



Press Release

Independence National Historical Park and City of Philadelphia

Michael A. Nutter, Mayor, City of Philadelphia
Cynthia MacLeod, Superintendent, Independence National Historical Park

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESIDENT'S HOUSE SITE NEARS COMPLETION, PREPS FOR OPENING

(Philadelphia – October 8, 2010) – A decade of passionate debate, national attention and unprecedented collaboration nears a close today with the announcement that the exhibit interpretation of the site has entered the production phase. The opening event for *President's House: Freedom and Slavery in the Making of a New Nation* is scheduled for December 15, 2010.

Since receiving approval earlier this summer from Mayor Michael A. Nutter and Superintendent Cynthia MacLeod to move forward with the interpretive plans for the President's House project, the design-build team under the leadership of Kelly/Maiello Architects and Planners have been heavily engaged in construction, editing and review of all content, revisions to illustrations, and securing the necessary permissions for images. Working with scripts by renowned author, Lorene Cary, director Louis Massiah of Scribe Video Center has produced video vignettes that will provide visitors with an opportunity to view what the struggle for enslaved persons may have been like at the house. "Our charge was to use the historical evidence to explore the lives of the men, women, and children who were held in bondage in that house, as well as those who escaped with the help of Philadelphia's free black community," said Massiah. The exhibit interpretation has been developed by Eisterhold and Associates with Dr. Gary Nash (UCLA) and Dr. Spencer Crew (George Mason University) as lead historians.

"From its inception, this project has generated conversation and discovery, and we hope it will continue to do so. Benefitting from the voices of citizens and guiding legislation from the U.S. Congress and the collaboration between the City of Philadelphia and the National Park Service, the project is a welcome addition to Independence National Historical Park," said Cynthia MacLeod, Superintendent of Independence National Historical Park.

A joint initiative of the City of Philadelphia and Independence National Historical Park, the historic project commemorates the site of the executive mansion of the first two United States presidents, George Washington and John Adams, and exhibits reveal the long-obscured glimpse into the lives of at least nine enslaved Africans who toiled at the house during Washington's presidency. The project's funding was the result of protests from the African American community led by Avenging the Ancestors Coalition and Generations Unlimited. A number of organizations including the Ad Hoc Historians had long advocated

for an acknowledgment of the site of the place where the new nation shaped the executive branch of the United States government. Yet the compelling and unknown story of the presence of enslaved Africans became the driver of the funding from both the City of Philadelphia and the Federal government through Congressmen Bob Brady and Chaka Fattah. Mayor Michael A. Nutter undertook the initiative to raise additional funds to incorporate structural fragments into the site's design plan that were uncovered during a 2007 archeological dig.

The President's House project has been a source of fascinating revelations as researchers and historians perused diaries, records and other centuries-old documents. For example, visitors will learn that Martha Washington came to the marriage to George Washington as a widow with 285 enslaved men, women, and children. Because of the legal status of women at that time, George Washington became the manager of Martha's enslaved persons. Even though Washington's will stipulated that his enslaved persons became free upon his death, he did not have the authority to free Martha's dower enslaved persons. They were left to her descendants. Many historians argue that Washington was conflicted about slavery as revealed in his writings. However, many African Americans counter that Washington's action to free the enslaved only after his death is not a demonstration of conflict at all. Another interesting revelation occurred during project development, as Mount Vernon historians discovered documentation that showed Hercules, Washington's chef, escaped from Mount Vernon, VA instead of Philadelphia, as had been previously thought.

The final few months of construction and design work will include erection of the memorial to the enslaved; preparation of the glass vitrine that will allow visitors to view the archeological fragments that were unearthed in 2007; installation of Porcelite panels and illustrated glass that will provide the brief history of the site; and installation of video treatments. "Visitors will learn a lot of thought-provoking new information as they tour the President's House footprint," said Roz McPherson. "We are hopeful that this site will serve as the catalyst in seeking more information about the obscure lives of the people who were such a significant part of the nation's past and that visitors will have an expanded context for reviewing early American history."

"Because of the passionate debates surrounding its development, the site has been the source of much new knowledge for the project team and we are excited about the important opportunities that lie ahead for deeper interpretation," said Clarence Armbrister, Chief of Staff to Mayor Nutter and Chair of the Oversight Committee. "Our charge to the public is to continue the quest for a deeper understanding of what it truly meant to be in a new democracy."

Plans for the ribbon cutting event are being managed by the Office of the City Representative. Support for this important milestone in the project is also being provided by Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation.

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