

Chapter 10

New Philadelphia National Historic Landmark Designation

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Introduction

More than one and a half million properties are listed in the National Register of Historic Places; all are worthy of preservation for the stories they tell of our country and its people. Less than 2,500 of these historical and archeological sites are designated National Historic Landmarks (NHL), recognition reserved for sites deemed *exceptional* illustrations of our nation's rich heritage (National Park Service 2011). New Philadelphia, Illinois, designated a National Historic Landmark in 2009, ranks among these elite cultural treasures. This chapter focuses on New Philadelphia's National Historic Landmark nomination and designation qualifications; the NHL nomination process; a brief discussion of national preservation; and the implications of NHL status for New Philadelphia.

Developed as a Master of Applied Anthropology (MAA) project under the direction of Paul Shackel of the University of Maryland, I referred to and incorporated into the nomination archaeology reports, the National Register of Historic Places nomination form, atlases, doctoral dissertations, personal conversations with land owners and local residents, consultations with archaeologists, primary and secondary sources relating to the significant archaeological and historical themes associated with New Philadelphia, scholarly journals, internet resources, and the advice and guidance of my MAA chairman and committee members.

Once completed, the NHL nomination form, images, maps and supporting documents were submitted to the MAA committee for review. Erika Martin Seibert of the National Park Service (NPS) National Register and National Historic Landmark programs and Barbara Little of the NPS Archeology program, mentors for and MAA project committee members, along with committee chairman Shackel, dedicated countless hours developing, reviewing, advising and editing the nomination form. Vergil Noble of the National Park Service (NPS) Midwest Regional Office contributed valuable insight and advice throughout the nomination process. The nomination was then submitted for peer review to Timothy Baumann and Margaret C. Wood.

Requests by the proponents of the nomination for letters supporting New Philadelphia's NHL designation were sent to area residents, McWorter family members, descendants of New Philadelphia residents, academics, New Philadelphia property owners, members of the archaeology team, New Philadelphia Association members, as well as local, state and national political officials. Fifty-four supporters, including then U.S. Senator Barack Obama, submitted letters advocating NHL status for New Philadelphia (see Figure 10.1).

¹ New Philadelphia Association.

My name is Patricia McWorter, a Great Great Grand daughter of Frank and Lucy McWorter, and I rise to speak for and represent my family. We are so very pleased to be here helping the nation embrace its true self, something we have always known in our family, but now you will be enabling us to share and develop this story as part of the official history of the country. We thank you for this long overdue public recognition.

First and foremost I want to say that the importance of Frank and Lucy's accomplishments, specifically the founding and development of the abolitionist town of New Philadelphia, is about our family and all of the town's descendants, but it is also about Illinois and the entire United States. It's a message we can send to the world.

This story takes us back to the time of the birth of Frank and Lucy McWorter as slaves in the 18th century at the time of the founding of this country, (1771 and 1777). There have been some African Americans who have had their voices heard from the slave experience. Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Phyllis Wheatley, and Nat Turner, but there are so many, many more coming to the fore. The McWorter – New Philadelphia legacy is one of those voices.

Now, over 150 years since the death of Frank McWorter we stand here today reflecting on the meaning of his life and the town of New Philadelphia. Everyone is clear that the political struggle against slavery brings up the name of President Abraham Lincoln. Everyone is also clear that the moral and cultural struggle over slavery brings up the name of Mark Twain. Lincoln lived and worked in Springfield, and Mark Twain did the same across the river in Hannibal, Missouri. But where is the voice of the African American. We are fortunate to be able to call the name of Frank McWorter who gives us the chance to learn from the agency of an African American

Frank McWorter demonstrates the possibility of change based on what we can only call the birth of the American spirit for freedom. Born one year after the US won its national liberation from England, this slave worked under slavery, bought his pregnant wife first so that his fifth child would be born free, and in the end buying 16 family members including himself.

The town of New Philadelphia was an example of abolitionism at work, the sharing of a community by whites and Blacks, both as neighbors and as members of the same family. This was their lifestyle less than 20 miles from slavery. These were proud and noble people who were living up to the American dream in spite of what shape America was in at that time.

Our future is in the past. New Philadelphia is a key to the future of this country. The McWorters and the town of New Philadelphia were about freedom:

They assisted slaves running to freedom – “get to that New Philadelphia and one of those McWorter boys will give you a horse, a pair of shoes and guide you to Canada and freedom.” – So goes our family oral history

Grandchildren fought in the Civil War as part of the Union Army, Infantry 38th Regiment, United States Colored Infantry (Squire McWorter, 1846 – 1915)

But most important of all is that they lived free in Illinois and are a beacon light for all to see that the American possibility is a great challenge for all of us to live up to. We are strengthened by the memory of New Philadelphia.

One can read the testimony in the Pike County History of 1880 to see that the story has always been part of the local Illinois history. Now is the time for this to officially become part of the national narrative, part of our collective story. Frank McWorter and New Philadelphia are about what a Black man accomplished, what an abolitionist town accomplished, and what hard work and sacrifice for family, for freedom for all, can lead to even under the most adverse of conditions. Isn't this the message we need to send today, to ourselves and the entire world that this is what this country strives to be about when we are at our best.

As a family we are committed to working with the New Philadelphia Association and the governmental organizations from the federal, state, county and local levels to make this a site of national heritage that we can all learn from and be proud of for years to come.

Thank you.

Approved by the Landmarks Committee, the nomination was then heard at the larger, full National Park System Advisory Board meeting and recommendations were made to the Secretary of the Interior for designation. After reviewing the documentation, Secretary of the Interior, Dirk Kempthorne, designated New Philadelphia a National Historic Landmark on January 16, 2009.

Archaeological Significance – The Basis for National Register of Historic Places Listing and National Historic Landmark Designation

Once a thriving community where townsfolk labored at a variety of occupations, such as merchant, shoemaker, cabinetmaker, teacher, wheelwright, blacksmith, doctor, farmer and farm laborer (see [Chapter 2](#), “Background History”), today New Philadelphia is an archaeological site. No original buildings or structures are visible above ground, but the site possesses excellent archaeological integrity. New Philadelphia’s historical and archaeological significance was recognized in 2005 by inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) for its potential to yield information important to history or prehistory under National Register Criterion D.



Figure 10.2. Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne designated New Philadelphia a National Historic Monument on January 16, 2009 (Photograph by Charlotte King).

However, the site is also recognized at a higher level than the National Register. It was designated a National Historic Landmark (see Figure 10.2). New Philadelphia qualified as an NHL under the NHL Program's Criterion 6 for archaeological sites

That have yielded or may be likely to yield information of major scientific importance by revealing new cultures, or by shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States. Such sites are those which have yielded, or which may reasonably be expected to yield, data affecting theories, concepts, and ideas to a major degree. (National Park Service 1999:11)

Archaeological investigations conducted at the site since 2002 confirmed that findings at New Philadelphia may encourage new research trends in historical archaeology; provide a better understanding of daily life in multi-racial communities of the era; and provide insight into social relationships through material evidence (King 2008).

The Historic Sites Act, 1935

Rooted in the Antiquities Act of 1906, The Historic Sites Act of 1935 amplified the government's determination to preserve and protect sites deemed *nationally* significant for their inspiration and benefit to our country and subsequently inspired the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which established the National Register of Historic Places, recognizing historic properties important to the histories of states and communities (King 2005; National Park Service 1999:8; Shull 1994:1)

In addition to bolstering the legal foundation for conservation, the Historic Sites Act of 1935 mandated the Secretary of the Interior, as director of the National Park Service, to identify National Historic Landmarks, properties that are extraordinary representations or commemorations of our country's history. NHLs are insights into historically influential people, trends, events, concepts and accomplishments that created our history and shaped our country's character.

National Historic Landmark Qualifications

National Historic Landmark criteria are more stringent than those of the National Register of Historic Places and most frequently identified with one or more of 34 NHL theme studies, such as westward expansion, architecture, science or education (National Park Service 1991:68-70). These theme studies provide a context and evaluation tools for properties associated with a nationally significant theme in American history.

National Historic Landmark Criteria

The National Park Service has specified the following criteria for National Historic Landmarks (National Park Service 1999:11):

The quality of national significance is ascribed to districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States in history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture and that possess a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, and:

- *Criterion 1 – That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to, and are identified with, or that outstandingly represent, the broad national patterns of United States history and from which an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained, or*

- *Criterion 2 – That are associated importantly with the lives of persons nationally significant in the history of the United States; or*
- *Criterion 3 – That represent some great idea or ideal of the American people, or*
- *Criterion 4 – That embody the distinguishing characteristics or an architectural type specimen exceptionally valuable for the study of a period, style, or method of construction, or that represent a significant, distinctive, and exceptional entity whose components may lack individual distinction, or*
- *Criterion 5 - That are composed of integral parts of the environment and sufficiently significant by reason of historical association or artistic merit to warrant individual recognition but collectively compose an entity of exceptional historical or artistic significance, or outstandingly commemorate or illustrate a way of life or culture, or*
- *Criterion 6 - That have yielded or may be likely to yield information of major scientific importance by revealing new cultures, or by shedding light upon periods of occupation of large areas of the United States. Such sites are those which have yielded, or which may reasonably be expected to yield, data affecting theories, concepts, and ideas to a major degree.*

The archaeological resources found within the boundaries of New Philadelphia were deemed to possess a high potential to yield information of major scientific importance to our understandings of free, interracial, rural communities and for possibilities the town site possesses to affect theories, concepts, methods, and ideas in archaeology (King 2008).

Analysis of artifacts recovered during excavations conducted from 2004 through 2006 revealed little visual difference in the material culture of African-American and European-American households; however, small tokens that may be associated with the ancient game of mancala were found throughout the town site (Shackel 2011:158-160). Mancala originated in the Middle East about 4,000 years ago and was popular in many regions of Africa. Evidence found on plantations in association with living facilities of enslaved Africans and African Americans indicates that captive Africans brought the tradition to the United States (Townshend 1979:794-796).

The discovery of gaming pieces throughout the New Philadelphia town site suggests that cultural interactions occurred among the town's African-American and European-American residents. The findings indicate that the conventional practice of searching for cultural markers to identify ethnic or cultural groups does not apply to an integrated setting, such as New Philadelphia (Shackel 2011:159-160). These findings, and others, may revolutionize the way cultural and social scientists study race within communities and provide an opportunity to move beyond traditional research methods.

Finding mancala gaming pieces on sites associated with both African American and European Americans at New Philadelphia confirms the need to move beyond searching for cultural markers. Conventional historical archaeological investigations have been concerned with sites associated with the elite, colonial settlements and sites related to the founding of our nation. New Philadelphia's excellent archaeological integrity can potentially provide nationally significant information about the lifeways and cultural interaction of formerly enslaved individuals and subsequent free-born generations who struggled for autonomy and economic freedom.

National Historic Landmark Themes

The archaeological site at New Philadelphia contributes to two themes identified by the National Park Service: "Peopling Places: Westward expansion and the movement of people to the new lands;" and "Creating Social Institutions and Movements."

Peopling Places: Westward expansion and the movement of people to the new lands

The size of the United States of America doubled after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and, after the war with Mexico in 1848, the country's east to west borders spanned the continent, from the Atlantic to Pacific Oceans, south to the Rio Grande River, and north to the 49th Parallel. The United States Government provided incentives to encourage settlement of the vast country by offering land on the frontier at affordable prices or fulfillment of a requirement to put the land to productive use.

Population pressure caused by increased immigration in the early nineteenth century and the economic downturns of 1818 and 1837 also motivated settlement of the country's western frontier. Removal of Native Americans from the region following the Black Hawk Wars of 1832, and links to eastern markets by way of canals and steamship transportation and travel further encouraged settlement.

Settlers, attracted by the economic opportunities of the western frontier, spurred avid town planning activity in Illinois from 1835 to 1837, but only a few of the plats became actual towns and even fewer survived. By 1837 the cost of transportation improvements led to a nationwide economic downturn that stunted town planning (Davis 1998:232). By 1840 only about half of the towns founded around 1836 still existed. New Philadelphia was one of 126 towns laid out in 1836 (Walters 1983-1984b:332-333, 340) and one of the few to survive the economic crisis.

New Philadelphia seemed primed for success. It was located on fertile prairie land suitable for agriculture. Land surrounding the town straddled both timberland and prairie, crucial elements for town locations (Walters 1983-1984a:337). Accessible timberland provided material needed to construct dwellings, fences, wagons, implements of many types, and to provide fuel. The nascent town was near major country crossroads. Proximity to the Mississippi River provided access to the efficient cargo capacity and speed of steamboats that navigated inland waters. The town's location between the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers promised access to the proposed Illinois and Michigan Canal and a link to distant eastern markets.

Some towns, like New Philadelphia, that survived the economic downturn begun in 1837 succumbed when the railroad passed them by later in the nineteenth century. Historian James Davis explains, “railroads crippled towns they bypassed” (Davis 1998:377; see also Walters 1983-1984a:340). Chapman wrote of New Philadelphia in 1880 that, “At one time it had great promise, but the railroad passing it a mile distant, and other towns spring up, has killed it” (Charles Chapman and Co. 2006 [1880]:217,740-741). Many townspeople moved away by the turn of the century, but a few families continue to make their home in New Philadelphia into the 1940s (Burdick n.d.).

Creating Social Institutions and Movements—New Philadelphia’s Ties to the Underground Railroad

While studies of the town site can add to our knowledge and understanding about the westward expansion of our nation, oral histories tell us about the town’s involvement in the abolitionist movement to end slavery. For example, Solomon McWorter’s son John reported his father’s involvement in assisting runaway slaves to freedom, and family descendant Ellen McWorter Yates recalled that the original McWorter home included a cellar room used to hide fugitive slaves (Walker 1983:149). Local resident Elmo Waters remembered that a rock cellar underneath a building across from the town was associated with the Underground Railroad (Waters 2004). Mr. Waters’s recollection may refer to the original McWorter home, which was located directly north of the town site.

Historian and McWorter descendant Juliet E. K. Walker relates that Frank McWorter’s son, young Frank, escaped slavery in 1826 and found refuge in Canada. The elder McWorter negotiated with slaveholder Obediah Denham, exchanging his lucrative saltpeter manufacturing operation located in Danville, Kentucky, for young Frank’s freedom in 1829. Once manumission legalities were completed, young Frank returned to the United States a free man. According to Walker, Squire, and other family members traveled to Canada to help enslaved individuals find freedom (Walker 1983:53, 61,149).

Pike County, where New Philadelphia is located, was reported to be part of the Underground Railroad network. According to one account, “Pike County had a few stations on what was known as the Underground Railroad in slavery times. Many honored old citizens were often severely censured because they sheltered and fed runaway negroes” (Massie 1906:132).

Ruby Duke, area resident, recalled her grandmother’s accounts that a wagon used to carry produce to the railroad depot for transport to markets was specially outfitted to hide escaping enslaved individuals. “They had a box built under the bottom of the wagon and if a slave come in on the train, then they would hide them in it and take them back to the farm” (Duke 2004). Mrs. Duke remembered that fugitive slaves sometimes worked in her grandmother’s garden and that the family dog barked

At those posses coming up this little dirt lane...they would take off and run to the Creek. Down by the creek there was a big cave. Others would get into a box that was under the nest where the chickens laid their eggs. Then, my grandparents would let a chicken out and that dog would kill the chicken. So, when the bounty

hunters got there, that's what they thought was all the commotion....My great-grandpa never did lose one of the blacks then, even though they had a lot people looking. (Duke 2004)

National Historic Landmark Dedication Ceremony

To celebrate the designation of New Philadelphia as an NHL, Illinois Congressman Aaron Schock of the Eighteenth Congressional District presided over a dedication ceremony held at the site on August 23, 2010 (see Figure 10.3). The event was attended by many area residents and New Philadelphia members who generously provided homemade refreshments for the attendees (Pease 2010:5).



Figure 10.3 Congressman Aaron Schock dedicated New Philadelphia National Historic Monument on August 23, 2010 (Photograph by Charlotte King).

Additional Preservation Efforts

NHL status stimulated a great deal of interest in New Philadelphia. For example, The Archaeological Conservancy purchased 9.14 acres of the historic town site, an area documented as the center of the town's activities and the location of extensive household and commercial remains (Archaeological Conservancy 2009).

Many private individuals demonstrated their support to preserve New Philadelphia with monetary contributions. Organizations, such as the 1772 Foundation, also funded preservation efforts (New Philadelphia Association 2011).

The Illinois Rural Electric Cooperative recently pledged \$7,500 a year for 10 years to finance improvements to the site. Local area residents, businesses, and a community college are collaborating too construct an informational visitor kiosk, develop a self-guided walking trail and plant native wildflowers along the historic site's perimeter (Husar 2012).

National Park Service Feasibility Study

National parks, regarded as the nation's cultural crown jewels, originally established as "an area maintained by the Federal Government and dedicated and set apart for the benefit and enjoyment of the people" were soon recognized for their educational opportunities. Interpretation of a park's educational, inspirational and esthetic characteristics became integral features of park administration duties and responsibilities (National Park Service 2003).

It must be noted that of the 397 parks in the National Park system, only seventeen parks, or 4.3 percent, are predominantly associated with African Americans and African-American history (Moyer 2012: pers. comm.). As a unit of the National Park system, New Philadelphia would be an inspiration and an educational tool to exemplify themes common to all Americans as a place of freedom, self-determination and opportunity and contribute to a more accurate account of our country's history.

The compelling story of New Philadelphia captured the interest of Congressman Aaron Schock and Senators Roland Burris and Richard Durbin when approached by proponents of the site. The lawmakers agreed to sponsor and introduce legislation authorizing the NPS to conduct a Special Resources Study required to assess New Philadelphia's qualifications to become a unit of the National Park Service. An act of Congress is required to authorize the study, which is designed to evaluate the site's national significance, feasibility and sustainability (Journal Courier 2010; Olson 2010; United States House of Representatives 2010; United States Senate 2010). The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee approved the proposed bill and referred the legislation to the full committee, however, Congress adjourned before a vote could be taken.

Subsequently, Congressman Schock and thirteen bi-partisan co-sponsors introduced legislation, H.R. 1563, to the House of Representatives in April 2011 (Dutton 2011; United States House of Representatives 2011). After months of persistent follow-up, Senator Durbin and Senator Mark Kirk introduced identical legislation, S 1902, to their colleagues in the United States Senate in

November 2011 (United States Senate 2011). The bills were referred to the House and Senate Energy and Natural Resources subcommittees, where they await consideration.

In keeping with the National Park Service policy, “The national-park system should possess variety, accepting the supreme in each of the various types and subjects of scenic, scientific, and historical importance” (National Park Service 2003) the New Philadelphia town site is a viable candidate for inclusion as a unit of the NPS. Research confirms that New Philadelphia is unique as “one of the few archeological NHLs that can explore the relationships between African Americans and European Americans – in a town platted by an African American during the early nineteenth century – in the Midwestern United States” (Martin Siebert 2005).

Conclusion

New Philadelphia represents more than the compelling story of Frank McWorter and his family’s pursuit of freedom, self-determination and economic opportunities. Long after the town site was abandoned, the story of New Philadelphia, its founder, its townspeople and the qualities they represent resonated among family members and the surrounding community who were determined to keep the town’s memory alive.

National Register and NHL status acknowledge that New Philadelphia allows social scientists an exceptional opportunity to explore the complex issues of race and racialization and focus on research questions with historical and contemporary implications. Findings at the site may cause a reconsideration of history as it is currently written and revolutionize research methods and approaches for a better understanding of the complicated dynamics that shaped American history.

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