Chapter 2
Background History

Kathryn Fay[1] with contributions from Paul Shackel[2]

Early Settlement of Illinois

Most of the early European settlers of Illinois came from states in the southeastern portion of the country, and they typically established communities by waterways where they had easy access to transportation, power sources, and food. The general settlement pattern of the area which would become Illinois went from south to north, with Chicago beginning as a relatively remote trading post. The French were the original colonial occupiers of the area, constructing many forts, missions, and trading posts throughout the Midwest region. Illinois was a valuable location in the French colonies, as it provided a somewhat central location for trade and defense.

The French lost their territorial claim to land in North America after the French and Indian War in the 1750s and 1760s, and control went officially to the British. Illinois was not nearly as central of a location for the British, as their primary colonies had already begun developing along the eastern coast of the continent. For the British, Illinois served as a buffer from Native American encroachment, even though some colonists continued to move west and challenge the land claims of the native groups.

After American independence, the new government set out to place some sense of order to the western lands they were fast acquiring. The Land Ordinance of 1785 created townships six miles square and aligned to the cardinal directions. Each township contained 36 sections, each one mile square and containing 640 acres. As a result, roadways often developed along section lines and crossed each other at right angles (Davis 1998:93–94). This new, ordered grid system helped to tame the western frontier by making it regular, measurable, and standardized. While encouraging self–government, the ordinance also ensured the same protections found in the Bill of Rights. While the ordinance proclaimed that three to five states should be developed from the Old Northwest Territory, it also stated that each territory needed 60,000 free people in order to seek statehood. Article 6 of the ordinance banned slavery and involuntary servitude, although there was an exception for French and Canadian settlers, as well as those who had sworn allegiance to Virginia (Davis1998:96).

Many of the early American settlements in Illinois developed around the established communities in the American Bottom such as Kaskaskia, Prairie du Rocher, and Cahokia (Alvord 1920). The European settlement of present day Illinois began at a relatively slow pace and access to familiar consumer goods was difficult. Material goods came to the western frontier from manufacturers in Pittsburgh, Wheeling, Cincinnati, and Louisville via the Ohio River. James Davis (1998:133) describes the material culture of early European/Euro-American settlers:

---

[1] University of Illinois.
[2] University of Maryland.

In southern Illinois and in other wooded regions log cabins were the norm for settlers. These pioneers ate at rough tables, some fashioned from bottom and side boards of discarded wagons. Benches and stools persisted for years. Chairs appeared only over time, and were reserved for esteemed household members and guests. Eating utensils were wooden or, at most, pewter. Few early households had silver or plate. Window glass, metal door hinges and locks and even nails were expensive and rare. Weapons, axes, and fireplace implements were the most common metallic objects. Settlers arrived with few clothes and imported even fewer, unlike eighteenth–century French Illinoisans, who enjoyed imported European clothes and fabrics. Hunting and trapping yielded hides, pelts, and skins for moccasins, boots, gloves, and britches, dresses, and other garments; much production occurred during winter's slack hours. Predators, though, continued to suppress wool production for decades after statehood.

In 1800, France won the Spanish Louisiana Territory and three years later sold it to the United States. This new acquisition allowed settlers on the American western frontier to have unimpeded access to the Mississippi River, New Orleans, and the Gulf of Mexico. New frontiers opened in terms of trade and migration and the large, mostly French trading town of St. Louis became a principal market for goods imported from the East Coast. After 1800, the steamboat greatly reduced shipping prices from the Gulf and along upriver routes (Davis 1998:118; Troen and Holt 1977:211). Trade with Native Americans also played a significant role in the exchange of goods (Mazrim 2002:13).


Figure 2.1. *Map of Illinois Territory, 1809-1818 (Sommers 1977).*

On February 3, 1809, Congress established the Territory of Illinois, which included modern day Illinois, Wisconsin, northern Minnesota, and the western Upper Peninsula of Michigan (see Figure 2.1). At the same time, Native Americans from the territory continued raiding new white settlements (Davis 1998:135). After the War of 1812, immigrants began a steady migration into the area. Many of the new residents were poorer European Americans from the southeastern and southwestern states.
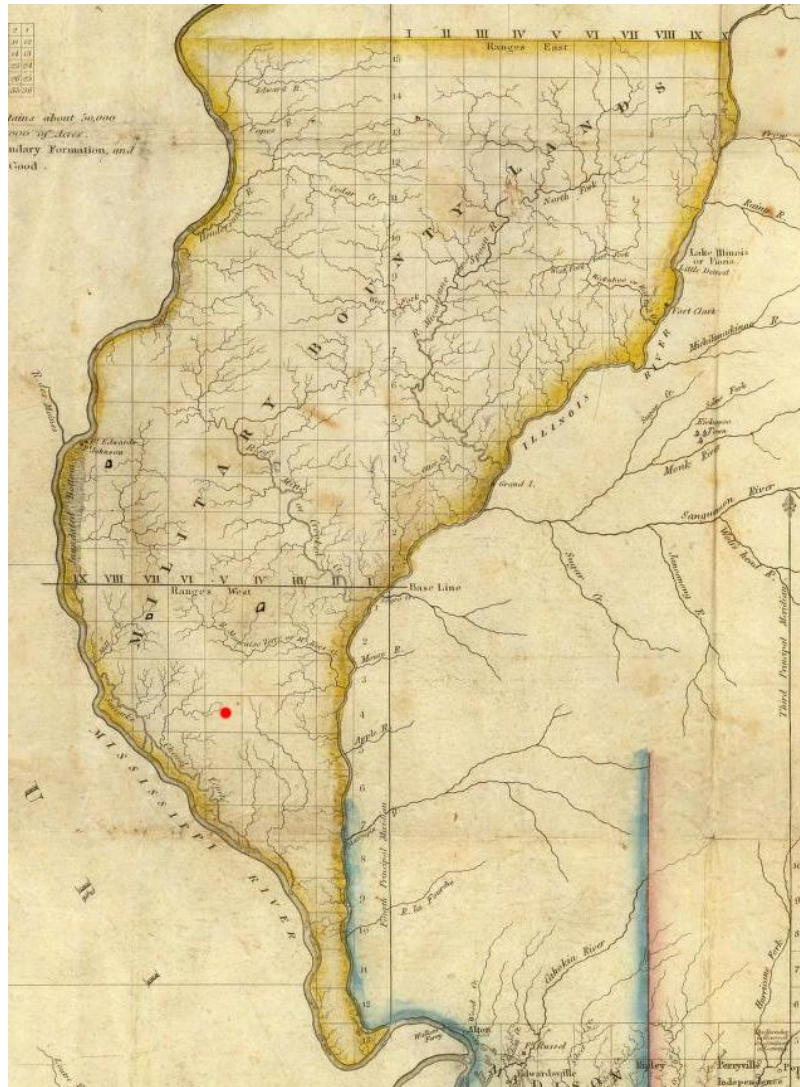
Figure 2.2. *1820 map of Military Bounty Land in western Illinois. Red dot shows approximate future location of New Philadelphia (Melish 1816).*

In 1817, Congress set aside 3.5 million acres known as the "Military Tract," and allotted 160 acre tracts to veterans in an area between the lower Illinois River and the Mississippi River (see Figure 2.2). Veterans also received back pay to help them move to the new region. The public could also purchase tracts of land at $2.00 per acre with only a small down payment. In 1820, the credit system was dismantled and the minimum parcel was reduced to 80 acres at a price of

$1.25 per acre. The government later reduced the minimum purchase to 40 acres, which is the amount of land Frank McWorter initially purchased in Illinois (Mazrim 2002:25).

The territory soon became a battleground between proslavery Southerners and abolitionist Northerners (Davis 1998:19). Six of the first seven Illinois governors came from slave states and they influenced the abolitionist issue. According to Davis (1998:20), no other state north of the Ohio River had as many slaves nor came as close as Illinois to providing constitutional protection for slavery. Many of the new settlers from the South supported the existing institution of slavery (Davis 1998:161).

When Illinois became a state in 1818 it had about 40,000 residents, with over one third of them living in the greater American Bottom. Some of the early nineteenth–century immigrants brought enslaved persons with them into Illinois. In 1818, most of the slaves north of the Ohio River resided in Illinois in the American Bottom as well as another area known as the "salines." The salines area, named for the saltwater springs present in the terrain, produced salt for harvest and export. Enslaved laborers retrieved the water and boiled it down to extract the salt. By the early 1820s, the salines produced $11,000.00 a year in tax revenue, or about one-fourth of the state's expenses. The 1818 Constitution allowed enslaved laborers to be imported into Gallatin and Jackson Counties for one year in order to work at these facilities. The enterprise was required to cease operations by 1825 (Simeone 2000:25).

Political leaders reached a compromise in order to minimize the debate on slavery, a strategy influenced by the likelihood that Congress would reject a proslavery state constitution.

While the majority of the early settlers came from the South, Illinois's Constitution was based on articles used in the constitutions of New York, Ohio, and Kentucky. The new Constitution stated that enslaved persons owned by French citizens could be retained in bondage. Indentured servitude, whereby African Americans were contracted to work for decades, was acceptable under the state's Constitution. The offspring of indentured servants had to serve until they became 21 years of age for males, and 18 years of age for females. Enslaved people could also be brought into the salines until 1825 (Davis 1998:165).

Slavery proponents called for a constitutional convention to revise Illinois's Constitution in order to allow chattel slavery. In 1818 through the early 1820s Illinoisans faced an economic depression and many believed that they suffered because Missouri now gained a steady flow of Southern immigrants because it was admitted as a slave state as a result of the 1820 Missouri Compromise. In addition, an epidemic of yellow fever had hit most of the American Bottom. Over half the population died in Atlas, the county seat of Pike County (Simeone 2000:50). Illinois was a northern state with a majority of its citizens from the Upland South area of the United States, which included Kentucky and Tennessee, as the principal sources of immigrants. However, by the early 1820s Northerners began their steady influx into the new state, thereby beginning to sway the majority of public opinion against the idea of chattel slavery.

The influx of Northerners brought new customs to the area. Previously, business deals were typically sealed with a handshake. As one former Tennessean wrote, once the "Yankees" infiltrated the area they introduced a "system of accounts and obligations" which was looked upon by the Southern community with great distrust. The Yankees used words and writing that

intimidated "the white folks" (Buck 1917:291). It is interesting to note that she constructed whiteness as including Southerners, while others, including European American Northerners, were not included in that category.

Many of the early settlers flocked to the American Bottom, but periodic flooding meant that it was susceptible to outbreaks of malaria. This problem, many of the American Bottom settlers believed, could be solved by introducing slave labor, much like their French predecessors had done. Post-statehood, plans arose for a limited slavery system whereby the Illinois General Assembly would allow the importation of enslaved people to clear the land and build drainage canals. After a 10–year period these enslaved laborers would be shipped down the Mississippi River and sent to Africa. This proposal met stiff resistance and new debates arose about the future of slavery in Illinois.

Generally, the new Illinois residents who were typically poor, white, and from the South, felt threatened by the invasion of Northerners, and by free African Americans who would compete for similar resources. On August 2, 1824, in a referendum proposing the universal legalization of slavery, the proposal fell to defeat by a vote of 6,640 to 4,972. Pike County overwhelming voted against the referendum (23 for and 261 against) (Davis 1998:167). Generally, Southern settlers joined Northerners to voice their opinion against slavery. Eleven of the 18 abolitionist state legislators came from the South. However, the proslavery faction gained many seats and the control of the General Assembly. Illinoisans created a society that hampered the introduction of slavery, but nevertheless contained an implicit white supremacy. Black Codes passed in 1819 and 1829 restricted the rights of African Americans and discouraged their settlement in the state (Simeone 2000:157).

The 1830s served as one of the most speculative eras in Illinois land sales. The Blackhawk Wars ended in 1833, thus forfeiting the last Native American lands in Illinois. The era was characterized by wild speculation in the incorporation of towns that were platted from 1835 to 1837. Some town plans remained only on paper and others barely developed before they folded (Davis 1998:236).

Frank McWorter

The founding of the town of New Philadelphia in west–central Illinois by Frank McWorter, a freed African American, in 1836 is both a compelling and heroic story. Frank was born near the Pacolet River in South Carolina, to his mother Juda, with his father most likely being his master. In 1795, when he was about 18 years old, his master George McWhorter relocated him to the Kentucky frontier in Pulaski County. George McWhorter later purchased additional properties in Kentucky and Tennessee and left Frank behind to manage the farm. Historian Juliet Walker's (1983) biography of Free Frank describes that while he was enslaved he also established a saltpeter mining operation in Kentucky. Frank married Lucy in 1799, who was also enslaved in Pulaski County. He became the father of four children while still enslaved: Judy, Sallie, Frank and Solomon. In 1815 George McWhorter died without making any provisions for Frank's manumission.

In 1817 Frank had saved enough money to purchase his wife's freedom for $800.00. Since Lucy was pregnant at the time, this action ensured that their son Squire would be born free. Two years later Frank was able to purchase his freedom from George McWhorter's heirs for the same sum. The document that declared his freedom stated that, "a certain Negro man named Frank, a yellow man," was to be liberated. His former owners signed the document on September 13, 1819, in Pulaski County, Kentucky (Matteson 1964:2). In the 1820 Federal Census he is listed as "Free Frank." He continued to live in Pulaski County while he speculated on and expanded his saltpeter operations near the town of Danville. After he and his wife were free, they had three additional children: Squire, Commodore, and Lucy Ann (Matteson 1964:1; Walker 1983:28-48).

In 1829 Frank traded his saltpeter enterprise for the freedom of his son, Frank, Jr. In 1830 Free Frank decided to leave Kentucky and he acquired a quarter section (160 acres) of land from Dr. Eliot, sight unseen, in Pike County, Illinois. Free Frank, Lucy and their freed children arrived in Hadley Township in the spring of 1831 after spending the preceding winter in Greene County, Illinois. The McWorters were the first settlers in that township, and other settlers finally joined them two years later (Charles Chapman and Co. 2006 [1880]:216-217).

Frank left three children behind, along with 11 other family members, their spouses and children. Over the next 25 years he succeeded in purchasing their freedom (Walker 1983). During his tenure in Illinois, McWorter acquired over 500 more acres. He grew wheat, corn, and oats, and on his farm he raised cattle, hogs, horses, mules, and a mixed variety of poultry (Matteson 1964:5). By 1835 Free Frank purchased his son Solomon's freedom for $550.00 (Walker 1983:89).

Several citizens from Kentucky and Illinois vouched for Free Frank's character in order to pass a legislative act to change his name to Frank McWorter, taking the surname of his former owner while changing the spelling of that name. The act also gave him the right to "sue and be sued, plead and be impleaded, purchase and convey both real and personal property in said last mentioned name" (Illinois State Archives 1837b:175). The law also stated that his children shall take the name of their father. The Illinois legislative act made note that Frank had laid out the town in 1836 "which he calls Philadelphia, and understanding and believing that the said Frank has laid out the town intending to apply the proceeds of the sales for the purchase of his children yet remaining slaves, two young women about twenty years of age – The said town is in handsome country, undoubtedly healthy" (Illinois State Archives 1837a).

New Philadelphia was at times referred to as Philadelphia and was platted with 144 lots, each measuring 60 x 120 ft. Each block typically contained eight lots, and the two main thoroughfares, Broad Way and Main Street were platted as 80 ft. wide, secondary streets were 60 ft. wide, and alleys measured 15 ft. wide (See Figure 2.3). While African Americans developed towns before 1836 (Cha-Jua 2000), New Philadelphia is the earliest known town founded and platted by an African American. Both European Americans and African Americans purchased property in New Philadelphia and moved to the community.
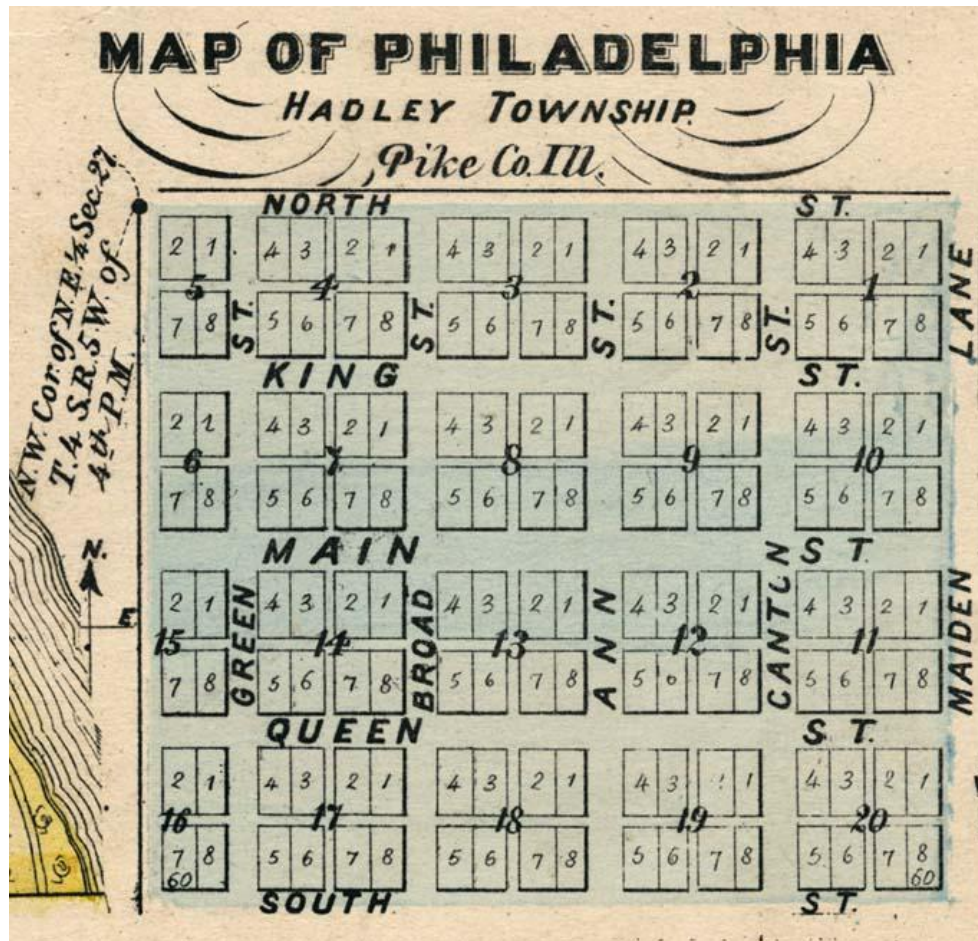
Figure 2.3. *1872 Plat Map of New Philadelphia (Ensign 1872).*

Frank died in 1854 at 77 years of age. Frank McWorter not only purchased the freedom of himself, his wife, his four children, and two of his grandchildren before he died, but, also his will provided for the purchase of the family members who were then still in slavery (grandchildren and great-grandchildren), freeing sixteen people in total. His two sons Solomon and Commodore carried out the provisions of his will (Matteson 1964:10; Walker 1983).

New Philadelphia: Frontier Town

New Philadelphia existed as a small rural town through the 1880s until its virtual abandonment in the early twentieth century. The 1850 federal census indicates that the town had 58 residents living in 11 households. The town had a Baptist preacher, a cabinet maker, a laborer, two merchants, two shoemakers, a wheelwright and four farmers. About one quarter of the town's residents were born in Illinois. The federal census listed racial categories, including "white," "black," and "mulatto." The 1850 census lists 20 (35%) residents as mulatto, 2 (3%) individuals as black, while the majority (36 individuals, 62%) were categorized as white. The State of Illinois had less than 1% of its residents listed as black. Twenty residents (37%) were born in the Great Lakes region, 13 individuals (22%) came from Illinois, and 11 people (19%) came from

New England and the Northeast region. Some of the prominent town residents included McWorter, Burdick, Clark, and Hadsell (King 2006).

Five years later, the 1855 state census lists 81 town residents, an increase of 40%. The 18 African–American residents accounted for only 22% of the town's population, and the rest (n=63) were listed as white. The 1860 census shows an increase of the town to 114 individuals. A blacksmith, a carpenter, a physician, a schoolteacher along with 13 farmers resided in the town proper. Ninety–three (82%) of the residents were listed as white and 21 individuals were recorded as black or mulatto. The State of Illinois had less than 1/2% of its population listed as black. No doubt, the legislative restrictions enacted in 1819 and 1829 prohibited any real growth of the African American population in Illinois.

A large proportion (43.9%) of the town came from other Illinois communities, and 24 people (21%) were born in the Northeast portion of the United States, including states like Maryland, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania (King 2006). New Philadelphia's population peaked by 1865 with a total of 160 individuals residing in 29 households. The census indicates that 112 (70%) individuals were categorized as white and 48 (35%) were of African American descent, indicating a twofold increase in the number of African–American residents over that recorded on the census just five years earlier. Place of origin was not recorded in this state census, but perhaps the influx of African Americans was a result of the northern migration of formerly enslaved persons leaving plantations. Only 9 of the 29 households reported owning any livestock compared with 14 of the 15 households a decade earlier. Prominent families included the Burdick, Hadsell, Clark, Cartwright (Kirtwright), and McWorter households. The Bower, Kellum, Vaughn (Vond), Baker, Johnson, and Shipman families also lived in the area (King 2006).

Throughout the history of the town all of the lots were sold, and many were sold up to a dozen times. The high turn–over rate of lot ownership is noticeable especially in the early settlement of the town. This trend may indicate that while the town survived as a small rural community serving the immediate hinterlands, many others prospected on town land with the hope of making significant amounts of money if a railroad line was laid adjacent to the town. There are many cases of small town speculations in Illinois in the 1850s where properties adjacent to the railroad doubled in value, and in some cases the values increased by as much nine times the original price (Davis 1998).

In 1853 the Pike County Rail Road Company, made up of prominent farmers and businessmen in the area, met to create a route for a new railroad line. The interests of New Philadelphia were not represented on the board. The route for the Hannibal & Naples Railroad came from the east and if it continued in a direct westerly direction it would have intersected New Philadelphia. Instead, the railroad company routed the line to New Salem and Hadley Station, north of New Philadelphia. In order to reach New Salem and Hadley Station, the line looped north and around New Philadelphia (see Figure 2.4). When the line reached a point west of New Philadelphia it swung south to a point directly west of the town and it again ran in an east to west direction until it reached the town of Barry (Charles Chapman and Co. 2006 [1880]:904; Matteson 1964:9; Pike County Railroad Company 1853).
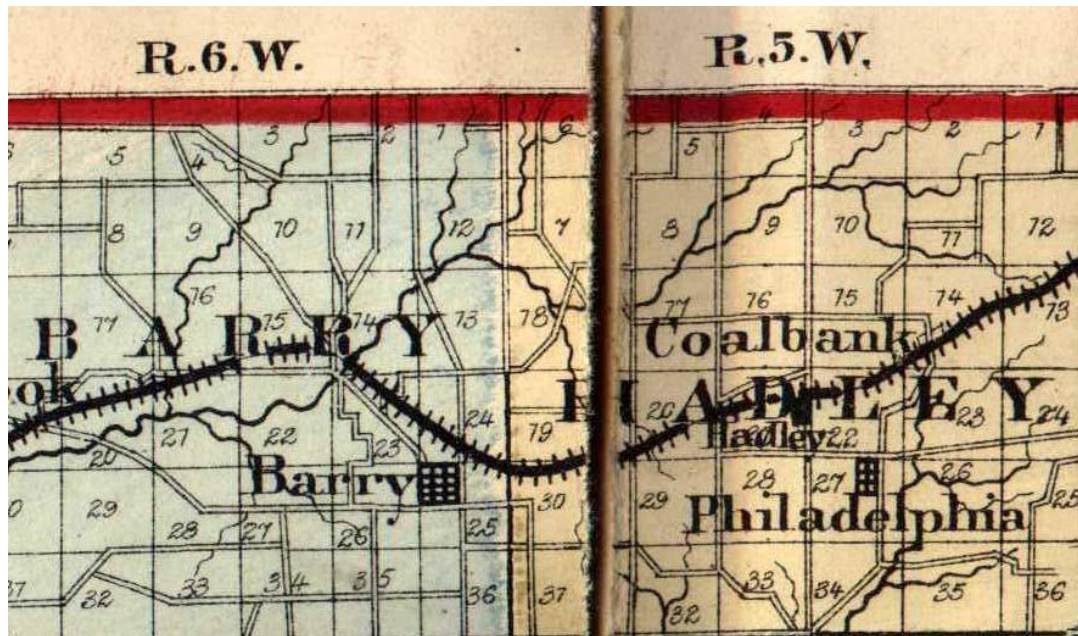
Figure 2.4. *Excerpt from 1875 Illinois Atlas showing railroad bypass of New Philadelphia (Warner and Beers 1875).*

The construction of the railroad across Pike County, from Valley City on the west bank of the Illinois River to Hannibal, Missouri, meant that purchasing consumer goods became more convenient and farmers had more outlets for their agricultural products. The railroad constructed a spur to Pittsfield, the county seat, shortly after its initial construction. Other railroad lines in subsequent years eventually connected the other sections of Pike County to larger regional markets. New Philadelphia's population decreased to about 123 residents by 1870. Some townspeople left for other opportunities west of the Mississippi River while others migrated to larger metropolitan areas.

Those classified as white continued to be the majority of the town (n=92, 75%) in 1870, while 25% (n=31) were listed as either black or mulatto. The Burdick, Clark, and Hadsell families continued to reside in the town. The town's workforce included one carpenter, two blacksmiths, a coal miner, three school teachers, a physician, a minister, three laborers, a seamstress, a shop worker and a speculator resided in the town along with farmers (King 2006).

By 1880, the number of residents in New Philadelphia fell to about 84 individuals (and 17 households), almost half of its size when compared to the 1865 state census. The town included 20 people employed in farming (farmers and farm hands) as well as a blacksmith, a school teacher, a storekeeper, two house servants, and nine general laborers. The majority of the residents (52, or 62%), were Illinois natives, and 13 individuals (14%) came from Ohio. The federal census listed 68 (73%) people as white; 22 (24%) as mulatto, and three residents (3%) were noted to be black. The routing of two main transportation arteries away from New Philadelphia severely hindered its growth. In 1880, Chapman (2006 [1880]:740–41) wrote, "At one time it had great promise, but the railroad passing it a mile distant, and other towns springing up, has killed it. At present there is not even a post office at the place."

The depopulation of New Philadelphia follows the trend for the rest of Pike County. While the county experienced rapid growth before the Civil War, expansion slowed in the 1870s and by the end of the century urban areas and western lands drew people away from Pike County (Smith and Bonath 1982:74-76). In 1885, the size and layout of New Philadelphia changed dramatically. Blocks 1, 10, 11, and 20, as well as the eastern half of Blocks 2, 9, 12, and 19, were declared vacant and no longer part of the town as the property was returned to agriculture. Canton Street and Maiden Lane were removed, and Queen Street became known as Stone Street. The platted land of the former town had shrunk from 42 acres to about 27.5 acres (Walker 1983).

Figure 2.5. *1939 Aerial photograph of the New Philadelphia area (United States Department of Agriculture 1939).*

By the early twentieth century only about a half dozen households remained in New Philadelphia. Throughout the twentieth century, several maps still designated the area of the former town site as Philadelphia or New Philadelphia. Oral histories of several former residents performed in the early 1960s indicated that a multi–racial community survived into the 1930s (Matteson 1964). The land was virtually abandoned by the 1930s with only the Burdick family remaining (see Figure 2.5).

References Cited

Alvord, Clarence Walworth
      1920   *The Illinois Country 1673-1818*. Springfield: Illinois Centennial Commission.

Buck, Solon Justice
      1917   *Illinois in 1818*. Springfield: Illinois Centennial Commission.

Cha-Jua, Sundiata Keita
      2000   *America's First Black Town, Brooklyn, Illinois 1830-1915*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Charles Chapman and Co.
      2006 [1880]   *History of Pike County, Illinois*. Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company.

Davis, James E.
      1998   *Frontier Illinois*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Ensign, D. W.
      1872   *Atlas Map of Pike County, Illinois*, p. 84. Davenport, IA: Andreas, Lyter & Co.

Illinois State Archives
      1837a A Bill entitled "An Act to change the name of Frank McWorter". Springfield: General Assembly Records, Illinois State Archives Enrolled Laws No. 2031 HR No. 18, Box 48. On file, Illinois State Archives.

Illinois State Archives
      1837b Laws of the State of Illinois passed by the Tenth General Assembly, at their session Commencing December 5, 1836, and ending March 6, 1837. Vandalia, IL: William Walters, Public Printer.

King, Charlotte
      2006   Census Data for New Philadelphia. Electronic document, www.heritage.umd.edu.

Matteson, Grace E.
      1964   "Free Frank" McWorter and the "Ghost Town" of New Philadelphia Pike County, Illinois. Pittsfield, Illinois: Pike County Historical Society.

Mazrim, Robert
      2002   "Now Quite Out of Society:" Archaeology and Frontier Illinois. Essays and Excavation Reports. Volume Transportation Archaeological Bulletins No. 1. Urbana-Champaign: Illinois Department of Transportation, Department of Anthropology.

Melish, John
      1816   Map of Illinois Constructed from the Surveys in the General Land Office and Other Documents. Samuel Harrison, sct. Entered according to Act of Congress the 16th

day of April 1816, Philadelphia, PA. Digital reproduction of 1820 'updated' version. Available in David Rumsey Cartographic Collections: http://www.davidrumsey.com. Accessed 03/05/2013.

Pike County Railroad Company
    1853   Record no. SC2287. *In* Records of the Pike County Rail Road Company. Illinois State Historical Society. Springfield.

Simeone, James
    2000   *Democracy and Slavery in Frontier Illinois: The Bottomland Republic*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press.

Smith, Charles R., and Shawn K. Bonath
    1982   A Report on Phase I and Phase II Historic Archaeological Investigations on Three Segments of the F.A.P. 408 Highway Corridor, Adams, Pike, and Scott Counties, Illinois (1979-1981). Midwestern Archeological Center, Illinois State University.

Sommers, Lawrence M., ed.
    1977   *Atlas of Michigan*. Lansing: Michigan State University Press. Map available at: http://www.geo.msu.edu/geogmich/Michigansboundaries.html. Accessed 03/05/2013.

Troen, Selwyn K., and Glen E. Holt
    1977   *St. Louis*. New York: New Viewpoints.

United States Department of Agriculture
    1939   U.S.D.A. Aerial Photographs Collection.

Walker, Juliet E. K.
    1983   *Free Frank: A Black Pioneer on the Antebellum Frontier*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Warner and Beers, Publishers
    1875   *Atlas of Illinois Counties*. Chicago: Warner and Beers, Publishers.

Return to 2013 Archaeology Report Menu