

american archaeology

fall 2008

a quarterly publication of The Archaeological Conservancy

Vol. 12 No. 3



COVER FEATURE 20 CONTACT COMMERCE

BY DIANE CLAY

An 18th-century village in northern Oklahoma is yielding information about early trade between the Wichita Indians and the French.

12 THE 920-MILE DIG

BY MIKE TONER

An immense cultural resource management project has its risks and rewards.

26 A NEW LIFE IN NEW PHILADELPHIA

BY MALCOLM GAY

The town of New Philadelphia was founded by a freed slave in 1836. It was inhabited by blacks and whites during a time of racial strife. Archaeologists are investigating the abandoned town to learn about its race relations.

32 WHAT BECAME OF THE HOHOKAM?

BY TIM VANDERPOOL

The Hohokam thrived for centuries in southern Arizona before mysteriously collapsing. An ambitious research project offers insights into the causes of the collapse.

38 A NEW DEAL FOR ARCHAEOLOGY

BY DAVID MALAKOFF

During the Great Depression, New Deal programs gave people various jobs, including digging archaeological sites. Despite being untrained, excavators working in southwestern Pennsylvania made an important contribution.

44 new acquisition

A GLIMPSE OF THE SUSQUEHANNOCK

The Upper Leibhart site is one of the last major villages inhabited by this culture.

46 new acquisition

PRESERVING AN UNUSUAL PUEBLO-PERIOD VILLAGE

The Wancura-Johnson site could provide a clear picture of its prehistoric occupants.

47 point acquisition

KEEPING A LATE ADENA MOUND INTACT

The Conservancy preserves the Dorr 2 Mound in Southeastern Ohio.

48 point acquisition

A PICTURE OF THE PLAINS VILLAGE TRADITION

The Flaming Arrow site apparently played a role in the Hidatsa origin myth.



GARY LAWSON



THE GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY WWW.GEORGIAHISTORY.COM



2 Lay of the Land

3 Letters

5 Events

7 In the News

George Washington's Childhood Home Found · Mississippian Site Destroyed · Civil War Sloop Discovered

50 Field Notes

52 Reviews

54 Expeditions

COVER: Archaeologist Richard Drass photographs a postmound that was uncovered at the Bryson-Paddock site. Photograph by Gary Lawson

A New Life in New Philadelphia

Freed slave Frank McWorter founded the town of New Philadelphia in 1836, a time of racial turmoil. The town was inhabited by blacks and whites, and it prospered for several decades before being abandoned. Archaeologists are working with descendant families to learn about the town and the nature of its race relations.

By Malcolm Gay



Researchers excavate a house site during last summer's field school. Archaeologist Terrance Martin, wearing a red baseball cap, screens excavated dirt for tiny artifacts.



Stepping away from the three-foot mound of earth that's grown beneath his screen, Terrance Martin grasps a tiny sliver of bone between his thumb and forefinger. Amber with age and encrusted with more than a century's worth of dirt, the bone is no larger than a matchstick. Still, Martin thoughtfully turns it over in his fingers, inspecting it more closely in the mild June sun.

"It looks like a squirrel bone," said Martin, an archaeologist at the Illinois State Museum who specializes in bone identification. "We're finding a lot of small game: squirrel, rabbit, a little fish." Minute though the bone is, it informs Martin's and his colleagues' study of dietary habits of the denizens of the mid-19th-century town of New Philadelphia, Illinois.

Founded in 1836 by Frank McWorter, a former slave who purchased his own freedom, New Philadelphia has vanished into the rolling hills of Pike County in western Illinois between the Mississippi and Illinois rivers. Now something of a celebrity, McWorter, who bought his own and many of his family members' freedom, is thought to be the first free African American ever to found a town. New Philadelphia's historical record is rich: Not only do investigators have the original 1836 plat map, they also have census data, tax records, newspaper articles, and oral histories from descendant families. These records describe New Philadelphia as a racially diverse community that was roughly one-third African-American and two-thirds white. It shows that the town functioned as a commercial hub for the area and was home to a wheelwright, a blacksmith, cobblers, a cabinetmaker, a physician, a Baptist preacher, and a merchant.

Still, the documentary record only goes so far in explaining what life was like in New Philadelphia, and in 2004 Martin, along with co-investigators Christopher Fennell of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and Paul Shackel of the University of Maryland, began an investigation of the site. The researchers wanted to better understand how consumer choices changed over the years as more goods reached the country's interior and how racism impacted such markets and consumer choices before and after the Civil War. The archaeologists, who were later joined by Anna Agbe-Davies of DePaul University in Chicago, wanted to determine whether New Philadelphians' dietary habits varied along racial or regional lines, and they also wanted to better understand the town's spatial context so as to determine whether black and white New Philadelphians lived side by side, or whether the town, though ostensibly integrated, maintained a de facto segregation.

"The McWorters were the founders of the town and definitely important, but what we're interested in is all the people of the community," said Martin. "That's what's really interesting because you're seeing people from New England, the mid-Atlantic, and the upland South, so we're trying to do a social history and ethnology of the town based on an interdisciplinary approach to archaeology and the historical record."

THE HISTORY OF NEW PHILADELPHIA cannot be separated from the story of its founder, Frank McWorter. Born a South Carolina slave in 1777, at the age of 18 McWorter moved to Kentucky with his owner (and likely father) George McWorter, who soon left for Tennessee leaving young Frank in

charge of the Kentucky operation.

Four years after his arrival in Kentucky, McWorter married Lucy, a fellow slave at a nearby farm, in 1799. Though their marriage was not legally recognized, Frank had a modicum of freedom, and in his spare time he began earning wages by working at other farms. McWorter increased his earnings during the War of 1812 when he began a saltpeter mining and manufacturing operation. By 1817, he earned the \$800 necessary to purchase Lucy's freedom. Two years later, McWorter, who became known as "Free Frank," bought his own liberty for the same price. He eventually bought the freedom of 15 of his relatives.

McWorter began purchasing land, and in 1830 he moved his family to Illinois, where he had bought 160 acres in Pike County. He purchased another 80-acre parcel, which he subdivided to create the 42-acre town. McWorter commissioned a survey and registered New Philadelphia in 1836. The town prospered, and census records report that its population peaked in 1865 when it had 160 residents spread across 29 households.

Fennell said New Philadelphia succeeded despite the times. "This region was absolutely torn by racial strife and violence," he said. "There are pro-slavery and abolitionist clashes across the Mississippi (River) and all surrounding us. There's also strong oral history evidence that residents in the area of New Philadelphia were involved in the Underground Railroad and helping escaped slaves."

BY THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, New Philadelphia had largely returned to farmland. Nonetheless, Free Frank and the town's legacy of racial integration lived on in the oral history of the town's residents and their descendants. "The local and descendant communities long knew the history of New Philadelphia, so they organized a non-profit organization that started talking with us," said Fennell. "Of course, our first question was: is the archaeology intact?"

To answer that question, the archaeologists conducted a survey at the site during the summers of 2002 and 2003 and they found roughly 6,000 historical artifacts, as well as evidence of a 7,000-year-old prehistoric site beneath the town. Confident that the site was intact, the archaeologists, with input from the descendant community, formulated their research questions and began excavating in 2004 courtesy of a three-year grant from the National Science Foundation.

The survey revealed a large concentration of artifacts that corresponded with a since demolished structure shown in a 1939 aerial photograph of the property. After performing a geophysical survey, archaeologists began excavating the area and soon discovered an intact storage cellar that was thought to have been associated with a house in block 9 of the town plan. They knew from the historical record that African-Americans had used the cellar, which they surmised from tax records was likely built in the mid-19th century.

The cellar yielded a trove of household artifacts—thimbles, buttons, children's toys, ceramics, and glassware.



Rusted tinware fragments separate the sherd of a whiteware plate (left) and an intact bluish glass Coca-Cola bottle (right). These items, as well as the neck of another bottle, were recovered from a house site.



The New Philadelphia school (left) also served the community as a general meeting place where church services, social functions, marriages, funerals, and other events were held. This late 1800s picture shows a market that was set up next to the school.

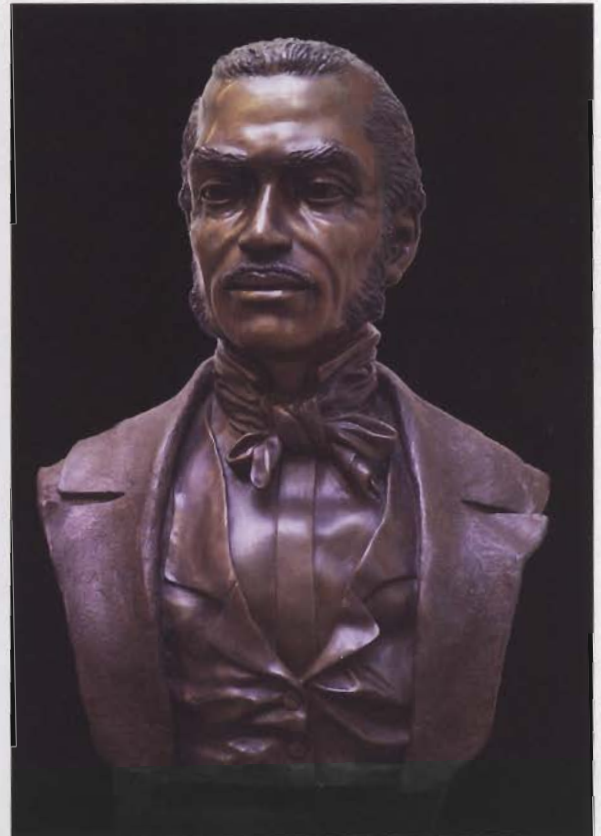
By comparing the ceramic patterns and glazes against a database of known ceramic styles, the archaeologists were able to date the artifacts to the mid- to late 19th century. The artifacts were revealing as to the degree to which race affected consumer choices. “In a lot of studies we’ll see that people from different regional or ethnic backgrounds make entirely different choices in terms of the ceramics they use, or the architectural style of their house,” said Fennell, whose team has now uncovered the remains of a dozen structures. “But here we find that consumer goods are pretty much uniform across households.”

Shackel is working on a paper that will explore the significance of the similarity of these goods, which seems to suggest a high degree of cultural exchange between the town’s white and black inhabitants. “You really have people who are operating in the same cultural milieu. They have the same markets to draw on, and, theoretically, they have similar options,” said Agbe-Davies. “Given that fact, archaeologists can use sites like New Philadelphia to refine our techniques and come to more nuanced understandings of how differences might still be expressed in material culture.”

New Philadelphians’ similarity in tastes did not extend to their diets. The documentary record showed that successive African-American families had inhabited the house in block 9. The archaeologists wondered whether those black families who arrived in New Philadelphia from Southern states had maintained a classic upland South diet while their white neighbors, who hailed from New England, maintained their own eating habits. “These are people who moved up from the South—Kentucky, Tennessee. They’d raise pigs and chickens but supplement their diet with wild game,” said Martin. “Meanwhile, in other sections of town, we’ve excavated cellars of people who came from the Northeast—they came down with the so-called Yankee tradition—and there’s more beef found on those sites.”

The cellar contained roughly 1,000 animal bones—by far the excavation’s biggest faunal discovery—that came from pigs, **american archaeology**

chickens, rabbits, passenger pigeons, and fish, but there was little evidence of cattle. The distinctions suggest that blacks and whites initially retained discrete regional dietary habits. This data, along with the town’s segregated cemeteries, imply there may have been limitations to the town’s racial integration.



This bronze sculpture of Free Frank McWorter was created by his fifth-generation descendant, Shirley McWorter Moss.



DOUG CARR, ILLINOIS STATE MUSEUM

Abdul Alkalimat (formerly known as Gerald McWorter), a direct descendant of Frank McWorter and a professor of African American studies at the University of Illinois, gives a talk on the history of African-American communities and the impacts of racism in the 19th and 20th centuries. Alkalimat's talk was one of the events in a speaker series offered through the field school.

It also appears that the schools were segregated. The white children were educated at a nearby school, and oral histories and documentary records suggest that Frank McWorter was trying to build a small school for the town's black children. (The State of Illinois did not provide for the education of African-American children until 1874.) The archaeologists

are searching for the school, but they haven't found conclusive evidence of the structure. "We find slate pencils, so we have found some of the artifacts for the school," said Fennell, "but we haven't found the foundation footers."

They have, however, found a considerable amount of information about the town's spatial context. They have located evidence of a merchant and a blacksmith as well as uncovered several residences, a few cellars, a well, and a privy. "The archaeology has told us things that weren't in the historical record at all," said Fennell. "This summer our field lab tent is located near a feature that was an early well." It was filled with 1840s and 1850s artifacts. After it ceased to be a well, it became used for refuse, and then they pushed soil over it and a house was put on top of that. There was no indication that we would find a house or a well here—there's no record of it."

Investigating the spatial context—for example, determining if blacks and whites lived next door to one another—is another way of assessing the degree of racial integration. One complication facing the archaeologists as they try to determine who lived where is the methodology of the 19th century census. Census takers did not necessarily move methodically down a street. Rather, they could often zigzag, crossing streets and backtracking as they searched for occupants.

"If you just read the census records it'd be very hard to draw a map of the town. You really need to layer it with multiple lines of evidence to draw the sort of detailed spatial maps that we achieve by adding the historical data to the oral histories and the archaeological record," said Fennell. "It's really refining our view."

The researchers have discovered that, for the most part, New Philadelphia was an integrated town. "We have not seen evidence of segregation within the town in terms of the spacing of households and businesses or the types of housewares they used," said Fennell.

EMALCOUN GAY



A bottle, which probably contained patent medicine, was uncovered during the excavations. It dates to the late 19th century.



Field school student Shalonda Collins uses a laser transit to take measurements within an excavation block.

ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE DISCOVERIES

the archaeologists made was during the summer of 2005, just before the town's descendant families arrived for a reunion. While carefully excavating a house owned by relatives of Frank McWorter, the archaeologists uncovered a Union army uniform button from the Civil War.

"We line up all this data, and we know that Louisa McWorter and Casiah Clark resided there. We also know that Frank's grandson, Squire, fights in the 38th Infantry Colored Unit in the Civil War, and now we find a Civil War Union button in Louisa's house," marveled Fennell. "So we have every probability that this is Frank's grandson's war button." The archaeologists attended the reunion and presented the button to the descendant family. "It's wonderful when you can get that kind of personal connection with the artifacts," Fennell said.

The Union button and the wealth of other archaeological american archaeology

resources swayed the federal government to place New Philadelphia on the National Register of Historic Places in 2005. But it is also a stark reminder of the racial tensions that pervaded the country and perhaps led to New Philadelphia's demise.

By 1857, a railroad linked the town of St. Joseph, in western Missouri, to Hannibal, located on the banks of the Mississippi in eastern Missouri. Another railroad track, which began on the eastern edge of Pike County, connected the area to the commercial centers of the East. A railroad running through Pike County would connect the two lines and would be a great boon to any community located along this new stretch of track or the death knell for any it bypassed.

The historical record reveals that merchants in Hannibal—a town with an active slave market—came to dominate a holding company that funded the rail line. When the railroad tracks were laid, they ran in a straight line across Pike County until they approached New Philadelphia, at which point the tracks were routed around the town. "If you take all the reasons of why a railroad would go somewhere, none explains the arc they built around New Philadelphia," said Fennell, who believes racism caused the town to be bypassed. "I don't have direct evidence, but you can see them going out of their way—at great expense and no rational business reason—to avoid New Philadelphia."

Sixteen years after the railroad bypassed New Philadelphia, a clerk noted on the town's original plat map that in 1885 the east side had been largely depopulated and was being treated as a large agricultural parcel.

Frank McWorter didn't witness the railroad's completion in 1869, having died 15 years earlier at the ripe age of 77. But his wife Lucy did. She died in 1870 at the age of 99.

But even though Frank, Lucy, and their town of New Philadelphia are gone, they live on in the work of the archaeologists and the descendant communities. They are petitioning the federal government to give the site National Historic Landmark status, which is awarded to significant historic places that vividly illustrate or interpret the heritage of the United States. Fewer than 2,500 historic places have received this distinction.

"The descendant community has told us that they don't want to just hear a story of how white racism killed New Philadelphia," said Fennell. "Instead, they want to follow the families and see how they overcame that adversity. The town may have died, but families didn't."

MALCOLM GAY is an editor-at-large for St. Louis Magazine.

To learn more about the New Philadelphia excavation, visit the Web site www.histarch.uiuc.edu/NSF/fieldschool.html