



# Press Release



## Independence National Historical Park and City of Philadelphia

John F. Street, Mayor, City of Philadelphia  
Darla Sidles, Acting Superintendent, Independence National Historical Park

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Contact: Joe Grace, 215-686-6210  
Roz McPherson, 856-261-4023  
Jane Cowley, 215-597-0060 (INHP)

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### **PLANS UNVEILED FOR INCORPORATING ARCHEOLOGICAL FINDINGS INTO PRESIDENT'S HOUSE SITE**

**Philadelphia, PA** – Mayor John F. Street and Independence National Historical Park Acting Superintendent Darla Sidles today announced the plan for incorporating recent archeological findings into the President's House commemorative project. The plan was developed by Kelly/Maiello Architects & Planners, the lead member of the team chosen this past February after a national competition to design the President's House commemoration. The announcement occurred during a President's House public meeting held at the Freedom Theatre.

The enhanced design features a multi-sided clear glass enclosure ("vitrine") at ground level, through which visitors will be able to look down and see an extensive portion of the original dig showing all of the key archeological findings in their undisturbed configuration. This solution – one of four new designs offered by Kelly/Maiello – was the unanimous choice of the President's House Oversight Committee, explained Committee member Michael Coard, representing ATAC (Avenging the Ancestors Coalition).

Upon its completion – now targeted for the fall of 2009 -- the President's House project will result in a new permanent outdoor installation on the doorstep of the Liberty Bell Center at 6<sup>th</sup> & Market Streets. The installation will commemorate the house where Presidents George Washington and John Adams lived from 1790 to 1800, and the long-observed story of at least nine enslaved Africans who lived and worked there during Washington's presidency.

The archeological dig at the President's House site, conducted from March through July of 2007, yielded a series of unexpected findings. Archeologists found a basement below the kitchen where Hercules – an enslaved African who later escaped to freedom – presided as George Washington's acclaimed chef. They uncovered the foundation from a bow window believed to be the prototype for the Oval Office at the White House in Washington, DC. They also found an underground passage from the kitchen to the main house, likely used by the enslaved and servants working between the two structures.

These findings and the excitement surrounding the ongoing dig itself captured the imagination of nearly 300,000 visitors, dramatically conveying the juxtaposition of freedom and slavery in making this new nation. "For me, that juxtaposition is a central theme of the President's House project, and the Oversight Committee made it very clear to us that the archeological discoveries had to be incorporated into the design," noted Mayor Street.

The National Park Service agreed. "The powerful visitor response to the site raised awareness of the President's House project beyond the boundaries of Philadelphia," said Acting Superintendent Darla Sidles. "In the same way the archeology expanded the educational opportunities of this site, it will also strengthen the commemoration for the site."

The planning for the redesign of the site has been a five-month process, triggered by the public's response to the dig. At the direction of Mayor Street and former Superintendent Dennis Reidenbach, a task force was convened in July 2007 to work with Kelly/Maiello in developing options for the site. The task force – which included nationally known experts in the fields of archeological preservation, exhibit design, African-American history, and architecture – was charged with brainstorming a range of alternatives to be developed further by Kelly/Maiello.

Task Force members included Fath Davis Ruffins (Curator of African American History and Culture at the Smithsonian Institute); Dr. Cheryl LaRoche (Historical Archeologist and Cultural Heritage Specialist for the President's House Dig); Dr. Richard Leventhal (Director of the new Penn Cultural Heritage Center and Professor in the University of Pennsylvania Department of Anthropology); Phil Lindsey (Vice President, Exhibits and Business Development for Houston's Health Museum); Dr. Frank Matero (Professor of Architecture and Chair of the Graduate Program in Historic Preservation at the University of Pennsylvania School of Design); Polly McKenna-Cress (Director of Museum Exhibition Planning and Design at the University of the Arts); Michael Paskowsky (Project Manager for Harpers Ferry Center, the National Park Service); and Dr. Steve Snyder (Vice President, Exhibit and Program Development at The Franklin Institute).

In addition to the input from the Task Force, Kelly/Maiello considered comments from the Oversight Committee, as well as public comments submitted to the City's website and through the mail.

The main challenge was to remain true to the project's original goals and themes while incorporating the key archeological discoveries in a meaningful and understandable way. Joyce Wilkerson, Mayor Street's Chief of Staff and a member of the Oversight Committee, noted that "The results of the dig were tremendously exciting to all of us – not because they changed the project's direction -- but because they offered a wonderful opportunity to enhance what we set out to do here."

"Our intentions have never changed," said Wilkerson, echoing remarks delivered by Oversight Committee member Karen Warrington. "It is the stories of the people who lived in that house – especially the enslaved – that matter and that must drive this project's design. The elegant solution presented today honors those people by including the archeological findings in an exciting way that will deepen the telling of those stories."

The solution presented today allows Kelly/Maiello to retain most of its original preliminary design. That proposal places incomplete walls -- architectural fragments -- around the original President's House footprint, in order to establish a powerful, historically accurate sense of place. Also, the area of the President's House now known as the Slave Quarters will continue to be especially defined in a solemn manner – a main goal of advocates who sought this commemoration. State-of-the-art audio and interactive visual technology will tell a series of compelling stories of life in the President's House. The archeological discoveries will now become a key and integrated part of the overall design, which will continue to evolve in the months ahead.

In selecting this approach, the City, INHP, and Oversight Committee also took into account the desire for 24-hour access to the President's House site; the need to protect the discoveries from deterioration and vandalism; ADA accessibility concerns; cost; and staffing requirements. Options that were considered and rejected included building an enclosed glass structure (roof and walls) around the re-opened archeological site; building an underground level where the archeological discoveries would be viewable; and exposing the archeological fragments to a view from the side.

A popular suggestion rejected by the project team was to cover the entire site of the dig with a glass floor. This option was ruled out because it would have been impractical during inclement weather; would have required wearing special shoe protectors to protect the glass; and, most importantly, would have shifted the focus of the commemoration away from the stories and onto the archeology, leaving little physical space in which to tell those stories.

The President's House was torn down long ago. During the construction of the Liberty Bell Center in 2002, however, it became clear that enslaved Africans in Washington's household had slept on what was to become the threshold of the new Liberty Bell Center. A public outcry ensued, with a demand that the President's House be marked and the stories of the enslaved be told.

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 intended to complete the funding for the project. Incorporating the archeology findings as proposed (and the related delay in the project) will add at least \$2.5 million to the project's original estimated cost of \$4.5 million – funds that must be raised, Wilkerson noted. Beyond that, the goal is to establish an endowment that can be used to maintain and keep current the commemoration once it is completed.

The dedication for the site is expected to occur in the fall of 2009.

The Oversight Committee was convened by the City and INHP in September 2005 to help guide the project's development and ensure its ultimate success. The Committee currently consists of the following individuals and includes representatives from the advocacy groups that called for this commemorative project.

- **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 Prof. of History, Villanova University; Editor, Pennsylvania History Studies Series, Pennsylvania Historical Association; Representing the Ad Hoc Historians;
- **Darla Sidles**, Acting Superintendent, Independence National Historical Park (replacing **Dennis Reidenbach**, now Northeast Regional Director, National Park Service);
- **Karen Warrington**, Director of Communications, Office of the Honorable Robert A. Brady, U.S. House of Representatives; and
- **Joyce Wilkerson**, Chief of Staff, City of Philadelphia.