

Response to Congressman Moore, House Subcommittee on Natural Resources Forests and Public Lands hearing April 21, 2021

By Philip E. Bradshaw, President of New Philadelphia Association

Question 1. I understand that you have been working on protecting New Philadelphia for a very long time. Can you tell us how you first got involved in this issue?

Yes, I have been working to protect and preserve the New Philadelphia site for over 25 years. The remarkable story of New Philadelphia was known for decades in Pike County, Illinois long before I took an active role in preserving and telling the story of New Philadelphia.

A wooden sign posted along the road passing in front of the long abandoned town attracted my attention as a high school student in 1955. Erected by the Pike County Historical Society, the sign commemorated New Philadelphia as a town founded in 1836 by a formerly enslaved man who sold lots to African Americans and European Americans alike and used the funds from lot sales to purchase freedom for enslaved family members. This was of special interest because my grandfather also came from Kentucky in 1889.

All through high school our church youth group (MYF) drove by New Philadelphia going to Barry. Our minister and we students visited about race relations as we drove past the site. It was a very prominent issue because President Eisenhower had been forced to order federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to ensure that black students were allowed access to Central High School. I can remember us discussing how this little town had both African Americans and European Americans living side by side even before the Civil War.

As I testified, New Philadelphia was a place where formerly enslaved and free born African Americans lived and worked alongside European Americans during one of the most racially turbulent eras of our country's history. Despite the upheaval all around them, there is no evidence of racial hostilities within New Philadelphia. Archaeological investigations conducted at the site through two three year National Science Foundation grants found little difference in the material culture of town lots occupied by African and European Americans.

In the early 1990s a very prominent African American man was on a public radio committee with me and asked me if I knew about New Philadelphia. I said yes and he asked me if I could show him where New Philadelphia was so he could bring his grandchildren over to show them the town site. He, his wife and his grandchildren met at my house and I drove them to New Philadelphia. The old wooden sign had almost rotted away and all you saw was weeds and grass. I decided that day that I was going to make sure that New Philadelphia had a good sign telling the story of Free Frank McWorter and the town he founded.

The civic organization (AMPS) promoting Interstate 72 (I chaired) wanted to make sure the new Interstate had good directions and recognized New Philadelphia.

In 1996 after the bridge for I-72 over the Mississippi was completed, members of the I-72 civic organization, descendants of New Philadelphia, civic leaders and local students of history formed the New Philadelphia Association. The New Philadelphia Association (NPA) has remained constant to its original goal: to protect, preserve and promote the extraordinary legacy of Frank McWorter, his family, the remarkable town he founded –New Philadelphia.

Question 2. In Utah, we have learned that one of the most important aspects of these designations is the management plan. In some cases, they have the potential to make or break a site. For this designation to succeed, what would you say are the most important management decisions that need to be made?

The New Philadelphia Association (NPA) holds that the management plan for New Philadelphia should be generated by the National Park Service (NPS). The goal of the NPS and New Philadelphia is to preserve and protect and tell the story of New Philadelphia. Therefore, all cultural and natural resources should be protected, and development on the site should be prohibited. The management and the development plan could be overseen and administered by the Lincoln Home National Historic Site located only 60 miles away. The management plan needs to be generated with community involvement.

The NPA collaborated with the Looking for Lincoln group, the Abraham Lincoln Home, Jim's Journey African-American Museum, the Quincy and Adams County Historical Societies and the Morgan County Historical Society Underground Railroad Committee. The New Philadelphia Association would anticipate continuing its relationships with these organizations and would anticipate the National Park Service would want to have these relationships.

The NPA would anticipate continuing hosting the complimentary four or five week Likes Lecture Series every summer. This year's five week program presented via Zoom technology features:

"Archaeological Perspectives of the New Philadelphia Town site"

"Ann Bradford, Civil War Nurse"

"Did Black Lives Matter in Early Illinois? Voices from the Brink of Slavery and Freedom"

"New Philadelphia, Illinois and Pleasant Ridge, Wisconsin-Slavery and Freedom on the Antebellum Midwest"

"Household' Music Making"

The protection, preservation and promotion of this remarkable site and story is the shared goal of the NPA and the National Park Service, a goal pursued for years by the NPA. Once established as a unit of the National Park Service, the NPA could serve in an advisory position and include further community outreach.

Long term management by the NPA is in jeopardy, the NPA board is aging. Many of the current board members were part of the original organizers, retirees now comprise the majority of the association. There is no future entity to interpret and protect the site. Direct management by the National Park Service is crucial for sustainable, long term preservation of New Philadelphia. Management by the National Park Service would ensure permanent protection and preservation of the site enforced by stringent, federally enforced protective legislation regulating development and future archaeological investigations.

Promotion of New Philadelphia would be ensured through the resources of the National Park Service. Literature and advertising generated, sponsored and published in the wide variety of media and Internet resources of the National Park Service would attract visitors from across the nation and around the world. The power of association with the National Park Service far exceeds the resources available to the current management.

There is no better example of people of different origins living together than New Philadelphia, a racially diverse community that existed only twenty miles from the slave state of Missouri.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your questions.

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