

PROTECTING AND PRESERVING NEW PHILADELPHIA FOR GENERATIONS

INSIDE . . .

THE MOUNDS
AMERICA'S FIRST CITIES

PULLMAN
NATIONAL
HISTORICAL PARK

SOCIETY BUSINESS

MEMBERSHIP
RENEWAL

Cover Image - Congressman Aaron Schock
(center left) at New Philadelphia kiosk
dedication ceremony June 3, 2014. Image
courtesy of Charlotte King.

By Charlotte King

Advocates and supporters of New Philadelphia, Illinois, the first known town in the United States founded, platted and officially registered by an African American, are dedicated to preserve and protect the site as a unit of the National Park Service, stewards of the nation's elite natural and cultural resources. An act of Congress is required to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to evaluate a site's qualifications for National Park Service (NPS) status.

The legislative process to authorize a special resources study of New Philadelphia began in 2009 with the introduction of *The New Philadelphia, Illinois Study Act* to the Senate by Senator Roland Burris and co-sponsor Senator Richard Durbin. Congressman Aaron Schock presented identical legislation to the House of Representatives. After his election, Senator Mark Kirk joined Senator Durbin as co-sponsor. Illinois legislators and their bi-partisan

co-sponsors continue to advocate New Philadelphia's inclusion in the NPS.

Among its stringent standards, the NPS mandates that, "The national park system should possess variety, accepting the supreme in each of the various types and subjects of scenic, scientific, and historical importance." Presently, no unit of the NPS is comparable to New Philadelphia. None can tell the story of an integrated community where formerly enslaved and free-born African Americans lived alongside European Americans during one of the most racially turbulent eras of our country's history.

THE STORY OF FRANK MCWORTER AND NEW PHILADELPHIA

New Philadelphia was founded in 1836 by Free Frank McWorter. Born enslaved in South Carolina, McWorter purchased freedom for himself and fifteen family members and acquired property in Il-

linois, all accomplished through his own initiatives. McWorter earned funds by hiring his time to other settlers, mining caves for crude niter, selling lots in New Philadelphia to black, white and mulatto settlers, and other enterprises.

Historian James Davis describes New Philadelphia as a nodal point for regional black activities. However, according to census records, African Americans historically represented the minority of New Philadelphia's population. The highest representation of African American residents occurred in 1850 when 38 percent of the town's residents were recorded as "black." According to Bureau of the Census records, the proportion of black and mulatto residents in New Philadelphia far exceeded the entire state of Illinois, which reported 0.6 percent of the entire population as black in 1850.

Located near major transportation routes, New Philadelphia became a regional center of activity. Area farmers patronized the town's craftsmen for a variety of products and services. The town boasted a one-room school and, for a time, a post office. Although New Philadelphia seemed destined for success, the death knell tolled for the town in 1869, when tracks for the proposed Hannibal and Naples Railroad were routed away from the community. A few families remained until the 1940s, but most moved elsewhere. In 1880 historian Charles C. Chapman (*History of Pike County, Illinois*) wrote of New Philadelphia, "At one time it had great promise, but the railroad passing it a mile distant, and other towns spring up, has killed it." Although abandoned, New Philadelphia was not forgotten. A plaque marked the site from the 1950s, and the New Philadelphia Association (NPA) formed in 1996 to commemorate Frank McWorter and the town he founded.

ARCHAEOLOGY AT NEW PHILADELPHIA

Today, no original structures are visible at New Philadelphia; only a few building foundations remain. Although agricultural use disturbed the upper 18 inches of soil, the town site retains excellent archaeological integrity.

Archaeological investigations at the site, conducted from 2004-2006 and 2008-2012, were sponsored by National Science Foundation – Research Experience for Undergraduates program grants. The collaborative project included the University of Maryland, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Illinois State Museum, University of Iowa, University of North Carolina, and New Philadelphia Association. Investigators recovered more than 150,000 artifacts spanning the town's occupation, including domestic, architectural, floral and faunal remains. Among the discoveries are many intact subsurface features,

such as substantial building foundations and the remains of wells and pit cellars.

NATIONAL HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

New Philadelphia achieved national recognition for historical significance in 2005 by inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. In 2009 the Secretary of the Interior designated New Philadelphia a National Historic Landmark. New Philadelphia's extraordinary national significance is attributed to excellent archaeological integrity, which may provide nationally significant information about the lifeways and economic and social relationships of African Americans and European Americans in a pioneer setting. The site's archaeological data also hold the major potential to affect research methods about race, ethnicity, and acculturation.

The NPS further recognized New Philadelphia's national historic significance in 2013 by inclusion in the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program. McWorter family and local residents' accounts and documented oral histories attest to the town's participation in the movement to abolish slavery by concealing, harboring, guiding and, sometimes, accompanying African Americans seeking freedom. Local historian Capt. M.D. Massie wrote in 1906 that Pike County residents often suffered the consequences of participation in the Underground Railroad: "Many honored old citizens were often severely censured because they sheltered and fed runaway negroes."

CURRENT ACTIVITIES AT NEW PHILADELPHIA

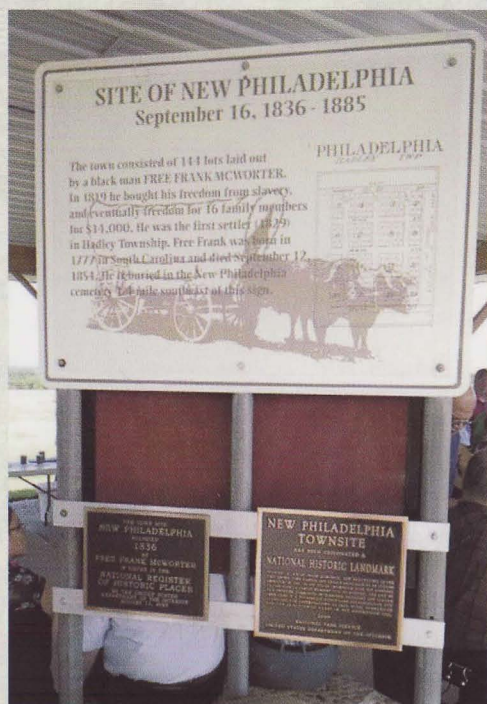
In 2005 the NPA purchased property in New Philadelphia that includes an unoccupied mid-twentieth century dwelling known as the Burdick House, situated on a lot sold to Virgil Burdick in 1921. One of New Philadelphia's earliest settlers, family ancestor Spaulding Burdick, a shoemaker, acquired the south portion of Block 4 Lot 1 from Frank McWorter in 1846. The NPA recently expanded its holdings by purchasing the majority of the 42 acre town site. In 2009, the Archaeological Conservancy purchased 9.14 acres of land considered to be the most archaeologically significant section, the town's commercial center.

At New Philadelphia's north boundary, a newly constructed kiosk greets visitors and will soon be equipped with interpretive signs to tell the story of the historic town and its founder. Kiosk construction was funded by a grant from the Illinois Rural Electric Cooperative (IREC) and built by the local John Wood Community College Workforce Training Program. IREC grant funds complimented an award from the NPS Network to Freedom Program for street marker installation and to develop a smart-phone interactive site tour. Congressman Aaron Schock dedicated the kiosk at a June 3, 2014 ceremony. Illinois State Senator Sam McCann, State Representative C. D. Davidsmeyer, along with several other local dignitaries and many area residents, attended the ceremony.

Efforts are underway to ensure permanent commemoration of the inspirational story of Frank McWorter and New Philadelphia through protection and preservation of the site as a unit of the National Park Service (NPS). In addition, New Philadelphia's NPS status would further acknowledge the contributions of African-Americans to our nation's history. Currently, fewer than 5 percent of the 401 units of the NPS are directly associated with African-American history.

Progress of *The New Philadelphia, Illinois Study Act S. 1328* will be posted on the New Philadelphia Association's website: newphiladelphiaill.org. As a unit of the National Park Service, New Philadelphia will inspire current and future generations with themes important to all Americans: the struggle for freedom and opportunity with an emphasis on love for family.

Charlotte King is a Director of the New Philadelphia Association.



Historical kiosk at the New Philadelphia site. Courtesy office of Illinois State Senator Sam McCann, 50th District.