NEWS CLOSEUP

LIBERTY IN A NEW LIGHT

Icon's Power Takes Center Stage in New Exhibit

Tourists coming to Philadelphia for early American history no doubt sense the tension of an urban environment that seems to envelop the shrine to the country's beginnings. The mannered restraint of Independence Hall, the rigorous virtue of colonial society expressed in the old architecture, is starkly at odds with the striving exuberance of the modern city.

A $314 million plan to renovate Independence National Historical Park, in progress for some years now, will reintroduce Philadelphia to its colonial legacy, not only physically, but intellectually and emotionally as well. If the overriding ethos of today's city is confident and supercharged, it is worth remembering that 18th century Philadelphia, the cultural jewel of the colonies and a magnet for free thinkers and seditious thought, wasn't much different.

Perhaps nothing expresses this continuity more than the Liberty Bell. In the latest round of renovations, the international symbol of freedom was moved to a new exhibit center that celebrates how an old idea still burns bright. The setting, open to Philadelphia's hustling cityscape, unites the icon with a living example of liberty in motion. The long, one-story center boasts floor-to-ceiling windows with a view of the mall on one side and imposing urban vitality on the other.

As part of a plan formed in the mid-'90s, the bell was moved from the small enclosure it had occupied since 1976 to a place closer to Independence Hall, not far from the original belfry. The city has changed a great deal in the five decades since the National Park Service acquired the three-block site. So have perspectives on history. Technology and interpretive methods offer more than ever, and public expectation is high. The plan brings a fresh view to a place that was threatening to slip into the musty annals of men in wigs and knickers.

According to Karie Diethorn, chief curator for the park, the mall—though considered very good for its day—lacked human scale. "It was designed after the grand European cities," she says, "but the design became impractical over time." The new approach blends the fabric of the city with that of the park. Cafes and shops will be on one side, so Diethorn says that "people will interact with the history even if they are just passing through."

Inside the exhibit, the bell's story unfolds through an interactive exhibit that, according to Doris Fanelli, chief of cultural resources management, describes "how it went from a functional object to an international symbol." A wealth of memorabilia illustrates the iconic pervasiveness of the bell, its feted symbolism on dramatic display in photo blowups. An eight-minute film plays on a flat, unobtrusive screen; the soundtrack is pure atmosphere, with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s voice drifting into the recesses of the space.

The exhibit follows the bell's meaning from a symbol of the abolition movement, to one of unification between North and South (it was less controversial than the flag), to an icon of women's suffrage. "More lately," says Fanelli, "it's been a symbol of human rights on an international level." Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Llama have visited the relic.

The bell itself is on view at the end of the exhibit, dramatic in stark natural light, with Independence Hall and its looming bell tower behind it. The tableau brings the presentation full circle to its roots in colonial America.

AFFIRMING THE BLUEPRINT FOR FEDERAL ARCHEOLOGY

National Park Service Director Fran Mainella recently affirmed the National Strategy for Federal Archeology, which sets archeological goals for agency preservation programs and Federally funded and authorized projects such as dam and highway construction. The National Park Service, as the leading Federal agency in preservation, developed the strategy in 1991, signed by then-Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan.

The strategy focuses on four primary areas: preserving sites in place, conserving collections and records, putting research to use, and promoting public education. The strategy sets general goals for research and calls for making the results available to professional and public audiences.

Citing the importance of this finite, fragile legacy, Director Mainella called on the preservation community to embrace the strategy's objectives.

For an in-depth look at how the strategy shapes the nation's archeological heritage, go to www.cr.nps.gov/aad/tools/natlstrg.htm.

Right: The Liberty Bell in its new environs.

INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

Certain truths about colonial America became contentious as the exhibit was planned. The executive mansion for the first two presidents was practically on the same spot; George Washington had slaves when he lived there. A local historian published an article on the subject that triggered concern about how liberty was going to be portrayed. Historians joined National Park Service officials to embrace the topic.

Is it ironic that the father of our country owned slaves just a short distance from where the Declaration of Independence was signed? "I don't see it as irony but as an opportunity," Diethorn says. "We want visitors to comprehend that history is not a straight line. History isn't finished yet."

The architectural firm of Bohlin Cywinski Jackson designed the center. The $12.9 million project was funded primarily by the city, the Annenberg Foundation, and the Pew Charitable Trusts.

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UNCIVIL WAR

Investigating a Day of Carnage at an Isolated Mountain Farm

Robert E. Lee's first foray into the North, best remembered by its epic culmination at Antietam, was regarded by many as the South's best chance at turning the tide in the Civil War. The larger-than-life events of Lee's campaign, however, began in a quiet saddle in the Blue Ridge now being studied for its archeological potential.

Fox Gap, located on the Maryland stretch of the Appalachian Trail, was the focus of a recent study aimed at shedding light on the events of September 14, 1862, establishing an archeological inventory of the site, and determining how to preserve and interpret it. The project is part of an effort to identify and preserve the trail's historic and cultural sites, work that has involved States, Federal agencies, and member clubs of the Appalachian Trail Conference.

THE BATTLE ALTERED LEE'S PLANS AND SET THE STAGE FOR THE BLOODIEST DAY IN AMERICAN HISTORY: ANTIETAM.

The place was the site of a mountain farmstead owned by Daniel Wise and his family, who had the misfortune to be there when the Union and Confederate armies discovered each other in the autumn of 1862. The battle altered Lee's plans and set the stage for the bloodiest day in American history: Antietam.

Realizing that large numbers of Confederates were moving north in the Shenandoah Valley, the Union Army tried to cut them off. Anticipating the move, the Confederates plugged the mountain gaps. At Fox Gap and nearby Turner Gap, the two sides fought a fast and furious battle, known as the Battle of South Mountain. The Wise Farm was at the center of the day-long fight that ended with 6,000 dead and wounded. Emerging from their refuge at a nearby church, the Wise family found their home transformed into a hasty cemetery (see sidebar, opposite).

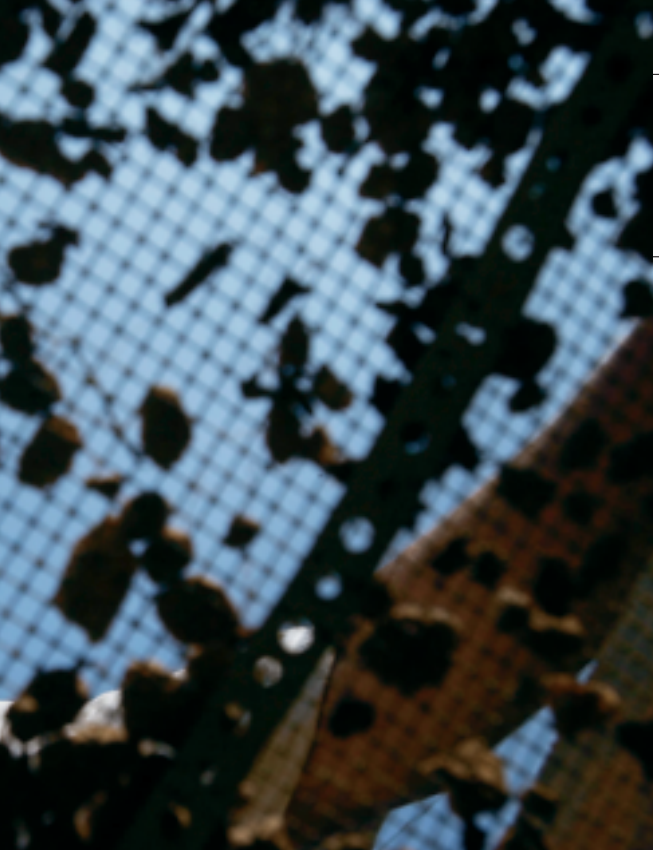
In the 1990s, the National Park Service and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources acquired tracts around Fox Gap, as did the nonprofit Central Maryland Heritage League. The league was awarded a grant from Preservation Maryland, a nonprofit, to conduct research and to develop a plan for Fox Gap.

The Appalachian Trail Conference joined the partnership, as did several local trail clubs, and the project got underway with an enthusiasm that reflects the increasing focus on preserving the trail's history. Joe Baker, an archeologist with Indiana University of Pennsylvania, led the investigation. "I had enough turnout from the professional [archeology] community," he says, "that I was pretty much able to pair up one professional with one amateur," an extremely rare event. The goal was to record as much as possible with minimal excavation. The archeologists visually surveyed the property and used remote sensing equipment to plot the findings in a Geographic Information System.

Though the study's main focus was the battle, researchers were very interested in the Wise family, which, in spite of extensive research remains something of an enigma. The farm and battlefield are described as having major potential for archeological research and unparalleled opportunities for public education. The entire site, according to researchers, would likely qualify as a National Historic Landmark. Baker and his team recommend its nomination. Now it is up to the entities with an official stake in the place to agree—as soon as possible—on a course of action. For models, researchers looked at how the National Park Service manages bat-

NICOLE MARTYN

Clockwise from lower left: Archeologist works a shovel at the Fox Gap site; sifting for clues; dishware and munitions from the Civil War era.



tlefields such as Antietam and Gettysburg. The Revolutionary War-era Cowpens battlefield in South Carolina is a particularly good example because, like Fox Gap, it is undeveloped and isolated. Says Baker, "This is a pastoral, beautiful, wild place. It will not bear a big parking lot and a visitor center. It's monumental enough as it is."

For more information, contact Joe Baker, (717) 705-1482, e-mail joebear81@aol.com, or Don Owen, Appalachian Trail Project Office, NPS Harpers Ferry Center, P.O. Box 50, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425-0050, (304) 535-4003.

The Battle of South Mountain

A Meditation on People and Place by Joe Baker

I am always the first one up. My reward is a solitary drink of mountaintop dawn over a cup of coffee. There is no sound from the other tents, and the pair of deer at the edge of this ridge top meadow pay no attention to me. It is unimaginably peaceful here . . . and I am in the middle of a battlefield. **In 1862, a family named Wise** was farming this ridge top. Yesterday we found the cellar hole of their cabin, some of their simple belongings, the stonework around their well. They had been here about five years, and while local talk and the newspapers brought them word of the great national struggle out in the lowlands, it must have seemed peripheral. Here what mattered was squeezing a living out of a four acre cornfield and a garden patch that were mostly rocks. Their family and neighbors mattered, and this same cool dawn quiet I'm enjoying, I'll bet that mattered too. The war was far away, below the Potomac. **Then came a morning in mid-September** and the sound of men and horses. A kindly infantry sergeant with a thick Carolina accent warned them they ought to vacate. Daniel, the patriarch, and his kids John and Matilda, and his granddaughter laid up in the little church below Boonsboro with their neighbors and kin, and over the next eight hours they heard the roar of cannon, the crack of rifles, shouting, screaming. What would you think? What would any of us think? **In their day, the Wises** were of no great consequence. They are almost invisible in the historical records. They didn't have any money, they didn't hold any office, or go to college, or wind up in the social registry. Why would an archeologist, or anyone else, care about these people? **My dad's people were Scotch/Irish and German folks** from off this same mountain, further north in Pennsylvania, so I have a stake in this, but it doesn't end there. Archeology has taught me that every culture under the sun can inform the rest of us, if we ask the right questions. The question here is: How did they do it? **When Daniel and the family came back to the house** a couple days later, there were still Union burial details hanging around. They were drunk and mean, and looked haunted. The crop was destroyed. The house was shot full of holes, used as a field hospital and looked like it, with no animals or food. There were men buried everywhere, four or five hundred, some with their toes poking out of the rocky soil. The burial details, sick of the labor and smell of corpses, dumped 58 dead down the well. Curious folks were looking for souvenirs; some cut the rings off the Rebel boys' fingers. The Wises cleaned everything up, and farmed this ground for the next 22 years. **The archeology of the Wise farm** is the archeology of people on the edge of things. They can teach us lessons about ingenuity, about perseverance and pride and community. I doubt they were saints or role models, just folks who carried on with dignity under circumstances that would destroy most of us. They are, in fact, people of consequence, and we ought to hear what they have to say. The only way that tale will ever get told is through the record of what we find buried here. **So I'm going to finish this coffee** and start waking people up. It's gonna be a hot one today, and we have a lot of dirt to move.

Notes from Archeological Field Camp, The 17th Michigan Field, Fox Gap, Maryland, August 18th, 2002, 6:13 am.