

New Philadelphia Archaeology: Race, Community, and the Illinois Frontier

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This report was written and edited by Paul Shackel, with contributions from (in alphabetical order) Alison Azzarello, Megan Bailey, Caitlin Bauchat, Carrie Christman, Kimberly Eppler, Christopher Fennell, Michael Hargrave, Emily Helton, Athena Hsieh, Jason Jacoby, Charlotte King, Hillary Livingston, Terrance Martin, Maria Alejandra Nieves Colon, Eva Pajuelo, Marjorie Schroeder, Erin Smith, Andrea Torvinen, Christopher Valvano

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Paul A. Shackel

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS 2004, 2005, 2006

New Philadelphia in Pike County, Illinois is situated between the Illinois and Mississippi rivers. It is the first known town planned, platted and legally registered by an African American in the United States. In 1836, Frank McWorter subdivided 42 acres to form the town. He then used revenue from the sale of the lots to purchase freedom for other members of his family (Walker 1983). African Americans as well as those of European descent moved to New Philadelphia and created a multi-racial community. New Philadelphia also serves as an important example of a farming community on the nation's Midwestern frontier.

The town's population peaked at about 160 people after the American Civil War, a size comparable to many Pike County communities today (King 2005). By the end of the century, however, racial and corporate politics of America's gilded age tolled the death knell for the settlement. The new railroad line bypassed the town. Many of New Philadelphia's residents moved away and, by the early twentieth century, only a few families remained.

Today, most of the original 42 acres have been returned to agricultural use, are planted in prairie grass, or lay fallow. Only a few scattered house foundations are visible in the fields. In the summer of 2002, Vibert White, then from the University of Illinois–Springfield (now with University of Central Florida), initiated a long-term research project to study and celebrate the history of New Philadelphia with the support of the New Philadelphia Association (NPA). The University of Maryland (UM) gathered census data, deeds, and tax records, as well as other primary and secondary sources. A collaborative project between the UM, Illinois State Museum (ISM), University of Illinois (UI), and the NPA helped to initiate an archaeological pedestrian survey in 2002 and 2003 (Gwaltney 2004).

Our initial archaeological survey work, along with Geographic Information System (GIS) overlays, identified several areas with discrete archeological deposits associated with known house lots (see below and Gwaltney 2004). This information along with the collection of census, deed, and tax information provided the research team with clues about the general settlement of the site.

During the summers of 2004, 2005 and 2006, UM served as the host institution, along with the University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign (UIUC), ISM, and NPA, for a three-year National Science Foundation Research Experiences for Undergraduates (NSF–REU) program. In 2005 UIUC also held their summer field school at the New Philadelphia town site. Undergraduate students from around the United States participated in this 10-week project each year. They worked for five weeks conducting archaeological excavations and for five weeks performing laboratory analyses at ISM. Students worked with professionals to excavate portions of several town lots for which archaeological and

geophysical evidence indicated the likely remains of past domestic sites. Students learned to excavate, catalogue artifacts, identify macrofloral remains, and perform faunal analysis, and minimum vessel analyses for glass and ceramics.

Prior to excavations Michael Hargrave (U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center, Construction Engineering Research Laboratory [CERL]) conducted a magnetometer and an electrical resistivity survey along with the NSF–REU students in all three seasons. This work, coupled with the archaeological survey data and the historical records, provided additional information that located potential archaeological features. All of these data helped develop an excavation strategy.

The primary goals of this research project are to: *1) understand the town's founding and spatial development as a multi-racial town; 2) explore and contrast dietary patterns between different households of different ethnic and/or regional backgrounds by examining faunal and botanical remains; 3) to understand the townscape and town lot uses of different households using botanical data and archaeological landscape features; 4) elucidate the different consumer choices residents of different ethnic backgrounds made on a frontier situation and understand how household choices changed with the increased connection to distant markets and changing perceptions of racism.*

Many of New Philadelphia's settlers came from the Upland South, the Midwest, and the east coast. The town's story is about the quest for freedom, life on the frontier, facing racism, and the struggle of a small rural town to survive. As the project develops we will immediately make our conclusions available to the public on the internet. Our goal is to be as democratic and transparent as possible and allow professionals and the public to see how we develop and create our conclusions about New Philadelphia. This research will elucidate how individual members and families of this multi-racial community made choices to create their immediate environment, diet, agricultural practices, and consumer choices.

While we do not pretend to be the last word on the history of New Philadelphia, our efforts, with input from the larger descendant and local communities, will build a better understanding of this town. We hope to make the stories connected with this place part of the American story and the national public memory.

Completion of the project's ongoing work will allow the collaborative research team to explore other avenues for funding future work centering on issues of racism and group boundaries. It is important to understand that ethnic boundaries are fluid and it is necessary to see what forces have transformed these boundaries over time (McGuire 1982:161; Rodman 1992). In a place like New Philadelphia that developed as a multi-racial town, defining these boundaries becomes increasingly difficult since it appears to be a small community in which neighbors supported and traded with each other. However, it is probable that some form of local hierarchy may have existed that was based in part on racial categories. Placing future archaeological work within the context of the changing meaning of race is essential to knowing how groups in this community became racially

identified and how racial conflicts have shaped American society (see Omi and Winant 1994).

Many studies in African–American archaeology and material culture have dealt with the pre–emancipation era (Epperson 1999; Ferguson 1992; Kelso 1986; Upton 1988; Vlach 1993). Several archaeology studies have also dealt with the post–emancipation era (Mullins 1999, 2004; Warner 1998). An archaeological study of New Philadelphia allows archaeologists the opportunity to examine the development of a multi–racial community on the western frontier during the pre– and post–emancipation eras. New Philadelphia provides a unique case study since it survived as a multi–racial community for about a century. Anthropologist Mary Douglas (Douglas and Isherwood 1979) notes that on a periphery, such as a frontier situation, differences and deviations from the norm are acceptable. However, once those frontier situations become part of the core or semi–peripheral area, material culture and behavior often becomes standardized. The same may be true for the frontier situation of New Philadelphia. The town developed as a multi–racial town from the 1840s onward, a situation that was not the norm in the core area of the eastern states. But when the Illinois frontier closed, racism set its limits to the town’s growth. Racism probably influenced the social and economic interactions between residents within the community as well as with residents outside the town. It is important to examine both the material culture record and the social history of the town in order to look for variability in the archaeological record as a way to see how the material culture may have changed as racism influenced the development and everyday lives of New Philadelphia’s inhabitants.

Understanding the role of consumerism and consumer behavior in a multi–racial community will be a key issue for this study. Several scholars have examined how ideals of consumerism filtered into rural and frontier communities (McMurry 1988; Purser 1992; Schlereth 1989). Consumption practices varied across regional boundaries as well as through ethnic, class, and gendered groups. Mullins (1999) shows how an urban African–American community chose to participate in consumer society as a way to avoid local racism and confront class inequalities. Warner (1998) shows how some African Americans chose a diet that was noticeably different from the Euro–American community. An analysis of rural consumption in New Philadelphia reveals the complexities of how mass–produced and mass–advertised products infiltrated the rural community, and it shows how consumption patterns changed as the concept of racism changed.

While the current archaeological work at New Philadelphia has further defined the boundaries of the town and the blocks and lots occupied in the town, an in–depth study of recovered archaeological materials contributes to the town’s social history. The research team’s goal is to develop a material and social context for the site in order to raise the visibility of the site and make it part of our national public memory. We have successfully placed the entire town on the National Register for Historic Places in 2005 because we were able to demonstrate that the town had tremendous archaeological potential. It qualified under criterion “D” because it has “yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.”

The New Philadelphia archaeology program is sponsored by the National Science Foundation's Research Experiences for Undergraduates program (Grant #0353550). In 2005 the UIUC archaeology field school under the direction of Christopher Fennell also participated in excavations and laboratory work. The 2004, 2005, and 2006 field seasons received tremendous support from the New Philadelphia Association and various other individuals and organizations. These people and organizations include:

University of Maryland, University of Illinois, Illinois State Museum, New Philadelphia Association, Sprague's Kinderhook Lodge, Gary Andrashko, Larry and Natalie Armistead, Darlene Arnette, Larry and Mary K. Bennett, Philip and Linda Bradshaw, Carnes & Sons Trailer World, Joe Conover, Tom and Joan Coulson, Carolyn Dean, Fat Boys Restaurant, Christopher Fennell, Lynn Fisher, Shirley Johnston, Cheryl LaRoche, Marvin and Pat Likes, Likes Land Surveyors, Inc., Claire F. Martin, Carol McCartney, Robert Newnham, Oitker Ford Sales, Terry Ransom, Red Dome Inn, Marjorie Schroeder, Karen Sprague, Vibert White, Robin Whitt, Mr. and Mrs. Roger Woods, Harry and Helen Wright.

2004 NSF-REU Field School Students: Cecilia Ayala, Dana Blount, Megan Cerasale, Richard Fairly, Katie Fay, Steve Manion, Jesse Sloan, Janel Vasallo, Laura Wardwell.

2004 NSF-REU Field School Staff: Carrie Christman, Christopher Fennell, Charlotte King, Terrance Martin, Paul Shackel, William White.

2005 NSF-REU Field School Students: Caitlin Bauchat, Kimberly Eppler, Shanique Gibson, Emily Helton, Jessica Jenkins, Hanah Mills, LaShara Morris, Andrea Torvinen Megan Volkel, Jordan Bush (volunteer for 10 weeks).

2005 NSF-REU Field School Staff: Carrie Christman, Christopher Fennell, Charlotte King, Terrance Martin, Paul Shackel, Christopher Valvano.

2005 University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Field School Students: Alison Azzarello Michael Collart, Elizabeth Davis, Thomas Duggan, Maria Elana Frias, Hillary Iden, Kyle Johnson, Matthew Kane, Gail Kirk, Christina Puzzo, Leslie Salyers, Jill Scott, Liz Watts, Charles Williams.

2005 University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Field school Staff: Christopher Fennell, Phil Millhouse, Eva Pajuelo.

2006 NSF-REU Field School Students: Adeola Adegbola, Holly Brookens, Athena Hsieh, Jason Jacoby, Hillary Livingston, Angie Maranville, Maria Nieves Colon, Shamia Sandels, Erin Smith, Megan Bailey (volunteer for 10 weeks), Chris Stawski (volunteer for 3 weeks).

2006 NSF-REU Field School Staff: Christopher Fennell, Emily Helton, Charlotte King,

Terrance Martin, Paul Shackel, Christopher Valvano.

Christopher Valvano and Charlotte King copy–edited versions of this report. Charlotte King directed the laboratory from 2004–2006. During her tenure all of the artifacts were cleaned, labeled, and entered on a data base, all during the 10 week field school. Because of her heroic effort and the diligence of many of the REU students, we had time during the field school to do preliminary analyses of the artifact and as well as the macrobotanical (supervised by Marjorie Schroeder – ISM) and fauna data (supervised by Terrance Martin – ISM). Christopher Fennell helped to supervise students (as well as the UI field school) and did all of the survey work for the 2004–2006 seasons. During the tenure of the project Carrie Christman (2004, 2005), William White (2004), Phil Millhouse (2005), Eva Pajuelo (2005), Emily Helton (2006), and Christopher Valvano (2005, 2006) played important rolls in supervising students. Christopher Valvano standardized the archaeological drawings and photographed the archaeological assemblages. His precise and professional work can be seen throughout this report.

To all, it has been a wonderful experience working on this project with so many dedicated, hard working students, and professionals. I appreciate the support of the local and descendant communities. I hope that our collaborative efforts have made us all learn and grow from our collective experiences and recognize that dialog, cooperation and tolerance can help make our world a better place.

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Paul Shackel
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Selected Links:

University of Maryland – Center for Heritage Resource Studies www.heritage.umd.edu
(follow the links to New Philadelphia)

University of Illinois –
<http://www.anthro.uiuc.edu/faculty/cfennell/NP/newphilgeog.html>

New Philadelphia Association – <http://www.newphiladelphiaail.org>

McWorter family – <http://www.mcworter.net/>