



# Press Release



## City of Philadelphia and Independence National Historical Park

John F. Street, Mayor, City of Philadelphia

Dennis Reidenbach, Superintendent, Independence National Historical Park

---

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

For immediate release: March 21, 2007

### **KICK-OFF FOR PRESIDENT'S HOUSE SITE ARCHEOLOGICAL DIG**

**Philadelphia, PA** – Mayor John F. Street and Independence National Historical Park Superintendent Dennis Reidenbach officially launched an archeological dig today at the site of the former President's House, on the threshold of the Liberty Bell Center.

At the controls of a hydraulic excavator, Mayor Street dug out the first mound of dirt from the site where Presidents George Washington and John Adams once lived -- and where we now know at least nine enslaved Africans, kept by Washington, also lived. "We don't know what's under all this dirt," Mayor Street noted, "but we do know that if there is something in the ground that can add to the truth of this place -- we're going to discover it."

The dig's purpose is to find out whether any artifacts relating to the President's House era -- 1790-1800 -- may still be in the ground. "As the custodian of this historic site, I could not be more excited about this exploration," Superintendent Reidenbach said. "We have a world class team ready to undertake this search, a team that knows probably better than anyone else how to search and what to search for."

The President's House archeology team, headed by the renowned URS Group, includes a coalition of nationally recognized experts with extensive experience working on key African American history sites. Dr. Warren Perry, the team's Research Director, served as Director for Archeology for the African Burial Ground in New York. Douglas Mooney, the team's Field Director, directed the recent digs at the James Oronoco Dexter and National Constitution Center sites here in Philadelphia; and conservator and cultural heritage specialist Dr. Cheryl LaRoche worked on both the African Burial Ground and National Constitution Center projects. Program Manager Stephen Tull is Vice President of URS's Archeological and Historical Architecture Group and Treasurer of the

Philadelphia Archaeological Forum. D'Angelo Construction, Riddick & Riddick, and Imprints Unlimited are also on the team.

A joint project of INHP and the City of Philadelphia, the President's House dig will be funded by the City and conducted under the direction of National Park Service Archeologist Jed Levin. The dig is the second research investigation to occur during the current revitalization of Independence Mall. The first was the 2003 investigation at the James Oronoco Dexter property site, which resulted in the discovery of thousands of artifacts.

Most of the President's House was demolished in the 1830s, and the site was repeatedly disturbed by subsequent construction and demolition. Despite this history, evidence of the President's House era may still remain. The dig will focus on previously unexcavated yard areas on the President's House site that are most likely to yield clues about life in that house. The dig will seek out and explore "shaft features" – historic pits lined with brick or stone that were used principally as outhouses and wells. Portions of the mansion's original walls may also be found, helping to confirm its exact location.

Following today's groundbreaking, the archeological team will begin using heavy equipment to remove the layers of fill and demolition rubble covering the site. "Controlled excavation" will follow – a painstaking process of identifying and removing any archaeological artifacts. The dig is expected to continue for 3-6 weeks, with the laboratory phase of identifying and analyzing the artifacts to follow.

"This is a rare opportunity for our community and our students to discover history first-hand," Mayor Street observed, "and a truly meaningful way to honor the people who occupied that house." With that in mind, throughout the dig, the City, INHP, and URS will provide "teaching moments" for the public and students. Archeologists will be on site to explain what they are doing and what they hope to find, and visitors are invited to watch the dig from the specially constructed viewing platform.

Philadelphia public school students will interact directly with the URS team of archeologists and will follow a structured program that includes exposure to lab work. Any artifacts that are unearthed will be sent to the Independence Living History Center Archeology Lab for cataloging and analysis, where all visitors are welcome. Located at 3<sup>rd</sup> & Chestnut Streets, the Lab is a working archeology lab and is open to the public Monday through Friday from 9 am – 5 pm; there is no admission charge.

During the construction of the Liberty Bell Center in 2002, 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 followed, with a demand that the President's House be marked and its full story – including 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 toward a commemoration. Thereafter, Congressmen

Chaka Fattah and Robert A. Brady secured a federal grant to complete the necessary funding, and the City and INHP have partnered in moving forward.

Following a national competition, the City and INHP announced last month that the team headed by Kelly/Maiello Architects and Planners will design and build a new permanent outdoor installation commemorating the President's House and all of its occupants. Kelly/Maiello is an award-winning minority-owned business 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 dig will come first. Present at today's announcement were representatives from the Kelly/Maiello team, and students from the Philadelphia School District's Constitution High School and School of the Future.

Also present were members of the President's House Oversight Committee, which includes representatives of the advocacy groups who fought hardest for the commemoration of the site – historians, community activists, and others who understood early on the national significance of the President's House story. The members of the Oversight Committee include:

- **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;
- **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; and
- **Joyce Wilkerson**, Chief of Staff, City of Philadelphia.

For more information on the President's House project, please visit [www.phila.gov/presidentshouse](http://www.phila.gov/presidentshouse).