THE
Pennsylvania
Magazine
OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

Editorial

Nearly three years ago, in January 2002, this journal published an extended article by Edward Lawler Jr. on the President's House in Philadelphia, the executive mansion of the United States from 1790 to 1800. Lawler introduced and presented historical evidence in defense of his conjectural floor plan of the house, the last standing wall of which had been torn down in 1951 to create Independence Mall. Nothing about the article caused more controversy or received more public attention, however, than the revelation that as visitors approached what would be the new Liberty Bell Center they would cross over the area where George Washington's slaves had once lived.

The realization that this site, one block from Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence was signed and our Constitution drafted, and just feet from the most recognized symbol of American freedom, the Liberty Bell, was not only the site of the Philadelphia White House, the site of the executive branch of government, but was also a place where black men and women toiled in slavery, created renewed interest in the President's House. Here, the stories of American slavery and American freedom came together in a single, and very significant, site.

But how should we tell this complex story? And how should the men and women who lived in slavery on this site be commemorated? Almost immediately controversy erupted. The Park Service initially announced that it would not change its interpretive plans for the site. Community groups, though, soon became involved and demanded that the story of Washington's enslaved workers be told. Representatives of some of the most important of those groups are represented in the pages that follow.

Avenging The Ancestors Coalition (ATAC) was among the African American groups to coalesce around this issue. Professional historians formed the Ad Hoc Historians in an effort to bring the work of academic historians to bear in this public history debate.

Much has been accomplished since January 2002. In 2002 it was not at all clear that slavery would be interpreted on this site—that visitors would learn about both freedom and slavery when they visited Independence National Historical Park, or about how inextricably linked those stories are. Now there is no debate. The stories will be told. The questions that remain are about how.

The articles in this issue both revisit and push forward the discussion. Edward Lawler Jr. begins by updating us on his research, and by telling us the stories of the nine men and women who worked in slavery in Washington's Philadelphia White House. Articles by architectural historian Damie Stillman and archaeologist and anthropologist Dennis J. Pogue provide us with some context and grounds for comparison, examining the various other presidents' houses and the living conditions of Washington's Mount Vernon slaves. The final three articles reflect on the controversy surrounding the site, and on where we stand now. Doris Devine Fanelli provides us a glimpse of how the Park Service approaches interpretation of historic sites. Michael Coard, a founder of ATAC, movingly makes the case for the need for a prominent official commemoration of the enslaved men and women who lived and worked at this site, as representatives of the countless enslaved Africans who helped to build this country and make freedom possible. Historian Sharon Ann Holt, a member of the Ad Hoc Historians and the editor of this journal who published Lawler's initial article, ends by eloquently explaining the difficulties yet necessity of melding scholarly and public history and by presenting her vision of what a truly engaged and meaningful interpretation of this site could accomplish.

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Editor