

The President's House: Freedom and Slavery in Making a New Nation

Coming to This Site in 2008: A Permanent Outdoor Commemorative Installation

From 1790 to 1800, Presidents George Washington and John Adams lived and worked in a mansion – *the President's House* – that stood on the site you are viewing now. In that house, our first two presidents created the model for the Executive Branch of the United States government.

The disturbing documented truth is that nine enslaved Africans – kept by George Washington, not John Adams – also lived and worked in this house, in the same era when the founders of our country were declaring that “All men are created equal.” The story of the President's House is thus one of achievement and infamy – of the birth of a free nation and indefensible slavery existing side by side.

That story will now be told: a new permanent installation will be built here to commemorate the President's House and the long-obscured story of the enslaved Africans who lived and toiled there during Washington's presidency.

Following a national competition, Philadelphia Mayor John F. Street and INHP Superintendent Dennis Reidenbach announced on February 27, 2007 that the team headed by Kelly/Maiello Architects and Planners will design and build the installation. Kelly/Maiello is an award-winning firm that has provided architecture and planning services in Philadelphia and the region for more than 30 years. Principal and co-founder Emanuel Kelly will serve as project director. The lead interpretive planner and historian is Dr. Richard Rabinowitz, the curator for the acclaimed exhibit “Slavery in New York” and founder of the American History Workshop.

The Kelly/Maiello team's design places incomplete walls – architectural fragments – around the original President's House footprint, in order to establish a historically accurate sense of place. Also, the area of the President's House now known as the Slave Quarters will be especially defined in a solemn way – a main goal of the advocates who sought this commemoration. State-of-the-art audio and interactive visual technology will tell compelling stories of life in the President's House.

The first step is the archeological excavation you are witnessing. The purpose of the excavation is to determine whether any artifacts or information relating to the President's House era may still be in the ground. The archeology team headed by the URS Group includes nationally recognized experts with extensive experience working on key African American history sites.



Kelly/Maiello team's preliminary design for the President's House commemorative installation.

The City of Philadelphia, National Park Service, and Independence National Historical Park are working in full partnership to complete the President's House project. The project was jumpstarted in 2003 at the opening of the new Liberty Bell Center, when Mayor Street pledged \$1.5 million in its support. Thereafter, Congressmen Chaka Fattah and Robert A. Brady secured a federal grant to complete the funding. The commemorative installation will be completed in 2008 and will add stirring overtones to each visitor's experience of the Liberty Bell itself.

The President's House Oversight Committee

The City of Philadelphia and Independence National Historical Park have convened a formal Oversight Committee to guide the President's House project. The Committee includes representatives from the advocacy groups who fought hardest for this commemoration – historians, community activists, and others who understand the national significance of this project. The members of the Oversight Committee are:

- Romona Riscoe Benson**, President & CEO, African American Museum in Philadelphia
- Michael Coard, Esq.**, Founding Member, Avenging the Ancestors Coalition
- Tanya Hall**, Executive Director, Philadelphia Multicultural Affairs Congress, a division of the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Edward Lawler, Jr.**, Scholar, Representing the Independence Hall Association
- Charlene Mires**, Associate Professor of History, Villanova University; Editor, Pennsylvania History Studies Series, Pennsylvania Historical Association; Representing the Ad Hoc Historians
- Dennis Reidenbach**, Superintendent, Independence National Historical Park
- John Skief**, Chief Administrative Officer of the Harambee Institute of Science & Technology Charter School; Representing the Honorable Chaka Fattah, U.S. House of Representatives
- Karen Warrington**, Director of Communications, Office of the Honorable Robert A. Brady, U.S. House of Representatives
- Joyce Wilkerson**, Chief of Staff, City of Philadelphia