



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

October 9, 2020

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
Chairman, House Committee on
Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva,

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) is pleased to endorse H.R. 8224, the New Philadelphia (IL) Historical Park Act. This legislation would not only preserve an historical and archaeological site of great importance to American history, but would also address the under-representation of minorities in the nation's historic preservation system.

The SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With nearly 7,000 members, SAA represents professional and avocational archaeologists, archaeology students in colleges and universities, and archaeologists working at Tribal agencies, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. SAA has members throughout the U.S., as well as in many nations around the world.

New Philadelphia, Illinois, was founded in 1836 by Frank McWorter, and was the first town created, platted and registered by an African-American in the United States. Its residents included both African-Americans and European Americans, and many of them helped freedom-seekers reach the North before the Civil War.

The town existed until the early 20th century, and is now an archaeological site. Extensive excavations have revealed a large number of building remains and at least 100,000 objects, bringing to life the story of a unique place and its people. For example, the site was found to contain mancala tokens, an ancient game popular in many regions of Africa. It is discoveries of this kind that give us a window on the long-neglected subject of race relations in 19th century America. In fact, archaeological research has been ongoing at New Philadelphia since 2002. The methods used included walk-over surveys, geophysical examinations, and some full-scale excavations carried out under the auspices of the National Science Foundation's Research Experiences for Undergraduates field school. The archaeological project has been a collaborative undertaking, involving students from around the country, many volunteers, local and descendant community members, and researchers from several universities and institutions across the United States.

Creating the New Philadelphia Historical Park will not only ensure that an irreplaceable cultural resource will be preserved for future generations, it will also mark a step forward in telling a more complete history of our nation. Currently, there are far too few places within the National Park System and other federally-supported cultural resources programs dedicated to the memory of the African-Americans who have made such important impacts in America's history.

The SAA is proud to support H.R. 8224, and urges its adoption by Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joe E. Watkins". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Joe E. Watkins, Ph.D., RPA
President