

**Archaeological Investigation of New Philadelphia (11PK455),
a Racially Integrated Community in Pike County, Illinois**

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Abstract

The New Philadelphia site (11PK455) is located between the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers in Pike County, Illinois, and is the first known town incorporated by an African American. In 1836, Frank McWorter subdivided 42 acres of land to form a town that peaked at 200 people after the Civil War. The population of the racially integrated farming community dwindled after a new railroad line was routed so as to avoid New Philadelphia. In 2002 and 2003, the University of Maryland, the University of Illinois at Springfield, the Illinois State Museum, and the New Philadelphia Association collaborated on an archaeological pedestrian survey that resulted in the mapping and recovery of more than 7,000 historic and prehistoric artifacts from the town site.

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The New Philadelphia Project is an interdisciplinary historical and archaeological study of a racially integrated town established in west-central Illinois on the Midwestern frontier. New Philadelphia is the first town incorporated by an African American in the pre-emancipation era. The town's founder encouraged other African Americans as well as those of European descent to move to the town and create a racially integrated community. As a rare example of an integrated early farming community on the nation's Midwestern frontier, the town thrived until the railroad company routed its line around New Philadelphia in 1869. The town slowly disappeared as people moved to the larger surrounding towns and more distant urban areas, until residents unincorporated the place in 1885. Today, the site is situated in a plowed field with only a few remaining fieldstone foundations. The goal of this project is to understand how ethnicity and race may have influenced consumer choice, landscapes, and diet. This study will add a new perspective to the changing relationships between whites and blacks in an integrated community over the course of the antebellum and postbellum eras.

The story of New Philadelphia begins with "Free Frank" McWorter. While enslaved in Kentucky, this enterprising African American hired out his own time and established his own saltpeter mining operation. With the money he earned he purchased his freedom and that of his wife, and in 1836 he acquired 42 acres of lands in sparsely populated Pike County, Illinois, an area of rolling hills located between the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers approximately 25 miles east of Hannibal, Missouri. McWorter incorporated a town, subdivided it into 144 lots, and with the revenue from land sales and farming, he purchased the rest of his family out of bondage (Walker 1983). While African Americans developed towns before 1836 (Cha-Jua 2000), New Philadelphia is the earliest known town *incorporated* by an African American. At its peak during the 1860s it contained about 200 people. Historian Juliet Walker's 1983 biography of Free Frank provides a significant amount of information about her great-great-grandfather's experiences at New Philadelphia from its founding until his death in 1854. The goal of the current project, however, is to provide a more in-depth social history of the town, documenting the rise of the town from 1836 through its demise during the Jim Crow era. We seek to build on Walker's research and look at the histories of all of the residents of New Philadelphia, describe social relations between blacks and whites through the early 20th century, and place this information into a larger context of small, rural 19th-century black and bi-racial towns.

In 1996 a group of Pike County citizens formed the New Philadelphia Association (NPA) as a non-profit group in order to strive for the preservation of the site. In 2001 they invited the University of Illinois at Springfield (UIS), led by Dr. Vibert White, chair of the African American Studies Program, to provide scholarly oversight for the study of the former community. In turn, the NPA and UIS invited the University of Maryland (UM) and the Illinois State Museum (ISM) to organize an archaeological survey to find and document the exact location of the former town of New Philadelphia in order to help broaden the scope of research.

During the fall of 2002 and spring of 2003 Dr. Paul Shackel of the University of Maryland helped to coordinate a long-term project to locate, document, and study the growth and eventual demise of New Philadelphia. Deed research and a census analysis by UM students provide a good sense of the town's population, which consisted of craftsmen, farmers, and laborers. We can state

with certainty that the occupants of each lot are known, and we are aware of the resident's ethnic and occupational backgrounds, as well as other related social information. A collection of oral histories by the NPA furnishes insights into issues of race relations in the town and the surrounding community during the early 20th century.

Although a rural market town like New Philadelphia could offer African Americans an alternative to isolated rural farmsteads and the hostile environment of urban ghettos, once the Illinois frontier closed, racism set limits to New Philadelphia's expansion (Davis 1998). In 1853 the Pike County Rail Road Company, made up of prominent farmers and businessmen in the area, created a route for the new railroad line. Instead of continuing directly from the east and intersecting New Philadelphia, the company routed the Hannibal & Naples Railroad line to New Salem, about one mile to the north of New Philadelphia, and then south to resume its westerly route to the nearby town of Barry (Pike County Railroad 1853, Chapman 1880:904, Matteson 1964:9).

While New Philadelphia existed as a small rural town through the 1850s, it boomed during the 1860s as newly freed African Americans joined the community in order to start a new life after emancipation. As a commitment to educating all of the citizens of the community, the town supported a racially-integrated one-room schoolhouse from 1874 until it closed in the 1940s (Matteson 1964, Pike County Schools 1996). The town population quickly dwindled in the 1870s after the railroad was completed with its route to the north. New Philadelphia was finally unincorporated in 1885. Oral histories of former residents performed in the 1960s indicate that an unincorporated New Philadelphia survived as an integrated community into the 20th century with only a few households (Matteson 1964). The last people abandoned the vicinity in the 1940s.

Joy Beasley (UM) and Tom Gwaltney (UM) directed the field survey and GIS work; Dr. Lynn Fisher (UIS) and Dr. Terrance Martin (ISM) coordinated the efforts of 31 student volunteers from UIS, Illinois College, and Hannibal-LaGrange College over the three separate weekend expeditions. In addition, Cheryl LaRoche (UM) is collecting oral histories from area residents. Using GIS, an overlay of the platted town was placed onto a modern aerial photograph to relate the town's precise layout to the modern landscape and to determine the boundaries of the project area for the archaeological survey. Prior to the walkover survey, the NPA plowed and disked the land, thereby providing a greater than 75% visibility of the ground. About 6 acres were not plowed, either because the area was never plowed, or owner permission was not granted, and an additional 9 acres were not plowed or surveyed because they were terraced in order to prevent erosion (Beasley and Gwaltney 2003).

The walkover survey was conducted over three long weekends in October and November 2002, and March 2003. Survey teams systematically walked over the area marking each historic and prehistoric artifact with a flag. The flagged artifacts were sequentially numbered, recorded, and collected. Finally, the numbered flags were surveyed sequentially using an electronic total station, and the recorded data were downloaded and analyzed by GIS software. A grand total of just over 7,000 artifacts were piece-plotted and collected. The collections were transferred to the ISM Research and Collections Center, where the objects were washed, labeled by field number, re-bagged with new acid-free labels, and inventoried in preparation for more detailed identification and

analysis. This work was accomplished by student volunteers and interns from UIS and Illinois College under my direction.

Domestic artifacts include small ceramic sherds, bottles, drinking vessels, smoking pipes, buttons, doll parts, horseshoes, miscellaneous iron objects and small animal remains. Architectural materials consist of brick fragments, nails, and window glass. Even though New Philadelphia was divided into 144 lots, and all of the lots were sold at least several times over a 100-year period, the artifact distribution shows that no more than 25% of these lots were actually inhabited over the life of the town (Beasley and Gwaltney 2003). Currently, Lynn Fisher (UIS) and Michael Wiant (ISM) are supervising UIS students in a detailed analysis of approximately 1,080 prehistoric chert artifacts and debitage at the ISM RCC. The preliminary indication is that Archaic period Native Americans visited the area to collect local chert from the creek margins.

One of the goals of this project is to list the New Philadelphia site on the National Register of Historic Places. Establishing the chronology of the town's settlement and determining the functions of various town lots can only be accomplished when the historic artifact cataloging and GIS work is completed. This understanding will also help guide future excavations.

Many studies in African-American archaeology and material culture have been concerned with the pre-emancipation era (Epperson 1999; Ferguson 1992; Kelso 1986; Upton 1988; Vlach 1993). An archaeological study of New Philadelphia will provide the opportunity to examine the development of an integrated community on the western frontier during the pre- and post-emancipation eras. Racism probably influenced the social and economic interactions between residents within the community as well as with people who lived outside of the town. It will be important to examine the material culture record and the social history of the town and look for variability in the archaeological record and see how the material culture may have changed as racism influenced the development of New Philadelphia and everyday the everyday lives of its inhabitants.

Understanding the role of consumerism and consumer behavior in an inter-racial community will be a key issue for this study. Several scholars have examined how ideals of consumerism filtered into rural and frontier communities (Purser 1992; Schlereth 1989; McMurray 1988). Consumption practices varied across regional boundaries as well as through ethnic, class, and gendered groups. Paul Mullins' study in Indianapolis (Mullins 1999) shows how an urban black community chose to participate in consumer society as a way to avoid local racism and confront class inequalities. An analysis of rural consumption in New Philadelphia will reveal the complexities of how mass-produced and mass advertised products infiltrated the rural community, and it will show how consumption patterns changed as the concept of racism changed.

Today, nothing remains of the community except for a few house foundations and a graveyard that contains the headstones of some of the former community residents. The town has all but disappeared from the landscape and survives only as an archaeological site covered by prairie grass and wheat. The few exposed building foundations serve as a reminder of a great achievement in the African-American experiment, a sojourn toward self-determinism, freedom, and the will to exist. The history of the entire town, black and white, from the 1830s through 1920, waits to be

rediscovered. The research team's goal is to develop a material and social context for New Philadelphia in order to raise the visibility of the site and make it part of our national public memory.

In closing, I wish to mention that these issues and more will be explored in a symposium on *Recent Research on African-American Communities in the Midwest* that I have organized for the Society for Historical Archaeology 37th Annual Conference on Historic and Underwater Archaeology in St. Louis this January. The session will feature presentations by Mary McCorvie on Miller Grove; Tim Baumann and colleagues on communities in Missouri; Cheryl LaRoche, Amanda Campbell, and Michael Nassaney on underground railroad sites; Paul Mullins on Indianapolis' near-westside; and Paul Shackel and colleagues on New Philadelphia.

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