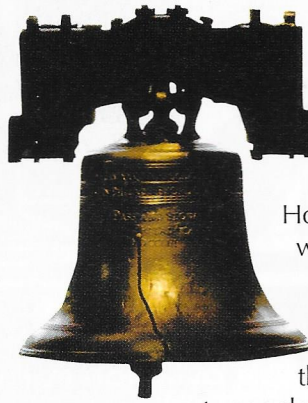


Liberty Meets Slavery in Philadelphia

Philadelphia's Independence Mall has recently become a battleground for historians and the National Park Service (NPS). At issue is a new home for the Liberty Bell that will rise on the site of the building that served as the president's residence between 1790 and 1800, when Philadelphia was the nation's capital. Located one block to the northwest of Independence Hall, the building was demolished in the 1830s.

In March the NPS, which is responsible for the operation and maintenance of Independence Mall, began construction of the new, \$12.6 million Liberty Bell Center on the site. The NPS expects to finish it next year. Philadelphia historian Edward Lawler was the first to challenge the plan when he insisted that the President's House "has been woefully neglected," and that "a floor plan of the house should be created to remember this lost landmark."

Park Superintendent Martha B. Aikens quickly dis-



missed the suggestion, stating that it would "create a design dissonance" between the new center and the area outside, "causing confusion for visitors."

An engraving depicts the Philadelphia house that Washington used when he was president. The new Liberty Bell Center will occupy the site.



PRIMEDIA ENTHUSIAST PUBLISHERS, INC.

Other historians soon entered the fray, accusing the NPS of trying to cover up a less attractive aspect of American history, since President George Washington's slave quarters once stood on the same spot. Archeologists excavated the site two years ago and uncovered an icehouse and several personal artifacts. The NPS contends that the construction of the new Liberty Bell Center will not disturb any of the archeological features, which have now been reburied. Ironically, the Liberty Bell gained national prominence in the 1830s when abolitionists adopted it as a symbol of the cause to end slavery.

"What we are talking about is the loss of historical memory," charged Gary B. Nash, a noted scholar of the American Revolution and Philadelphia's African-American community. "This is a wonderful example of trying to perpetuate historical amnesia." Nash and the loose coalition of historians he leads wanted the new center to include a more detailed interpretation of the site's history, one that would address the issue of slavery.

Aikens tried to pacify the historians in April by agreeing

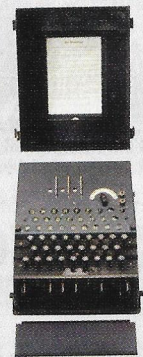
to include an interpretive panel in the new center that will discuss slavery in eighteenth-century Philadelphia, and offering a fuller interpretation of slavery at the Deshler-Morris House in nearby Germantown, where Washington also lived during his presidency. Nash says the proposals are inadequate because they "do not address the historical relationship between slavery and freedom, or their interdependence." Eventually, the two parties agreed to collaborate on an exhibit in and around the new Liberty Bell Center that will address the nation's complex and contradictory roots in freedom and slavery.

The exhibit will be a significant departure from the current celebratory story of the Liberty Bell told by park rangers. But the compromise still does not dismiss the suspicion of many historians that the NPS is more concerned about an immediate return on tourist dollars than the potential to learn more about the greatest paradox in American history—how the freedom of some was forged upon the slavery of others.

You can find more about the Liberty Bell and Independence National Historical Park at www.nps.gov/inde.
—William C. Kashatus

I Spy

The International Spy Museum opened in July in Washington, D.C. The museum presents the story of spies and spying from biblical times to the present. Items on display include an example of the German Enigma code machine from World War II (right), a Soviet listening device hidden in a shoe, a Soviet "lipstick" pistol, a KGB poison gas gun, and a CIA listening device disguised as a tree stump. According to Milton Maltz, the museum's founder, "Spying is an integral part of political and social landscapes across the globe, and how it is practiced affects each of us individually, shaping the kind of society and world we live in." The museum is located at 800 F St. NW in Washington. For more information call (202) 393-7798 or go to www.spymuseum.org.



INTERNATIONAL SPY MUSEUM

PHOTO BY COY BUTLER, PHILADELPHIA CVB