for it. We ignored the modern stuff on the surface.

We excavated four test units at this site. We placed the first three units in the back yard of the house, since projects at Whitehaven and the Moore house indicated that the rear yard was
most likely to produce archaeological deposits. We excavated the fourth unit in the west side yard. Between the junk and the vegetation, we didn’t even bother to survey a grid, and just numbered the tests as we started them.

Test 1 was a 1 x 2 meter unit directly behind the southwest corner of the brick wing. This spot was chosen in the hope of being outside the area of gravel driveway. We found only a very shallow, gravelly deposit, with few artifacts, and a gas pipe line here.

Test 2 was a 1 x 2 m unit to the southwest of the house. We hoped to get through a relatively thin layer of gravel and find an archaeological deposit below. Instead, we found mostly gravel, with very few artifacts. Inspection of the profiles indicates that there is a thin midden between gravel layers, but given its lack of artifacts and the difficulty of separating it from the gravel above and below, we did not try to follow the midden into an extension.

Test 3 was a 1 x 1 m unit placed closer to the back door of the house. It presents a similar profile to Test 2, with a similar evaluation.

Test 4 was a 1 x 1 m unit placed as a gesture of frustration in the side yard, west and a little south of the house, in an area surrounded by outbuildings. A loamy topsoil was not productive of artifacts.

Toward the end of the testing, we also excavated a series of postholes around the sides and back of the house, looking for archaeological deposits, following a method established at Whitehaven and the Moore house. No deposits more substantial than those in the test units were identified.

In sum, the Curtis-Sullivan House was about the dullest historic site I have ever tested. It is remarkably free of informative archaeological deposits. It is not clear why there is no midden around the house, but it seems unlikely that further excavation will answer the question. There
must be occupational debris somewhere nearby from the nineteenth century, perhaps in a dump away from the house, but overgrown conditions around the lot make other projects much more inviting. It would be interesting to see if the twin house is equally free of midden, but we have not had an opportunity to pursue that yet.

David Morrill House

The David Morrill House is located about two miles west of Lowes, in northern Graves County. It is situated on a terrace of Wilson Creek. It was built in the 1850s by an ancestor of the present owner, David Morrill. There was a 1950s brick addition across the back (west side). Mr. Morrill was planning construction to add onto the back and south side of the house, and kindly granted permission to do some test excavations before construction began. The mid-nineteenth century construction date of the house suggested that is would be a valuable comparative study to the Whitehaven, Moore House, Tilghman House and Curtis-Sullivan House projects.

We excavated five test units at the Morrill House, mainly targeting areas that would be within the proposed construction zone in the back. We placed Test 5 to the south of the house.

Test 1 was a 2 x 2 m unit off the southwest corner of the house. The unit penetrated a midden/topsoil zone and then a dense zone of brick rubble that appeared to be a collapsed wall. A neighbor who visited the excavation said that there had been a brick wing attached to the back of the house, which had fallen down, and I think that the brick pile must have belonged to that wing.

The most interesting historic artifact of the excavation came from this unit: a shield nickel. The coin is too worn to retain a legible date, but this coin, the first nickel 5-cent piece, was minted only during the period 1866-1883. I’m sorry I don’t have a photograph of it yet.
Test 2 was a 1 x 2 m unit placed near the northwest corner of the house. The soils here were a midden/topsoil, which contained a number of relatively modern flower pot fragments. Unexpectedly, we also recovered a chipped stone biface fragment and a sand-tempered potsherd. The only feature identified in the subsoil was a shallow trench of indeterminate function.

Test 3, also a 1 x 2 m unit, was placed near the garden, an area that Mr. Morrill suggested had been a detached kitchen. The profile here was similar to that of Test 2, the topsoil/midden being even shallower. We recovered a corner-notched projectile point near the base of the deposit. We extended the unit 1 m north, designating the extension Test 4, in hopes of finding more of the prehistoric material, but did not find anything. We would have extended more westerly, looking for the kitchen, but Mr. Morrill seemed to think that taking out a chunk of his wife’s flower garden was not the best idea.

Test 5 was a 1 x 2 m unit placed 11-12 m south of the house, taking a chance on finding an outbuilding visible in an old photograph in Mr. Morrill’s collection. We recovered a small chipped stone projectile point but no evidence of an outbuilding. The soil profile was essentially similar to those of the other tests.

The artifacts from the Morrill House have been washed but not yet catalogued. No analysis is possible at this time. My preliminary impressions are that the scatter of domestic artifacts--ceramics, glassware--is quite scanty. As at the Curtis-Sullivan house, it is possible that most of the debris from the nineteenth-century occupation is contained in a dump somewhere nearby.

The corner-notched point and the sand-tempered sherd may indicate an Early Woodland period occupation, but there is little indication of a substantial prehistoric site.

**Summary**
It’s kind of hard to sum these up, since I haven’t done any real analysis. I honestly don’t think there’s much analysis to do at the Curtis-Sullivan house. The catalog lists 116 sherds and 265 pieces of glass, but most of the sherds are crumbs and the glass splinters of window glass. There just wasn’t much here to find.

The most useful contribution Curtis-Sullivan can make is probably to a longitudinal study of the gravel driveway. This sounds flippant, but I have actually given it some thought. I have excavated examples of quite a few gravel pavements. At Wickliffe Mounds, we have a gravel driveway from the 1950s, and also one from the 1930s--note the difference in substantial construction. There’s a gravel driveway from Whitehaven. There’s a gravel pavement at the base of the Tilghman House deposit. I even have an eighteenth-century Chesapeake Bay version, made of oyster shell rather than gravel. If I’m ever really desperate for a paper topic, here’s a comparative study in the making.

The Morrill house has a more substantial midden, and I hope will repay further analysis. With any luck, I’ll be able to report on this project further in an upcoming conference. the Morrill house site also has a prehistoric component, possibly Early Woodland, but we saw no indication of any substantial or coherent prehistoric deposit.

Before I close, I’d like to invite you all to take a look at two of the houses I’ve mentioned in passing, since both are pretty handy here in Paducah. The Whitehaven mansion, built about 1860, is now the tourist welcome center off exit 7 of I-24, and many of you may have noticed it coming in. This is what it looked like when I first saw it. I’m not sure what the tour schedule is on weekends, but if you have time, it’s worth a walk around the grounds to see what a fine restoration job was accomplished.
The Tilghman House is on 7th and Broadway in Paducah. It’s hard to realize now, but this was right on the edge of town during the Civil War. It was built in the 1850s for Lloyd Tilghman, who became a Confederate general and was killed at Vicksburg. It is owned by a group affiliated with the local chapter of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, who are trying to raise money for restoration.